

Adelina Ștefan

International Tourism Between Tradition and Modernization in Socialist Romania: Promoting Tourism Abroad During the 1950s-1960s

Abstract: This article examines how socialist Romania used cultural heritage with an emphasis on guidebooks, photo albums, and exhibitions to promote itself as a tourist destination abroad during the 1950s and the 1960s. Guidebooks suggested certain itineraries for foreign tourists when visiting Romania, thus, building a certain imaginary, while exhibitions put on display material objects and images that claimed to help viewers get a better grasp of the socialist country. As the article shows, tourist promotion during socialism presented Romania as a space where rich history/culture, including religious symbols, blended with modern tourist infrastructure, such as brand-new hotels and restaurants. This strategy was first developed in the 1950s in the Middle East&Global South, while in the 1960s it was successfully implemented in capitalist Western Europe.

Keywords: Tourism; Socialism; Romania; Guidebooks; Festivals; Western Europe; Egypt; Tourist Promotion.

ADELINA ȘTEFAN

University of Ostrava, Ostrava Czech Republic
New Europe College, Romania, Bucharest
Adelina.stefan@gmail.com

DOI: 10.24193/cechinox.2026.50.01

In 1971¹, the Ministry of Tourism and the Council for Socialist Education in Romania commissioned the French writer Georges Pilement to put together a guidebook of Romania. Titled “La Roumanie Inconnue”, the guidebook was supposed to lure in the potential French speaking tourists to Romania.² The travel guide opened with a 15-page Foreword about the Orthodox monasteries in Northern Moldova, one of the tourist destinations the communist regime sought to advertise, but a region which was also of interest to some French tourists.³ The guidebook was part of the Romanian communist government’s larger initiative to promote Romania as a tourist destination abroad. This policy also included the organizing of several exhibitions as well as TV and radio shows that centered on both cultural sites and natural landmarks. Soon, this promotion strategy became customary for capitalist states in Western Europe. But before coming up with this marketing scheme in the capitalist West, this was successfully tested in the

Middle East. As of early 1950s, Romania strengthened its contacts with countries in the Middle East in the attempt to increase its cultural and economic exchanges. For instance, a number of cultural and tourist exhibitions were organized in Egypt, one of the largest states in the region, while Egyptian cultural figures, policymakers, and tourists were invited to visit Romania.⁴ Egypt is a case in point because it had good relations with both capitalist and socialist countries, and the cultural activities that the Romanian state organized in Cairo or Alexandria facilitated a communication between various actors from socialist and capitalist Blocs as exhibitions and concerts were attended by diplomats but also by local cultural figures and ordinary individuals. While other socialist countries and their relationship with Egypt and the Middle East have been more thoroughly examined, the Romanian case have been overlooked.⁵

This article examines how socialist Romania used cultural heritage with an emphasis on guidebooks, photo albums, and exhibitions to promote itself as a tourist destination abroad during the 1950s and the 1960s. Guidebooks suggested certain itineraries for foreign tourists when visiting Romania, thus, building a certain imaginary, while exhibitions put on display material objects and images that claimed to help viewers get a better grasp of the socialist country. As the article shows, the proposed trips presented Romania as a space where rich history/culture blended with modern tourist infrastructure such as brand-new hotels and restaurants. The article will focus on several tourist exhibitions as it wants to investigate how tourist objectives and symbols were prioritized in

the tourist promotion of the early communist Romania. As existing literature on socialist Eastern Europe has focused on the “global turn” in the 1970s both when discussing international tourism and relationship with the Global South and capitalist West, this article wants to broaden this perspective and to examine Romania’s global entanglements in the 1950s and early 1960s through the lens of tourist promotion.⁶ Current scholarship on Romania has emphasized either the coercive nature of the communist regime in the 1950s and early 1960s (i.e., political imprisonment, surveillance, forced labor, collectivization, cultural propaganda), or the relationship with the USSR and the neighboring socialist countries, while it has overlooked other European and global entanglements and connections.⁷

This article suggests that Romania operated in a much broader network than socialist Eastern Europe during the 1950s and early 1960s when it comes to tourism and cultural relations. While in the 1950s these contacts entailed cultural exchanges with countries in the Middle East, as of mid 1950s, cultural and tourist connections with Western European countries were resumed. In this process, the initial exposure in the Middle East helped Romanian tourist and cultural specialists to sharpen their ideas and strategies that they later used in Western Europe. This was even more important as Romania’s tourist promotion had an economic rather than a cultural goal, and Middle East countries did not have the economic potential to send tourists to Romania as the Romanian government hoped. By contrast, most Middle East countries wanted to attract tourists from socialist Eastern

