



Article

International Media and Tourism Industry as the Facilitators of Socialist Legacy Heritagization in the CEE Region

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Abstract: After the fall of state socialism in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), the socialist legacy became a matter of contested discourses, coming from the new national governments. However, with the recently awakening nostalgia for socialism and growing international interest for the socialist pasts, the approaches to its legacies began gradually to change. In this paper, the focus is on some recent international trends with regards to the socialist heritage for evaluating the share of their influences in the process of de-contestation occurring at the local/national levels. There are two processes standing in juxtaposition to be observed; on the one hand, official nation branding distances the state from socialist pasts to emphasize, often contrasting, post-socialist national identity. On the other hand, the development of communist heritage tourism attempts to reconsider and appropriate socialist legacies in the national frameworks for identity construction. Using the examples from Hungary, Romania, and the former Yugoslavia, the author demonstrates the role of international media and the tourism industry for meeting the objectives of economic development while maintaining post-socialist national identity senses, but also their potentials in reconsiderations of the contested history chapters.

Keywords: Socialist city; heritage contestation; identity building; tourism; media; Central and Eastern Europe

1. Introduction

A number of studies have already emphasized the importance of built heritage in the creation of national identities [1–3]. However, in the era of growing global competition over attracting infrastructure, investment, tourists, capital, and status, built heritage is also a key economic resource [4–7]. The tourism industry, as the most important sector of the economy using heritage, has become, over the last few decades, the largest service industry in the world [8]. The process of ascribing heritage values thus became increasingly subordinated to present-day interests and agendas [9,10], which often implied mobilization of selected pasts and desired histories. The aspects that could not be marketed easily for the purpose of tourism development, or the ones that lacked relevance for political identity building, were excluded from conservation policy and cultural remembrance. However, with the recent technological developments and the digital revolution that has revolutionized both travel and tourism [11], some new opportunities have also opened up. The purpose of this paper is to examine the links between the recent trends in the tourism industry and the rapid development of information and communication technologies in the context of ascribing heritage values to contested legacies in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). I argue that the growing and evolving needs of the tourism industry, supported by the mass media, could help unrecognized or unwanted heritage in it becoming a new source for strengthening place and national identities.

A well-known example of communist/socialist built legacy standing in juxtaposition with present-day agendas and interests is selected for analysis. Following the fall of state socialism in 1989, the process aiming to reconsider heritages and redefine national identities has been initiated across the whole region of CEE. During the long and difficult transition to the new socio-political and economic system, the built legacy of state socialism has not been adequately recognized or mobilized in the initial strategic approaches for urban and national identity (re)construction. However, with the increased representation of socialist architecture and planning in the global media, some new perspectives have opened, leading towards a change in public opinion. Many print publications, TV reports, social media, music videos, and even sci-fi movies with built heritage of the former socialist East have stimulated the interest of international tourists [12–14], curious for new destinations and experiences. This, in turn, played out an impulse across the region for reconsideration of the formerly neglected socialist legacy on different levels, ranging from private to governmental initiatives.

This study primarily relies on a non-systematic approach to data collection and data analysis. The material has been collected from the various secondary sources and media reports on the selected case studies from Hungary, Romania, and the former Yugoslavia. First, a growing body of scientific work in this context has been used—mostly from the year 2000, onwards—as an orientation and a relevant source of information for further analysis. Particularly interesting were publications about the individual cases of communist/socialist heritage emerging in representations of CEE cities and countries. Secondly, and equally relevant, were Internet sources and media-articles, for which a non-systematic online database search has been performed. Targeted were reports on the region that highlighted some alternative perspectives of socialist legacies and promoted them for international audiences. Finally, all the collected data has been analyzed in a non-systematic way and thus used to provide relevant information and support for the main arguments. Regarding the organization of the paper, the first section presents a theoretical background on the role of the media and tourism industry in the process of identity construction. The second part scrutinizes the duality in reconsiderations of the socialist pasts in the CEE region. The following part discusses the cases of global media and tourism industry initiating reconsideration of heritage in the selected cases. Lastly, following the discussion, the paper concludes with an emphasis on compromising approaches to redefining the perception of the socialist built legacy and the potential that the media and tourism have for further advances of this process.

2. Manipulation with Heritage and the Role of Media and Tourism

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), cultural heritage “gives each particular place its recognizable features and is the storehouse of human experience” [15] (p. 57). As such, it has long been recognized as a vital element in the construction of collective and place identities and a key resource for the development of urban and regional economies [4,5]. Cultural heritage has also played an important role in the rise of the tourism industry [11], along with the booming technological developments—particularly in travel and communication. However, these advancements also subjected cultural heritage to market rules, which in turn lead to its superficial exploitation [4]. This is evident in many cases of irreversible transformations and depreciation of its values, such as the common shifting of the function or form of built urban heritage to transform their meanings and appropriate them as resources for tourism and economy. The recent trends have thus also affected the heritagization process, as a concept that refers to the process through which objects, places, and practices are turned into cultural heritage.

The common opinion has been that once made official, “and hence transformed into a privileged class of ‘thing’ which we call ‘heritage’, (. . .), they will very rarely revert or transform into something else” [16] (p. 582). However, because of a present-centered perspective through the whole series of lenses of various actors and interest groups, the contemporary heritagization should be understood as a concept heavily driven by the current societal needs, which indicates that heritage is rather of ascribed than intrinsic worth. Graham and Howard have argued that “the contents, interpretations,

and representations of the heritage resource are selected according to the demands of the present and, in turn, bequeathed to an imagined future" [17] (p. 2). Many authors similarly view heritage as an agglomeration of values that are created, shaped, and managed in response to the demands of societies in the present [10,16–18]. However, as Graham and Howard point out, "(t)he creation of any heritage actively or potentially disinherits or excludes those who do not subscribe to or are embraced within, the terms of meaning attending that heritage" [17] (p. 3). As such, the process of production of heritage is highly manipulative and also associated with contestation of some of its unwanted components.

