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Opportunities for developing communist heritage tourism in Bulgaria

Abstract *The paper analyses the possibilities to develop communist heritage tourism in Bulgaria. After a review of related literature, the paper identifies five characteristics of communist heritage tourism: ideologically overburdened type of tourism, controversial, represents a limited time period of history, represents a personality cult, concentration of resources in places related with communist history in the country (in cities and the countryside). The paper summarizes some of the most important resources for communist heritage tourism development in Bulgaria and the potential market segments for communist heritage tourist products. The key market segments are considered Bulgarians and Westerners born before 1960 as they were at least 19 years old when communism fell and had clear memories of the period. The final section of the paper presents the structure of a proposed future museum of communism and analyses its three possible locations.*

Keywords:

communism; heritage; museum; tourism; tourist resources; segmentation; Bulgaria

Introduction

For a period of 45 years (from 1944 to 1989) Bulgaria had a communist political regime that marked the history of the country and left its scar on every aspect of life. Now, 20 years after the fall of communism in Bulgaria and the other socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, including the dismantled Soviet Union, communism and its monuments provoke different feelings within Bulgarian society and among foreign visitors. Some people, predominantly third aged, remember the regime with nostalgia because of the order it created compared to the chaos of the transition to market economy. People deprived by communism condemn it as a repressive regime. Younger people are not familiar with the communist period and for them and the foreign tourists from Western societies communism is an interesting part of history for which they want to know, but probably do not want to live in.

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During the communist rule in Bulgaria, many monuments were erected to commemorate the birth or death of communist leaders, partisans, the glory of the Soviet Union and the Red Army among others. While the statues of Lenin, Marx, Dimitar Blagoev and Georgi Dimitrov have been removed after 1989 and the streets and boulevards bearing their names renamed, there are still plenty of monuments that remind people of these historical times. Up to now they have not been successfully incorporated in tourism supply and are not visited by tourists. However, communist monuments possess high tourism potential and can attract both national and foreign visitors. Countries like Germany, Hungary and Romania have successfully introduced communist heritage tourism into the itineraries of organized packaged tours although public authorities are not very keen in emphasizing a part of country's history considered to be aberration from "normal" political development (Light, 2000a, 2000b). Other countries like China, North Korea, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia use communist heritage as an attractive selling proposition in their destination marketing as well (Henderson, 2007; Li, & Hu, 2008). Bulgaria is yet to realize the potential of its communist heritage and instead of rejecting it to use it as a promotional tool. In this regard, the aim of current paper is to present how to develop communist heritage tourism (or red tourism) in Bulgaria that can help diversify the unilateral specialization of country's tourism industry – mass (summer and winter) tourism.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. After a review of related literature on heritage and red tourism, section three of the paper identifies the main characteristics of communist heritage tourism. Sections four and five present analyses of communist heritage tourism supply and potential demand, respectively, while section six derives the strength and weakness, opportunities and threats in developing communist heritage tourism in Bulgaria. Section seven discusses the possible ways to develop communist heritage tourism in Bulgaria and section eight concludes the paper.

Related literature

HERITAGE, HERITAGE TOURISM AND POLITICS

Heritage "may be viewed as taking on the identity of an interest in the past, an interest in cultures, buildings, artifacts and landscapes of both the past and present" (Boyd, 2002, p. 212). It includes the cultural and natural environment that people inherit from previous generations. Cultural heritage is usually predominantly associated with built environment (Boyd, 2002) and material artifacts but intangible elements like media culture (Turnpenny, 2004), religion, dances, songs, literature, customs are also with great importance and attract a lot of visitors (Gonzalez, 2008).

Heritage tourism, as a way of consuming heritage, has received a lot of attention in past two decades (Jamal, & Kim, 2005; Timothy, & Boyd, 2003). Researchers focus on the management of heritage sites (Aas, Ladkin, & Fletcher, 2005; Poria, Reichel, & Biran, 2001; Li, Wu, & Cai, 2008), the demand for (Dutta, Banerjee, & Husain, 2007) and possibilities for developing heritage tourism (Li, & Lo, 2005), its economic and social benefits (Bowitz, & Ibenholt, 2009; Del Saz Salazar, & Marques, 2005; Ru-ijgrok, 2006; Tuan, & Navrud, 2008) and sustainable development (Chhabra, 2009).