Europe, including Romania, in order to consolidate their own tourist economies. Despite this conundrum, as this article suggests during the 1950s and early 1960s, spaces such as Egypt worked like cultural intermediaries between the socialist east and capitalist West. Against this backdrop, Romanian officials took full advantage of the cultural networks in these countries in order to increase the socialist country's visibility among various publics in Egypt. This knowledge was later used in Western European countries, which did have the potential to become a tourist market for Romania. This article follows these developments with an eye to both official policies regarding cultural and tourist promotion and to specific actors such as diplomats, cultural figures, tourist officials, and travel writers.

In the first part of the article, I will examine how and by whom was Romania promoted abroad as a tourist destination, secondly, I will focus on several guidebooks of Romania published in the 1960s in order to pinpoint the historical references that the communist regime deemed specific to Romania, as well as how tourism was supposed to construe a symbolic map of the country; and, thirdly, I will examine Romania's participation into international tourist fairs and exhibitions organized in Egypt in the 1950s.

Promoting Romania as a Destination Abroad in the 1950s-1960s

In 1958, Hugo V. Seib, a West German travel writer published a book entitled "Romania by car."⁸ Given the Cold War context which pitted the socialist East

against the capitalist West, his trip through Romania was quite noteworthy. Although not an actual guidebook, Seib's travel writing provided some data about a country that to West German travelers might have appeared sealed beyond the Iron Curtain. His focus was mostly on Transylvania as this region had a substantial German-speaking population. Seib praised the Brukenthal Museum in Sibiu, which housed a European art collection that spanned from the Baroque time to modern period, while complaining about the hotels and roads' poor condition in Sibiu, Braşov, and Prahova Valley, a mountain region in the Carpathians.⁹

His critique of the hotels and roads called the attention of the Romanian state, which had begun to take an interest in both how the country was presented in the capitalist West and in developing international tourism. A first study about how the Prahova Valley could welcome foreign tourists was put together by the Institute for Research and Development in Tourism already in 1956.¹⁰ The authors of the report mentioned that "the study was put together taking into account that the tourist objectives will be visited by foreign visitors who will start their trip in Bucharest and then spend a couple of days in Sinaia and Stalin Town (Brasov)"¹¹ both on the Prahova Valley. The study pinpointed several hotels and restaurants in both towns which met the expectations of foreign tourists as well as several places that were worth visiting such as the Sinaia Monastery and the Peles Castle, a former royal residence converted into a museum in Sinaia. The Romanian communist state deemed the Prahova Valley as a desirable region for welcoming foreign tourists. Surprisingly enough, when it

came to international tourism the choice of a monastery and a palace did not seem at odds with the socialist ideology.

However, a concrete strategy for advertising Romania as a tourist destination abroad only came out in the early to mid 1960s. After a meeting of tourist delegates from socialist countries in Moscow in 1961, which for the first time discussed the issue of welcoming tourists from capitalist West, the Council of Ministers asked for a report about the possibility to develop tourism with Western countries in Romania. The findings were however not very promising despite the 40,000 Western tourists who allegedly visited Romania during the previous year. This was mostly because the possibilities to spend an enjoyable time seemed still limited when compared with neighboring Bulgaria where tourists were invited to go on cultural tours to discover the history of the country and its main memory sites, while in Romania, tourists from both Western and socialist countries visited collective farms, which usually ended with a "comrade dinner party."¹²

Yet, a year later, in 1962, a report by the Propaganda and Foreign Relations Section within the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers Party (RWP) - the predecessor of the Romanian Communist Party- touted the progress that Romania made in popularizing its tourism abroad:

If during the previous years the tourist propaganda and the advertising of our country abroad focused mostly on general information, in 1962, these advertising materials became more detailed. Both printed materials and commercials advertised specific tourist destinations, including information

about the travel conditions, prices, and where one can book a vacation to the RPR (Romanian People's Republic). Some of the materials were printed in collaboration with the partner travel agencies from abroad, while others were made at the request of foreign firms to be disseminated in their respective markets.¹³

The report added that only in 1962, 124 publicity materials were printed with a circulation of 5.1 million copies. Furthermore, 5,2 million postcards were sold to promote Romania both domestically and abroad. The mounting interest for Romanian tourism in Western European countries was also shown by the request of two television channels in West Germany to produce a documentary movie about tourism in Romania.¹⁴ Given the slow start of Romanian tourism with capitalist West, the mobilization of tourist authorities was stunning in such a short period of time.

