

The Borders of Friendship:
Transnational Travel and Tourism in the East Bloc, 1972-1989

by

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Abstract

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The “borders of friendship” was an open border travel project between Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Poland starting in 1972. The project allowed ordinary citizens to cross borders with a police-issued personal identification card, and citizens of member countries were initially allowed to exchange unlimited amounts of foreign currency. In this episode of liberalized travel – still largely unknown in the West – the number of border-crossings between member states grew from the tens of thousands to the tens of millions within a very brief period.

This dissertation analyses the political, economic, social and cultural effects of this open border policy. It first clarifies what motivated authorities in Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia to promote unorganized foreign tourism in the 1970s and 1980s. Then, it explores how authorities encouraged citizens to become tourists. Governments wanted the “borders of friendship” to be successful, but they were unsure how to define success. Each government had different understandings about what the project was supposed to entail. Whatever the case, officials worked to ensure that their population reaped the greatest rewards from the open border.

For ordinary citizens, the “borders of friendship” were popular, but were fraught with problems. They liked being able to go abroad, but felt uneasy about foreigners entering their own lands, often plagued by shortages. Additionally, border guards and custom officials harassed people going abroad. Furthermore, people had not forgotten unpleasant chapters of World War II, including forced population movements and genocide. Finally, even if people gained a greater sense of “freedom” through open borders, few forgot the looming presence of the totalitarian state.

Yet the open border project (like the travel it was meant to encourage) was not organized by the state. Contrary to commonplace views of the East bloc, officials did not act in unison, but rather struggled unsuccessfully to control undesirable travel and to gain reliable information to disseminate to socialist neighbors. Additionally complicating matters was the fact that everyone had different understandings as to what the open border project

was meant to entail. Nevertheless, even if locals were chagrined by shortages in their supermarkets, the open border project provided everyday individuals with a new social environment. By 1989, travel had become engrained in the habitus not only of citizens in the West, but of East Central Europe, as well.

In sum, I paint a picture of late state socialism which, on the one hand, alters our commonplace perceptions of life behind the “Iron Curtain,” but on the other, which also confirms views of governments hyper-sensitive to change.

Table of Contents

<u>Tables and Charts</u>	<u>ii</u>
<u>Images</u>	<u>iii</u>
<u>Abbreviations</u>	<u>v</u>
<u>Acknowledgments</u>	<u>vii</u>
<u>Introduction</u>	<u>viii</u>
<u>Chapter 1: Integration, Socialist Cooperation, and the Borders of Friendship</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Chapter 2: Performing the Border</u>	<u>20</u>
<u>Chapter 3: The Baltic Gives me the Runs!</u>	<u>44</u>
<u>Chapter 4: Crossing the “Borders of Friendship”</u>	<u>72</u>
<u>Chapter 5: Don’t think the World’s Yours</u>	<u>91</u>
<u>Chapter 6: The Politics of Travel and the Creation of a European Society</u>	<u>116</u>
<u>Conclusion: Legacies</u>	<u>137</u>
<u>Sources</u>	<u>144</u>
<u>Endnotes</u>	<u>156</u>

Tables and Charts

<u>Chart 1. Illegal Departures of GDR Citizens from the East Bloc</u>	<u>xiii</u>
<u>Chart 2. Czechoslovak and East German Travel Statistics</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>Table 1. Czechoslovak and East German Travel Statistics</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>Table 2. Visitors from Other Countries to Eastern Europe in 1971</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>Chart 3. Poles in socialist countries, 1955-1988</u>	<u>29</u>
<u>Chart 4. Arrivals in Poland</u>	<u>29</u>
<u>Table 3. Border crossings, GDR to Poland, 1971-1980</u>	<u>29</u>
<u>Table 4. Border crossings, GDR to Poland, CSSR to GDR</u>	<u>30</u>
<u>Chart 5. Polish travelers to Czechoslovakia, 1978-1981</u>	<u>30</u>
<u>Chart 6. Annual wage growth (in percentage) since 1970 by country</u>	<u>55</u>
<u>Chart 7. Net growth in wages by country</u>	<u>56</u>
<u>Chart 8. Consumer prices, 1972-1975</u>	<u>56</u>
<u>Chart 9. Labor income, 1972-1975</u>	<u>56</u>
<u>Chart 10. Price of East German marks in Polish zloty</u>	<u>59</u>
<u>Chart 11. Percentage of goods purchased and exported to Czechoslovakia</u>	<u>63</u>
<u>Table 5. Amount of goods “exported” by citizens of the GDR and CSSR in one month</u>	<u>64</u>
<u>Chart 12. Czechoslovak koruna (in millions) spent by East Germans</u>	<u>67</u>
<u>Chart 13. East German marks (in millions) spent by Czechoslovaks</u>	<u>67</u>
<u>Chart 14. Comparison (in koruna) of spending ratio</u>	<u>68</u>

Images

Image 1. David Černý's <i>Quo Vadis</i> (Prague)	ix
Image 2. Cars lining up for miles to enter the foreign country	x
Image 3. East Central Europe, 1949-1989	xvii
Image 4. "Socialist Friendship"	2
Image 5. "'From Correspondents around the World'"	4
Image 6. "What is your position on the Oder-Neisse?"	10
Image 7. Willy Brandt's <i>Kniefall</i>	10
Image 8. Duna Intercontinental Hotel	13
Image 9. The Panorama Hotel in Oberhof	21
Image 10. The Bastei in Dresden	21
Image 11. Pioneer Greetings at the Monument of the Polish Soldier	23
Image 12. Front page of <i>Trybuna Ludu</i> on 25 June 1972	24
Image 13. Shoppers at the Centrum-Warenhaus in Berlin	33
Image 14. Josef Abrhám in <i>Vrchní, prchni!</i>	40
Image 15. A rendition of Brno in a Hungarian travel brochure	40
Image 16. "Dederonski" crossing the Czechoslovak border	42
Image 17. "The Baltic gives me the runs!"	45
Image 18. At the Polish market	50
Image 19. An East German cartoon	52
Image 20. A service route close to Zittau	53
Image 21. "What if everyone returned a few kilos slimmer?" Scene from <i>Miš</i>	54

<u>Image 22. Closing scene from <i>Die Architekten</i></u>	<u>74</u>
<u>Image 23. Position at the Czechoslovak border</u>	<u>76</u>
<u>Image 24. Mauled sheep on the Polish-Czechoslovak border</u>	<u>77</u>
<u>Image 25. Approaching the border to Czechoslovakia from Poland</u>	<u>77</u>
<u>Image 26. A stamp (albeit to the West) to cross the international borders of Poland</u>	<u>81</u>
<u>Image 27. A gasoline coupon for twenty liters of diesel in the GDR</u>	<u>82</u>
<u>Image 28. “Warmer, Warmer... Hot!”</u>	<u>84</u>
<u>Image 29. “A little present”</u>	<u>86</u>
<u>Image 30. East German and Polish youth groups in Frankfurt Oder</u>	<u>94</u>
<u>Image 31. Scene from <i>Die Schlüssel</i></u>	<u>99</u>
<u>Image 32. Scene from <i>Die Schlüssel</i></u>	<u>101</u>
<u>Image 33. Scene from <i>Nuit et brouillard</i></u>	<u>101</u>
<u>Image 34. “Don’t get irritated that the natives aren’t singing”</u>	<u>104</u>
<u>Image 35. Karel Gott at the alter in a Czechoslovak kitchen</u>	<u>105</u>
<u>Image 36. Angela Davis at the World Youth Festival</u>	<u>108</u>
<u>Image 37. Vacláv Havel meeting Lech Wałęsa on the Czechoslovak-Polish border</u>	<u>112</u>
<u>Image 38. Walter Ulbricht, friend to Czechoslovakia?</u>	<u>119</u>
<u>Image 39. Pat and Mat in <i>Kut’áci</i></u>	<u>121</u>
<u>Image 40. East Germans shopping in Poland in 1990</u>	<u>136</u>
<u>Image 41. European leaders opening the Polish-German-Czech border in 2007</u>	<u>139</u>
<u>Image 42. Tearing down the border in Frankfurt (Oder)</u>	<u>144</u>

Abbreviations

AAN	<i>Archiwum Akt Nowych</i> (Poland)
ABS	<i>Archiv bezpečnostních složek</i> (Czech Republic/Czechoslovakia)
ADN	General German News Service (Germany)
AMZV	<i>Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí</i> (Czech Republic/Czechoslovakia)
BArchB	<i>Bundesarchiv Berlin</i> (Germany)
BStU	<i>Behörde des Bundesbeauftragten für die Stasi-Unterlagen</i> (Germany)
CRZZ	<i>Centralna Rada Związków Zawodowych</i> (Poland)
CDU	Christian Democratic Union (Germany)
CSAT	Conference of the State Authorities for Tourism of Socialist Countries
CSCE	Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
CSSR	Czechoslovak Socialist Republic
DAdDDR	<i>Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR</i> (Germany)
DEFA	<i>Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft</i> (East Germany)
EC	European Commission
FAZ	<i>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</i> (West Germany)
FDGB	<i>Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund</i> (East Germany)
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GKKFiT	<i>Główny Komitet Kultury Fizycznej i Turystyki</i> (Poland)
HA	Hoover Archive (USA)
HU OSA	Hungarian Open Society Archive
IPN	<i>Instytut Pamięć Narodowej</i> (Poland)
JW	<i>Junge Welt</i> (East Germany)
KC PZPR	<i>Komitet Centralny Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej</i> (Poland)
KSČ	<i>Komunistická strana Československa</i> (Czechoslovakia)
LOT	<i>Polskie Linie Lotnicze</i> (Poland)
MfAA	<i>Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten</i> (Germany)

MOL	<i>Magyar Országos Levéltár</i> (Hungary)
NA	<i>Narodní Archiv</i> (Czech Republic)
ND	<i>Neues Deutschland</i> (East Germany)
NVA	<i>Nationale Volksarmee</i> (East Germany)
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
ROH	<i>Revoluční odborové hnutí</i> (Czechoslovakia)
SED	<i>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands</i> (East Germany)
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany (West Germany/Germany)
StB	<i>Státní bezpečnost</i> (Czechoslovakia)
TL	<i>Trybuna Ludu</i> (Poland)
UN	United Nations

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what travel must have been like in the 1980s—from eating in old pubs in Prague to visiting small towns in former East Germany or meeting with former dissidents in Warsaw.

Introduction

One cold Monday morning in 1972, readers of the Czechoslovak communist daily, *Rudé právo*, found a report about East Germans crossing the border in the thousands. Hidden amongst reports of the unusually frigid weather (it had been twenty below zero the night before), officials estimated that more than 4000 citizens from the German Democratic Republic had traveled south. The veritable flood of migrants was shocking to authorities. How were they to react to the increasing number of Germans in Czechoslovakia? They had been coming in their iconic automobiles, the Trabant, since Sunday morning. These cars symbolized in no better way East Germany and its political system. Designed in the 1950s of technically advanced materials (Duroplast), the Trabant underwent little change over the course of the GDR's history and, in comparison to West German automobile design and performance, had become antiquated before it left the assembly line in mass production.¹ By the late 1980s, people waited over a decade to purchase one of these vehicles, and when they got them, many drove south to Czechoslovakia.

The image of East Germans in Trabants is perhaps the most enduring one for Czechs (and Slovaks) born early enough to remember the fall of communism. In warmer months of 1989, thousands of would-be tourists from Dresden, Berlin, or Leipzig crossed the border to their southern neighbor, where they sought refuge in the West German embassy in Prague. Televised images of emigrants in the embassy penetrated the consciousness of viewers around the globe. It also stuck in the mind of David Černý, who, in June 1990, positioned a huge sculpture out of Plexiglas in the Prague's old town. One of the most famous artists in Czechoslovakia, he made a Trabant with oversized legs marching towards freedom in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Ten years after reunification, the German embassy commissioned a bronze replication of the work, which stands today in the embassy's garden. Ironically, the monument is not publically accessible. It is locked behind the embassy's gates where East Germans once sought freedom, a hidden monument to the role people from a small country played in tearing down the Iron Curtain.



Image 1. David Černý's *Quo Vadis*, photographed through the barbed-wire fence.
(Photo: Mark Keck-Szajbel.)

On the face of it, the article from *Rudé Právo* seems run-of-the-mill: a story of East Germans fleeing a restrictive state. How much stranger, that people in the article were not looking for asylum, rather, as the journalist reported, “for Czech beer.”²² The year was 1972, not 1989, and the editorial board of *Rudé právo* was not spreading propaganda. It was recounting an unusually successful policy of late state socialism. In the years after 1972 East Central European citizens had a chance to drink Czech beer in Prague or Slovak wine in Košice. They could go to East Berlin or Warsaw to witness the “success of socialism” abroad (or at least have a good time trying to find it). Inhabitants of Plauen, East Germany could hop in their Trabant and go to Cheb, Czechoslovakia; farmers in the southwestern most point of Poland could fetch stray cows across the border. They did not need a visa, and they did not even need their passport, as three repressive communist governments moved to open borders. After 1972, citizens could travel unabated from their home country to a foreign destination. This dissertation explores the so-called “borders of friendship” between East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s. Overnight, tens of millions of citizens began traveling, using the ability to cross borders to neighboring countries.

In this dissertation I explore three primary aspects of the social and political ramifications of liberalized travel regimes. First, I analyze the odd corrosive effects of a liberalizing program in repressive states. The commonplace narrative of communism in East Central Europe is that, after 1945, nearly all the countries in Eastern Europe became

satellites of the Soviet Union and had communism imposed on them. Starting with 1956, “the Soviet Union moved gradually from a pattern of active to passive management of the imperial periphery;” “separate roads” were taken by the communist states, with some more repressive (East Germany) than others (Poland, Hungary).³ Despite variations, a common thread of repression and severe curtailment of individual liberties linked these countries.

East Central European regimes, it should be noted, were exceptional in their *lack* of a liberalized travel program. Comparing past repressive and/or authoritative regimes, historians have shown—in the case of Nazi Germany, for example—how even radically racist regimes condoned international tourism (especially to Mussolini’s Italy).⁴ Spain’s modern tourism industry had its roots in Franco Spain. Despite the prominent role of the Catholic Church in the Fascist regime (which shunned the notion of scantily clad northerners sunbathing so close to Barcelona), Spain’s modern tourism began in the 1950s.⁵ By the 1960s, Spanish audiences were viewing films like *Manolo la nuit* or *Los días de Cabirio* where Hispanic men lured foreign tourists into bed for a quick romantic fling.⁶

In the aftermath of World War II, governments across Europe closed borders to stabilize their countries. But the Soviet Union and its satellite states continued to restrict travel after new governments had been established. How can the historian explain this genuinely strange move towards liberalized travel? How did average citizens understand the policy in comparison to how state planners envisioned it? Were the “borders of friendship” a means to “catch and overtake” the West in tourism?

This dissertation is also a story about a program in late state socialism which enjoyed approval amongst the populace. Seeing masses of people marching on May Day or celebrating at national festivals was nothing new. They were choreographed events. But in Eastern Europe it was unusual, even shocking to see hundreds of people queuing at the border without detailed itineraries. This was *unexpectedly popular* amongst a populace which increasingly disdained its government (or at best grudgingly accepted the status quo). Border guards were overburdened with the thousand-fold increase in travelers coming by foot, in trains and automobiles.



Image 2. Cars lining up for miles to enter the foreign country.
Sign reads: “Border Crossing.”⁷

Finally, it is a story which helps explain the failure of communism in East Central Europe. The open border project—like American films and illegal radio programs—revealed to people the generalized impoverishment and insolvency of state socialism. Daily life, with all of its rituals, was largely similar across the bloc: queues were in every country, and popular styles in fashion, music, and film were also comparable.⁸ In contrast to (western) mass media, this experience was firsthand, and all the more powerful because of it. Not only did they drink beers: more sinisterly from the regime's perspective, they compared the oppressive hand of the state abroad and even came into trouble with a foreign country's secret police themselves. East bloc citizens found that the grass was not greener on the opposite side of the border: if beer was better in Czechoslovakia, rock music was better in Poland. But even if inhabitants of the region were quick to highlight the differences between consumer goods and the length of queues, East bloc citizens also came back home with a greater understanding of the dreary lives led on both sides of the border. They gained knowledge of conditions in socialist countries abroad and realized that the promise of socialist abundance outpacing the West never materialized, even in the best of economies.⁹

Beyond the anecdotal, there was a greater sense of dissolution in the political system for people travelling about the bloc, heightened by the experience abroad in culturally distinct, but systemically similar systems. Analyzing oral history, newsprint, films, novels, citizen complaints and archival documents in a half dozen countries, I recount how peoples' reaction towards open borders changed over time. Their response to open borders was massive and motley. In a nutshell, East bloc citizens initially associated the open border policy with state initiative. Over time, however, they separated policy from the state, making the state responsible for negative effects from greater tourist traffic. The state was also seen as the guarantor ensuring that tourist exchange ran smoothly. But the positive effects of open borders were seen as natural. That foreign travel to socialist neighbors came to be seen as self-evident marked a sea-change both in administrators' as well as citizens' understanding of their role in state socialism. Was the socialist state the *creator* of a better, more-humane and hence socially-conscious citizen, or was it a huge welfare state ensuring that its workers enjoyed a bare minimum of what modern society had to offer?

Although historians generally agree that East bloc governments retreated from radical designs to socially engineer a new man under socialism by the early 1960s, open border policies would seem to be a relic of such attempts. Official documents reflected the project's hybrid nature between old hopes for a new socialist society and a more modern recognition that travel was simply part of modern society. In the spirit of Vladimir Antonov-Saratovskii (who wrote about tourism as a Soviet high functionary in the 1930s, that it might "enhance the solidarity between the toilers of all people" and assist in class war), East Central European officials consistently padded the language concerning the open border in terms of socialist internationalism in the early 1970s: the project would provide "excellent political breeding grounds" to "educate the proletariat" especially "in light of the [recent] past and the era of Hitler fascism."¹⁰ As in other older projects and policies under communism—such as World Youth Festivals, retreats to beachside resorts or even worker exchanges to foreign countries—people were to train and educate themselves for the good of the state, all the while building strength to fight for socialism. International exchange worked as a filter,

separating trusted cadre and future members from the common man so as to display the fruit of socialism abroad. At the same time, socialist tourism was intended to reinforce individuals' identification with the socialist system, to make alternatives seem impossible and undesirable. According to the logic, a system which helped a miner or seamstress by sending their child on an all-expense paid student exchange to the Black Sea or their spouse to an expense-paid vacation on a beachside resort every five years was a mark of a bona fide workers' state.

Importantly, however, this project marked a departure from previous ideological attempts at socialist tourism. The rhetoric of the project highlighted the model citizen fighting for socialism, but in reality the "borders of friendship" was designed for tourists who did *not* go on official tours. After all, one could not be prevented from travel, even if one did not belong to the party or frequent youth group events. People went on trips at the spur of the moment, and socialist dailies highlighted the fact that people could go whenever they wanted (in a cartoon in *Neues Deutschland*, one family calls from their window that they needed fresh bread, and wanted it from Poland quickly. "Guests are coming," cries the father, "drive to [Poland] to get some bread!").¹¹ Seen in this light, the project was a corrective, making possible an act which was common in other regions of the world (where many East Europeans' distant relatives lived). But just because it was common for Poles living in Buffalo, New York to go to Toronto for the weekend does not make the liberalization behind the "Iron Curtain" less remarkable. As a region consistently seen (by Western scholars) as backward, open borders meant more than the possibility of buying goods in Czechoslovakia: it meant a return to modern society.

An alternate explanation of the "borders of friendship" would fit in discussions of late state socialism. After Stalin's death and Khrushchev's denunciation of the cult of personality and severe repression there were two waves of reform aimed at creating "socialism with a human face." While each country varied, laborers in each case demanded first basic worker rights and later the overthrow of the system: in the 1950s, workers in Plzeň, Berlin, Poznań and most notably Budapest revolted against the one-party state's patent disregard of worker conditions and human rights. A decade later, people in Czechoslovakia called for political liberalization and the freedom of the press. Neither reform movement went unpunished: communist regimes sent tanks and the secret police to ensure their political power. But they also offered pro forma reforms and material goods in exchange for their populations' political apathy.¹² This was an era of "normalization," when each East bloc country began to focus on the material well-being of its citizens through an increase in consumer goods and personal freedoms. International exchange through the "borders of friendship" could be a tool to ensure that the masses did not flee west or decry the regime's human rights abuses (the net number of both successful and unsuccessful escapes from East Germany through East bloc countries did, in fact, decline from 1972 until 1988).¹³

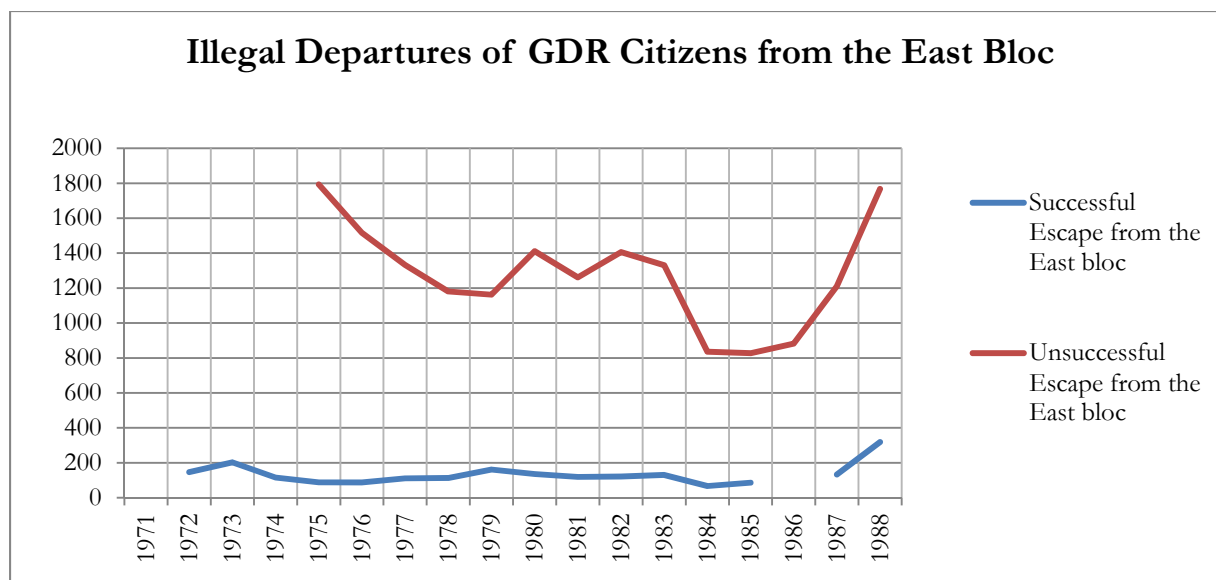


Chart 1. Illegal Departures of GDR Citizens from the East Bloc¹⁴

The open border project quickly developed to be a central symbol of East Central European diplomacy in the 1970s and 1980s. Through mass rallies, border festivals, and official declarations, authorities promoted the open border as a development of “really existing socialism.” People on the ground did not understand open borders in terms of socialist fraternal friendship, choosing instead—as members of central committees in all three countries quickly realized—to utilize the liberty to travel in order to pursue unorthodox pleasures. In one instance, East bloc citizens’ “unorthodox” behavior—that is, smuggling—provided neighbors with an excuse to exit the transnational agreement. Although patently alarmed about the grass-roots workers’ union movement, *Solidarność*, East Germany and Czechoslovakia shut borders with Poland in 1980 citing ordinary Poles’ “profiteering” and “extensive smuggling.”

But the essence of the travel agreement was maintained: Czechoslovakia and East Germany maintained the open border policy, and other regimes lobbied as best they could to expand passport- and visa-free travel. Indeed, while the policy had its hurdles, regimes of late state socialism consistently advocated for its retention even when it meant that locals had to compete with foreigners for hard-to-find goods and even when it threatened the legitimacy of the state. Poland’s frustrated Foreign Minister, Stefan Olszowski, declared in a secret meeting with his socialist neighbors in 1982 that “Poles cannot be locked up; they at least need the possibility to travel to socialist states.”¹⁵ In bad times, the lack of a travel agreement with socialist neighbors aggravated grievances towards the government. In good times, governments proclaimed that the policy was a proof of ideological validity: article one of the transnational travel agreement stated that “greater tourist travel... enabled” citizens to gain “comprehensive familiarity with the historical traditions and the life of citizens in the other state” and helped in “the construction of a socialist society.”¹⁶ The open border project was an experiment in socialist construction. Hence, while it might have to be regulated, the ability of workers to travel across borders would have to be upheld in order to prove that, in

East Central Europe, proletarian internationalism was alive and well in real existing socialism.

My dissertation is divided into chapters which investigate the upper echelons of power, mass media, belletristic novels, contemporary reactions on the ground, as well as interviews undertaken in the era of the Schengen Zone. I begin by analyzing the underpinnings of the project in the late 1960s and early 1970s, exploring the influence both of intra-bloc politics as well as comparative projects in the European West. Here, I show how a general shift in leadership, as well as the hope of economic prosperity, brought authorities to devise more elaborate ways to express the Marxist principle of “proletarian internationalism.” Behind closed doors, leaders were convinced that a sufficient degree of parallelism had been achieved in each country, and that the home populace would not cause significant problems while abroad. Even if there were problems, they suggested, they believed in their planners’ ability to streamline travel to ensure the lowest degree of friction. “Socialist integration” was imperative in the age of an increasingly interconnected world.

Next, I explore the “Borders of Friendship” as a staged phenomenon in the press. I choose a series of mass rallies and border festivals where the regimes’ citizens, so it was hoped, could perform international diplomacy through travel, strengthening the ties between socialist neighbors along the way. Of course, the major difference between the open border project and prior declarations of fraternal friendship was its unorganized nature. Each country’s press aimed to control and channel something inherently uncontrollable, but they also highlighted different aspects of the open border project. Whereas some journalists hoped to discourage smuggling through diatribes against kitschy consumption, other news outlets focused on GDR citizens’ ability to visit former homes in formerly German areas, while others promoted the ease of travel to socialist friends. All the while, foreign attachés and the secret police combed through the press of their immediate socialist neighbors, keeping a watchful eye on explicit advertisements to their socialist country. Even if such surveillance was commonplace in the East bloc, was it warranted?

In order to answer that question, I explore the economics of socialist tourism in this unique era of liberalized travel in chapter three. Masses of economists and statisticians were engaged in counting: border crossings, buses, foreign workers, sausages, baby shoes, washing machines; they counted according to region, according to city, according to season, and even day of the week; they claimed to know exactly what products Poles, East Germans, and Czechoslovaks coveted. For the historian, they left a remarkably rich database of the social life of things in East Central Europe. Like pre-modern systems of commodity exchange, citizens of East Central Europe transported goods of social significance; depending on which side of the Oder-Neisse one lived, Teksas jeans, Karo cigarettes, or canned sardines had a completely different meaning. The “borders of friendship” were partly envisioned as a project to equalize socialist societies economically, but since each country relied on the advice and approval of their big brother to the East, multi-lateral agreements between member states of the open border agreement were categorically impossible. In a free market economy (especially in the early 1970s, with the global transition away from the Bretton Woods system and the gold standard), exchange rates and inflation regulated prices; since East European governments were reliant on pegged exchanges to the ruble, the only way they could ensure, for example, that East Germans did not buy all of the gasoline in

Czechoslovak border towns was to enforce either alternative currencies or strict circulation controls. These controls ran counter both to the word and the intention of the “borders of friendship.”

Objections to controls were frequently voiced to officials, in a variety of ways. After my study of the economics of open borders, I make a transition to an everyday history of borders in the East bloc and ordinary individuals’ experience of the foreign country. In the absence of sufficient multi-lateral agreements on normative travel behaviors, national authorities represented the last instance to protect their citizens against what was widely seen as blatant discrimination. Following travelers in their venture to Prague’s pubs to get drunk, hitchhikers’ treks, and routine border controls, I document violent disagreements, blatant harassment, and intoxicated chicanery. I also explore more amiable contacts: meeting lovers in another East bloc country, finding friends in East German Guben or Czechoslovak Těšín, administrators finding new colleagues across the border. Even if national governments worked to better their citizens’ image abroad, the best way to ensure smooth international travel would be through economic parity. But self-interested governments consistently worked to better their nationals’ advantages.

In all three countries, the open border project was designed to attract one particular population: youth. Internal documents highlight how authorities believed young East Germans, Czechoslovaks, and Poles deserved to travel abroad. Young people in the 1970s were arguably living in the best generation of state socialism in terms of material provisions and cultural openness. Coupled with the liberalized travel regime came the 1973 World Youth Festival in Berlin, the drastic increase in personal automobiles, color televisions, Western films, and rock music. Utilizing a variety of novels, films, mass publications and media, I reproduce a twenty-something’s worldview, and reveal how taboos and worldviews changed for the children growing up in the 1970s. And change it did: economic collapse and a return to ideological orthodoxy brought many youngsters to doubt the regime. Travel, in any case, had become doxa in the eyes of youngsters. While regimes were willing to provide vacationsapes and cheap getaways in the early 1970s as a safety valve for social unrest, by the 1980s, people no longer considered travel a gift. Instead, it seemed right inherent to modern society. In this chapter particularly, but throughout my work more generally, I explore how the meaning of travel changed in society from the late 1960s to the late 1980s. In this regard, the growth of mass tourism in the East paralleled that in the West, even if that growth was belated and stunted by the limited options.

In my closing chapters, I reflect on the legacy of the “borders of friendship.” First, I look at citizens’ complaints at East Germany’s decision to require a passport and visa for all East bloc citizens in 1990, and compare this with restrictive measures introduced by “socialist neighbors” in the 1970s and 1980s. Here we see a genuine push from national governments to renew treaties after new border restrictions prevented their citizens from travel. And even if many ordinary people greeted limiting foreigners’ ability to purchase hard-to-find goods, citizens were outraged when their own rights in a genuinely popular program were curtailed. Of course, the difference in the 1990 was that citizens were demonstrating in the streets rather than petitioning the Central Committee. Ironically, Western governments, which had argued for liberal travel regimes for forty years, changed to support stringency in light of the mass migration of poor, undereducated foreigners to what

would become part of a united Germany. Similarly, the Czechoslovak and Polish governments moved to stem the tide of Easterners. All the while, people in each of these countries were celebrating their “return to Europe.”

Does a “return to Europe” categorically imply the exclusion of others? If so, what has made the Schengen Zone and eastern expansion so successful? Did the “borders of friendship,” as a parallel development to liberalized travel regimes in Western Europe, go wrong? In my conclusion, I return to the idea of “socialist integration” with these questions in mind. As I document, the rhetoric of the socialist open border project was remarkably similar to contemporary celebrations of the European Union and the Schengen Zone. But the design and the outcome of modern day open border projects stem from fundamentally different impulses. In contrast to the 2010s, private initiative was prevented in state socialism. Immediately after the transition to democracy, interest groups and organizations sprouted like mushrooms across the East Central European landscape, revealing the hidden potential of grassroot organizations and informal organizations



Image 3. East Central Europe, 1949-1989¹⁷

Integration, Socialist Cooperation, and the Borders of Friendship

In June 1971, the Soviet journal, *Problems of Peace and Socialism*, called a conference in Prague to discuss a topic which most people would have found thoroughly drab: socialist internationalism. The term—like socialistic cooperation, fraternal friendship, united front, or international proletarianism—had been used in political rallies, on state holidays, and during official meetings with foreign dignitaries ad nauseam. Many foreign dignitaries were present on that warm day. The dignitaries, largely economists, had been carefully selected by central committees in seven countries to present their ideas not of economics, but of the term integration. Soon temperatures rose in the conference hall. At issue was not the meaning of socialist internationalism, but whether this was a “principle” or a “law.”¹ There were two main protagonists in the debate. First, the director of the Institute of Economics for the World Socialist System in Moscow, O. T. Bogomolov, insisted that socialist internationalism was, in practice, a law. Socialist internationalism, he said, “exclude[d] any form of exploitation of some countries by others, any privileges for any state.”² Planned division of labor, output exchange, and technological cooperation, he stated, was an “objective law” and “one of the most important advantages opened up by the development of socialism as a world system.”³ Centrally planned economies, in other words, were destined to integrate economically with other socialist countries.

Romanian economist, E. Hutira, begged to differ. Even if “the socialist method of production had... crossed national frontiers,” it was impossible for individual nation-states to overcome the “immense differences” in “economic, political and cultural heritage.”⁴ He argued that, of course international interests should be taken into account when creating national policy. But, in the end, Hutira asserted that the age of full integration was still in the distant future, and that the “correct solution” was to recognize “national and international factors” when devising economic plans.⁵ What seemed a moot point became political when Hutira recommended to his Comecon counterparts that a socialist country could “have a joint plan even with non-socialist countries” if it furthered both the long- and short-term

goals of the state.⁶ Suggesting cooperation with capitalist (and hence imperialist) neighbors went a step too far, even to the most liberal communist countries.

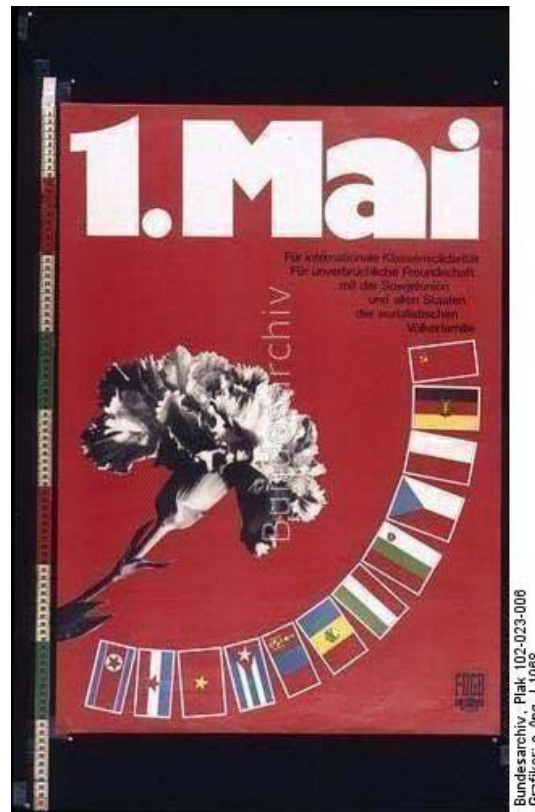


Image 4. “Socialist Friendship.” A Poster from 1 May 1968 proclaiming (in traditional fashion), “For international class solidarity, for unbreakable friendship with the Soviet Union and all the nations of the socialist peoples’ alliance.” The first flags (in clock-order): USSR, East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia.⁷ (Permission: Bundesarchiv)

In the ensuing war of words, Hutira was admonished for “arguing that each country [had] its own road to socialism.”⁸ After 1956, there was some recognition of the legitimacy of separate ways.⁹ But the criticism was clearly in reference to the Prague Spring: that each country could choose its own form of socialism was justification for reforms in 1968. Unsurprisingly, the director of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, historian V. Kral, went on to defend the invasion of Czechoslovakia three years earlier. But despite Bogomolov’s assertion (that “integration [was] a new law” in socialism), Hutira could only conclude that “although the present phase is called by some people integration, there is not yet a clear understanding of the term,” and that “the very concept is taken from capitalist practice, where it has its own content and expresses an orientation alien to socialism.”¹⁰

In the summer of 1971, East bloc countries allied behind the Soviet Union to express disapproval of the Romanian economist’s understanding of integration. The Romanian dictator, Nicolae Ceaușescu was a darling of the West when he refused to cooperate with other Warsaw Pact countries invading Czechoslovakia in 1968. (Mere weeks after the conference in Prague, Ceaușescu also gave his notorious speech declaring his intention to

pursue an authoritarian socialism à la North Korea's Kim Il Sung.) Ideological unity aside, Hutira had enunciated something for which lesser men in Prague would have been imprisoned, something many across the bloc had on their minds. (Of course, Hutira likely would have been imprisoned in Bucharest had he *not* stated it.) How did the socialist version of integration differ from the capitalist one? By 1971, many socialist states claimed to have achieved "really existing socialism." The question was, had they achieved the degree of integration necessary for "really existing socialism," and if not, what would that entail?

Although unlikely to reach the front pages of Western newspapers or evening broadcasts, the theoretical debate about socialist integration pitted economics professors from the best universities across East Central Europe against each other and cast in sharp relief both the elusive terminology of socialism, as well as each individual country's stance towards Brezhnev and the Soviet Union. Hutira's position—that current levels of economic exchange between socialist countries could not be called "integration" since each individual state prized its own economic stability over transnational cooperation—was tacitly shared by Poland's ambassador to the Comecon, Piotr Jaruszewicz, as well as the Hungarian ambassador, Jenő Fock. They did not formally take part in the conference, and did not support Hutira's ultimate conclusions. But they did support more radical economic exchange in the pursuit of greater socialist integration: Hungary even went so far as to propose a single currency for the bloc; Poland's representative argued for liberalized exchange of goods, the release of market forces in the field of consumer goods and the introduction of restructured exchange rates.¹¹ East German planners were against liberalization of trade agreements, but were in favor of "'deliberately harmonized exploitation' of the Comecon countries' potential."¹² One of the survivors of the Prague Spring was the development of "commodity-money" relations and the notion that "proposals... were vague enough that one could hope for liberal interpretations and ultimately for more progressive revisions."¹³ After the Prague Spring, member countries of the Comecon and allies of the Soviet Union recognized that socialist integration had to become more than rhetoric. But the realization of socialist integration was far from clear. To address this question more thoroughly, the First Secretary of the Soviet Union called a meeting in early August on the Crimean Peninsula.

At the meeting with Brezhnev, numerous topics were on the table. The most pressing was the proposed treaty ("likely proposed during Ceaușescu's visit... to Beijing") between China, Albania, Yugoslavia, and Romania for closer economic and political relations, threatening the USSR's alliance with its European satellites.¹⁴ Another main theme was developing unified language towards upcoming international conferences. Making reference to the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin (which established Berlin as a city outside of the jurisdiction of East and West Germany), "Comrade Brezhnev informed [his interlocutors] that Nixon had assured [him] during secret conversations that the United States would support a European conference after an agreement had been made on West Berlin."¹⁵ He encouraged his foreign counterparts to prepare for a European conference which would guarantee borders, alleviate the threat of nuclear war, and limit intercontinental missiles.¹⁶ Additionally, the Polish and Hungarian first secretaries, Edward Gierek and János Kádár, both proposed creating broad-based mass movements in support of a European conference, integrating workers' unions in East and West to "widen the societal idea of the conference."¹⁷



Image 5. A typical issue of *Neues Deutschland* highlighting “From Correspondents around the World.” Here: Description of a “Giant Clinic for Children” (in Poland); “The Flow of Mecca Pilgrims” (in Saudi Arabia), and “Observers on ‘Fire Mountain’” (in Indonesia).¹⁸

Beyond practical negotiations, discussion of socialist integration continued to play a prominent role in East bloc politics at home and abroad throughout the 1970s. In the third world, intellectuals discussed integrating new states and societies into the Soviet bloc. Shortly after discussing the European conference, for example, Brezhnev “appeal[ed] to fraternal parties to increase current contacts with the nations and communist parties of Vietnam, Laos, [and] Cambodia and to impress [upon readers] in propaganda the importance of the Soviet delegation’s meeting in Vietnam.”¹⁹ Press dailies were filled with reports about workers on other continents.

But while Brezhnev encouraged the use of propaganda to impress the importance of communist integration with southeast Asia to readers in countries wedged between the Soviet Union and the European Community, to many living thousands of miles from Saigon or Phnom Penh this sort of integration was meaningless (even if its practical realization was supposed to effect everyone’s life). Closer to home, journalists queried Hutira’s assertion about the viability of cooperation with non-socialist countries. “Anxious utterances” were heard that “livelier trade with the capitalist countries might lead to a loosening up of Comecon integration, or even to the over dependence [sic] of some Comecon countries” on the West.²⁰ In response, leaders in East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia began—slowly but surely—to develop their own project of closer cooperation and practical integration amongst peoples. As a document from the Stasi archive put it, “in 1971, East German party and state leaders concluded that the fraternal relationship with [its neighbors] had advanced so far, that travel between states could be substantially eased.”²¹ Although not a panacea, the three governments aimed to prove social and (limited) economic integration through tourism.

Europeans’ right to travel across international borders was rapidly expanding starting in the 1950s: Western Europe allowed visa-free travel for European Community counterparts as early as the 1950s; the Nordic Passport Union eliminated passport

requirements between Scandinavian countries in 1952; and socialist Yugoslavia opened borders to western tourists in the 1960s.²² Leaders in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany also decided to open their borders to individual travel to citizens of Warsaw Pact countries in the form of liberalized travel and temporary worker exchange. In prior years, those living closest to the border could cross to the other side after applying for a pass. In 1964, East Germany stated that a goal of its long term relationship with Poland and Czechoslovakia was to foster “border-crossing traffic” and to “protect socialism” at a transnational level.²³ Tri-lateral meetings were scheduled in 1966 and 1968, and leaders expressed an intention to hold “personal talks at the highest levels of power in years when no official delegations [took place].”²⁴

Alas, the August invasion (which quelled the Prague Spring) temporarily put the brakes on any further development of transnational travel. For a minority of people in Hungary, Poland and East Germany, closing borders with the CSSR was a welcome sign of change since some Czechoslovaks had taken to nationalistic chants against neighbors for their lack of support. The Hungarian secret police reported that Slovaks painted graffiti of “fascist symbols [and] double crosses” and slogans like “Hungarians and Soviets go home” on trains traveling over the border.²⁵ Many other, more informed citizens regretted the violent reversal of reform and the forced transition of government.²⁶

Three years after the invasion by Warsaw Pact troops, the East German, Polish and Czechoslovak governments again took up the issue of open borders in the East bloc. Similar to agreements in Western Europe and Scandinavia, the project was envisioned to expand, including other East bloc countries over the course of the 1970s and 1980s.²⁷ All that would be needed for citizens to cross borders within the Bloc would be a police-issued personal identification card (as in the EC). In addition, citizens of member countries would be allowed to exchange unlimited amounts of currency at the border and permitted to buy goods (for private use at home) in the foreign country.²⁸ Border controls would continue, and border guards would punish smuggling or the purchase of goods for resale. Even if older Poles, Czechoslovaks and Germans could remember travel as it was before World War II, for the first time a generation citizens in each country would be able to travel outside the state individually and in an unorganized fashion.

Travel Talk, Travel Practice

The push to increase informal travel across borders was part of larger international trends to encourage regional cooperation, and, when discussed in the media, was framed in terms of socialist integration. Some of these trends explicitly encouraged tourism, while others acted as an impetus to broaden regional cooperation. One meeting in October 1971 between the new leaders of Poland and Czechoslovakia acts as an example of how state authorities understood regional cooperation.

In a small town in the Masurian lake district, Edward Gierek and Gustáv Husák highlighted that economic relations—“with the exception of Romania”—were growing strongly.²⁹ Gierek stressed that his countrymen “valued the Treaty of West Berlin” which opened the “possibility of official relations with West Germany.”³⁰ Poland’s Foreign

Minister, Piotr Jaroszewicz, highlighted that his administration wanted to “raise the number of foreign guest workers in Czechoslovakia to 50,000 by 1975,” especially since his country had a surplus in labor (roughly calculated at 1.5 million).³¹ Husák noted how relations with West Germany, while stronger than in the past, “depended on recognition of the invalidity of the Munich Agreement,” and that at this “critical moment” East bloc leaders needed to act as, well, a bloc.³² Czechoslovakia’s Foreign Minister Lubomír Štrougal summarized that both countries “had a vital interest—especially in regional cooperation—in advancing socialism and national spirit.”³³ Gierek agreed, but insisted on “raising the question of greater contact between both nations.”³⁴ He highlighted that regional cooperation was not only a question of “official contacts,” rather of social connections. For that reason Polish authorities “wanted to collaboratively examine the future [of] open borders and freedom of movement.”³⁵ Authorities made decisions to liberalize travel, realizing the positive PR they would receive should they prove willing to encourage greater openness between countries. The Minister Council between Poland and the GDR noted that “in press... class enemies cannot deny the positive political impact” of open borders between erstwhile enemies.³⁶

As such, they were well ahead of Gorbachev in their realization that “policy [could] no longer be determined by a state identity that equated the national interest with the continued hegemony of the party-state.”³⁷ Certainly, liberalized travel was not the same as human rights, but already in 1971 the leaders of Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Poland “identified [their] interest with... the wider society.”³⁸ While in other European states travel was expanding, the GDR had restricted even the occasional visit from Western contacts. From 1961, it had built, and then reinforced the Berlin Wall, and moved to prevent “contamination” of its population through Western contact in third nations such as Poland, Hungary, or Czechoslovakia. But leaders of the so-called “northern triangle” were willing to improve their image abroad by preempting international treaties such as the Helsinki Accords, if only to prove that their ideology could offer alternatives to unabated travel from East to West.³⁹

Attempts to improve travel regulations coincided with a unique era of prosperity across Europe. The era marks not only a time when governments grew more willing to permit contact across borders, but also when general affluence provided workers with disposable income and free time.⁴⁰ The result was twofold: on the one hand, many workers in the East had money but no consumer goods to spend it on; on the other, Central European governments developed an appetite for collecting the disposable income of Westerners with convertible currencies. Governments devised a bifurcated approach to ensure both Eastern and Western travelers left as much hard currency in their own banks as possible: they enforced mandatory exchange rates and coerced Westerners to exchange minimal sums, while curtailing right of their citizens to possess and exchange currency.

Planners could not openly entice people from the West to visit their communist “paradise” for at least three reasons. First, with the exception of Prague, underinvestment and funding shortages left the tourist industry bereft of hotel rooms, restaurants, and adequate recreation facilities to attract foreigners. Secondly, planners were ill-advised to encourage foreign tourism without first promoting vacations for their own working classes lest they be publicly criticized for favoring Western tourists over the proletariat (as one East German Central Committee member did while holding a call-in radio program).⁴¹ Finally,

consciously choosing not to imitate the openness of Yugoslavia (the pariah of the Comecon) or Bulgaria, they lacked a model for socialist tourism.⁴²

One year before the violent crackdown in Czechoslovakia, the UN made 1967 the year of tourism, highlighting its importance as “a basic and most desirable human activity deserving the praise and encouragement of all people and Governments,” and “international tourism, as an important invisible export,” fostering greater awareness “of the inherent values of different cultures, thereby contributing to the strengthening of peace in the world” through integration.⁴³ In 1970, when the United Nations established the World Tourism Organization and declared the 27th of September an international holiday, East bloc countries had to promote international tourism within the bloc or lose face. But the most pressing declaration came at the Council for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), when European nations established the basic principles of travel, stipulating that:

The participating states intend to facilitate wider travel by their citizens for personal or professional reasons and to this end they intend in particular: gradually to simplify and to administer flexibly the procedures for exit and entry; to ease regulations concerning movement of citizens from the other participating States in their territory, with due regard to security requirements. They will endeavour gradually to lower, where necessary, the fees for visas and official travel documents.... The participating States consider that tourism contributes to a fuller knowledge of the life, culture and history of other countries, to the growth of understanding among peoples, to the improvement of contacts and to the broader use of leisure. They intend to promote the development of tourism, on an individual or collective basis, and, in particular, they intend: to promote visits to their respective countries by encouraging the provision of appropriate facilities and the simplification and expediting of necessary formalities relating to such visits; to increase, on the basis of appropriate agreements or arrangements where necessary, co-operation in the development of tourism, in particular by considering bilaterally possible ways to increase information relating to travel to other countries and to the reception and service of tourists, and other related questions of mutual interest.⁴⁴

By the late 1960s, if travel had yet to become engrained in the concept of “socialist integration,” it would become so soon. There were some outliers: Albania and North Korea were not as welcoming to foreign tourists as Yugoslavia or Bulgaria.⁴⁵ The Soviet Union had difficulties providing enough hotel rooms and camping spots for its own citizens and could ill afford providing satellite citizens with coveted accommodations (and, more importantly, they held foreigners in deep suspicion).⁴⁶ But East German, Polish and Czechoslovak travel organizations and ordinary citizens were more accustomed both to pre-World War II travel norms and seeing Westerners in their own country. International agreements consistently referenced the freedom of movement and peaceful travel as a centerpiece of modern civilization. International exchange in the form of such programs as the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the William J. Fulbright Program reinforced notions of the freedom to travel for education.⁴⁷ The cohesion of the Warsaw Pact countries would have to be bolstered with at least a minimal degree of formal and informal exchange among their

citizens, especially when comparing the degree of openness demonstrated between other 'imperialist' European countries.⁴⁸ As Erich Honecker wrote to his Czechoslovak counterpart, "you know the current rules [on travel to the West].... citizens can travel only in the case of family emergencies. For that reason, as compensation, we need robust tourist traffic between our socialist countries."⁴⁹ In a revealing statement, the East German dictator showed concern not only about the state of tourism in the East bloc, but about East German society, as well.

Honecker's statement additionally revealed how rapprochement with West Germany was a consistent yet subliminal leitmotiv in tourism agreements. Although there were disagreements between East Germany and Poland over the status of Szczecin—and particularly shipping rights in Szczecin's large bay—GDR authorities shared with their Polish and Czechoslovak counterparts a genuine disdain towards the Federal Republic due to border recognition.⁵⁰ As with Poland and Czechoslovakia, West German officials refused to recognize East Germany as an independent state—or at least not fully—and Erich Honecker desperately wanted to achieve international recognition (i.e. by gaining full membership at the United Nations).

Scholars discount the fear of West Germany across the East bloc as propaganda by hyper-sensitive and sheepish governments. But the border with Poland was not recognized until 1991. As late as the 1970s western interest groups categorically denied the validity of Eastern borders and lobbied for conservative members in government. In one satirical portrayal an instructor teaches old German men how to camouflage their revisionist worldview: "If you are asked about [your position on the Oder-Neisse border], then say, 'that is a very interesting question.'"⁵¹ The satire from a leftist newspaper in West Germany reveals how conservative political parties in Western Germany were interested partially in the claims of German expellees, but more importantly in the funds the expellee's provided to campaign coffers.⁵² Regardless, Eastern populations could not ignore the very real perception that Western governments would revise borders if only they could.⁵³

Public opinion in West Germany was changing towards expellees' demands to revise borders as well as towards Eastern neighbors. At the beginning of the 1970s West Germany's chancellor Willy Brandt was actively pursuing *Ostpolitik*. Recognizing the necessity of peaceful cooperation with its neighbors and the potential of exercising influence in Central Europe, the former Mayor of West Berlin moved to force conservatives in the *Bundestag* to officially end World War II with Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Soviet Union by officially recognizing postwar borders. His popular appeal in the East was well-known: when visiting the East German town of Erfurt, tens of thousands of citizens greeted the supposed West German "imperialist." In 1970, months before ratification of peace treaties with Poland and the Soviet Union, he appeared in Warsaw and shocked the small crowd of onlookers when he knelt in solemn remorse before the monument to the Ghetto Uprising of 1943.