The main actor in the heritage tourism is the heritage tourist; therefore, his profile and requirements (Poria, Biran, & Reichel, 2009; Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2001, 2003, 2004) and the authenticity of his tourist experience (Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003; Kim, & Jamal, 2007; Reisinger, & Steiner, 2006; Steiner, & Reisinger, 2006) are object of significant research as well. The heritage tourist has a deep emotional involvement with the place visited, perceiving it as part of his/her own heritage, although his visit is not always related to nostalgia (Caton, & Santos, 2007). This distinguishes him from the visitors to heritage sites who are unaware of its heritage characteristics or might have recreational, educational or other motives for visiting the place and do not experience it as part of their personal heritage at all (Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2003).

Heritage and heritage tourism are deeply interlinked with politics (Su, & Teo, 2009) and “to speak of heritage is to speak of politics” (Allcock, 1995). They are often used by politicians to instill national pride in citizens and impress foreigners. Cultural heritage tourism is a powerful source for creating and maintaining the national identity (Palmer, 1999) due to the emphasis of on common (glorious) history of people living in the country or of a specific ethnic group. The heritagization of cultural resources is at times intentionally based on an invented, hidden, as well as a purposely chosen past (Poria, & Ashworth, 2009, p. 523), thus bordering ideological manipulation (Goulding, & Domic, 2009). Sometimes part of the national history and cultural heritage is considered inconvenient (slavery and segregation in America or South Africa, the Nazi period in Germany or communism in former socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe) and politicians try, successfully or not, to stay away from it. However, such historical moments also find their deserved place in the shared sense of history and heritage among people through dedicated memorials, established to educate and remind people of past mistakes (Buzinde, & Santos, 2008; Hanna, 2008; Wight, & Lennon, 2007; Worden, 2009).

This close relationship between heritage tourism and politics can create potential conflicts between the tourism industry and the government. Tourist companies can differ from government institutions in their marketing strategies towards country's heritage commercialization and its representation (Bandyopadhyay, Morais, & Chick, 2008). Companies are eager to valorize heritage tourism resources in order to gain competitive advantage on the fast growing heritage tourism market. On the other hand, governments are more concerned with the preservation and conservation of the resources and their presentation in the politically *proper* way (e.g. emphasizing the repression during communism and not its social achievements, or vice versa). This creates a potential conflict between the tourism industry and the government institutions that could lead to hindering the development of specific *politically sensitive* heritage tourism subsegments like communist heritage tourism.

COMMUNIST HERITAGE TOURISM

Communist heritage tourism, as a subsegment of heritage tourism, has recently captured the interest of the academics and the available literature on the topic is very limited. Light (2000a, 2000b) is among the first authors in the field focusing pre-

dominantly on Romania's past. He analyzes the presentation of communist heritage in Romania and concludes that it is considered an "unwanted past" (Light, 2000b). However, cities like Berlin and Budapest capitalize on their own communist heritage through embedding it in the itineraries of city tours. Berlin saved parts of the wall that divided the city for nearly three decades and is now a symbol of German unity. Budapest authorities moved the ideological communist statues to the Szoborpark (the Statue Park) which now attracts cultural tourists (Light, 2000a). In similar vein, Dujisin (2007) shows that communist sites can be successfully included in the tourism supply in Albania. The Central and Eastern European countries mentioned above are not the only ones to utilize their communist heritage. Henderson (2007), for example, puts her focus on the East Asian countries of North Korea, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia, while Li and Hu (2008) discuss red tourism in China. For these countries tourism is an important tool for enhancing their sense of national identity and to propagandize the achievements of the socialist regime.