In 1965, the Council of Ministers and the Romanian Communist Party's Political Bureau discussed the first concrete plan for developing tourism with the capitalist West and agreed to allocate 3 billion lei to investments in tourism.¹⁵ This was a substantial financial venture for the Romanian state and the plan mentioned that Romania should welcome 1.2 million tourists in 1970 in order to make this investment profitable.¹⁶ The money was mostly directed at building the infrastructure on the Black Sea Coast, which was the most sought tourist area in Romania, and for training tourist workers, but a significant amount was allocated to publicizing Romania as a tourist destination.¹⁷ The plan put together by the Council for Planning and the

National Office for Tourism-Carpathians (the main state agency in charge with tourism in socialist Romania), pinpointed West Germany, Scandinavian countries and France as the main target countries because they showed “a high tourist potential.”¹⁸ In order to attract these tourists, the plan recommended that besides sojourns on the seaside to offer tours that covered “the most enticing tourist areas and objectives such as the Danube Delta, Carpathian Mountains, Orthodox Monasteries in Northern Moldova, and Bucharest.”¹⁹ These regions were part of the tourist imaginary that tourists specialists wanted to build about Romania and, hence, these destinations became part of the country’s tourist offer. The plan concluded that:

The positive results with international tourism are in large measure a consequence of the publicity work (propaganda), such as organizing exhibitions, and film galas, of radio and TV advertising, of cinema and of the publishing of guidebooks, brochures, flyers and posters as well as news in foreign newspapers. The propaganda work was done through the partner institutions in the main tourist sending countries.²⁰

The task of promoting Romanian tourism abroad fell under the responsibility of the National Office for Tourism Carpathians (NTO-Carpathians) and of The Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. The latter was in charge with Romania’s participation in tourist exhibitions abroad. In the mid-1960s, Romania became a regular attendee in the tourist exhibitions organized in Western Europe

besides those planned in the neighboring socialist countries. One such exhibition was in Milan, Italy. Romanians first attended this exhibition in 1964 but with limited success because as the Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries itself admitted, “we received the invitation late and we didn’t send the most appealing posters (only what we could find in storage), but this year we are better prepared.”²¹ And indeed the odds for 1965 looked better as the invitation arrived already in March, while the exhibition was supposed to take place between 9 July and 9 September as an open air event in the main square in Milan. For this exhibition, Romania decided to send posters depicting folk art and natural landscapes. As Milan was a tourist city itself the tourists that the exhibition was trying to attract were not just confined to northern Italy but to visitors from all over Europe. This aspect was encouraging for the Romanian tourist officials who wanted to appeal to travelers from capitalist Northwestern Europe.

Besides Italy, Romanian tourist advertising made its presence felt in the Cold War neutral Austria already in the early 1960s. In 1963, the Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries reached the NTO-Carpathians and asked for tourist materials to be put on display in a tourist exhibition in Vienna in February 1964. The NTO-Carpathians promise to send several documentary films, such as *Poiana Braşov* and *Mamaia*, named after a mountain and, respectively, a seaside resort in Romania, besides the usual folkcrafts and pictures with natural landscapes, new hotels, and industrial sites.²² This time the participation into the exhibition was facilitated by the Austro-Romanian Friendship

Association, a communist oriented organization, which the Romanian state sponsored in order to help with the publicity/propaganda work in Austria. The available space was of about nine square meters in which the organizers planned to show 8-10 representative tourist posters along with brochures and fliers in German language and 25-30 color and black and white photos of different dimensions in order to catch the visitors' attention.²³ As the participation into this exhibition was deemed successful, the NTO-Carpathians decided to send materials the following year as well.

German-speaking tourists were of particular importance for the Romanian authorities and, hence, the request of the Radio Berlin (a West German radio station in West Berlin) to help with the material for a travel show about Romania was promptly answered in 1968.²⁴ The show called "The Big Travel" was supposed to have the West German actor Jürgen Graf as a host and four young Romanians, two flight attendants, and a folk orchestra as guests. In its message to NTO-Carpathians, the West German TV station detailed their planned activities:

The timeline for this show has been set as follows: the arrival of a Romanian team which should include two young ladies and two young men, if possible, with ages between 18-25 years old on 17 March 1969, preparations and rehearsals will take place on 18 and 19 March with the recording scheduled on 20 March. Additionally, we would need to invite two flights attendants from TAROM and a folk orchestra that is representative for the Romanian traditional music.²⁵

Thus, beyond the folk culture, West German tourists were lured in with sexualized images of young women. Moreover, the presence of TAROM flight attendance was supposed to put into a better light the socialist airline company but also to offer concrete information on air travel to Romania. This promotional scheme wanted to humanize the socialist country and to present it as a "normal" place that was to a certain extent similar to the familiar space of tourists' home country.

