Fighting the Cold War on the beach: East–West encounters on the Romanian Black Sea Riviera between the 1960s and the 1980s

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how starting in the 1960s and with the peak in the 1970s and into the early 1980s, the Romanian Black Sea Coast became a hotbed of European tourism with visitors not just from Romania and the neighbouring socialist countries, but also from western capitalist countries. Following the model of more developed tourist countries and lured by the possibility of gaining hard currencies, socialist Romania sought to develop beach tourism so as to attract Western tourists seeking seaside vacations. But, as this article shows, the socialist state was not the only one to benefit from the arrival of Western tourists. The presence of foreign tourists, especially of those from capitalist countries who were in stark majority on the seaside, offered the Romanian citizens the opportunity to mingle and to establish economic and personal relationships that helped them to acquire goods unavailable in ordinary shops, while enabling them to adopt a more cosmopolitan way of life. This article shows that from the mid-1960s until the early 1980s, on the Romanian Black Sea Coast, with the tacit acceptance of local officials, became a space that mingled socialist landscape and values with capitalist material culture.

Evening sinks itself upon the countryside and stoops secretively to every ear: come with me! It is an invitation to visit the numerous resort towns on the Romanian Black Sea Riviera. (...) A broad inviting stretch of coast beamed upon by a generous glowing and warming sun, a warm and clean sea, neighbored by freshwater lakes of wondrous origin, hospitable hotels in the middle of rich vegetation, an atmosphere like it was designed for recovery and cure – these are the trump cards of the Romanian seacoast.1

From the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, the Romanian Black Sea Coast (Romanian seaside) became a popular tourist destination for tourists from both socialist and capitalist countries. The 1970 tourist flyer quoted above, published in German, sought to lure West German tourists to this area by promising an idyllic place, where they could sunbath and restore their energy.2 Beach tourism became fashionable for the working-
class all-over Europe starting in the mid-1950s. Socialist states, Romania included, seized this opportunity in order to increase their stock of hard currencies and to improve their image abroad. And indeed, throughout the 1960s and the 1970s, the Romanian Black Sea Coast did become famous. As a matter of fact, in January 1974, the officially sanctioned weekly magazine, Săptămâna, touted that Hollywood actor Clint Eastwood had plans to visit Mamaia and to shoot a film on the Black Sea Coast in the coming summer.  

It was not just Clint Eastwood who visited the Black Sea Coast, so too did numerous Western politicians and journalists, some of whom had begun to spend their vacations on the Romanian Riviera in the 1960s. For instance, in 1962, G. Mabille, a Belgian expert to the United Nations, spent a couple of days together with his wife in Constanta, the main city on the Romanian Black Sea Coast, as part of a cruise from Istanbul that included Romania, and he confessed to his guide that ‘the actual reality exceeds his expectations and what he has seen in photos.’

This article examines international tourism on the Romanian Black Sea Coast with a focus on how daily interactions between Romanians, West European, and East European tourists affected space and everyday life practices, especially consumption, on the Romanian seaside between the 1960s and the 1980s. The Romanian Black Sea coast has been examined from the lens of architectural development and urban planning or labour and gender, but the ways in which informal and formal (work) interactions between Romanians and tourists from capitalist and socialist countries shaped the actual space and everyday life habits have received less attention. Yet these mundane contacts caught the attention of the socialist state as they took place against the backdrop of both the Cold War, which pitted the socialist east against the capitalist west, and the shortage of consumer goods in Romania. At the same time, Romanians who befriended foreign tourists, especially from capitalist countries, enjoyed social prestige among their peers because these connections enabled them to procure commodities that were unavailable in regular stores. According to a 1977 decision of the Romanian Communist Party’s Central Committee, Romanian citizens who received gifts from foreign tourists had to declare them as income. This policy created a tension between the socialist state and its citizens. Yet because many times these exchanges were a matter of one’s private life, the state had very little power to enforce this regulation, and these practices went unfettered. As this article shows, a tension between the authoritarian state’s policies of social control and the citizens’ desire for a private space in their everyday lives grew out of Romanian tourism. Contacts with foreign, especially Western tourists were one way for Romanian citizens to acquire some autonomy in relation to the authoritarian

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2Ibid.
3Ray Arco, ‘Exclusivitate Săptămâna Clint Eastwood’, Săptămâna, January 4, 1974, 4. Săptămâna Culturală a Capitalei (the official name) was a weekly cultural magazine published between 1962 and 1989. Between 1970 and 1989 the magazine’s chief editor was Eugen Barbu, known for his ideological work and his close relations with the Romanian Communist Party and its leadership.
4Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives (henceforth AMAE), Belgium, 1962, file no. 372, folio 10.
5Alina Șerban, Kalliopi Dimou, and Sorin Iștudor, eds., Enchanting Views: Romanian Black Sea Planning and Architecture of the 1960s and 70s (Bucharest: Asociatia Pepluspatru, 2015). Johanna Conterio, “‘Our Black Sea Coast’: The Sovietization of the Black Sea Littoral under Khrushchev and the Problem of Overdevelopment’, Critika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History, 19, no.2 (2018): 327–61. For tourism as an escape see Irina Costache, ‘From the Party to the Beach Party: Nudism and Artistic Expression in the People’s Republic of Romania’, in Socialist Escapes: Breaking Away from Ideology and Everyday Routine in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989, ed. Cathleen M. Giustino, Catherine J. Plum, and Alexander Vari (Berghahn Books, 2013).
6National Archives of Romania (henceforth ANIC), Fond CRCP-DICALS, file no. 83/1977, f. 9.
state. But to complicate things further, studies on how to develop international tourism in Romania in the 1970s put together by tourism specialists often emphasised the importance of personal relationships in making foreign tourists ‘feel at home’ while vacationing on the Romanian Black Sea Riviera. The clash between ideology and economic pragmatism became endemic to Romanian tourism. This convoluted story begs the question how ‘socialist’ the spaces on the Romanian Black Sea Coast were, given that they were the venues for personal and economic interactions between ordinary people from the capitalist West and the socialist East. But it does engage two other key questions: how did these connections shape Romanian tourists and tourist workers’ individual experiences as well as those of tourists from socialist and capitalist countries vacationing on the Black Sea Coast, and how did different actors in the Romanian state react to this transnational mingling?

As recent literature on tourism has shown, tourism was paramount in ‘normalising’ East–West relations in the Cold War and in consolidating socialist economies while being part of the social welfare programme that socialist states in Eastern Europe and Soviet Union provided to their citizens. Despite that work, international tourism in Romania has received little attention as most studies on tourism in socialist states have been geographically clustered around the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and more recently, Hungary, Bulgaria and the GDR. Similar to other tourist countries (i.e.