Characteristics of communist heritage tourism

Communist heritage tourism has several specific characteristics that stem from the political system it represents (communism) and its ideology (Marxism-Leninism and personally cult). The most important are the high political charge communist heritage tourism possesses (it might be used to praise or blame communism as a political regime by political parties) and its controversial nature (acceptance or rejection of communist monuments, buildings and art as being part of nation's *heritage*).

IDEOLOGICALLY OVERBURDENED / POLITICALLY CHARGED TYPE OF TOURISM

Communism presents a period of human history marked with hostility and tension between two opposing blocs – the socialist countries and the capitalist economies. The end of the Cold War did not mean, however, the end of communism in people's minds. Many people remember it and in countries that still have this regime (Vietnam, China, North Korea, and Cuba) tourism is a tool to promote the success of socialism and communism. In Bulgaria and other former socialist countries strong pro- and anticommunist feelings still exist thus making communism (and potentially communist heritage tourism) a highly politically sensitive topic.

CONTROVERSIAL TYPE OF TOURISM

It is a characteristic that naturally flows from the ideology embedded in communist heritage. Different social strata interpret it differently and some even do not recognize it as a "heritage" by its own right. Post-communist governments do not want their countries to be associated with communism and to put the line behind that period (cf. Light, 2000a, 2000b). In Bulgaria communism collapsed only 20 years ago and memories of it are still alive. Bulgarian society is divided into its assessment of the past. Older generations remember it with nostalgia because of the political and economic stability it created. Former dissidents and people that won from the transition to market economy condemn the regime emphasizing the concentration camps, political killings and lack of freedom of speech. It is peculiar to mention that presently the history

textbooks in Bulgaria pay little attention to the socialist period and the latter is literally non-existent in museums, similar to the situation in Romania as noted by Light (2000a).

LIMITED PERIOD OF THE HISTORY

Communist period in Central and Eastern Europe represents a limited time frame of about 45 years (for Bulgaria it is the period between 1945-1989). In Russia this period extends to 74 years (1917-1991). The system of communist heritage resources is closed and no new monuments or memorabilia are added. However, there are some new monuments, statues, museums that are now being constructed and related to communism like the Szoborpark (the Statue Park) in Budapest, containing the communist statues from Budapest. These new monuments serve the purpose of representing the past and reminding current and future generations about the communist regimes.

REPRESENTATIONS OF PERSONALITY CULT

Love and obedience to the communist leader was a specific characteristic of communist regimes. The statues, busts and monuments built during that period were nearly exclusively connected with birth- and death places of local communist heroes, Lenin, Marx and Stalin. The names of the streets, boulevards and squares in every settlement were also related to the communist mythology. Therefore, the communist heritage of former, and especially current communist regimes (China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba), is a representation of personality cult.

CONCENTRATION OF RESOURCES IN PLACES RELATED TO COMMUNIST HISTORY IN THE COUNTRY

The resources are concentrated in birth places of communist leaders, battles of communist partisans with the regular army or foreign enemies during the Second World War, places associated with specific moments of the Communist Party's history (e.g. the place where the party was established). A positive side of this communist heritage-space relationship is that most of the resources are not located in mass tourist destinations (sea-side and mountain resorts) but can be predominantly found in cities (monuments erected during communist rule) and mountains/forests (places related with the battles of the communist partisans with the governments before the former took power). This makes communist heritage tourist resources an excellent addition to tour itineraries and a tool for territorial diversification of visitor flows. In Bulgaria, communist monuments, statues and busts can be found in nearly every city, town and village which makes their inclusion in tourism supply as an attraction even easier.

Analysis of communist heritage tourism supply in Bulgaria

COMMUNIST HERITAGE TOURIST RESOURCES IN BULGARIA

Table 1 presents a typology of communist heritage tourism resources in Bulgaria based on holistic approach. The communist heritage resources are divided into 6 large groups depending on the reasons for their creation, their dedication and material expression. By and large, the communist monuments are dedicated to the Bulgarian Communist Party and specific moments of its history (the uprising in 1923, the Socialist revolu-

tion in 1944, the founding of the party or its particular regional/local organisation), communist leaders and partisans (places of birth or death) and the Soviet Union (Red Army/Russian soldier/Unknown soldier and Bulgarian-Soviet friendship monuments). These monuments were deliberately built to accentuate the communist ideology and, therefore, were and some are still highly ideologically overburdened.