The task of promoting Romanian tourism abroad was divided between the Romanian state's agents (National Office for Tourism-Carpathians, the Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries) and private associations or foreign media. Although, some of the foreign organizations or personalities had communist leanings, the applied strategies were highly commercial in order to succeed in a competitive market, such as Western Europe. Thus, Romania's promotional strategies in Western Europe tried to adjust ideally to the specificities of each country in Western Europe and to overcome the usual bureaucratic numbness of communist regimes.

Guidebooks and Photo Albums

The tourist guidebooks or photo-albums that advertised Romanian tourism abroad during the 1950s and the 1960s mentioned both the brand-new socialist monuments and buildings along with the more well-known historical sites and natural landscapes. Yet, the way in which the selection of references worked did not always meet the ideological criteria of the regime. In 1959, at a Council of Ministers' meeting the newly established National Office for

Tourism Carpathians complained about the quality of advertising materials that ESPLA (The Publishing House for Art and Literature) printed and distributed on the Romanian and foreign markets. The main complaints covered issues such as the advertising materials' chosen topics, the quality of photos, the format, and overall, the quality of printing. The document went on and offered concrete examples of malpractices. For instance, the photo album "Visit Romania!" did not include images of the regime's new accomplishments, such as the Spark House (Casa Scînteii) or the Lacul Roșu's hydro power plant. At the same time, the album failed to convey the Danube Delta's beauty and to depict Romanian folk art, key historical monuments, natural landscapes, or recent memorials like the 'Hero of the Soviet Union statue.²⁶ According to the ONT-Carpathians' officials these shortcomings failed to communicate an accurate image of Romania to potential tourists as these images were meant to build both a tourist and a mental map of this socialist country. The printed materials had to send the right ideological message to potential foreign tourists, and the combination of text and images was essential in this respect.

Guidebooks and their ability to convey ideologies and shape desires and identities have been a preferred topic of study in the scholarly literature. In a study about the role of guidebooks in building national sentiments in modern Germany, Rudy Koshar argues that tourism is a collective experience that has the ability to promote national identity beyond consumerist pursuits.²⁷ He concludes that "guidebooks functioned as manuals in a complex process whereby the tourist learned to consume

time and space", while they also "pointed to a set of meanings and symbols that transcended the everyday life of commodification and consumption."²⁸ In the case of Romanian communist regime, guidebooks worked as a form of propaganda as they were supposed to convey an official view on country's history and geography. Yet, their ability to "educate" tourists with regard to potential places of interest did not lack completely. Beyond suggesting possible tourist routes, most guidebooks offered essential information about various points on the road, such as hotels, restaurants, and sites to visit.

For instance, one of the first comprehensive guidebooks of Romania published in French in 1967 under the supervision of Șerban Cioculescu, a well-established literary critic and historian, was divided in three parts: the first section suggested 21 possible circuits, the second part made in-depth recommendations about what sites tourists should visit in each part of the country, and finally the last chapter contained practical information about restaurants, hotels, exchange rate, telephone rates, etc.²⁹ The guidebook opened with Bucharest, the capital of the country, followed by the Prahova Valley, a region well connected with Bucharest by train or by car, then explored central Transylvania (Brașov-Sibiu and Brașov-Sighișoara-Sibiu areas), Oltenia (Craiova-Petroșani-Simeria)), Banat-Western Transylvania (Timișoara-Arad-Oradea-Cluj), the seaside (Bucharest-Constanța and the seaside) Danube Delta, and last but not least Moldova (Bucharest, Buzău, Bacău and Northern Moldova with its famous Orthodox monasteries).³⁰ This division stemmed from way the travel infrastructure was devised: Bucharest had a

direct railway line with Prahova Valley and Brașov-Sighișoara-Sibiu area as well as a modernized highway on this route while Oltenia and the Banat region had good railway and highway connections as well; this was also the case with Moldova and Bucharest as well as with Bucharest and Constanța.