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8ANIC, the Institute for Research and Development in Tourism Fond, 7/1981, folio 21.
9On different views about socialist spaces see: Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space (Translation in English by Donald Nicholson Smith) (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1991) where he rejects the existence of such spaces. For a response to it, see: Lukasz Stanek, Christian Schmid, and Akos Morawanszky, Urban Revolution Now, Henri Lefebvre in Social Research and Architecture (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014) in which the characteristics of spaces in socialism (i.e.
10state property and management that allows for a more balanced and coordinated use of space than in the case of private property) are emphasized.

9Diane Koenker and Anne Gorsuch, eds., Turism: The Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), Anne Gorsuch, All This Is Your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Diane Koenker, Club Red: Vacation Travel and the Soviet Dream (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), Hannes Grandits and Karin Taylor, eds., Yugoslavia’s Sunny Side: A History of Tourism in Socialism (1950-1980) (Budapest: CEU University Press, 2010), Mark Keck-Szajbel, ‘The Border of Friendship: Transnational Travel and Tourism in the Eastern Bloc, 1972-1989’ (PhD diss., University of California Berkeley, 2013), Oana Adelina Stefan, ‘Vacationing in the Cold War: Foreign Tourists to Socialist Romania and Franco’s Spain, 1960s-1970s’ (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2016), Christian Noack and Sune Bechmann Pedersen, Tourism and Travel during the Cold War: Negotiating Tourist Experiences across the Iron Curtain (New York: Routledge, 2019), George Bodie, “It’s a Shame We are Not Neighbors”: GDR’s Tourist Cruises to Cuba, 1961-89, Journal of Contemporary History 55, no. 2 (2020): 411–34. For more on literature about tourism in state socialism see Adam T. Rosenbaum, ‘Leisure Travel and Real Existing Socialism: New Research on Tourism in the Soviet Union and Communist Eastern Europe’, Journal of Tourism History, 7 (2015): 157–76. For tourism in coastal regions in socialism and post-socialism see Michael Zinganel, Elke Beyer, and Anke Hagerman, eds., Holidays after the Fall: Seaside Architecture and Urbanism in Bulgaria and Croatia (Berlin: Jovis, 2013), Kristin Ghodsee, The Red Riviera: Gender, Tourism, and Postsocialism on the Black Sea (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

10Gorsuch and Koenker, Turizm, and Grandits, Taylor, Yugoslavia’s Side Side. Igor Tchoukarine, ‘Yugoslavia’s Open Door Policy and Global Tourism in the 1950s and 1960s’, East European Politics and Societies 29, no. 1 (2015): 168–88. On international tourism in socialist Romania see: Štefan, ‘Vacationing in the Cold War’, Duncan Light, The Dracula Dilemma: Tourism, Identity and the State in Romania (New York, Oxon: Routledge, 2012) (with one chapter examining tourism during socialism), Daniela Dumbrăveanu, Duncan Light, Craig Young, and Anya Chapman, ‘Exploring Women’s Employment in Tourism Under State-Socialism: Experiences of Tourism Work in Socialist Romania’, Tourist Studies 16, no. 2 (2016): 151–69. On tourism in Hungary during socialism see Alexander Varó, ‘Nocturnal Entertainments, Five-Star Hotels, and Youth Counterculture: Reinventing Budapest’s Nightlife under Socialism’, in Socialist Escapes, Breaking Away from Ideology and Everyday Routine in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989, ed. Cathleen M. Giustino, Catherine J. Plum, and Alexander Vári (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013) while on tourism in Bulgaria see Ana Luleva, ‘The Bulgarian International Tourism in Late Socialism: Between the Class-Party Ideology and the Economic Interests’, Balkanistic Forum 30, no. 1 (2021): 207–26, on the GDR, Michelle Standley, ‘Experiencing Communism, Bolstering Capitalism: Guided Bus Tours of the 1970s East Berlin’, in Tourism and Travel during the Cold War: Negotiating Tourist Experiences Across the Iron Curtain, ed. Sune Bechmann Pedersen and Christian Noack (New York, Oxon: Routledge, 2019).
Yugoslavia or Spain) in the 1960s and the 1970s, international tourism in Romania came to be conceptualised as a type of service and as a promising economic sector.\textsuperscript{11} Yet the Romanian case is interesting and somewhat different from the above-mentioned countries because of the tension between the country’s economic opening to the capitalist West already in the late 1950s (which also involved convincing promotion campaigns to attract Western tourists) and the strong ideologisation at the domestic level associated with restrictions regarding travelling abroad (to capitalist countries) and endemic shortages of consumer goods, especially as of late 1970s and throughout the 1980s.\textsuperscript{12} But despite the difficulty to travel abroad and to acquire desirable consumer goods, Romanians did pursue their consumerist desires through the daily interactions with tourists from both capitalist and socialist blocs that visited Romania, especially the Black Sea coast. These aspects have been less studied.

This article aims to close this glaring gap in the literature by examining how, from the 1960s to the 1980s, contacts between Romanian, eastern and western tourists on the Romanian Black Sea Coast prioritised exchanges of goods, ideas and mores over ideological conflicts and thereby created a cosmopolitan environment, which combined socialist values and esthetics with capitalist practices. Based on archival research in the Romanian Communist Party, Central Committee Collection, Chancellery and Economic Sections and the newly opened collection of the National Institute for Research and Development in Tourism at the Romanian National Archives, the archives of the former Securitate and oral interviews with Romanian and foreign tourists, and with tourist workers, this article proposes a bottom-up approach to the Cold War relations in the 1960s through the 1980s on the Black Sea Coast. This approach enables us to understand the Cold War was not just as a contest fought in the political and economic realms in socialist East or capitalist West but as both a competition and form of cooperation often negotiated and mediated at the beach. As tourists from both eastern and western Europe, and elsewhere, met on the Romanian seacoast, trade, friendships and romantic relationships blossomed.\textsuperscript{13} This created a form of internationalism that turned ordinary people from both the socialist bloc and from the capitalist West into transnational subjects against the backdrop of the Cold War. Those interactions also shaped space and experiences on the Romanian Black Sea Coast.

The first part of the article examines how and why socialist Romania decided to develop international tourism with capitalist countries in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The second part looks at how the Romanian Black Sea Coast turned into a space for international tourism. The third section examines the ways in which the socialist regime attempted to control the interactions between foreign/Western tourists and Romanians, while the last part studies the types of contacts established between

\textsuperscript{11}Oskar Snak, \textit{Economia și organizarea turismului} (Bucharest: Sport Tourism Publishing, 1976), 28.

\textsuperscript{12}Liviu Chelcea, ‘The Culture of Shortage During State Socialism: Consumption Practices in a Romanian Village in the 1980s’, \textit{Cultural Studies} 16, no. 1 (2002): 16–43. For everyday life during socialism in Romania see Jill Massino, \textit{Ambiguous Transition: Gender, the State and Everyday Life in Socialist and Postsocialist Romania} (New York: Berghan Books, 2019). For foreign policies, see Ronald Linden, ‘Socialist Patrimonialism and the Global Economy: The Case of Romania’, \textit{International Organizations} 40, no.2 (Spring 1986), (special issue on Power, Purpose and Collective Choice: Economic Strategies in Socialist States). In 1979 gasoline for cars was rationed, while in 1981 the bread rationing was reintroduced after it had been abolished nationwide in 1962.