Communist heritage resources include communist architecture and iconic buildings and memorabilia from the period (coins, medals, poster, etc) as well. Art and media culture too served the regime. Bulgarian communist heritage boasts songs, poems, novels, films, paintings dedicated to communism, many of which were commissioned by the Communist Party or other public and cultural institutions.

Table 1

CLASSIFICATION OF COMMUNIST HERITAGE TOURISM RESOURCES IN BULGARIA

Resources	Locations (selected examples)
Resources related to communist leaders and partisans	
Birthplaces of a communist leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kovachevtsi (Pernik district) – Georgi Dimitrov • Pravets (near Botevgrad) – Todor Zhivkov • Gabrovo – Mitko Palauzov (the youngest partisan)
Monuments, commemorating the demise of partisans and communist leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sofia – the place where the Georgi Dimitrov’s Mausoleum was located before its demolition in 1999 • Yastrebino – a place where 6 children were killed by the police during the partisan movement in Bulgaria in 1943. A national children complex is established and still functional • Eremia – the “Tulip” monument, dedicated to the partisans killed by the army in 1944 • Maglizh – the burial place of Doncho Boyadzhiev • Sofia – Bratska mogila monument, dedicated to the partisan movement • Pleven – Bratska mogila monument, dedicated to the partisan movement
Statues / busts / low relief of communist leaders and partisans (outside the places of their birth or death)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varna – Alley of the antifascist heroes in the city’s sea garden • Bourgas – monuments of partisans in the sea garden • Belovo • Bratsigovo • Smaller sculptures in nearly every city and town in Bulgaria
Resources related to the Bulgarian Communist Party	
Monuments, commemorating specific moments in communist history of Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buzludzha – a complex on the mount Buzludzha in the Balkan mountain on the place the socialist movement in Bulgaria was established in 1891 • Stone engraved inscriptions commemorating the establishment of a local Communist Party organisation (e.g. Koprivshtitsa) • Stone engraved inscriptions and monuments commemorating the Socialist revolution on 9th September 1944 (e.g. Strelcha, the Liberty Arch on Goraltepe peak near Troyan) • Monuments, commemorating the communist uprising in September 1923 (e.g. Maglizh, Pazardzhik)
Resources related to the Soviet Union	
Red Army / Russian soldier/ Unknown soldier monuments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sofia • Plovdiv • Bourgas • Pleven • Russe • Sliven
Monument, dedicated to the Bulgarian-Soviet friendship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varna

Table 1 **CONTINUED**

Communist architecture and iconic buildings	
Specific architecture of the buildings in the town centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dimitrovgrad – “Stalinist baroque” • Sofia – the “concrete blocks” architecture – Mladost and Lyulin quarters • Sofia – the buildings of the Presidency, Council of ministers and the former Communist Party house (now hosting offices of the Parliament) • Former Communist Party houses in every major city – Varna, Plovdiv, Bourgas, Russe among others
Other monuments and iconic buildings related to communism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sofia – Assembly “Flag of peace”
Memorabilia	
Memorabilia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coins • Medals • Military uniforms • Photos • Posters, etc.
Arts and media culture	
Arts and media culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Songs, poems, novels, films, paintings devoted to communism, communist leaders and heroes, and the Soviet Union (the Red Army)