In the second part the guidebooks suggested potential places that tourists could visit. These suggestions included both historic and religious sites but also the regime's new industrial plants and constructions. For instance, on the Prahova Valley, tourists could both visit the Peleş Castle and the oil equipment plant in Ploiești. As the site of the plant was highly secured and access to outside visitors was made almost impossible, most likely this information was meant to highlight Romania's fast pace of industrial development rather than work as an actual recommendation for foreign tourists.³¹ Folklore and high culture were also both high on the Romanian communist regime's symbolic agenda. Găina Mount Festival was recommended as a possible destination for foreign tourists while at the Peleş Castle, the guidebook highlighted the rooms' Rococo/Baroque influences, which suggested a cultural synchronization with Western Europe in the late nineteenth century. This was part of the communist regime's larger goal to catch up with Western Europe/capitalist world in both economic and cultural spheres.

The interest in promoting Peleş Castle was significantly high among communist officials, given that the castle benefitted from a guidebook in French language, which was published in 1961.³² The guidebook "Le musée Peleş a Sinaia" emphasized the cultural significance of the place while

overlooking its historical connotations. The little information that the guidebook provided centered on artistic and decorative elements that were exemplified with images (i.e. a picture of the façade or detailed photos of the stairs as well as of the rooms). For instance, one picture shows what it looks like Carol I's office, which was described as "room in rococo style" without revealing the connection with the royal figure.³³

A photo album entitled "Geographical Outline of the Socialist Republic of Romania" published in four different foreign languages (English, French, Spanish and Russian) in 1966 included images with natural landscapes in the Carpathian Mountains (View from Făgăraș Mountains) as well as the new hotels in Mamaia on the Romanian Black Sea Coast.³⁴ Besides nature and brand-new modern buildings, the photo album comprised images with folk costumes from different regions of the country as well as with traditional peasant homes. One such picture depicted a peasant house from the Argeș county, a mountain region in southern Romania along with specific crafts from the region. These images capture well the Romanian communist promotional strategy with regard to tourism. Basically, this tried to lure in tourists with the promise of comfort, nature and a taste of the so-called Romania's cultural specificity. To a certain extent this tactic was not much different than the approach of other tourist countries regardless of their political regime. This happened because the Romanian state partnered with foreign publishing houses, media, and authors when it came to tourist promotion.

The publishing of a tourist guide of Romania in France titled "La Roumanie

Inconnue”, and authored by Georges Pillement, an awarded French writer, worked as an excellent illustration of this policy. The author put together the guidebook based on the information that he received from the Romanian Ministry of Tourism. Afterwards, Georges Pillement was the one to approach editors in Paris. After several failed attempts he managed to secure a contract between the Romanian Ministry of Tourism and Albin Michel, one of the largest presses in France.³⁵ The guidebook’s final version was reviewed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Council for Socialist Education in Romania as well as by the Albin Michel’s editors. The last stage of the production process was the printing of actual book in Romania.³⁶

Similar to the Șerban Cioculescu’s travel guide, the guidebook authored by Georges Pillement suggested several itineraries through Romania. The guidebook was divided in three parts: a Foreword about the monasteries in Northern Moldova, a second part with practical information about how to travel to Romania, and the third part and the main one that divided Romania into several circuits. The proposed itineraries started in Bucharest and circled the entire country. The first proposed itinerary was Bucharest and its surroundings, then the guidebook suggested a trip from Bucharest to Constanța or from Bucharest to Brașov in central Transylvania. From Brașov, the tourist was invited to travel to Iași, in Moldova. Further on, from Iași, the guidebook suggested that tourists could visit Suceava and monasteries in Northern Moldova. From Suceava, one would cross the Carpathians back into Transylvania and visit Oradea, while from Oradea they could travel to Sibiu. The trip

from Sibiu continued to Târgu Jiu and Turnu Severin in the Banat region, and from there finally back to Bucharest.³⁷

Overall, the guidebook tried to mix the suggested itineraries, so they were not confined to a single historical region. Thus, it crafted Romania as a cohesive national space, while it avoided the regions where the Hungarian minority was more numerous, such as Harghita and Covasna, but also Cluj Napoca. This message was quite similar to the one that Șerban Cioculescu’s guidebook conveyed, which showed that Romanian officials used the same strategies both at domestic and international levels when it came to travel writing. After two years in the making the 300-page guidebook was available on the market in early 1974 with an initial circulation of 4000 copies.³⁸ In their correspondence with the French writer, the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs insisted to have the guidebook published before the start of the summer season, so it helped tourist promotion that year.³⁹