\textsuperscript{13}In the late 1970s, West Germans made up 30 percent of the total number of tourists from capitalist countries in Romania. ANIC, fund PCM-Sector Coordonare (PCM- Coordination Sector), file no. 180/1984, folio 6.
Romanian, eastern and western tourists, and impact of these relations on everyday life practices and experiences on the Black Sea coast.

The politics of international tourism in the 1960s: from socialist brotherhood to tourism with the capitalist west

In 1959, during a meeting between Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, secretary general of the Romanian Worker Party (as of 1965, Romanian Communist Party) and Konni Zilliacus, a well-known left-wing MP from the Labor Party in Great Britain, the topic of international tourism stood out like the cherry on cake. Zilliacus called attention to the development of ‘a novel phenomenon regarding international tourism which remains largely neglected’, namely the fact that tourism had begun to look attractive not just for the elites, but for people with limited means, such as workers. These individuals’ wish to travel to foreign countries grew out of the recently introduced paid holidays. Although workers spent less money than did well-to-do tourists, they generated more revenue because of their higher numbers. Zilliacus could not have been more eulogistic about this form of tourism as he mentioned that besides the considerable income that it brings, international tourism helps ordinary people in the West to get acquainted with the accomplishments of socialist regimes in eastern Europe. Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej replied that Romania is interested in welcoming such Western tourists, but for the time being Romanian officials were still confronted with a number of logistical issues, such as how much money to charge for tourist services in hotels and restaurants because he said ‘if we are charging too much, tourists will stop coming’. However, he added, Romanian authorities did plan to buy IL18 Soviet airplanes that could help to transport foreign tourists to Romania.

This discussion illustrates the stage of international tourism in socialist Romania in the late 1950s and early 1960s. On the one hand, the socialist regime was willing to welcome tourists from both the socialist and capitalist blocs, especially if these were workers, but on the other hand, it still lacked the necessary infrastructure and know-how necessary to turn international tourism into a lucrative sector. And there was the issue of risk – in the late 1950s, international tourism for middle and working classes was still quite the novelty, even in more developed tourist countries. From this point of view, these discussions placed Romania in sync with the larger developments in international tourism, despite hardly being a tourist destination for Western tourists before the 1960s. At the same time, this new form of tourism geared to working and middle classes, albeit of commercial nature, was hardly at odds with the principles of socialist societies in eastern Europe, as the discussion between Zilliacus, a fervent supporter of communism, and Gheorghiu-Dej confirmed. Nevertheless, the communist authorities

14Romanian National Archives (henceforth, ANIC), Romanian Communist Party’s Central Committee Collection, Chanc- lery Section, 33/1959, folio 1.

15Ibid., folio 2.

16Ibid., folio 2.

17Ibid., folio3.

18Ibid., folio 3.

19Charter flights were introduced to Europe in 1959. See, Peter Lyth, ‘Flying Visits: The Growth of British Air Package Tours, 1945-1975’, in Europe at the Seaside. The Economic History of Mass Tourism in the Mediterranean, ed. Luciano Segreto, Carles Manera, and Manfred Pohl (New York, London: Berghahn Books, 2009), 39. Eduard W. Bratton, ‘Charter Flight to Europe’, South Atlantic Bulletin 34, no. 3 (May 1969): 32.
in Romania seemed to understand that their tourist offer had to please foreign, especially Western, workers, who were after all paying customers. Already in 1959, Romanian communist officials did not see a tension between socialist ideology and the attempt to adjust to the market in order to meet the tourists’ expectations and desires.

For travel to Romania to become possible a number of measures had to be taken. In March 1960, a decree that renewed custom regulations was adopted. The decree introduced tourist visas for tourists from capitalist countries while vacationers from socialist countries were exempt from a visa altogether and could bring their cars or other vehicles into Romania without any supplementary paperwork. The new regulation asked for waiting time at the border to be reduced and custom areas to be dotted with modern sanitary facilities, restaurants, shopping areas, post office and telephone booths. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent the new directive to Romania’s diplomatic offices in Western Europe with the purpose of informing travel agencies from these countries and, hence, attracting more tourists. At the same time the dropping of any paperwork for tourists from socialist countries who arrived by car signalled the government’s intention to develop automobile tourism, which was on the rise in Europe.

International tourism with capitalist countries became a topic of interest within the socialist bloc as well. In 1961, a meeting of tourist delegates from socialist countries in Moscow discussed the issue of tourism with capitalist countries in a more concrete way. The second point on the agenda at the tourist delegates’ meeting referred to the ‘importance of developing international tourism between socialist and capitalist countries as a means of popularising the accomplishments of socialist regimes and of counterattacking the unfriendly imperialist propaganda towards socialist countries’. Next, the participants stated that relationships between socialist and capitalist countries in the field of tourism should be based on socialist states being cheaper and more attractive tourist destinations. The summit in Moscow thereby signalled the official shift from a ‘domestic’ tourism within the socialist bloc that aimed at strengthening socialist brotherhood to international tourism with the West that was driven by profit and worked as ‘soft power’ in the Cold War context.

In response to this meeting, in 1962, the Romanian tourist authorities put forth a plan to advertise Romania as a tourist destination in the capitalist West. Yet only in 1965 did

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20AMAE, The Netherlands, 1960, file no.222, folio 1. In 1967 the visas for Western tourists traveling in groups were abolished altogether on the occasion of the 1968 International Year of Tourism, while for tourists coming on individual basis could conveniently obtain the visa at the border.

21Ibid., folio 6.

22Ibid., folio 7.

23Ibid., folio 8.

24The meeting was in fact the fourth such summit of tourist representatives from socialist countries. On this, see Adelina Ştefan, ‘The Lure of Capitalism: Foreign Tourists and the Shadow Economy in Romania, 1960-1989’, in Tourism and Travel during the Cold War: Negotiating Tourist Experiences Across the Iron Curtain, ed. Sune Bechmann Pedersen and Christian Noack (New York, Oxon: Routledge, 2019), 47–60. The first meeting of tourist delegates from socialist countries took place in Varna, Bulgaria, in 1955. See, Sune Bechmann Pederson, Eastbound Tourism in the Cold War: The History of the Swedish Communist Travel Agency Folkturs, Journal of Tourism History 10, no. 2 (2018): 130–45.

25ANIC, Council of Ministers Collection, file number 29/1961, folio 5.

26Ibid., folio 6.