Official *Ostpolitik* coincided with an informed cultural infatuation with Central Europe.⁵⁴ Thousands of young people in Western Germany began traveling to Czechoslovakia, Poland, or East Germany looking to change the persistent view of Germans as fascists, to gain inspiration from "genuine" socialist states, or just to have a cheap getaway.⁵⁵ Every East Central European country's coffers grew as Germans, Austrians, and

Americans crossed the Iron Curtain. Hungary saw double-digit growth in the number of western tourists in the 1970s.⁵⁶ The number traveling to Poland grew from 50 thousand in 1960 to 190 thousand in 1965. That was dwarfed after Willy Brandt's tour of Poland: half a million westerners came in 1973, and that was doubled by 1978.⁵⁷ Students from the Federal Republic usually went on two foreign trips in the final years of their high school studies: Prague and East Berlin.⁵⁸ As they were quick to discover, the German mark was a welcomed addition to the tourist scene in Warsaw and Prague; governments and individuals alike hoped to cater to West Germans in return for desperately needed infusions of hard currency capital. Persistent appeals for cooperation with the Soviet Union and its satellites threatened the well-established image of West German revanchism, and its neighbors would have to prove the value of socialist integration in ways that went beyond official proclamations.

East Germany would have to do something to counter West Germany's cultural penetration into its limited sphere of influence.⁵⁹ For East Germany, pressure from the West (and more limited encouragement from the East) made liberalized travel with its Comecon neighbors seem advantageous. After a brief rupture in travel immediately after the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the trend throughout the 1960s was towards greater freedom with East Germany's neighbors. Individuals still needed a state-issued bloc passport, which was hard to attain, but available in theory, nevertheless. Even if planners were overly-sensitive, there was a genuine interest in expanding travel possibilities for their citizens, who were already limited in their choices for travel.⁶⁰

Officials' primary concern in Prague was normalization and the improvement of their state's image with its Eastern neighbors. They wanted to open borders with East Germany to help a neighbor in need of international recognition, even though travel was not as popular at home as it was in East Germany (only in the immediate months after Prague Spring did the number of Czechoslovaks outnumber East Germans visiting each other's countries). Czechoslovaks were more accustomed to travel agreements with neighbors where more guests came rather than locals leaving: in the late 1960s, more West Germans came to Prague than Soviet citizens, and until the crackdown in 1968/1969, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia actually encouraged Westerners to become familiar with "better living standards" and propagate the message for travelers home.⁶¹ Even if the government was not prepared for the explosive growth in tourism in the 1970s (as will be seen in subsequent chapters), planners were collecting know-how on how best to channel streams of tourists following agreements with Hungary (which allowed families residing close to the southern border passage across the Danube).⁶²



Image 6. “What is your position on the Oder-Neisse?”



Image 7. Willy Brandt’s *Kniefall*, Warsaw, 7 December 1970⁶³ (Permission: Bundesarchiv.)

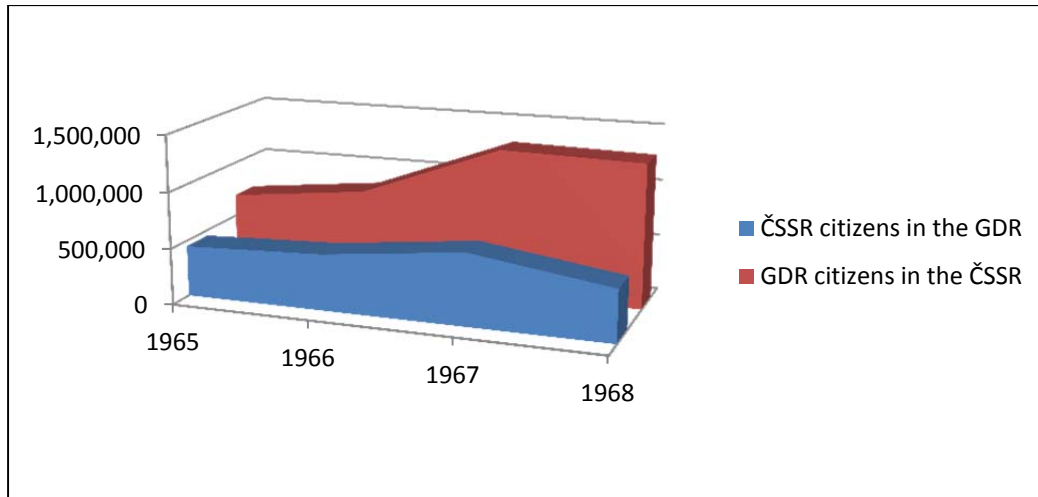


Chart 2. Czechoslovak and East German Travel Statistics in 1968

	Number of Tourists	Total Population	Percentage of Tot. Pop.
CSSR (in GDR)	464,889	15 million	3.1%
GDR (in CSSR)	1,282,839	16.7 million	8%

Table 1. Czechoslovak and East German Travel Statistics in 1968⁶⁴

Poland had the most to win from open borders with its neighbors. Despite valiant efforts to encourage international tourism to Poland as early as 1956, authorities had been largely unable to overcome geography: in a country surrounded by three strictly orthodox countries, Poland had neither the infrastructure nor the political weight to force its neighbors to open borders.⁶⁵ That did not prevent planners from advertising the country as an island of relative liberalism in the East bloc; but in order to convince its neighbors of the good (“socialist”) nature of transnational unorganized tourism, it had to ensure at least a minimal degree of restraint.⁶⁶ Still, Polish authorities at all levels had worked from the 1950s to encourage liberal travel with other East bloc neighbors. In contrast to East Germany, they were motivated less by international pressure to allow the freedom of movement than by the possibility to reap economic rewards from mass tourism.⁶⁷ What the Poles envisioned in a travel agreement was something much closer to the experience of their historic partner to the south: Hungary.

Hungarian Tourism

Even if no East bloc country had moved to liberalize to such degree or on such a scale as was envisioned by leaders of the “northern triangle,” planners in the three countries did not have to look far for inspiration: since the Thaw, select countries had moved to liberalize travel. Of course there was Yugoslavia, but other countries within the bloc had also attempted to attract greater numbers of tourists. Bulgaria and Romania, for example, decided to open coastal resorts for all socialist countries (provided citizens had a passport) at an international conference 1955, and by 1965, Bulgaria was allowing more Westerners into the

country than socialist brethren (a fact that its neighbors worked to expose in later years).⁶⁸ According to reporters and Central Committee members alike, Bulgaria was the quintessential example of a country functioning by exploiting foreign tourism. If the great disparity between incoming and outgoing tourists was any indication (2.7 million: 340 thousand), Bulgaria's regime worked to fill its coffers with hard currency.⁶⁹

In contrast, during the 1960s Hungary was the most successful member of the Warsaw Pact in alleviating border restrictions with socialist neighbors, and East bloc leaders looked to the Kádár regime for inspiration. As early as 1971, there was one tourist visiting for every two citizens living in the country.⁷⁰

Destination country	From soc. countries	From non-soc. countries	Total	% from soc. countries	% from non-soc. countries	Population	Total %
Bulgaria	1,421	1,300	2,721	52	48	8,400	32.3
CSSR	3,900	790	4,690	83	17	14,400	32.5
Hungary	5,230	875	6,105	86	14	10,300	59.4
Poland	1,552	313	1,865	83	17	32,600	5.7
Romania	2,230	470	2,700	83	17	20,000	13.5

Table 2. Visitors from Other Countries to Eastern Europe in 1971 (in Thousands)⁷¹

There were two impetuses to opening borders in the late 1950s. First, in 1954 and 1955, hundreds of thousand soccer fans traveled across the Iron Curtain to view third-ranked Hungary play second-ranked Austria.⁷² Five years after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the Kádár regime (like Czechoslovakia ten years later) aimed to pacify a citizenry which had experienced popular uprising and occupation and to normalize relations with its neighbors. Not fully adopted until 1968, this was done through comprehensive economic reforms which focused on “balanced development,” part of which included “moderate, but permanent increase[s] in real incomes and consumption,” which would have to be buttressed through increased state revenues.⁷³ Copying Western Europe, planners created the Hungarian National Tourism Office, enticing visitors to the capital and highlighting the economic benefits of international tourism. By 1965, border guards were removing minefields on the Austro-Hungarian border, adding tourist information points with details on restaurants and resorts, and reducing controls at the border to a “cursory check.”⁷⁴ Hungary's great tourist draw: visit us and you won't step on a mine!

Although there were positive reviews from Western journalists, other East bloc countries were hesitant to imitate the Hungarian model. Budapest, with its sprawling cityscape, was at the center of attempts to attract foreign guests, and tourist bureaus moved to increase the number of accommodations for Western tourists, encouraging the growth of outdoor cafes, publishing tour guides in French, English, and German, and offering ship transportation between Austria and Budapest.⁷⁵ And attract it did: in 1964 the number of tourists who visited Hungary soared to 1.3 million, tripling those of a year earlier.⁷⁶ Promoting this growth, the Hungarian government agreed to allow the Texas-born Neal Prince design a six million dollar hotel with a large choice of culinary and sport facilities on the Danube, in the heart of Budapest, in 1966.⁷⁷ In 1972, numerous Hollywood stars came

to Budapest—including Ringo Starr, Roger Moore, and Richard Burton—for Liz Taylor’s fortieth birthday at the Duna Intercontinental Hotel. Rumors circulated about the movie stars’ antics in the socialist capital: from cat fights to open drunkenness. For average Eastern tourists, Budapest quickly became a city of lights and Western glamor.

In the 1970s, the *Kis Színpad* [Small Stage] performed in the capital, and became notorious for its biting satire and irreverence about almost anything (the Hungarian premier included). In 1973, the *Színpad* performed thirteen sketches on a pair of scientists beamed to the present from a distant future. Their mission was to examine the city of Budapest and decide if (and when) it had achieved socialism. Debating whether Lenin would be proud of the Hungarian capital, one of the performers declares, “Obviously not... since the only decent building from that period is the capitalist designed and financed Duna Intercontinental Hotel.”⁷⁸ For central planners in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and East Germany, the sketch was as biting as it was apt.



Image 8. “The capitalist designed and financed Duna Intercontinental Hotel” in central Budapest (photographed in 2009). (Photo: Mark Keck-Szajbel.)⁷⁹

Although each country had its own reasons to open borders in the early 1970s, Hungary came to symbolize both the desired goal and its antithesis. Hungarian economic officials were attracted by the promise of gains in promoting tourism after the 1956 revolution, while political authorities wanted to present their country as peaceful and prosperous, a run-of-the-mill (and normalized) European country. Having learned from the tourist experiment in Yugoslavia, the Hungarian tourism office was allowed to market extensively in the West. But in the process of doing so, the thin line between unofficial acceptance and official indulgence of “Western tourism” was crossed, and Hungarian tourism became as unaccepting of citizens of other East European countries as Budapest’s five star hotels were to Polish, Czechoslovak, or East German currency. Socialist

governments from the “northern triangle” wanted to draw millions of tourists (including Westerners with their coveted hard currency). But they did not want to go the way of Elizabeth Taylor and Ringo Starr. Hence, after a decade of wary observance, in light of Western overtures for détente and the growing numbers of tourists crossing borders in the East bloc, the governments of East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland decided to open their borders as well, but were determined to create a more “socialist” form of travel and tourism.

A More Socialistic Form of Tourism

Long before the Romanian economics professor Hutira debated with his bloc counterparts the meaning and the goal of socialist integration in Prague, another conference had been called to the capital of Czechoslovakia in 1957. This conference’s aim was to provide a platform to discuss tourist exchange in the East bloc and also to solidify the program for the upcoming Conference of the State Authorities for Tourism of Socialist Countries (or CSAT), established by Comecon countries in 1955 to unify touristic policies.⁸⁰

Helmut Günther, the East German scientific advisor for the state planning commission of tourism, held talks with many of the delegates at the meeting.⁸¹ With his Hungarian counterpart, he proposed creating a voucher system that would permit people to purchase hotel accommodations, transportation, and even entertainment in one’s national currency before departure. The system would also provide for limited amounts of spending money and individual expenses, secured like travelers checks. Most importantly, vouchers provided central governments with the tools to guide the market: since currency was non-convertible, the voucher was *mutatis mutandis* a tool to prevent uncontrolled consumption. The advisor wanted vouchers for a mere two thousand East German travelers; with Albania, he proposed another nine hundred.

But when he was approached by his Polish counterpart he told a different story. “At the behest of the Polish delegation” reported Günther, “the GDR delegation held a meeting about possible tourist trips to the People’s Republic of Poland after a representative of the minister of transport, comrade Tarantowicz appeared with the explicit goal” of discussing the topic with East Germany.⁸² Tarantowicz suggested a parallel structure as with Hungary: that two thousand tourists be sent to Poland on vouchers “to help Poland and to contribute to mutual cooperation.”⁸³ He assured his East German counterpart that “the tourists would be housed in special homes,” which “met necessary control standards” so that they would “not come into contact with tourists of capitalist states.”⁸⁴ Segregation of Germans was customary in the 1950s; like tours offered to Stakhanovite workers, state-procured vacations followed a bifurcated philosophy. By offering limited touristic opportunities, the state showed its paternalism and its benevolence. Since the state was also the tourist guide, however, it provided workers (and occasionally their families) with rest and relaxation at ideologically *appropriate* sites.⁸⁵ In other words, the organized tool revealed to the worker not only that the state was proud of its workers, it also ensured the worker that he would not be tempted or disturbed by scenes which would diverge from the what the state wanted him to see. For that reason the understandable suggestion to send a mere 2,000 workers was

rejected. Günther concluded that “the suggestion could not be accepted” only ten months after the uprising in Poznań, and that such “broad” contact with East Germans would be inappropriate.⁸⁶ What should have been an innocuous recommendation revealed instead the sensitivity with which lower-level officials approached their bloc counterparts.

As the last example shows, although it was possible within the Comecon for tourists to travel on their own since the late 1950s, the dilemma was that state socialism had to exercise control over its population. That was usually achieved through (in)formalities that made travel all but infeasible. In 1964, for example, citizens of East Germany were formally granted permission to travel without a visa to the East. But supplemental, state-issued papers were required in addition to identification cards; these papers were only seldom issued, and required at least fourteen days to be processed. Additionally, draconian laws capped the amount of currency East German citizens *without* a college degree could exchange, whereas highly educated citizens had no limitations at all.⁸⁷ University professors—the paradigmatic example of socialist intelligentsia—were able to spend as much as they wanted while steel workers—the paradigmatic example of socialist proletariat—were limited in the amount of currency they could exchange.

Given the labyrinthine and opaque bureaucracy, it is on the one hand unsurprising that any open border project would demand inclusion of a countless number of departments, but on the other surprising that authorities managed to put forth a viable transnational plan for liberalized tourism across three Warsaw Pact countries at all. Even if tourist bureaus in all countries purported to have peaceful relations with their socialist neighbors, and authorities signed treaties enshrining reciprocal cooperation and friendship at regular intervals, the travel agreement was ambitious since it would inevitably result in an unparalleled level of transnational exchange in the East bloc. The unprecedented project would allow millions to travel abroad in an unorganized fashion, and would be felt most acutely in ordinary people’s lives.

Each country had its own historical baggage with which to deal in anticipation of open borders. In East Germany—where one out of five inhabitants came from Poland’s “Recovered Territories” or the Sudetenland—visiting homes and towns recalled memories of what was lost in the aftermath of World War II. At the same time, the arrival of hundreds of Germans brought local inhabitants in both Czechoslovakia and Poland to fear revisionist tendencies. Polish statements about German tourists revealed the political potential of open borders. People began to express anti-German moods by making reference to World War II. That feeling was most acute in Poland. Polish radio received an anonymous letter: “The Polish nation praises the friendship between Poland and the GDR highly, but [our] society is concerned about what will happen later. What will happen, when the tourist season begins?”⁸⁸ A citizen of Rzeszów reacted similarly:

Everyone is happy about the friendship with the GDR and the opening of the border for mutual visits. But are information signs in German necessary on Polish signposts or buildings? We waited so long to wipe out German words from Polish soil. It would be suitable to write information signs in all languages since we have guests from the entire world.⁸⁹

For Czechs and Slovaks, recent memories of the arrival of masses of Soviet bloc citizens haunted inhabitants: even if both Polish and Hungarian authorities were more willing to allow liberalization in 1968, the fact that East bloc countries invaded the country (with the exception of Romania) exacerbated the propagated image of “friendship” for most people.

Beyond the danger of challenging the rhetoric of socialist integration, the complex system of travel would be difficult to reform for at least four additional reasons. First, it was unlikely that state-run tourist industries could accommodate an unpredictable number of tourists. Secondly, open borders would force official tourist organizations to compete with ordinary people; Orbis (in Poland), Čedok (in Czechoslovakia), and the Reisebüro der DDR (in East Germany) controlled the majority of offerings to foreign destinations and were supposed to be attuned to the best tours for workers of the state; package tours (even though subsidized by the state) were the *raison d'être* of state agencies. Additionally, people could not travel abroad without foreign currency. Finally, keeping in mind that possession of foreign currency was virtually prohibited across the Bloc, new legislation would have to be passed to solve the problem of masses of tourists. Most importantly, if the individual was to cross state-lines, he/she became a far more complicated subject to monitor.

Realpolitik and Travel Politics

When the time came to discuss the realization of “socialist integration” through open border politics, national interests soon emerged as a major field of conflict among members of the northern triangle. What sounded clean and clear-cut in newspapers and at international conferences became messier when officials were brought to sit at the negotiation table in order to discuss the scope and the details of the travel initiative.

The Czechoslovak government was initially upset that the open border project was presented as a unified front of all three countries. In February 1972, the Foreign Minister and the assistant to the Foreign Minister expressed their frustration that “the principles of negotiation” had been distorted. They insisted that the “borders of friendship” represented not a tri-lateral agreement, but rather bilateral agreements between three countries. At first glance, this distinction seems minor. But later it was crucial to a policy that unilaterally restricted foreigners in the home country. In order to “create the prerequisites for mutual cooperation in international relations and the spirit of socialist internationalism,” one had to implement greater “control measures.”⁹⁰ Having allowed thousands of Czechoslovaks to leave the country just a few years earlier, the Foreign Minister was concerned that legislation on the “borders of friendship” might hamper his country’s ability to limit tourism.

Polish officials had to create a virtual lobby in order to be included in the deal with Czechoslovakia. In October 1971, Piotr Jaroszewicz and First Secretary Edward Gierek arrived in Prague bearing a diplomatic booby-trap. Although diplomatic, they threatened their Czechoslovak counterparts in the name of intra-bloc relations. The problem was border populations: Edward Gierek informed his Czechoslovak counterpart that one “had to concede that there [was] a higher standard of living in the CSSR.”⁹¹ Aiming at getting the most from a future travel deal, he stated that, even if People’s Poland had no intention of profiting from transnational tourism (or, as Gierek put it, Poland did “not want to profit

from tourists like Yugoslavia or Bulgaria”), stark economic imbalances threatened friendship.” Furthermore, he argued, “your people [that is, the Czechoslovaks] regularly enter up to 50 km into Poland.” That was not legal. “We could send them back home, but we don’t want to.... [Since] People’s Poland doesn’t hoard its material abundance.”⁹² Gierek was offering his neighbors incentives hoping that Czechoslovakia would ratify the agreement on the most liberal terms possible.⁹³

East Germany had its own problems with Czechoslovak authorities. In April 1971, Foreign Minister Willi Stoph, visited the CSSR to discuss “the common fight against the Federal Republic.” Stoph pushed the Czechoslovaks to adopt the same language as East Germany in a planned communiqué.⁹⁴ The major problem for ambassador Chňoupek was language on internal security, where Prague and Berlin had different concerns. At the time, the GDR was negotiating travel for citizens of (West) Berlin, and the Federal Republic was pressing the GDR to allow its citizens greater freedom of movement.⁹⁵ In order to save face, East German leaders had to say that they were allowing more West Berliners into the country as part of a general opening of borders. But, Chňoupek asked, why did Czechoslovak authorities care what happened in distant Berlin? In fact, they were concerned about smuggling and shopping sprees. They wanted the communiqué to say that borders were controlled to prevent abuse. Czechoslovaks, in other words, could rest assured that their border guards would not seem compromised in the eyes of the East German consumer-traveller. Czechoslovak foreign minister Hamouz later complained about the “difficult” behavior of East Germans, who categorically denied that their population could ever engage in “speculation and smuggling,” and insisted that they were preventing in every possible fashion “the entry of undesirable persons” to the CSSR.⁹⁶ East Germany’s language was defensive. At the same time, policy makers in Prague were cool and matter-of-the-fact. The language used at meetings on the part of all three countries reflects how political leaders saw their own citizens, and how they perceived foreign authorities. They were like parents standing behind their rowdy children at the playground: he did not *steal* your toy; we taught our child how to behave *correctly*.

Any change in policy on tourism would alter the algebra of socialist paternalism. Freedom to travel would challenge not only the monopoly of state tourist industries, it would also separate the worker from his battalion as he travelled with his family. Of course, free time with the family was not a problem for socialism, but the resulting loss of proletarian solidarity could be. Freedom to travel called into question fine-tuned and orchestrated experiences of the socialist foreign country. It had the potential to undermine the legitimacy of the socialist regime when its citizens compared living standards and/or freedoms enjoyed abroad. Hence, East German authorities’ hypertension was partially justified. They wanted to achieve parity with the number of FRG citizens in the East. Everybody knew that West Germans garnished favor through their prized Deutschmarks.

If their language was akin to that of protective parents, perhaps socialist leaders were actually more like parents letting a child go away to college. If socialist authorities were going to open borders for all citizens, they had to let go of their children.

Friendship amongst Peoples

Each East bloc country had vested interests in pursuing closer cultural contacts in the early 1970s. Whereas the 1960s marked a retrenchment in the Cold War, the 1970s were a time of détente between West Germany and the East bloc (as best symbolized by Willy Brandt's famous "*Kniefall*" in front of the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial in 1970). Each country hoped to garner not only unconditional recognition of borders, but also much-needed Western credits in return for normalized relations. In return, socialist states were willing to sign international accords officially endorsing regular cultural exchange. In 1975, the Helsinki Accords formally made human rights, freedom of religion, and the freedom of movement issues of international concern.⁹⁷ For most East bloc countries, it seemed obvious that détente with the West had to come with greater cooperation among members of the East bloc, lest it seem that one nation was closer to the West than they were to their socialist neighbors.

What was not so obvious was that socialist leaders in three repressive countries would move to deregulate the travel regime toward neighbors. After all, East Germany constructed a wall only a decade earlier to prevent the freedom of movement, and the Soviet Union had just smashed a Czechoslovak initiative promoting greater openness. In the same year that young people in Prague took to the streets in a failed attempt to institutionalize "socialism with a human face," the Polish regime pursued an anti-Semitic campaign to weed all those deemed politically unorthodox. In other words, Warsaw Pact states had a variety of weapons to prevent deviance at the same time that they had countless instruments to celebrate friendship between neighbors. A policy of open borders was unnecessary to prove "socialist integration." Leaders could continue to publish letters of friendship and cooperation as they had been doing for years. If anything, the potential for discord among neighbors made liberalized travel politics seem dangerous and unnecessary.

As mass "manifestations" and industrial quotas within the planned economy best reveal, authorities in all three countries had an instinctual fear of unorganized movements of citizens, goods, and currencies. Whereas tourist organizations controlled the movement of people, state banks and economic planners controlled the movement of goods. In countries driven by planned economies and unconvertible currencies, open borders would lead to trade imbalances and currency shortages.

The international change of travel regime required certain changes in the regimes of all three countries. In Poland, the ascension of Edward Gierek in 1971 drastically altered the anti-German (and anti-Semitic) rhetoric of his predecessor, Władysław Gomułka. More willing to cooperate with neighbors to ensure economic growth in Poland, Gierek inaugurated an era of economic growth and raising of living standards. Similarly, the 1971 replacement of the octogenarian, Walter Ulbricht, with the fifty-something, Erich Honecker, signaled a change of guard in East Germany. Ulbricht had only reluctantly accepted de-Stalinization in the late 1950s, and his government's approach to cultural diversity was containment. Viewed from the early 1970s, Honecker's rise to power gave people hope that a limited thaw—seen in Poland in the 1950s—might finally arrive in Berlin. And although he did not mark a liberal shift, Gustáv Husák's ascension in 1968 brought efforts to normalize daily life after the tumultuous Prague Spring and made planners focus more centrally on living standards, economic output, and material security. The new first secretaries focused on

what they variously called their “new economic plans,” all of which were successful in raising workers’ wages and the availability of consumer goods.⁹⁸ Growth would come to a halt with the global downturn, but not before each regime decided that greater inter-cultural contact among socialist countries was more advantageous than the method of selective (and minimal) travel which typified the first twenty-five years of state socialism in Central Europe.

By November, 1971, Gustav Husák declared his enthusiasm for an open border project. In the small city of Lány, he lauded Erich Honecker for his promotion to First Secretary of East Germany, and subsequently stated that he “gave full support to the intensification and particularly liberalization of touristic travel between both states... It should begin in January 1972.”⁹⁹ The Polish Foreign Minister concluded that “the German Democratic Republic and the People’s Republic of Poland are indeed bound in close friendship, since a socialist society was established in both countries.”¹⁰⁰ The new leaders saw that liberalized travel could provide a safety valve for disgruntled citizens and alleviate Western criticism while spurring transnational economic growth and (most importantly) socialist integration.

Authorities realized the revolutionary move to allow citizens to travel in an untethered and unorganized way, and the language of official documents reveals how authorities in Prague, Berlin, and Warsaw were guided in no small degree by hope. The mood did eventually sour: even official publications would recognize that “much remain[ed] to be done, particularly in economic cooperation and tourist exchange.”¹⁰¹ Some countries (especially East Germany) were all too aware of the possibility of defection from other East bloc countries (and for that reason, arguably chose not to include liberal Hungary in the travel deal). Perhaps anticipating that the number of attempted illegal border crossings from Czechoslovakia to Bavaria would peak, the Stasi created new units to monitor and prevent escape from the East bloc via third countries.¹⁰²

What cannot be discounted is the genuine belief of leaders in the power of international socialism. Opening borders was a move beyond mass festivals. Border guards, local administrators, shop keepers and workers questioned the move. Their economies (in the early 1970s) were relatively stable, countries were not hemorrhaging young people to the West, and cultural policies were permissive of change to reflect the times: rock music and Western TV series were beginning to permeate the East bloc. Travel augmented prosperity. As one press office put it—in consultation with the Advisory Council—in late 1971, “the travel agreement offers... [East bloc citizens] favorable opportunities to familiarize themselves with the achievements of the neighboring country in building socialism.”¹⁰³ If state socialism could survive that, why not allow people travel to socialist neighbors without visa or passport?

When officials finally published details of the travel agreement, they decided to call the project the “borders of friendship.” A move towards unrestricted cultural and economic understanding between socialist states and a preemptive action to quell international criticism, the “borders of friendship” were meant to reveal the triumph of “socialist integration” in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. They constituted one of the last moments when socialist authorities believed in the propaganda of proletarian internationalism, and also marked the zenith of officials’ conviction that their citizens could foster socialistic transnational friendship.

Performing the Border: Depicting Mass Travel (and Hoping to Guide it)*

On New Year's Eve 1972 readers of *Rudé Právo* read that “Tens of thousands of [Czechoslovak] artisans technicians, engineers, merchant marines and doctors in the GDR were [at their jobs], while other tens of thousands were relaxing.” Lazy vacationers were unaware of the toils of Czech and Slovak proletarians, working on the street, in power plants, or at sea in the name of their state. But there was also good news: for some workers, “recreation [was provided] in the GDR, [where they] slept for the first time in modern Interhotels, such as the Neptun in Warnemünde on the Baltic coast, the Bastei in Dresden, and the Panorama at the winter resort in Oberhof.” And while CSSR citizens were housed in fancy new hotels, “most GDR citizens utilized the first two free days to visit the Polish People's Republic, since between the GDR and People's Republic of Poland there was visa-free travel starting 1 January 1972.”¹ The tone of the article was a bit confusing: it was admonishing wealthy private vacationers, who were relaxing on holiday (as if they should be doing something else) while at the same time promising workers that their chance to stay at a fancy hotel would also come soon.

New Year's 1972 brought the opportunity to travel for millions of East bloc citizens, who used that chance to go skiing, visit friends, or just walk along the beach. Between Poland and East Germany, borders were opened at the beginning of the year; Czechoslovakia followed suit with the GDR two weeks later. From the start of the open border project, East German, Polish, and Czechoslovak newspapers reported on individual

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travel, utilizing a variety of genres and tropes in order to give shape to inchoate popular desires. In this chapter, I analyze the ways in which authorities depicted travel and tourism at the start of the open border project. Each national press streamlined coverage to serve and guide respective audiences; communist regimes advertised their own version of the open border. On the one hand they enacted new identities, providing neighbors with ready-made symbols of their socialist paradise: East Germany was a modern nation with international recognition; Poland was a relatively liberal but somewhat backward country with rich natural resources; Czechoslovakia possessed deep riches of tradition with a long history of hospitality. The press also created images of the foreign country at home. It mirrored country-specific images from abroad. These stereotypes were not in themselves new, but what was new was the desire by socialist governments to encourage interpersonal encounter—after all, the open border policy would be a failure if ordinary people did not want to go on vacation.



Image 9. The Panorama Hotel in Oberhof. (Permission: Bundesarchiv.)



Image 10. The Bastei in Dresden.² (Permission: Bundesarchiv.)

For the first time in the history of state socialism, governments capitalized on unorganized, transnational mass-tourism. Certainly, the daily press disproportionately reported on governmental aims in reporting the “borders of friendship,” but at the same time it had to attract travelers with something more than newspeak. Depictions of tourism abroad could not rely merely on continuous declarations of solidarity and fraternity. As such, they reflected the touristic desires of their readership: the East German press informed readers about particular cities and activities, while the Polish press focused more on border crossings and exchange rates; the Czechoslovak press highlighted the importance of serving travelers in the name of socialist integration and intra-bloc peace.

The “borders of friendship” were meant to ensure economic and political equality. Socialist integration according to planners meant the eventual convergence of industries not only through governmental agreement, but through the purchasing power of ordinary citizens abroad. The aim of messages in newspapers and on the radio was partially to ensure the greatest political gain from both local and international observers. All the while, governments read their counterparts’ descriptions of tourism, acting as foreign editors and editing their own media to guide the tourist gaze.³

The Symbolism of Open Borders

Advertising of the 1970s in East Central Europe was minimalist compared to today: only occasionally did the press inform citizens of the CSSR, Poland and the GDR of tourist offerings abroad. That came down to supply: hitherto state-owned tourist companies were the only advertisers and organizers for tours abroad. As in other communist countries, these sold quickly.⁴ Since people rarely travelled privately, publishing travel formalities in the national press was irrelevant. That changed after the enactment of the open border policy, when tens of millions were allowed to travel individually.

Informing citizens of the attractiveness of foreign travel came through official “manifestations” which encouraged mass participation through advertisement and through individual accounts of experiences abroad. The media was additionally used as a tool to admonish people for devious behavior and to advise travelers on normative travel behavior. According to the conventional logic of propaganda, heads of state had the initial burden of proving the symbolic and intended mass appeal of the socialist open border project. This came through explicit and implicit suggestion.

On 15 May 1972 *Neues Deutschland* [New Germany] published a prominent article concerning the unveiling of the Monument of the Polish Soldier and German Anti-Fascist in World War II.⁵ The article argued that while West Germans were in the middle of heated debates on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or overcoming the Nazi past, East Germans were bridging divides with their socialist neighbors. Entitled “United by the Ideas of Socialism and Internationalism,” the article goes on to proclaim that Poland and East Germany have “filled the gaps of the past”; Prime minister of Poland and prominent member of the Central Committee, Piotr Jaroszewicz, stated that:

The inflammatory border of the past has changed into a border of peace and good neighborly cooperation. What could symbolize this radical change better than the fact that this border has been opened to an uninhibited stream of millions of tourists between our states, to mutual visits by good neighbors of both friendly peoples, [who were] divided in the past by a stream of blood thanks to the German exploiting classes?

Today nothing separates us anymore. We live in good-neighborly, fraternal relations. Visit us, worthy comrades, as often as possible, our land and our capital, Warsaw. We will take you in with all of our hearts.

The proclamation of brotherly friendship came on the twenty-seventh anniversary of the end of World War II. For the Polish observer, the proclamation came two years after Willy Brandt's famous Warsaw prostration in front of the Monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.⁶ The monument was a symbol of unity, peace, and anti-Fascism.

For citizens of socialist countries, travel was the most significant departure from conventional East bloc politics. Even if no Warsaw Pact country could open borders to the West, the supremacy of socialism in the international politics in Cold War Europe was expressed in drastic liberalizations such as the lifting of travel regulations. In order for travel politics to be a success, it was essential that the project not only be created, but also that it be acted out in the upper echelons of power.⁷ Hence, when delegations from Poland in East Germany made a regular stop by the Monument of the Polish Soldier and German Anti-Fascist in World War II, they assured their citizens not only of the diplomatic success of socialism in East Central Europe, but also of the continued social success of the open border policy.⁸



Image 11. Pioneer Greetings at the Monument of the Polish Soldier and German Anti-Fascist in World War II⁹



Image 12. Front page of *Trybuna Ludu* on 25 June 1972.

Upper-level “manifestations”—parades, worker visits, diplomatic proclamations—prominently displayed the trust and friendship between countries throughout the 1970s. As if by clockwork, figures of the state would visit each other every season; take vacation in the other’s country, visit workers on the job, or simply “swing by” on much larger diplomatic tours. On the first page of the 25 June issue of *Trybuna Ludu* [The People’s Tribune], an image of a train full of happy travelers is juxtaposed to an image of Honecker and his foreign minister walking across the “bridge of friendship” with Gierek and his minister. The regimes’ citizens could vicariously perform international diplomacy through travel into the brother-land.

At the local level, newspapers and national associations encouraged workers’ groups and youth organizations to plan outings together.¹⁰ On May Day 1973, for example, “in the early hours of the morning... friends from the Polish Youth Band and members of the FDJ [Free German Youth], as well as Polish Youth Pioneers met... at the current of friendship, hand in hand.”¹¹ Border guards organized soccer matches. Schools organized days of meetings between cities.¹² *Neues Deutschland* reported that female workers from Poland and the GDR, “who had begun working together this year,” traveled to the birth home of East Germany’s first president, Wilhelm Pieck. It used to be in Germany, and now (after World War II) it was in Polish Gubin. Conversely, co-workers from Poland liked the “meticulously preserved [and] interesting memorials” and came from Polish Zgorzelec to its sister city across the Oder, Görlitz, to “get to know them” with their East German counterparts.¹³

Ceremonial acts of friendship were central to official East bloc fraternity, and were embedded in all forms of entertainment, business, and politics. Most people did not take this

type of thing seriously. For politicians, the ceremonies were not notably different from the past—except now they would talk about vacation in conjunction with the friendship between peoples. But other people did use the occasion to meet more frequently: in the 1970s, the mayors of the border cities Guben/Gubin famously became friends, maintaining close personal contacts well into the 1990s.¹⁴ At the Poznań Fair, Artur Boeck reported, “relations are developing in all areas between peoples. Alliance and partnership, recognizable and perceptible to everyone, [has] become the significant component of the political thinking of [each] people.”¹⁵ Although authorities held sporting events from the early 1960s, events such as the annual “Tour of Peace”—a bike tour from Poland to East Germany and then Czechoslovakia—received markedly more attention as international audiences rooted for their favorite team in neighboring countries.¹⁶ 1973 saw the initiation of the “Run across Friendship Bridge,” where young and old met to encourage health and well-being through a collective jog from Frankfurt to Ślubice.¹⁷ And annual youth festivals on the “three-country triangle”—that is between Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany—promoted cultural programs with dancing, singing, and bonfires.¹⁸ Teams and committees orchestrated these events and participants were compelled to join in ceremonies and museum visits.

Beyond mass celebrations and parades, the most obvious form of popularizing open borders in the daily press came in the form of advertising.¹⁹ In the first years of the open border, *Neues Deutschland*, *Trybuna Ludu*, *Rudé Právo* and other press organs prominently featured offers from the Reisebüro der DDR, Čedok and Orbis to travel to each respective neighbor. These advertisements appeared most frequently in May or June (with the inauguration of summer vacation), or in January and February (when new offers were made for the coming year). Magazines like the *Światowid* or *Turysta* published offers in every issue, although they changed during the course of the year. Likewise, *Junge Welt* published monthly offers of travel to foreign countries. Magazines like *Polityka*, *Wochenpost* or *Eulenspiegel* never published explicit advertisements, although articles found within their corpus made great efforts at mobilizing the population. The format of advertisement came in varying forms and sizes. *Neues Deutschland* seldom printed advertisements for the Reisebüro, although it allotted more space for the Reisebüro when they did. The *Trybuna Ludu* was much more akin to Western newspapers when it came to travel advertisements—there, instead of an entire page, editors incorporated travel advertisements into the classifieds. Magazines like *Für Dich*, which regularly advertised travel, had offers within larger texts focusing on single cities (within East Germany and abroad). Advertisements, depending on their size, provided readers with pictures (of the Masurian lakes, renovated cities, mountain landscapes, or modern strips of shopping centers), or short texts concerning the foreign country, their (female) inhabitants, and their culture. Czechoslovakia’s *Rudé Právo* was reticent in advertisement. Tours were offered primarily for the homeland, while only the successes of socialism were publicized.

If references in advertisement were made beyond dates and times, they were singularly positive, while the linguistic and visual vocabulary involved in projecting different countries varied. In a country like the USSR, one “Sees New Things – Experiences Interesting Things” in the Georgian SSR – where modern hotels are built adjacent hanging cliffs and old fortresses; in Tashkent – where contemporary museums revealed the life of Lenin; and in Baku – where a damsel’s tower picturesquely graced the city center.²⁰ Hungary was a gothic capital with numerous spas and swimming resorts.²¹ In Bulgaria “the sun

smiles.”²² East Germany was not a small country in northern Europe, but a growing country with futuristic and bustling cities and a modern beach resorts; Poland was a quiet landscape and a “relaxed” society, usually embedded in particular areas: places like Szczecin and Gorzów Wielkopolski, Krkonoše/Karkonosze and Masuria. Similar to East Germany, Czechoslovakia was not a country, but depicted a European metropolis with a unique mixture of fin de siècle, medieval, and modern. It had all the amenities that modern cities entailed, but gained value through its rich and well-preserved tourist resorts.

Press corpora printed personal experiences of individual travel in the neighboring country; this was typically transmitted through trusted travel reports in daily newspapers but also popular illustrated magazines. Particularly in the GDR, these travelogues—carefully filtered, but still promoting individuals’ ability to “go away”—were meant to guide other visitors on where to go and what to do by means of subtle, personal suggestion. Hence, they tell us much about nation-centric perceptions of foreign countries. As Matthias Heeke writes, “Travel literature betrays, in the end, more about the traveler and his cultural background than about the visited and described land itself.”²³

East German newspapers featured reports on travel to Liberec, Wrocław, or Gdańsk. Even if authorities strictly enforced Polish and Czechoslovak usage, readers knew these had been German cities.²⁴ On 28 March 1973, *Neues Deutschland* took readers on a virtual tour of Poland by means of four individuals’ “Impressions of a Visit to Polish Neighbors.” The first traveled to Szczecin, the second to Zielona Góra, the third to Krkonoše/Karkonosze, and the fourth to Gubin.²⁵ East German authorities hoped to provide their citizens with vacations in familiar, formerly German places in order to counter demands to travel West, but shunned suggestions that these areas were once German. The East German press also encouraged sailing, hiking, camping, and fishing in Masuria, an area once divided between Poland and East Prussia.²⁶ The official reception was positive: all areas were considered to be well renovated and maintained after the devastation caused during WWII. Reports lauded the Poles for friendly service, willingness to help, and the ease of travel. Simply put, Poland was a country where one “does a lot, but also relaxes.”²⁷

In order to best persuade East Germans to travel east, writers for dailies understood that they had to avoid areas where the historical legacy of Germany had been overwhelmingly negative. Why go on vacation to a place where locals associate Germans with atrocity? The exception proved the rule: in April, 1973, Klaus Habedank from Potsdam had a chance to go to southeast Poland. After an extended description of his journey from Frankfurt to Zielona Góra, and he went onto Cracow. There,

trips with Polish friends to the surroundings were also interesting. About 64 km away from Cracow we visited the Museum of the Martyrdom of the Peoples—Auschwitz and Birkenau. The reports about the death of four million people from twenty nine counties due to fascist crimes were moving.²⁸

Journalists were well versed in methods of retouching the past: ideological censors developed new phraseology in each country to erase ethnicity from World War II. It was not a *German* war, it was a series of “fascist crimes,” “Hitlerian [*hitlerowski*] wars,” or “imperialist aggression.” The phraseology expressed the idea that not all Germans were liable for crimes,

and that the GDR was the best expression of the fact that Germans could live in peace with neighbors. That was all well and good for readers far away from international borders. But it was a particularly thorny issue to delete the German legacy in cities like Łódź or Prague for travelers: how should *Für Dich* readers understand and feel emotionally bound to the history and culture of cities where Germans had perpetrated monstrous crimes, as monuments and plaques reminded them? Could the East German press erase the ethnic component of the past merely by substituting “German” for “Fascist”?

Where indirect reference was made about the status of these areas before the War, the East German press deleted any mention of the “Germanness” of these areas. Instead, the War was perceived as ground zero; even if the castles, lakes, and gardens were present before the “fascists” were repelled (thanks by and in large to the Red Army), these areas appeared to the reader as having been unpopulated, static, and characterless before 1945. Anyone who did populate the area was either explicitly pro-Polish (having long ago placed the German-Polish border on the Oder-Neisse),²⁹ or an imperialistic class-enemy. Klaus Rachow, for example, wrote of his experiences in Poland:

The difference [here] is unmistakable. The car... came close to Łagów. Magnificent forests, small viaducts [which] the Polish train department has built, a long, narrow lake, a romantic castle—quite like no other. One Baroness von Wurm rapidly abandoned Łagów in 1945 with an elite division [called] “Hermann Göring.” Living in the USA today, she still mourns in letters about [having left] “Łagów, the most beautiful place on Earth.” But in the town itself no one sheds a tear, and sees no value in correspondence with this lady.

By reading travelogues we see the schizophrenic nature of East German motives.³⁰ On the one hand, they wanted to encourage citizens to go to former German regions. On the other, they had to say how thoroughly Polish the regions were. By allowing East Germans to pack up their Trabant and go to Pomerania or Silesia, the East German authorities were promoting a form of tourism which placated Germans through the possibility of visiting former homes in the East instead of family members in the West; through substitution, travel made the loss of *Heimat* and family more bearable.³¹

In keeping to official nomenclature and strictly avoiding claims of German rights in the East, one could posit that the GDR was making overtures to the Polish government. But surprisingly, Poland seems to have generally overcome most fears of retributive East Germans. As the Polish Central Committee openly stated, Germans were most interested in seeing “familiar places and even familiar apartments from 1945.” The Central Committee was also interested in seeing that the current inhabitants’ opinions were generally positive.³² Western press would also suggest that Poles have overcome their fears of the Germans. Leslie Colitt would even posit: “Only a few years ago, Poles who knew German refused to speak it. Today, German is once again the most widely-spoken foreign language in Poland.”³³

That the Polish, Czechoslovak and East German tourist could now travel “freely” was itself quite remarkable. Real and perceived forms of surveillance were temporarily lifted (even if the individual was exchanging one secret police for another across the border); people were no longer required to put their names on lists for organized travel (since no one could be denied the personal identification card required at home and now sufficient to travel abroad). As if purging themselves from previous fears that there would be a social backlash in the face of so many German foreigners, Poland’s Central Committee called a meeting on 2 February 1972 to consider the failure of state planners to estimate the number of visitors in that cold month of January.³⁴ Many more had come than anticipated. The decision to open the border had “met with great interest and satisfaction by society,” and there was a “great demand for many goods.” In the first four days of January, 90,000 East Germans crossed the border to Poland.³⁵ 45,000 East Germans were reported crossing to Czechoslovakia in the first two days of liberalized travel.³⁶ Some three months later, when more than 3 million East Germans had already crossed the border, the Polish militia reported to the Central Committee that public opinion was “decisively positive,” and, that increased tourism was very profitable: the Polish economy had already taken in more than 150 million zł. through exchange commissions.³⁷ Five years later, when millions fewer crossed the border, the Central Committee still reported receiving huge sums (100 million ruble)s through tourism with East Germany. In private meetings with his Polish and Czechoslovak colleagues, chair of the council of ministers, Willi Stoph, stated that the project established “trust amongst the working classes in the power of socialistic unity... and [that the project] must not be limited.”³⁸ The open border appeared to be a win-win situation.

For central committees, the sheer number of tourists was the most gratifying—but also astonishing and dangerous—aspect of the “borders of friendship.” Within one year, the number of Polish tourists abroad in socialist countries grew annually from less than one hundred thousand to a shocking ten million. In any given month, nearly one and a half million Poles crossed into East Germany; nearly one million East Germans entered Czechoslovakia; and the numbers grew into well into the mid-1970s.³⁹ Willi Stoph noted that “in Western television... even class enemies could not find any bad material despite their greatest exertion.”⁴⁰

Behind closed doors Polish authorities likewise underscored the significance of the open border project. The ambassador of Poland in the GDR (and later CSSR), Stanisław Supruniuk, “recognized the political significance” of open borders and wanted to ensure their expansion.⁴¹ Even in Moscow, Poland’s ambassador Czesław Kapczyński highlighted “the stark growth of personal relationships between [East bloc] citizens due to passport- and visa-free travel.”⁴² Foreign minister, Stanisław Olszowski, underscored that the “introduction of visa-free tourist traffic [was] a historic event in the lives of [East bloc] citizens, which gave many a [feeling] of great optimism. It was an expression of socialistic relations... with no negative consequences. It was a great success.”⁴³ If there were any real problems it was that the socialist open border project undermined the profitability of national tourist organizations.

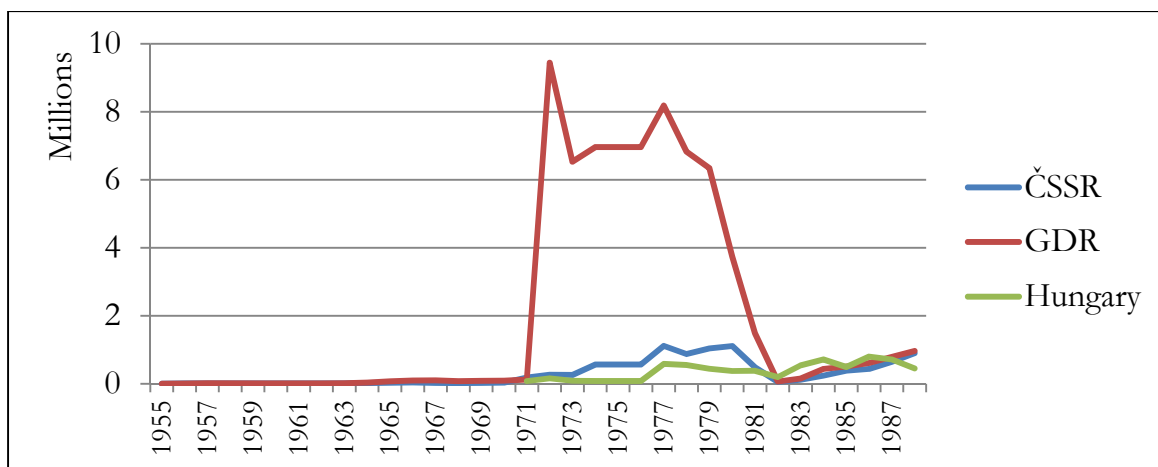


Chart 3. Poles in socialist countries (selection), 1955-1988⁴⁴

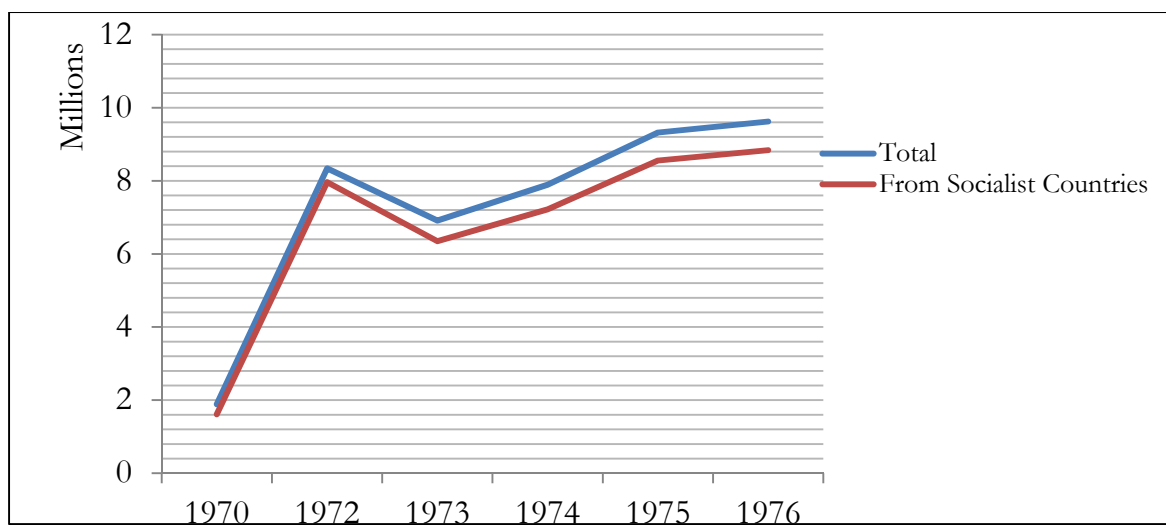


Chart 4. Arrivals in Poland⁴⁵

Year	Number of border crossings			
	GDR to Poland		Poland to GDR	
	Total	Border regions	Total	Border regions
1971	537,000	68,000	197,000	36,000
1972	6,763,000	2,950,000	10,054,000	4,125,000
1973	5,297,000	2,110,000	6,543,000	3,210,000
1975	5,112,000	2,310,000	5,675,000	2,620,000
1977	5,706,000	2,095,000	6,659,000	2,715,000
1979	4,693,000	1,980,000	5,367,000	2,010,000
1980	3,435,000	1,800,000	3,200,000	1,430,000

Table 3. Border crossings, GDR to Poland, 1971-1980.⁴⁶

Year	GDR/Poland		GDR/CSSR	
	GDR citizens to Poland	Polish citizens to GDR	GDR citizens to CSSR	CSSR citizens to GDR
1972	6,774,069	10,054,866	5,821,507	1,127,442
1973	5,297,861	6,712,064	4,198,089	1,230,253
1974	5,110,307	6,973,169	4,048,619	1,505,841
1975	5,112,093	5,675,105	4,527,198	1,733,271
1976	3,753,639	6,761,268	4,237,609	1,677,607

Table 4. Border crossings, GDR to Poland, CSSR to GDR.⁴⁷

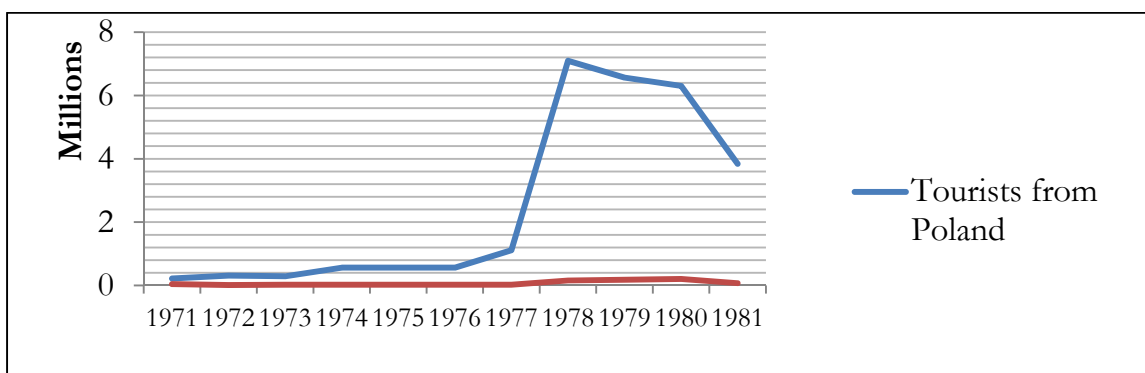


Chart 5. Polish travelers to Czechoslovakia, 1978-1981⁴⁸

The real problem of the tourist industry in the 1970s was that its *raison d'être* as arbiter of organized tours was increasingly obsolete. The percentage of tourists traveling on state-run tours plummeted from twenty percent of foreign trips in 1971 to a mere four percent a year later.⁴⁹ But if organized tourism was forced into oblivion, the greater goal of socialist integration advanced toward realization. The “borders of friendship” program was a measure to prevent social unrest by providing a secondary marketplace. The result was a stark imbalance between the number of East Germans coming to Poland as tourist traders and the number of Poles who poured into the GDR to shop, and the number of Czechoslovaks coming to East Germany or Poland and the number of East Germans who poured into the CSSR to shop. That twice as many Polish tourists were in East Germany as vice versa, and three times as many East Germans in Czechoslovakia balance was impossible to achieve.