Although highly present in present-day agendas for economic development, manipulation of cultural heritage is not a recent phenomenon. According to Ashworth [3] (pp. 267–268), the built heritage of European cities has been 'filtrated' over time. On the one hand, there is involuntary destruction or disappearance of artifacts, spaces, buildings, and elements, as well as voluntary eradication caused by modernization or changes in political regimes or the cultural paradigm. On the other hand, museumification involves the shift in the function and form of heritage that has occurred on purpose "in order to transform the meaning of the conserved schemata or/and use the conserved schemata as tourist/economic resources" [2] (pp. 23–24). Finally, in almost all European cities, according to Gospodini (2002), it is possible to provide evidence that by means of such manipulation processes, built heritage has been produced or selected "by such criteria so as to constitute a great narrative supporting national identities; and thereby, legitimising the hegemony of nation states and justifying and guaranteeing common political governances over particular land territories" (2002: 25). In this sense, the historical physical configuration of modern cities could be regarded as purposefully created, developed, and transformed. Behind this intention is the whole range of criteria for selection of appropriate built heritage from the past to be preserved, thus finally making its effects on the present and the future [2,17,19].

Either for the purpose to support the creation of national identities or for development of urban and regional economies, the phenomenon of heritage manipulation is getting more pronounced today. In an increasingly complex and competitive global marketplace, the forces behind globalization and informatization largely influence and control the societal ways of communication [20], which for tourism marketers, implied a higher reliance on the creation and management of distinctive and appealing destination images distributed through various sources [21]. Furthermore, the later expansion of interactive media, such as E-tourism and the Internet, not only redefined the entire process of developing, managing, and marketing tourism products and destinations, but also opened endless possibilities for transformation and promotion of values associated with cultural heritage. A technology-empowered marketing approach also holds enormous potential for the process of creating and communicating new and more purposeful heritages [22]. The rapid development of information and communication technologies that have supported the rise of the tourism industry has thus not only initiated its comprehensive transformations [23], but also seriously affected the way the society perceive and evaluate heritage.

Based on the above-highlighted discourses from the literature, the theoretical framework of this paper is constructed around the arguments for present-centered goals and objectives driving the process of creation and manipulation with heritages. Although this process traditionally stems from the need for construction of collective and place identities, it is increasingly motivated by development goals of urban and regional economies. The highly competitive tourism industry that largely relies on the capacities of cultural heritages utilizes the advantages of information and communication technologies as a response to increasing consumer demands. Particularly highlighted is a phenomenon in which some heritages are heavily promoted through media-generated images, while others are ignored and forgotten due to their incompatibility with the desires and demands of societies and governments in the present. However, in some cases, the perspectives of nation-states regarding the place and nation branding might significantly differ and even collide with some other objectives, such as of the tourism industry. The following section introduces the main issues associated with such duality occurring in the CEE region.

3. The Main Features of Urban Image and Identity (Re)construction in the CEE Region

Contrary to the high heterogeneity between the CEE countries, during the past three decades, they have been facing complex transformations from communist totalitarian to democratic political regimes, and from centrally planned to market economies. While social structures with more-or-less success adapted to the set of new conditions, the enduring nature of the built environment hindered its follow-up with the rapidness of the socio-political changes [24]. Furthermore, the creation of new identities in the CEE region during the post-socialist transition came under the profound influence of a neoliberal doctrine that heavily promoted a marketing economy, while the representation of the socialist pasts in such ventures remained largely a matter of contested discourses. A shift from state control towards a range of diversified private sector interest and changing market rules finally demonstrated a general lack of vision for the post-socialist city. Urban space and identity construction ended up becoming rather questionable and even neglected aspects of transition [24,25].

The most common strategic approach frequently involved prioritizing “European-ness” by turning towards the pre-socialist urban and national pasts [26,27], rebranding through culture [28], or even for comprehensive architectural remodeling of cities [29]. Numerous initiatives of the so-called “de-communization” of urban space [30,31] aimed at intentionally erasing the socialist past, rejecting associations with the East, and emphasizing connections with Western Europe. The creation of a “better” past usually involved changing names of cities, buildings, streets, squares, and parks; changing the use of former socialist public buildings; restoration of formerly destroyed historic and sacral buildings; and removal or even destruction of the socialist symbols, monuments, and buildings [32]. However, both national and international interest in the socialist heritage started to rise in the early 2000s, after about a decade of transition. Its culmination was in the official recognition of some less difficult and less unilateral aspects of the socialist legacy due to the efforts of a number of heritage experts and scholars. Besides, the most important role in the de-contestation of socialist heritage was the rise of nostalgia for socialism and particularly its perception as “a novel form of Orientalism” [12] (p. 3) that propelled the dynamic development of the trends within the tourism industry, using heritage as a resource. An important breakthrough for the rapid development of tourism in the region was the accession of new countries to the European Union, and their further inclusion in the Schengen area that also facilitated international mobility [32]. Equally relevant were the booming technological developments, going along with the digital revolution and regional collaboration [11]. Finally, the recent phenomenon of “communist heritage tourism”, as Light has noticed, involved “the consumption of sites and sights associated with the former communist regimes” in contemporary CEE [33] (p. 157).