The collapse of communism in Bulgaria caused a pendulum shift in every aspect of life, including monuments and architecture. All monuments of Karl Marx and Lenin were dismantled, while many statues of partisans and communist leaders – destroyed. The tenth year of the “transition period” (1999) witnessed the demolition of Georgi Dimitrov’s mausoleum in Sofia, despite the discussions for its transformation into a museum of Bulgarian military glory. Nearly all streets bearing names of partisans and socialist leaders were renamed. Many towns and cities try to delete the 45 years of communist rule with few peculiar exceptions. Pravets, the birthplace of Todor Zhivkov, who governed Bulgaria from 1956 to 1989, named its main square after its prominent citizen and a bust was erected. In similar vein, the village of Kovachevtzi, Pernik district, kept the monument of Georgi Dimitrov and his home house. The monumental complex on Buzludzha peak (see Figure 1) is one of the iconic buildings constructed on the place where the 1891 Congress of the Bulgarian Social-democratic party (a predecessor of the Bulgarian Communist Party) took place. On this congress the party adopted Marxism as its political ideology. Currently, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (the successor of the Bulgarian Communist Party) organizes annual celebrations on the same place on 1st August for its members and potential voters. Dimitrovgrad is a prominent example of the socialist architecture and urban design. The town was constructed during 1950s and named after Georgi Dimitrov. Until 1980s it was a symbol of communist enthusiasm of the youth. Dimitrovgrad has preserved its unique architecture, represented by the so called “Stalinist baroque” – a Soviet type architecture from the 1950s.

Figure 1
BUZLUDZHA MONUMENT



Although the “democracy pendulum” eradicated or left into oblivion many communism related monuments there are currently still plenty of them that can be incorporated into tourism supply of the destination. Most of them are located in small towns and villages, where little has changed since the end of communism. None of the monuments is currently used for the needs of tourism in Bulgaria. Many of them are in bad condition (especially the complex on Buzludzha), due to the lack of maintenance for the last two decades. Their inclusion in tourism supply, however, will require only funds for reconstruction and marketing, not for infrastructure, because of their good transport accessibility achieved during the communist period.

COMMUNIST HERITAGE TOURIST PRODUCTS IN BULGARIA

In contrast to the rich communist heritage tourism resources Bulgaria is endowed, it astonishes the lack of organized tours to communism related monuments. They are not even mentioned in the brochures of the destination, issued by the Bulgarian State Agency for Tourism and the incoming tour operators. Foreign tour operators omit communist heritage as well. The country is presented with its beaches, countryside, mountain resorts, wines, nature parks and historical heritage from the First and Second Bulgarian Kingdoms and the Turkish yoke. Communism, with all its achievements and misfortunes is perceived as a temporary “off-track” period that does not deserve the “tourist gaze”. Therefore, currently no visitor can buy a package or a short tour to communist heritage resources. This is an empty niche which Bulgarian incoming tour operators can use to diversity their products.

Analysis of potential communist heritage tourism demand in Bulgaria

Poria, Butler and Airey (2001, 2003, 2004) argue that motivation behind visits to heritage sites depends on the perception of that site in relation to tourist's personal heritage. Therefore, potential *communist heritage tourists* would visit communism related resources because they perceive them as part of their own (hi)story – they have lived in communist times, were party members, and embraced deeply the communist ideology. On the other side, *visitors to communist heritage sites* would differ to communist heritage tourists with the lower degree of their involvement with communism – they either did not live in communism due to their nationality and age, fought against it, are indifferent to it or have only general interest in the period. Some people could also visit communist sites for recreational purposes without any ideology or history involved. Either group is not likely to perceive communist heritage tourist resources as part of their own heritage but might have *cultural* interest in the period and its heritage thus generating tourism demand.

In practical marketing terms the potential communist heritage tourism demand can be segmented by using two segmentation criteria – nationality and age of the person in 1989 (when communism fell) (see Table 2). By nationality we could divide potential segments to 3 groups – Bulgarians, foreigners from other former socialist economies and foreigners from Western countries. The rationale for such grouping is that foreigners from former communist countries have had similar experiences to Bulgarians but for them their own communist heritage might be of greater interest as they perceive it as closer to their own personal heritage. Foreigners from Western countries would perceive communist heritage products in CEE more or less as substitutes (excluding landmarks, like the Berlin Wall, that do not have substitutes worldwide). Therefore, the “nationality” segmentation criterion determines whether the potential visitor lives or not in a former socialist country and, ultimately, has had experience with the communist system.