Although trading across borders has existed for millennia, the *tourist* trader is a phenomenon of modern nation states. Whether trading marijuana or margarine, the tourist trader went abroad with multiple aims: on the one hand, the tourist trader was interested in the foreign land, but also in the goods which could be procured abroad. Many got rich selling goods abroad, but the vast majority of tourist traders sold consumer goods to get by, to afford a vacation, or simply to acquire currency (which was frequently limited). As the Foreign Minister of Poland, Radosław Sikorski, admitted while visiting San Francisco in 2009,

the groundwork for Polish entrepreneurship was actually laid in the 1970s by the communist Edward Gierek. He allowed us to travel.... It was very difficult to actually go on holiday... and what we did in those days was to trade our way to pay for the holiday. Millions of people did it. And what began as a cottage industry in those days became a groundswell of entrepreneurship of the 1990s.⁵⁰

As implied in the quote from the foreign minister, Polish officials were not only aware of the tourist trader imbalance between Poland and her neighbors, but actually encouraged Poles to take advantage of foreign abundance. Of course, there were periodic admonishments, but as the East Germans joked in the 1980s, “Why is Pope John Paul II going to the capital of the GDR soon? Because he’s the last Pole who hasn’t shopped at Alexanderplatz.”⁵¹ Poles flooded German cities, emptying stocked shelves and loading their cars with goods to take home for family and friends, with their government’s general approval. Indeed, Polish authorities viewed the open border much like a consumer pressure valve to alleviate their own supply problems. But increasingly, rampant and uncontrolled consumer activities across the border also made it clear to all governments that the open border threatened social control. In response, officials would have to *admonish* people for “bad travel,” while endorsing correct, normative modes of travel and consumer restraint. But this seemed unrealistic once the “borders of friendship” had come to symbolize a secondary marketplace.

That was reflected in the Polish press, which was as interested in practicalities as in the ease of traveling abroad: “The essential novelty [of the ‘borders of friendship’] is that the tourist fee assessed by the exchange office to all Comecon countries was lowered from 50 to 30 percent” and that “limits on the frequency of travel and on the exchange of currency have also been repealed.”⁵² Although Polish journalists reported on practicalities, they were also the first to openly articulate (already in 1972) the expected results of the Polish shopping frenzy in Germany. Mieczysław Rakowski, the editor of *Polityka* and later prime minister of Poland, wrote with foresight:

On 1 January, the treaty between Poland and East Germany on passport-free border crossings was enacted. The exchange of [Polish] zloty for [East German] mark (1 zł = 4.78 marks) is unlimited. According to first reports from the GDR, our citizens are storming the stores in Berlin and other cities. It’ll be interesting when the Germans start to protest empty shelves.⁵³

Like Rakowski, the German press predicted throngs of Polish shoppers and was quite aware that this did not bode well for Germans, whose consumer supply was potentially in jeopardy. As *Neues Deutschland* delicately put it, there were fears that some “problems would occur from the start,” potentially leading to “impairments in foreign currency balances” and, more importantly, to “temporary impairment” of the “continuous maintenance of certain goods in our lands.”⁵⁴ By contrast, politicians and journalists acknowledged and welcomed the opening of the border as a boon to the Polish economy and the Polish consumer. The Polish Central Committee initially feared the consequences of an open border and the return of some estimated seven to eight million Germans expelled from Poland from 1945 to 1948 following World War II and the redrawing of borders (even if the number of expellees was

likely fewer than a million).⁵⁵ But fears of property reclamations or explosive tensions between Poles and Germans on Polish soil dissolved in the face of the economic benefits. As future First Secretary, Stanisław Kania, confirmed, individual tourism was a “priceless” form of “economic cooperation.” He noted how tourism to East Germany “aided the [Polish] national economy” by giving average citizens new shopping venues (and filling government coffers through exchange commissions).⁵⁶

The Polish press was exceedingly positive about the opportunity and outcome for travel to East Germany and Czechoslovakia. Journalist Jerzy Urban, for example, lauded the opening of the border between the two states as a historic corrective to trade barriers introduced in the twelfth century and passports in the sixteenth. As he elaborated, the open border project was perhaps the single most important move toward interpersonal understanding across borders.⁵⁷ The press documented how Polish travelers were enjoying the old towns of Plauen, Görlitz, and Leipzig, but especially German restaurant food, which was less expensive than Polish fare. Big cities were also high on the Polish itinerary, even in official publications. Dresden was a lively city of sounds and restaurants; Leipzig was “so full of people, one could not make it through the market”; Berlin was not only a “triumph of the idea of socialism” but also an “active city,” with “modern architecture,” especially at Alexanderplatz, where one found the shopping extravaganza Centrum-Warenhaus (Central Department Store).⁵⁸

The Polish press not only depicted the vast opportunities but gave practical tips on shopping in East German cities, including details as new shopping centers were established, with their opening times and the variety of goods to be purchased there. The Germans seemed just as eager to point to their state as a cornucopia for socialist consumers. As with 1960s Yugoslavia, where Western models were used to advertise home-grown industries, so with Poland, where citizens were encouraged to experience a modern (consumer-friendly) East German state.⁵⁹ In East German cities one could always find (according to tourist advertisements and journal reports) a mall, a boardwalk, or simply well-supplied shops. In an interview conducted while he was visiting Poland, Peter Koehli, the director of the East German state-run airline Interflug, reminded Polish readers that “prices in Germany [were] attractive” and significantly lower than in Poland for frequently purchased goods. A bottle of beer, for example, cost 60 pfennigs in German restaurants, and cigarettes cost only 1.60 GDR mark per pack.⁶⁰ The result, as the well-known Polish reporter Andrzej Wróblewski remarked in an interview, was that “more than one Pole goes to Frankfurt for chicken, because it is cheaper there.”⁶¹



Image 13. Centrum-Warenhaus in Berlin (Permission: Bundesarchiv.)

The presence of East Germans and Czechoslovaks in Poland and Poles in East Germany and Czechoslovakia brought ideology, economy, and social norms to convergence in the 1970s.⁶² Upholding the notion of friendship, the Polish press implied that participation in this range of tourist, leisure, and shopping activities was a reciprocal relationship established through the new border politics; that is, Germans enjoyed consuming goods in Poland as much as the Poles did in East Germany. Germans did buy products in Poland, especially those that were cheaper than back home or else of better quality, and they particularly took advantage of cross-border shopping on weekends when their own shops were closed.⁶³ In Warsaw, the government closely tracked German consumer demand, as shown in an official report to the Central Committee on how Germans wanted cheap(er) goods from Poland—“some types of manufactured goods/cigarettes, some higher quality smoked meats, natural coffee, vodka, polyamide covers, bikes, electric lamps, gasoline, etc.”⁶⁴ And Polish shopkeepers were also quick to capitalize on the quality of their goods. As the prolific journalist Andrzej Mozółowski highlighted in *Polityka*, signs in store windows along the Polish border towns advertised in German, and one sign in Słubice jumbled Polish with German in a sort of East bloc consumer esperanto: “*Cukiernictwo—lody—Eis. Marian Kral (Polnisches Eis schmeckt besser)*” [Confectioner—Ice Cream—Eis. Marian Kral (Polish Ice Cream Tastes the Best)]. Mozółowski added that East Germans often bought bread in Poland because “the bread is better—and always fresher.”⁶⁵ Specifically, shopkeepers also changed the mixture of their salamis (adding a bit more fat and a bit less red meat), avoided government price hikes by

buying their own supplies in the GDR, and more generally catered to East Germans willing to pay East marks for their goods.

Still, German participation in trader tourism was less extensive than Polish, and East German magazines and newspapers, unlike their Polish counterparts, stressed the fact that consumption was not the reason to travel to Poland. In part, this was a measure to work against animosity: indeed, many Bloc citizens were convinced that East Germany's economy was flourishing at the cost of other Warsaw Pact countries.⁶⁶ In general, the East German press focused on the open border as an opportunity for socialist Germans to travel and partake in recreation in areas once familiar to them. More so than shopping, it was an opportunity to return "home," to step back into a lost home. Newspapers chided trader tourist consumer activities, especially when they seemed to overshadow social obligations. In one issue of the *Wochenpost*, the reporter explained that a *Jugendweihe* (the communist equivalent of first communion) was a very special occasion, and that it was "more valuable" ("mehr wert") to be in the company of good friends than to engage in "some type of 'consumption.'" ⁶⁷ In other words, presents were less important than the presence of family members, and social gatherings should not be an excuse to travel to Poland for gifts. From the side of East German officials, even meager individual shopping trips into Poland were seen as suspect, and by no means encouraged.

Nevertheless, Germans also went east for a taste of the "exotic": the Slavic language, different (sometimes otherworldly) norms, and the possibility to experience a level of cultural liberalization foreign to GDR citizens. A young reader of the *Eulenspiegel* [The Trickster] was pleasantly surprised by the strange but charming manners of the Poles, the difficult language, and the friendly service. And indeed, unaware of the conventions of East German travel to Poland, he was taken aback when he learned that his parents had been advised not to fill up on gasoline in their native East Germany. Gas in Poland, they had been told, was much cheaper and available right beyond the border. Quite predictably, they ran out of gas just kilometers before reaching that border. But a Pole on his way back from Germany arrived and, despite the language barrier, which meant a minimal exchange of words, generously gave them several liters of gasoline hidden in his trunk. When the East Germans offered payment for the man's generosity, the Pole refused, simply responding, "*Proschim*" (a Germanized, ungrammatical and incorrect form of "You're welcome").⁶⁸ On the one hand, this public (and thereby publicized) account of cross-border tourism seemed to highlight the "mistake" of East Germans who refused to buy gasoline on their own side of the border, or who used trips to Poland for purposes of shopping. On the other, it recalled the original purpose of the cross-border project—socialist brotherhood—suggesting that even through misplaced ideas about consumption, East bloc socialist ties might be generated.

But brotherhood or not, the trader tourist imbalance was evident, and it soon became clear that the open border was in fact stymieing any potential economic reform in Poland by offering fast and effective, yet ultimately superficial, solutions to serious problems. Since Poles exchanged nearly twice as much money as East Germans, and East Germans three times as much as Czechoslovaks, open border consumption aided anti-inflationary politics, but did little to solve deeper economic problems facing each government.⁶⁹

Both governments realized the necessity to create more spaces for travel, along with the trains, planes, and automobiles in order to bring visitors to their destination. Hence at the party meetings throughout the 1970s, officials set goals to alleviate problems in mass tourism: workers had to produce more trains, build more boat docks, and construct more hotels.⁷⁰ The East German Interflug, as well as the Polish LOT, created weekly, direct flights to Gdańsk, Warsaw and Kraków. New bus-lines served Berlin-Szczecin, Frankfurt (Oder)-Poznań, Guben-Krkonoše/Karkonosze, and Dresden-Wrocław. State-run worker unions—the FDGB (East Germany’s Free German Trade Union), the ROH (Czechoslovakia’s Revolutionary Trade Union Movement) and the CRZZ (Poland’s Central Council of Trade Unions)—consistently made overtures to the working classes, promising new travel possibilities and means of trans-national interaction.⁷¹ In January of 1972, the General German News Service reported that a 330 kilometer-long highway made travel to Szczecin, Koszalin, Gdańsk, and other Baltic Sea tourist spots more accessible for the East German traveler.⁷²

The liberalized travel regime signaled a significant departure from the repressive regime many had grown accustomed to in the 1960s, and Western commentators were surprised by the regimes’ change of direction, even if they recognized significant deficiencies. Frank Riley of the Los Angeles Times was able to report in 1978:

For the first time, one of the guards who checked us through Checkpoint Charlie was a young woman whose green uniform skirt terminated above the knees. An irrepressible demand for more consumer goods, from a people who wanted to look as mod as the tourists, forced a slow brightening of still austere shop windows. Just as irrepressibly, the people of East Germany wanted to be tourists, too. They couldn’t travel westward, but we skied with them in Poland and Czechoslovakia.⁷³

As communist parties attempted to shape the new tourist industry that had resulted from the open border, “economic cooperation” remained one of the leitmotifs. Each party anticipated a larger flow of Poles into East Germany and Czechoslovakia (Poland had, after all, twice as many inhabitants), but they also assumed that consumer interests would eventually balance out as access to a foreign market became more commonplace, and that cross-border shopping would be limited to a handful of cheaper items or goods of higher quality. These assumptions, however, proved to be rather naïve in retrospect, particularly considering the imbalance of goods available in the CSSR and GDR compared to Poland in this period.⁷⁴ A 1976 issue of *Polityka* published a poem from eleven-year-old Hania Milewska, next to an article by Andrzej Wróblewski. Hania’s poem read:

On the bridge in Slubice, there is a lot of commotion
You hear German and Polish.
German kids eat Polish ice cream,
And we munch on their candy.
...
Dietmar from Frankfurt,
Jaś from Slubice

Both know how to say
Dzień dobry and Guten Tag

Although Hania evoked a child's world, it was firmly rooted in trade and exchange. The poem, placed on the cover page, gave Wróblewski the opportunity to comment snidely; reflecting on Hania's poem he elaborated that shopping was in fact *the* essential element of the open border for average Poles. "Today, when I went across the bridge," he wrote, "there was no commotion." People were not going to visit friends, but "to buy tomatoes."⁷⁵ It became increasingly apparent that the tourist trade imbalance was there to stay—particularly considering the continued encouragement of it by the Polish government, which recognized a simple solution for economic woes when it saw one.

Importantly, people on the street and in the bureaucracy called the street activity during the era of the open borders what it was: it was a "market." While seemingly trivial, the acknowledgement of a marketplace in socialism was, in fact, quite radical. The entire *raison d'être* of state socialism was to control economic activity. State managers were to know how best to guide the economy. But in border towns and inland, handlers and consumers negotiated prices and worked out trade deals. The activity was incomparable to the globalized marketplace of the 2010s. What was happening, however, was not socialist: it was entrepreneurialism writ large.

The media took up the campaign to promote "rational" modes of consumption in East Germany. This tactic was common: throughout the Cold War (and, to some degree, on both sides of the Curtain) a typical instrument to discourage conspicuous consumption was caricature and derisive language. One way of reprimanding the public about its "unsocialist" behavior was to poke fun at the absurdity of the goods bought. In his travel log, Mozółowski described the East German "Handelsmarkt" (trade market) on Saturdays in Zgorzelec and Görlitz, close to the Czechoslovak border. He was unimpressed by the "orgy of color," the "rich assortment" of bronze, porcelain, and wooden goods, the plates with pictures of Wrocław city hall, horses, and dogs. He was also not humored by the pidgin language spoken by Poles: "*Porceln, cwaj hundert, a to jest holc, tak samo cwaj hundert, egal*" ["Porcelain, *zwei hundert* (two hundred), and that is *Holz* (wood), *zwei hundert, egal* (whatever)"]. One could not see beyond the stands with plates, he wrote, because of the crowds. Later, he found an assorted variety of buttons and stickers: "Beatles, Locomotiv GT, ABBA and Frank Schöbel . . . unpretentious [buttons in English with phrases such as] 'I love you,' and, 'Kiss me,' ball caps with '*VM im Fussballspiel München 1974*'" ["World Cup football game Munich 1974"]. This last item he found particularly distasteful since "half of Görlitz" was already wearing it. From the trunks of cars, as he described, one could also buy "onions, apples and potatoes, 'Teksas' jeans," and, to top it off, for 400 zloty, "neon sweaters" ("*'neonowe' sweterki*").⁷⁶ With his derogatory assessment of the East German Handelsmarkt, Mozółowski attempted to draw attention to the absurdity of paying so much money for what he considered East bloc kitsch. In an article titled "Borders Without Complexes," Aleksander Paszyński and Marian Turski guaranteed that the consumer should not expect too much when purchasing abroad:

Do people go over the bridge [to East Germany or Czechoslovakia]?

No, what for? In the beginning there were more [German] marks, [and] the border guards were less stringent. . . . When they invited you, they put out sandwiches and you could sit the entire evening with just one glass of wine; not like here, where one does everything in order to lay the table with abundance [*by stół był zastawiony*], even when it's hard to buy things.

But are shops [over there] stocked better?

It just seems that way, once [my] wife bought a blouse, [and] after the third wash—it's already a rag. In fact, all you have to do is look how we are dressed and how they are.⁷⁷

In other words, the neighboring proletariat also had to deal with shortages, and the quality of foreign goods was perhaps not as good as originally thought. If the question of aesthetics did not prove to be persuasive enough, then the quality of goods might be.

On the radio, some programs attempted to address complaints relating to tourism. In East Germany, former Central Committee member Rudolf Singer was questioned on air why there was not an agreement with the "Big Brother." On national radio, the speaker responded that:

Travel without special papers of visa, i.e., without any formality, does exist between the GDR and Poland, and with some restrictions also from the GDR to the CSSR. Such extensive agreements have not yet been made with other socialist countries, but an increase of tourism is planned. Well, a look at the map will show why this is so: Poland and the CSSR are our immediate neighbors. Many of our citizens just take a short trip there which often takes only one day, and special relations result, of course, from the immediate neighborhood in the border areas. Trips to more distant socialist states require more preparations, also for the country which is to be visited, since a longer sojourn is contemplated in any case. The conditions for such unguided tourism do not prevail, especially during the main tourist season. Even the Soviet Union is just beginning to develop its industrial sector of tourism, and it must be taken into consideration that the USSR is a country which is visited by people from all over the world.⁷⁸

On the same program (designed to answer problems of international peace and cooperation), one caller asked why Bulgarian resorts were segregated according to Western currency: those who had it were let into certain restaurants, while those who did not were denied. A touchy subject for leaders, the official could only respond that "the state uses these monies for the further development of the country... in other words, in the social interest."⁷⁹ That a socialist citizen was not allowed into a Bulgarian restaurant only proved, in other words, the desire of the state to redistribute funds to build socialism. Even if the Westerner got the pork chop, the revenue coming from that cut of meat was spread amongst the toiling classes. A somewhat more delicate question was avoided by thinly-veiled "socialist Reaganomics": the pork chop paid for social services and greater socialist welfare.

Common sense helped editors guide travelers on their trip abroad. And it was subjective. But when did it go too far? “Was a striptease socialistically amoral?” queried a citizen. Rudolf Singer responded:

You know, Mr. Schlammer, striptease does not have too much to do with socialist morality. On the other hand, one striptease... will probably not undermine [your sense of] socialist morality. If I were you, I would not really take this whole thing too seriously.⁸⁰

Like pornography, you knew socialist internationalism when you saw it.

As a rule, people were supposed to see new things while abroad. But not everyone agreed what that was. The East German newspaper *Sonntag* criticized its readers for their “superficial” engagement with the CSSR and Poland, going there just “for shopping or restaurants.”⁸¹ In March, 1972, one diplomat quipped that “the Czechs have been spending valuable hard currency to keep the consumer market supplied and suddenly they discover that free-spending Germans were grabbing the imports and taking them home.”⁸²

Another solution to curbing cross border consumption was more direct: border policing. Although this topic will be discussed in chapter five, suffice it to say that policing, seemingly at odds with brotherhood and unity, was justified in the press as a prophylactic against the darker side of trader tourism—that is, speculation and smuggling. In answer to a reader’s question about why there were customs controls and taxes, *Trybuna Ludu* accorded some normalcy comparative to the EU, writing that “even in the European Community” there were taxes on tourist goods, and the Polish customs guards were merely there to “protect” the public: “One of the tasks of the customs officers is to not allow the ‘aiding’ of state enterprises by private persons in foreign trade.”⁸³ “Aiding state enterprises” was a euphemism used by smugglers for their activities, which were assumed to constitute significant border abuse. Language itself adapted to open borders.

To some degree, official admonishment worked. A student and dissident, Wojciech Maziarski, later recalled his embarrassment at being denied the appropriate stamp from the Polish police to travel abroad:

The [officer] took my identification and examined it carefully. He count[ed] the number of pages in it. He finally ask[ed]:
“You sure you didn’t tear out anything?”
“No, why would I tear anything out?”
So the police officer [started phoning around]. . . .
“You won’t get the stamp.”
“Why?”
“I don’t know,” he replied, “you must have smuggled something.”
All people in the queue started staring at me, eyeing the smuggler [emphasis in original].⁸⁴

Although official sources still encouraged people to buy abroad, stigma was placed on those who chose to deal. Official Polish sources continued to try to discipline their unruly trader tourist through subtle persuasion. At the same time, they worked to guide the “tourist

gaze.”⁸⁵ They wanted people to go abroad, but they did not want to lose the good will of neighbors with open borders. In Czechoslovakia, the problem was inverted: authorities wanted to control their own population, but did not want to drive away foreigners. There, the service industry guided policy.

Run, Waiter, Run!

In the 1981 Czechoslovak film, *Vrchní prchní* (Run, Waiter, Run!), the protagonist acts as a waiter in multiple restaurants in Prague and Karlovy Vary. He serves the wealthy and foreigners visiting the country. All the while, he steals money from unknowing tourists by cashing in bills, dressed as a waiter, although he does not work in any restaurant. The devious waiter cashes in while tourists unwittingly sponsor a thief in state socialism.⁸⁶ He is the paradigmatic example of the citizen who understands that the foreigner in Czechoslovakia has enough money to spend on caviar and crepes, in contrast to the average individual who has to queue in order to buy basic foodstuffs.

Within Comecon, it was Czechoslovakia which had the largest growth in tourism (although Hungary had the largest numbers of visitors). Before the Prague Spring, there were 4.6 million visitors to the country. That number plummeted in 1968/1969, when Czechoslovakia was a forbidden land for foreign tourists. But by 1971, tourism had already rebounded, despite new restrictions imposed by the Husák government, to 4.7 million.⁸⁷ (Poland’s tourist industry could only welcome a third as many tourists in the same year.) But while the country welcomed increasing numbers of tourists, it was incredibly cautious about tourism policies. State officials wanted to tend to the number of tourists as if in a five-year-plan: that is, to ensure that any East bloc citizen follow itineraries and rules. For that reason, although the Polish press continually announced that the open border project would be expanded to the CSSR, by the end of 1972, a written invitation was still necessary to go to or from Czechoslovakia.⁸⁸



Image 14. Josef Abrahám in *Vrchní, přební!*

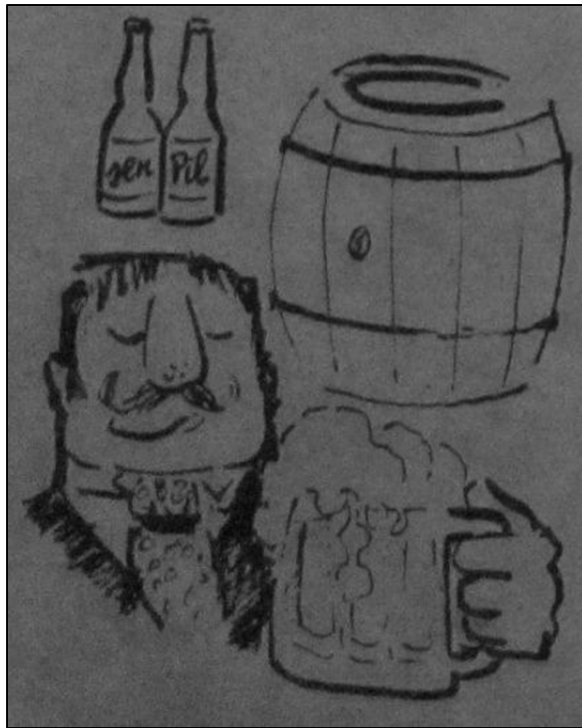


Image 15. A rendition of Brno in a Hungarian travel brochure⁸⁹

The country's tourist officials were primarily interested in drawing tourists to Czechoslovakia (rather than sending locals abroad), and highlighted to its own citizens, as the *Zemědělské Noviny* stated, that "the foundation of Czechoslovak tourism is home... where the standard of living has rapidly improved, the work week has shortened, and motorization

has grown.”⁹⁰ It went on to showcase the “fifty eight spas [where] patients from all continents of the world get healthy,” and Krkonoše, where tourists from both capitalist and socialist countries gather in the winter months.⁹¹ Similar to other tourist locations—most notably the Bahamas and Cuba in the 1940s and 1950, but also Spain and Portugal in the 1960s and 1970s—Czechoslovakia pursued a policy of self-promotion, pointing to “good service” and “a wide array of hotels, restaurants, cafés, [and] wine bars” to attract guests.⁹² All the while, it highlighted the fact that Czechs and Slovaks played along—allowing the occasional misstep and unorthodox behavior.

Scholarly journals also took up the cause of international tourism and socialist integration. In 1974, R. Nádlerová developed a critique of mass tourism, all the while noting that in non-socialist countries tourism was very “advanced.” The contrast, wrote Nádlerová, is that in “capitalist countries there is stark competition,” and that travel agencies were “always looking for new markets.”⁹³ In contrast, Comecon countries aimed at economic parity and “consistent consolidation of the position of socialistic countries on the world stage.”⁹⁴ Mass tourism was based on the “fundamentals of the Comprehensive Program, particularly in coordinating the developmental plans” of socialist countries.⁹⁵ Czechoslovakia was, in the words of R. Nádlerová “a supply country”—meaning the number of tourists coming to the country outnumbered citizens leaving the country.⁹⁶ In contrast to Poland or East Germany, both the large cities as well as regional villages had gone unscathed by the war. It was more collectivized agriculturally than Poland, but the countryside and mountains were more attractive than those of its neighbors. Had Czechoslovakia solved the Hungarian dilemma, offering renowned tourist attractions without becoming slaves to Western actors and superstars?

Czechoslovak officials thought theirs was an ideal form of socialist tourism. Rather than a cheap imitation of the West, Czechoslovakia was inviting the world to their home, and was providing services that were both economical, of high quality, and ideologically correct. Western celebrities did not come to Prague for their birthdays, and the lack of social unrest (or large dissident movement) after 1968 made Czechoslovakia a model country to showcase the success of socialism. But one of the largest problems with the open border policy was that the government had yet to issue new regulations on travel documents.

Old passports were required to receive new government endorsement and identity cards were not valid for travel to Poland or the German Democratic Republic.⁹⁷ On primetime radio, the head of the passport administration, Josef Ripl, explained the continued restrictive travel regime. While the “‘overwhelming’ majority of Czechoslovak citizens represented their country well when abroad.... although offenses persisted which sometimes bordered on criminal activity, such as machinations with the Czechoslovak and foreign currencies and goods, and concealing and falsifying of data.”⁹⁸ The government ensured its listeners that, after 31 December 1972, when new stamps were required on all travel documents, the situation would be alleviated. *Večerní Praha*, after describing the presence of East Germans in Czechoslovak cities, gave its readers the assurance that “reciprocity will surely not be delayed too long.”⁹⁹



Image 16. “Dederonski” crossing the Czechoslovak border. (Permission: Bundesarchiv.)

In the meantime, foreigners flooded into the country. Czechoslovaks began complaining about East Germans—the “Dederonski” (after a synthetic material, Dederon, which was mass produced in the GDR)—and calling the East German mark “Ulbrichts” (after the former First Secretary).¹⁰⁰ The symbolic car of the GDR, the Trabant, was colloquially referred to as the “revenge of Honecker.” Still, the populace took the position of a service community: just a few years “after the Warsaw Pact invasion” wrote one journalist, visitors “were addressed politely.”¹⁰¹ Czechoslovakia sought legitimacy through travel as Spain and East Germany had.¹⁰² In both those countries, tourism was used as a tool to ensure the perpetuity of the political system. If foreigners could visit and have a good time in the cities or on the ski slope, then the government was obviously not as depicted by the Western press.

Perhaps for that reason, writer Jiří Hájek protested that “in terms of tourist exchange with capitalist countries, we have no reason for a ‘normalization’ as before 1968.... after all these years we are not interested in the ‘golden West of the Red East’... where everything is sold for cheap prices—starting with artistic-historical artifacts and ending with Tuzex blondes.”¹⁰³ He argued for a realistic approach, recognizing “the nationalist hysteria, which arose amongst us in 1968.” But he also argued for a long term plan which reflected “those facts rather than continuing with a conception of tourist exchange with socialistic countries.”¹⁰⁴ He wanted the government to pursue a sensible plan which did not promote decadent, luxurious travel. Intercontinental hotels for Hollywood superstars were counterproductive, as were restaurants restricted to people with hard currency. Socialist travel had to be reciprocal with other socialist countries, and it had to include all social strata.

The notion that Czechoslovakia would be a perpetual host to foreign guests was unacceptable.

Conclusion

The depiction of “the borders of friendship” revealed substantial differences amongst member countries. What united them—outside a perpetual desire to project socialist unity and fraternal relations with the Soviet Union—was an understanding that the time was rife to allow greater socialist mobility, especially given global movements to promote contact through education, cultural exchange and tourism. South of the “northern triangle,” governments in Hungary, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia had already established lucrative tourist models to encourage westerners and easterners to experience their country (and leave a bit of hard currency behind). Given their long histories of emigration and foreign travel, planners in East Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia were also aware of the *abnormality* of their hitherto restrictive travel regimes. But what strikes the reader are the marked differences between countries when it came to print articles about tourism. Czechoslovak newspapers expressed their willingness to host while cautiously trying to avoid the pitfalls of the Prague Spring. East German journalists promoted nostalgic travel, confident that what drew readers abroad was their familiarity with “foreign” cities and landscapes. Polish magazines and newspapers highlighted economics. Indeed, when it came to travel, Poles were uncontested entrepreneurs.

The Baltic Gives me the Runs! Rooted Czechoslovaks, Entrepreneurial Poles, and Patronizing Germans

While researching in the small town of Zittau on the “three-country-triangle” in 2008, I spoke with the archivist at the local library about life in the 1970s. A native of the region, she remembered how, in the early 1970s, there was only one bridge to cross the borders with Poland and Czechoslovakia. In 1972 that changed when the government built one more into Poland. The new construction made sense, since it alleviated traffic. More importantly, it was part of propagandistic moves to celebrate friendship between the three countries—in contrast to mass expulsion and violence of the past, now East Central European leaders were building bridges to encourage friendly contact. It was a physical manifestation of peace under socialism. (Unfortunately, since the first one was already called the “Peace Bridge,” planners chose instead to name it after Chopin.)

Chopin Bridge was meant to show that relationships between countries of the Comecon were putatively socialist, friendly and cooperative. I told the archivist that I was writing about open border policies between Czechoslovakia, Poland and East Germany. Though grimacing she listened politely. “You can’t compare it to today” the archivist said. The open border project between the socialist states was more restrictive than the modern-day Schengen Zone (where people cross freely without border checks). Above all, borders still existed: documents as well as currency were still controlled, people could not expect much in the way of customer service or tourist accommodation, and English was not the *lingua franca*. Nevertheless, for citizens of otherwise repressive governments, wasn’t the new project relatively liberating? The archivist wanted nothing of such talk. It wasn’t so much that there were borders or restrictions, it was the people: “The Czechs didn’t like it when we went there. We saw them all the time here, but whenever we went there, they didn’t want us there.”¹

Although the narrative of “them not wanting us” is tragically frequent in former East Germany, the perception that Czechoslovaks were unwelcoming is not peculiar to the GDR.

One renowned Polish poet related to me how much he hated traveling over “that” border—that is, the Polish-Czechoslovak border. “That” border recalled visceral memories: the length of the wait at the border, the stringent controls, and the harassment by authorities made him exclaim that “they were worse than the East Germans.”² A middle-aged woman explained in detail how as a child in southern Poland, she knew her parents would tell her to hide her toys and chocolates as they approached the Czechoslovak-Polish border on their way home: “as a girl I didn’t understand why, but I knew that the Czechoslovak police could come, open my bags and take anything they wanted.”³ This might seem one-sided, if not for the fact that Czechoslovak authorities and even the citizenry seemed disinterested in the open border policy.

Only ten percent of Czechoslovaks left the country for Poland or East Germany combined, as opposed to some thirty six percent of East Germans traveling to Czechoslovakia alone.⁴ Poland—a much larger country, and hence harder to “escape”—also had a much larger traveling population: there, nearly ten percent travelled annually to Czechoslovakia. As one critical western voice from Prague had it, “the Czechoslovak population, apparently cast in the role of perpetual hosts to their... neighbors, probably feel more frustration than pleasure at the moment.”⁵

One of the most beloved Czechoslovak films of late state socialism reconfirms the notion of local-rootedness. In Jiří Menzel’s *Vesničko má středisková* (Home Sweet Home), the director creates a montage of the Czechoslovak home town. There is the old grandmother, who cleans homes and gossips about other people’s affairs; the well-intentioned, round-bellied protagonist, who is forced to work with alcoholics and low-ranking party-cadre on a collectivized farm; and Otík, the mentally-challenged, twenty-something who has a small brain and a large heart. And then there is the local town doctor (played by Rudolf Hrusínský), who protects every citizen as if he was their father. When the town doctor suggests to an ailing old man to close down the local pub and go to the Baltic, the old man replies “I went the year before last. It gives me the runs.” Nor does he go to the mountains, since he “can’t stand heights.” In other words, neither Poland nor East Germany could possibly cure his ailment. This fictional anecdote seemed substantiated through the evidence of travel to foreign countries by Czechoslovak citizens in the 1970s and 1980s.⁶



Image 17. “The Baltic gives me the runs!”⁷

On the face of it, Czechoslovak rootedness was part and parcel of “normalization.” After all, the aim of normalization—after the mass exodus of Czechs and Slovaks to the West—was to ensure stability after the Prague Spring; it promoted a retreat into private life and withdrawal from political activism.⁸ Since nearly all of the Warsaw Pact countries joined in the invasion of Czechoslovakia, normalization was also a way to avoid remembrance of the occupation. Hence, it was ironic that this isolation was breached by the very regime which encouraged “normalization.” Why would an isolationist country allow transnational travel precisely when the popular uprising had been put down?

There were critics. Some saw this as a net plus: interpersonal exchange would force the economy to become more flexible; it would aid the domestic market; and it would allow consumers greater choice. In theory, the growth of tourism would also promote an industry which was significantly smaller than in European countries of similar size (e.g. Spain, Portugal, or Denmark).⁹ A large number of specialists saw impending doom: in an economy of shortage, adding a small number of consumers in a zero-sum game was dangerous. Friendship or no, tens of millions of additional socialist consumers might lead to unrest (even if it did not). Additionally, until there was more investment and development in tourist infrastructure, an influx of foreigners meant that hotel rooms and camping spots would be sold off to someone, who, although still a worker, was not a “local” worker. In what follows I explore the economic aims of the open border policy in greater detail. The heart of the program was international in scope, but foreign consumer purchases—which were unexpectedly large—brought authorities to change that scope. At first authorities sought to eliminate negative economic effects of the open border internationally. But over time each government altered policies to support local consumers, surrendering to popular demands.

Comprehensive Program

The open border project was a step-child of Brezhnev’s Comprehensive Program, which was a response from the USSR to reform what was increasingly seen as inefficient economic cooperation within the Comecon. It was comparable to agreements between Scandinavian countries in the 1960s and western European countries in the 1950s in that it encouraged greater market integration, but only partially. It did result in more substantial exchange between countries, but it failed to address fundamental problems which had loomed since the 1950s; as such, it acted more as a bandage to systemic inefficiencies in the East bloc.

At issue were 1) multilateral trade agreements, 2) limited specialization, and 3) the non-convertibility of currency.¹⁰ In the era of the European Community and the transformation of world banking, East bloc economic planners understood the necessity to create new economic institutions with supranational powers.¹¹ However, since the Comecon founding charter had established the principles of interestedness and unanimity, reform was impossible if a single member of the body of eight vetoed initiatives. Planners could not (and did not) organize industries according to specialization: East Germany had its Trabant, the Soviet Union its Lada, and Romania its Dacia. Moreover, East Central European leaders considered the “multilateralization of finance”—or internationalization of banking and

convertible exchange rates—unacceptable throughout the 1950s and 1960s; trade agreements had to be incorporated into plans, resulting in bilateral barter between individual states. In the months before the Prague Spring, Czechoslovak authorities were the most vocal agitators for semi-independent enterprise, federalism, and the reintroduction of profitability in the bloc. When tanks gathered at Wenceslas Square in August 1968, however, broad Comecon reforms became largely taboo.¹²

The Comprehensive Program was designed as a cure for chronic problems, but was actually a smorgasbord of quick fixes. The final agreement, signed in April 1971 by all eight Comecon members, was murky.¹³ As a general principle, it gave impetus to individual countries to search for alternatives in economic planning; acknowledging that currency convertibility was a problem which needed to be solved it gave members greater liberty to close bilateral agreements; it created an economic body which was scheduled to meet every five years to establish new exchange rates; and it allowed countries to bi-laterally change convertibility rates annually.

Convertibility rates were the core of many economic debates among East bloc countries in the 1970s and 1980s. Convertibility rates—or the percentage of increase or decrease any one country requires when making a specific economic transaction—were designed in Comecon states to allow for price inflation or deflation without devaluing pegged currencies more generally. For example, if Bulgaria wanted to sell twenty tons of tobacco to Poland, and if it wanted to do so *without* first exchanging into USSR transferable rubles (the international currency for East bloc countries), then it could negotiate with Poland the rate of exchange *solely for the twenty tons of tobacco*. Since, both the Bulgarian lev and the Polish zloty were non-transferable, and since exchange rates were pegged to the ruble (and hence, by and large to each other), the two countries could agree that, instead of an effective exchange rate of 100 zloty to 100 lev, they could increase the value of the lev by two percent, making the rate of exchange 102 zloty to 100 lev. That would make those twenty tons of tobacco two percent more expensive.

The Comprehensive Program helped alleviate the problem of currency exchange. Negotiating the price for each object of exchange between countries was costly in time and resources. Additionally, if countries were planning on sending millions of citizens abroad, they would have to settle upon a more effective exchange rate to allow citizens to purchase services and goods when in the socialist neighboring country. Hence, in the 1970s and increasingly in the 1980s, the convertibility rate—usually between one and two percentage points—was changed to account for *all* transactions, whether it be a ton of tobacco or a can of sardines. Unless otherwise negotiated for specific transactions, the convertibility rate was established between two countries to streamline transnational exchange—both materially and for private individuals. It effectively allowed, for example, Hungarian officials to inflate or deflate their currency by a small percentage each year vis-à-vis another East bloc country.

In terms of tourism, the convertibility rate was used in addition to mandatory exchange amounts. Since tens of millions of Czechoslovak koruna, East German marks and Polish zloty were to be exchanged at banks prior to departure into socialist neighbor countries, the convertibility rate was a key mechanism to at least partially control tourists' consumption. Each citizen could exchange only a specific amount. In addition, since there was a great disparity in the numbers of tourists—as already noted in the introduction—the

convertibility rate also became a tool to reduce or increase the actual exchange of currency between national governments. Finally, since trade surpluses—achieved in no small degree by individual consumers traveling abroad—often forced individual countries to “give” a second country goods, services or materials to alleviate the surplus, the convertibility rate assisted in reducing or increasing the amounts of goods proffered.

The “borders of friendship” were not only one of the key components of the Comprehensive Program writ large, but they were quickly adopted by all three countries as a potential mechanism to alleviate economic problems, which was one of the aims of Brezhnev’s plan. As the finance minister of East Germany wrote in 1972, “the measures [to liberalize travel are] an expression of the politics of socialist internationalism... [and] an important step in connection with the realization of socialist economic integration.”¹⁴ Leaders in the “northern triangle” hoped to reaffirm not only brotherly love between neighbors, they also aimed at intra-bloc economic parity through interpersonal consumption and movement.

Objects of Desire and Resourcefulness

It is puzzling how planners imagined economic integration if prices could not float and if the economies were not calibrated with one another. What exactly did economic integration mean in terms of liberalized travel? Krystyna Kostrzewa, the long-time foreign correspondent for the Polish press organ, *Trybuna Ludu*, elaborated on what the state intended for the population in 1972:

“Teksas” jeans for youngsters and women’s blouses are sold out in clothing stores [in Poland]... [and Poles] bring cosmetics from the GDR. Outside of that, [they buy] women’s stockings and baby clothes, household-, electric-, and radio-goods. As of late, tourists are driven by taste or appetite, the natural desire to have something different, but soon the selection of goods will be decided by price and quality.¹⁵

For travelers, economic parity meant a projection of the border in the future of all three societies once travel and tourism had reached its true potential within a modern economy, and would develop over years. In Poland specifically, the open border policy was developed in conjunction with heavy investment in consumer industries (which started in 1971). Planners recognized that parity would not happen overnight, but hoped that the open border would provide both new marketplaces, as well as new impetus to recreate the foreign market at home.¹⁶ As the Polish minister of finance commented, “with the introduction of visa-free travel, [we] assume that the possibility of shopping in the neighboring countries will alleviate the ‘necessity to buy’ [i.e. immediate shopping]... so that Polish production of consumer goods will more quickly modernize and improve in quality... and price.”¹⁷ The minister’s statement was shortsighted: it assumed that firms that produced things not desired would suffer, or more quickly alter production. That did not happen. The open border project was immediately popular on a mass scale, and people discovered their established objects of desire. They used their resourcefulness to attain these objects.

People in socialist societies were known for their resourcefulness. That meant not only recycling glass or comparing prices at local markets, but tactics that penetrated personal and professional relationships of all but the upper-echelons of power.¹⁸ In the workplace, resourcefulness meant knowing how to escape work unnoticed, or hoarding hard-to-find materials. At home, it meant learning to sew from patterns, or knowing how to repair the car without the necessary materials, having a retired person in the family, so she (and it was usually a woman) could queue in line. Between friends, it meant fostering and nurturing the right contacts to ensure that they horded from their workplace for you. Resourcefulness, like the shortage economy or the etatization of time, is a crucial but understudied concept of state socialism.¹⁹

Individuals knew where to go for the products they wanted. A handful of goods filled the tote bags of every socialist visitor as indicated by the young reporter above: coffee, cigarettes, gasoline, and alcohol were the usual suspects.²⁰ These were (and still are) typical everyday purchases. They can only limitedly be considered “objects of desire” since they did not attain greater value depending on local or country-specific context—that is, they were coveted in each country by every citizen, and belonged to the shortage goods of each country. They did not travel into, in the words of cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, new “regimes of value,” since most goods were sought-after in East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia.²¹ Accordingly, it did not matter where you bought the Hungarian sausage, it mattered that you were the *one who had the Hungarian sausage*. (Of course, central planners were also very concerned about these goods, and did everything possible to prevent their export.) What is of particular interest to me here is economic exchange in the sense of exchange of value. In late state socialism—where societies were built not only on shortage economies but also on subtle understandings of resourcefulness—each country developed specific, sometimes quirky objects of desire depending on which country its citizens traveled to.

One interviewee, a gynecologist, took me to his garage in Poznań, where we rummaged. While there, he showed me with pride his small, faded, light-orange electric fan. Of course it looked like kitsch today. It might have even looked like kitsch in 1985. But what was particularly important to him was, on the one hand, that it was nearly 40 years old, still in near perfect condition, since it was made of synthetic materials. On the other hand, he was proud to show me what was on the base of the small electric fan: “Made in GDR.”²² “Made in [the] GDR” in the 1970s and 1980s context automatically meant for many in the East bloc something similar to what “Made in Germany” means in 2013. It was of high-quality, constructed of advanced materials such as plastics, and even if it was not always as qualitatively good as similar items in the Federal Republic, at least it was in the same league; “made in [the] GDR” meant a good which was at least something comparable with the West.²³ Most importantly, it meant something attainable yet different.²⁴

For Czechoslovaks and Poles shopping in East Germany, shoes—especially children’s shoes and women’s boots—were understood as being of better quality. Of particular significance were Trampler shoes—an ankle high shoe best described as a mixture between current-day Converse and Doc Martins. Evidence of discarding shoes close to the border led customs authorities to interrogate nearly anyone with a fresh pair of GDR shoes (a topic which I discuss in later chapters). In addition to Trampers, ladies and children’s shoes, and artificial leather shoes were in high demand.

In the 1970s, East German production of artificial leather was unrivaled to other countries' manufacturers—its quality was much better and its price much lower—and consumers from other East bloc states particularly liked, as authorities put it, “red and black” artificial leather shoes.²⁵ Juwel 72 cigarettes were also a hot item. As the first filter cigarette in the East bloc, they imitated American and West German brands not only in their production, but in their look and style.²⁶ They were also packaged in cellophane wrapping (a first in the northern triangle). Czechoslovaks, in particular, desired yellow rain coats from East Germany, as one Czech art historian in Prague related to me.²⁷ They also coveted “window shades, table cloths, bed linens, towels, fashionable shirts, high-heeled shoes... and replacement parts for [their] Trabants and Wartburgs,” as stated by finance ministers.²⁸ For their part, Poles were drawn to corkscrews, can-openers, cheaper watches and “1001 knick knacks.”²⁹ They also bought suitcases. After the border opened, one scientist called a colleague and suggested a family trip. “We need[ed] new suitcases, and the German ones are better” than those in Poland.³⁰ Another scientist, Dr. G. Wittek from the *Institut für Marktforschung*, wrote, “according to our findings,” citizens’ taste “also extends to suitcases. Frequently, they are the first thing tourists buy, to transport other goods.”³¹ Poles were known for their ubiquitous bags and suitcases in foreign cities at what would be called the “Polish market.”³²

Czechoslovakia—for both East Germans and for Poles—was a land of comparative plenty. Czechoslovakia was not a land of capitalist plenty, but interviewees from elsewhere said it seemed like the country in the “northern triangle” with the fewest consumer shortages and also the most stable economy, at least in terms of price inflation and wage changes.³³



Image 18. At the Polish market in West Berlin, note how all of the suitcases are of GDR production, 1989.³⁴ (Permission: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej.)

Czechoslovakia was best known for athletic gear—ski boots, track suits, skis, motorcycle jackets.³⁵ That was not surprising, considering that the country was known as a Switzerland of the East—plenty of slopes and snow for tourists from the East bloc.³⁶ As D.B., a West German historian and enthusiast of East Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, put it, “hiking in the mountains, you could tell a Czechoslovak instantly, by their tight spandex sports suits. It was best not to get behind them when heading uphill, unless you wanted to ruin the view.”³⁷ Implying the sight of corpulent or at least out-of-form human bodies squeezed into spandex, the interviewee joked about the fashionable articles of clothing.

Czechoslovakia was also a country for beer.³⁸ It was the Central European capital for the hoppy beverage due not only to its variety; it was also the only bloc country which never had a shortage of beer in its socialist history. Eighty-four percent of youngsters from other countries, one report indicated, spent money on beer, and were “very impressed” by the selection.³⁹ It was also a land of canned goods: canned milk and especially canned fish. (When Czechoslovak custom guards entered a train full of foreign passengers in 1975, they found one wagon full of East Germans, each with “two boxes of juice and one or two cans of sardines.”⁴⁰)

That was the irony about the objects of desire from Czechoslovakia. They were not necessarily typical “Czech” or “Slovak” items or items of Czechoslovak industrial production which drew foreigners from the East bloc. Generally speaking, Czechoslovakia was a place where the tourist gaze—that is, the vacationsapes and the relatively exotic—competed with the desire to buy. According to one East German author, Czechoslovakia was “used to tourists and had better tourist offerings.”⁴¹ While it is true that beer, winter gear and “Prague hams,” were on consumers’ short list when spending their valued koruna abroad, it was “Hungarian salami, and Russian caviar” which drew foreigners to the Czechoslovak marketplace.⁴² Fruit—canned, fresh and in juice form—was also a lure for people from abroad.⁴³ A menial worker in Poland during the 1970s, J.K. stated that “in contrast to Cieszyn [a Polish town close to the Czechoslovak border], it seemed that there was always some fresh fruit in Czechoslovakia. Sure, there were waiting times, but where we came from it was just absent.”⁴⁴ Poles’ in Czechoslovakia were driven largely not by the exotic, but shortages at home.

In contrast to recent times, when Poland is seen as a place of less expensive goods, in the 1970s the People’s Republic seemed expensive for Czechoslovaks and East Germans. That meat prices brought Poles to the streets was well known to East bloc leaders and their citizens: revolts and worker demonstrations set off by basic good prices were almost cyclical in People’s Poland.⁴⁵ It was not that all goods were qualitatively better, rather that the state did not subsidize nearly as much as their respective neighbors or they subsidized other things. Simply put, the Polish marketplace was different since it was so basic.

In Poland, an economy with relatively few advanced synthetic technologies and manufactured goods but abundant with agricultural land, foreign consumers were attracted to foodstuffs: meat, salami, poultry and eggs. Bread was consistently mentioned as being better in Poland. Poland was additionally known to travelers for imported coffee.⁴⁶ Especially in the mid-1970s, when there was a severe coffee shortage in other East bloc countries, the coffee in Poland was known to be *real* coffee, and not substitute coffee brands

like Inka or so-called “*Erichs Krönung*” (derived from combining the GDR’s First Secretary, Erich Honecker, with a popular West German coffee, Jacobs Krönung). Finally, ice cream and antiques were coveted by travelers from the East bloc.