27Ibid., folio 6. Attempts to develop tourism between socialist and capitalist countries had been made before. In 1957, Sabena, national airline of Belgium, established a direct flight with Bucharest with a layover in Vienna, while in 1958 Czechoslovakia was selling tourist packages in the United States. See: https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/search/site/CIA%20RD80T00246A003100040001-2, accessed 8 May 2022.
the Council of Ministers, the State Committee for Planning and the ONT–Carpathians (the official state agency in charge with tourism), came up with a concrete plan for the development of international tourism with capitalist countries. The Romanian authorities decided to bolster commercial tourism with capitalist countries (devize libere) and 4.8 million rubles from tourism with socialist countries (cliring).28 Similarly, in 1965 out of the 259,000 foreign tourists that were expected to visit Romania, 130,000 tourists came from Western countries.29 For 1970, Romanian authorities anticipated earning 420 million lei valuta (approximately 32.3 million dollars) from tourism of which 325 million lei valuta (approximately 25 million dollars) came from Western tourists (devize libere), while only 95 million lei valuta (approximately 7.3 million dollars) was brought by visitors from socialist countries.30

One can appreciate the sheer pragmatism of Romanian authorities regarding international tourism from another report by the Ministry of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation published in 1966. This document mentioned that Romania had to first and foremost develop individual tourism (as opposed to the organised tourism based on contracts with travel agencies) because this form of tourism promised to become ‘an excellent source of hard currencies’.31 The report further noted that the number of West German and Scandinavian tourists was on the rise and that tourist advertising should seek to draw in these visitors to Romania.32

The conclusion of this report suggests the Romanian tourist experts’ and officials’ familiarity with the global trends in tourism and their interest in emulating these developments in Romania. As beach tourism was the main attraction in the 1960s worldwide, Romanian officials concentrated their efforts on the seaside, and in this process, the Black Sea Coast became the region in Romania most sought by tourists from both capitalist and socialist countries, but also by Romanian tourists themselves.

Re-shaping space on the Romanian seaside in the 1950s and the 1960s

The process of turning the Romanian Black Sea Coast into a tourist area involved investments in tourist infrastructure, especially an improvement of tourist services, along with the creation of a hassle-free environment to meet the tourists’ needs and desires. The seacoast became the most visited tourist region in Romania thanks in part to the global trends in the 1960s that prioritised beach tourism, but also because this area had a tourist infrastructure that met the modern tourists’ expectations.33 The process of rebuilding the Black Sea Coast as a tourist destination for international tourism had
already started in the mid-1950s. At that time, the Romanian state was seeking to attract tourists from the neighbouring socialist countries and Romanian tourists. While tourists from socialist countries visited Romania in organised groups and paid through the convoluted clearing system, Romanian tourists benefitted from the subsidised vacations offered by the trade unions as part of the ‘restorative tourism’ policy.  

In 1955, a plan for the systematisation of the Romanian seaside was put forth, while in 1956, the architect Cezar Lăzărescu, in charge with reshaping the architecture of Romanian seaside, announced plans to erect new tourist buildings in Mamaia and Eforie Nord. One year later, the Hotel Bucharest (nowadays, the fashionable Iaki) was opened in Mamaia, while in 1961, the Hotel Europa (Europe) with a name that suggested socialist Romania’s unquestionable Europeanness and perhaps an early shift towards the ‘West’ was launched in Eforie Nord. Consequently, the lodging capacity on the Romanian seaside increased from 500–600 beds in 1941–3000 in 1957 and 10,000 beds in 1961, to 15,000 beds in 1965.  

But the growth of the Black Sea Coast as a destination of vacation for Western tourists only started in the early 1960s. Whereas in 1960, there were no earnings coming from Western tourists on the seaside, in 1965, Western tourists generated a revenue of 44.7 million lei valuta out of the total income of 63.4 million lei valuta obtained from the seaside alone. In 1965, the total revenue from international tourism was estimated at 114 million lei valuta, which means that slightly more than half of the tourist earnings in Romania came from beach tourism. The spiralling income from the seaside called for further investments in this area. As Gheorghe Teodorescu, an official of the ONT–Carpathians explained, 5000 bed places in Mamaia had been already contracted for 1966, and if investments were further delayed the growth of tourism on the seaside could be seriously halted. As a result, in May 1965 after prolonged discussions, the Council of Ministers approved a three billion lei investment for the development of tourism in Romania between 1966 and 1970. Most of the money was directed at building new tourist infrastructure on the seaside and for training tourist personnel. The purpose was to turn the Romanian Black Sea coast into an international tourist destination and to create an attractively shaped leisure space.  

To a certain degree, the process was successful. A 1967 guidebook to the Romanian Black Sea Coast (littoral), described Mamaia, one of the oldest and at that time the main resort on the Romanian seaside, as a ‘resort of international interest’. The guidebook published in English highlighted the construction of newly built hotels, mostly seven to ten story buildings, and their facilities, which ranged from shops to covered
pools to various sport amenities. As a result, in 1967, Mamaia became not just an accumulation of hotels and restaurants, but an urban space where modern art installations and green spaces harmoniously mingled here and there. Needless to say, this outlook was similar to that of other beach resorts in Southern or Eastern Europe. As studies about East European and Black Sea coast architecture have shown, a process of regional integration that centred around health resorts took place as of the late 1950s on the Soviet, Bulgarian and Romanian Black Sea Coast. Given that architects from socialist countries met regularly, they came to share a common perspective on urban planning that was not necessarily of Soviet/Stalinist influence. In fact, because of Nikita Khrushchev’s policy of ‘peaceful coexistence’ that prioritised economic versus military competition between the socialist and capitalist blocs, from the early 1960s onwards, exchanges with architects from Western countries intensified and journals published in the capitalist West became available in socialist countries, including Romania. These connections helped Romanian architects to stay in tune with the latest tendencies in European and world architecture, and it explains the esthetical and functional similarities between hotels on the Romanian Black Sea coast and those in other seaside areas in Europe.

The reshaping of leisure space in Mamaia and other resorts on the Romanian Back Sea Coast brought about a different attitude towards the human body. Women in bikinis and men in swim trunks were a usual sight, but soon nudism was possible too on specially arranged beaches. Already in 1967, a guidebook to the Romanian seaside highlighted the existence of a beach for nudists, located in the northern part of the resort. All these amenities along with the lower prices attracted an impressive number of Western tourists. Whereas at the national level the number of Western tourists was lower than that of tourists coming from socialist countries, in resorts like Mamaia, the Romanian and eastern tourists were in a stark minority.

Romanian tourists who visited Mamaia in the 1960s recall the changes in aspects of the resort. Mărioara V., an accountant at ‘Electrofarm’ Factory in Bucharest, remembered that in the mid-1960s, ‘the resort was small, but later when they built more hotels it became a bit packed. But one could have had fun. You could go to the bar… there was back then ‘Melody Bar’, with the programme starting only at 11:00PM. You would pay an entrance fee, which included one drink, it was music and dancing, and a variety programme for about one hour. Everybody, women or men had to dress-up,'
they wouldn’t let you in otherwise’.