The age criterion is used to identify the *level of experience* people had in their everyday life with communist rules and whether they can identify communist heritage as part of their own personal heritage. Obviously, unborn people and children under 6 have not been included in socialist organizations and have not experienced the regime. The first conscious touch with communist rules in Bulgaria appeared when the child entered the “Chavdartche” organization at the age of 7. The next big step in the inclusion in the communist society was when youngsters graduated from high schools at the age of 18 and entered the workforce or continued to the universities. The 45-year mark is selected to denote middle age at the time of communism's collapse. The last segment starts at the age of 55 for women and 60 for men that were the retirement ages for both genders during communism. The discussed segmentation criterion is time-anchored, i.e. it refers to the people that were at a specific age at a specific time and the size of the segments (excluding the A1, B1 and C1 from Table 2) only diminishes through time.

Table 2

POTENTIAL MARKET SEGMENTS OF COMMUNIST HERITAGE TOURISM IN BULGARIA

		Age in 1989				
		Unborn-<6	7-18	19-45	46-54	55(60)+
Nationality	Bulgarians	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5
	Foreigners (former socialist countries in CEE)	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5
	Foreigners (Western countries)	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5

The combination between the two segmentation criteria generates a matrix with 15 possible segments, denoted in a letter-figure style. Segments B1-B4 would most likely have no interest in communist heritage tourism to Bulgaria because they come from countries with same regimes and have mixed feelings about the period as Bulgarians do. To segments C1 and C2 the Cold War is now not more than a memory or story told by their parents. They might not distinguish the “communist” from “non-communist” heritage of the country. If they do visit communist heritage sights in Bulgaria it would not be intentionally showing specific interest to communism but as part of their general tourist gaze. Therefore, we identify 7 segments with potential interest to communist heritage characterized briefly below:

- *Segment B5*. These were retirees at the time of communism’s collapse. During 1970s and 80s they had travelled to Bulgaria’s resorts and have good memories of the period. Most probably they have some nostalgia and want to remember to “good all times”.
- *Segments C3-C5*. They remember the Cold War quite well. For them, the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc were the enemy. They might visit the communist heritage sites in Bulgaria from curiosity – to see what in fact life was on the other side of the Iron curtain.
- *Segment A1*. The Bulgarians that were unborn or under six and, therefore, not involved in socialist organizations, have no experience whatsoever with communism itself. They have no knowledge about the system either. In this regard, a government policy should devote more attention to the proper education of younger generations and their balanced knowledge about the communist rule in Bulgaria – both positives and negatives.
- *Segment A2*. These Bulgarians do have experience with communism, but only in youth organizations. They have not worked during communism, so that had not experienced the harsh side of the regime. For them communism was a period that coincided with their childhood and adolescence and is associated with the security on the streets, well maintained sports facilities, organized government-financed cheap summer and winter holidays, first flirts and loves. In short, communism for this group is a romantic period of their lives.

- *Segment A3.* In 1989 members of this segment had already started their careers. Many of them emigrated in the early 1990s; others had to change their professional field. For those that succeeded in the transition period, communism is a period not much talked about; for the rest – it is a period of lost security and morale.
- *Segment A4.* This is probably the segment that lost most from the transition period. In 1989 people in the group suddenly found themselves unnecessary – with obsolete skills and outdated knowledge. Being in or above their middle ages it was difficult for them to change the profession. Therefore, they have a real nostalgia for the communism times and would like to visit communism related sites. A brief overview of Bulgarian Socialist Party's (the renamed Communist Party) participants in gatherings on Buzludzha and other places reveals the nostalgic feelings of the segment.
- *Segment A5.* The whole conscious life of these Bulgarians passed in communism. They had witnessed the coup d'état in 1944 and participated in the build-up of the communist state. Their psychological involvement with the regime is strongest and the "heritage" takes personal forms. Of course, for the dissidents the opposite is true.

From the segments analyzed most feasible are C3-C5 and A3-A5. However, the current youngsters can and have to be involved in communist heritage tourism in order to increase their knowledge about the period.