Although ice cream was similar in production and taste across borders, the sale of antiques was a particular element of local markets in People’s Poland.⁴⁷ Poland and the Soviet Union had, after all, transferred several million citizens in the aftermath of World War II from former Polish land in the east to areas of the west. In newly resettled homes—called *poniemiecki*, or “after the Germans”—objects remaining in abandoned homes later became articles of intense interest for former inhabitants. In Poland—and to a limited degree in Czechoslovakia—antiques became a desirable object. Germans scoured the marketplace in Wrocław in search for commemorative plates and pre-War objects. At times East Germans did not seek to buy at the marketplace. As East German Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer said in an interview after 1990, there were problems with people from Silesia when they “started to dig out their silver cutlery,” and whatever else “they had hidden before the Russians came.” The number of those “rummaging in gardens and in barns” were few, but the foreign minister acknowledged that Czechs and Poles were shocked and distressed about East Germans (literally) in their back yard.⁴⁸

As Daniel Logemann—a scholar on the region—recently put it, whenever people wanted to go West, they went East: goods in Poland were either reminiscent of the past, or were closer to the West.⁴⁹ Whenever possible, East Germans and Czechoslovaks purchased “Teksas” jeans, women’s clothes, handbags and other pieces of clothing. Poland—and especially Warsaw—was a fashion hub.⁵⁰ Even in the Soviet Union, fashion magazines from Poland were seen as chic, and one former Soviet citizen who spent her childhood in Moscow remembered the joy she felt when purchasing an issue of *Polsh’a*, the Russian edition of a popular magazine about Polish culture published in a handful of languages worldwide.⁵¹ There, politics writ large were not discussed, rather the magazine focused on culture, fashion, and art.⁵²



Image 19. An East German cartoon: “Guests are coming at four! Harold, drive to Slubice [Poland] to get some bread!”⁵³

Finally, Poland was known for rock music and films, theater and live concerts. Theater was a major draw for tourists in Poland. R.G.—a former inhabitant of Frankfurt Oder, who still visits the city to explore bookstores—told me how he traveled to Gdańsk or Poznań to view happening-like theatrical events like the “Theater of the Eighth Day.”⁵⁴ Similarly, nearly every interviewee related the fact that in Poland, “we could see the movies we never saw at home.”⁵⁵ In Rolf Scheider’s popular book about travel to Poland, *Die Reise nach Jarosław* [The Trip to Jarosław] (which the GDR author wrote immediately after the border opened, the teenage protagonist describes going across the border, where she finds she can view the American film, *Love Story*, and that in a “teeny tiny town.”⁵⁶ Poland became a mecca for more liberal cultural consumption. But that only hid the fact that basic food stuffs were chronically unavailable. (As one common joke went, two dogs heading in opposite directions met on the border between Czechoslovakia and Poland. “Why are you going to Czechoslovakia?” “At least once I really want to pig out! Why are you going to Poland?” “At least once I really want to bark out loud!”)

Objects of desire—Hungarian salami, yellow raincoats, Russian caviar, track suits—were not static, but changed over time and even according to season. Especially in the late 1980s, smuggled goods from the West like video recorders and video cassettes, Walkmans, pornographic films and movies, and video games increasingly occupied higher ranks in the hierarchy of desired objects. These were goods of Western production, but the transit routes went through the East. The so-called Three-Country-Triangle was, for example, crisscrossed with trader routes.⁵⁷ Ordinary smugglers knew when and where to go over.⁵⁸



Image 20. A service route close to Zittau frequently used (as the Czechoslovak secret police document here) to smuggle. Signs state “Warning—State Border!”⁵⁹ (Permission: Archiv bezpečnostních složek.)

Items from the East also gained currency in the cornucopia of goods: the desire for East German remote control cars and rubber balls; rock music and pulp magazines from Poland; or Czechoslovak bikes grew with time.⁶⁰ East German clocks, purchased by Czechoslovaks in Poland, also became more popular.⁶¹ For teenagers, Czechoslovakia was known for copper pipes. They were not interested in plumbing, rather in the color of the pipes. “They became a cult object for young people” said one woman who was a teenager in 1970s and 1980s.⁶² Economic crises facing each country could not be ignored: there were fewer goods everywhere, lines were longer in big cities like Prague or peripheral villages like Těšín. The smorgasbord of goods purchased by tourists set loose in foreign countries is of interest for an anthropology of late state socialism, but its make-up was not entirely unexpected. It was made up of things that people stood in line for at home.

Entrepreneurial Poles

If Czechoslovaks were rooted to their homeland, Poles were resourceful. In the opening scenes of another cult film of the 1980s, Stanislaw Bareja’s 1981 *Miś* (Teddy Bear), a bus full of Polish citizens returns home. At the control station customs agents check the identity card of an unassuming, mustachioed Pole. He is required to stand on a scale. The baffled officer in charge asks, “115 kilos? There should be 119. Four kilos are missing.” The middle-aged Pole relates to the officers that he lost weight. Instead of congratulating him the guard barks, “so you are bringing four kilos of a citizen less [back into the country]? What if everyone returned a few kilos slimmer? There would be fewer and fewer of us!” The citizen asks what he should do. The officer demands “60 zloty for each kilo.”⁶³



Image 21. “What if everyone returned a few kilos slimmer?” Scene from *Miś*. (Note the individual standing first in line—a suitcase from the GDR!)⁶⁴

The scene satirizes the omnipotence of the border guard, who has the right to weigh citizens (and many other things) reentering their homeland. But the subtext—that no one from Poland can come back with less than when he left—reveals the acknowledgment of the authorities that citizens who return weighing more are worth more. Returning with more—here depicted as physical weight, but a thinly veiled reference to material goods (note the suitcase of the individual standing first in line in the scene)—was a national mission in the film: “Each kilo of the educated citizen [is of] special value to the nation,” states a sign in the guards’ office.⁶⁵ An educated traveling citizen knew which goods to buy when, was of the resourcefulness in order to obtain those objects, and would be clever enough to ensure that his/her weight would not be greater (or less) than what was stated in the passport. His ability to consume properly was part of being “culturally fluent.”⁶⁶

Individuals’ importation of goods was seen as a product of open borders. In the early 1970s, the average rise in income in Poland was unparalleled in East Central Europe. In contrast to East Germany and Czechoslovakia, Polish workers nearly tripled their income over a decade as wages grew from an average of 1848 zloty per month to 4872 zloty. In the first five years after Edward Gierek came to power as First Secretary, wages nearly doubled (as one interviewee told me, “we had a lot of money to spend, but nothing to spend it on”).⁶⁷ Increased income, however, paralleled inflation. In 1975, the head of the office of prices sent the first secretary information on price differentials between countries since the opening of borders between East Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1972.⁶⁸ The office compared 125 different goods, in seven countries, and rated them according to user price and labor price (how long it took to earn the money to buy a product) in each different country. Comparing Czechoslovakia, Poland, and East Germany, the bureau of prices concluded that food prices were twenty percent more expensive in Poland; shoes were nearly thirty percent cheaper in the GDR. Czechoslovakia shared relative equilibrium with the GDR when it came to the price of goods. Czechoslovakia and East Germany also had relative parity when it came to the amount of time necessary to purchase, say, high-heeled shoes. In contrast, Poles had to work 42 percent more for the same pair of shoes.

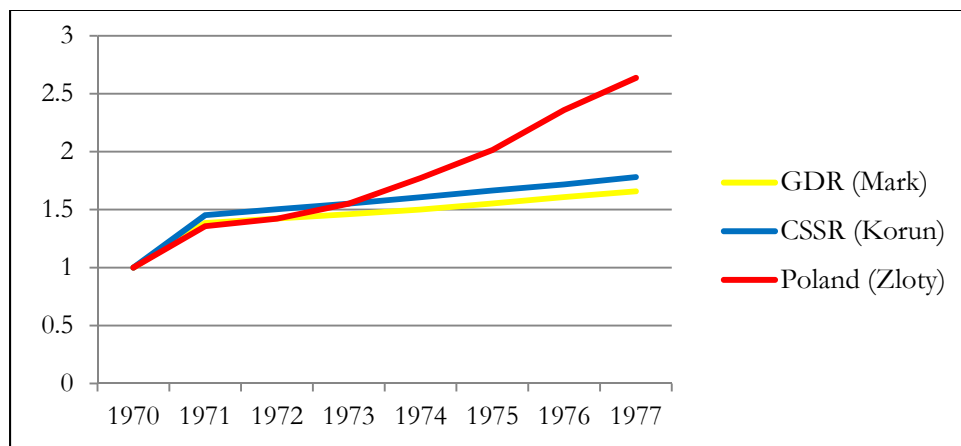


Chart 6. Annual wage growth (in percentage) since 1970 by country⁶⁹

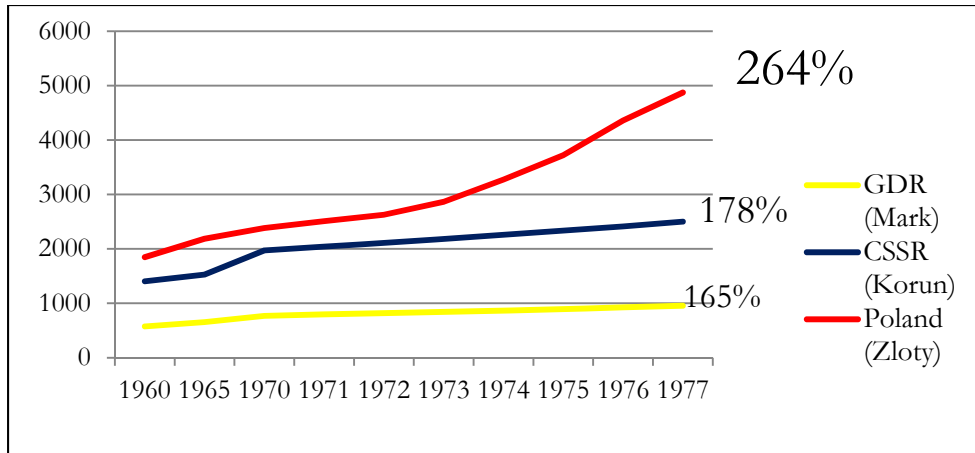


Chart 7. Net growth in wages by country (in national currency)⁷⁰

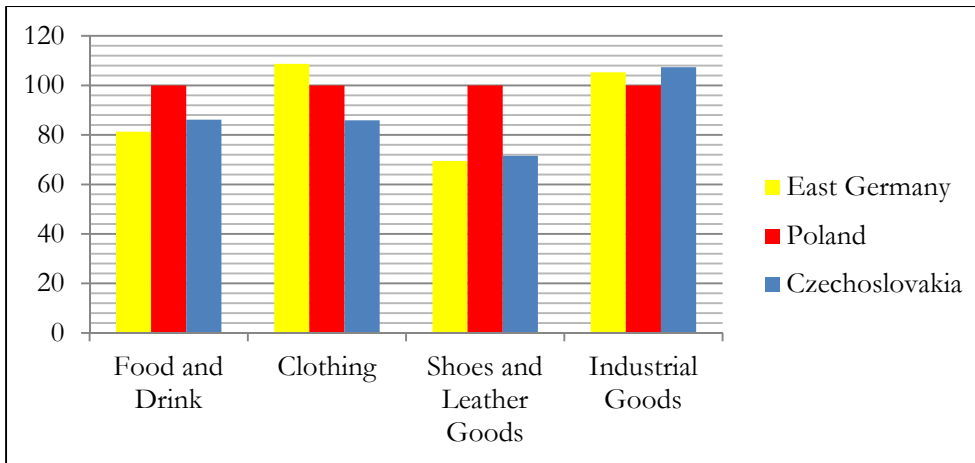


Chart 8. Consumer prices, 1972-1975 (100 = Standard price in Poland).⁷¹

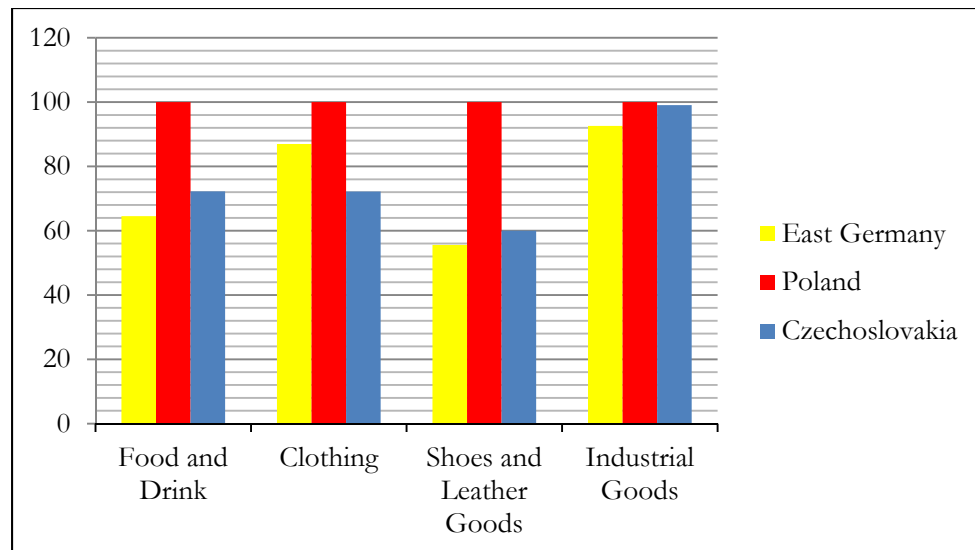


Chart 9. Labor income, 1972-1975 (100 = Standard in Poland).⁷²

The author of the study aimed, as he wrote, to “realize the Comprehensive Program,” and suggested that price differentials between countries would be temporary. “With the rapid growth of tourism, there will be new demands and at the same time new possibilities to satisfy these demands. That is best expressed in the increase of international trade by citizens, for whom the differences in prices play a significant role.” He continued: “The increase in the exchange of consumer goods between Comecon countries improves the selection of goods and provides citizens with benchmarks, expressed in the price of these goods.”⁷³ He suggested that prices would guide foreign citizens’ consumption patterns. Indeed, Polish citizens quickly realized the advantage of purchasing abroad.

Of course there were some problems, but officials thought they would subside with time; the occasional smuggler or dissident did not harm the project as a whole. As statisticians tallied numbers, they also ensured central committees in Prague, Berlin, or Warsaw that the home population was generally following rules passed with the best of intentions when it came to the spirit of the project. That there was so much economic activity across borders would seem to be the epitome of integration (which was the aim of the open border project). The major problem facing planners by the mid-1970s was the huge disparity in numbers. Poland was twice as large as East Germany or Czechoslovakia, and the sheer number of Poles travelling became cause for alarm.

That Poland was a country of entrepreneurship was highlighted by its home government, which appreciated the economic ramifications of citizens’ smuggling and legal importation of goods which were either cheaper abroad or hard to get at home. Polish authorities were the most willing to negotiate currency prices and agreed between 1972 and 1975 to deflate their currency twenty five percent—from 4.78 zloty to 6.00 zloty per GDR mark—understanding that, on the black market, East Germans received nearly twice as much currency from the black market as legally through banks (so-called *wymienarzy*, or exchangers, would offer 8 zloty per GDR mark).⁷⁴ Finance ministers of all three countries wanted to stop the flow of illegal currency into the marketplace, but since bilateral agreements were limited to ten percent inflation or deflation annually, neither country could catch up to the black market. By 1980, one GDR mark officially went for 7.70 zloty.⁷⁵ After the imposition of martial law (and the subsequent closure of the border between Poland with East Germany and Czechoslovakia), the price of the mark and the koruna skyrocketed: not only did neighboring countries insist on the maximum legal amount of deflation annually (ten percent), the zloty was also devalued at each general meeting of Comecon member states. By 1989, one mark went for over 270 zloty, and the price disparity also grew drastically. Already in 1985, the Stasi calculated Poles could fetch a 1,370 percent profit from selling in Poland a package of gelatin from the GDR or Czechoslovakia; 900 percent from a bar of chocolate; and 520 percent from something as simple as pepper.⁷⁶

The expansion of tourist opportunities gave people a means outside of the state structure to earn money, and changes to the travel regime fueled increases in grey-market trade. The Polish economic bubble of the 1970s empowered people who were willing to break rules when traveling abroad: those who broke the rules had more disposable income in the 1970s than ever before, were willing to spend that income abroad (where most prices were cheaper), and had more opportunities to exchange on black markets. At the same time, restrictions made “legitimate” tourism—that is travel for the sake of recreation and leisure—

more difficult. B.S.—a teenager at the time—pointed out, “later on [in the 1970s] it was hard to get a room and feed yourself from the allowed amount of currency. We brought things to exchange along the way.”⁷⁷

Perhaps it is not surprising then, in light of the experience with East Germany, that Czechoslovakia did not immediately follow suit with the GDR in participating in the open border project with Poland. Instead, Czechoslovak leaders made a bilateral agreement with East Germany on the freedom of travel, and then cautiously observed developments that the GDR had with its neighbor from afar. As the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs declared to his East German counterpart in 1975, “in light of the high debit account of Poland with the CSSR” Poland did not want to “rush the question” and that “the implementation of visa and passport-free travel can hardly be expected this year.”⁷⁸ On the part of Poland, he explained, this hesitation had nothing to do with politics, was rather merely an economic question. For try as they might to curb trade through economic mechanisms, the Polish government was unable to prevent the expansion of both legal and illegal economic activity. The ensuing trade imbalance, which amounted to hundreds of millions of zloty, made both the Polish People’s Republic and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic hesitant to pursue open border expansion. Hence, it was not until late 1976 that Czechoslovakia agreed to open borders with Poland.⁷⁹

Patronizing Germans

East German authorities were unhappy about particular developments in what was one of their most important propagandistic successes—the borders of friendship. On the one hand, they had an eastern neighbor whose citizens were traveling across the border largely to shop. On the other, they had a southern neighbor whose populace did not want to come at all. That became problematic as trade imbalances—caused in no small part by traveling tourists—complicated strict central planning. Tried and true economic models of socialism were tested by average citizens who profited from socialist “plenty” abroad. In a market economy, consumer demand is controlled either by raising the price of goods or through adjustments in exchange rates. The Comprehensive Program was devised to aid the state economy by allowing for a limited amount of bilateral exchange rate adjustments and through limited, bilateral trade agreements. But the Program was not meant to control travel and tourism; instead, it was aimed at central planning authorities. The unorganized nature of the “borders of friendship” drove planners mad as they attempted to create new ways to prevent tourists from buying while abroad.

It was not for lack of desire that tourism was not regulated. Realizing the impressive growth of tourist travel across the “borders of friendship,” governments were willing to negotiate bilaterally. Poland stands out for willingness to negotiate details of the policy, but also for caution before pursuing transnational liberalization.⁸⁰ When problems did occur, party officials moved to act at a supranational level (by contacting Moscow; refusing to alter currency value; or by releasing information concerning the neighbor to a third party). When that failed, they used economic tools at the national level in order to prevent “negative

occurrences.” Finally, they turned locally, if only to impress upon citizens that the regime was protecting the citizens’ best interests.

East German authorities were in the strange position of, on the one hand, desperately wanting to open eastern borders, but on the other, being pathologically concerned with supplying their population with goods. Both concerns were related to competition with their Western neighbor—they had to provide their citizens with the same opportunities and material wealth offered in the Federal Republic. In terms of the open border project, these aims resulted in patronization. East German ministries wanted both to send and receive tourists, but they did not want to disrupt the delicate consumer balance. As one observer put it, “lately, besides the main mentor—the Soviet Union—it is East Germany that has been developing into a kind of ideological instructor” for its neighbors.⁸¹ Already in 1972, East German and Czechoslovak leaders met to discuss the problem of tourism.

In May, the prime minister of Czechoslovakia, Lubomir Štrougal, met with members of the SED Central Committee in Berlin, and admitted to the impressive growth of tourism, and “that [the government] was looking for a way out” of the deal. He was presenting the concern of his government that too many East bloc citizens were coming to Czechoslovakia. “In 1967,” he declared, “1.3 million GDR citizens visited Czechoslovakia.... Since January of this year [1972], there have already been 1.7 million.” That was more than 110,000 per week, “and the tourist season had not even started yet.”⁸² He added that his Polish colleagues were “pressing him” to expand the agreement,⁸³ and reminded his East German colleagues that only “700 million crowns” had been promised to the government for tourist travel in 1972. By April, more than half that amount had been exhausted. “If [we] were to open the borders with Poland, Czechoslovakia could not cope.”⁸⁴ He hastened to remind his GDR counterpart, Willi Stoph, that it had only been four years since the unrest in Prague, and that the population was growing unhappy with the number of tourists.

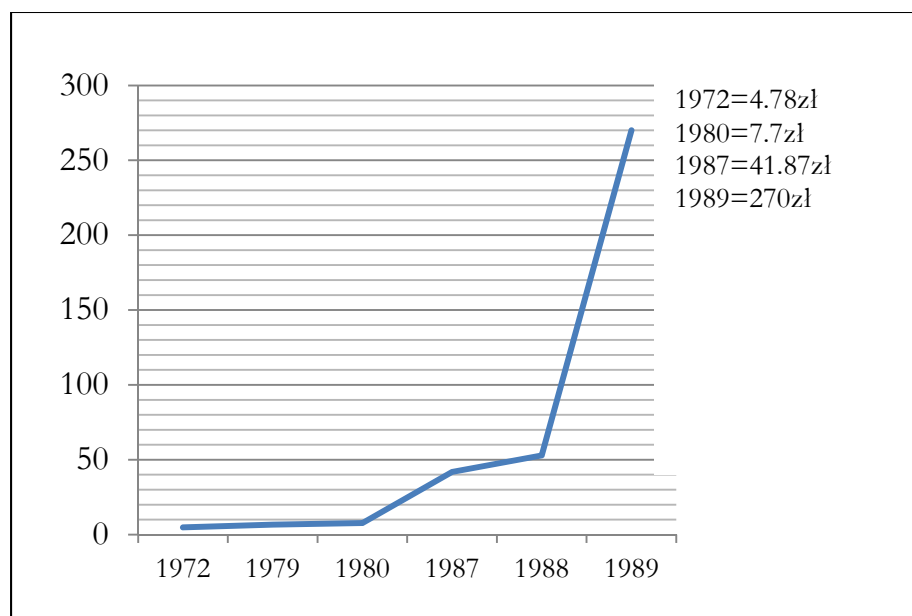


Chart 10. Price of East German mark in Polish zloty⁸⁵

Willi Stoph (a former Wehrmacht officer) retorted that “everything new comes with problems.... You can’t assume in the first few days that phenomena [i.e. shopping tourism] are normal.”⁸⁶ Referring to Czechoslovakia’s First Secretary, he continued that the agreement had already been signed by none other than “Dr. Husák himself,” and that “everyone genuinely interested in friendship between peoples, between workers, were excited and in full agreement.”⁸⁷ Then he began an interrogation, asking why “only one-tenth” of Czechs and Slovaks came to the GDR, when so many from his country had welcomed the possibility to travel?⁸⁸ He reminded the Czechoslovak minister that the GDR was allowing Czechs and Slovaks to exchange far more currency than vice versa, and that “there was already a large number of citizen’s complaints” decrying the inability to exchange enough currency in Czechoslovakia.⁸⁹ Finally, he concluded: “we are advancing the political objectives and are creating the material conditions for the realization of these measures. If more CSSR citizens took advantage of the opportunity to go to the GDR, there would be no problem with koruna.”⁹⁰ Perhaps for the first time in history, an official of East Germany—most recognized for its restrictive measures on freedom of movement as symbolized by the Berlin Wall—acknowledged western demands for the freedom of movement. As one Leninist to another, Stoph reminded Štrougal that the state controlled everything. He then asked “Why don’t you let more CSSR citizens travel? It’s not so bad in our country.”⁹¹ It might not have been “so bad” for East Germans in East Germany, but leaders in the Central Committee in Prague apparently viewed millions of East bloc citizens in their country as unruly enough to send a petition all the way to Moscow for help.

Once peak season arrived, East Germans alleged that a minister in Prague had given “very one-sided information” to the Soviet Union about an aide-memoire they had received from the GDR ambassador to Czechoslovakia.⁹² In the letter to the Soviet Union’s Central Committee member Konstantin Fedorovich Katushev, authorities explained their situation: while Czechoslovakia welcomed neighbors in a spirit of “socialist friendship,” “normalization” was being challenged by a new invasion of foreigners.⁹³ The Soviet Union, according to ministers of the Socialist Republic, had to publically or privately admonish the GDR for its apparent abrogation of peace through tourism.

Katushev did turn to the GDR government, to explore what exactly the problem was. The foreign minister of the GDR assured his Soviet colleagues that “as was well known, tourist traffic with the CSSR was going as it was with Poland—that is, very well. Then [our] Czechoslovak comrades had all sorts of quibbles.”⁹⁴ Then he asserted (falsely) that there were fewer tourists in 1972 than “in 1967 during the time of [previous First Secretary] Novotny... while travel with Poland [was] running superbly.”⁹⁵ Authorities in Berlin, the Foreign Minister asserted, could not continue to make public pronouncements of friendship. It was not the USSR which had to admonish East German leaders, but they—leaders of the GDR—who had to tell their own citizens that the government of the CSSR was the source of the problem.⁹⁶

The problem to which they referred was the transfer of currency and is one of the first examples of how each country devised bureaucratic measures to streamline and to control tourist movement. In this case, Czechoslovakia withheld currency from foreign banks. Even if it had promised a certain amount of koruna to a foreign government for

exchange, it delivered the currency twenty million at a time. Willi Stoph blamed his counterparts for the resulting “buying psychosis” of GDR citizens: if they were unsure of the availability of Czechoslovak currency next week, they chose to buy today.⁹⁷ At the same time, the GDR waged a battle of words against its southern neighbor. The Central Committee argued with Czechoslovak authorities, that “they had not, as a result of the [travel agreement signed] at Lany, made travel at all easier for their citizens.”⁹⁸

Indeed, Czechoslovakia had restricted foreign travel of their citizens by requiring a new personal ID to go abroad. That ID could be issued only if the older ID had expired or if they needed to apply for a passport.⁹⁹ But the government in Prague continually insisted that “authorities do not prohibit anyone from going to the GDR.”¹⁰⁰ For them, the real question was “what the agreement at Lany meant: unrestricted tourism, or restricted travel movement.”¹⁰¹ Prague authorities clearly wanted the latter. In contrast, GDR authorities demanded that socialist internationalism be worked out through negotiation. They “noted experiences with Polish travelers and explained which measures they had instituted to answer problems in cooperation with Polish comrades.” The GDR and Poland had decided, “for example, [to] expand trade networks [and] the delivery of select goods.”¹⁰² The two countries also expanded the exchange of “blueprints and designs for the production of consumer goods,” ensuring that engineers and designers could produce the popular products in the GDR and Poland (at least in theory).

East German authorities were trying to show that they were willing to sacrifice economic advantages to ensure their international image remained unblemished: “what is decisive for us is the political question.”¹⁰³ How would it look to international observers if the project ran into insurmountable problems? East German authorities were mirroring the rhetoric of socialist integration onto tourist travel: through the liberalized travel regime, citizens were “cooperatively finding answers” to questions of socialism.

All the while, border guards were counting how many goods went where, assuring home officials that their country was the most responsible, its citizens least likely to smuggle, and its guards the most objective. Although there were three times more Germans crossing the border than Czechoslovaks, East German customs agents wrote that “90 percent of East German citizens do not bring objects with them,” after analyzing statistics from the South.¹⁰⁴ They painted an innocent picture of locals, whereas “every fourth CSSR-citizen exported one pair of women’s or men’s shoes, and one in ten a pair of children’s shoes.”¹⁰⁵ The average Czech and Slovak left the GDR with nearly four times as much chocolate as an East German did; eight times as many children’s coats; one and a half times as much decorative fabric; and twice as many household appliances. East Germans focused apparently on the essentials: they brought more porcelain, tank tops and bedsheets home than the Czechoslovaks.

The document was typical with its intentionally flawed data. For a regular observer, it would appear that the Czechoslovaks were acting defiantly, going abroad only to smuggle or reap the benefits of a foreign socialist state. In common usage, one would say that these people were purchasing goods abroad. In official documents, they were “exporting” goods. Nowhere did the document highlight the fact that the custom agents were counting only goods they considered to be “exports”: by definition, everything citizens of Czechoslovakia purchased to bring home with them was an “export,” whereas items East Germans carried

with them could be classified as a “personal item” necessary for travel in Czechoslovakia. Depending on one’s nationality, a bar of chocolate or a can of coffee turned from a present for friends to contraband.

That was the irony of the Comprehensive Program: while the countries were meant to grow together economically, the opposite happened. East German leaders learned from the Czechoslovak treatment of their own citizens how to control the uncontrollable. They began refusing to raise the amount of currency allotted to People’s Poland and suggested that the Polish government impose an increased tax on currency exchange—effectively making the amount Poles spent for every mark the same as what they paid on the black market. But that only buttressed illegal exchange: why wait in line at the bank, when you would get the same amount of marks or koruna from the local guy?¹⁰⁶

In the end, each government agreed to continue with the project—not “experiment.” But the governments also moved to ensure there was no expansion of the open border policy, at least not unless their citizens were the sole beneficiaries. Czechoslovak planners refused to include Poland in the border agreement until 1976, and even then both sides held back from full implementation. Hungary was prevented from open borders to East Germany and vice versa. All the while, some partners received favorable treatment: Polish authorities complained that “the GDR, with a much smaller population, receives annually ca. 900 million koruna [actually they agreed on 1.15 billion for 1976 and 1.3 billion for 1977]” whereas Poland received a measly 220 million. The Polish demand for “at least 500-600 million” was “rejected with the explanation, that only so many koruna can be placed at the disposal of Polish tourists as allowed by the domestic market.” This amazingly clear case of discrimination was never directly discussed—Poles seemed to smuggle with their authorities’ approval, and hence the 220 million koruna were obviously buttressed by other means. Still, giving the country less currency only ensured that more people would try to break the rules. That Czechoslovakia was increasing the daily exchange requirement for East Germans must have been known to members of Poland’s department of tourism.

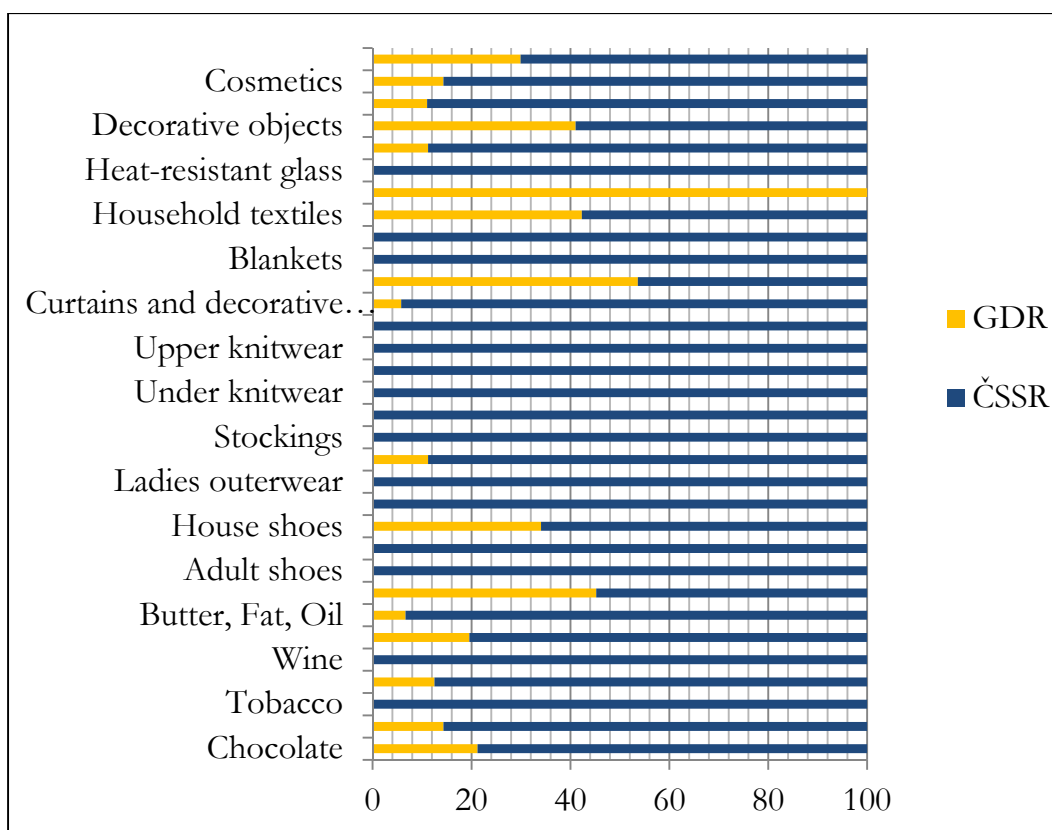


Chart 11. An example of flawed data: percentage of goods purchased and exported to Czechoslovakia¹⁰⁷

Assortment	Unit	Total export	Via GDR citizens	Via CSSR citizens
Chocolate	Kg	4117	873	3244
Nuts, Almonds	Kg	6092	873	5219
Tobacco	Kg	141	-	141
Spirits	Liter	48860	6115	42745
Wine	Liter	21302	-	21302
Meat and Meat Products	Kg	58052	11357	46695
Butter, Fat, Oil	Kg	32796	2184	30612
Tropical Fruits	Kg	3863	1747	2116
Adult shoes	Pair	32587	-	32587
Children's shoes	Pair	15094	-	15094
House shoes	Pair	5132	1747	3385
Menswear	Piece	282	-	282
Ladies outerwear	Piece	564	-	564
Children's outerwear	Piece	7785	873	6912
Stockings	Pair	846	-	846
Tights	Piece	1833	-	1833
Under knitwear	Piece	9028	-	9028

Corsetry	Piece	3385	-	3385
Upper knitwear	Piece	1719	873	846
Suits and dress materials	Meter	1410	-	1410
Curtains and decorative fabrics	Meter	113062	6552	106510
Sheets	Mark	666145	357337	308808
Blankets	Pieces	2962	-	2962
Tablecloth, Plate cushions	Pieces	13966	-	13966
Household textiles	Mark	181701	76884	104817
Porcelain	Mark	46742	46742	-
Heat-resistant glass	Mark	43450	-	43450
Household utensils	Mark	269119	30142	238977
Decorative objects	Mark	209637	86058	123579
Toys	Mark	709213	78194	631019
Cosmetics	Mark	64050	9173	54877
Household appliances	Mark	544927	162942	381885

Table 5. Amount of goods “exported” by citizens of the GDR and CSSR in one month¹⁰⁸

All of these actions are not spectacular by themselves. The tactics were an example of shortage economies merging. But they aggravated citizens. Mandatory exchanges, for example, were upsetting in at least three ways. First, as foreign trade ministries in each country were well aware, minimum exchanges were different in each country. Whereas Czechoslovakia required 50 koruna daily exchanges, East Germany required 30 marks (but no more than 500 per quarter, and no more than 2000 per two years). Poland, which never required minimum exchanges, moved to unilaterally impose them in 1980. But the requirement to spend would be effective only if the marketplace was relatively attractive. Since prices for nearly all goods were more expensive in Poland than either Czechoslovakia or East Germany, foreign consumers got homesick for prices at home. Polish bread was better (and fresher) than its counterparts, but you could eat only so much bread. Finally, mandatory exchanges aggravated people at home and abroad: how were they to rent hotel rooms if foreigners were spending their money on accommodation and camping? And if there was not enough currency allowed per day, how were they to rent rooms for a genuinely enjoyable vacation? Popular sentiment was best expressed in a June 1975 article in *Polityka*. There, Daniel Passent exploded:

From Christmas to mid-March there have been about ten different extended communiqués and statements concerning foreign exchange and customs in the press. On average, the citizen gets an earful every two weeks or so about new decisions and interpretations, admonishments and clauses about how and why he can travel (or not), especially to socialist countries. The rules are constantly changing.... Even the first announcement from the Treasury at the end of December 1974 concerning the sale of foreign currency for private trips was too complicated. It turns

out things aren't so easy.... There are a ton of bureaucratic and financial nuances, for example, to buy cash for use in socialist countries, with the exceptions—Warning!—of Yugoslavia, Hungary, the GDR once every quarter, the GDR when camping outdoors, the GDR when on transit, for spa trips organized with and without a travel agency, for gasoline rations, of traveling to Yugoslavia individually, to Yugoslavia in transit, to Yugoslavia in an organized group, to Yugoslavia after a stay in another socialist country, [or] to Yugoslavia after a stay in another (capitalist) country when having previously used all or some of the allowed amount of foreign currency as documented in a currency book, after the loss of the book, etc., etc.

Passent concluded, “The great complexity of the rules [on foreign currency exchange] shows that the Ministry is striving to categorize every imaginable circumstance in all of life, which is impossible, making the rules unintelligible for citizens and bureaucrats alike.”¹⁰⁹

Following the rule of the Comprehensive Program, Soviet officials resisted involvement in the “borders of friendship.” Either they did not think it grave enough of a problem, or they did not understand their satellites’ concerns. Regardless, was it really “worth the time” to get involved with “tourists” when it seemed to be such an easy problem to solve?¹¹⁰ The Soviet Union, while interested in proving to the West that there was a viable East bloc European community, was less interested in meddling in the matters of tourism. At the same time, the Soviet Central Committee concluded that publishing anything about problems between member states of the borders of friendship “could bring with it undesirable political consequences” and encouraged members of the “borders of friendship” to solve their problems without the Moscow’s aid.¹¹¹

The Local Turn

Economic planners were divided about the role of the open border project on the interior market. There were those who encouraged mandatory exchange rates and/or export restrictions upon foreigners because of the shortage of goods. But others recognized the xenophobic—and anti-socialist—nature of analyses asserting that Poles, East Germans or Czechoslovaks were somehow responsible for economic shortcoming.¹¹² That foreigners were responsible for scarcity across the country was a symptom rather than cause of the shortage economy, not only since the buying population was so small in ratio to local populations, but also since tourists were usually concentrated in specific areas.¹¹³ Buying in Prague did not mean shortage in Ostrava, and if things sold out in Prague, that should spur planners to raise quotas.

Indeed, many saw a positive aspect of the project: people’s purchase of specific goods abroad meant that these goods were of high quality and desirability. While no company produced a campaign based on brand name abroad, the fact that foreign citizens flocked to particular brands confirmed their relative quality. W. Bischoff of East Germany’s Institute of Market Research stated that foreign citizens “were adopting GDR citizens’ tastes, especially when it comes to quality.”¹¹⁴ The same institute found, after the GDR closed the border to Poland in 1980, that shortages had not been alleviated (as would be expected if foreign

consumers were the ones buying all the goods).¹¹⁵ Instead, Bischoff concluded that money otherwise spent abroad was now being used at home.¹¹⁶ Even though the six million Poles who would have come to East Germany were no longer welcome, people's perceptions of the marketplace on the ground had not changed: 67 percent of those interviewed by the Institute said that the availability of goods stayed the same after the closure of the border with Poland.¹¹⁷ Regardless of the actual facts, people in each country thought that foreigners, not the centrally planned economy, were responsible for empty shelves. This conclusion needs explanation. It seems that if people thought the supply had not changed after border closure then they would blame the state eventually, wouldn't they?

But people in state socialism blamed foreigners for two reasons. First, and most obviously, people would not tell authorities or colleagues that they thought the state was responsible for greater shortage, since no one knew who was an informal agent of the secret police. No reason to become a dissident just because you were unhappy about the lack of sausage in the store, after all. Blaming the foreigner was a "safer" way to express discontent. Secondly, since the 1970s was generally a time of economic growth, the socialist foreigner was one of the few new elements in everyday life. If everything was looking up for the buyer in the 1970s, one of the major reasons why things began to falter had to be the presence of foreign consumers on the marketplace. The logic seems outlandish, but socialist governments ate it up.

The perceived actions of foreigners brought regimes to devise new mechanisms to promote the interests of one's own country while preventing outright discrimination. In the case of Poland's neighbors, that meant sealing the borders (discussed in chapter six). In the late 1980s, Czechoslovakia additionally began enforcing a minimum exchange of currency for East Germans. Here, the tables were turned, since the GDR was no longer requesting more currency, rather trying to encourage their citizens to spend less. Hence they encouraged East Germans to spend in Prague and Brno, hoping to receive more goods from the GDR as repayment for trade imbalances through goods-exchange at a governmental level. By the late 1980s East Germans had such a surplus that their government (like Poland in the 1970s) had to pay 74 million Rubles annually to make up for deficits (which totaled more than 300 million Rubles) with Czechoslovakia.¹¹⁸ It was not so much that East Germans were not spending enough, but that the authorities in Prague wanted to ensure that they had the upper-hand in future debates on the development of tourist traffic, and to force the GDR to export more goods (at no cost) due to their large foreign travel imbalances.

At the same time that Czechoslovakia was changing the dynamics of allotting currency to its German socialist neighbor, authorities were promoting a form of consumption which was turned down by other countries. In border towns like Cheb, Ústí nad Labem, Český Těšín or Námestovo, authorities sponsored and encouraged shops to "regulate, check, and hide goods before Polish [citizens] came to purchase them."¹¹⁹ The economic minister of Czechoslovakia thought that, even if persons from abroad (especially from Hungary and Poland) came to purchase goods legally, their real value was much higher than what the foreigner was paying since the goods had been subsidized by the state. Goods are "not regulated according to their real price," wrote the Finance Minister, and hence should be controlled by locals who know how much is purchased by whom.¹²⁰ The intention was to protect the local market: when socialist neighbors proved unable to control their

inhabitants while abroad, they started selling hard-to-find goods in the factory (where foreigners were off limits), and also began removing goods from stores on major thoroughfares. They also turned to blatant discrimination at the official level, charging twice as much for specific goods and harassing people in border towns.

In Poland locals were cashing in on the cornucopia of goods proffered in the foreign country through stores called *Komis*.¹²¹ The *Komis* was a second hand store for items no longer needed by the consumer who purchased them. These stores repurchased goods from people and resold them at a mark-up. Since prices in the “socialist abroad” were generally significantly lower, they could return to Poland and cash in a profit at the *Komis*. A Pole who bought a spandex outfit in Czechoslovakia, returned with it to Poland, and resold it in a *Komis*, even though not receiving the equivalent of a new suit imported by the state, would still make a profit (and do so legally), since the price of the suit in Czechoslovakia was much cheaper than at home.¹²²

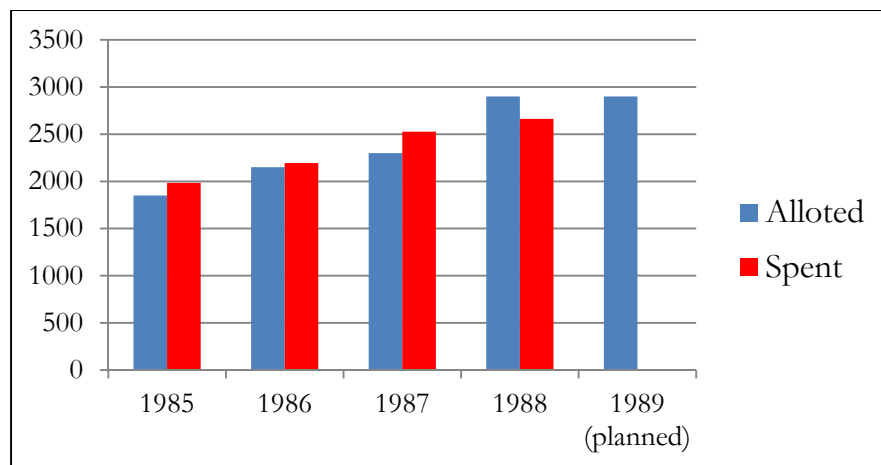


Chart 12. Czechoslovak koruna (in millions) spent by East Germans¹²³

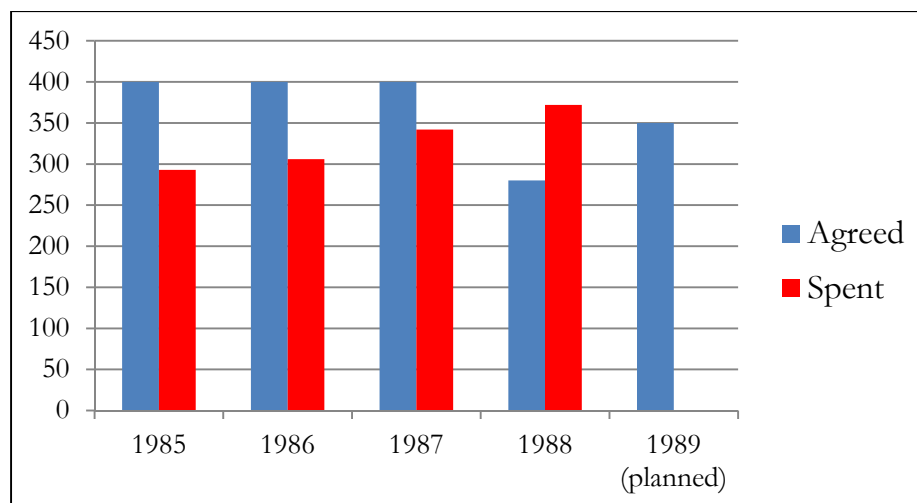


Chart 13. East German mark (in millions) spent by Czechoslovaks¹²⁴

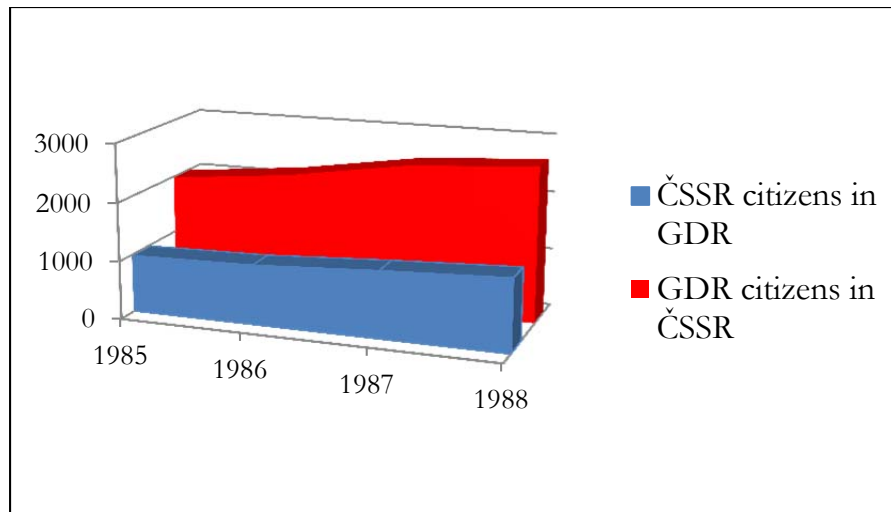


Chart 14. Comparison (in koruna) of spending ratio¹²⁵

Poland's secret police analyzed the semi-legal trade in goods from Czechoslovakia and the GDR in the mid-1970s to gauge public sentiment, visiting *Komis* in areas of western Poland. "In the state-run company *Komis* in Slubice, women talked about marking up (motorized) car parts by one hundred percent."¹²⁶ This particular *Komis* also made its own meat products: they would buy bacon for 18 zloty and "put them in sausage" which they sold for "60 zloty... and in that way obtained additional funds."¹²⁷ Ominously, there were rumors going around town that an East German delegation was "checking prices" in Poland "in order to raise prices of items sold in the GDR so that Poles would not buy them [emphasis in original]" and resell them in *Komis*.¹²⁸ In East Germany, real or perceived empty shelves in the stores came to pose a "large physical and psychological strain" on store managers, the public and worried state officials.¹²⁹ And, depending on whom one asked, Polish entrepreneurialism dealt a blow to the relatively well-stocked local GDR market. An East German official estimated that in a single year Polish buyers in one city bought up more than 25 percent of perishable goods, more than 60 percent of children's clothes, and more than twenty percent of women's shoes.¹³⁰

When restrictions were imposed at the local or the official level, Poles called the Germans "fascists" and said they "were going to buy everything, until there is nothing left in the GDR, as in Poland; you would strike too, if there wasn't anything to buy." In return, Hans Modrow (the head of the regional party office in Dresden) stated that East Germans were beginning to question authority. "There are already signs in many industrial companies, especially in Görlitz, that although workers can't strike, they could slow work down [in protest] to underscore the problem, since the government was ignorant of the problem."¹³¹ Especially women were willing to strike, since they were standing in longer lines. People were asking "where the GDR-money is coming from" that Poles use.¹³²

The best way for governments to control the market, in the end, was to create and continue to expand the list of goods that could not be exported. The process had already started earlier with fewer objects. But by 1989, Czechoslovakia prevented the export of over 366 goods(!).¹³³ East Germany took a similar course.

The back and forth between member states of the “borders of friendship” had no end, since very little was done to streamline *local* economies after the ambitious Comprehensive Program—by providing greater goods to border communities most affected by the storm of visitors, or by improving infrastructure to ensure there were enough goods at times most needed. Instead of streamlining local economies, individual countries frequently adopted local *tactics* to prevent unrest. This was an unusual move, since national governments usually relied on international agreement for policy making.

On 24 October 1980, Hans Modrow wrote Erich Honecker that “in regional counties, especially in eastern zones, rash moods and opinions are growing.... in connection with the buying out of goods by Polish citizens.” He estimated that in the Centrum-Warenhaus Görlitz in September 1980, Polish consumption constituted 24.2 percent of the sales, and in October it has been between 36 and 43 percent. “In the city center of Dresden, the current turnover—80 percent in children’s stores, 70 percent in specialty retail outlets for confectionary, and 60 percent in the HO-Markets, as opposed to the normal turnover of 15–30 percent—is in no small part due to Czechoslovak and Polish citizens.”¹³⁴ He was worried, since, “local authorities [were] taking measures” to “control the situation.” They were starting special “sell Saturdays”—otherwise times when shops were closed—“when concentrated and specific articles are offered to our populace” [*unsere Bevölkerung*]. Others were considering selling “in the evening hours” as an informal way to prevent foreigners (who had to return home in the evenings) from buying goods. “All of that leads, despite the established additional use of official personnel from state authorities and trade organs, to extraordinarily high burdens for workers in trade, especially considering the increase in insults and aggressive behavior towards the sales personnel and also curses and hateful speech against the GDR.”¹³⁵

Polish border guards were notoriously lenient when it came to checking travelers for foreign currency and goods. In second-hand stores such as *Komis*, and on the street (where people sold goods from their trunk), authorities did little to prevent illegal trading, ensuring at least a minimal penetration of the Polish market with foreign goods.¹³⁶ The state effectively rationed out the task of export/import to its citizens. The chronic discord astride the “borders of friendship” led officials to recalibrate local customs. Stoph explained that any more money allotted to Polish banks would result in an “extra burden” for GDR citizens.¹³⁷ He underscored that “the majority of goods” bought by Czechoslovaks and Poles while in East Germany “are concentrated in border regions and in the capital, Berlin.”¹³⁸ What was particularly problematic, and one of the primary reasons more currency was not provided, was that “goods bought in the GDR *are primarily intended to supply demand in the domestic market of the GDR for our citizens*” [emphasized in original].¹³⁹ In each country, the traditional hierarchies were altered: whereas international or national imperatives from above traditionally trumped local demands, by the 1980s the state was institutionalizing grassroots actions. It took several years, and it was not out of a lack of effort to streamline the project that citizens’ initiatives were accepted.