Although state owned, ‘Melody Bar’ in Mamaia was just one of those places on the Romanian Black Sea Coast where clothing and a pocketful of money could shape social relations and hierarchies despite the socialist promise of equal access.

As the number of tourists continued to grow, Mamaia and Eforie proved insufficient to cope with the demand. The Romanian tourist officials agreed that the only solution was the building of new resorts. This was even more urgent because for Romanian tourists, vacations on the seaside became prohibitive because of the lack of accommodation as well as the soaring prices. To solve this problem, in 1971, the Politburo proposed lowering the prices in some hotels in Eforie Nord and Eforie Sud, and selling vacation packages mostly to domestic market and the trade unions. This was possible because the building of a new chain of resorts located in the south of the Romanian seaside that was almost entirely geared to foreign tourists was underway. Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s the investment programme on the seaside centred on Mamaia and Eforie Nord and Sud, in the 1970s it extended to Mangalia, a town just ten kilometres from Bulgarian border.

In 1966, the National Office for Tourism, the Ministry of Commerce and the local authorities in Constanta had been asked to put together a plan for the systematic development of the seaside. The plan mentioned the urgency of building a new resort in the southern part of the seaside, in the proximity of the Bulgarian border, but no concrete measures were taken. Only in 1968 did the National Office for Tourism come up with a concrete plan for building a new resort from scratch in Mangalia, a town located 37 kilometres south of Constanta. This complex became the future Neptun-Olimp, Venus, Jupiter, Cap Aurora, and Saturn chain of resorts. The new seaside complex was to be built on 140 hectares, ‘mostly unproductive land that belonged to the nearby collective farm’, three kilometres away from Mangalia’s city centre, but close to a forest, which increases the chances for successfully promoting the resort on the foreign market. The resort’s planned capacity was to be 18,000 beds, which was 6,000 more than in Mamaia. Most of the accommodation infrastructure consisted of two-star hotels (C category), 8400 beds, while only 300 beds were in a four-star hotel (A and lux categories). This configuration was chosen in order to improve the economic efficiency of the new resort and to follow the tendencies in the more developed tourist countries. In fact, a detailed study of the external market served as a basis for the planning of future resorts.

50Mărioara V., age 72, high-school degree, interviewed by the author, Bucharest, Romania, July 2013.
51ANIC, CC al PCR Collection, Chancellery, file no. 138/1971, folio 142.
52Ibid., folio 143.
53ANIC, CC of PCR Collection, Chancellery Section, 176/1968, folio 22.
54Interestingly enough, the names of the brand-new resorts were inspired from Greek mythology. This was in reference to the Greek colonies that were established on the Black Sea Coast in Antiquity.
55ANIC, CC of PCR Collection, Chancellery Section, 176/1968, folio 23.
56Ibid., folio 228.
57Ibid., folio. 230. The building costs of the whole resort were of 62 billion lei (around 340 million dollars), and the investment was supposed to be recuperated in fifteen years. The Direction for Planning, Architecture and Organization of Territory, which was subordinated to the People’s Council (sfatul popular) in Constanta, was in charge of putting together the execution project plan (systematization and hotels’ design), while the Ministry of Industrial Constructions was responsible for erecting the resort’s hotels and various buildings. Most of the materials and techniques were purchased from the domestic market, with just seven percent (furniture and various technologies estimated at 4.2 billion lei) bought from abroad. Almost half of the materials purchased from abroad were from capitalist countries. The NTO report to the PCR Central Committee emphasized that the building of Mangalia would be less expensive than that of Mamaia at the end of the 1950s-early 1960s. It projected that the cost to build a hotel room together with the different
When planning the resort, tourist officials aimed to meet ‘all tourists’ needs and demands.\(^{58}\) Hence, the resort was dotted with commercial centres, cultural and entertainment spaces, sport facilities, clinics and pharmacies. The report announced that additional independent commercial areas would be built after 1970 ‘to cope with further demand’.\(^{59}\) The overall layout of the Neptun-Olimp, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, and Cap Aurora did impress the foreign visitors as *Roumanie Le Guide Blue*, a guidebook published in 1974 in France noted. The guidebook described the resorts as displaying a ‘personalized architecture, full of light, with hotels facing the sea and surrounded by green spaces where each tourist can find something to her/his liking’.\(^{60}\) Also, the travel guide mentioned the attempt to include elements of traditional architecture in the design of Venus, at that time the newest resort on the Romanian Black Sea Coast. As the guidebook put it: ‘Notably, in Venus hotels incorporate elements of traditional Romanian architecture attuned to the demands of contemporary tastes’.\(^{61}\) Significantly enough, references to traditional architecture were meant to showcase Romanian specificity in the eyes of foreign tourists, which was a common strategy for other tourist countries from the socialist bloc, or beyond it as well.

Besides the modern outlook that the resorts on the Romanian Black Sea coast displayed, the authorities also made constant efforts to improve the still meagre tourist services. As a 1974 survey conducted by the Centre for Economic Research for Promoting International Tourism within the Ministry of Tourism shows, tourists were relatively content with the overall services. Thus, 34.8% of the group surveyed characterised them as good as opposed to only 6.9% who were completely dissatisfied.\(^{62}\) Tourists were particularly pleased with lodging conditions but disliked the food and service in the restaurants. They also grumbled about the lack of entertainment possibilities compared to other seaside destinations in Europe.\(^{63}\) The Ministry of Tourism was keen to follow tourists’ suggestions especially those regarding entertainment, but these complaints persisted in the surveys the Ministry conducted throughout the 1970s, albeit to a lesser degree. Moreover, this was not a matter that the government could ignore because the lack of entertainment options lowered the amounts of hard currencies the state obtained from international tourism for the obvious reason that tourists did not have activities on which to spend their money.

This was exactly the conclusion of another study from 1973 suggestively entitled, ‘How Western tourists spend their money on the Romanian seaside’.\(^{64}\) The survey showed that single tourists tended to spend more (around 500 Deutsche Marks per seven-day stay) than visitors travelling with families who were more careful with their expenses. But because of the general image among Western tourists that Romanian seaside was rather dull, the latter tourists dominated, and in 1972, only 10.43% of the

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\(^{58}\) Ibid., folio 234.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., folio 236.

\(^{60}\) *Roumanie Le Guide Bleu* (Paris: Hachette, 1974), 302.

\(^{61}\) *Roumanie Le Guide Bleu* (Paris: Hachette, 1974), 302.

\(^{62}\) ANIC, Institute for Research and Development in Tourism (INCDT) Fund, 7/1974, folio 7v.

\(^{63}\) Ibid., folio 7v.