SWOT analysis for the development of communist heritage tourism in Bulgaria

As a tourist destination Bulgaria possesses several strengths and weaknesses in developing communist heritage tourism. On the strong side, the country is endowed with plenty of communist monuments that can be found within nearly every city, town or village. They are very easily accessible from all seaside and mountain resorts and the main cities. The only exception is Buzludzha that is located on one of the peaks in the Balkan mountain but it can be combined in an itinerary with the Shipka monument (dedicated to the soldiers that died during the Liberation war in 1877-1878) which is only few kilometers away. However, although the country can offer many communist heritage sites, the desire of post-communist governments to drift Bulgaria away from its past image, resulted in no financial resources poured into site preservation and many of them are in a miserable condition. The access to EU funds could be a way to finance communist sites' restoration and their inclusion in tourism supply. There is not museum of communism which can serve as a flagship for communist heritage tourism in the country or organized trips (round, half- or one-day) to communist heritage sites, thus underutilizing the tourist resources of the country.

The development of communist heritage tourism faces some current opportunities and threats. Bulgaria can use the Western societies' interest in "otherness" and their memories from the Cold War. The attraction of tourists can be stimulated by the increase in number of low-cost airlines flying to the destination while EU funds for preservation of country's cultural heritage can be used to restore communist sites. On the other

side, entrance into the EU will decrease the differences between Bulgaria and other member countries in the long term, through the “Europeanization” of (capital) cities (Young, & Kaczmarek, 2008), which will most probably lead to a lack of interest in communist heritage. As time passes, there will be less and less people that have lived in or have clear memories from communism which will transform communist heritage into a part of the general “tourist gaze” in the destination (Urry, 1990).

Perspectives of communist heritage tourism in Bulgaria

There are several ways for the inclusion of the communist heritage resources in tourism supply. The first one is by preparing dedicated half-day tours to communism-related monuments or their inclusion in regular tours with other attractions. This is the easiest and most natural way as it will strengthen the existing tour itineraries and will not require much investment. Only few communist heritage resources that have been neglected in last two decades, like Buzludzha, should receive public funding for reconstruction.

The second way for incorporating communist heritage resources in tourism supply is by establishing a specialized museum of communism. The above analysis definitely identifies the need for a museum of socialism and communism. The target market might consist of foreign tourists visiting Bulgarian sea side resorts as they receive most of the arrivals to the country. The museum could be located in a village or small town near the Black sea coast with easy access to the resorts. An excellent option is the town of Kableshekovo. It is located in about 15 km south west from Sunny beach and 20 km. north east from Bourgas. Within 50 km range from Kableshekovo there are more than 300 000 beds in hotels, family hotels, private accommodations and campsites. The tourists that stay at these establishments during the summer season constitute an enormous target market of about 1,5 million people annually. The museum can also be visited by tourists from other resorts, especially from the North Black sea coast, and by Bulgarian nationals. Other location options might include the city of Pernik, due to its proximity to the capital Sofia and good flight connections to it. The location of the museum in Pernik will strengthen the tourist supply of the capital and the city break packages to it but will lose the tourists visiting the seaside. Another advantage of the Pernik location is the possibility to generate visits to the museum all year round, not like the sea-side location. A third possible choice is the currently abandoned monument at Buzludzha peak in the Balkan mountain (Figure 1). This choice will require little super- and infrastructure investments as it will utilize an existing monumental complex but a visit to it would require a full-day tour with transportation difficulties during the winter time.

Foreigners and Bulgarians will differ in their reasons for visiting the museum. The former are attracted by their interest to the life behind the “Iron curtain” and a system that was proclaimed the “evil empire” and enemy of democracy. For older Bulgarians (above 55 at the time of writing of current paper – 2009), a visit to the museum will be a nostalgic reminiscent of the good old times when everything in life was well organized, people had proper jobs, before the transition to market economy destroying ev-

everything. Young Bulgarians can also be attracted because for them the visit will be both informational and educational. Generations born since 1990 know virtually nothing about the 45 years of communism in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe or have only one-sided perspective of the period created by media and the stories of their parents and especially grandparents.