Conclusion

Czechoslovaks were not more xenophobic than their East European neighbors, and they were not less open to foreigners than the GDR or Poland. But the economy of shortage, coupled with historical memory (especially the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968) brought locals to approach foreign communities with particular caution. It was not helpful that the normalization regime systematically hindered Czechs and Slovaks from travelling to “socialist neighbors” through its requirement of new IDs and bloc passports.

At the same time, the effect of open borders on Polish citizens—precisely at the outset of a wage and spending bubble—was relatively spectacular. While wages grew at an average of ten percent per year, consumer goods increasingly vanished from Poland’s local shelves. Of course the extra income had to go somewhere. Many opened foreign currency accounts, others went shopping abroad. Some did both at the same time. East Germans, who were loath to offer alternative vacation spots for their captive population, argued the rule of mutual agreement when it was favorable for them, but likewise argued against expansion when it meant the increase of consuming visitors to the homeland.

The East German government stood as the most economically secure, yet inconsistent partner. While berating Czechoslovakia for travel restrictions, it complained to Poland about its border policies and its liberal approach to travel. The Polish government, which consistently denied “equality” when it came to currency exchange and trilateral mobility, was the first to cry foul in the game. Working to enable greater mobility for its citizens, it had little to lose in loosened restrictions. All the while, the Czechoslovak government, having recovered from major political instability less than five years prior, was willing to toe the party line, but was unwilling to pursue anything approaching real liberalization. According to the Husák regime, anyone who wanted to leave the country had the possibility to do so in 1968/1969. At the same time, Czechs and Slovaks were reminded of the occupation when foreigners visited their country. They were economically sound, politically defused, and had their dachas to which to escape. Transnational mobility, in the context of the 1970s, was not nearly as important as it was for the East Germans or the Poles.

Many scholars speak of economic stagnation in the 1970s and 1980s. Stagnation defined not only the economy, but also the unwillingness of policy-makers to change. This chapter has shown that, in contrast to stereotypes about the “Brezhnev era,” the 1970s were a period of frustrated experimentation. There were numerous ideas floating in the East bloc on how to integrate more closely along the lines of the European Community. Authorities in Poland were trying, in the spirit of the Comprehensive Program, to encourage individual economic initiative to alleviate shortages at home. Not exactly reform, but a reform idea. Like ministers in East Germany, they saw the huge value in open borders in the East. In contrast to East German authorities, they understood the value of open borders to be economic (whereas the East Germans understood it to be of value to combat claims the state was imprisoning its own population). Czechoslovakia, in trying to deal with a storm of consumers, also experimented in new methods of controlling the way economic exchange occurred at the local level.

The 1970s were a period of stagnation in the sense of rigidity in not only ideology, but also a rigidity of structure. Even if they were still dictatorships, in which popular pressure was strongly mitigated, each regime, and each population, acted according to their freedoms of movement and utilized their leverage to gain the greatest rewards for citizens. Moscow, ironically, remained largely aloof, even when members of the Comecon beckoned their assistance. Indeed, the 1970s and the 1980s reveals not a systemic problem with each country, but a systemic problem within the Comecon, which imposed regulations on bloc-wide liberalizations (even if countries like Hungary went much further when it came to economic reform). At the interstate level, when one member took extraordinary action, other members worked to veto such action. As a result, limited reform led governments to turn away from the international, and turn to the national, sometimes even the local. By the mid-1980s, each regime implicitly or explicitly adopted local tactics to ensure the availability of consumer goods. All the while, citizens were becoming more exposed to the bankruptcy not only of their regime, but of socialism altogether.

**Crossing the “Borders of Friendship”:
On the Border between
East Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia**

Thus far, I have shown how borders were more porous in the East bloc than previously expected. As millions of people went to neighboring countries in the mid-1970s, new populations penetrated neighboring socialist countries in the press, economically, and on the ground in ways that were remarkably similar to Western Europe. Today, people who lived during the period of liberalized travel in Czechoslovakia, Poland or East Germany discount their ability at that time to travel. That is a topic which I will discuss in greater detail in my concluding chapter. My aim here is to explore the concept of a walled society and the effects of open borders on that society: that is, how Slovaks, East Germans, Poles, or Czechs *felt and understood* borders. Keeping in mind that older cohorts lived through the alienating experience of totalitarian regimes and the rampages of World War II, and that younger people had only gone abroad in organized school tours, travel regimes in 1972 radically changed the feeling people had about borders. Land which was off limits for over a generation could now be visited by ordinary citizens.

Borders are perhaps the most evident instantiation of state power; those that lose control of borders proclaim that they are no longer states in the full sense of the word. Counter intuitively, they were additionally the places where citizens and uniformed guards questioned societal roles: as liminal areas, border cities were either the first experience for foreigners in an unknown land or the last before going abroad from home. Depending on one's disposition, they brought uncertainty, joy, excitement, or relief. They also revealed deviancy and criminal activity. For their part, border guards varied controls depending on the number of travelers, the location, the amount of currency exchange, or the time of day. Although few people were spared, for non-smugglers or even supporters of the regime, border controls were arbitrary and happenstance. With few checks on the behavior of border guards, party members and cadre received information about the experience at the border

through citizen complaints, personal inspections and occasionally through personal experience.

What happened when citizens—in relatively apolitical circumstances—complained about the border controls or the regimes they encountered when abroad? What did those political actors do when they learned about latent discrimination against nationals in foreign countries? The open border project between the three members of the “northern triangle” created new constellations amongst actors in socialist societies. When citizen complaints collected on the tables of the politburo, party cadre investigated conditions at border crossings. Precisely since the border was such an alienating experience, traditional enemies in commonplace narratives of state socialism—the citizen and the politician—acknowledged each other as what they were: representatives of the people and people with representation. Polish communists worked for the wellbeing of Polish citizens; East German officials complained about their Czechoslovak and Polish counterparts; Czech and Slovak authorities stood up for guards. Complaining about changing standards, profiling, or plain discrimination, authorities and citizens worked together to protect nationals.

Wall Sickness

Walls were more than their physical structure: they were social and personal, and were most of all political, a crucial element of what Jan Gross called the “spoiler state” in that they prevented initiative and self-realization while ensuring social security.¹ And they drove people mad: Dietfried Müller-Hegemann documented in 1973 a new clinical sickness similar to “barbed-wire sickness” after World War I, or “concentration camp sickness” for holocaust survivors. The “Berlin Wall sickness” was a psychological illness directly related to the construction and the reinforcement of the Berlin Wall (or, as the East German government called it, the “anti-fascist protection border”).² One of his patients, E.S., was denied exit from the GDR after the construction of the Berlin Wall, despite having a Western pass. When she went to the authorities, “the answer was always the same.... [Her West German] husband had [to be notified] that he could no longer serve the imperialist West German, divisive state and would have to come as quickly as possible to the GDR, the first peaceful German state, to build socialism with his wife.”³ By the time of the psychologist’s publication—1973—he was not able to say whether the woman had been reunited with her husband. The psychologist acknowledged that “while it is customary with the development of health problems to prize physical changes and personal conflicts in the family or [amongst friends], and only seldom the detrimental influences of larger social formations,” he had uncovered a psychosomatic sickness which could only have one major cause in dozens of his patients.⁴

Many complained that Müller-Hegemann was over-estimating the specificity of Berlin. It was not, after all, only in Berlin that there were walls.⁵ At a general level, specific criticism of Müller-Hegemann was justified: the book smacks of moralism. Nearly everyone with “Wall sickness” is a victim of political coercion or coaxing. The Stasi inducted one teenage girl as an informal collaborator against her will. “They told her she had already become one, and had no choice. And it would have benefits.”⁶ Similarly, one doctor fell into

psychosis after the Stasi coerced him into giving up doctor-patient anonymity.⁷ As a political refugee from the GDR, Müller-Hegemann was also considered tainted in the West, and an enemy-of-the-state in the East. Though pervasive in East Germany, the deep sense of living in a walled society was present throughout the East bloc.

Walls were everywhere—not only at checkpoints on Bernauer- or Friedrichsstraße, but in committee meetings and art exhibitions, at marketplaces and at Christmas dinner. In the last (East) German Film Corporation (DEFA) production, *Die Architekten*, a middle-aged architect receives his first chance to develop an apartment mega-complex. Not a party member, the protagonist is slowly belittled, shunned, receives a divorce, and loses his only child to Western emigration.⁸ His daughter expresses her happiness that the country she will move to (Switzerland) is so close to her dad, not understanding how insurmountable a task it would be for her father to come visit. The six-year-old had not developed the sense of imprisonment shared by adults around her. Peter Kahane's film reveals how a society grew *around* the understanding of walls: like a horse with blinders, individuals' worldviews were restricted to the East. In a closing scene of the film, after the protagonist accepts that his vision of a socially-friendly apartment mega-complex has been rejected, the East German national anthem plays while a car drives through Berlin, revealing how wherever one went, walls prevented an individual from even seeing the West. In its place there was a white wall where the attics of West Berlin apartments occasionally peak through. In this case, the protagonist decided to remain in the society he thought was the more humane and socially just. But in so doing, he ironically had to sacrifice the very ideals which made him decide to stay.



Image 22. “Our *Heimat* is not only the cities and villages, it is also the trees in the forest, and the grass in the meadow.” Closing scene from *Die Architekten*.⁹
(Permission: DEFA Foundation.)

To get through walled societies was to achieve new freedoms, even when crossing into the lands of East-bloc neighbors: it meant meeting relatives, lovers and friends, buying different goods, or watching movies. But before one could get to the “prized” land, one had to cross the liminal zone. That was the essential double-standard of the “borders of friendship”: on the one hand it was designed to welcome guests to the home country, to celebrate foreign neighbors as good comrades and colleagues in press publications and mass demonstrations; on the other, one never knew when things would go awry, when one’s car would break down, when there would be a medical accident, or simply ordinary problems. For visitors, the charm (or chagrin) of the foreign country was that things were not the same on the ground, in shops, amongst inhabitants and friends. “I was drawn to Czechoslovakia as a teenager because they were simply different,” replied B.S. from East Berlin, “in contrast to today, there was not a supermarket chain on every corner. And it was nice to see different things.”¹⁰ An elderly Czech woman from Prague—a housekeeper who lived close to the border during the 1970s—explained that “we bought in East Germany, where things were relatively inexpensive for us.”¹¹ On the other hand B.G., a resident of Ostrava, was shocked when his mother-in-law was prevented entry to the GDR from Poland in 1977. She had become deathly ill while vacationing at the sea and the closest hospital was in Ahlbeck. Poland’s hesitant border guards eventually allowed the unconscious woman to exit the country, provided she was aided by her next-of-kin. But the family was denied entry to East Germany. The Czechoslovaks were ordered to go to a Polish hospital in Świnoujście, although an East German hospital was just over the border.¹² Even with open borders in the East bloc, distance was not to be measured in kilometers, but in political regimes.

Inhabitants close to the border did not receive better treatment. The East German O.U. was shot at twelve times by border guards patrolling in Czechoslovakia.¹³ He was not doing anything illegal—he was mowing his lawn—but the guards were uncertain where the border was, and thought he might be an East German trying to use an unauthorized border crossing. O.U. described the sounds of bullets striking the ground next to where he stood, close to an almost non-existent border post. Regardless of individual travel regime or border guards, interviewees consistently cite the visceral experience they had when approaching the Czechoslovak-Polish-East German border. J.K., resident of Cieszyn, related how crossing the German-Polish border made him sweat, even today.¹⁴ Comparing the past open border project with today, K.G. related to me how his child now lives in Spain with his girlfriend. It was just a flight away. How odd, he quipped, that in the age of the Schengen Zone, people could decide to live in a country which once seemed so far that it was practically “in outer space.”¹⁵ In the era of the “borders of friendship,” the biggest difference for him was that crossing borders out of Poland meant dealing with a new specimen of secret police agent. As a long-time dissident, he was familiar with the secret police’s routine in Poland during communism: after being locked up for a night, he would be released. Crossing international borders, he was never sure if there were Stasi agents, or even the KGB, in his presence.¹⁶



Image 23. Position at the Czechoslovak border “where the GDR citizen can be seen by those who shot” at him. Arrow points to O.U.’s position on the farm. Note how defended the border is by a short beam painted red and white.¹⁷
(Permission: Archiv bezpečnostních složek.)

Even if the secret police was not tailing citizens on their vacation, border guards and customs agents still had their time to belittle or annoy you. Customs agents were menacing, but within the state structure they usually belonged to the ministry of finance. In contrast, border guards were selected by the same ministerial branch as the secret police—namely, the ministry of the interior.¹⁸ In East Germany, the border police were part of the ministry of national defense or the ministry of state security. In either case, both ministries had signed agreements promising cooperation and collaboration “in the interest of rapid and comprehensive prosecution of planned, attempted and achieved penetration of the border.”¹⁹ Similarly, cooperative agreements between each East bloc country were signed to ensure the protection of borders. Poland signed with Czechoslovakia late—in 1975—but otherwise border protection agreements came either in the late 1960s or early 1970s.²⁰

For citizens, the border was a zone which began long before crossing into a foreign country: in East bloc countries trip wires were installed at least two kilometers before citizens reached the border to detect movement and prevent illegal penetration. A teenager at the time, C.J. was caught on two occasions by tripping wires, and the Stasi decided in 1984 that the likelihood of his attempting to escape again was so high that he was included on a list of individuals which the East German state allowed to emigrate in return for hard currency.²¹ Border guards, for their part, ended up recording more wildlife than people trying to cross illegally: fawn and fowl were not informed of border rules, resulting in hundreds of reports by uniformed officers. Particularly between Czechoslovakia its northern neighbors, where low mountains and shallow streams generally demarked international borders, domesticated animals rebelled at night: large dogs mauled lost sheep roaming in foreign back yards and horses were found mornings grazing in valleys. Wild animals were

even more ruthless: Hungarian border guards spent many weekends repairing barbed wire fences after wild boar broke through the “Iron Curtain” in search of truffles.²²

How markedly different was the experience for humans? When train engines and car motors stopped, the heart begin to race, beads of sweat collected on the forehead and one’s attention focused on the representative of the state. Border guards, like territorial pack animals, always came in groups. Like the secret police, they knew the individual’s language (especially since borders were increasingly controlled jointly between each neighbor states). It was on the one hand a zone of laws and strict orders, on the other a zone where no one could expect “normal” laws to be followed. Placed between two states, people were unsure if an officer of the home country would be conducting the control or if the foreign agent would do the questioning. Would one be attacked or allowed to pass without explanation? Would the guards invade one’s privacy—opening car-door-paneling, trunks or winter jackets? If they did find anything of interest, what would you say? Would you supplicate the state official or stand by your rights? Was there any real reason to stand up for rights? Did you, your parents, your children have any reason to hide information from the state? Was there anything you were hiding during the interview at the border?



Image 24. Mauled sheep on the Polish-Czechoslovak border.²³
(Permission: Archiv bezpečnostních složek.)



Image 25. Approaching the border to Czechoslovakia from Poland.
The sign declares “We celebrate the thirtieth year of independence.”²⁴
(Permission: Archiv bezpečnostních složek.)

That the border zone was a liminal zone was most evident in the breakdown of hierarchies. Border guards were non-discriminant: habitus, class and occupation meant little to the inspector. Tenuous societal roles which were so important to the stability of socialist societies were disrupted by seemingly omnipotent border agents. A former East German professional soldier stated that “whenever [he] was transporting valuable goods, [he] tried to let [guards] know that [he] was in the military, expecting better treatment.”²⁵ Telling border agents of his status usually helped E.R., but the fear that it would not help never went away. The treatment people received at the border frequently led to protests from all members of society, regardless of status: party members objected to their treatment, as did young people, the sick, elderly, and simple travelers. In the most egregious cases of harassment, citizens complained directly to the powers-that-be.

Citizen Complaints

The formulaic nature of citizen complaints was a unique invention of state socialism. Living in a totalitarian, paternalistic society, citizens were afforded the ability to complain directly to their representatives. The nature of the complaint was unbound: it could be about the unorthodox nature of Romanian communism, or (as depicted in *Good-Bye Lenin!*) the size and style of women’s clothing. Citizen petitions in state socialism acted in three ways. First, they channeled citizens’ frustration towards the state and its authority that cars were not delivered on schedule; that clothes were not the right size; or that there were simply too many tourists in a particular spa. Since the party acted as a paternalistic guarantor of rights, it was also to be the guarantor of consumer goods and other modern comforts. Secondly, the petition was meant to absolve the individual of guilt (for example, of alleged illegal activity abroad). Knowing that border guards had impunity at checkpoints, for the citizen, the petition was a form of self-justification and exculpation. (“Sure, there might have been ten pounds of oranges in the suitcase, but I have grandchildren, and I fought against the Nazis in Bohemia.”) Finally, the petition functioned as a means for people to identify with the state, to acknowledge the state as the ultimate arbiter and highest authority.²⁶ The citizen complaint both broke and reaffirmed allegiance with the state, making the political personal and the personal political.²⁷

The “borders of friendship” were a hotspot for complaints. Readers of newspapers in the early seventies were urged to go abroad alone, but still had to face the border. Some complaints were minor. In July 1978 authorities heard from a “severely handicapped” person, who had traveled to Prague for summer vacation, and who loved to hear music on his record player. In the Czechoslovak capitol, he visited different music stores where he found an album by Paul Hörbinger and Peter Alexander. Paul Hörbinger and Peter Alexander were movie stars and folk singers, something akin to Willie Nelson in country music and Will Smith in Hollywood films. Importantly, Hörbinger was a star before and during the Third Reich, but remained popular after the war, especially since he was not overtly political. When the petitioner returned to the GDR, he discovered that the goods he

bought were a problem at home. He found it “inexplicable, that his two records... would be confiscated in the customs bureau.”²⁸ Why, he wondered, make a tempest in a teapot?

The old man’s complaint was traced back to Plauen, where border guards invested the time to transcribe the lyrics of the songs on the record. Reporting to the Ministry of State Security, they showed how both performers sang songs which came from formerly German areas in Bohemia. The songs themselves were not irredentist, but did evoke “nostalgic feelings” towards the areas now ethnically cleansed of Germans. After several weeks and more complaints, border authorities made an exception for the handicapped old man: they returned his purchase from Prague. At least they did so in part. That did not please the petition writer, however. In his attempts to retrieve his beloved recordings of two of the best-known German-speaking film stars, what this writer found most egregious was that, after the long battle, “they sent me the empty record sleeve!”²⁹ Unfortunately, he never received the actual LP. As many of the complaints in this chapter, his only came to light through archival research since ministries of state security, ambassadors, or recreation officials’ sent responses to higher authorities giving clarifications or opinions in the cases.

Many complaints were aimed at seemingly unjustified delays due to guards at the border. It was not the chance of being humiliated which brought citizens to petition; it was the unpredictability of the encounter with guards. In 1975, central passport authorities in Berlin inquired about R.W.’s treatment at the border with local guards and train station employees. He protested when he, his sick Czech wife, and their eleven-year-old son were held in Bad Schandau, a train station where rail travelers between Dresden and Děčín would cross and which locals liked to call “the head of the needle” due to its size and location in a valley surrounded by jutting mountains.³⁰ R.W. was searched at this station in the middle of nowhere, as was his family. The problem was that they were released “exactly three minutes after the [connecting] train had left.” Stuck at the train station on the frigid evening of 23 December, station guards refused reentry to the main hall and they had to welcome Christmas Eve sitting on the platform.³¹

In August 1980, P.M. wrote both to Polish and East German authorities. The treatment he received when going across the border with his Polish relatives, he wrote, was “deplorable.” P.M., a self-proclaimed communist since before World War II traveled across the Polish-East German border. Everything was “orderly” in Poland, but when confronted by GDR guards, he was “taken into custody and treated like a serious criminal agent or who knows what from 1:30 in the morning to 8:45.”³² Even after guards explained their side of the story—that P.M. had concealed “one folk cap, three hand-crafted pairs of shoes, one wandering stick and ax, still five further pairs of hand-crafted shoes, two table clocks, two bottles of alcohol, and two crystal ornaments” in his car—P.M. assured the guards as well as the Central Committee that he was treated worse than in World War II.³³ “He seemed to take pleasure,” wrote the guards after the encounter, that he had “found such a receptive audience.” After he revealed an “Official Identification Card for the politically, racially, or religiously Persecuted,”³⁴ the Pole “made long overtures about his activities before 1945, his connections to higher-ranking Polish leaders, Comrade [Walter] Ulbricht, and to the Central Committee of the SED.”³⁵

The fact that the “racially persecuted” citizen was a Polish émigré living in West Berlin drew the ire of guards. Legislatively, the open border project was complicated since

passport regimes were markedly draconian. In the 1970s and 1980s in Poland, for example, there were a total of nine different forms of travel documents: there was the “blue” or “red” passport (which allowed for travel to the West or only in the East bloc); the diplomatic passport; service passports (for employees traveling abroad); consular passports; group passports; amendment passports for the identification card; the identification card; and sector passports (for people living close to the border).³⁶ Ironically, travel documents did not travel: they were locked in file cabinets at police stations when people were not travelling abroad. With the exception of the identification card, people had to go to the police to obtain travel documents. Here, outside the courts or the public sphere, the police could harass, interrogate, or simply deny stamps based on real or invented charges of criminal activity such as smuggling.³⁷ Fortunately, to get to Czechoslovakia or East Germany from Poland (and vice versa), travelers needed only the identification card.

Authorities thought the liberalized travel policy would alleviate such harassment by bypassing the necessity to get a passport altogether. Although people still needed a stamp from the local police to exit the country, receiving a stamp was more of an inconvenient formality than a means of preventing enemy elements to travel. For precisely that reason, contact with foreigners—but also with emigrants or ethnic brethren living abroad—became easier for locals. That was primarily a concern of East German leaders, who wanted to prevent natives from interaction with their capitalist other, but each country in the “Northern Triangle” faced the problem of cross-bloc exchange with ethnic nationals. The Polish ambassador reported a year after the policy had been approved with East Germany:

the appropriate authorities of the People’s Republic of Poland have been informed that former citizens of People’s Poland, who deserted Poland and have taken up permanent residence in Western countries (for example Denmark), travel to the GDR with passports for political refugees from those countries and meet with Polish citizens, who came to the GDR as part of the visa- and passport-free travel, to discuss questions of political agitation against People’s Poland.... of which there had been 50 arrivals [to the GDR] and 200 transit arrivals of such former Polish citizens [to People’s Poland].

He asked for the “GDR’s assistance” to eliminate the problem.³⁸ Contact with Western citizens was politically dubious, and guards were to use caution when permitting entry.

In 1974, the state security in the industrial town of Plzeň reported that western literature was switching hands among socialist citizens: “in this tourist season the circulation of anti-socialist and anti-Soviet literature continue[s] to grow. [The secret police] identified twenty three known cases of such serious ideological sabotage. It is mainly literature of Solzhenitsyn (*Archipelago Gulag*, *The Cancer Ward*), Ota Šik (*The Third Way*), Pasternak (*Dr. Zhivago*), the manifestos of Enver Hoxha (in Albanian) and Maoist groups in West Germany (in German).”³⁹ The secret police implied that circulation was the result of contact between the 247,000 summer tourists from “capitalist states” and the 917,640 from the GDR.⁴⁰ Secret contacts and romantic rendezvous were common, given that cities like Prague or Budapest not only attracted increasing numbers of Russians, Poles and East Germans, but also western travelers in search for the exotic East.⁴¹ (The protagonist’s alienated wife in *Die*

Architekten casually tells her husband, that he knows “exactly why [she] was going to Czechoslovakia,” making reference to the fact that, in contrast to East Berlin, she could meet her Swiss lover in Prague.)⁴²

One of the impetuses for liberalizing travel among socialist countries was to counter the growth of western tourism. Especially in Czechoslovakia and in East Germany, the presence of French, Americans or Austrians called into question the solidarity among East bloc nations.⁴³ Westerners were prized for their hard currency by governments and for their exoticness by locals. As the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* put it in 1988, “for *western* tourists it is much *easier* to travel to a communist country than it is for an *East citizen*.”⁴⁴ Hotels (some of which were created in city centers by Western firms with an eye towards the rich) reserved the best rooms for customers paying in hard currency, not the least since Eastern travelers frequently used coupons. Westerners also had access to western-currency shops like Tuzex and Pewex, where hard-to-find goods like quality coffee, filter cigarettes and Western whiskey were sold.⁴⁵

Governments did create measures to allow Eastern citizens into western shops. Over the course of the 1970s Czechoslovakia, Poland and East Germany each established either western currency bank accounts (as in Poland) or created a new currency. In the case of Poland, Western bank accounts facilitated the transfer of money in foreign currency from relatives abroad.⁴⁶ For the state, it ensured that at least some of the money earned by Poles abroad was reinvested in the motherland. That was particularly the case here, since when people withdrew their money—their foreign currency earned in America, France, or Libya—they usually received “Polish dollars.” Polish dollars were initially devised to ensure that people could spend their money in the western-currency shops *without* having the dollars in hand. The policy was reproduced in East Germany and Czechoslovakia (as well as most East bloc countries).⁴⁷ Eventually, however, “Polish dollars” (and their East bloc counterparts) were offered by the state to ordinary people, establishing a second currency in state socialism. Not unlike modern-day Cuba, there were multiple currencies on the streets of Eastern Europe: western currency, pseudo-dollars (for western-currency shops), local currency and (in crisis situations) ration cards.

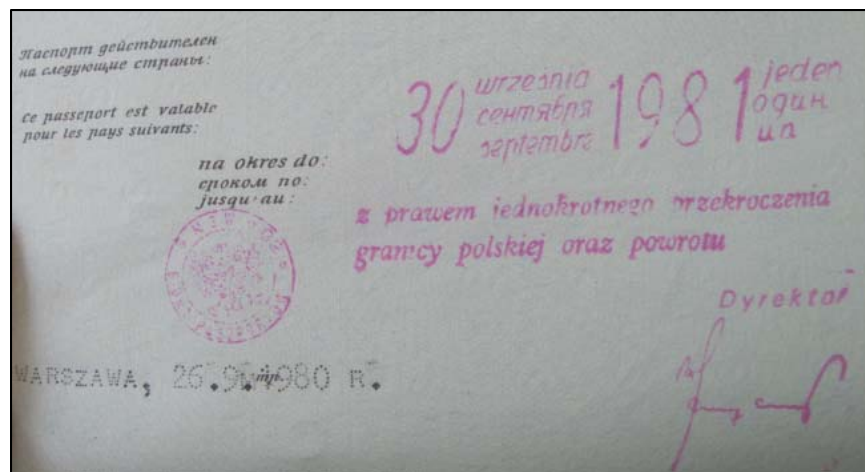


Image 26. A stamp (albeit to the West) to cross the international borders of Poland “one time... and to return”⁴⁸ (Permission: Archiv bezpečnostních složek.)

The fact that regimes would prize capitalist visitors over their guests from socialist neighbors discouraged foreign officials and citizens alike. “In the East” the *Neue Züricher Zeitung* wrote, “a two-class society is the rule: those who have western hard currency are welcomed with open arms.”⁴⁹ Eastern citizens asked why governments and shops prized greenbacks over Eastern currency? The Polish ambassador to East Germany recounted with disdain how “in Cottbus, one Polish citizen... was told he had to pay for gasoline in hard currency.”⁵⁰ Not only was it not necessary for the Polish citizen to pay in hard currency, it was virtually impossible to purchase Western currency for a trip to East Germany. A very real problem was that East bloc citizens were restricted in the amount of dollars they could purchase annually: they had to carefully calculate where to spend the few dollars they could buy each year.⁵¹ Finally, the East German government moved to prevent purchase of gasoline by Czechoslovaks and Poles by requiring coupons to purchase gasoline. As the ambassador reported, however, “since the citizen did not have any hard currency, the Polish Fiat 125p was towed” back to Poland.⁵²

Western currencies notwithstanding, currency regimes were initially liberalized in the era of the “borders of friendship.” The most radical liberalization was between Poland and East Germany, where citizens could exchange unlimited amounts of zloty and marks and where commission fees were reduced from thirty to fifteen percent. Like the sheer number of travelers, the amount of currency exchanged was phenomenal and planned economies had difficulty absorbing the influx of new consumers.

A direct result of such influx was two measures to control the circulation of currency, adding to the alienating experience at the border. First, citizens were obliged to carry a government-issued booklet documenting the amount of currency officially exchanged at state banks. Wallets were opened as Czechoslovakia in 1972, East Germany in 1973, and finally in Poland in 1980 required minimum exchanges to enter the country. With the possible exception of Czechoslovakia, this vicious cycle of requiring currency but preventing consumption was never satisfactorily solved.



Image 27. A gasoline coupon for twenty liters of diesel in the GDR.⁵³
(Permission: Archiv bezpečnostních složek.)

Secondly, receipts were controlled, not necessarily at every border or with every citizen. But when a suspicious amount of goods was transported across borders, then guards were obliged to inquire about their procurement. They had to decide who was the smuggler, who the concerned relative with multiple children at home, and who simply the ignorant traveler. The Polish ambassador queried about the twenty-five year old who carried “seven cans of coffee-substitute, one pair of lady’s shoes, two towels, two pairs of panty hose, two pairs of children’s long underwear, one children’s overall, two children’s suits, one jogging suit, one scarf and one children’s sweater” confiscated. Was she really a smuggler? According to the head of the consular department, the Poles felt that the goods should have been considered for personal use: even though seven cans was a lot, it was, after all, only coffee *substitute*, and otherwise the quantity of goods was run-of-the-mill.⁵⁴ For readers today, the fact that consuls were even debating about the contents of one traveler’s luggage is outlandish. Readers of the popular tourist magazine, *Światowid*, laughed not only at the fact that a young boy was turning in his smuggling parents when he played a game of hide-and-seek with a customs official, but also that smuggling an insignificant amount of goods could be a crime at all.

There was a catch-22 in checking purchase and bank exchange receipts. As a teenager, border guards held the Czechoslovak citizen, E.M., at the border in Varnsdorf. An inhabitant of Cheb, he traveled frequently to the GDR. When he was returning from a weekend trip, authorities forced him to pay customs on clothing he had purchased on previous trips, suggesting that he had intentionally discarded his clothes before reaching the border.⁵⁵ The secret police had documented such cases in the past: foreigners would arrive in the shopping centers in Berlin, Schwedt, or Zittau, buy new clothing (especially shoes), drive out of town and discard their old threads before crossing the border. But E.M. had purchased the jacket legally, and had not even purchased it on *this* trip. How could he prove he was not breaking strict export rules? E.M. had crossed the border on numerous occasions, but guards had never commented on his jacket until that cool September evening. How could the authorities account for the significant differences in what was considered “acceptable” at different border-crossings? For him, it was difficult to distinguish between the guards’ desire to demean him and legally enforce export regimes. Maybe the guards were bored, had a hangover, or were just plain jerks. After many hours of argument, he was allowed to go home with his jacket, but not until his connecting train had left.⁵⁶

As citizens and officials grew more accustomed to East bloc travelers, export rules became more refined. Border guards worked more extensively to uncover illegal goods, and the number of prohibited goods expanded. By the mid-1980s, long after borders were “temporarily closed” to Poland, both Czechoslovak and East German customs agents had declared a “customs war” on Poland.⁵⁷ In newspapers, citizens in each country were informed of attempts to “aid the national economy” and to transport citizens to third countries illegally.⁵⁸ Regardless of the actor—whether it be the Poles who dressed up as American soldiers to get into West Berlin; Austrian truck drivers dealing in contraband; or Polish officers who turned a blind eye to smuggling—the media assured the citizenry that such attempts were punished with “stark sentences.”⁵⁹



Image 28. “Warmer, Warmer... Hot!”⁶⁰

Inspectors additionally controlled guards. Authorities reporting to Dresden were aggrieved at a number of Czechoslovak border guards and their treatment of East German citizens. In 1975 inspectors reported an instance in Vojtanov, Czechoslovakia, where custom guards entered a train full of foreign passengers. In one wagon, where about 50 East German citizens sat, the guards realized that every passenger had exactly “two boxes of juice and one or two cans of sardines.” When passengers declared that they had no more Czechoslovak koruna to pay duty taxes, the guard commanded that they “open [the cans] and eat the contents.” The guard had “partaken of alcohol beforehand,” and made his demands in an “impolite and loud” manner. The passengers complied, bringing the drunken guard and “the others at the train station to explode in laughter.” Czechoslovaks were thoroughly “entertained about the event,” to the disdain of the East German representatives.⁶¹

Border Reactions to Tourists

The border was experienced not only by travelers and border guards. The increase of tourist traffic—both by natives and by foreigners—was both a plus and a minus for locals: state authorities had to focus on otherwise backwater towns, bringing new investment and new initiatives; but traffic resulted in greater rates of crime and criminal activity.

In the small town of Zgorzelec on the Neisse, the Polish Automobile and Motorcycle Association decided to reduce their open hours “out of concern for their personnel.” The city had become a place “of criminal elements” which was “typical of areas with greater touristic traffic.” Since employees “were afraid to go home at night” the automobile association decided to reduce their hours of operation.⁶² It was not only foreigners who caused problems: in small border towns where state border security frequently constituted

one of the few employers, parents were never sure whether their children's friends were members of border guard families or, worse, of the secret police.

Local governments, travel agencies and police organizations frequently protested the open border policy. It was not that they were fundamentally against greater tourist flows. They simply did not know what to do in light of directives from above; authorities were not trained to manage the flood of tourists; guards were informed about the changing travel regime, but were not schooled in public relations. There were, as Vaclav Roubal noted, more than 391 meetings between border authorities in 1974 alone.⁶³ But a controlling force meant that hundreds of thousands were now put in place to control tens of millions of citizens. The biggest problem was the variability of the border regulations: exchange regimes, export regimes, as well as visa regimes confused those most affected by the onslaught of new travelers. After hearing of the open border policy, the city council of Guben called an emergency meeting to clarify just what was to happen once the border was officially opened. At the meeting, they inquired:

- How [well] will the most important provisions for residents [be supplied] during this time?
- Should there be special shops for foreign tourists?
- How long can [visitors] travel in the GDR?
- Will there only be special zones, in which one can travel?⁶⁴

City officials foresaw potential problems with the open border, but had yet to receive sufficient orders from Prague, Berlin or from Warsaw. In sober realization, they recognized that they would not only be confronted with a second population of consumers, but would have little control over the actions and (more importantly) reactions of their own residents.

As late as the 1950s, the rumors that areas of Saxony near cities such as Bautzen or Niesky were to be settled by ethnic Sorbs and annexed by Czechoslovakia were so great that “many workers abandoned work to defend their apartments, and many farmers declared that they were not going to tend their fields.”⁶⁵ Although it was now the 1970s, the arrival of hundreds of Germans brought local inhabitants in both Czechoslovakia and Poland to fear irredentist tendencies. In such an atmosphere of anxiety and excitement, fear was not uncommon in any of the three countries. Especially in Poland, this anxiety was exacerbated in the first several weeks after 1 January 1972. The Polish *milicja* had not been able to produce enough identification cards for Polish citizens, even though the opening of the border had been rescheduled from 1 December 1971 to January in order to alleviate logistical problems. As a result, most Poles were unable to cross the border until weeks after it had been opened, while East Germans could pass without complication. One witness recalls, that “On 1 and 2 January, the city was entirely quiet. Poles had vanished from the face of the planet. Everyone sat in their homes and watched [to see] what would happen. Masses of Germans came to the city.”⁶⁶ Sociologist Tomasz Goban-Klas reported in 1973 that nearly 40 percent of Poles asked perceived the open border as negative.⁶⁷ One border guard said, “[t]he Germans came like pilgrims to Mecca. We opened four borders but nevertheless could not get through the kilometer-long lines.” Another woman stated that the “Germans walked around with their children, grandparents, and aunts... Entire families

along with [their extended] families. They were everywhere. And it appeared as if they knew our city well.” “If they could,” concluded one inhabitant concerning the Germans, “they would take away our land again; one can see it in their eyes.”⁶⁸ In hindsight, these fears seem unwarranted. Even if the daily press in all three countries propagated the “revisionist tendencies” of the Germans, statements were directed solely at the West Germans; additionally, East Germans could expect little sympathy (and would likely receive jail time at home) for contesting Czechoslovak or Polish ownership of formerly German territories.

Czechoslovak park rangers reported similar incidents, and were particularly chagrined that foreigners did not understand “appropriate behavior” when visiting Czechoslovakia.⁶⁹ Not only would visitors veer off the beaten track in area parks and recreation areas, and not only would they purchase hard-to-find goods en masse, they would frequently disturb locals through their public drunkenness and impropriety; “young people caused disturbances,” one analysis to the Central Committee stated, by “fighting, disturbing the peace, rowdy behavior—usually under the influence of alcohol.”⁷⁰

Particularly for Germans, knowledge of the foreign language was limited, and the understanding that others might not speak German was equally limited. In each country, foreign language courses were initially offered to promote friendship amongst peoples. Czechoslovakia, a hesitant partner of the open border project, was particularly engaged in knowledge dissemination, offering film weeks, language courses, and cultural events. But the intended audience for such courses was small, and in no country was the demand for foreign languages courses greater than the offering. East German travelers were depicted in *Junge Welt* and *Eulenspiegel* as being loud and drunken, squirrels prone to smuggle, linguistically incompetent and somewhat chauvinist. Take, for example, a centerfold in one *Eulenspiegel* issue, where a middle-aged lady from Germany is just coming into an acquaintance’s home with her husband. She has a present, but the host couple is grimacing. The caption reads: “A little present, reasonably chosen, makes contact with your foreign hosts more comfortable. Traveling teaches!” The German is offering her hosts a German dictionary.



Image 29. “A little present, reasonably chosen, makes contact with your foreign hosts more comfortable. Travel educates!”⁷¹

Notable in novels and films, in magazines and newspapers is the casualness with which East Germans speak to their eastern counterparts. In the 1974 East German film *Die Schlüssel* [The Keys], a young couple visiting Cracow speaks German to older people (but not to young Poles). Despite the innocence of the couple, such casualness comes across as demeaning. One of the protagonists asks an old train conductor late at night, surprised: “*Wieso sprechen Sie so gut deutsch?*” (“Why do you speak such good German?”) to which he, after much prodding, responds, “*Ja... ich spreche dreißig Jahre vor,*” (“Yes...I speak it thirty years ago.”[sic.]). Making reference to his experience of World War II, the director does not problematize the issue, nor would the presumable audience. Even if they were socialist, it was obvious that East Central Europeans spoke at least a little bit of German for reasons no one cared to reflect upon. In one 1974 East German novel by Rolf Schneider, *Die Reise nach Jarosław*, the teenage protagonist travelling to Poland does not even intend to speak the language.

I walked across the bridge [to Poland] and.... came to an intersection behind which there were residential homes. A German sign told me that I was welcome to the People’s Republic of Poland, and those were the last German words I read. Man-o-man, Poland has a crazy language!.... There were a lot of funny commas and points on the letters, and I couldn’t get any of them. I gave up.⁷²

The book is a fictional account of how travelers experienced foreign languages and land, but the author related to me how he envisioned his own children travelling abroad. While personally a Poland enthusiast, he admitted to speaking French when he went on vacation in the East.⁷³ When crossing borders, East Germans (both in virtual travel accounts and in actual ones) made little effort to learn the language of the new inhabitants.

“Inappropriate behavior” was chronic at the “borders of friendship” and displayed at all levels. The stubborn seniors; the drunken border guards; train cars packed like sardines with people holding cans of sardines are common tales of the open border. Surprisingly, however, governments were responsive: this individual’s complaint, along with numerous others, led representatives from embassies to investigate the situation at local borders and at train stations with particular focus on border guards and customs authorities. In one instance, border guards complained that a “representative of the Polish embassy” had interrupted their work at the *Ostbahnhof* in Berlin by meddling around the station and surveying the guards’ actions.⁷⁴ One week later, the official came “very drunk” and screamed at the border guards, letting them know exactly how he felt about their work: while they had a right to control the border, trains on a voyage to Poland or Czechoslovakia were not to be inspected by border guards in Berlin.⁷⁵

Polish authorities seem to have been the most vocal in their complaints; officials from Warsaw protested on several occasions, both in Prague and in Berlin. While recognizing that their “peoples have to—and always will—live next to each other,” authorities highlighted that travelers were chagrined at the “abominable discrimination” received both on the border and in the interior of the country visited. Citizens were upset to the point that “comrades [in Czechoslovakia and East Germany] could not imagine.” The

interior minister in Poland reported that “reactions... had become [so vocal]... that they are political in nature.”⁷⁶

On their way to Schönefeld Airport the Polish president of the customs bureau told his East German counterpart that “the ease [of travel]... instituted by leaders of states, was accepted in the GDR, only because it [that is, the government of the GDR] needed the People’s Republic of Poland.” He continued that, “now [that] the GDR was certain to be accepted in the UN and recognized by all countries,” everything would change. He concluded that “leading comrades don’t believe in the least, that [the border was opened for]... economic reasons. Instead, they thought it was opened out of political calculation.” East Germans had better watch out, since their “actions... were constantly being watched.”⁷⁷

Blame was not merely placed on the Germans: every government would reproach their neighbors at one point or another in response to citizens’ complaints. At times, two of the governments would hold top-secret meetings in order to discuss the actions of their third counterpart. In 1977, general inspectors from Czechoslovakia and East Germany came together to privately discuss the situation on the borders with Poland. At the meeting, the Czechoslovak representative stressed that, while “the CSSR was obliged to help the PRP,” the relationship was based on the assumption that “the partner would act ‘respectably.’” Czechoslovak customs agents were discouraged by the fact that their Polish counterparts were acting too “liberally” when it came to controlling their borders. The situation was particularly problematic, since Czechs and Slovaks did not understand why they could not enjoy the same degree of liberalization as Poles.⁷⁸

Discrepancies in the stringency with which border guards controlled the border were frequently a source of frustration. In late 1975, one diligent traveler described the situation at the Polish-Czechoslovak border: when he went to the idyllic Czechoslovak small town of Frýdlant, he found that an “apparently new” border crossing had suddenly opened. But there was “merely one table and four chairs, at which one passport and one customs guard from Poland and Czechoslovakia chatted,” uninterested in who or what passed the border.⁷⁹ At the same border, another related how he was able to buy as many goods as he wanted in Czechoslovakia. When returning home, he said, he made sure that the guards knew he was a member of the military, since they generally let class comrades pass without checks.⁸⁰

One East German traveler, who had talked back to Czechoslovak guards after receiving unfriendly treatment, was told “if you don’t like the [border] controls, then you shouldn’t travel abroad.”⁸¹ Of course, that was unacceptable to authorities in Prague, Warsaw, and Berlin: all three members were supportive of the project, and encouraged travelers to continue traveling while trying to answer chronic problems at the border.

Imbalances and Correctives

In early 1976, David Bolen had just arrived in East Berlin as the first American ambassador to the GDR. Having occasions to travel through the region, he preferred travelling by train to enjoy the land and the people of the region. The sight of an African-American

ambassador on trains throughout East Central Europe must have been a sight, indeed. In 1979, he confidentially reported back to Washington, that:

Interestingly, we find that the views of the many East Germans on the question of liberalization are probably closer to that of the regime than to western liberal traditions.... It would appear that there is little sense of oppression and only rare expressions of protests at being denied rights which are considered basic in the West.... The one restriction about which East Germans do volubly complain is the prohibition on travel.⁸²

In the report, Bolen decided to strike through the section which said: "Most East Germans with whom we have discussed this issue claim that they wish only to travel abroad temporarily and would return." But he included the statement that preventing travel only exacerbated the European "passion for travel" and that restrictions "represent[ed] in the clearest form possible the total lack of confidence and trust between the regime and the people."⁸³ He closed with a statement, penciled into the margins: "People know that WGermans and Poles/Hungarians can travel and wonder why they can't. I question whether the fact that certain E. Germans can travel makes it seem, to E. Germans, that system is unfair."⁸⁴

While exaggerated (neither Poles nor Hungarians had such great liberty to travel at that time) the document reveals how neighbors in East Central Europe felt in relation to their socialist brethren. If you were Polish, you were upset that you could not buy meat in East Germany or Czechoslovakia; if you were Czech or Slovak, you were upset that guards were more restrictive at home than in East Germany or Poland; if you were German, then you were certain that Slovaks, Poles, and Czechs could travel freely. Everyone—including officials—believed that their counterparts across the border had the better deal: while one interviewee in a Czechoslovak border town assured me that East Germans were, in fact, abusing the freedom to travel to buy sardines and chocolates; a former East German officer reminded me that Poles were taking all the shoes from Frankfurt; and a menial laborer assured me that the Slovaks was eating up all the cheese in Zakopane.

Precisely since everyone thought the other side was profiting from the open border project, they saw no problem in utilizing the "borders of friendship" to advance their own personal interests. An elderly Czech woman wondered why she *should not* go to the GDR or Poland to visit a foreign country *just to* buy chocolate.⁸⁵ East Germans saw no contradiction in going to Poland to watch the newest *James Bond* film while complaining about Eastern neighbors shopping in "their" supermarket. Polish citizens were happy to enjoy a supermarket stocked with consumer goods and blamed the dearth of goods at home on bloc-wide subsidies to East Germany. Governments additionally willingly involved themselves in the open border, and complained about real or perceived injustices against nationals.

Authorities' responsiveness was meant, at least partially, to fill the vacuum left by a travel industry which, in comparison to the West, Yugoslavia, or Hungary, was rudimentary.⁸⁶ But their responses also suggest the degree to which each individual regime had different understandings about what the open border project was meant to mean—what

the “borders of friendship” were. Were they primarily economic? Or, were they intended to foster transnational understanding? State officials, as might be expected, announced that the open border project was about both. But in practice, the vagueness of the nature of open borders, the lack of basic and consistent travel information, and the discrepancy between what one heard in the home country and what one experienced at the border meant that citizens invariably felt violated by and vindictive towards authorities who made the rules.

At first glance, this seems to be a story of dysfunction: nobody was happy with the deal, and everyone thought they had been deceived. There was no East bloc *Gemeinschaft*. But reading David Bolen’s document against the grain, one gains the insight that people knew of—and had experiences with—the Czechs, the East Germans, the Slovaks, and the Poles traveling throughout their country. The open border project had succeeded in creating a *Gesellschaft* of socialist citizens which had non-organized contact with people from other bloc countries. Even if they were disadvantaged, their statements show how taken for granted travel had become.⁸⁷

Ironically, at the same time that there was a walled society, there was a societal understanding that the liberty to travel was one right a citizen of a modern industrialized nation should have. Regimes were initially swamped with complaints from people on the border frightened about outsiders flooding their city. But if locals were anxious in 1972 about the influx of new consumers and former inhabitants, fears subsided as they grew acquainted with the vacation spots and shops across the border.⁸⁸ By the late 1980s, the open border was a common feature for Europeans living east of the Elbe, north of the Danube.

On borders between Poland, the CSSR and the GDR people built tenuous communities and loose interest groups.⁸⁹ In no way were they interest groups like Greenpeace or Amnesty International. But they were an informed citizenry with contacts abroad. The contacts were economic: small shop owners or colleagues at similar workplaces close to the border fixed prices cooperatively.⁹⁰ Sometimes, they were secret agents, who reported back to central authorities about their visits abroad.⁹¹ In the 1980s, interest groups of environmentalists, car hobbyists, theater-buffs, and jazz aficionados also grew.⁹² Especially for youngsters (as I explore in the next chapter), the open border meant the possibility to explore new places in an otherwise restrictive society. Sometimes, socialists travelers became lovers, cheating on their husbands and wives.⁹³ (Sometimes, estranged wives and husbands became the secret agents reporting back to central authorities.⁹⁴)

The experience of the border united all of these people. Borders were rarely positive, but potential relationships that could be created beyond the border could be. Conversely, the “borders of friendship” produced tensions and contradictions that *uniquely* showcased the problems of socialism. Sometimes people became lovers, but sometimes the “borders of friendship” permitted state socialist citizens to hate each other more intimately than would have been possible under a more restrictive regime.

**Don't think the World's Yours:
Transfer of Culture and Cultural Change
in East Central Europe in the 1970s and 1980s**

A transnational project such as the “borders of friendship” would require new approaches to taboo topics. And while it was not the harbinger of new approaches, the project came at the same time as a generational shift in culture. Through their consumption of music, film and novels, youngsters in the 1970s readily adopted new styles and attitudes. This generational shift was most marked in travel habits: while the elderly went abroad looking for old homes, the younger generation was attracted by foreign marketplaces and different cultures.

Young people born after the War were neither old enough to remember Khrushchev's secret speech condemning Stalin's personality cult and politically-motivated purges, nor to battle in the uprisings across East Europe against workers' norms and socialist leaders in the 1950s. More importantly, they would come to understand the state in drastically different terms from those of their parents and grandparents. They had grown up in state socialism, knowing neither pre-World War I cosmopolitanism, nor the “Golden Twenties.” In their lifetime, they fought neither the fascists, nor the capitalists (at least, until after 1989). Seeing as how many children were forced into kindergarten in their first year of life, they were spoon-fed socialism nearly from birth.

This generation had a sense of style that was completely different from its elders: it was infatuated with Teksas jeans, Wranglery, and so-called “elephant pants”—or bell bottoms—and were already acculturated to the notion of Lenin in a mini-skirt.¹ In Czechoslovakia, the Škoda Š100, and, in Poland, the iconic Polski Fiat 125p were rolling off the lot in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The explosive growth of these small, mass produced personal automobiles in the early 1970s meant that, even if the youngest

generation did not immediately obtain an automobile (or a driver's license), they went hitchhiking in them.² And they loved Hungarian beat.

The generation born after the communist takeover in each country (between 1947 and 1948) has been variously called by scholars the "*Hineingeborene* generation," or the last Soviet generation.³ It understood the necessity to march on May Day, but also understood the ins-and-outs of rock-n-roll and underground clubs. The youth understood that you could diverge from the path of the faithful socialist, as long as you atoned for this through participation in the local youth group or a similar communist-organized group. It was the generation which drank Pepsi Cola (starting in 1972).⁴ At the same time, it participated in youth organizations and clubs in the search for negotiated or compromised spaces. For the post-War generation, it was the convergence of many different social, economic, and political elements which made them both the inheritors and audible critics of the most affluent form of socialism. They understood the immutability of the system, but also grew up in a normative system where limited criticism was, in varying degrees and depending on the country, publicly tolerated.