Considering that each country sought to present their unique features to visitors and to promote themselves in a way to emphasize their sense of a national identity [34], development of tourism has a significant role in the process of identity (re)construction, along with the potential to enable the necessary growth of income for post-socialist economies burdened by the transitioning process. However, the rising interest in heritage of the socialist era was obstructed in the sense of its confrontation with the official national policies for identity construction based on nostalgia for the pre-socialist history chapters. According to Velikonja [13], the long-term trauma in the former socialist countries was thus required to be “healed” through musealisation and consumerism. In the core of this paradox was persistent contestation of the socialist legacy that continued even after its revival and partial appropriation solely for touristic purposes. Prague’s Museum of Communism, Budapest’s Statue Park, or the permanent exhibition Socialist Realism in Kozłówka in Poland—they all shared the “antinostalgic attitude by conforming to the dominant ideological interpretations of the past and legitimizing them” [13] (p. 540). In a situation with economy verses identity constructs, the priority for the CEE countries to place the communist period behind them has thus been overshadowed by the resource that enabled tourism to become a source of revenue [35]. An emerging challenge, therefore, was to find ways for accommodating the rising tourist interest, thereby not to compromise the post-socialist identity construct.

4. Media and Tourism as Initiators of Heritage De-Contestation—Case Studies from Hungary, Romania, and the Former Yugoslavia

In the focus of the following analysis are the three rather specific cases of socialist heritage contestation occurring in the CEE region, following the responses towards its re-evaluation during the post-socialist times. The first case brings a rather particular context of Hungary, which after World War II, experienced a hardline Stalinist regime, followed by its gradual liberalization in the late 1960s. Although the inner city of the capital, Budapest, was mostly spared the radical changes, the most visible aspect of socialist intervention assumed an aggressive ideological campaign that included a massive public display of revolutionary symbols, for which the urban fabric of the inner city was extremely convenient. However, after the fall of state socialism, most of the socialist monuments across the capital of Budapest became symbols of the Soviet oppression that needed to be removed.

The second case involves the Romanian context, which, contrary to the Hungarian course of gradual liberalization, followed a rather different course. The autocratic rule of its leader, Nicolae Ceausescu, was certainly marked by draconian austerity measures imposed to eliminate the country's foreign debt, causing living standards to plummet for its own citizens. Paradoxically, Ceausescu's plan to turn central Bucharest into a modern socialist capital during the 1980s was characterized by a grandiose scheme, for which almost a quarter of the historic center was razed. Significant demolition and new construction within the urban fabric of the socialist Bucharest, along with the difficult socio-economic circumstances, became the main reasons behind the later contestation of this socialist legacy in the national frameworks.

The last case brings another specific context of comprehensive identity reconstruction occurring among the post-socialist successor states of the former Yugoslavia. The former federation of six socialist republics advocated for an official national identity based on an ideological vision of the common future; rather than on ethnic, political, and cultural characteristics of the constituent nations [36,37]. The need for new symbolical representations and interpretations caused thousands of monumental sculptures to be erected throughout the former Yugoslavia to commemorate the sites where World War II battles had been fought. After the armed conflicts and the federation falling apart, these monuments became unwanted symbols of the past, which could no longer comply with the new national identity constructs of the successor nation states.

4.1. *Tempering the Socialist Legacy in Budapest, Hungary*

Intended to serve as a constant reminder of solidarity and gratitude to the Soviet Union, the iconography of revolutionary symbols in Budapest in the early 1950s started to suffer from a great disjunction between their inscribed meanings and the significance attached to them, turning instead into symbols of unwanted external control [38]. One such example was the 9 m tall statue of Stalin on the Procession Square as a representation of Soviet domination in Hungary, which was toppled over during the uprising against the communist government in 1956. Additionally, during the early transition period following the shift in 1989, Budapest faced even greater challenges. The remaining revolutionary symbols in the central neighborhoods were no longer providing an adequate image for the re-establishment of urban and national identity. The previous removal of Stalin's Statue was thus followed by a massive destruction or removal of other monuments immediately after the fall of socialism, while over 300 streets, squares, and parks were renamed and ended up regaining their historical names [33,39].

Intended to become a repository for the city's monuments to socialism, the Statue Park Museum or the Memento Park (Szoborpark) was established in 1993, on the second anniversary of the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Hungarian territory, in the outskirts of Budapest (Figure 1). The initial role of the park was both temporal and spatial distancing from the socialist past, achieved through different means. First, the relocation of the monuments was clearly aimed at radically destabilizing their intended meanings that could be conveyed to the public only within their original urban settings. Second, the architectural solution that won the competition announced by the Budapest General

Assembly (Fővárosi Közgyűlés) in 1991 involved the concept in which socialist past was safely placed in a form of a quarantine. Third, the massive portal at the entrance to the park seemed to communicate to the visitors their parting with reality, as like the Western amusement parks (Figure 2). Finally, the thematic emphasis was on the less positive memories of socialism, as conveyed by its original title—“A Sentence About Tyranny” Park, named after a poem by the Hungarian politician of democratic leanings, Gyula Ilyés.



Figure 1. The center of Budapest (A), and the remote location of Memento Park in the outskirts (B). © 2018 Microsoft, Earthstar Geographics SIO & © 2018 HERE. Source: <http://www.bing.com/maps/>, 2018-11-09.



Figure 2. The main entrance to Memento Park in the outskirts of Budapest, marking both temporal and spatial distancing from the contemporary Hungarian national construct. Photo: author, 2018-08-05.

Budapest, as a new and attractive destination in the East, experienced a tourist boom in the immediate post-communist period, illustrated with the number of hotels that nearly doubled in only eight years from 1990 [39]. Memento Park also showed considerable tourist appeal [33]. Probably resulting from this new trend, the National History Museum opened a thematic gallery back in 1996. The exhibition showed the portraits of post-war communist leaders and a statue of Stalin, but also displays depicting the collapse of the communist state, interpreting thereby the pre-transition

post-war period as just another closed chapter in Hungary's history. However, after the initial swing in removing socialist revolutionary symbols, years of difficult economic transformations and hardships of privatization slightly redefined the general attitude towards socialist egalitarianism. Concurrently, public view on the prior removal of communist monuments also changed. Many residents of Budapest started believing that the monuments should have been left at their original locations, as authentic markers of their historical period. Their relocation was increasingly seen as an unnecessary public expenditure, considering that they had lost their original meanings a long time ago [33,38].