Tourist Exhibitions and Promotion in Egypt

The uniformization of communist Romania’s tourist promotion in the capitalist West in the 1960s was the outcome of a decade long experience in the convoluted but more politically friendly Middle East throughout the 1950s. Hence, cultural promotion and tourist exhibitions went hand in hand to improve Romania’s image in Egypt throughout the 1950s.⁴⁰ The first opportunity to promote Romania in Egypt occurred in 1952 when an Egyptian cultural association “Friends of Fine Art” invited Romanian authorities among other

socialist countries to participate into an international exhibition of tourist posters, in which the Hungarian delegation managed to obtain second prize.⁴¹ Encouraged by their neighbor's performance, Romanian officials decided to take part into a second exhibition organized by the Egyptian State Administration two years later in Cairo.⁴² The Romanian Consulate in Cairo, which needed the approval of Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to participate in this event, motivated their request as follows:

Taking into consideration the current political situation in Egypt, we suggest to accept the invitation, which could be an opportunity to popularize our country's natural beauties and eventually (to a lesser degree) the fact that they are now visited by working people and that they are made available to the working class. The photos we would show could depict beautiful natural landscapes, rest houses and mountain cabins recently built by our regime, workers on holiday, winter sports, or foreign workers visiting our country. It is mandatory that the photos to be thoroughly selected to express the right message in order to avoid any mistakes and interpretations. The photos need to be of good quality and to properly convey the beauty of our country. After we receive the photos, we will carefully select them together with our good friends and make a decision about each photo's appropriateness.⁴³

The Romanian Consulate in Cairo recommended that the exhibition should be organized by a cultural association in

Romania (IRCS or a folk association) in collaboration with an institution in Egypt. One possible suggestion was the Egyptian Press Institute, which, the Consulate mentioned, had a suitable exhibition room that could ensure good visibility. The Consulate also devised a plan to advertise the exhibition through media. Given Egypt multi-linguistic environment, they suggest covering both the Arab language newspapers and the French and English ones. Besides the newspaper coverage, the Consulate put together a campaign to make Romania more visible among ordinary public in Egypt through classical and folk/instrumental music. The music was supposed to be broadcasted on radio in order to attract a larger audience.⁴⁴

The exhibition took place in April 1954 and lasted for a month, with two weeks in Cairo and another two weeks in Alexandria. It displayed both material objects (including thirty musical records such as *Perinița* – a rhythmmed folk song/dance) and photos with explanations in Arabic and French. Quite notably, *Perinița* was required by several Egyptians, who participated in the 1953 Youth Festival in Bucharest, thus suggesting a certain ideological closeness with some of the visitors of the exhibition. Although the Romanian Consulate in Cairo was the de facto organizer, due to the complicated political context in Egypt and of the Cold War dynamics, it labeled the event as a cultural one rather than as a diplomatic attempt to sell the Romanian socialism as a viable political regime.⁴⁵ The whole event cost the Romanian government about \$3444 (approximately \$40,000 at today's value), which did pay off as the exhibition received a decent number of visitors

of approximately 20–30 people per day.⁴⁶ Photos from the event show a relatively relaxed atmosphere with visitors gazing at the objects, and sometimes commenting on them as their gestures suggest.

In May 1956, Romania participated into another folk-art exposition that put dollies dressed in national costumes on display. This exhibition had a more official flair as it was organized by the state-run Egyptian Tourist Office.⁴⁷ Twenty countries participated into this fair among which four from the socialist Bloc: Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Bulgaria. The rest of the participants were Egypt, Lebanon, Jorda, Iraq, South Africa, Great Britain, Japan, India, Italy, Syria, Greece, Switzerland, The Netherlands, West Germany, and Yugoslavia. Romania's stand was next to that of Portugal and besides dolls it displayed folk costumes and objects as well as several photos and musical records in the backdrop on the walls. In the aftermath of the exhibition Romanian representatives and their foreign counterparts exchanged dolls as a token of friendship between their countries, which made the Romania Consulate in Cairo appreciate that the event was a "real success."⁴⁸

Cultural exchanges between Romania and Egypt were also notable and helped tourist promotion. In 1957, the George Enescu Classical Music Festival was popularized in Egypt in order to call the attention of both the general public and of Egyptian cultural milieu.⁴⁹ Moreover, in 1958, Țandarică Theater – a children themed theater– toured Egypt while the Romanian Army Orchestra gave a concert.⁵⁰ At the same time, some Romanian films were shown at Odeon, the main movie theater to show films in foreign languages made in

the Soviet Bloc, among which "Litoralul" (The Seaside) or "Pe drumurile României" (On the Romanian Roads), hence, showing the intention to promote Romania as a tourist destination.⁵¹ This promotion model was in fact common to other socialist countries as well. A 1957 note by the Romanian Consulate in Egypt to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest discussed how a Soviet film festival took place in Cairo.