Understanding the dynamics of generational shift in the East is complicated. First and foremost, who belongs to a generation? Generational shifts in state socialism have been discussed in several outstanding works—most notably by Alexei Yurchak for the Soviet Union and Catherine Epstein for East Germany.⁵ Here, I do not argue against their understandings of generations in state socialism, rather expand on their studies by advocating for an understanding of generation unbound by chronological eras and enjoined by culture and *Weltanschauung*. Generations are not clear-cut bodies: two people born in the same year or in close proximity can belong to different generations. Amongst other factors, personal biography, family background, and social status create the generational divide. (To give but one example, although both were born in 1941, Bob Dylan and Dick Cheney hardly seem to belong to the same generation.)

In exploring the idea of generation, I clarify a squishy phenomenon of late state socialism which involves three basic problems for historians: first and foremost, why do similar styles in the East and the West emerge at the same time amongst people literally and figuratively divided by a no-man's land? Citizens of East Germany and some areas of Czechoslovakia were exposed to Western television. People across the bloc could (openly) listen to Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, the BBC and Radio Liberty. But western influences notwithstanding, why do hippie-styles—bell bottoms, beards and beat music—cross nation-state boundaries with such ease? Secondly, how can the historian explain remarkably similar cultural developments amongst young people in numerous countries when the post-totalitarian (nation-)state was led by septua- and octogenarians in control of nearly all cultural output? Indeed, not only were party leaders in the 1970s arriving at retirement age when they came to power, the political apparatus and governmental posts were made up of aged men who—as historians to date have explained—approached new youth initiatives with extreme caution if not downright suspicion. Even if thirty-somethings were increasingly allowed into the ranks of youth organizations and state cultural institutions, and also increasingly given free hand to direct their own programs, that did not protect them from criticism and/or whole-sale shutdown.

Finally, this chapter is an attempt to explore how historians can explain the idea of “Central Europe” in the 1970s and 1980s as a development *beyond* intellectual and dissident circles. Intellectual circles are responsible for the dissemination of novels, samizdat and tamizdat to the West. But few people had the contacts, or even the desire to risk their and their family’s well-being to consume intellectual material. An inherited understanding of history and culture was one thing, trying to get underground material was another. That does not mean that the great intellectuals of Central Europe were wrong. The idea of “Central Europe” developed on the ground and amongst people of different countries who shared the fate of living in late state socialism.

In this chapter, I show the differences in generation through a cultural change that was pervasive across the East bloc. Exploring changes in the memory of World War II and the holocaust in literature; in the celebration of rock music and film; and at international happenings, I argue that teenagers starting in the 1970s were raised with an increased sense of acceptance not only of their history, but also their state. Critically, they also gained a greater sense of ideological irony: just as it became more acceptable to discuss taboo topics like Stalinization or German expulsion, so too were deviations from strict ideology more accepted. Indeed, by the late 1980s, even party members openly discussed their own “sins” against ideology.

Young people were pre-determined by socialist authorities to reap the fruit of a new border policy in the East. Tourist organizations, youth groups and cultural organizations sought to attract young people to events celebrating the state, the leader, or May Day. After all, there was not more potent symbol of socialist states’ drive for world peace and cooperation—indeed, of socialist integration—than children playing together at demonstrations, or an ethnically-diverse group of teenagers singing communist fight songs and playing the guitar in an open park. As in the 1974 agreement between Czechoslovakia and Poland, both governments committed themselves to “deepen the development of cooperation in the field of culture, education, sports, and other areas of socialist society.... and also develop relations between... the youth and social organizations, universities and other institutions.”⁶ Younger dissidents also found networks of individuals willing to defy the state. In general, the effect of the young having frequent contact with people and cultures abroad was to promote a deep sense of ideological irony. They were willing to challenge their elders (and hence the party), reinforcing a sense of transnational *Schicksalgemeinschaft*, or community of fate.



Image 30. East German and Polish youth groups in Frankfurt Oder

Overcoming the Konrád Paradigm

Traditional historiography on late socialism asserts that the horrors of occupation and the holocaust were manipulated by state planners and paternalistic educators. Expressing intensely personal stories about brutality, rape, and murder at the hands of Germans, Russians, or one's own neighbors was considered in bad taste, unless it was done to celebrate the legitimacy of the new socialist state as a would-be protector of the nation and of peace. Similarly, racial distinction was subsumed in the grand narrative of the fight of socialism against fascism. Museums such as the one at Auschwitz highlighted the Polishness of the victims and the fact that they were victims of fascism (as opposed to Jewish victims of Nazism).⁷ But things did change. In literature and film, that happened slowly and organically, with some exceptional works changing the way in which artists approached topics of guilt, collaboration and personal responsibility.

In the 1950s and 1960s, artists were encouraged—as according to the prescripts of socialist realism—to present protagonists who overcame insurmountable problems to succeed. In the first post-World War II German film, *Die Mörder sind unter uns* [The Murderers are Amongst Us] the protagonist chooses alcohol to forget the past. With the help of his female roommate, he brings himself to confront the ghosts in his closet and, more importantly, to focus on the future. Marek Hlasko's protagonist in his *Ósmy dzień tygodnia* [Eighth Day of the Week] struggles to forget the past, and in so doing, chooses sex. More typical were narratives such as Herman Kant's *Die Aula* [The Lecture Hall] or Eduard

Claudius's *Menschen an unserer Seite* [People on our Side] where people persevere despite insurmountable challenges, doubt from colleagues, and in the case of Claudius, party functionaries.

It took a generation to make the transition from works about optimistic rebuilding to sobering accounts of the past. Even then, reflection was only minimally acceptable since recent history was fraught with taboo topics. In Johannes Bobrowski's *Levinsmühle*, the author thematizes German settlers in the East. As a native-born Tilsiter, and with a family history in East Prussia and the Memel, he had personal connections with the region.⁸ In the early 1960s, he received information about a peculiar case from the 1870s: courts had convicted *Johann* Bobrowski of destroying a flood wall in order to destroy a mill belonging to a Jew named Lewin. But Bobrowski chose not to give a factually accurate account of the historical event. In the 1870s, Johann Bobrowski had become destitute and was convicted of destroying a Jew's mill. In the novel, Johannes Bobrowski changed the story, leaving the crime unpunished by the courts, the Jew destitute, and the grandfather alienated by the community. Although his story is in the distant past—instead of the 1870s, Bobrowski's narrator alternates between events in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries—Bobrowski feels compelled to characterize the German settlers in negative terms.⁹ While there are sympathetic characters in the book, the Germans are pictured as plotting, lying, and generally unfriendly towards their multi-ethnic neighbors. In the end, the past is not reflected upon; the Prussian is, as according to GDR official historiography, racist, capitalist, and base. Characters are formulaic, and the narrative form becomes the central point of interest.

That would change in the late 1960s, as regimes permitted greater room to experiment not only in voice, but in themes, as well. Experimentation in voice and theme was perhaps best taken up in Hungary, where authors such as György Konrád and Imre Kértesz breached formerly taboo topics such as the role of Hungarians in the expulsion of the Jews from Budapest, or social problems such as alcoholism and child abuse. Both authors were unique in their writing style, but their engagement with difficult topics—confronting the recent past, recognizing personal responsibility in a paternalistic system, or openly decrying social injustice (in state socialist)—was not.

In Konrád's *A látogató* [The Case Worker], the author reflects on his experiences as a social worker in Budapest.¹⁰ Although fictional, Konrád's characters are drawn from actual actors. His work details the witnesses and victims of everyday life in an industrialized, alienating (and alienated) society with no past to remember:

if nobody says anything; if the telephone keeps quiet, the radiator doesn't hiss, the loudspeaker doesn't bark, [...] if from my memory that is becoming more and more like a junk pile [...] from] official spokesmen who communicate nothing, [...] if my wife and I have gone for our usual quiet walk on the hillside the night before; if the rent, electric, and telephone bills have been paid and there's still enough money for milk, meat, fruit, coffee, tobacco, and wine.... [...]
... then, even then, this day will be still pretty much the same as every other day.¹¹

In a society where the future is prescribed by propagandistic visions of fraternal friendship and where the past is easily forgotten, ordinary life is depressingly static; small variations

(such as the ability to buy tobacco or wine) are of no importance, since the day will begin and end as it always does. It comes as no surprise, then, that for the case worker in Konrád's novel, complaints and grievances are of little concern; they will go away with time. It will still be the "same as every other day."

Konrád's commentary on everyday life, on remembering, and on counter-memory marks a significant departure from prior works in state socialism primarily in that he makes citizens if not equally, then at least partially guilty for their own collective amnesia and inaction. Konrád assures the reader that memory is not only a tool to fight power: memory can also ensure compliance with the system. In *A cinkos* [The Loser], the narrator exclaims:

Let's run, kids, the bogeyman is coming [...] What I call "I" dissolves. There is my own undoing on one side, and on the other nothing. But something must happen—am I not already what I will be one day? I am tired of lugging around the threadbare suitcase of my past. In the morning it occurred to me that I wouldn't make it to the end of the day, and this made me feel good.[...] The trouble is, we are too transparent, we can be read too fast, like a telegram.¹²

Through muddled narrative, the reader can ascertain that memory and the past still play a significant role in the self-understanding of this inmate in an insane asylum. He would prefer not to "lug the suitcase;" he wants to be freed from responsibility, to "dissolve" his own person to become the glorious man promised by the future. When the individual agrees to free himself from the weight of memory and responsibility in return for a post-totalitarian system, authors talk of the "Konrád Paradigm:" that is, where the individual is active in his own imprisonment, and where there is no unspoiled memory, since the state's subjects are active in mis-remembering.¹³ In fact, Konrád confronts the system by revealing individuals' compliance in the system.

Imre Kertész won the Nobel Prize in 2002 for his work from the 1970s, *Sorstalanság*. The narrative—like nearly all the works I am addressing—was semi-biographical. The narrator relates his experience of the concentration camp, which he survived as a child. A moving piece of literature, what is striking for the historian is his frankness in retelling the reaction of natives upon his return. The boy, György, experiences three concentration camps, the death of many friends and family. *Sorstalanság* also offers us the opportunity to reflect on phantom borders and networks of infrastructure in cultural history.

It was in the 1970s that the meta-biography attempted to go astray from the protective state, confronting the ghouls of the past. In *Sorstalanság* streets and rails take up a major role as silent characters, reminders of innocent years. György's close camp friend, Bandi Citrom, is constantly singing songs from home, explaining how things were in the past, and especially, as the narrator explains, talking about the streets.

His other often repeated thought was "I shall again walk the cobblestones of Nefelejcs Street," that is, where he had lived, and he mentioned this street and his house number so frequently and emotionally that finally I also became familiar with its attraction, almost as if I too were longing to be there, even though in my own

memory it was a small, insignificant side street somewhere in the neighborhood of the Keleti train station.”¹⁴

Exploring the streets of Budapest, György grows convinced that he shares the memory of Nefelejcs Street. When he does finally, after release from the concentration camp, arrive at the street so fancifully described by his colleague, he finds that it smells “rotten;” that the trees are small and “half-bare,” fighting for life with their “dusty leaves.”¹⁵ György assures the inhabitants of the street, half-heartedly, that their son would return from the concentration camps, like he did. All the while he thinks to himself, that his friend likely will not return to Nefelejcs Street.

Following the encounter with once imagined, now pitifully real streets, he returns to old streetcars. He did not need a map of the city, as he remembered the lines which would take him to his house, where he was uncertain if anyone in his family survived.

I climbed aboard a streetcar because my leg was hurting and because I recognized one out of many with a familiar number. A thin old woman wearing a strange, old-fashioned lace collar moved away from me. Soon a man came by with a hat and a uniform and asked to see my ticket. I told him I had none. He insisted that I should buy one. I said I had just come back from abroad and was penniless. He looked at my coat, then at me, then at the old woman, and then he informed me that there were rules governing public transportation that not he but people above him had made. He said that if I didn't buy a ticket, I'd have to get off. I told him my leg ached, and I noticed that the old woman responded to this by turning to look outside the window, in an insulted way, as if I were somehow accusing her of who knows what.¹⁶

The old woman, the other passengers in the streetcar, had already moved to forget the past. While not in the novel, the willing amnesia was common to societies in state socialism. It was encouraged by authorities, who aimed at being the fathers to a grateful populace free from responsibility.

For us, the remarkable fact of *Sorstalanság* is the way in which the author recounts his travel back from the concentration camp. While he does mention, on the road, that “he passed through former cities that were now nothing but places of rubble, with a few black remnants of walls,” he also details how inhabitants—would-be socialist citizens—disregarded his experience, so as not to feel guilt themselves.¹⁷ One Hungarian even denies that there had been concentration camps. In the 1970s, socialist authors began to explore the recent past, the ghosts in their closet. Very frequently, they did this—like Imre Kertész—through the genre of travel literature.

Indeed, while travel literature did not usually depict one Jew's return from the concentration camp, authors in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s detailed adventures abroad. Poland's best travel literature was written by Kapusiński, who had the advantage to travel west (and to Africa). His extremely popular works brought readers first to Africa, then to Central Asia, South America, East Asia, and then (after the fall of communism) to Russia. His literature fed a generation of young (and not-so-young) readers, and left its implant on children's literature and cartoons. One of the most popular cartoons from the 1960s, 1970s

and 1980s, *Bolek and Lolek*, took the same path as Kapuściński. Their cartoons brought youngsters in the late 1960s “on vacation” and “around the world.” Similarly, East Germany’s *Sandmännchen* brought children to ethnic homes around the (third) world starting in the 1960s. Czechoslovak film and literature referenced travel in passim, like in the 1984 film cult classic, *Fontána pre Zuzanu*, where the family members relate that travel was possible before 1968.¹⁸ In the GDR starting in the 1970s, a series of films and novels were released which built on the theme of travel. Here, phantom borders and networks of infrastructure collided with personal biography and national consciousness.

Egon Günther’s 1973 film, *Die Schlüssel* is about a young pair (Ric and Klaus) who decide to visit Poland for the first time. They take a plane to Cracow from Berlin for what promises to be an unforgettable trip. “The Poles are more relaxed,” is the constant refrain to be heard from the male protagonist in the film. That Poles are more “relaxed” is proven to the pair at the airport, where an unknown man urges them to stay at his apartment while he is gone on vacation, to which they agree. In the taxi cab, the driver insists on (illegally) exchanging money with the East German couple. In clubs, Czesław Niemen publically performs to a captivated audience of young and old. And when the couple is caught in the apartment by neighbors, they are not admonished for living in the apartment, but invited to drink vodka in friendly circles.

Notable about the film are the numerous scenes where the German past is directly discussed. When visiting the St. Mary’s Basilica in the city center, the guide to the church explains (in broken German), that “the altar was stolen by the Germans, by Hitler, by the Gestapo, the SS and brought into Germany. A young American soldier brought it back to Cracow.”¹⁹ During the scene, the viewer hears crying from a young Polish woman in the background. In the following café scene the female protagonist stops to recognize an elderly woman with short sleeves. There she sees a number tattooed on the woman’s arm. The camera holds still, allowing the audience to contemplate the meaning of the tattoo, after which the director scrolls across the room, focusing on the number of elderly people in the restaurant. Clearly making reference to the holocaust and extermination camps (a few miles from Cracow), *Die Schlüssel* brings East Germans on a virtual trip to Poland, where they must confront the dark German past.

Travelling with a Polish soldier friend, the two protagonists stop frequently to speak with the elderly, and the camera continually counterbalances old people with deep wrinkles and expressive faces with the young, uninhibited, new Polish society. Ric returns to the GDR in an old cargo wagon, having tragically died due to a tram accident. The director focuses on the old, wooden train wagon, which is slowly locked shut by a Polish soldier in uniform, and a white cross is sketched in chalk. One hears the old steam locomotive starting to churn, on a long return voyage to East Germany. For many viewers, the scene would call forth memories of expulsion and extermination at the hands of soldiers in 1945, or at least similar scenes in the 1955 film *Nuit et brouillard*.²⁰ The latter, a chilling documentary about Nazi death camps, was known in East Central Europe not only due to the fact that footage of areas came from the region: prominent figures such as Hanns Eisler cooperated in the work (in this case, by creating the music). The West German foreign ministry formally petitioned the French government to prohibit the Cannes Film Festival from screening the film (precisely when the FRG was trying to join NATO).²¹ That the post-war government of

West Germany wanted to prevent the world from viewing Nazi concentration camps fit perfectly with socialist propaganda.

Similar to *Nuit et brouillard*, *Die Schlüssel*'s open discussion of German guilt—as well as Polish religiosity and laxness—did not go unnoticed: after its release by DEFA in East Germany in 1973, it was retracted from international competitions shortly after its premier. Polish authorities objected to the depiction of Polish society. The East German Union of Film and Television Creators tried to cooperate with Günther—to make his work more palatable for all audiences, but got the silent treatment from the director. Eventually, when Günther cancelled his membership from the Union, he asked “What’s to explain?... I am disgusted about the incomprehensible and irresponsible campaign against *Abschied* and *Die Schlüssel*.”²² In theory, the film could be viewed by East Germans at home, but was not allowed in foreign theaters until 1977. Even then, and despite Günther’s reputation as the budding young director of the GDR, audiences were not offered venues to view the film.

A significant element of generational change—in the East as in the West—was an acceptance and complex understanding of the past. The Jewish cemetery in Slubice is an ideal example. Slubice is a tiny, backwater town in Poland. Before open borders, no one would have much reason to go there: it featured a small cinema, a handful of bakeries and a market. High-rise housing blocs were being built in the city by the 1970s. Because Slubice was a former suburb of a German town, its city council was unsure what to do with the numerous cemeteries a quarter century after the German community had been expelled. The greatest concern was the abandoned Jewish cemetery: while on the outskirts of town (like most cemeteries), the Jewish cemetery was located “on the main path of tourist traffic” connecting the city of Frankfurt Oder with the highway to central Poland.²³ Should regional authorities remove the graves and de-sanctify the grounds? Or should they keep the grounds in their unkempt condition?



Image 31. Scenes from *Die Schlüssel*. (Permission: DEFA Foundation.)

The Jewish cemetery of Slubice was one of the first sites of transnational culture which was informally built across borders in the era of open borders. Though the cemetery was not a flashpoint for dissent, people from abroad broached the silence between regional authorities and the foreign population in order to try to save a heritage site. In the 1950s, regional authorities still tried—in cooperation with local GDR citizens—to identify gravesites of Jewish soldiers.²⁴ Eckard Rieß first visited the cemetery in the 1960s, regretting the dilapidated state of the graveyard.²⁵ After the opening of borders, citizens from Frankfurt Oder could only see an overgrown wilderness. Many were outraged that nothing was being done to at least preserve what little had survived the war. East Germans' response to the Jewish cemetery was loud enough to make Polish local authorities do something. In this case, unfortunately, it was to devastating effects.

Local officials in Poland decided that the cemetery had to be demolished “in light of the opening of the border and the huge growth of tourist traffic.”²⁶ Ironically, the Jewish cemetery, which received greater attention due to the rise of tourist traffic from other East bloc countries, was victim of that very tourist traffic. Not only did they demolish the cemetery, regional authorities built a *hotel* for guests from abroad on the site. Change in understanding—such as how the cemetery needed to be preserved, not razed—occurred slowly.

For obvious reasons, it was the Germans who had the most to overcome. The East Germans' response to the state of the Jewish cemetery in Slubice partially compensated for personal guilt over inaction during the Third Reich. But in Poland and in Czechoslovakia, younger people were also confronted with difficult pasts. In Bohumil Hrabal's 1976 *Prliš blučna samota* (Too Loud a Solitude) the deeply-philosophical but dimwitted worker reflects on the trainloads of books he has to crush and recycle. Versed in the philosophical greats, the paper crusher reflects on the fate of the gold-embroidered books he sees being sent across the border in exchange for ransom money from the West German government.²⁷ All the while, he is active in destroying books (and mice), recalling a line from one of his literary victims, Heinrich Heine. In Ryszard Kapuściński's 1978 travelogue novel on the downfall of the old Ethiopian monarchy, *Cesarz* (The Emperor) *translate*, the author describes the complicity of ordinary servants of the emperor: “in the Palace questions were always asked from the top to the bottom, and never vice versa. When the first question was asked in a direction opposite to the customary one, it was a signal that the revolution had begun.”²⁸ His book could be published in People's Poland since the successor of the Haile Selassie was a communist. But for readers in the East bloc (where it was quickly translated into Czech, Hungarian and German), the journalistic novel about a travel to a distant empire which was out of touch with the world, but which was held up by the people, was a disguised judgment of late state socialism and its society.



Image 32. Scene from *Die Schlüssel* (Permission: DEFA Foundation.)



Image 33. Scene from *Nuit et brouillard*

Four years before Kapuściński published his work, the otherwise little-known East German author, Rolf Schneider—submitted a manuscript for review to the East German writers’ guild. In the work the narrator—a girl born in the same month as the Polish uprising in Poznań (June, 1956) discusses travel to Poland, setting out to find the home town of her grandmother, Grandma Helga, who recently passed away. Along the way, she becomes romantically involved with a young Pole and ventures across East Germany and Poland with her new love. *Die Reise nach Jarosław* marks a watershed moment for historians of the GDR when state socialism had moved away from strict, patronizing styles, and toward relative cultural liberalization. On the one hand, the old generation is portrayed as apolitical and personable. The only person with whom the protagonist has a close relationship is her grandmother. “Grandma Helga came to Berlin in the middle of the war from Jarosław since she lost her husband, but had a kid in Jarosław, and leaving Jarosław, I think, is the only

thing she ever resented.²⁹ Germans were unhappy to leave their homes at the close of the War. Gittie's grandmother regrets it, although she does not elaborate on the situation further. The questions are openly discussed, even if the answers are avoided. Why was Hela fleeing Jarosław? Where did her husband go? Who made her leave? Clearly, many elements are understood within a society where one in five was a former inhabitant of either Czechoslovakia or Poland.

It is also understood that some topics are taboo. Still, the protagonist's Polish boyfriend, Jan, explains that, his "father hates all Germans I don't get it.... He was in Germany ... during the occupation. He had to work in a mine. He is organist, [and was] in an accident where he crushed his knee cap. It is very difficult for him to play the organ, because of the pedals."³⁰ By 1974, nevertheless, authors had greater liberty to explore the past. In contrast to prior works, where public figures and family were held up as examples, the protagonist begins her diatribe early in the work against her parents.³¹ Not only does Gittie use the language of an eighteen-year-old—calling her parents "fogies," old people "bums" and finds things "*cool*"—she is open about formerly taboo topics, detailing more-or-less open sexism at her school, her adoration of Western music, and her desire to view American movies.

Christa Wolf, having already established herself through the *Der geteilte Himmel* (Divided Heaven) and *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (Meditating on Christa T.)—both of which received considerable attention both in East and West Germany—attempted to explain her own role in the Nazi past of a formerly German city (Landsberg, now Gorzów Wielkopolski) in *Kindheitsmuster*. She explains,

Back in the summer of 1971, [I] agreed to the proposal to drive to L., now called G. Although [I] kept telling [myself] that there was no need for it. Still, why not let them have their way. The tourist business to hometowns was booming. People who had gone came back praising the friendliness of the town's new inhabitants, and describing the roads, the food, the lodgings as "good," "fair," "adequate." You listened without any particular emotion. Topographically, you said—partly to give the appearance of genuine interest—you'd be able to rely on your memory completely: the houses, streets, churches, parks, squares, the entire layout of this ordinary town was forever preserved in your head.³²

The 1970s offered Christa Wolf, and her fictional narrative, the opportunity to transgress the phantom borders. While she had found no need before, new travel regulations of the 1970s allowed her (and millions of other East Germans) the right to travel to Poland and Czechoslovakia.

Wolf responds to a trip to Poland in 1971, asking "how did we become what we are today?"³³ The protagonist and Wolf struggle to find an appropriate answer. The three main figures in her quasi-autobiography—that is, the narrator (who experienced the rise of Nazism as a child), her mother (who, in winter 1945, left her children) and her daughter (who, we presume, is enjoying a "model childhood")—are blended together, and reveal the difficult process of remembering when new roles were adopted, or when new identities were

forced to be taken. As in Konrád's novels, the narrator of *Kindheitsmuster* struggles to find the language of consciousness:

To be inconsiderate—without looking back—as a basic requirement for survival; one of the prerequisites that separate the living from the survivors.

Question from the audience: And do you believe it's possible to come to grips with the events that you write about?

Answer: No.³⁴

Wolf—who assured West German audiences when the book was published that it was fictional—recognizes that life after Nazism required an abdication from reflection, since continual thought about the past would lead to “severe, lasting depression.”³⁵ *Kindheitsmuster* is an important work reflecting on the Nazi past of ordinary Germans. She relates how, even though in her hometown there were only few party enthusiasts, even she “longed to know how it felt to be at one with all, to see the Führer.”³⁶ Significantly, however, reflection stops in 1945, and Christa Wolf wonders “Stalin.[...] Has he died then? Has he already been buried?[...] When will we start speaking about that, too? To get rid of the feeling that, until we do, everything we say is temporary, that only then would we really begin to speak.”³⁷

In one account, she told how her (fictional) daughter, Lenka, took a trip to Prague. “Can you guess what [the East Germans sang] at night when they got drunk on Prague beers?” Lenka asked. She responded: “In a Polish town.”³⁸ The song, about a girl who hung herself after having sexual relations with a German during World War II, was particularly distasteful and brought the narrator in Wolf's novel to despair about her uncouth comrades. (Another situation was displayed in an issue of *Eulenspiegel*: a group of ‘rowdy’ Germans are sitting in a foreign restaurant, intoxicated. While unhappy nationals sit at the surrounding tables, the caption reads: “Don’t get irritated that the natives aren’t singing with you when sitting in friendly circles. They just don’t know the trusted German texts!”³⁹) Referring to tourists’ ignorance of national sensibilities, the cartoon highlights not only the lack of self-restraint, but also the perception that no one spoke foreign languages.

State socialism required that new roles be adopted after the collapse of fascist regimes. By the late 1970s, the new generation could discuss the fascist past, personal responsibility in the Holocaust, and even the illegitimate use of force during Stalinism. Travel literature, like the millions of people who travelled, was obliged to problematize difficult history, if for no other reason than that people were actually brought to establish contacts with foreigners while abroad. Children born and raised into state socialism, who neither fought in World War II nor participated—or only limitedly—in the wave of uprisings in 1956, grew up in a society of normalization, where there were spheres of compromised space. It was not compromised in the sense of counter-revolution or revolt against the state, rather in the sense that people felt they were outside of the purview of state security. The largest compromised space for these youngsters was the foreign land, to which they travelled with relative ease after the borders were opened in 1972.



Image 34. “Don’t get irritated that the natives don’t join you in a gay round of song. They just don’t know the trusted German texts!”⁴⁰

Sites of Transnational Exchange

A number of events symbolized the transnational culture emerging in East Central Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. In previous chapters, I have described the highly-scripted events Polish, German and Czechoslovak authorities planned to celebrate “socialist friendship” in the era of liberalized travel. But people at the private level also discovered their own transnational sites from abroad and while abroad. More often than not, these sites were officially sanctioned and supported. State youth organizations, regional and city councils, or small interest groups initiated events to entertain or inform the populace and at times they expended great effort to ensure that the (youth) population participated in organized festivities. Frequently, however, these festivities grew to such a degree that local populations, official organizers, or central authorities deemed them “happenings:” unchoreographed, wide-based movements with both actors and participant from across the East bloc.⁴¹

One of the major “sites” of transnational exchange was rock music. On East Central European radios in the early 1970s, music had made a genuine rock turn. Governments were no longer censoring all Western music. They had realized the futility of trying to stem the tide of Beatle mania, as well as the potential ideological strength behind listening to people like Jimmie Hendrix or Otis Redding, whom they saw as leading the fight against racial discrimination in the capitalist West.⁴² Some eastern bands were honored by substantial numbers of fans on the other side of the Iron Curtain. The best known East-West crossover was Karel Gott, whose universally-known songs introduced popular children cartoons and who fashioned himself a Liberace of Czechoslovakia. Poland’s iconic rock singer Czesław Niemen opened the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, West Germany, and was brought to the United States to record an album in 1973.⁴³ Generally, bands were only heard within single countries—neither were their lyrics translated nor their music widely-circulated. That was due primarily to lack of popularity, or due to politically motivated censorship. (As

shown in the previous chapter, not all music was allowed to cross borders, even if it was legal.)

I call rock music a site for two reasons. First, youngsters who listened to rock had to hope that the radio played the song, or they had to buy records—in shops, on the black market, or at friend's houses. Not only were these locations charged with excitement of attaining the newest music from a band, the records and tapes that contained the music also transformed normal rooms into sites. They were locations where people would remember hearing Niemen or *Omega* for the first time. The second reason why I call rock music a site is due to the transnational nature of the bands themselves. The number of rock groups playing abroad ballooned in the 1970s as communist authorities lifted hurdles obstructing such musical exchange. The Hungarian *Locomotiv GT*, Bulgarian *Grillen*, and East German *Die Puhdys* toured East Europe frequently.⁴⁴ Karin Stanek and *Czerwono-Czarni* remained a mainstay of international music festivals until the Polish singer immigrated to West Germany in 1976. “A Fictitious Report about an American Rock Festival,” was the first rock musical in the East, coming five years after “Hair” staged in New York in 1972.⁴⁵ It did not show nudity (like “Hair”), but it did explore gay sexuality, urban violence and drop out cultures.⁴⁶



Image 35. Karel Gott at the altar in a Czechoslovak kitchen.⁴⁷
(Permission: Dana Kyndrová.)

In the early 1990s, Tymothy Ryback described the adoption of rock music in socialist states as a form of cooptation: the government agreed to let some bands play, and bands agreed to tone down their lyrics, if not their amplifiers.⁴⁸ In many cases that was true: everyone in East Germany understood that the rock band *Die Puhdys* had given into pressure to toe the line, but they also knew that the *Klaus Renft Combo* had refused to do so. That eventually led to the latter group's demise, as East German authorities decided that the *Combo's* lyrics "defamed the working class" in 1975.⁴⁹ While many bands of the so-called "big-beat" era moved to streamline their style and music, that did not mean they relented in their criticism of social(ist) life, and central governments occasionally decided ex post facto that the music, the performers, or the lyrics were counter-revolutionary.⁵⁰ In many ways, the members of *Illés* were indicative of a new generation in East Central Europe.

By far the most notable (and controversial) beat was from Hungary. An *Illés* song, *Ne gondold*, shocked listeners when they told the cultural ministry, who had criticized them for their long hair and hippy attire:

Ne gondold, ó, ne, hogy tied a világ,
Nem fog mindig a szerencse könyörögni
hozzád,
És ha még most tied a szó,
Ne hidd, hogy így marad örökre,
Ajánlom, tünjél el a színről sietve.

Don't think, oh, no, that the world is yours,
It will not always bring you all the luck,
And if you still make the rules,
Do not think it will remain so forever,
I'd suggest exiting the stage quickly.

Ne hidd azt, ó, ne, hogy letagadhatod,
Mások dolgoznak helyetted, míg szerepedet
játszod,
Egész más most ez a világ,
Jobb lesz, ha végre már megérted,
Az idő lassan-lassan eljárt feletted.

Don't believe, oh, no, you can deny
Others work, while you play your important
roles,
Now this is an entirely different world,
Better get out now if you understand
Time is slowly, slowly passing you by.

The band's leader, whose namesake it adopted, rejected authorities' insistence that he cut his hair, change his clothes, or stop playing music. Instead, he took the music to clubs. Certainly, he did not call for the Hungarian Central Committee to change policy or step down, but he refused to bow to the politics of cultural conformity. Perhaps for that reason, the band was an immensely successful one, touring the bloc and even the West in the 1970s. Today, it remains a cult-group in Hungary, although the group disbanded in the mid-1970s (later to reemerge without their lead singer).

The best known case of such a happening was the 1973 World Youth Festival in East Berlin.⁵¹ The state-sponsored, mega-event coincided with the completion of the TV tower in Alexanderplatz, along with its fountains and institutional buildings, as well as the groundbreaking of the Palace of the Republic.⁵² Since Berlin hosted an earlier festival in 1951, the state had moved to drastically liberalize their rule on public orderliness. Here, the police are described as being friendly. One eyewitness said:

We were lying early in the morning somewhere and the police woke us up in a friendly way ... There was an atmosphere that before then you would never have thought possible. In the morning at the fountain this huge orgy of washing took place. And nothing happened. They just turned a blind eye. And the amazing thing was that there was food round the clock, everything was working. In the city center until eight in the morning you could drink, eat, without any hassle, without someone saying, "That's an end to it now." The amazing thing was that people stood around at Alex discussing throughout the night. Not just young people but then also workers from the pub or from their shift... something like that had never happened before... The police were really like "your friend and helper," just like in a children's magazine.⁵³

On the streets, twenty five thousand people from over one hundred nations were allowed to debate and the state did not try to control what was said. Angela Davis—a young, African-American communist who became a heroine in the East bloc after she was charged in California on trumped up gun-trafficking charges—was brought to the festival as an honored guest of Erich Honecker. And while there were public marches of youth organizations, the seemingly never-ending mass calisthenics and cult-like celebrations of the leader were nowhere to be seen.

In lieu of mass exercise, there was entertainment. In the spirit of the open border with Poland, Anna Janka (who tragically died in a plane crash only a few years later) as well as Polish hippie groups like the *Amazonkis* performed to international audiences. Wearing long hair and bell bottoms, they contrasted with many of the delegations on the other side of the Oder.⁵⁴ The American East bloc-superstar Dean Reed played folk music in the evenings.⁵⁵ R.B.—a student of Esperanto—remembered that people went "skinny dipping at night, which I thought was pretty funny, but never wanted to join."⁵⁶ Polish guests spontaneously held happenings, undressing on the Alexanderplatz and streaking the public. Here, too, the police did not arrest foreign guests.⁵⁷

The important aspect that many—even functionaries in the festivities—remember was that people were not forced to spend time in group organizations. G.A., who was at both the festivals in 1951 and 1973, remembered that the second World Youth Festival "was arranged individually" and that "political propagation... was not the most important aspect" of the festivities.⁵⁸ Scarfs were handed out to youngsters to collect signatures from new friends. But here, too, most remember how uninterested they were in the so-called "friendship scarfs."⁵⁹ Another remembered that "there were always fewer blue shirts," indicating both that it was so warm that they took off their FDJ uniform, and that people were going nude more often.⁶⁰



Image 36. Angela Davis at the World Youth Festival.⁶¹
(Permission: Bundesarchiv.)

Not only were the never-ending mass calisthenics and cult-like celebrations of the leader were nowhere to be seen, the leader had actually *died* during the festivities without anyone noticing. Long-time leader Walter Ulbricht had a stroke and a heart attack sitting at his home in East Berlin while the World Youth Festival was taking place outside his window.⁶² Ulbricht had been deposed with the support of the Soviet Union in 1971. As soon as Honecker came to power, he commenced a name changing campaign to erase Ulbricht's ubiquity from the city (the stadium of the World Youth Festival had its namesake removed before the festivities began). The festivities distracted youngsters (and their parents) from thinking about politics.⁶³ Still, it would be expected in such an atmosphere of radical liberalization and inhibition that a relatively unloved figure of GDR history—the man most responsible for the construction of the Berlin Wall and the suppression of the July 1953 Uprising—that acts of defiance would be spontaneous and widespread. But Hagen Koch, who worked as a cultural officer of the Stasi, noted that even during the funeral ceremony for Walter Ulbricht nothing of significance happened.⁶⁴ His death was not even mentioned until the closing ceremonies.⁶⁵

Can the state sponsor and organize an event which is *not* political in nature? After all, the Stasi was still monitoring the crowd, albeit with blinders. “Amongst [informal] singing groups” and “in group discussions,” the Stasi was told only to “paint a positive picture of the GDR?”⁶⁶ The Youth Festival was a carnival-esque event where people lost their sense of living in a repressive government. Perhaps for that reason, even would-be dissidents came to the World Youth Festival. One man from Altenberg, who had painted graffiti (“Dubček”) in 1968 on trains in the GDR, and who carried the Czechoslovak flag with him to provoke authorities decided he could not miss out of the celebration.⁶⁷ The young man—a twenty-

three-year-old in 1973—maintained contacts with the CSSR, although he admitted not “having the conscience of a dissident.”⁶⁸ During the festival, he came with his girlfriend to Berlin without a passport, and remarked how there were:

so many people [who came] illegally to Berlin that they were selling blankets at Alex[anderplatz].... I can remember that we once were sleeping somewhere in the morning and then we were awoken by the police with the friendly notification that the spots were needed, and that we should go to the grass in front of the Rotes Rathaus, [where] we could continue sleeping until 11. The metro stations were opened in the evening, there was an atmosphere that no one thought could exist before.⁶⁹

People could write graffiti on the walls, and nothing was done.⁷⁰ It gave him hope for the Honecker regime. They could even talk about Prague and Ostpolitik with West Berliners. For that reason, the festival was commonly known as the “Red Woodstock.”⁷¹

Similar international—and explicitly intra-bloc events—occurred at certain intervals. The annual Festival of the Three-Country Triangle in Zittau (East Germany), Liberec (Czechoslovakia) and Bogatynia (Poland) in June secured positive and sometimes negative press about the youth of each country getting together: that was one of the only days designated for youngsters that the area was fully supplied with kielbasa and beer. In the same region, tourist campaigns promoted people getting together to “grill sausages” at mountain passes.⁷² The Meeting of Friendship in Frankfurt in June, 1977 brought together thousands of people young and old to the city on the Oder. Despite the highly orchestrated nature of many events, documentary films from the festival show the unorganized contacts created between Polish and German young people. Even today, the (now elderly) participants of the festival display with pride their cloth bags, clay beer mugs and porcelain plates. Many other events were less organized. In Warsaw, people from across the bloc travelled to the Jazz Jamboree every year in the spring and to Prague for the Jazz Festival.⁷³ Similarly, the Workshop Peitz/Free Jazz hosted musicians in the small town of the Spreewald until it fell into disrespect in 1982.⁷⁴ There was a close connection between Warsaw and Peitz. As Christoph Dieckmann explains, he nearly missed his first premier as a Jazz musician in Poland:

I drove annually starting in 1975 [to Poland], as did hundreds of my peers. The Jazz Jamboree was the largest East bloc festival and our Oktoberfest. The relations between jazz fans and GDR border guards were not so relaxed. The latter naturally knew where the weird youngsters were going and tried to prevent them from going to Poland. The train reached Frankfurt Oder: Passports! They contemptuously inspected the [jazz kids]. Your personal documents. I handed them my passport. Rip, the guard tore out half of the first page. Citizen, he laughed maniacally, I see that your passport is damaged. It is impossible to let you into the People's Republic of Poland. Get off the train.⁷⁵

Fortunately, the jazz fan was able to go away from the train station and pass through an alternate pedestrian border with his regular ID. Then he took a bus to the next train station, arriving in Warsaw in the early morning. His friends were surprised that he even made it to Warsaw.⁷⁶

A more common way for adventure seekers to travel through Poland was by hitchhiking. Not only did hit songs like “*Jedziemy autostopem*” [“We’re going Hitchhiking”] make it more popular, Poland was one of the few countries which actually supported legalized hitchhiking (albeit only during the summer months). However, since it was nearly impossible to control every individual, the official hitchhiking program—called “*autostop*”—virtually legalized informal travel by foreigners in the People’s Republic. After the borders were opened in the 1970s, growing numbers of young tourists took to the street in Poland to meet the locals and to get around cheaply.⁷⁷ Organizers noted that, by the 1980s, more than a million hitchhiking booklets (the “passport” for hitchhiking) had been sold over the history of the program, an increasing amount of which were being purchased by non-Poles.⁷⁸ East German and Czechoslovak youth organizations, attracted by Poland’s official hitchhiking program, tried to legalize the movement in their respective countries. Alas, the mere thought of allowing youngsters to informally connect with (potentially) Western strangers or dissidents was too much for either regime to accept.⁷⁹

As the case of hitchhiking suggests, governments were resistant to letting citizens meet and congregate informally. In this regard, the East German government’s reaction towards the World Youth Festival and the Polish government’s response to hitchhiking were the exceptions which proved the rule. In August, 1974, the East German Central Committee was flooded with citizen complaints about the treatment of campers in Brno.⁸⁰ According to numerous witnesses, one evening at ten pm police in riot gear had come, demanded (in Czech) that the campers disperse, and almost without warning, surged into the crowd swinging batons. J.V. described how, “when I asked a policeman, why we weren’t told during the day [to move camp], another policeman pulled my head back by the hair and another sprayed tear gas in my face.”⁸¹ Another complained that when families with small children attempted to hold out in their tents, the police “slit them open with knives and sprayed tear gas inside.”⁸² Those with vehicles were forced to drive out of the city, even when they let the police know they were intoxicated; dozens were beaten in jails at night; when the jails got too full, GDR citizens were taken to the insane asylum, where they were not only held against their will, but were forced to pay 125 koruna for room and board. Of course the authorities in Czechoslovakia had an explanation. According to the Ministry of State Security, that weekend in Brno nearly 15,000 primarily young East Germans had come for the annual motocross race, and had chosen to illegally occupy a football field on the outskirts of town. They had begun to dismantle street signs and block traffic. The police, the ministry reported, interfered only when campers began setting up on the street itself, lacking room on the field.⁸³

This annual “Race for the Big Prize” was a magnet for East bloc tourists—especially from the GDR and Poland.⁸⁴ There, young people set up early and enjoyed (perhaps too much) Czech beer and hot summers. Several interviewees had fond memories of their time in Brno.⁸⁵ There was often trouble with the police, but visitors to the race were hardened fans, and were used to it.⁸⁶ Similar to visitors of the Jazz Jamboree or the Workshop Peitz,

fans who visited the race regularly expected at least some trouble when going abroad, even if they were not self-ascribed dissidents.

The “borders of friendship” offered new vistas for the dissident to go abroad. Dissidents were, despite their small numbers, crucial figures for the dissimulation of transnational culture in the East bloc. The prototypical border crossing for dissidents was not far from the site of the Festival of the Three-Country Triangle. There, as described best by Padraic Kenney, activists from Wrocław and Prague met in the mountains separating Poland and Czechoslovakia. It also happened to be close to where guards shot at passer-bys, unsure if they were mowing the lawn, or trying to escape the country (see chapter four).⁸⁷ The Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity groups exchanged literature and know-how in the 1980s, and also ensured that Polish colleagues, if caught by border guards, were blamed. As K.G. put it, everyone in Poland knew that punishment for dissident activities in Poland meant at most a day or two in jail.⁸⁸ Sentences in East Germany or Czechoslovakia were harsher. Nevertheless, people like Stefan Fechner (the son of an SED Central Committee member) or Matthias Domaschk still regularly had contact with dissidents in Czechoslovakia; in Poland, East Germans like Ludwig Mehlhorn and Gerd Poppe sought guidance and also contributed to dialogue between the countries to ensure intercultural communication.⁸⁹ When Václav Havel met Lech Wałęsa in 1990 for an informal meeting, crowds immediately understood the historical significance of location: it was in the Silesian mountains precisely where so many dissidents—but also nature enthusiasts and youth groups—went to hike from one country to the other. Sněžka lay on the pedestrian path between all three countries, and countless people went along the path in the era of open borders. The “Path of Friendship” was a beloved site where from the three states could relatively easily cross international borders.

In 1979, Polish and East German authorities discussed the problem in greater detail: government agreements from 1967 only allowed citizens from their native country into the neighboring country.⁹⁰ Since the path lay largely in Czech lands, and since Czechoslovak citizens were not hindered from travel to both countries, Czechoslovak officials saw no reason to change the agreement, although both Poland and East Germany wanted to ensure freedom of passage for all citizens. For governments, the “Path of Friendship” was a pawn: whenever there was a conflict between nations, security on the “Path of Friendship” increased, or borders were closed to citizens of third countries. As one Berliner wrote to Egon Krenz, he was denied entry to Poland when hiking along the “so-called ‘Path of Friendship.’” Polish guards, who according to the writer “were not too friendly to East German citizens,” let him know that the border was “*Für Deutsche verboten*.”⁹¹ Refusing to let the citizen pass, the guards forced him to travel back to Liberec in order to return home. His conclusion: the “*Freundschaftsweg*” (Path of Friendship) should actually be called the “*Freundschaft –weg!*” (friendship—be gone!).⁹²



Image 37. Václav Havel on his way to meet Lech Wałęsa on the Czechoslovak-Polish border
(Permission: Tomki Němec)⁹³

Conclusion: Approaching Central European Identity

The “borders of friendship,” as the last example reveals, became not only a safety valve to keep the population compliant; they were utilized to challenge the promises of each respective regime as they became more of a normality than an oddity. Even if people were occasionally prevented from entry to third countries or harassed at border crossings, passage into foreign countries had become commonplace. The petitioner in the last instance did not complain that he was not allowed to travel, rather that he had problems travelling freely to a *second* country. For him, the right to go to another East Central European country was self-evident. Citizens petitioned when their right was infringed. Why shouldn’t he be able to walk from Czechoslovakia to Poland?

Academics from the 1980s read in the *New York Review of Books*, the *New Yorker*, but also other Western journals numerous articles concerning the concept of Central Europe. The pillars of the movement were Milán Kundera, a naturalized French citizen in 1981, and Czesław Miłosz, a Berkeley professor who escaped Poland in the 1950s. Both tried to identify “Central Europe,” highlighting the weight of history on identity, the incorporation but also disdain of Western styles, the church, and of course communism.⁹⁴ The legacy of the intellectual endeavor brought scholars like Frederike Kind-Kovács and Gordon Skilling to insist on the existence of an independent and culturally unique Central Europe.⁹⁵ The unique cultural group was civil society—a loosely-formed independent organization of intellectuals united by understandings of a Central Europe founded on tradition, culture, and history. Recent research—most notably that of Stephen Kotkin and Jan Gross—contests that the communist system permitted “anything like a civil society to

exist,” since it never permitted citizens to self-organize and to “have recourse to state institutions to defend associationism, civil liberties, and private property.”⁹⁶ Civil society could not bring the socialist system down since it did not exist in the first place. Their alternative is “uncivil society”—that is the regime itself. The regime itself stopped believing in the system, letting it go bankrupt.

What I would like to propose here is that dissent against the system did not come from several thousand officially recognized dissenters, but from the millions of people who had grown accustomed to life in Central Europe. These were not intellectuals, but they were intimately aware of the system in which they had grown, and were familiar with the normative rules of behavior. Ordinary people of late state socialism grew up in and knew the ins and outs of the socialist system. Thanks to travel and TV, they also had some kind of shared experiences and consciousness.

That was particularly true for people growing up in the 1970s and 1980s. If there was any generation that liberalized travel was meant to affect, it was the youth generation of 1972. In each member country of the “borders of friendship,” party officials declared their support of youth projects, and even after some restrictions were put in place, administrations worked to ensure that the younger generation was the least affected. The fact that youngsters were consistently singled out as a target audience for travel to so-called “friend lands” reveals something about the socialist system’s logic generally, and late state socialism’s demise in particular, for part and parcel of normalization was to make contemporary society seem “normal.” For youngsters, liberalization in almost every sphere of cultural life cultivated an intense feeling of ideological irony. From music to cuisine, the East bloc experienced a significant and symbolic change which embraced internationalism and youth culture. Importantly, for youngsters in the 1970s, socialist orthodoxy and unorthodoxy were intertwined. Quite frequently, the state itself provided the fodder through which to question the state.

Take, for example, Jiří Menzel’s 1985 *Vesničko má středisková* (Home Sweet Home). The movie is revealing of late state socialism. It reveals how hesitant locals were to adopt socialist customs. When an artist comes into the town, he approaches the grandmother:

“Aunt, are there rooms to let?”

“Are you my nephew? Funny thing, I don’t know you.... The village’s changed, young man. We don’t address each other as aunt and uncle.”

“We use our first names and ‘comrade’ instead?”

“I wouldn’t insist on that. But customs have changed.”

The old woman finally accepts the artist into the home, but has no qualms about voicing her disapproval of new ways. For example, barefaced corruption. When a villager asks a party functionary about his son’s chances to get into the university, the camera exposes the apparatchik’s back-room deal, “Just say if you need a good word put in,” he states, “I found a nice place [for a dacha], see.” When the townspeople learn of the scheme by a party bigwig from the big city to have the town idiot transferred to a new prefab apartment in Prague (he wants Otík’s home as private dacha) the grandmother and the community come together

to prevent the intrusion of a city-slicker in their “Sweet Little Village” (the English translation of the film).⁹⁷

Individuals of the youth generation of the 1970s and 1980s were raised with greater access to films, music, TV, and travel. For them, travel was a normative part of industrial society. Individuals were happy they could travel to Poland and Czechoslovakia, but did not consider it a *present* from their paternalistic government. Instead—like political irony, truancy or hitchhiking—it was simply a part of everyday life. Authorities also understood the problem—belatedly—with increased contact between youngsters across borders. In 1989, Czechoslovak officials proclaimed that “the most provocative actions” of *Czechoslovak* youth groups were “in relation to the legalization of opposition groups in Poland and Hungary.”⁹⁸ It was not that students were demanding the freedom of press, or right to travel west. It was that they were talking about events in Poland and Hungary. They were penetrating *eastern* borders with increased ease, and that was a problem.

With the exception of Poland and Hungary, each Central European regime backtracked on liberalization. East Germany’s liberalization was brief: no one remembers another summer like the one during the 1973 World Youth Festival. Author Rolf Schneider, for example, was eventually criticized and nearly black-listed for “describing the GDR as a dreary grey-in-grey and [for] degrading the parental generation.”⁹⁹ Many of the rock bands of the 1970s—like the *Klaus Renft Combo* or *Omega*—were restricted or emigrated to the West. The most famous example is the Plastic People of the Universe, who were imprisoned by Czechoslovak authorities and which led to the creation of Charter 77. In East Germany, the expulsion of Wolf Biermann led to the protest of numerous figures in literature, especially writers who, themselves, tested the borders of what was possible.

But even with greater restrictions, the youth generation was intimately aware of oases of relative freedom and ideological irony. The pinnacle of ideological irony was achieved in 1985, when the foreign minister of Czechoslovakia, Lubomír Štrougal, met with his East German counterpart, Oskar Fischer, to discuss bilateral trade agreements and scientific exchange. Outside of computer technology, tractors, and automobiles, the foreign ministers discussed camcorders and videos. Štrougal stated:

The... issue concerns video technology. We have now discussed this issue in the government and in the Politburo. We simply cannot live without video recorders. Now they are being smuggled into the country in all possible ways. There are already about 50,000.

People are also bringing in cassettes with various programs that are just not good. Porno movies, for example.

I like to watch them from time to time, but ideologically that is not in order.