The change in the national attitude based on a tourist perspective facilitated the forthcoming process of partial rehabilitation of the socialist past, which also initiated some adaptations of Memento Park in 2006. In front of the main entrance, the so-called "Witness Square" was introduced, which, for the first time, emphasized the historical importance of the place, as well as its potential for cultural production. Furthermore, a new exhibition hall and a small movie theatre for the thematically structured programme surrounded the square, enabling an approach to topics from the socialist past with more depth and content. Also, a life-sized copy of the Stalin Monument with the broken bronze shoes on top of the pedestal was built as an artistic interpretation to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1956 revolution. Since then, as a unique museum in the CEE, Memento Park has been rapidly established as one of Budapest's most unusual tourist attractions and a new urban brand (Figure 3). It started featuring in the mass media of a global reach as the place to experience the Hungarian socialist past (Figure 4a). The US American broadcaster, Cable News Network (CNN), described the site as a must-see "monumental cemetery" [40], while the largest travel guidebook publisher in the world, "Lonely Planet", listed and promoted Memento Park as one of the top-choice historic sites in Budapest [41]. Along with the rising attention gained by the international media and tourism industry, the park went a long way finally to feature today in the official promotional material advertising the Hungarian capital city as a tourist destination [42].



Figure 3. Tourists visiting Memento Park in Budapest. Author's photo, 2018-08-05.

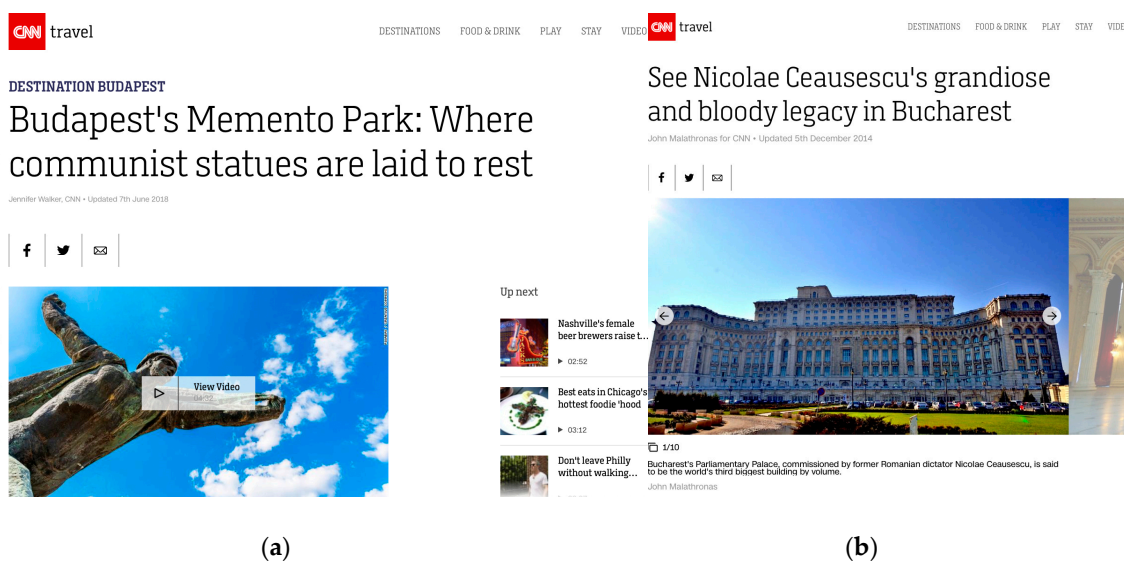


Figure 4. Cities from the CEE region in the focus of the US American broadcaster, CNN. (a) Memento Park was described as a must-see “monumental cemetery”; (b) visitors are invited to see the “grandiose and bloody legacy in Bucharest”. Screenshots, 2018-08-10. (a) <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/memento-park-budapest-hungary/index.html>; (b) <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/ceausescu-trail-bucharest-romania/index.html>.

4.2. Compromising National Identity in Bucharest, Romania

Contrary to the less invasive interventions of socialist planning in Budapest, Ceausescu’s planners envisioned the massive Civic Centre (Centrul Civic) in the place of historical urban districts in central Bucharest. After its completion, the immense House of the People (Casa Poporului) housing presidential, state, and party activities held an absolute spatial domination of central Bucharest (Figure 5). This was accentuated by an absurd gesture of an axis that ran through the grand ceremonial Union Boulevard (Bulevardul Unirii), but led to nowhere in particular. Deliberately planned to be longer and wider than the Champ-Élysées in Paris [43], the Boulevard was lined with 10 story apartment buildings that housed key state functionaries and officials. This monumental urban ‘façade’ also had a major role to convey an image of a grand national capital, while hiding the less representative urban fabric of socialist Bucharest out of visitors’ sight at the same time. Thus, similarly to a discord between the inscribed meanings and the significance attached to the monuments in Budapest, the newly created image of Bucharest also demonstrated a shift in the intended symbolism. Designed to become one of the world’s largest buildings that would demonstrate authority and power of the communist state, the House of the People became instead the “defining symbol of totalitarianism” in CEE [43] (p. 19).