On 8 July the Soviet film *41* was shown. On this occasion, the Soviet cultural attaché has invited diplomats, numerous Egyptian personalities, functionaries from the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, journalists, etc. Both on the ground floor –where regular public could buy tickets– and on the first floor where special guests were seated all seats were taken.⁵²

Romanian diplomats endeavored to follow this model and to become as visible as possible in Egypt in the mid to late 1950s. The outcome of this cultural/tourist promotion was that several Egyptian tourists expressed their interest to visit Romania. One such group took part in a programme called "Holidays of Peace" which toured Romania in 1957, while in 1958 a group of Egyptian tourists asked for permission to get off their cruise in Constanța and to rent a bus in order to visit the city along with the surrounding area. By comparison, until 1959 foreign diplomats from capitalist countries could not leave Bucharest without permission if they were using their cars. Yet, despite these isolated episodes and the relative success of the exhibitions that the Romanian state organized

in the 1950s, the number of tourists from Egypt to Romania remained low. The reason stemmed from Egypt's foreign travel policy which according to the Romanian Consulate in Cairo "limits the granting of visas to Egyptian citizens to leave the country for any reasons, especially tourism."⁵³ The causes were economic as the political regime in Cairo wanted to save hard currencies. Thus, the Romanian Consulate in Cairo suggested the signing of a touristic agreement between Romania and Egypt.⁵⁴

But travel agencies and cultural associations in Egypt struggled to find a way to overcome these economic hurdles. In 1959, the director of an Egyptian travel magazine, "Journal d'Egypt", Edgar Sallad approached the Romanian Consulate in Cairo with a business proposal. He wanted to organize an excursion to Romania with the help of the Egyptian Tourist Office if the National Office for Tourism Carpathians would support this initiative. Sallad suggested that the interested Egyptian tourists to pay in Egyptian liras directly to his travel magazine, while all the accommodation and meals in Romania were supposed to be covered by the Romanian state. In exchange, when NTO-Carpathians would send tourists to Egypt, their expenses were paid by the Egyptian state.⁵⁵ This barter arrangement was supposed to help the two parties overcome the financial burden of spending hard currencies for foreign travel. Yet, the director of Romanian NTO-Carpathians, Gheorghe Teodorescu replied that this kind of arrangement is illegal by the Romanian law despite the initial enthusiasm manifested by the diplomats employed at the Romanian Consulate in Cairo.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Socialist Romania used an array of tactics to promote itself as a tourist destination abroad during the 1950s and 1960s. Exhibitions and cultural exchanges intermingled with publication of guidebooks with the goal to construe a politically viable image of the country and of its political regime but also to attract foreign visitors. In order to present Romania in an alluring way the communist official rhetoric included elements of folk culture but also of so-called cultural heritage, which were not necessarily related to the socialist period. Thus, castles and palaces linked to the previous ruling class in Romania, or medieval churches and monasteries were rebranded in an acceptable way so to include them in the 'new national culture.' In most cases the tactics involved a de-contextualization of these places and an emphasis on the decorative/stylistic aspects of the buildings&monuments. Moreover, these decorative elements were tied to the European major artistic developments, such as the Renaissance or Baroque in order to become comprehensible to Western visitors. The guidebooks' attempts to convey an acceptably political meaning was notable when emphasizing the communist regime's accomplishments but also its version of history. This message focused on the fight against the Ottomans in the Middle Ages or against fascism during the WWII, but also on workers' class struggle along with economic and social modernization, which were key tropes in the official narrative.

In the case of exhibitions, the Romanian communist regime's emphasis was on folk culture and artefacts, which were also appropriated so to fit within the official rhetoric. Thus, although the discourse

insisted on their authenticity, these objects were integrated into a larger narrative about nation-building (which usually excluded ethnical minorities) and political regime consolidation to the extent that they were voided of content. For instance, songs/dances such as Perinita became political because they were associated with the solidarity/union between workers and developing nations as both socialist Romania and Nassar's Egypt branded themselves.

When skimming through the published guidebooks or visiting the exhibitions, readers or visitors from Western Europe but also from the Middle East&Global South could find some familiar elements. These either referred to common artistic European developments, or reinforced a European identity, which was being mostly related to Christianity and fight against evil forces in history, while in case of visitors from the Middle East&Global South, the Romanian cultural and tourist promoters hoped to play the card of class and ideological solidarity. Visual materials, such as the folk objects but also the open-wide spaces, luring landscapes, or the images of modern hotels presented both in photo-albums and exhibitions were

supposed to convince tourists that Romania was both naturally and culturally rich as well as modern.