(Laughter)

So here I have practiced ideological samokritika. But the fact is that we need to get these audio-visual technology and video technology under control.¹⁰⁰

In the era of normalization, it was clear even to the upper echelons of power that citizens were engaging in illegal activity. Authorities were no longer trying to prevent illegal behavior. Instead, they chose to support it and, hopefully, make it somehow socialist in form. Annual

events such as the “Race for the Big Prize” or Poland’s legalized hitchhiking program, *autostop*, increasingly drew East bloc young people.¹⁰¹ In big cities, Polish Cultural Centers were renowned for selling records not only from other, more liberal East bloc countries, but also from the West.¹⁰² And even after recession into more strict cultural regulation, regimes still allowed for more cross-cultural penetration.

Normalization was a veil, partially whitewashing an otherwise repressive regime. But the 1970s was about convergence with other industrialized countries. This was not necessarily an imitation of the West: West and East were two sides of the same coin. Teksas jeans, “big beat” music, and Polish *maluch* cars were part and parcel of a normative industrial society. But by the 1980s it was clearly a dead letter. The East could not keep up with the revolution in technology. Ideology, while still crucially important to rulers, had now become multi-valient: it meant different things at different times. In the Central Committee, it meant continuing the fight for Marxism-Leninism. In public, it meant providing for the future. In private, it meant understanding what was legal and illegal. Depending on the setting, “sinning”—and limited criticism—was acceptable, and upheld the government’s claim to a normative industrial society.

While regimes were willing to provide vacation spots and cheap getaways in the early 1970s as a safety valve to social unrest for older generations, people no longer considered travel a gift by the 1980s. Instead, it was a right inherent to modern society. More precisely, people had come to understand that travel *restrictions* were an unacceptable *deviation* from the norm. People (including many from the working class) went from Poland to Germany and France constantly in the period before World War I. Millions of Europeans moved to North America in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. That said, East Germans and Czechoslovaks certainly did not see global travel as normative by the 1980s. That is what made East German demand “*Visafrei bis Hawaii*” [“Visa-Free as far as Hawaii”] so radical. But they did see travel to *socialist neighbors* as normative. (No one went to the street declaring “*Visafrei bis Tschechoslowakei*.”) When regimes moved to restrict travel altogether—even to Czechoslovakia and Hungary—the point of “criticality” had been breached.¹⁰³ The social agreement between the rulers and the ruled had broken.

I propose, that in order to understand the failure of state socialism, it is crucial to go beyond a handful of intellectuals or a handful of leaders. Travel, while not the sole reason for state collapse, changed millions of people’s worldview; visits to Ústí nad Labem, to Frankfurt (Oder), or to Warsaw made the bankruptcy of the system salient to people in ways much more personal and persuasive than Radio Free Europe or the Helsinki Accords. The generation of the 1970s grew up more aware and connected to other state socialist citizens, even if they did not speak the language or count many foreigners as their close friends. They were connected as a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, developed through a youth transnational culture which developed across the East bloc.

Chapter 6

The Politics of Travel and the Creation of a European Society*

„a stary mury runą i pogrzebią stary świat”
(“and the walls will crumble and bury the old world”)
Inscription on the Berlin Wall
from the lyrics of Jacek Kaczmarski

When the heroine of *Good-bye, Lenin!* awoke from the coma, she saw her dream fulfilled: downtrodden people were fleeing capitalism into East Berlin. In Wolfgang Becker's 2003 production, the young protagonist Alex Kerner (played by Daniel Brühl) is compelled to convince his once comatose mother (who had been unconscious during the fall of the Berlin Wall) that the explosive influx of West Germans into the capital of East Germany was due to dissatisfaction with life in the West. With his friend, Alex creates a pseudo-news report, where the newscaster reports that, “at an extraordinary meeting called by the Socialist Unity Party, the Secretary General of the Central Committee.... Granted political asylum in the GDR to West Germans seeking refuge.”¹ The scene—like the film in general—pokes fun on many levels: viewers familiar with the history of 1989 can only laugh not merely at the depiction of history turned on its head, but even at the notion that East Germany could possibly become a country within which to seek refuge. Indeed, commonplace views of post-war East Central Europe maintain that despite variations, a common thread of repression and severe curtailment of individual liberties and freedoms linked all of the

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countries. How could anyone from the West prefer life in a country where goods were hard-to-find and where daily life was so bleak?

In May 1990 life imitated art when thousands did seek refuge. However, the refugees were going from the impoverished East (Romania, Bulgaria, the Soviet Union) to the less impoverished East (Czechoslovakia and East Germany). In May, 1990, the *Frankfurter Rundschau* gave an account of train D-372, which, as reporter Axel Vornbäumen informed readers, was consistently full of travelers from abroad on transit through Dresden to Berlin. “For days now, the night train [in] Dresden... is full. On this morning, the transportation police counted 500 new arrivals.”² As the foreign minister of the GDR stated, the masses of travelers could only be “akin to the Age of Migration” [“*völkermigrationsähnlich*”].³

While full trains were not uncommon in Dresden, readers of the paper would have associated the image with two recent events, both of which had to do with vast exoduses of East Germans. The first event was in the previous summer. Travelers would invariably connect to the train number D-372 to travel to Hungary, which, in the summer of 1989, began to gradually open the borders with Austria to third party visitors.⁴ While “Budapest authorities did not originally plan to allow non-Hungarians through the official frontier crossings.... East Germans learned that the Hungarians... would no longer stamp the passports of those intercepted on the way into Austria.”⁵ In other words, even if East Germans were denied entry to Austria, the Stasi could not prove illegal departure, and hence, could not prosecute them according to §213 of the East German Criminal Code (that is, the crime of “fleeing the Republic”). Peculiarly, the decision *not* to stamp passports provided East Germans with grounds to travel to Hungary; D-372 would take them to where tens of thousands of East Germans had spontaneously set up camp in anticipation of a (semi-legal) departure.⁶

The second event which everyone would remember that spring was the exodus which had come after GDR authorities realized the loophole which the Magyars had created and decided to deny East German entry to Hungary. In lieu of exit through Hungary, Czechoslovakia was the only remaining option to emigrate for East Germans. Hence, in October 1989, thousands of citizens sought asylum in the West German embassy in Prague. After long negotiations, the East German regime allowed for a sealed train to depart for West Germany—albeit through Dresden. The demonstrations and the violent confrontations that followed when people attempted to board the train as it traveled across East German territory were some of the first palpable symbols for Westerners of the collapse of the SED and state socialism in the GDR; the state’s strict restriction of travel and emigration in 1989 commenced the carnival which would lead to the downfall of Erich Honecker’s regime, as citizens mobilized at the Alexanderplatz under the banner “*Rücktritt ist Fortschritt*” (“Stepping Down is Striding Forward”).⁷

Hence, by May 1990, the image of trains full of passengers going through Dresden acted as a symbol recalling events leading to the collapse of communism. But the trains on which the *Frankfurter Rundschau* was reporting were arriving months after the regime opened borders, and they were not destined for Budapest or Prague, rather to East Berlin. With the important exception that people were not going from West to East but East to East, in an ironic turn of events, East Germany had become the land of opportunity depicted in *Good-bye Lenin!*

The reality of mass immigration, however, was not nearly as humorous as portrayed on the silver screen. Unlike the influx of West Germans in the fictional story, the Romanian, Bulgarian, and Polish travelers were entering as tourists from what had for the previous forty years been called neighboring, “fraternal socialist countries”; but they were not nearly as welcome as the West Germans in *Good-bye Lenin!*, nor as in prior years, when the government controlled all forms of public expression. Now, instead of “socialist friends,” they were seen as a motley crew of (to use the language of the day) “Ossis” (Easterners).⁸

The reaction of the government and of locals resulted in a curious debate amongst Germans: how should they respond to a large population of emigrants after borders had opened between two different countries on opposing ends of the ideological spectrum? The GDR became restrictive as its own freedoms increased (under a non-Communist regime).

Governments did have historical examples: on three occasions after the first uprisings in 1956, Warsaw Pact countries closed borders with would-be socialist neighbors. Each successive closure led to greater wrath from local populations upset at the inconvenience of traveling or performing everyday tasks. By 1989, actions signified more than inconveniences: people were charged by the knowledge of living standards. They knew that even East Germany—which prized itself as one of the ten most developed countries in the world—was desperately trying to contain discontent. And they knew that travel had been guaranteed in principle since the “borders of friendship” had been open in 1972. By 1989, as I show in this chapter, East Germans fumed when they heard that their country would be completely sealed.

Two and a Half Closings

If, as I have argued in previous chapters, the “borders of friendship” policy adopted in 1972 was a means to diffuse dissent, then closing borders was a way to contain it. Closed borders allowed governments not only to quash public dissent at public places with the assurance that there were few to none foreigners, but also to control the circulation of information abroad. As best revealed through altering depictions of major political unrest in *Neues Deutschland*, *Trybuna Ludu* and *Rudé právo*, the national press was seen as the first and foremost instrument to influence public opinion.

In 1968, East bloc leaders worried about challenges to power, unusually blatant expressions of political critique in the Bohemian lands and Slovakia was a way to contest the communist rhetoric of internationalism. In Prague, caricatures made fun of Walter Ulbricht, the satirical magazine *Eulenspiegel*, as well as the notion that East Germans were trying to help a fraternal neighbor. In *Mladý svět*, one cartoonist compared a recent cover of the East German *Eulenspiegel* with Czechoslovak perceptions of German assistance in their country. Framed in First Secretary Walter Ulbricht’s dining room is the latest issue of *Eulenspiegel*, which propagandistically depicts Warsaw Pact countries’ stance towards Czechoslovakia through an eagle and a dove passing an olive branch between each other. In *Mladý svět*, Ulbricht is shown as a plump man, fork and knife in hand, getting ready to dine on the Czechoslovak peace dove. Given Germany’s legacy in the Czech and Slovak lands—and that 1968 marked the thirtieth anniversary of Hitler’s dismemberment of the First Republic—

East Germany's foreign ministry protested the depiction of Ulbricht and the GDR's intended role in "cutting up" the CSSR in 1968. According to East Germany's foreign minister, the caricature fed Czechoslovak nationalist tendencies and damaged bilateral relations.⁹

In August 1968, Polish, Hungarian and East German governments closed borders with Czechoslovakia. Overnight, security on the borders reflected the change. Citizens were not allowed to cross, and military personnel positioned themselves on borders to prevent Czechoslovak "enemy elements" from entering People's Poland and the GDR. Secret police agents who went to the CSSR for their vacation were required to report on their vacation to higher authorities.¹⁰ To alleviate tensions, the city council of Krnov publicly posted the notice to Polish citizens:

Polish Brothers!

You came to our city, which before your arrival lived in peace and quiet. Before you came, there had never been a shot fired either in our city or our region. We trust you, and we would love to welcome you as neighbors, tourists, friends. Military transporters, tanks and rifles do not however belong to the term "friendship." Please leave our town and let us live in peace, and think about your own country. Tell everyone at home that we are a brother who wants peace, freedom and socialism with a human face. Come to us with flowers, not guns. The entire country is unified.¹¹



Image 38. Walter Ulbricht, friend to Czechoslovakia?¹²

The only borders that were open to Czechoslovaks were those to the West: either you left to the capitalist enemy or you agreed to stay in your place at home in Czechoslovakia. This was the first in a cycle of border closures that had take place since 1956.¹³

Understandably, 1968 cast a long shadow on the government and society of Czechoslovakia. In their cultural policy, the new government was hypersensitive and draconically restrictive. In 1976, when Lubomír Beneš and Vladimír Jiránek revealed their (now famous) Claymation figures, Pat and Mat, to television audiences, Czechoslovak authorities initially protested the over-politicized depiction of two friends trying to cook a chicken. They thought the color of the protagonists' t-shirts—red and yellow—reflected the Soviet-Sino split.¹⁴ In the cartoon, the two friends lost the chicken they were trying to roast, but decided to divide the chicken's egg, so as to feast on the spoils once it hatched. The allusion to Ulbricht feasting on the Czechoslovak dove in 1968 was too much: Lubomír Beneš and Vladimír Jiránek did not create another cartoon for three years. In many ways, this was the *Zeitgeist* of normalization.

That *Zeitgeist* was also reflected in travel. As explored in previous chapters, Czechoslovak border guards seemed more willing to harass. Czechoslovak officials on the border were more reserved, more likely to refuse service to East bloc foreigners, and less likely to make meaningful contact with outsiders. The Czechoslovak government did indeed sign agreements for liberalized travel with East Germany and Poland. And while citizens of foreign countries were allowed access to Czechoslovakia, Czechoslovak citizens were prevented the same degree of liberalized travel abroad. Travelers did not need a passport or notarized invitation, but they did need a voucher from government travel agencies (as well as a currency exchange booklet). This effectively allowed the Czechoslovak government—which was still hypersensitive to unfettered border penetration—to cap the number of Czech and Slovak travelers to the GDR and Poland, even if the variety of traveler was harder to control.¹⁵ Ironically, however, it was only Czechoslovakia which imposed such restrictions. East German and Polish authorities did not include long-term measures limiting travel from other countries to restrict movement.

Legally, the agreements establishing “the borders of friendship” allowed for limited wholesale closure of the border. Outbreaks of diseases (such as the foot-and-mouth disease epidemic in 1972/1973) or national elections did bring the temporary closure of borders.¹⁶ But astonishingly, ministries of foreign affairs either did not foresee unrest; believed that the open border policy would not be problematic; or simply did not have the administrative tools to devise an easy way out of the travel agreement. This meant that when governments moved to seal borders in the new era of liberalized travel that they would almost inevitably heighten tensions on the ground. After all, if daily propaganda downplayed political unrest abroad, the fact that suddenly millions of people could not cross a border transformed the importance of an event. Sealing borders changed the semantic weight of an event: accordingly, it was not a mild outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, it was an epidemic; it was not a bunch of rowdies and hooligans causing problems, it was a full blown political crisis; trains besmirched with hateful slogans were not examples of hooliganism, but a Trojan horse bringing crisis to the home country.



Image 39. Pat and Mat in *Kul'áci*, Waiting for the Egg to Hatch.
Note how the two friends drew an exact dividing line in the middle of the egg.

As was the case between the Slovak lands and Hungary, trains from Poland also betokened trouble for the GDR. There the independent trade union, *Solidarność*, was legalized by Polish courts in 1980. In the late summer of 1980, it became increasingly clear that Poland—its party having changed leadership after strikes, and having crumbled under the pressure from an outside workers' union—was not viable as a state-socialist regime. Both neighboring governments were willing to close the border in 1980, not only to contain *Solidarność*, but also to conclude an era that had threatened their consumers with excess shoppers from Poland. Across the border, the Polish government was in dire straits: in a last attempt to quell basic food shortages, the Polish government moved to increase the maximum amount of zloty Poles could exchange for East German marks and Czechoslovak koruna on 10 September 1980.¹⁷ That was followed by ration cards for essential goods. The camel's back had been broken: Poland's neighbors had already decided that, in the event of rationing, the borders of friendship had been breached, and they sealed the border.¹⁸ But in shutting the borders with Poland, both governments had to face a public which had grown accustomed to "socialist travel."

In contrast to popular reactions towards the closure of borders with Czechoslovakia in 1968, the immediate response of many GDR and CSSR citizens was positive. The Stasi, in particular, was active in assessing the reaction of ordinary East Germans. They found that ordinary people—even when they "had nothing against Poles"—supported "temporary" border closure.¹⁹ "I think that the temporary decision is something which helps both countries—[it helps both] Polish workers in stabilizing their country and us in sustaining our people."²⁰ Poland's loss, in other words, was its neighbors gain.

The Stasi and the Czechoslovak secret police (StB) both closely watched trains coming from the Polish People's Republic. By October, train directors reported to East

Berlin that international trains were no longer being boarded by station directors in Kostrzyn: “the train station directors stay in their office.”²¹ More than the rise of *Solidarność*, some teenagers and residents close to the border remember the long waits at border train stations in Poland.²² By the end of the month, nearly hourly telegrams from border stations reported to central ministries in Prague and Berlin about the situation on the border. On 27 October 1980, the political department of the Deutsche Reichsbahn wrote to the minister of transport, Otto Arndt, that

at 12:45 at the station Lichtenberg [we] found several types of letter-sized flyers in Polish glued on a passenger wagon.... The content [of the flyers] could not be translated. At 8:45 on 27 October 1980 [the next day] in the same train flyers were distributed throughout the train and had even been pasted on windows and in compartments.... From the text one can infer it concerns an action of the “Solidarity” union movement.²³

The train with flyers was one of a handful of trains that crossed the Polish-East German border many times daily; it was the only one that went to Szczecin (which, next to the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk, was a major hub for the first independent union in communist Poland). The ministry of transportation was alarmed at the potential of the Polish virus “infecting” the East German population. Their fears were not entirely unfounded: workers in Berlin, Leipzig, in Frankfurt and more generally across the country respected the actions of their Polish counterparts, even if they were anxious about the outcome.²⁴

What the president of the political division of the Deutsche Reichsbahn did not know was that on 24 October, the newly elected First Secretary of Poland, Stanisław Kania, had telephoned First Secretary of East Germany, Erich Honecker, to speak of developments in Poland before traveling to Moscow. They spoke for nearly an hour. Outside of pressing concerns about the delivery of coal to the GDR (neither Czechoslovakia nor East Germany had received any since August), the main point of discussion was the upcoming decision to close the border and provisionally nullify the liberal travel legislation. Kania was distressed about those rumors, stating that “everyone in the [Polish] party [knew] that the agreement was an initiative of Comrade Erich [Honecker].” He pleaded with the East German leader, arguing that Borders of Friendship was not only about trade, and to end the agreement would simply “not be right.” Honecker responded that since “the condition of [East German] retail trade was so fragile, it could not be put off any longer.”²⁵ Three days later, the same stance was taken in a discussion between the secretary of the SED Central Committee and the Soviet Politburo. Secretary Joachim Hermann stated that Poles were “racketeering,” a practice that needed to be halted:

I would like to inform the [Soviet] comrades of the fact that the Politburo of our party has decided to change the agreement on pass- and visa-free travel between the GDR and People’s Poland temporarily. This measure has become necessary because pass- and visa-free travel has been used for purposes in contradiction to its basic principles. Mass purchases and racketeering have reached an indefensible magnitude.

This activity has come under increasing criticism on the part of the population of the GDR.²⁶

Clearly, from the East German standpoint, Polish shopping practices, as well as illicit trade, were the central issue in forcing the border closure. Gustáv Husák also charged the foreign ministry with closing borders. In defiance of numerous requests that the CSSR expand tourist traffic with Poland, the foreign minister echoed East German newspeak:

An important form of relations between our countries is tourism. As you know, we were forced to enact several temporary measures which somewhat restrict the exchange of individual tourists and prevent negative phenomena that afflicted supplies in our border areas, [such as] violations of customs and trade regulations due to adverse developments with People's Poland.²⁷

Both countries promised to lift restrictions after measures had been enacted to ensure “friction-free” transnational travel.

For their part, the Poles were bitter about the unilateral decisions to close the “borders of friendship,” and when the press reported the closure it squarely pinned responsibility first on Berlin and then Prague. A short notice from 31 October informed Polish readers that limitations had been placed on individual travel, and that they were “limitations—initiated by the GDR.”²⁸ This came just days following an editorial from the East German Press Agency to Poles that had praised the open border concept as a “step in serving friendly get-togethers between citizens.” The editorial went on to note, however, that, “It has changed.... The decisions that have been taken are without doubt restrictive for the citizens of both countries. They are, nevertheless, necessary.”²⁹ Acting preemptively, Poland's neighbors seemed to be saying, unequivocally, “all's well that ends well.”

For citizens across the East bloc, the “temporary” nature of the GDR and CSSR actions toward Poland seemed ironically delusional. Overcoming the symbolism of an independent trade union supported by Polish workers, Poland's economic collapse under Western debt coupled with state-planned inefficiency, as well as the political anxiety at home and abroad seemed impossible. It was also intellectually demeaning since nearly everyone understood that the closure was all but temporary. That did not mean, however, that people in power did not try to lift travel restrictions.

It also did not unequivocally mean that citizens of other East bloc countries were happy to see the border closed. When M.S. and H.S. – an East German/Polish couple married for over three years – attempted to invite M.'s aging mother from Radom for the Christmas holidays, local police refused to give an official stamp on the letter of invitation. M.'s husband, knowing a few local city administrators, decided to approach them personally to try to get the letter stamped, and the visa approved. Sitting in an office of such an administrator, it became clear that he would not receive it, however. Infuriated, he shouted at the local officials: “what's the point of the so-called friendship between peoples, if we can't even invite family during Christmas!”³⁰ While the family did eventually receive a visa for the mother-in-law (they reportedly spoke with family friends in the Ministry of State

Security), the outburst of frustration was a genuine expression of the hopelessness in late state socialism.

At the time an East German twenty-something, R.G. was never caught smuggling, but also never tried smuggling. A man in his young twenties when the border opened, he was interested more in film and theater.³¹ Poland, as was known throughout East Germany and Czechoslovakia, screened many more western films and was less restrictive when it came to theatrical experimentation on the stage. When the border was closed, he felt that it was not the Polish regime which was the problem, but the overly sensitive East German regime. “The government said that everything was normal across the border, but they refused to let us travel,” R.G. said. “Even though they said it was going to be a temporary closure, everyone knew it was going to be closed much longer.”³² His primary concern, however, was that his Polish friends were no longer able to travel anywhere outside of the country; living on opposing sides, he was unable to visit his colleagues in the Poznań, Gdańsk, and Łódź nearly as much as he would have liked.

Unlike dissenters and ordinary citizens, powerful figures were happy to see the borders sealed. The government in Prague worked bilaterally with their counterparts in the GDR to ensure that the language of closure remained the same: they colluded in the delusion.³³ Due to restrictions, only three percent as many Poles went to Czechoslovakia in 1981 as compared to 1980; twenty percent as many Czechoslovaks went to Poland in 1981 as compared to 1980.³⁴ In East Germany, polls found that “the announcement [to close borders] was overwhelmingly welcomed... by train conductors.”³⁵ Interviews with the state workers’ union in the GDR echoed this sentiment. A welder in Niesky said “it was high time for [the borders to close];” another “feared that we might get the Polish sickness.”³⁶ Party member Johann Böhlke of Anklam said that “it couldn’t keep going [the way it was], that they kept on taking advantage of our generosity.”³⁷ Generosity is hard to measure. By 1980, East Germans were right in saying that theirs was a relatively wealthy country, at least in comparison to other East bloc states. At the same time, Czechoslovaks were complaining about GDR citizens taking advantage of their generosity. The entire open border project was built on the fundamental idea that—through interpersonal everyday exchange—the wealth of each signatory country would be shared and, eventually, parity would be achieved. A temporary lifting of liberalized travel to Poland would be understandable if, once political and economic order had been reestablished border regimes were restored. But provisional measures proved hard to remove.

The Polish government, the press and even civil society were most audible in their desire to restore the status quo ante.³⁸ In an unusually brazen attempt to represent Poland’s people, even the head of *Solidarność* protested against the closure of borders. In an interview with Western journalists, Lech Wałęsa decried the closing of borders with Czechoslovakia and East Germany as “a very bad development.” He was “devastated” about new hurdles being put into place to prevent contacts between people. *Solidarność* was “trying to encourage that the decision [to close borders] was reversed.”³⁹ Some people—especially youngsters—remember how difficult it was in border towns like Liberec and Těšín to be cut off from friends. K.J. understood how important travel had become to her and her friends in Ostrava. When she was told that she could no longer travel to Poland, she protested with border guards: “why shouldn’t friends be allowed to see each other?”⁴⁰ Unsuccessful in her attempt

to cross, she wept about the lost opportunity to go hiking—the Czechoslovak pastime—with her Polish girlfriends.

Almost immediately after martial law was lifted in the summer of 1983, the Polish ministry of the interior communicated to the press: “as a result of sizable number of queries regarding 26 July... the issuance of passports has resumed.... but we have to keep in mind the change of relations with other countries, [especially in regards to] the reinstatement of visa- and passport-free travel through different countries.”⁴¹ So many people had written the interior ministry that it felt obliged to publish an announcement in a major Polish newspaper. In an article three years later, the same newspaper ensured readers that “a goal [of modern Polish-East bloc politics] is the reinstatement” of the “borders of friendship.”⁴²

But by 1986, the Polish economy had declined to such a degree that it was considered on par with third-world, developing countries. Even Poland’s immutable state bureaucracy called for private input for innovative approaches to rectify economic recession by 1987.⁴³ Yet representatives of the state thought their sincere attempt to solve economic problems, coupled with the suppression of *Solidarność* should have provided the basis for lifting the “temporary” travel restrictions. But the East German consular attaché to Poland noted in November, “answering the question [of reinstating ‘the borders of friendship’] has to be seen through the lens of economy, which has changed after the modification of price policies in People’s Poland. For that reason, a return to the situation of 1971 is impossible.”⁴⁴ Poland’s representative, Bilinski, retorted that even the USSR had lifted restrictions; “it is finally time that other fraternal countries likewise reach the same conclusions” (underlined in the original).⁴⁵ The language of dissent and Helsinki had also made its way to the upper tiers of power. Bilinski

explained that the Polish state considers the reinstatement of the 1971 agreement on visa-free travel between the two countries as timely, taking into account the complete normalization and stabilization of the Republic of Poland. Reinstatement is also necessary in view of the development of relations between European states in the framework of the CSCE congress, which promotes humanitarian contact... and obliges [positive] examples between socialist countries. (underlined in the original)⁴⁶

Bilinski and the Polish government wanted desperately to prove to their people that the trust of their neighbors had been won. Yet in 1986 that was still not possible. As would be expected of states with shortage economies, consumption was considered to be political in many ways.

Starting in 1987, but going well into 1989, the East German government blamed foreigners from East Central Europe for the difficulties being experienced in the interior. In 1988, the minister of trade and supply reported that “since 1982, the growing number of annual arrivals of foreign tourists in the GDR correlates with.... the shortage of goods,” and that a one-month study at the CENTRUM-Kaufhalle at the Alexanderplatz had counted, “12,000 foreigners, primarily from Poland, as opposed to 8,000 East German citizens.”⁴⁷ A Stasi report noted that East Germans were vocally complaining that “the Poles should go work properly”; “they should lock them up”; or “[they] don’t go to work, just live on the cost of others.”⁴⁸ In response, the chair of the Council of Ministers, Willi Stoph, demanded

that people of the GDR be informed about government attempts to prevent foreigners from buying out goods in shops. He also wanted that it be published that the Polish government had been explicitly warned to control travel to and through the country.⁴⁹ In a notable departure from egalitarian rhetoric, the Council also suggested hiring more “male workers... during peak buying hours”; “to deliver sought-after goods only during non-peak ‘foreigners’ buying’ hours”; and “warehousing goods away from the center of towns” (e.g., away from train and bus stations).⁵⁰ The East German government was taking drastic (and discriminatory) measures to control travel and so-called “*Kaufstourismus*,” or consumer tourism.

Undaunted, Poland’s undersecretary of the foreign minister, Henryk Jorszek, worked in the direction of international openness, and brought up the issue of liberalized travel again in August 1987. He carried a personal letter from the foreign minister “expressing the unrelenting will to reestablish the rules for travel” with East Germany and Czechoslovakia. It was “mutually beneficial” for all countries and reflected the “current state of relations between our countries.”⁵¹ He also brought up the official cause of border closure to Poland. Referring to illegal smuggling, he noted that the number of cases “was not large,” and added that “Poland also had to deal with excessive consumption of textile articles, leather goods [and] crystal” by GDR and CSSR citizens.⁵²

A few months later, the mouthpiece of the communist party in Poland, the *Trybuna Ludu*, openly complained that East bloc border guards were discriminatory towards Polish citizens.

Controls are inadequate, formalized, or inconsistent when it comes to the complaints of Polish citizens about unfair treatment of officers and regulators... [especially] in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, the GDR and Romania... The treatment of Poles [at borders] contributed to the opinion that [border guards see] all Poles as resellers and speculators. Such an assessment is unjustified. (Underlining in the original.)⁵³

The following year Press Secretary Jerzy Urban said the government was working to solve the problem of discrimination against Poles abroad.

The treatment of foreign visitors in East Berlin did not always go unnoticed. At the CENTRUM in Alexanderplatz there was a muted outcry against the party line, as well. In a letter to the Central Committee, a surveillance worker at the shopping center, said the measures “could in no way be accepted,” and that “if they [that is, foreigners] have committed a crime, they are still human beings, and should not be debased [through] strip searches, the use of truncheons, or cursing.”⁵⁴

To Urban, the problem was not Poles’ illegal behavior, but structural hurdles which made it impossible to travel comfortably and legally. In *Życie Powszechne*, he said that the government aimed to raise the amount of currency Poles could exchange in several countries—especially Hungary.⁵⁵ The occurrence of illegal trade, he noted, was “merely a epiphenomenon,” since Poles were not legally allowed to exchange enough money to go on vacation. Since his statements were in a Polish newspaper, Urban was likely preaching to the choir. Still, the fact that by 1988 no Central European country had returned to the liberal travel regimes of 1980 seemed to many a depressing recognition of the state of affairs in

East Central Europe. The fact that it was actually easier to go to West Germany only added to the ironic delusion. In their attempt to encourage other central committees to revert to the treaties of 1971, Polish authorities increasingly noted how “larger numbers are going to capitalist countries instead” since travel to “socialist brother countries do not equivalently reflect their political and economic relations” with Poland “and growth [in tourism] is hindered.”⁵⁶ Indeed, the solution for Polish authorities—markedly different from the GDR regime only one year later—was to radically reaffirm the right to travel.

In May 1988, press agencies reported that the notoriously long lists of banned goods, as well as the custom duties for others, had been annulled when traveling to Poland. The move was made before the start of the tourist season and was aimed at alleviating problems of travel to Poland for the 28 million arrivals each year as well as, most importantly, to “boost the supply of goods and basic food stuffs.”⁵⁷ Finally, days before Christmas 1988, the government declared that every citizen of Poland had the right to receive a passport valid for all countries. Crucially, the passport could be kept at home—gone were the days of demeaning supplication and humiliating questioning (at least at home, in Poland).⁵⁸

If the numbers of tourists grew after Poland’s decision to issue universal passports to all citizens, they were dwarfed a year later, when stability of the entire East bloc was questioned as growing numbers of political and economic emigrants began their exodus from Hungary, whose government had liberalized travel not to state socialist countries—but to the “class enemy.”

The exodus began in the summer along the shores of the Balaton Lake—a beloved vacation site for East Germans. Young Hungarians remember hundreds of Germans setting up camp on the Balaton, and especially along the Neusiedler Lake bordering Austria. There “Tante Agnes”—who issued daily parking permits—worked as a good Samaritan on the side, informing individuals when and where it was safe to cross into Austria.⁵⁹ Later in August, East Germans flooded across the Hungarian border to the small town of St. Margarethen in the Austrian Burgenland, and the middle-aged M.S. took in refugees into her home as they came searching for water, a place to sit, or simply to celebrate their reaching Austria.

To the East Germans’ horror, a German-speaking border guard came to the residence of M.S. They were certain that the petite woman had informed the Stasi of their presence. The uniformed guard, M.S.’s husband, had to explain that he was simply an off-duty officer, and that they “had already reached freedom.”⁶⁰ On this particular day, only 600 East Germans escaped the East bloc. But over the summer, nearly 100,000 East Germans went the same path, over the official objections of the GDR government.⁶¹ In response, East Germany revoked the right to independent travel to Hungary. At the same time, it left only Czechoslovakia as the last country East Germans could travel to with relative ease.⁶²

In October, the Central Committee of the SED received a letter from the S. family of Dresden: “Our government has thanked workers for their diligence throughout forty years of the GDR’s existence, [and] for the achievements of the socialist social order. In the same breath, the only country to which we could travel without difficulties as GDR citizens has been closed.”⁶³ The S.s’ destination country was, of course, Czechoslovakia. The GDR had decided, on 3 October 1989 that open borders in socialism were to be sealed “temporarily.” The S.s asked if they were not supposed to cancel their long-planned autumn trip. They had

read in the newspaper that people “true to their socialist state,” did not have to worry about the closure, all they had to do was simply file a visa declaration. “The communiqué” they had read was “completely unbelievable.” They reflected on the past: in 1980 they had “personally witnessed” how the Polish border was closed due to political turbulence, an action which was also supposed to be temporary. But, they wrote, nine years later it was still virtually impossible to travel to Warsaw, Łódź, or even Zgorzelec without a personal invitation or visa. They felt like “criminals locked up in a 168,000 km² land.” They concluded: “That’s the thanks we get, that is the generous gift the government has given its workers.”⁶⁴

A mass of complaints piled on authorities’ tables when the open border project was restricted for East Germans starting in the summer and autumn of 1989. I.R. wrote to complain that “we found out that the passport- and visa-free traffic between the GDR and CSSR was temporarily lifted for citizens of the GDR. The hope that this was in fact temporary was killed with [a further] communiqué.” She reminded officials about a peculiar similarity: “After the temporary lifting of visa-free tourist travel to the People’s Republic of Poland, which has now been lifted for more than eight years, this is the next big disappointment for us.... In the regions close to the border, day-long trips there had become a favorite hobby.”⁶⁵

It was not only a hobby: by 1989, people understood travel within the East bloc as a right. Where it was limited, governments advocated maintaining liberalized travel to a few select countries; where it was permitted citizens understood that it was intractable. After all, as one citizen explained in a letter to the Central Committee, travel to Hungary, Romania, or Czechoslovakia came in exchange for other rights which had been sacrificed. Highlighting the human element of closed borders, the writer complained that travel had become impossible not for her, but her husband, a policeman from Leipzig. Asking how it could be that the police showed less allegiance to their state than did regular citizens, she demanded an explanation, resulting in a two and a half hour conversation with a member of the Department of Security Questions (*Abteilung für Sicherheitsfragen*).⁶⁶ At the meeting, she related her frustration: it was enough that she and her husband had “broken relations with members of the family in the West,” now they were forbidden from traveling to familiar destinations in nearby Czechoslovakia.⁶⁷

In the summer of 1989, the B. family of Görlitz finally decided to apply officially to leave East Germany permanently. The reasoning behind the application was not oppression in East Germany, nor the lack of travel rights to the West. Rather, the treatment they received by the Czechoslovak authorities was so “depressing” that they felt they had no choice but emigration. While on vacation, they were accused of attempting to leave the Republic illegally more than fifteen kilometers away from the border and held “by soldiers with machine guns” for sixteen hours.⁶⁸ As soon as they returned home, they decided that they could no longer live in East Germany, where even the right to travel to socialist neighbors was now placed in question for fear of repercussions in the “friends’ land.”⁶⁹

The East German government, whose authorities were trained for years to be attentive to detail and respond to citizens’ objections, were hesitant to respond to so many complaints about travel in the precarious summer months before their ultimate demise. After 9 November, protesting families received a formulaic letter declaring:

Esteemed Colleague!

We thankfully received your complaint in connection to tourist traffic.... Since that time, you have learned through publications in the press and through radio and television transmissions, the temporary rules have been lifted once again. The cause for your complaint thus no longer exists.

With Socialist Greetings,
Miethe⁷⁰

Indeed, the GDR had not only dropped “temporary” restrictions of tourist traffic to the CSSR after 18 October, in the months after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a steady stream of visitors were flowing into the GDR. Most were Westerners, who hoped to catch a fleeting glimpse of state socialism before the GDR disappeared forever. However, as mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, the GDR also became a Mecca for citizens of East Central Europe.⁷¹

On 3 November 1989 in a telegram to East Germany’s foreign minister from Warsaw, representatives from Poland’s foreign ministry anticipated that the GDR would try to restrict movement. “Poland’s mass media has widely published the GDR’s intentions to liberalize travel and pass regulations” for East German citizens.⁷² For that reason, the minister of foreign affairs in Warsaw “anticipated that restrictive measures” on Polish travel will be received “with a lack of understanding and a negative reaction.”⁷³ A month later, after the Berlin Wall had fallen and East Berliners freely crossed into the West, the *Rzeczpospolita* published a statement from the government:

The Polish government received the GDR’s most recent restrictive decisions, which discriminate against Polish citizens residing in or traveling through the country, with distress and disapproval. They are in contradiction to the declarations of the new regime of the GDR promoting the development of friendly and neighborly relations with Poland as well as the traditional and wide-spread contact between the people of both countries.... They also go against the closing document of the CSCE.... The Polish government demands the repeal of the decisions and declares itself prepared to take cooperative steps to prevent negative phenomena in tourist traffic. In order to achieve this goal, a Polish delegation from the foreign minister has been sent to Berlin on 28 November.⁷⁴

The Polish ambassador in East Germany also complained in early December. Rampant discrimination of Polish citizens was being tolerated on the streets: Poles were denied entry into shops, refused service in restaurants and bars, and arbitrarily interrogated by the police.⁷⁵

East Berlin’s Lichtenberg railway station was the arrival point for Eastern migrants. As the main hub for trains from abroad, Lichtenberg station had been the scene of numerous unpleasant confrontations between border guards and visitors.⁷⁶ But now, in the spring of 1990, as American journalist Mark Fisher wrote, visitors sought refuge at Berlin Lichtenberg: “refugees huddled in corners around the station – large families and single men,

Gypsies, Romanians, Poles, [and] Bulgarians.”⁷⁷ “The station [was] a mess,” he continued, and “littered [by a] field of chicken bones sucked clean, filthy shawls that serve as blankets, [and] bundles of belongings.”⁷⁸ As more arrivals flooded into Lichtenberg station, the area of immigration would expand to the periphery. Austrian Dieter Stacker went to the station, only to find that, while “some of the new arrivals stayed at the station and camped at the lockers, two gymnasiums [were] also occupied [and] in East Berlin’s Biesdorf quarter, hundreds of Romanians live[d] in the barracks.”⁷⁹

Travelers had come to East Berlin fleeing acute social hardship. In the atmosphere of uncertainty across the region—Romania was experiencing a Thermidorian reaction from reform communists, Yugoslav republics were demanding greater autonomy, and all of the socialist countries were grappling with economic collapse—the GDR was measurably safer than the respective home country and money earned on a single day at Berlin Lichtenberg was equivalent to several months’ salary.⁸⁰ Even if some would belittlingly claim that many travelers understood “the difference between East and West Germany only vaguely,” it was clear to every Easterner that crossing the border to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was still demonstrably more difficult than arriving to Lichtenberg. Strangely, however, while the FRG had extensively pushed to open borders to the East in prior generations, travel agreements with most Warsaw Pact countries still required that Eastern tourists have both a passport and a visa for entry. Hence, as one Czech woman recounted, while it was relatively easy to get to Italy as early as 1988, if “she wanted to [get to] the Federal Republic,... she had to wait in a queue for an eternity.”⁸¹

Visas notwithstanding, even before the SED allowed the Wall to crumble under the stress of popular protest, East Germany was comparatively wealthier and better-stocked than other Warsaw Pact countries. More often than not, goods were also comparatively cheaper in the GDR than in other socialist states.⁸² The difference after 9 November, of course, was that visitors could receive West German marks and Western goods in both halves of Berlin; in the months after the revolutions across East Central Europe, both had significantly abetted the creation of a “double currency market” in Prague, Warsaw, and Budapest.⁸³ As such, travelers preferred not only to reside at Lichtenberg, but also trade at make-shift marketplaces. “The immigrants,” wrote Monika Zimmermann, “had transformed [East Germany’s showplace,] the sterile Alexanderplatz into an oriental bazaar.”⁸⁴

Confronted with a huge new population of travelers, authorities both in East and West Germany were hard pressed to devise solutions to logistical and social problems. They desperately tried to calculate how many immigrants would arrive—with figures ranging in the thousands to the hundreds of thousands—while media and politicians chastised the GDR government for the “total disorder” in East Berlin. “Nobody knows how to deal with populations fleeing [their home countries in Yugoslavia and Southeast Europe],” wrote *Der Spiegel*.⁸⁵ The *Frankefurter Rundschau* added that, although the state had developed perhaps the most sophisticated border controls, this “wave of flight confronted citizens and authorities completely unprepared.”⁸⁶ Authorities put the People’s Army (the *Nationale Volksarmee*, or NVA) to work in the capital and in the peripheries in an attempt to transform virtually overnight a closed capital to an open refugee camp.⁸⁷ But even if enough housing were to be found, the GDR did not have enough translators or administrators to accommodate the arriving masses.⁸⁸

One of the basic problems for the GDR was that, in terms of citizens from other socialist countries, there had never been a legal distinction between the tourist and the refugee. GDR's neighbors, according to the logic of international cooperation and socialist understanding, could not perpetrate crimes against their citizens; the notion that Romanians, Hungarians, or Poles would emigrate to the GDR in search for asylum was, literally, categorically impossible. So infrequently had foreigners emigrated to East Germany, authorities had yet to create the administrative categories of "asylum seeker"; as such, would-be refugees were considered tourists, and many citizens who did travel to Lichtenberg described their flight to East Germany—conscious both of the dangers in expressing their intention to stay as well as the lack of asylum rights—in terms of a vacation or a short trip.⁸⁹ As *Der Spiegel* wrote, the GDR was a "juridical no-man's-land."⁹⁰

If GDR authorities were overwhelmed by the wave of immigrants, contemporary readers in the West were equally shocked at the sudden surge to East Germany. While incomparable to other mass migrations just after WWII, the magnitude of Easterners traveling to the newly reformed state both recalled and exceeded the number of East Germans traveling to Hungary and Czechoslovakia just over six months previously.

As Easterners flowed into Berlin Lichtenberg, reporters uncomfortably noted "the growing hatred towards foreigners in Berlin."⁹¹ In department stores, employees called to shoppers to "secure their bags," wrote one German, when "Romanians entered the shop,"⁹² and people pondered "what would happen... when the Poles [*die Polen*]⁹³—20,000 of which have already applied for citizenship in the GDR—arrive?"⁹⁴ On the outskirts of East Berlin, citizens' committees protested housing emigrants in their jurisdictions.⁹⁴ In a remarkably similar report to that of the Stasi to Willi Stoph, one member of the people's police [*Volkspolizei*] stated bluntly: "They [Eastern foreigners] should develop something at home, instead of coming here. The problem is open borders."⁹⁵ Nearly a year after East Germans had sent their complaints to the Central Committee about travel restrictions, now the only fear relating to travel in many Germans' minds was that the border would not be closed quickly enough. As one reader's commentary on 10 February 1990 in the Frankfurt (Oder) *Märkische Zeitung* [Mark Newspaper] stated, "[we] should greet a border closure, since we won't be plundered and bought out by the Poles."⁹⁶

What made the situation even stranger was that, concomitant to demands to close the border with neighbors, East Germans were successively gaining greater rights to travel to Western countries; officials in Bonn had negotiated with neighbors to remove visa requirements for citizens of both East and West Germany. Hence, while many were complaining at the sight of the "oriental bazaar" at Alexanderplatz, readers of the *Neues Deutschland* were informed that France and the Benelux countries would welcome East German waves of tourists.⁹⁷ Similarly, Norway's foreign minister, Kjell Magne Bondevik, visited his GDR counterpart in Berlin to announce the liberalization of travel agreements by 1 July 1990. At the foreign ministry (just a stone's throw away from the Alexanderplatz,) both representatives "underscored their interest to build closer economic and cultural cooperation."⁹⁸ Meanwhile, the East German government decided that Romanians would only be allowed into the country on the "condition of a written invitation," categorically declaring that "the social challenges of East Europe cannot be solved on land of the GDR," as Interior Minister of the GDR (and member of the CDU), Peter-Michael Diestel, put it.⁹⁹

As the GDR and FRG worked on unification, visa restrictions—hitherto unheard of since the 1970s—would be imposed on other East bloc countries; for a year after the “explosive influx” of foreigners, citizens of countries who had only recently shed their communist regimes, all travel to Germany would require a visa (and passport), regardless if traveling to West or East Germany, and regardless if it was only for one day, or for three months.¹⁰⁰ Decades of “socialist brotherhood” had been erased with the stroke of a pen. Poles, Russians, Romanians, Hungarians were *not welcome* in East Germany. They needed passports, papers, and invitations.

Here was the first legacy of the “borders of friendship.” People came to East Germany asking for the friendship (or at least a modicum of understanding) promised by decades of empty speeches and organized events. Few people believed in the words when they were publicly declared in the 1970s and 1980s. But now that Germany was to unite, the possibility of getting to East Germany became all the more attractive for everyone. The GDR was attractive before for economic reasons (as I have shown throughout the dissertation), even if the populace and the secret police were occasionally hateful. But now the secret police were impotent, and East Germans were jubilant about open borders with the West—all the more reason for Easterners to go to Sachsen, Brandenburg, or Berlin. But how was a new, fledgling government to prevent public outrage about the influx of refugees while simultaneously greeting new travel arrangements with the West? Easterners asked: where was the friendship now?

Diestel would explain that he was reacting out of caution: public displays of hatred towards Eastern European refugees were beginning to taint the euphoria of unification. When 200 right-wing activists shelled a hostel in Greifswald full of East European asylum seekers, injuring fifteen policemen and causing considerable damage to the home of the foreigners, a religious group rescued the foreigners by convoying a bus and 45 personal cars from the location in Greifswald (in East Germany) to Schleswig-Holstein (in the West).¹⁰¹ But despite the shocking story, authorities in Kiel were unsympathetic towards the illegal transport of asylum seekers to their state, claiming Schleswig-Holstein’s quota had already been surpassed, and forcing the asylum seekers to return to Greifswald.¹⁰²

5,000 Berliners demonstrated against violence towards (Eastern) refugees, while hundreds of neo-Nazis gathered in front of a home for foreigners, armed with baseball bats and waiting for the arrival of the demonstration.¹⁰³ News sources—both in West and East Germany—began to publish articles explaining “Why we have to help Poles”; and questioning statements such as this: it is “Better [to have] Italians than Poles in our Country.” Readers complained that the governments in East and West were being “narrow-minded towards Immigrants.”¹⁰⁴

Berlin’s city council was divided about the situation—how could the state move to close borders with the East, when they had joined in the euphoria of freedom of travel; how should they respond to a population of poor emigrants after having just opened borders between two different countries on opposing ends of the ideological and economic spectrum? After all, as one commentary stated, East Germans collected at the same train station to flee from the Honecker regime as Easterners were now to flee economic and social hardship.¹⁰⁵ Helmut Domke added, “what would have happened to this revolution, if Hungary and Czechoslovakia would have sealed their borders to GDR emigrants?”¹⁰⁶ Within

the state magistrate, members vehemently argued against the decision to close borders. Almut Berger, who was the state secretary and commissioner for foreigners from March until October 1990, was particularly vocal in her criticism, calling the legislation “a political decision... of immense reach.”¹⁰⁷ One German cynically stated that the minister council had “created... a refugee policy which excluded refugees.”¹⁰⁸

In the meantime, while their government moved to restrict travel from the East, and after the East German mark was replaced by the deutschmark (in July 1990), the flow of traffic shifted as citizens of East Germany traveled to buy cheaper goods in Czechoslovakia and Poland. “Consumer tourists are making every workday intensively active [for guards] on the border,” wrote *Der Spiegel*.¹⁰⁹ In marked contrast to the 1970s and 1980s, thousands of GDR citizens were now “standing on the border,” in pursuit of cheaper food and clothes in neighboring countries:

For consumer driven GDR-citizens, [now that they had the deutschmark] the border town of Slubice suddenly emerged as a cheap-man’s paradise [*Spardies*]. The city comes across more like an overflowing shopping center. Since the monetary union, 200 loafs of bread are being sold daily. One butcher had to close shop long before closing time: he had sold out in the early morning.¹¹⁰

Evoking what is, by now, a familiar metaphor, one local inhabitant noted that the masses of Frankfurters in Slubice gave the impression that entire city was “like an oriental bazaar.”¹¹¹ As in Slubice, one inhabitant of Zgorzelec (bordering Görlitz) noted that “overnight... they [the Germans] had powerfully shown us [*na siłę udowodnił*] that they no longer had to love us,” as had been required during communism; instead, now they only wanted to buy from Poles.¹¹² The speaker, Ryszard Czarnecki, hoped that “even if there would be passports and visas, normality would have to return.”¹¹³

The presence of GDR citizens grew in the border countries as both Germanys moved to unite on 3 October 1990. “Twelve kilometer traffic jams” were expected at border crossings across the soon to be non-existent Democratic Republic, as East Germans scoured the shelves for “good deals.”¹¹⁴ 800,000 East Germans flooded to the borders within two weeks, “more than the entire previous year.”¹¹⁵ In the past, the GDR had decreed that foreign *Einkaufstouristen* were damaging to the home market, and restricted them from purchasing goods. Now, GDR citizens refuted claims that they were causing problems in the East by buying out hard-to-find goods: “everyone gained from the trade,” wrote one German.¹¹⁶ Johannes Groschupf recognized the irony of the situation, writing:

for years West Berliners cursed the Polish market [*Polenmarkt*], but repeatedly went there to indulge in bargain purchases. Former GDR citizens complained bitterly about West Germans [*Westler*], who traveled through the dilapidated Republic [the GDR] and got caught up in a consumer-happy fervor in light of the advantageous exchange rate. Now, the new FRG citizens thrust themselves to reap [the rewards of having] West marks in their pockets.¹¹⁷

When Germans ventured to their neighboring countries, they would find East Europeans demonstrating in their home country against travel regulations, carrying signs such as “no wall on the Oder-Neisse,” and comparing the new visa regime to communist predecessors.¹¹⁸ The city orchestra of Frankfurt/Oder and Slubice stopped their performances, since they could no longer practice with each other. Even the Pope sent a note to the small town on the Oder, blessing anyone who worked to promote open borders between countries.¹¹⁹

Unlike the East German regime, neighboring governments did little to prevent the influx of travelers from the West. Symbolically, some countries imposed mandatory visas on Germans in retaliation, although (in the case of Poland) the requirements would be unilaterally lifted three days after German reunification.¹²⁰ Hence, at the end of 1990, when the newly constituted Federal Republic would celebrate its first New Year’s Eve, German citizens had gained the right to travel almost anywhere on the continent without a visa. In contrast, East European citizens were, for the first time in many young people’s lives, forced to queue at the embassy in order to cross their western border.

Global Impacts: The Politics of Travel and the Creation of a European Society

Without the help of “socialist brethren countries,” it was doubtful that the Berlin Wall would have fallen, or that it would have fallen so rapidly.¹²¹ After all, as late as October 1989, citizens were convinced that the regime would seal all borders, locking them in their “168,000 km² jail.” That neighboring actors took such a significant role in bringing down the Wall helps explain why Padraic Kenney calls 1989 a “carnival of revolution.” Actors in Kenney’s carnival defied conventional categories of communist authorities, breaking down borders and “issuing a challenge to the existing order.” Part of that challenge was to “melt” the “Iron Curtain.”

No longer did Central Europeans fight their national demons alone. These new movements, instead, paid a great deal of attention to one another. When possible, they visited one another, regardless of communist border guards and Kafkaesque passport restrictions. This interaction is a central feature of the carnival story.¹²²

Kenney suggests that interpersonal contacts between the politically indifferent “melted” the iron curtain. Was it safe to assume, when the Berlin Wall fell, that the travel regimes of the past were history?