After the fall of socialism in 1989, the evocation of the pre-socialist period has been increasingly constructed as having been Romania’s “Golden Age”, which started with the comprehensive renaming of streets and squares [44]. The country also faced a challenge in finding a future use for the socialist urban landscape, which still carried traumatic associations to the oppression and harm caused by the former totalitarian regime. The prevailing public opinion was that the unfinished House of the People should be torn down [33,43]. After many debates on its future use, an international architectural competition entitled “Bucuresti 2000” was launched in 1995, with the aim to provide solutions for a comprehensive remake of the Civic Centre. Apart from the objective to open-up, reconfigure, and somewhat “decontaminate” totalitarian landscape, the initiation of the competition was also an attempt to improve the existing negative international reputation of the country following the disputable legacy of Ceausescu’s autocratic rule [43]. However, the winning design of the competition was never implemented due to its high implementation costs. The national government thus eventually decided to complete the construction work on the building itself, after which it was designated to

house the national parliament. Thereby, its symbolic meaning was reconfigured through a rather pragmatic way—by renaming it the Parliament Palace (Palatul Parlamentului).



Figure 5. The dominating location of the Parliament Palace (A) in the center of Bucharest, accentuated with the axis running through Union Boulevard (B). Next to the Parliament Palace is the construction site for the People’s Salvation Cathedral (C). © 2018 Microsoft, © 2018 DigitalGlobe & © 2018 HERE. Source: <http://www.bing.com/maps/>, 2018-11-09.

The following attempts to minimize the building’s negative connotation involved diversification of its functions—since 1994, it has also housed an international conference center, followed by an art museum that was introduced in 2004. Moving further, a relatively slow progress in remaking the landscape of the remaining Civic Centre resulted in only a few private sector investments, which introduced business and banking into the district. The attempts to further diversify the functions had commenced with public-private initiatives to construct the first shopping mall and a five-star hotel in 2000 [43]. More recent appropriations of the socialist legacy occurred in 2010, when construction work on the monumental Cathedral of National Salvation commenced in the very heart of the Civic Centre to rival the Parliament Palace in both scale and symbolic representation (Figures 5 and 6). This initiative represented the processes of post-socialist healing and “Europeanization” by emphasizing the nation’s Orthodox identity triumphing over totalitarianism, but also testified to a general absence of a vision for the development of the 21st century Bucharest [45], as a common feature of many other post-socialist cities.

Contrary to the extreme ambivalence shown by Romanian citizens towards the Parliament Palace, Bucharest’s communist past was gradually gaining its place in the Western media with a global outreach (Figure 4b). Considering that the country has experienced a relentless decline in tourism from 6.5 to 4.6 million visitors between 1990 and 2000 [46], there seemed to be little choice but to make the former Civic Centre available to curious international visitors in mid-1997. International media expressed a fascination with this built legacy due to its intriguing history and immense proportions. The branch of the US American broadcaster, CNN travel, specialized in tourism, invited the visitors to a “see grandiose and bloody legacy in Bucharest” [47], while multilingual European broadcaster, “Euronews”, promoted the city’s communist past through a report that nostalgically evoked its Soviet times, inviting visitors to “take a tour through Bucharest’s communist past” [48]. Such marketization of sights in Bucharest reaching international audience made benefits for further development of tourism at the national level. Some private tourist companies, as an example, responded to the gradually increasing interest in the socialist past, such as Unveil Romania that offered the specialized city

tour, “The Ashes of Communism”. The tour that put an emphasis on the city’s communist past was promoted through its most iconic imagery, including the built legacy of the former Civic Centre [49].



Figure 6. The construction of the gigantic People’s Salvation Cathedral in close vicinity of the Parliament Palace in Bucharest. Photo: Mirail Mihai, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en>.

The Parliament Palace ironically became the city’s biggest tourist attraction, reaching approximately 25,000 visitors annually [33], which finally included the site in the official material promoting the country. Another turn was when the apartment blocks along the Union Boulevard became the city’s most expensive real estate, primarily due to their modern and earthquake-proof features. The former symbols of totalitarian power thus gradually became the space in which the arrival of international tourism and global capitalism in Romania has been proclaimed, with billboards and advertisements for global consumer goods, and the impact coming from the private sector and tourism industry [43]. After many contestations, the former Civic Centre, with plenty of contest, became the new, appropriated, and Westernized center of the post-socialist Romanian capital city. However, although the tourism industry, in this case, clearly imposed legitimation of the socialist legacy through its inclusion in the official tourist offer, it still has not led to the official recognition of the Civic Centre as a heritage site. In fact, the contestation of the socialist past continued through its translation in presenting the Parliament Palace to tourists with the emphasis on its physical dimensions, craftsmanship, and current functions, while at the same time ignoring less impressive details from the site’s dark history [33].

4.3. Changing Perspective on the Anti-Fascist Monuments of the Former Yugoslavia

Contrary to the previous examples, the search for new symbolic representations to support national unity and represent all cultural and political identities in the complex Yugoslav society was a thorough and comprehensive endeavor for the post-war federal government. This task has necessarily required a rediscovery of concepts, narratives, and symbolism of the past, for which an interpretation of the anti-fascist revolution and people’s role in it was conveniently selected [50]. The new narratives were based on the national liberation struggle, with a particular emphasis on the horrors inflicted upon

the Yugoslav people. Grandiose monuments introduced all around the country thus aimed at marking the sites of major battles during World War II or simply to convey messages related to the People's Liberation Struggle (NOB) (Figure 7).