\(^{64}\) ANIC, Institute for Research and Development in Tourism (INCDT) Fund, 24/1976, folio 6,7.
West German tourists who visited Romania came alone as opposed to 60.60% who travelled with their families. These numbers worried the tourist officials as this was not the image that the Romanian government wanted to send. As a follow up, in 1975, Gheorghe Barbu, head of the Centre for Economic Research for Promoting International Tourism and a top tourist specialist, published an article titled, ‘Directions for improving tourist services on the seaside’. He proposed various improvements, such as a better training of tourist personnel, more attention to details in hotels and restaurants, and offering more opportunities for entertainment. He also recommended that beyond the existing amusement facilities such as discos, bars, pools, mechanical games, bowling rooms, sport centres, etc., the tourist personnel should take care of the little things that make visitors more welcomed. In this respect he suggested that tourist workers could organise more often evenings parties in each hotel that would include karaoke and stand-by comedy shows, which he said, ‘might help tourists to get acquainted with the hotel employees in less formal settings’. Similarly, tourist workers could throw a surprise party for those tourists who celebrate their birthdays, or just offer flowers and a small present on behalf of the hotel. Furthermore, Barbu suggested that the music in the discos and night-bars should be up-to-date and, of course, equipment in mechanical game rooms should be functional. These suggestions were hardly unusual and hotel managers did follow some of them. For instance, in the mid-1980s it was standard practice to offer goodbye parties to groups of tourists according to Nelu T., a former waiter at the hotel Doina in Neptun. Without doubt these gatherings helped tourist workers establish more personal relations with foreign tourists, and according to my interviewees it created networks because some tourists used to return on a recurrent basis and kept a regular correspondence with Romanians they befriended while on vacation.

Interactions and surveillance

The Romanian government’s economic policy to develop international tourism in order to acquire hard currencies, and hence to equalise the balance of payments, not only helped state finances, but it also produced unintended consequences at the level of everyday life, especially on the Black Sea Coast. Thus, the communist government faced an unexpected challenge as a result of Western tourists’ arrival there. The development of international tourism presented the ordinary Romanians with the opportunity to overcome the shortages of consumer goods in the domestic economy and to get access to the more cosmopolitan material culture of the ‘West’, otherwise hardly accessible to them. Because various Romanian leaders feared that their citizens’ attraction to Western consumerism could compromise the legitimacy of the regime, the interactions between Romanians and foreign tourists sent cold chills down the socialist officials’ spines. Despite the regime’s attempts to control these interactions, from the 1960s to

65Ibid., folio 7.
66ANIC, Institute for Research and Development in Tourism (INCDT) Fund, file no. 5/1976, folio 197.
67Ibid., folio 198.
68Ibid., folio 199.
69Nelu T., high-school education, age 47 years old, interviewed by the author, Râmnicu Sărat, Buzău County, Romania, February 2013.
70Ibid., and M.T., high-school education, age 45, interviewed by the author, Râmnicu Sărat, Buzău County, Romania, February 2013.
the 1980s, Romanian tourists, hitchhikers from the GDR, smugglers from Poland, and wealthy West German tourists mingled on the Romanian Black Sea Coast. Besides helping ordinary Romanians to overcome the shortage of consumer goods, international tourism had another surprising effect: by bringing together tourists from both political blocs, it eased the ideologically tensioned relationship between the socialist East and the capitalist West.71

The brand-new modern spaces in Mamaia and Neptun-Olimp were populated by foreign tourists, but Romanians could be spotted as well. And of course, many worked there. Doru B, a former bellboy who climbed the ladder to become a hotel director at the time of the interview, described Neptun, the newly built resort, as follows: ‘Whereas in Neptun-Olimp, Romanians and foreign tourists were separated, in most hotels in Mamaia, they boarded together. Only the eating spaces were separated’.72 Maria V., a Romanian tourist at the seaside, described the geography of the restaurant in such hotels:

They were making a difference. Both at ‘Jupiter,’ where Mr. Dima was [an acquaintance who helped her get the holiday vouchers], and at ‘Doina’ - where my uncle was working-there were some mini-saloons separated by green fences/plants … and on one side British were seated, on the other Swedish, or Russians. Romanians were seated in the center.73

Despite this clear-cut official division, everyday interactions were common occurrences. The Romanians and foreigners would mix on the beach, or in the dancing clubs. Doru B. recalls that although in the late 1980s the entrance fee in the discos was paid in dollars, the locals had free entrance simply because they knew the doorman.

‘Now, let me tell you this: the entrance fee was in dollars … it was three dollars for the top discos. But we were locals, and young, and the doorman, many times a friend or a neighbor, was letting us in … for free’.74

Asked if he interacted with foreign tourists, Doru B. nodded his head and replied: ‘of course, I had a lady friend from Norway, you know they would be the ones to come and hit on you!’75 His comment suggests two aspects worthy of note. The first is that despite efforts to separate foreign tourists and Romanians, relationships between them, sometimes intimate relationships, developed. This anecdotal evidence suggests that these relationships were not uncommon. The other is Doru B.’s conception of the looser sexual mores of tourists, females in particular, from western (or northern) Europe. How common it was for female western tourists to ‘hit on’ Romanians is not clear, but the more relaxed approach of some western tourists to sexual relations became a trope among hotel workers – and hence no doubt to their friends – and offered new ways for Romanians to think about sexual mores. Recent studies on sexuality under state socialism by Khristin Ghodsee, Katerina Liskova and Agnieska Koscianska have nuanced the socialist prudishness regarding sex and have showed that east Europeans’

71 On tourism across the Iron Curtain see ‘Introduction’, in Tourism and Travel during the Cold War, Negotiating Tourist Experiences across the Iron Curtain, ed. Sune Bechmann Pedersen and Christian Noack (New York, Oxon: Routledge, 2019).
72 Doru B., age 47, high-school education, interviewed by the author, Neptun, Romania, June 2013.
73 Maria V., age 72, high-school education, interviewed by the author, Bucharest, Romania, July 2013.
74 Doru B., age 47, high-school education, interviewed by the author, Neptun, Romania, June 2013.
75 Ibid.
sexual norms and behaviour were more complex than the western Cold War stereotypes described. Doru B. is just one example in this respect.