As I have shown, border regimes to the West became more restrictive as travel regimes in a soon-to-be-united Germany liberalized. The East German government—whenever opportunity was allowed—not only chose to restrict travel, but also imposed new regulations for citizens of other Eastern countries. Before border agreements had been made in 1968, the borders to Czechoslovakia were closed to passenger traffic. In 1980, instrumentalizing public concerns about the stability of the internal marketplace, the Central Committee in Berlin moved again to restrict travel to Poland. In 1989, when tables had

turned and it was East German citizens who were trying to leave Hungary, the GDR once again moved to restrict individual mobility. It was only the combination of bloc-wide crisis, Western pressure and individual outrage that brought the government to retract restrictive measures.

Perhaps one reason East Germany exited the “carnival” after November 1989 is that even the reformed government—which was no longer SED after 1990—quickly moved to insulate themselves against their eastern neighbors. After March 1990, the leading party of the East—the CDU—was consulting with Bonn about policy measures. And even though Poland’s borders were reopened in December 1990, it was not opened on the terms of the “borders of friendship.” Now people needed their passport. By closing borders, instead of pursuing greater openness, the state was reincarnating the specter of the “Iron Curtain” at the very moment when East Germans were gaining greater travel rights to the West. In the uncertain environment of dissolution, the decrepit GDR turned to familiar tactics in 1990.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-1990-1105-304
Foto: Weistfog, Rainer | 5. November 1990

Image 40. East Germans shopping in Poland in 1990. (Permission: Bundesarchiv.)

Conclusions

Days before Christmas 2007, millions of citizens of the ex-Soviet bloc celebrated what was considered by many to be the most significant ease of travel regulation in history. Eight new states of the European Union entered the Schengen Zone, an area which hitherto encompassed most western European states where travel documents were unnecessary. The New York Times reported on the significance of the occasion, stating that “the most violently contested frontiers on earth, [are] being thrown open.”¹ Similarly, in an article entitled “The Czechs are enthusiastic, the Germans are afraid,” the largest Polish daily, *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Election Newspaper), wrote that, “it is a historic moment.... For the youth it is obvious, for the elderly—a dream come true.” German chancellor Angela Merkel—who had come to the German, Polish, and Czech border to celebrate with Polish prime minister Donald Tusk and her Czech counterpart, Mirek Topolánek—even went so far as to say that “after twenty-two years, we can finally erase the lines on the map which arose due to the Cold War and under which Europe so dearly suffered.” Everyone was ready to bury the hatchet and end a chapter of history which started with the consolidation of the East bloc in the late 1940s, and ended on December 21, 2007.

Milán Kundera opens his *Knihy smíchu a zapomnění* [Book of Laughter and Forgetting] with the suggestion that memory is one of the most powerful tools to use against the regime: “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”² In December 2007, the governments of Central Europe tied opening the borders to the memory of World War II and the fall of the Iron Curtain. In contrast, neither politicians nor journalists mentioned the legacy of the open border project during communism. Similarly, in most interviews I held with witnesses of the era I had first to explain what the “borders of friendship” were. Most remembered that travel became easier in the 1970s—how much fun they had on a trip to the mountains, or to the ocean—but others categorically denied that there was any liberalization at all. By contrast, people associate the European Union with the Schengen Zone travel regime. In 2010, the European Commission asked 26,000 citizens in 29 EU and EU candidate states “what does Europe mean to you personally.” Seventeen states rated the “freedom to travel, work and study” as the most important aspect of the EU. In the remaining twelve, the freedom to travel came in second place (usually after the Euro).

In all of my countries, the ability to travel freely and without visas surpassed 50 percent of the population: Poland (57 percent), Slovakia (57 percent), the Czech Republic (54 percent), and Germany (52 percent).³ Two years later, the German-French Institute asked young people to respond to the Institute's first "Question of the Week." They listed answers according to ranking—with those most popular listed first. The winning response (353 votes) stated: "Freedom, well-being, but also a shared history."⁴ The second place winner (333 votes) stated the obvious: "Europe is a continent." But the third and fourth place winners (327 and 325 votes) highlighted travel: "[Europe] is a continent. And naturally the freedom to travel;" "[it] is the possibility to travel with friends across all of Europe."⁵ Especially for older people from East Central Europe, the European Union's *raison d'être* is the freedom to travel.⁶ Given the remarkable parallels between EU avowals of unity and socialist-era declarations of the borders of peace, one has to wonder where the European Union's liberalized travel regime has gone right where the socialist project went wrong.

In contrast to the modern day Schengen Zone, as I have revealed in my dissertation, both ordinary people and administrators were constantly confused about the rules of travel. The East German, Polish and Czechoslovak governments failed to adequately standardize regulations. Not only did the lists of forbidden goods constantly change, they did so at the national level. A Pole could buy a package of powdered milk in East Germany legally, only to have it confiscated at the Czechoslovak border. Likewise, listening to Led Zeppelin in Warsaw was run-of-the-mill, while it drew the attention of the secret police in East Berlin. All the while, the local border guard was put in the uncomfortable position of having to enforce chimeric rules.

That did not mean that the project was haphazard. On the contrary: groups tallied and analyzed open borders; market researchers gaged what goods were being bought where; and mixed commissions of border officials met on a weekly basis to share numbers. But there was no single body between all three countries charged with standardizing the travel regime. On the contrary: in late state socialism governments worked to ensure that their power was not restrained. In the case of Czechoslovakia, it was adamant that there be no universal travel regime between the GDR, Poland and CSSR. In the late 1980s, East German officials also protested Polish claims that the GDR was acting unilaterally (all the while imposing new legislation on travel from the People's Republic). In lieu of a tri-national commission to regulate travel, each government worked to keep up with new laws. The back and forth between national governments in Prague, Berlin and Warsaw, coupled with communication between regional authorities led to confusion and a chronic cat-and-mouse game to homogenize rules and make them more transparent to citizens and authorities.



Image 41. Mirek Topolánek, Hans-Gerd Pöttering, Donald Tusk, José Manuel Barroso and José Socrates opening the Polish-German-Czech border in 2007.⁷
(Permission: Bundesarchiv.)

The second major departure from contemporary travel regimes is that, although governments in state socialism were willing to allow uncontrolled mobility to socialist neighbors, they systematically prevented their citizens from organizing transnational interest groups or associations. Authorities promoted, and sometimes enforced closer relationships between established worker organizations or sports clubs. These contacts indubitably resulted in greater understanding of the foreign culture and in more friendships between peoples. But that was a shotgun wedding doomed to fail in all but the most exceptional cases: you cannot force friendship between peoples. In contrast, when groups of people met out of personal initiative the government at best set up surveillance to monitor the group silently and at worst systematically harassed and threatened so as to dissolve any independent initiative. Hence it is relatively unsurprising to see groups like *My Life*—a group of Polish and German seniors who record their own telling of their life stories for posterity—emerge immediately after 1989.⁸ The seeds for friendship were laid during communism, but the flowers bloomed after communism's collapse.

That was one of the ironies of late state socialism: East Central European governments in the era of normalization tolerated (and buttressed) the separation between private and public spheres. It was acceptable to build a chata in the forest for your family and retreat there every weekend. It was also relatively normal to load the small Fiat and go on vacation to the Balaton with in-laws. Indeed, the open border policy was intended to encourage interconnectedness and socialist friendship. Displaying unconditional support for the socialist neighbor in public and out of schedule, however, was suspect, as Polonophiles found out in the autumn of 1980. The fact that there were no informal outlets to express

solidarity across borders affected the project as a whole. Since people could not organize outside of established structures, most could only buy and consume (which enflamed home-grown hatred of the foreigner). In a shortage economy, purchasing goods of any sort can be seen as competition in a tight market.

The resulting animosity between national communities competing for scarce goods at a transnational level has been described by historians as emblematic of (failed) attempts to liberalize across the East bloc. On the one hand, open borders provided people with otherwise hard-to-find commodities, but on the other hand the unmatched extent of scarcity brought disgruntled citizens to protest foreigners and the regime.⁹ In part, the animosity toward new consumers was part of larger, historical trends of hatred toward foreigners: citizens readily picked up “old vernacular,” as Jonathan Zatlin writes, which was greatly reinforced in light of the postwar redrawing of nations.¹⁰ Although responses at the national level are well documented and analyzed, historians have been slow to consider homegrown images of foreign societies.¹¹

The final difference with respect to contemporary travel regimes is upper-level reaction. In the European Union, recent proposals to permit restrictions in the Schengen Zone (allowing countries to close borders when, for example, there are waves of illegal emigration) have resulted in both governmental and popular protest.¹² In contrast, when the open border project between socialist neighbors in the 1970s gained mass fanfare and millions decided to travel across borders, each country sought to restrict mass movement to one degree or another. This enraged local travelers and brought them to challenge the regime’s rhetoric of socialist friendship (and, by extension, the regime itself) by pointing to blatant inequality abroad.

Once the liberalized travel regime was implemented, it was difficult to revoke by a home government. Each country adamantly ensured that their population had greater travel rights in the East bloc. Indeed, in only one case were restrictions imposed by the home government, and that was in the GDR in late 1989. There, the imposition of new travel regulations was tantamount to building a new Berlin Wall. When other states closed borders (most notably Czechoslovakia and East Germany with Poland in 1980), Polish authorities consistently requested that restrictions be lifted. As in Poland, governments used a common tactic to display their support of the home population: they blamed other nations for the lack of freedom to travel. Indeed, that the Polish regime allowed greater travel to the West in the 1980s was a measure to alleviate problems at home when other socialist countries denied entry of Polish citizens. The state socialist open border project was devised to connect people and economies. Unlike the modern-day European Union, the brain children of the open border project in the 1970s and 1980s not only systematically prevented grass-root contact across borders, their project aggravated existing animosities.

All the while it divided society in new ways: it was no longer “us” against “them,” that is, socialist authorities against the populace. With few exceptions citizenship trumped class. Documents show how adamantly home governments worked to gain advantage in the travel regime for *their* citizens, and how opposed they were to greater liberalizations for *foreign* tourists. Lacking open, multi-party elections, here is one location where the masses’ voice could be heard by governing authorities and where the government could change policy according to popular demand. Occasionally, when governments adopted xenophobic

measures to ensure the loyalty of the home population, socialism was jettisoned in the name of the nation (or what planners called “saving the local market”).

Although the borders of friendship divided society into nationalities competing for the greatest advantage in a tri-lateral agreement, there was one crucial exception: the youth generation. Having grown up with no alternative to socialism, having lived through no wars, no mass expulsions, virtually no Stalinism, teenagers and twenty-somethings were socialist travelers par excellence. Socialists targeted young people as participants in the new open border policy and the younger generation was all too willing to bond across linguistic and national boundaries. Visiting concerts and motorcycle races in foreign countries, the youngest generation grew up with an understanding that international travel—while at times a hassle on the border—was a fundamental element of modern society. It was not a gift from a paternalistic regime, rather one constitutive part of living in Europe in the twentieth century. The policy helped people connect and relate to others beyond national boundaries.

Socialist governments had hoped for the deepening and the expansion of feelings of worker internationalism. But instead, people across borders noted the failure of socialism in their own state and in the East bloc generally. In the 1970s, knowledge of conditions in the East bloc did not have to be subversive. By the late 1980s, however, knowledge of economic stagnation and each regime’s immobility, gained through travel, resulted in general dissatisfaction with the state and state socialism. If statistics are any indication, then transnational travel had a huge effect on the worldview of ordinary people. For many, a trip to Warsaw, Brno, or Plauen in the 1970s and 1980s revealed in profound ways the utter disappointment of citizens in countries of late state socialism. Hence, the first irony of open borders was that people did not gain a deeper understanding of the strength of ideology, rather of unfulfilled promises of socialist governments.

The second irony of the open border project was that it was successful: it helped form a transnational identity which both state planners, as well as intellectuals and dissidents had wanted in the 1980s. Both Czesław Miłosz and Milán Kundera wrote in the mid-1980s that peoples of East Central Europe needed to unite. As seen through the rapid growth of international interest groups, entrepreneurship, and the push to join the European community, know-how gained through the open border experiment not only fostered discontent with the communist system, it also encouraged the citizen to create new relationships with his/her political, social, and economic environment. At the political level, alliances such as the Višegrád Group were meant, at least partially, to foster a regional identity comparable to the European Coal and Steel Community or the European Union. But in the wake of the peaceful revolutions, the discourse on a Central European identity almost immediately turned to “returning to Europe.” Especially in the decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification, part of “returning to Europe” meant that citizens had the freedom to travel—to actually “return” to Italy, France or West Germany. Certainly, politicians aimed at the economic advantages of joining the European Union, but for ordinary people, waiting in lines for visas and on the border signified the largest hurdle to becoming “European.”

Success did not result in more legitimacy for state socialism. On the contrary, in the international travel regime, communists were uncannily capable of undermining their own power. In this regard, travel is similar to other would-be popular programs: in Romania,

officially sponsored soccer games caused rifts in allegiances in Bucharest when teams from Ceaușescu's son and the secret police competed; on May Day—when citizens were obliged to attend parades—citizens arrived drunk, or drank all day long, to “celebrate” the advancement of socialism; calling “Gorby-Gorby” to celebrate the presence of Mikhail Gorbachev at the fortieth anniversary celebrations of the GDR indicated not support of the regime, but resentment at the lack of change.¹³ In similar ways, travel was used as a tool by ordinary citizens to challenge the regime. It was initially presented as a gift from a paternalistic regime but grew to become a heterotopia, an imperfect reflection of socialism where people pursued individual interests.

Travel is rarely treated as a serious topic of international relations. In the case of 1989, it seems obvious that an East German grievance was one of the causes of regime change, but historians have failed to look beyond East German society in analyzing the role of tourism in the fall of communism. Instead, historians have argued that four elements provided the impetus for tearing down the Iron Curtain in 1989: 1) economic bankruptcy coupled with ideological reform; 2) generational change; 3) civil society; and 4) apolitical, grassroots dissent.¹⁴ Although all of these explanations are valid in their own way, they fail to take into account the masses of people who arose instantaneously and at a transnational level nearly simultaneously, to protest the socialist system. To be sure, some had received information through Western-sponsored radio and television broadcasts like Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, and Deutsche Welle. Others subscribed to or received Western magazines through family and friends. Yet large areas of Poland and Czechoslovakia, as well as zones around Leipzig and Dresden were “blackout” from Western television and radio frequencies. These societies were not isolated from the outside world, but before the age of internet or cellphones people could not coordinate activities from the comforts of home. Why did millions of people come to the street in 1989, and how did they—common workers, neither card-carrying communists, nor *konkretny* activists—identify with counterparts in foreign countries? My work adds to and revises scholarship on (un)civil society, on the polity's belief in ideology, and on East Central European cultural history. In order to understand the failure of state socialism, it is crucial to go beyond a handful of intellectuals or a handful of leaders.

Clearly, both dissidents and socialist leaders were crucial in bringing down (and maintaining) the state. But travel, while not the sole reason for state collapse, changed millions of people's worldview; visits to Ústí nad Labem, to Frankfurt (Oder), or to Warsaw made the bankruptcy of the system salient to people in ways much more personal and persuasive than Radio Free Europe or the Helsinki Accords. Unlike Padraic Kenney's activists, my actors were not organized; they did not take to the streets on April 1, or spray graffiti; in fact, they weren't even dissenting. But they were taking stock of conditions abroad, comparing their existence to their neighbors, and generally increasing their knowledge of state socialism. When East Germans took to the streets to protest the temporary lifting of visa- and passport-less travel in October 1989, peoples across East Central Europe took notice not only as distant observers, but as fellow travelers.

This sense of solidarity—created by frequent travels to neighboring countries—was one of the first victims of regime change in the early 1990s. As the vast majority of interview partners related, the collapse of communism in Central Europe meant that interest in the

region rapidly declined. No longer was the Balaton an East German province in August, nor were Poles the nomadic entrepreneurs on the road. Tourists went to Mallorca instead of Varna; Paris was more interesting than Warsaw. Not only did travel to the region collapse, public memory of the “borders of friendship” has all but vanished. What has made this socialist project—which afforded people the right to do something unforgettable (go abroad)—so utterly forgettable?

Answering that question, I think, greatly helps to explain the nature of what has come to be called “*Ostalgie*,” or nostalgia for state socialism.¹⁵ People forgot, on the one hand, because the borders—friendship or not—continued to remind people that they lived under a capriciously repressive regime, that valued and respected neither its own citizens, nor those of other socialist states. That was the slap in the face one got each time before heading off to enjoy the new freedoms. Comparing genuinely open borders in the European Union with the late state socialism, people remember the slap in the face, not the new freedoms of the 1970s.

The other reason people forgot is that the West did not want them to. Critics complain that anyone who desired a return to the past forget how omnipresent and abusive the state was. It imprisoned with impunity; it blacklisted gifted intellectuals and artists and kept them from practicing their trade (in public); and it worked to divide societal solidarities between people and their neighbors, spiritual leaders and family.

The case of the “borders of friendship” reveals how people are not nostalgic for the state and its rules. Most have forgotten about the project, but when questioned, they refuse to forget the good times that they had visiting friends and neighbors in East Central Europe. Remembering the know-how established by annual visits to Brno or Cracow is not equivalent to mourning the loss of a repressive government. Instead, it is a declaration that, with the collapse of communism, people across the East bloc lost a bond which had united them earlier. Not only were travelers now going to Spain or France for summer vacation, visas were now required to go to former member countries of the “borders of friendship.” Distinctions which once made ordinary citizens crave visiting foreign, formerly-socialist countries have been eroded. At multi-national stores like *Kaufland* or *Lidl*, there is little difference in the quality of bread, and beer from Czechoslovakia is no longer an such a premier object of desire (they can buy *Budvar* in *Kaufland*). That does not mean that the “borders of friendship” have not left a legacy.

Since the summer of 2012, I have lived and worked in Frankfurt (Oder). The city’s devastation after 1945 left its villas and medieval walls in ruins. In their place, prefabricated blocks and large streets were built. After World War II, the city was also divided between two states: on the left bank of the river Oder, the city remained in Germany; on the right bank, a new Polish state encouraged homeless citizens to take residence in vacated homes. Until the West German government signed the Treaty of Moscow and the Treaty of Warsaw in 1970 recognizing the post-War borders, citizens of Frankfurt’s counterpart across the river were never sure if they could stay permanently in their adopted home. In contrast to many cities, fewer street names were changed after 1989 in Frankfurt. The most representative streets remained the same: Karl-Marx-Straße and Rose-Luxembourg Straße. Similarly, in border cities in Poland and Czechoslovakia, street names remained largely the

same. Almost immediately after the fall of communism in East Central Europe, actors on both sides of the border moved to create closer links to neighbors. In addition to the European University, private organizations sprung up as if out of nowhere. Now the city hosts dozens of Polish/German groups which support meaningful cooperation between the two states. Like street signs, the relations established during communism created the basis for the future.

Last fall, the city brought in caterpillars and front loaders. They came to tear down the border structures. For a week, the bridge between Poland and Germany was closed, and city authorities only allowed foot traffic on the bridge. Young people collected on the street to drink beers and contemplate the landscape, now undisturbed by automobile noise pollution. People's plastic bags also revealed the legacy of the open border policy: Poles bought laundry detergent in Germany, Germans bought sausage and cigarettes in Poland. Although there are some Germans who fear Polish buying power (and vice versa), going to the foreign country has become an everyday and completely normal experience.

The open border program was not only propaganda for the state; it was an ideologically-grounded attempt by governments to create economic parity between East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Poland in the 1970s and 1980s. It was a form of economic agreement seldom replicated in the history of state socialism. At first glance, it appears that the socialist open border project—in contrast to the European Union—disregarded economics in the interest of ideology. Socialist friends were to transgress borders to become better world citizens, even if that meant turning over some of the spoils of a successful planned economy. In fact, it is the current project which, despite significant hiccups and hurdles, prizes ideology over economics: in the age of the European Union, borders are becoming relics of the past.



Image 42. Tearing down the border in Frankfurt (Oder) in 2012. (Photo: Mark Keck-Szajbel)

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Endnotes

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Chapter 1

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⁶⁰ Oschowsky, Burkhard, *Einvernehmen und Konflikt. Das Verhältnis zwischen der DDR und der Volksrepublik Polen 1980-1989*, (Osnabrück: Fibre Verlag 2005), 25-30; Heike Wolter, "Ich harre aus dem Land und geh, ihm fremd." *Die Geschichte des Tourismus in der DDR*, (Frankfurt et al.: Campus Verlag 2009), 395-424; Zimmermann, Volker, *eine sozialistische Freundschaft im Wandel. Die Beziehungen zwischen der SBZ/DDR und der Tschechoslowakei (1945-1969)*, (Düsseldorf: Klartext Verlag, 2005), 235-300.

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⁶² Ibid., 230-235.

⁶³ BArch, B 145 Bild-00182585. Also available at: [http://www.bild.bundesarchiv.de/cross-search/search/_1292854567/?search\[view\]=detail&search\[focus\]=2](http://www.bild.bundesarchiv.de/cross-search/search/_1292854567/?search[view]=detail&search[focus]=2). (accessed 2 December 2010)

⁶⁴ Source: Federální Statistický Úřad (ed.), *Historická statistická ročenka*, (Prague/Bratislava: Federální Statistický Úřad, 1985), 344; Zimmermann, Volker, *eine sozialistische Freundschaft im Wandel. Die Beziehungen zwischen der SBZ/DDR und der Tschechoslowakei (1945-1969)*, (Düsseldorf: Klartext Verlag, 2005), 386; Wiener Institut für Internationale Wirtschaftsvergleiche. *COMECON Data 1979*. New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980, 30.

⁶⁵ Keck-Szajbel, Mark, Shop around the Bloc: Trader Tourism and its Discontents on the East German-Polish Border, In: Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger (eds.), *Consuming Communism: Cultures of Consumption in Postwar Eastern Europe*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Ibid., "A Cheap Imitation, or Tourist Innovation? Polish Tourism during State Socialism," in: *Polish-AngloSaxon Studies*, 14/15 (2011).

⁶⁶ Cf. Majowski, Marcin. *Polska Ludowa zaprasza: polityka turystyczna w czasach Edwarda Gierka*. Warszawa: Wydawn. Trio, 2008, 32-38.

⁶⁷ Mazurek, Malgorzata, *Spoleczeństwo kolejki. O doświadczeniach rniedoboru 1945-1989*, (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2010), 107-142. Hartwich, Mateusz J. *Das schlesische Riesengebirge*. Wien: Böhlau, 2012.

⁶⁸ Keck-Szajbel, Mark and Heike Wolter, "A Contradiction in Terms? An Analysis of the Historiography on East Bloc Tourism," *Yearbook of the International Association for the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility*, 2, 2010; John Storojev, "Vacationland Bulgaria: The Tourist Boom," RFE/RL BR, 24 February 1966.

⁶⁹ N.a., "Tourism in Eastern Europe, 1966-1971," RFE/RL BR, 2 May 1972, 3.

⁷⁰ "Situation Report: Hungary, 19 October 1971." Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest, October 19, 1971. HU OSA 300-8-47-102-38; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department: Situation Reports. <http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:d8a03db9-2578-40b6-88dc-df56645ebaca>.

⁷¹ N.a., "Tourism in Eastern Europe, 1966-1971," RFE/RL BR, 2 May 1972, 3. See also HU OSA 300-2-1, box 42, np. ("Tourism in CEMA countries continues to register gains").

⁷² In a notable departure from prior regulations, the Ministry of Internal Affairs suggested on days with key soccer matches, when crowds were expected to be so large, that "visitors

arriving in Budapest find accommodations with friends and relatives if possible.” In previous years, even the thought of housing a foreign visitor would arouse the suspicion of the AVK (or Hungarian secret police).

⁷³ Berend, Ivan and György Ránki, *The Hungarian Economy in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 236.

⁷⁴ Binder, David, “Hungary undertakes Face-Lifting at Border Crossings,” *New York Times*, 27 September 1965.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ See (no author), “Hungary Tourism Booms,” *Wall Street Journal*, 18 August 1970.

⁷⁷ See Paul Hofmann, “Hungarian Urges Western Contact,” *The New York Times*, 20 November 1969.

⁷⁸ Arpad A. Kadarkay, “Hungary: An Experiment in Communism,” *The Western Political Quarterly*, 26 (1973), 280-301.

⁷⁹ See: http://www.tripadvisor.com/LocationPhotos-g274887-d276671-w4-InterContinental_Budapest-Budapest.html#25479322 (accessed 1 December 2010).

⁸⁰ Wolter, Heike, “*Ich barre aus im Land und geh, ihm fremd ...*” *Die Geschichte des Tourismus in der DDR* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2006), 443.

⁸¹ BArchB, DY30/IV 2/6.05/26, “Vorläufiger Bericht über die Teilnahme an der I. Regionalen Arbeitskonferenz der Reisebüros der sozialistischen Staaten, die vom 29.9.-4.10.1957 in Prag und Karlsbad stattfand.

⁸² Ibid. p. 47-49.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Wolter, Heike, “*Ich barre aus im Land und geh, ihm fremd ...*” *Die Geschichte des Tourismus in der DDR* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2006), 50-86.

⁸⁶ Keck-Szajbel, Mark, Ibid., “A Cheap Imitation, or Tourist Innovation? Polish Tourism during State Socialism,” in: *Polish-AngloSaxon Studies*, 14/15 (2011).

⁸⁷ See Hans Lindemann, “Visafreies Reisen,” in: *Deutschland Archiv*, 5 (1972), 4, 402-405.

⁸⁸ Archiwum Polskiego Radio i Telewizji, Komitet ds. Radia i Telewizji. Biuro Listów, „Biuletyn wewnętrzný” 1972, vol. 8, Listy nawiązujące do otwarcia granicy Polski i NRD, 13.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁹⁰ “Návrh zásad pro jednání s Německou demokratickou republikou o turistickém ruchu,” *Narodní Archív* (henceforth NA), fond KSČ-ÚV-02/1. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945-1989, Praha – předsednictvo 1971-1976, sv. 31 ar.j. 32 b. 3, 6.

⁹¹ See: “12. Schůze předsednictva ÚV KSČ ze dne 8. Října 1971,” *Narodní Archív*, fond KSČ-ÚV-02/1. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945-1989, Praha – předsednictvo 1971-1976, sv. 13, ar.j. 14, b. 3, 35.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ “Informace o návštěvě ministra zahraničních věcí ČSSR s. Ing. B. Chňoupka v Německé demokratické republice ve dnech 4. až 7. Dubna 1972,” *Narodní Archív*, fond KSČ-ÚV-02/1. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945-1989, Praha – předsednictvo 1971-1976, sv. 40 ar.j. 42, info 5, 59.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 60.

⁹⁶ “Průběžná informace o jednání s NDR o koordinaci řešení vzájemných podmínek rozšíření cestovního ruchu mezi ČSSR a NDR,” Národní Archiv, fond KSČ-ÚV-02/1. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945-1989, Praha – předsednictvo 1971-1976, sv.32 ar.j. 34 b.1, 50.

⁹⁷ Thomas, Daniel, *The Helsinki Effect. International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁹⁸ Wolle, Stefan. *Die heile Welt der Diktatur*. Berlin: Links, 2013.

⁹⁹ MfAA C76/76, 43.

¹⁰⁰ MfAA C104/77, p 41.

¹⁰¹ Życie Warszawa, 16 August 1983; also: Ronald Asmus, “The Honecker Trip to Poland,” RFE/RL BR 19 August 1983, 3.

¹⁰² Tantzsch, Monika. *Die verlängerte Mauer: die Zusammenarbeit der Sicherheitsdienste der Warschauer-Pakt-Staaten bei der Verhinderung von “Republikflucht.”* Berlin: Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1998, 11-12.

¹⁰³ BArch B, DC 20 I/3 921, 27.

Chapter 2

¹ Rudé Právo, 3 January 1972, 5.

² Bastei in the 1970s, <http://img.zvab.com/member/576411/39873336.jpg>

³ Löfgren, Orvar. *On Holiday: a History of Vacationing*. California Studies in Critical Human Geography 6. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

⁴ Noack, Christian “Building Tourism in One Country?: The Sovietization of Vacationing, 1917-1941.” In Zuelow, Eric G. E. (ed.), *Touring beyond the nation : a transnational approach to European tourism*. Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011, 172.

⁵ In ND, 15 May 1972, 3.

⁶ For the significance of the *Kneefall*, see: Huener, Jonathan, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945-1979*, Athens/Ohio 2003. V. Knigge and Frei, N. (Eds.), *Verbrechen erinnern. Die Auseinandersetzung mit Holocaust und Völkermord*, Munich 2002.

⁷ This was reflected in many contemporary articles in the West. Cf. van Voorst, Bruce “Crossing East European Borders,” in: Times Herald, 12 March 1972, L4; Hans Lindemann, Visafreies Reisen, in: Deutschland Archiv, 5 (April 1972), 4, 402-405.

⁸ See images on ND, 19 June 1972, 3.; Junge Welt (henceforth JW), 19 VI 1972, 1; ADN, Partei und Regierungsdelegation der Volksrepublik Polen besucht die Deutsche Demokratische Republik, in: ND, 3 June 1973, 1.

⁹ In ND, 15 May 1972, 3.

¹⁰ See: Gersdorff, Susanne, “Bei Freunden in Bydgoszcz,” in: ND 3 June 1973, (no pagination: damaged in microfilm), where “19 boys and girls from the cable-works in Oberspree went for four days on a ‘great trip.’... Here there was a meeting with young workers from the cable-works there, who were already guest in Berlin in April... At that time, they welded [*schmiedeten*]... plans for further fraternal cooperation.” See also: PAP, Zakonczenie wielkiego spotkania mlodziezy Polski i NRD, in: TL, 31 V 1972, 1. Also Boeck,

Artur, „Begegnung mit polnischen Werktätigen im Geiste brüderlicher Freundschaft,“ in: ND, 7 June 1972.

¹¹ N.a., „Voller Optimismus beging die Republik den 1. Mai 1973,“ in: ND, 2 May 1973, 4.

¹² Häuser, Otto and Horst Thomas, „Sie kommen und gehen über die Brücke der Freundschaft,“ in: ND, 3 June 1973, (no pagination, damaged microfilm), as well as Below, Igor, „Wissen wir genug über unser Bruderland?,“ in: JW, 3 June 1973, 5. In the latter report, the author was obviously working to reverse any stereotypes concerning the Poles. Having taken the class to Ślubice, she writes that children were most impressed about the appearance of the city: “many spoke about the very clean streets and nurtured green areas.”

¹³ N.a., „Bürger der DDR und Volkspolens besuchten Gedenkstätte,“ in: ND, 4 January 1972, 2.

¹⁴ Jajesniak-Quast, Dagmara. *Geteilte Städte an Oder und Neiße: Frankfurt (Oder) - Ślubice, Guben - Gubin und Görlitz - Zgorzelec 1945 - 1995*. Berlin: Berlin-Verl. Spitz, 2000.

¹⁵ Boeck, Artur, „Brüderlicher Bund – im Leben bewährt,“ in: ND, 17 June 1973, 7.

¹⁶ ND, 4-7 May 1972; JW, 3-7 May 1972; ND, 28 May 1973; JW, 25-28 June 1973; etc.

¹⁷ Rusek, Volkmar, „Festivalmeile ‚International‘ über Brücke der Freundschaft,“ in: ND, 12 June 1973; JW, 12 June 1973.

¹⁸ See, for example, ADN, „Jugend traf sich in Zittau zum Fest am Dreiländereck,“ in: ND 12 June 1973, 2; as well as PAP, „Jak spędzą wakacje dzieci i młodzież,“ in: TL 12 June 1973, 7. The Western press always perceived this fraternal relationship as particularly dubious on the level of the regime. See particularly: Reinhardt, Klaus, “Unsere Freiheit ist wie ein Gummiband,” in: *Der Spiegel* 80 (1974), 30, 60-68; also see: Prinsky, Robert, “Within East Bloc, Tourists Go Bye-Bye Mostly to Buy, Buy,” in: *The Wall Street Journal*, 14 January 1977, 1; Wood, Mark, *Flow of Soviet-Block Visitors Curbed*, in: LAT, 13 August 1980, C8.

¹⁹ For discussion concerning the role of advertisement in socialism, see: Sinclair, John, *Images Incorporated*, London et al. 1987, 129-131.

²⁰ See ND, 5 May 1972, n.p.

²¹ See advertisement in: ND, 9 December 1972, n.p.; ND, 25 November 1972 (no pagination); Światowid, August 1973, 24-25; Światowid, January 1977, p. 26-27; Światowid, March 1975, 23-24.

²² See advertisement in: ND, 3 VI 1973, n.p. See also, Olszewski, Tadeusz, *Bulgaria*, in: Światowid, June 1973, 18-19; Światowid, January 1977, 26-27; Światowid, April 1976, 12.

²³ Heeke, Matthias, *Reisen zu den Sowjets. Der ausländische Tourismus in Russland 1921-1941*, Münster 1999, 3.

²⁴ Both countries had strict control on the labelling of cities, areas, and each respective country. See: Curry, Jane (Ed.), *The Black Book of Polish Censorship*, New York 1984 125-128.

²⁵ As Klaus Rachow reported, “the three palatinates on the border – Szczecin, Zielona Góra, and Wrocław – are the most sought-after destinations.” See: *Dzień dobry, Zielona Góra*, in: *Wochenpost* 19 (1972), 16, 18.

²⁶ ND 10-11 June 1976, 5.

²⁷ ND, 28 March 1976, 8.

²⁸ ND, 12 April 1972, 8.

²⁹ See the example of Wilhelm Pieck. Dylawerska, Halina, „Polen deckt den Touristen-Tisch!“, in: *Wochenpost* 19 (1972), 12, 27.

³⁰ The West, however, continually reminded their readers of the historical legacy of the areas to which East German (and Polish) tourists were traversing. Although, “Poland and East Germany did away with passport, customs and currency controls at their common border,” Dan Morgan reported, “[a]nimosities of Poles towards Germans still linger.” Especially when considering border guards, it was reported, Poles were worried about “Germans giving orders to Poles and all that.” See Morgan, Dan, “E. German, Poles Try Economic Integration,” in: *WP*, 20 April 1973, A19.

³¹ Olschowsky, Burkhard, *Einvernehmen und Konflikt. Das Verhältnis zwischen der DDR und der Volksrepublik Polen 1980-1989*, Osnabrück 2005, 27-29.

³² Hoover Archive, Biuro Informacyjnej, Komitet Centralny Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej (henceforth BI KC PZPR) 219 VI from 4 February 1972, 23-25.

³³ See Colitt, Leslie, “Peaceful German Invasion Being Welcomed in Poland,” in: *WP*, 12 August 1973, E14.

³⁴ BI KC PZPR 219 VI from 4 February 1972, 23.

³⁵ RFE/EE 4 February 1972, 2.

³⁶ RFE/EE 4 February 1972, 5

³⁷ BI KC PZPR 223 IV from 2 V 1972, 31.

³⁸ BArchB, DC 20 4410, 57.

³⁹ BArchB, DC 20 17232, 2-20.

⁴⁰ BArchB, DC 20 4410, 35.

⁴¹ MfAA C108/77, 114.

⁴² MfAA C1259/75, 108.

⁴³ MfAA C1266/75, 142.

⁴⁴ Stola, Dariusz. *Kraj bez wyjścia? : migracje z Polski 1949-1989*. Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu : Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2010, 488-489.

⁴⁵ Cf. BI KC PZPR 272 VI from 30 October 1976, 19. From 1955 to 1971, there were 9,032,200 reported travels outside of Polish territory. In 1972 alone, there were 10,600,000. See: Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Rocznik Statystyczny*, Warsaw 1973-1987; Staatlichen Zentralverwaltung für Statistik, *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, Berlin 1972-1981; Sowiński, Paweł, *Wakacje w Polsce Ludowej*, Warszawa 2005, 287; Ropers, Norbert, *Verständigung mit Polen durch Reisen und Kontakte?*, Mainz 1989, 112; Hall, Derek R. (Ed.), *Tourism and Economic Development in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, New York 1986, 191.

⁴⁶ Kochanowski, Jerzy. *Tylnymi drzwiami : “czarny rynek” w Polsce 1944-1989*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo “Neriton,” 2010, 152.

⁴⁷ BArchB, DC20/5147, 173.

⁴⁸ Rychlík, Jan. *Cestování do ciziny v habsburské monarchii a v Československu : pasová, vízová a vystěhovalecká politika, 1848-1989*. Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2007, 98; AAN, GKKFtT, 18/53, „Informacja w sprawie rozwoju współpracy z Czechosłowacją w dziedzinie turystyki i sportu, 3.

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- ⁴⁹ AAN, GKKEiT, 18/53, „Informacja w sprawie rozwoju współpracy z Czechosłowacją w dziedzinie turystyki i sportu, 3
- ⁵⁰ Sikorski, Radysław, at the World Affairs Council, 5 August 2009.
- ⁵¹ Mehlhorn, Ludwig, „Przyjaźń nakazana? Stosunki między NRD i Polską w latach 1949–1990,” *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie 1949–2005. Wspólnota wartości i interesów?* eds. Basil Kerski and Wolf-Dieter Eberwein (Olsztyn: Borussia, 2005), 94–110.
- ⁵² Kostrzewa, Krystyna, „Prywatny wyjazd turystyczny do wszystkich krajów,” TL 1 January 1972, 1, 4.
- ⁵³ Rakowski, Mieczysław, *Dzienniki polityczne 1972–1975* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo ISKRY, 2002), 10.
- ⁵⁴ N.a., „Ein Schritt von historischen Rang,” 10 January 1972, 1.
- ⁵⁵ Kwilecki, Andrzej, „Badania socjologiczne na pograniczu Polski i NRD,” *Sprawy Międzynarodowe* 7(8) (1973): p. 145–46; Kwilecki, „Problematyka socjologiczna ruchu granicznego i kontaktów ludnościowych Polska-NRD,” *Przegląd Zachodni* 4 (1974): p. 399–404; Mazurek, Małgorzata, *Spółeczeństwo kolejki. O doświadczeniach niedoboru 1945–1989* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2010), 107–42.
- ⁵⁶ BI KC PZPR, 219 VI from 4 February 1972, 23; BI KC PZPR, 272 VI from 30 October 1976, 23; see also n.a., „Treffpunkt Centrum,” *Für Dich* 44 (1972): p. 32–35.
- ⁵⁷ Urban, Jerzy, „Przy drzwiach otwartych,” *Polityka*, 15 January 1972: p. 1, 5.
- ⁵⁸ Filiatowski, T. „Drezno,” *Światowid*, April 1978, 28–29; K. Konicki, „Lipsk,” *Światowid*, January 1977, 24–25; Pawelkova, Irena, „Berlin,” *Światowid*, August 1974, 26–28.
- ⁵⁹ Patterson, Patrick, „Truth Half Told: Finding the Perfect Pitch for Advertising and Marketing in Socialist Yugoslavia, 1950–1991,” *Enterprise and Society* 4 (2003): p. 683–720.
- ⁶⁰ „Interview with Peter Koehli,” *Światowid*, 2 January 1972, 3.
- ⁶¹ Wróblewski, Andrzej, „Notacy,” *Polityka*, Apr. 10, 1976, 5.
- ⁶² Kochanowski, Jerzy, „Wir sind zu arm, um den Urlaub im eigenen Land zu Verbringen. Massentourismus und illegaler Handel in den 1950er und 1960er Jahren in Polen,” in Borodziej et al. (eds.), *„Schleichwege,”* 135–52. Ludwig Mehlhorn, „Przyjaźń nakazana? Stosunki między NRD i Polską w latach 1949–1990,” *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie 1949–2005. Wspólnota wartości i interesów?* eds. Basil Kerski and Wolf-Dieter Eberwein (Olsztyn: Borussia, 2005), 94–110.
- ⁶³ BI KC PZPR, 295 III from 15 March 1976, 16–17.
- ⁶⁴ BI KC PZPR, 223 IV from 2 May 1972, 31.
- ⁶⁵ Mozołowski, Andrzej, „Notacy na granicą,” *Polityka*, 22 May 1976, 3.
- ⁶⁶ Zimmerman, Volker, *Eine sozialistische Freundschaft im Wandel. Die Beziehungen zwischen der SBZ/DDR und der Tschechoslowakei (1945–1969)* (Düsseldorf: Klartext, 2010), 393–98.
- ⁶⁷ N.a., „Dzień dobry, Zielona Góra,” *Wochenpost* 19 (1972): p. 18.
- ⁶⁸ N.a., „Über meine Freundschaftsreise,” *Eulenspiegel* 27 (1972): p. 8.
- ⁶⁹ Rogowiec, Maria and Tadeusz Szumowski, „Wpływ ruchu turystycznego między Niemiecką Republiką Demokratyczną a Polską na sytuację rynkową w wybranych rejonach naszego kraju,” *Roczniki Instytutu Handlu Wewnętrznego* 68 (1973), 97–107; BArchB, DL 203 20-00-44, Karton 357.

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- ⁷⁰ BI KC PZPR 223 IV from 2 May 1972, 33; BI KC PZPR 280 VII from 1 August 1977; and BI KC PZPR 249 VII from 27 July 1974, 85.
- ⁷¹ The Reisebüro der DDR was also appraising their role in foreign tourism. In Deutschland Archiv, the editors cited that in 1973, more than one million should travel with the Reisebüro. See DA 6 (1973): p. 1, 14-15.
- ⁷² In ND, 4 January 1972, 1.
- ⁷³ Riley, Frank, "Tourists Breach the Berlin Wall," in: Los Angeles Times, 30 July 1978, 17.
- ⁷⁴ See Lenk, Karin, "Von Salamiwürsten und Salamanderschuhen. Schmuggel zwischen der DDR und der Volksrepublik Polen in den 1970er und 1980er Jahren" (M.A. thesis, Frankfurt/Oder, 2006).
- ⁷⁵ Wróblewski, Andrzej, "Notacy," *Polityka*, Apr. 10, 1976, 5.
- ⁷⁶ Mozołowski, Andrzej, "Handelsmarkt," *Polityka*, May 22, 1976, 3.
- ⁷⁷ Paszyński, Aleksander and Marian Turski, "Granice bez kompleksów," *Polityka*, May 28, 1977: 10-15.
- ⁷⁸ HU OSA 300-2-1 box 42, np. (some questions and answers on the East German radio)
- ⁷⁹ Ibid.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid.
- ⁸¹ HU OSA 300-2-1, box 42, np. (GDR papers on tourism to and from Poland)
- ⁸² HU OSA 300-2-1, box 42, np. (East Europe Trips Encounter Snags)
- ⁸³ Editorial, n.a., *TL*, 5 September 1980, 5.
- ⁸⁴ Maziariski, Wojciech, "Z dziejów paszportu w PRL," *Gazeta Magazyn* 25 (18 June 1996), n.p. For other examples of "spontaneous" declarations promising not to smuggle, see n.a., "Bruderbund DDR-Polen für immer unzerstörbar," *ND*, 9 June 1973, 1-2.
- ⁸⁵ Urry, John, and Jonas Larsen. *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*. SAGE, 2011.
- ⁸⁶ Smoljak, Ladislav, Zdenek Sverák, Jan Balzer, Josef Abrahám, Libuse Safránková, Eliska Balzerová, Daniela Bakerova, Czech Republic) Ustřední půjčovna filmu (Prague, Bontonfilm (Firm), and LC Czech Collection (Library of Congress). *Vrchní, prchní*. [Prague]: Bontonfilm, 2003.
- ⁸⁷ HU OSA 300-2-1 box 42, np. ("Tourism in CEMA countries continues to register gains")
- ⁸⁸ Ibid.
- ⁸⁹ IBUSZ, *Utažon veliink*, n.d. (ca. 1976), n.p
- ⁹⁰ E. Burian, *Zemědělské Noviny*, 28 November 1972, 3.
- ⁹¹ Ibid.
- ⁹² Ibid.
- ⁹³ R. Nádlerová, "Socialistická integrácia a cestovný ruch," in: *Plánované hospodárství*, nr. 1, 25-34. Here, 27.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid., 25.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid., 32.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid., 33.
- ⁹⁷ HU OSA 300-2-3, box 58, np. (New Measure to Speed up Issuing of CS Travel Documents)
- ⁹⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹⁹ *Večerní Praha*, 17 January 1972.

¹⁰⁰ HU OSA 300-2-3, box 58, np. (East German shopping in Czechoslovakia)

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Pack, Sasha D. *Tourism and Dictatorship : Europe's Peaceful Invasion of Franco's Spain*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

¹⁰³ Jiří Hájek, “‘Exploze’ turistiky?” in *Tvorba*, nr. 36/6, September 1972, 7.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Chapter 3

¹ Interview with J.R. on 12 August 2009.

² Interview with K.C. on 9 November 2011.

³ Interview with B.H. on 11 July 2013.

⁴ Národní archiv, Praha, (henceforth NA), Komunistická strana Československa, Ústřední výbor, (henceforth KSČ ÚV) 02/1 sv.10 ar.j.9 b.3, n.p.

⁵ Radio Free Europe, Background Reports, Czechoslovakia (henceforth RFE BR CZ), 1972 3/20, 3.

⁶ Jirí Menzel, János Bán, Marián Labuda, Rudolf Hrusínský, Zdenek Sverák, Jaromír Sofr, und Hannes Gromball. *Vesnicko má stredisková*. Barrandov: Filmstudio Barrandov, 1985.

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⁸ Cf. Bren, Paulina. *The greengrocer and his TV : the culture of communism after the 1968 Prague Spring*. Ithaca, [N.Y.]: Cornell University Press, 2010, 1-10.

⁹ Compare: Crumbaugh, Justin. *Destination dictatorship : the spectacle of Spain's tourist boom and the reinvention of difference*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2009; Pack, Sasha D. *Tourism and dictatorship : Europe's peaceful invasion of Franco's Spain*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

¹⁰ Nove, Alec. *The economics of feasible socialism*. London; Boston: G. Allen & Unwin, 1983, 107-109.

¹¹ Schaefer, Henry W. *Comecon and the politics of integration*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972, 4; Reisinger, William M. “The International Regime of Soviet-East European Economic Relations.” *Slavic Review* 49, no. 4 (December 1, 1990): p. 554–567, 556; Butler, William Elliott. 1978. *A Source book on socialist international organizations*. Alphen aan den Rijn, the Netherlands: Sijthoff & Noordhoff, 33-120.

¹² Gorbachev, Mikhail Sergeevich. *On my country and the world*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, 55.

¹³ Ibid, 53.

¹⁴ BArchB, DC 20/4410, 75.

¹⁵ TL, 16 January 1972, 3.

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Chapter 4

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Chapter 5

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Chapter 6

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¹¹⁸ Piepgras, Ilka, "Die Mauer an Oder und Neiße," *Die Zeit*, 26 October 1990.

¹¹⁹ *Frankfurt (Oder), Stubice, Guben 1990 - Spiegel TV Zeitreise 2/2*, 2010.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4exgO78rVk&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

¹²⁰ Andrzej Mozołowski, "Święte oburzenie," *Polityka*, Vol. 37, No. 1741 (1990), 5.

¹²¹ Cf. Precan, Vilém. *Ke svobodě přes Prahu: exodus občanů NDR na podzim 1989 : sborník dokumentů*. Praha: Československé dokumentační středisko, o. p. s., 2009.

¹²² Kenney, Pádraic. *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, 4-5.

Conclusions

¹ Nikolas Kulish, "Memo from the Poland-Germany Border," *NYT*, 20 December 2007.

² Kundera, Milan. *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. 1st Perennial Classics ed. Perennial Classic. New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1999, 4.

³ European Commission, Eurobarometer 73. Public Opinion in the European Union. First Results, May 2010. See:

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb73/eb73_first_en.pdf, 18.

⁴ See: http://www.europa-nur-mit-uns.eu/forum/News_1/Question-of-the-week-no--1---br---What-does-Europe-mean-to-you-_1/?g=1&o=1&order=asc.

⁵ See: http://www.europa-nur-mit-uns.eu/forum/News_1/Question-of-the-week-no--1---br---What-does-Europe-mean-to-you-_1/?g=1&o=1&order=asc.

⁶ Compare the film created for the twentieth anniversary of the fall of communism, which depicts a "typical" youngster's life if he was born in 1989. The student travels with his parents to Italy, goes on exchange to Berlin, and lives with a girlfriend in Spain. See: *1989-2009: 20 Lat Wolności*, 2009.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vv48uepOhpo&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

⁷ BArch, B 145 Bild-00168430.

⁸ See: <http://www.mylife-online.eu/>

⁹ Christina Petrescu, “Entrepreneurial Tourism in Romania: A System-Stabilizing Factor?” Borodziej, Włodzimierz, Jerzy Kochanowski, and Joachim von Puttkamer. *Schleichwege : inoffizielle Begegnungen sozialistischer Staatsbürger zwischen 1956 und 1989*. Köln: Böhlau, 2010, p. 115–34.

¹⁰ See Jonathan Zatlin, “Scarcity and Resentment: Economic Sources of Xenophobia in the GDR, 1971–1989,” *Central European History* 40 (2007): 683–720.

¹¹ See especially Borodziej, Włodzimierz, Jerzy Kochanowski, and Joachim von Puttkamer. *Schleichwege : inoffizielle Begegnungen sozialistischer Staatsbürger zwischen 1956 und 1989*. Köln: Böhlau, 2010.

¹² “‘Freedom of Movement Is Slowly Being Undermined’ | Europe | DW.DE | 30.05.2013.” *DW.DE*. Accessed May 30, 2013. <http://www.dw.de/freedom-of-movement-is-slowly-being-undermined/a-16850313>.

¹³ Florin Poenaru, “Power at Play: Soccer Stadiums and Popular Culture in 1980s Romania.” In: Giustino, Cathleen M, Catherine J Plum, and Alexander Vari. *Socialist Escapes : Breaking Away from Ideology and Everyday Routine in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2012; Isaacs, Jeremy, Martin Smith, Pat Mitchell, Kenneth Branagh, Turner Original Productions, and Cable News Network Warner Home Video (Firm). *Cold War*. Burbank, CA; [Atlanta, Ga.]: Warner Home Video ; CNN Productions, 1998.

¹⁴ See: Kenneth Jowitt. *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction*, Berkeley 1992; Leslie Holmes, *The End of Communist Power: Anti-Corruption Campaigns and Legitimation Crisis*, New York 1993. Stephen Kotkin and Jan Gross, *Uncivil Society. 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York: Modern Library Chronicles 2010); Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgoß, “Comparative Perspectives on Dissent and Opposition to Communist Rule,” In: *Ibid*, eds., *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe. Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition*. Hants 2004, 231-266, here: 247. For debates on “Central Europe,” see: Frederike Kovacs-Kind, “Out of the Drawer and into the West”, 370-379. See also: Timothy Garton Ash, “Refolutions,” In: *The Uses of Adversity: Essays on the Fate of Central Europe*, New York , 309-324.

¹⁵ Berdahl, Daphne. *On the Social Life of Postsocialism: Memory, Consumption, Germany*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.