The museum of communism should present all aspects of life and could have the following sections:

- *Bulgarian Communist Party* – pictures of party leaders, the chart of the Communist Party, the text of the oath of Communist party members, history of the party, party documents, the 9th September 1944.
- *Youth section* – the inclusion of children and youngsters in the communist movement – uniforms of the types of organizations (“chavdarcheta” – 7-10-year old, “pioneers” – 10-16-year old and “komsomoltsi” – 16-27-year old), the texts of the oaths of their members, description of the organizations and their goals, pictures of mass events with children and teenagers and their participation in scientific and social events.
- *Communist culture* – books and excerpts of books, poems, playwrights, films, and songs devoted to communism, communist leaders and heroes, and the Soviet Union (the Red Army). The section can include a subsection on communist abbreviations and slogans, and a second subsection of newspapers covering different stories from everyday life – what were the main topics covered by the press, how they were presented.
- *Communist economy* – a representation of the major points in the communist organization of economic life, the nationalization of land and capital, communist money (coins and banknotes), agricultural cooperatives, the achievements of communism on the economic front (the construction of large heavy industrial plants, the nuclear power station in Kozlodui, the electrification of the country, roads). A compulsory subsection should be dedicated to specimens of products from communism, company and store names and labels, which still cause nostalgia in many Bulgarians.
- *Science and technology* – a section presenting the achievements of scientists in Bulgaria during the communist period in physics, chemistry, biology, sociology, technology, etc.
- *Common people* – series of pictures, presenting the everyday life of the common Bulgarian during communism – work, home, and leisure; young and old; happy and bad moments; alone and with fellows.
- *International relations* – a glimpse at the international relations of Bulgaria with other (socialist) countries during communism. Special attention should be paid to the “Iron curtain” and the attempts of Bulgarian citizens to cross it. A subsection can be dedicated to the way how the West was described and presented in Bulgaria – with titles in newspapers and magazines, caricatures, propaganda slogans. A reciprocal subsection can show how communist countries were described in Western societies with similar materials from the press.

- *The dark side of communism* – a section concentrated on the censorship, concentration camps from the early years of communist regime, political murders, huge foreign debt, and environment polluting plants.
- *Communist memorabilia* – symbols of communism – stars, flags, medals, uniforms, stamps, labels, etc.

If located near the Black sea coast, the visit to the museum of communism can be arranged as a half day tour by tour operators. The museum can also distribute leaflets in English, German, Russian and Bulgarian among hotels in the resorts in the South Black sea coast. Its price should be in the range of 10-15 euro per adult during the main season (July-August) with huge discounts offered the school children (nearly all of whom shall be Bulgarians), youngsters (18-25), third-age tourists (above 65) and off-season visits. The museum could generate enough funds to sustain 2-3 full time jobs and 5-7 part-time seasonal jobs depending on the size of the establishment.

The third way of utilizing communist heritage resources is by creating special events and attractions for the tourists. An “Iron curtain” attraction can be established, together with the museum or in separate location, where participants reconstruct the crossing of the Iron curtain – with barbed wire, fences, and soldiers with communist army uniforms, prison and so forth. Participants in the game who pass through all the obstacles in the game receive a certificate for successful crossing of the Iron curtain.

Conclusion

Similar to dark tourism, communist heritage tourism is a controversial and ideologically overburdened type of special interest tourism. Visits to communist monuments can elicit different feelings in visitors and local residents. Although communism in general has a negative image in Europe, its heritage can and should be preserved and used in tourism. For Bulgaria it represents a viable source for diversifying the destination tourist product.

Potential conflicts may arise with the development of communist heritage tourism in Bulgaria. The Socialist party, some of its elderly supporters or firm anticommunists might object the way communist heritage is presented to tourists. These groups have opposing and sometimes extreme views on how Bulgaria’s communist past should be interpreted. However, the communist heritage tourism must look for a more balanced representation of the period emphasizing both its negative sides and positive achievements avoiding extremely positive or negative interpretations.

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