Yet the socialist Romanian state was not particularly happy about these unfettered interactions and responded to this situation with increased surveillance. In 1977, a report by the Ministry of Interior noted that,

54 officers from the Foreign Language School were included among the tourist guides or used in order to solve various problems in the security work. In addition, two surveillance teams, eight officers from the operative technique unit and 45 officers specialized in economic and financial crimes (all of them subordinated to Securitate, the secret police) went to the seaside to help with the surveillance work.77

But this mobilisation of forces hardly delivered the expected results as the unwanted, even criminal activities, mounted. The Securitate’s report noted that ‘criminal activities’ on the Romanian seaside had increased by 30 percent compared to the previous year. Thus, 2,000 people were charged with smuggling of goods or foreign currency, while 12 kilograms of gold and 28,000 U.S. dollars were confiscated. The value of illegal transactions within just a couple of months reached an impressive total of 2.6 million lei.78 Moreover, the secret police complained that tourist workers temporarily employed for the summer were not thoroughly checked, and ‘dubious elements suspected for smuggling and prone to various criminal acts’ got hired by the Ministry of Tourism.79 Furthermore, the report added, when the militia or the Securitate succeeded in checking the employees, these verifications were shallow and there was little concern from the local office in Constanta to comply with the requests of the Bucharest headquarters.80 Little coordination within the secret police structures as well as between the Securitate and the Ministry of Tourism were to be blame for the limited success of surveillance on the seaside. Existing literature has explained the surveillance policies’ shortcomings in Romania through the lens of ‘weak state’ plagued by bureaucratic fixation.81 Although this view is correct to a certain extent it is still insufficient to shed light on the societal complexities under socialism. As studies coming mostly from anthropology have shown a tension exists between the state and citizens in most political regimes where the latter act ‘in spite of’ or ‘beyond’ the state depending on how effective the state governance is (or it is perceived as being effective) in a given context.82 This tension was especially prevalent in the case of state socialism in Romania. The Securitate’s attempts to curb the interactions between Western tourists and Romanians and the so-called criminal activities on the Black Sea Coast were doomed to fail not just because of the high number of these occurrences and the secret police’s actual lack of means, but also because of the individuals’ wish for a private space and autonomy in relation to those

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76Kristen Ghodsee and Katerina Liskova, ‘Bambling Idiots or Evil Masterminds? Challenging Cold War Stereotypes about Women, Sexuality and State Socialism’, Filozofija i Drustvo XXVII, no. 3 (2016): 489–503, Agnieska Koscianska, Gender, Pleasure and Violence, the Construction of Expert Knowledge of Sexuality in Poland (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2021).
77ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, file number 11487, 1977, f.235v.
78Ibid., f. 237.
79Ibid., f. 238.
80Ibid., f.238.
81Katherine Verdery, What was Socialism and What Comes Next (New York: Princeton, 1996), 40 and Katherine Verdery, My Life as a Spy, Investigations in a Secret Police File (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).
82Abel Polese, Borbála Kovács, and David Jancsics, ‘Informality “In Spite of” or “Beyond” the State: Some Evidence from Hungary and Romania’, European Societies 20, no. 2 (2018): 207–35.
state institutions unable to perform ‘good governance.’ As recent works on informality during socialism have shown, the central distribution of goods generated shortages, which in turn required citizens to turn to petty illegalities in order to cope with the lack of consumer goods. 83 What the socialist Romanian state deemed as illegality, ordinary citizens regarded as a quite legitimate way to fulfil needs against the backdrop of consumer goods shortages and the authoritarian state’s attempts to control their everyday lives.

**Gift giving, tipping and friendships on the Romanian Black Sea coast**

Despite the increased surveillance, casual relations between tourist workers, Romanians, and foreign tourists thrived in the 1980s. Among the most common of these relations were economic exchanges, such as gift giving. Gifts have been part of the ritualistic relationship between locals and foreign tourists in many geographical settings and historical contexts. 84 However, in the particular context of economic shortages of socialist Romania, gifts played an important role in binding the relationships between foreign tourists and Romanians. In the 1960s-1980s, gift giving had both social and economic meanings, and was part of the intricate communication process between foreign tourists on the one hand, and Romanian tourists and tourist workers on the other. Ileana M., a Romanian tourist at the seaside and a French translator, befriended a Belgian couple who came every year to Romania. At the end of the sojourn they would give her books or various inexpensive goods bought from the tourist shops. 85 Yet when she or other acquaintances needed more sizeable commodities, the Belgian tourists would buy them from the shop and resell them at a higher price. 86 As they had learned some Romanian during their vacations, the Belgian couple turned this into a small business endeavor. Cristina, who was a tourist guide with NTO–Littoral (part of the NTO–Carpathians agency that was in charge of the seaside starting in the 1980s) remembers how tourists would ask her every year what kind of presents she would like to receive: ‘Perfume, what kind of perfume, champagne, what kind of champagne, cigarettes, what kind of cigarettes’. 87 Alexandra, who worked as a waitress in the restaurant of a three-star hotel (category A hotel in the Romanian classification) in Neptun, remembered having the same type of conversations with foreign tourists who would come back on a recurring basis. ‘Tourists would always ask: What should I bring you next year when I am coming back? And you would have said: Bring me some chocolate, or some tights, or some perfume, it varied according to each one’s preferences and needs’. 88 Toursists were all well aware of the difficulty of getting foreign goods in Romania and they used these gifts, in most cases inexpensive things, to get better treatment or preferential services as they noticed the power of informal relationships in socialist Romania. Cristina, the

83 Alena V. Ledeneva, *Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge Russian and Post-Soviet Studies, 1998) or Alena Ledeneva, *The Global Encyclopedia of Informality; Towards Understanding of Social and Cultural Complexity* (London: UCL Press, 2018).

84 John F. Sherry, ‘Gift Giving in Anthropological Perspective’, *Journal of Consumer Research* 10, no. 2 (Sept. 1983), 157–68., Michael D. Large, ‘The Effectiveness of Gifts as Unilateral Initiatives in Bargaining’, *Sociological Perspectives* 42, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 525–42.

85 Ileana M., age 62, university degree, interviewed by the author, Bucharest, Romania, June 2015.

86 ibid.

87 Cristina C., age 61, university degree, interviewed by the author, Bucharest, Romania, December 2013.

88 Alexandra N. age 44, high school degree, interviewed by the author, Neptun, Romania, March 2013.
tourist guide, assumed that: ‘They all knew, either because they used to come every year, or because their friends who visited Romania told them. They were well informed. They were so accustomed to offering gifts that they continued to bring things after the revolution too, even when we didn’t need them so much.’

As Caroline Humphrey argued in her study about personal property in socialist Mongolia, material possession matters and it holds both identity and ritualistic significance in one’s life. Regardless of how insignificant the gifts that tourist workers received from foreign tourists were, they were extremely meaningful in the context of the consumer goods’ shortage in socialist Romania of the 1970s-1980s. For Romanian tourists and tourist workers, these goods opened a window onto a world that was not physically accessible to them, as they could not easily travel to Western countries.

Besides the relationships established in the framework of state-organised tourism, unofficial youth tourism flourished on the Black Sea Coast. The Romanian seaside was part of an extended network of hitchhikers that included youngsters from all Europe. Jan M., a truck driver from the GDR, recalled that as an East German, he could easily travel to Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, but not to the more liberal Yugoslavia. This is why, in order to spend a couple of days on the seaside, each summer he would hitchhike across these countries and live for a couple of weeks in either Costinești in Romania, or Melnik in Bulgaria. These two places were among the meeting points for hitchhikers from socialist Europe who wanted to spend a couple of days on the Black Sea Coast, the only place suitable for sunbathing, other than the Yugoslav Adriatic Sea in the socialist eastern Europe. ‘Everyone in our group knew the place. There was a similar village in Bulgaria, Melnik; one year we would go to Melnik and one year to the place in Romania (Costinești)’ (Figure 1).