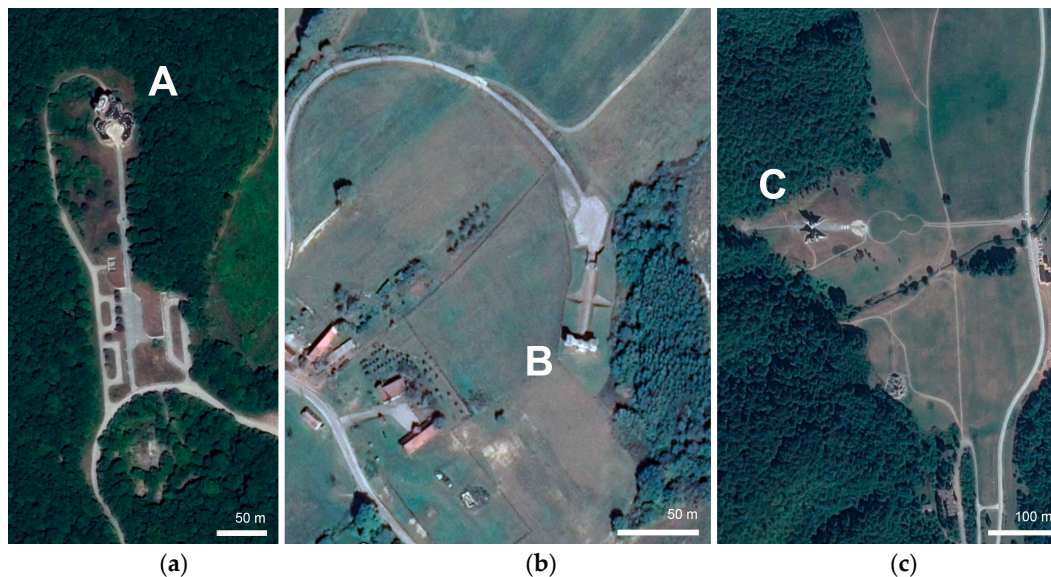


Figure 7. Remote locations of Yugoslav monuments in spectacular natural settings: (a) Petrova Gora Monument; (b) Monument to the Revolution of the People of Moslavina; (c) The Battle of Sutjeska Memorial Monument Complex. © 2018 CNES/Airbus Map data © 2018 Google, Source: <https://www.google.com/maps/> 2018-11-11.

Besides creating new narratives for the society, which lacked in common symbolic foundations, the Yugoslav anti-fascist monuments also had the task of providing relevant points of national identification. Thus, besides the stylistic architectural expression with plenty of symbolic values, the new federal government had to rely on the artistic values of the new symbols as well. Not only renowned artists from the region, but also from all over Europe authored the monuments; a number of them even got quite revolutionary designs, such as the Petrova Gora Monument by a prominent Croatian sculptor, Vojin Bakić (Figures 7 and 8). Some contemporary art critics even saw this monument as a predecessor of the hybridity between sculpture and architecture, on which the work of American architect, Frank Gehry, later became recognizable [51] (Figure 8b). Built in a modern architectural style that was often associated with abstract and even ambiguous expression, Yugoslav monuments were gradually considered as some of the most impressive modernist monuments in Europe [52].

The transition from the national celebration, over general contestation, back to slow and partial recognition of the Yugoslav socialist monuments was and still remains a long and complex process. It has commenced after the breakup of the federation when the system of symbolic values developed around the socialist monuments dramatically changed. From the ultimate memorials of the antifascist struggle, the structures were largely reduced from their previous symbolic meanings only to represent material pieces of evidence of the once complex symbolic apparatus of the former state. In addition, these monuments also started to remind of oppressive pasts among the successor states in the post-conflict contexts that needed to be forgotten and its traces removed. Due to a lack of any potential for integration into the new official narratives of successor states, they were finally ignored or even forgotten by the new regimes across the region. Out of an estimated 6000 monuments only in Croatia, one half of them has been either legally or illegally removed or blown away [53]. The more remote ones have been left to slowly decay or were gradually destroyed by secondary waste collectors (Figure 8a). The situation was quite similar in other successor states of the former Yugoslav federation.

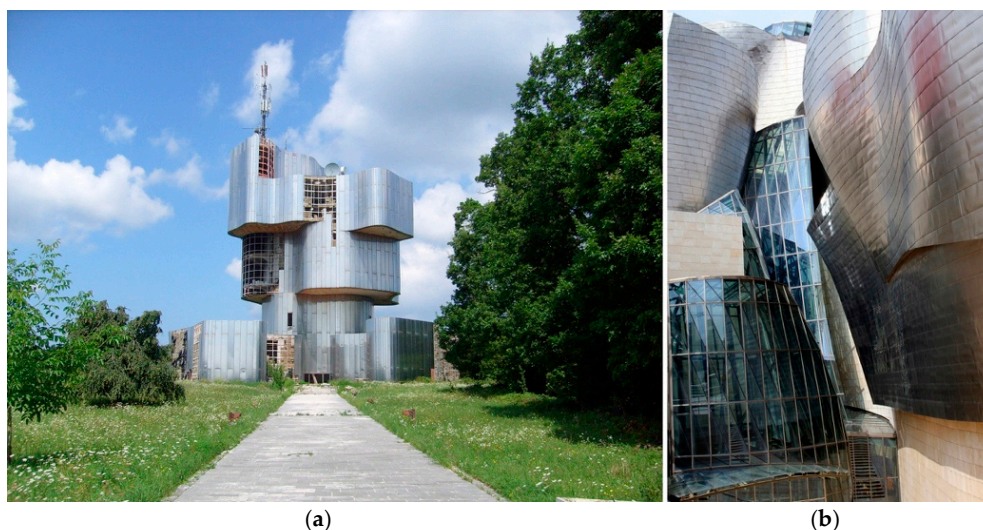


Figure 8. Petrova Gora Monument, built in 1981. (a) The state of decay, as of 2010; (b) the spatial composition of the monument has been seen as a predecessor to the hybridity of architecture and sculpture, as the example of the Guggenheim Museum (1997) in Bilbao shows. Photos: (a): Sandor Bordas, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>; (b): E. Goergen, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>.