The hitchhikers camp in Costinești was not on the official tourist map and in fact Jan M. believes it was illegal because the militia would only let them camp there during the night; during the day they had to take their belongings and leave. The photos depicting Jan M. with his friends show them at a terrace/pub in Costinești, a village 15 kilometres south of Constanța that communist officials called the ‘resort of youth.’ It was the location for several official student holiday camps and the place where Romanians in their 20s and 30s would choose to spend their vacations. The hitchhikers lived in a ‘commune’ type of settlement playing music, swimming, owning very few belongings, and barely taking a shower. ‘The sea was close, so we didn’t need one,’ uttered Jan M with a grin on his face. As the hitchhikers would meet there every year, their group worked as a network that exchanged music, ideas and a way of life among young people from socialist Eastern Europe and beyond. Communist authorities, hardly

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89Cristina C., age 61, university degree, interviewed by the author, Bucharest, Romania, December 2013.
90Caroline Humphrey, ‘Rituals of Death as a Context for Understanding Personal Property in Socialist Mongolia’, The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 8, no.1 (March 2002): 65–87.
91Jan M., former truck driver, now librarian, college degree, interviewed by the author, Vienna, May 2013.
92Ibid.
93Claudia G., age 56, college education, interviewed by the author, Râmnicu Sărat, Buzău County, Romania, March 2010. ‘My husband and I used to spend our vacations at Costinești. Because it was hard to find housing we would stay in the car or find a host. But sometimes it was better in the car, because one time we discovered that our rented room served as a mortuary place probably just weeks or months before we stayed there...’
94Jan M., former truck driver, now librarian, college degree, interviewed by the author, Vienna, May 2013.
95On the role of hitchhikers and youth travel in construing Europeanness see Richard Ivan Jobs, Backpack Ambassadors: How Youth Travel Integrated Europe (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017).
thrilled by the presence of these tourists who did not bring money into the official economy and who acted like ‘western punks,’ tolerated them as long as they did not openly challenge the official power. ‘The Militia used to raid our camp, but they weren’t taking any action against us as long as we followed some rules (i.e. not making a fire),’ explained Jan M. 96 Beyond the banality of Jan M’s actions, the youth encounters on the Romania Black Sea coast were in fact part of a broader youth travel movement in Europe, which as Richard Ivan Jobs has meaningfully shown played a role in connecting the continent and in ‘fostering a European cultural and social integration’ in the postwar period. 97

On the watch of quite lenient local officials (be they, hotel directors, COMTURIST shops managers, or militia) material exchanges between Romanians, especially tourist workers, and tourists from socialist and capitalist countries became a common occurrence despite the central authorities’ recommendations to contain them. Although the Romanian Black Sea coast became mostly a destination for families among foreign tourists, the presence of more rebellious figures like Jan M. was also part of the informal internationalism that tourism engendered on the Romanian riviera. For Romanian tourist workers and ordinary tourists, interacting with foreigners, especially Westerners, was but a way to cope with the pervasive shortage of qualitative consumer goods in official stores and to build friendships that worked as an escape from the dullness of everyday life routine (Figure 2).

96 Jan M. interview by the author.
97 Richard Ivan Jobs, Backpack Ambassadors, 3.
Conclusion

From the 1960s into the early 1980s, the Romanian Black Sea coast turned into a hotbed of European tourism. This happened because of the state’s project to develop international seaside tourism, which led to significant investments in the area and a reshaping of space in order to welcome tourists from capitalist countries, neighbouring socialist countries, and Romanian tourists themselves. For the Romanian communist state, international tourism was a source of hard currency but also a living proof that socialism was a viable political regime, which brought modern living style to the seaside. Yet the arrival of

Figure 2. A map of Romanian Black Sea coast, 1968. Source: Roumanie, Informations Touristique (Bucharest: Office National du Tourisme, 1969), back cover.
tourists from capitalist countries although economically beneficial to the Romanian state produced a conundrum. Interactions between Romanians and tourists from socialist and capitalist countries became a usual sight despite the communist regime’s attempts to keep this mingling under control. Besides the direct confrontation between material culture of capitalism and socialism that the arrival of both tourists from capitalist and socialist countries engendered, personal and economic networks developed among tourists to the dismay of the communist regime.

These networks developed under the leniency of local authorities, such as hotel directors and militia, who at times were themselves part of the grid that benefitted from the presence of foreign tourists. All they had to do was to turn a blind eye to the material and personal links between Romanians and foreign visitors. This observation forces us to rethink the view of the communist regime in Romania as a monolithic entity and to consider the importance of the diversity of actors who shaped tourism practices in a densely populated tourist region like the Black Sea coast. With western tourists making-up almost fifty percent of the tourists on the Romanian Black Sea coast, the region became a place where economic exchanges, personal relationships, and intimate relationships, left their mark on more than people’s memories. It is impossible to quantify the impact just as it is impossible to ignore it. In addition to the West German, Scandinavian or Belgian working-class families that vacationed on the Black Sea coast and comprised the majority of Western tourists, there were also East German hippies, Polish traders, hitchhikers from socialist Eastern Europe, and at times Western Europe, along with Romanians who regularly met on the Romanian riviera. This created an informal form of internationalism, that although officially sanctioned (as tourism was a state policy of the communist regime) was shaped from below through the daily interactions between tourists of different nationalities and cultures, Romanians included.

These exchanges helped foreign tourists and Romanians alike to experience tourism in a way that challenged the propagandistic message sent out by their governments against the backdrop of the Cold War. For the Romanians, these interactions served as a window onto the inaccessible West but also as a way to cope with the shortage of goods in the regular shops and to purchase or receive foreign goods that would fulfil more than basic needs. By so doing, they enhanced their social status among peers at work or school. For tourists from other socialist countries, like Jan M., the Romanian Black Sea Coast was an escape from the ordinary socialist way of life and an opportunity to enjoy freedoms inaccessible in their home countries, while for the Western tourists it offered the opportunity to have a firsthand experience with a so-called ‘exotic place’ and an opposing political regime in ways that were not always condoned by governments in their countries. For tourists from capitalist countries, interactions with citizens of the eastern ‘Bloc’ brought about some material advantages as well and at times more room for manoeuvre as they did enjoy a privileged status when vacationing in socialist countries. These contacts equally shaped human relations and space on the Romanian Riviera. Undoubtedly, from the mid-1960s until the early 1980s, with the tacit acceptance of local officials, the Romanian Black Sea Coast offered a space that mingled socialist landscape and values with capitalist material culture and practices.

On the Western stereotypes about the Balkans and Eastern Europe see Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
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