The dramatic situation in which the anti-fascist monuments got into recently commenced its slow turnover. With the rising trend of rediscovering Europe’s East, the legacy of Yugoslav architecture and planning finally got its ways to the Western audience. The new perspective on this legacy largely challenged the former stereotypes and taboos through the means of global mass media. This trend firstly started after the Belgian photographer, Jan Kempnaers, documented some of the Yugoslav monuments in his photographic monograph, “Spomenik”, published in 2010. The photographs of its ‘alien architecture’ captured the audiences’ attention, particularly through circulation in the digital media. Besides, the project has also been exhibited in many global centers, like New York, London, Amsterdam, and Tokyo, thereby receiving a number of reviews in the media with global outreach, like “The Guardian” [54] and “The New York Times” [12].

Of particular interest for the rise of interest for the Yugoslav monuments was the postscript of Kempner’s book, in which Willem Jan Neutelings considered them fitting “seamlessly into the Sixties-era aesthetics of Barbarella movies, Paco Rabanne dresses and Lava lamps” [55] (p. 64). According to Kulić, these interpretations inspired mass media and individual authors, in particular, to “regularly describe socialist buildings as ‘alien’, also bringing in further sci-fi references: Flying saucers, Star Wars fighter jets, and so on” [12] (p. 3). The review of Kempner’s monograph by “The Guardian”, titled, “Spomeniks: the second world war memorials that look like an alien art” [54], was particularly driven by such an interpretation, which later turned into a trend for cultural production through other media. The monument at Mountain Kosmaj near Belgrade was part of the setting in the US American sci-fi franchise, “Hunger Games”, from 2012. Furthermore, the UFO-looking Monument to the Revolution of the People of Moslavina (Croatia) (Figure 7b) and The Battle of Sutjeska Memorial Monument Complex (Bosnia and Hercegovina) (Figure 7c) were used as the background for the futuristic music video, “Darkside”, by Alan Walker, released in 2018 (Figure 9). The monuments of Yugoslav socialism, in short, have gradually revived as a source for cultural production.

The increasing interest in the Yugoslav socialist legacy recently culminated in one of the biggest international events that celebrated its concrete monuments and urban planning visions. The exhibition, “Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980”, displayed in the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2018–2019 (Figure 10), further demonstrated the immense influence of the international intellectual elite, going along with the power of global mass media and social networks

to attract attention and set the frameworks for general cultural preferences of the masses. Besides, along with the rising interest in the legacy of the former Yugoslavia coming from international authors and media, a notable interest on this topic started to emerge at the national levels as well. Plenty of local media and authors across the region dealt with the topic of decaying monuments, raising their voices for necessary preservation of the remaining ones [53]. The most notable is the documentary, “Unwanted Heritage”, from 2016 by a Croatian film director and screenwriter, Irena Škorić, that attracted plenty of attention from the international audience and won a number of international awards, including for the best documentary on the festivals in Sweden and Italy. One of the latest is a documentary, “The Art of Memory”, by a Serbian director, Jelena Radenović, to be premiered in 2018 on national television, aiming to reflect on the forgotten significance and symbolical values of these monuments.

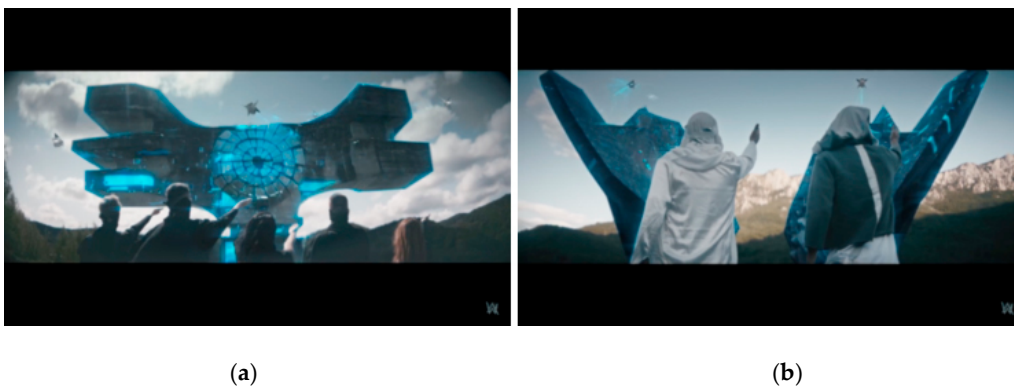


Figure 9. Sequences from the music video, “Darkside”, by Alan Walker, released in 2018, showing the Yugoslav monuments as a background for the futuristic music video. (a) Monument to the Revolution of the People of Moslavina, Podgarić, Croatia; (b) The Battle of Sutjeska Memorial Monument Complex in the Valley of Heroes, Tjentište, Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Screenshots, 2018-08-08. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-P4QBt-FWw>.



Figure 10. Catalog of the exhibition, “Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980”, at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, showing the Battle of Sutjeska Memorial Monument Complex in Tjentište, Bosnia Herzegovina. Source: Author’s photo.

5. Marketing Socialist Legacy—A Long Way from Repression towards Reconsideration

In the particular case of the contested post-transitional reality in the CEE region, the approach to the socialist legacy has demonstrated some dynamic trends evolving over time, despite a number of local differences depending on the country [32]. These ranged from the most extreme physical removal or eradication, over partial assimilation and appropriation, finally to the gradual rehabilitation of socialist built legacy through musealisation and consumerism. Although there seems to be a linear development of these processes, they run in parallel with shifting intensities, driven by the two opposite phenomena—one dominant at the national levels of CEE, and the other being imposed mostly from the international spheres.

After the fall of state socialism, the transition that followed showed to be an extremely complex process. Although it brought some positive developments, post-socialist transition imposed at the same time a number of challenges and troubles. Demolition of the welfare state, the rise of social injustices, national conflicts, or re-traditionalisation were only some of the negative consequences that had their effects, varying in intensity across CEE. Unique combinations of successes, failures, hopes, and disappointments resulted with a growing number of people that started to rethink the recent past, which finally turned out to be the initiator of uncritical glorification of socialist times. Although the real causes and consequences of “red nostalgia” are still under debate and yet to be fully explored, some authors see it as “mourning for the irreversible loss of the past (. . .) images of a safe society, calm times, prosperity, and solidarity among people” [13] (p. 538). This retrospective utopia, as a hope for a better world, imposed an alternative view on socialist pasts and thus represented the very first step towards reconsideration of socialist legacy at the local and the national levels. Furthermore, an outsider’s perspective on CEE through its former socialist context also holds a certain ‘oriental’ flair that awakens curiosity and invites exploration. As such, the emerging reconsideration of socialism can also be seen as an opportunity to fabricate and impose new ways towards achieving commercial or political objectives for the benefit of different groups of people. Such interests can be detected both at the level of national governments, in their strive for attracting foreign investments and profit, and particularly from a number of actors at the international level with regards to the CEE context. In achieving such objectives, media and tourism present the most pragmatic way towards changing and controlling the perception of the masses through reformulating perspectives, representations, and imaginaries, thus opening new markets and possibilities for economic development as the major objectives of the neoliberal global agenda.

Removal of the socialist past through relocation of its iconography in the case of Budapest showed a shift that occurred from the most pragmatic approach to decommunization of urban space, by stripping off the unwanted meanings through simple relocation of its symbols. After Budapest joined the arena of competitive global cities, it increasingly attracted the attention of many international tourists and investors, which also spread to the then-unfamiliar socialist context as a new form of Orientalism [12]. Coupled with musealisation and consumerism, this trend largely helped in the transition from the initial contestation to the recognition of Memento Park as a new urban brand and just another tourist attraction that the Hungarian capital city has to offer. Furthermore, appropriation of some unwanted legacy elements in the case of Bucharest demonstrated an example of the fluid and deliberately created duality in approaches aiming to oppose the striking presence of the socialist heritage in its urban realm. Conflicting tourists’ and residents’ expectations thus finally resulted in the partial and convenient rehabilitation of certain elements from Romania’s former totalitarianism through controlled appropriation and musealisation of its major components. Finally, the case of abandoned and ignored socialist monuments in the former Yugoslavia illustrated not only the fragility of local and national memories and associations that built legacy previously conveyed, but also the paradox of their international revival through a new-age cultural production and consumerism driven by neoliberal Orientalist impulses.

The analysis of the case studies finally provided two major insights. The first one relates to the process of urban and national identity (re)construction in the CEE context, demonstrating the

opposite phenomena running in parallel. On the one hand, contrary to some evidence of nostalgia for socialism, the official policy of nation branding has kept on shifting away from the socialist legacies. The negative and slowly changing collective memories and associations related to the former regimes, along with its striking contrasts and conflicts with the newly emerged identity constructs, have thus generally hindered de-contestation of socialist cultural heritage. On the other hand, rapid technological developments that significantly contributed to internationalization, connectivity, and informatization of the global society initiated a slight reshaping of the perspectives towards socialist heritage. Coupled with neoliberal Orientalism, these modern developments thus kept on contributing to the growth of international tourism in the CEE region. Newly emerging possibilities for generating necessary income for post-socialist economies burdened by the transitioning process could finally be considered as promising for further facilitation of acceptance, appropriation, and future inclusion of some elements of the socialist legacy into the new national identity constructs. The second insight, therefore, relates to the necessary reconciliation of the two opposite objectives, as a final prerequisite for the heritagization of the socialist legacy eventually to occur.

6. Conclusions

Contrary to some evident advances, the process of socialist legacy emerging as a new urban heritage is rather slow and selective, still relying on modification or erasure of some difficult elements of history from the repository of collective memories. On the other hand, the case studies demonstrated that a socialist past can provide the required element of extraordinariness, as a distinction from ordinary and common, thus holding the potential not only for the creation of international visibility through various media, but also for the development of tourism and thus for profit generation. Reconsideration of the ways socialist heritage is perceived and managed is evident through the example of specialized tourism experiences taking precedence over mass tourism that has been spreading out to the CEE countries since a few decades ago [56]. However, considering the often-colliding market requirements and the new national identity constructs, it seems that long-term prosperity is a matter of time and skillful compromising.

Besides the already significant achievements in initiating and driving reconsiderations of contested legacies, both international tourism and the media also showed a high potential for reconciling the two opposite objectives. The scenarios towards the profound de-contestation, recognition, and possibly even heritagization of the socialist legacy in CEE, however, strongly depends on locally specific conditions; while both the cases from Hungary and Romania demonstrated the crucial role that international tourism plays in these ventures, the more difficult post-conflict framework of Yugoslav monuments particularly emphasized the role of international media in this process. The locally specific conditions also involve different temporal requirements for the reconsideration of the socialist legacy to occur. However, if regarded as the initial step towards the potential preservation of the abandoned monuments, the processes currently occurring in Hungary, Romania, and the former Yugoslavia could finally result in their inclusion into future strategies for the development of socialist tourism in the region. The forthcoming tourism development could further motivate local and national governments in the long-term not only to redefine approaches to the formerly contested history chapters, but also to include them in the wider frames of strengthening national identity senses.

Considering the role that tourism and media play today in the process of creation of heritage, it remains important to note that addressing the current needs and trends imposed from the international arena of neoliberal societies still cannot be considered as a guarantee for successful outcomes. On the contrary, it could easily result with some rather extreme phenomena, such as musealisation of sites and creation of urban spaces of memory purely based on the requirements from the tourism industry and general consumerism. Thus, the CEE countries are still facing the core challenge to find case-specific approaches to deal with an extreme fluidity of meanings, contestations, and drives behind the process of forthcoming heritagization of socialist legacy. This finally reiterates the debate on “whose heritage” is to be selected and preserved for the future generations [57], as an inquiry

that certainly remains a crucial aspect in further efforts for rehabilitation and creative exploitation of contested pasts.

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