The actors involved in Romania's tourist and cultural promotion were both state and non-state individuals, institutions and organizations. First and foremost, the Romanian diplomats from both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest but also from the embassies in those respective countries as well as various employees from the National Office for Tourism Carpathians or from the Council for Socialist Education tried to build networks as well as to shape the discourse with regard to Romania's cultural heritage. Yet, beyond these state actors, the guidebook writers and various private organizations or media outlets in the targeted countries were also involved. Whereas in some occurrences certain ideological affinities helped Romania's tourist and cultural promotion abroad, in most cases, these non-state actors acted pragmatically as they hoped to increase their revenues and to turn Romania into a profitable market. Romanian socialist officials also followed suit and tried to maximize the Romanian state's economic profits and cultural exposure.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bathory, Delia, "Romanian Solidarity with Countries in the Global South", in *History of Communism in Europe*, vol.12/13, 2021-2022, pp.71-88.
- Cătănuș,, Dan Octavian Roske, *Colectivizarea Agriculturii, Represiunea*, vol. 1, 1949-1953, Bucharest, INST, 2004.
- Cioculescu, Șerban (ed), *La Roumanie- Guide Touristique*, Bucharest, Editions Meridiane, 1967.
- Deletant, Dennis, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania 1965-1989*, Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, 1995.
- Deletant, Dennis, *Teroarea comunistă în România. Gheorghiu Dej și statul polițienesc, 1948-1965*, Iași, Polirom, 2001.
- Kligman, Gail, Katerine Verdery, *Peasants under Siege: The Collectivization of Romanian Agriculture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

- Koshar, Rudy, "What Ought to be Seen: Tourist Guidebooks and National Identities in Modern Germany and Europe", in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 33, no. 3, (Jul 1998), p. 325.
- Mabro, Robert, "Egypt's economic relations with socialist countries" in *World Development*, vol. 3, issue 5, May 1975, 299-313.
- Mureșan, Alin, *Pitești. Cronica unei sinucideri asistate* Iași, Polirom, 2011.
- Iordachi, Constantin, Dorin Dobrinu, *Transforming Peasants, Property and Power: The Collectivization of Agriculture, 1949-1962*, Budapest, Central European University Press, 2009.
- Iacob, Bogdan C., "From Africa to the World: Romania's Global Turn in the 1970s", in *Studii si Materiale de Istorie Contemporana*, 18 (2019), issue 1, pp. 149-162.
- Taterova, Eva, 'Czechoslovak-Egyptian Relations at the Onset of the Cold War: The Way to a Pragmatic Partnership in Asia and African Studies', vol. 31, no. 2, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.31577/aassav.2022.31.2.05>.
- Roth-Ey, Kristin (ed.), *Socialist Internationalism and the Gritty Politics of the Particular. Second Third-World Spaces in the Cold War*, London, Bloomsbury, 2023
- Ștefan, Adelina, *Vacationing in Dictatorships: International Tourism in Socialist Romania and Franco's Spain*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2024.
- Taterova, Eva, 'Czechoslovak-Egyptian Relations at the Onset of the Cold War: The Way to a Pragmatic Partnership' in *Asia and African Studies*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.31577/aassav.2022.31.2.05>.

NOTES

1. This work was supported by a grant of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-IV-P2-2.1-BSO-2023-0005, within PNCDI IV and by the European Union under the REFRESH – Research Excellence For Region Sustainability and High-tech Industries (project number CZ.10.03.01/00/22_003/0000048) via the Operational Programme Just Transition"
2. Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (henceforth AMAE), Fond 1971, file no. 1236, folio 21.
3. *Ibidem*, folio 22.
4. On Egypt's economic relations with socialist countries as they were discussed in the 1970s see Robert Mabro, "Egypt's economic relations with socialist countries" in *World Development*, vol. 3, issue 5, May 1975, 299-313.
5. For instance, there is literature that looks at the relationship between Czechoslovakia and Egypt. See Eva Taterova, 'Czechoslovak-Egyptian Relations at the Onset of the Cold War: The Way to a Pragmatic Partnership in Asia and African Studies', vol. 31, no. 2, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.31577/aassav.2022.31.2.05>.
6. See for instance: Bogdan C. Iacob, "From Africa to the World: Romania's Global Turn in the 1970s", in *Studii si Materiale de Istorie Contemporana*, 18 (2019), issue 1, pp. 149-162. Delia Bathory, "Romanian Solidarity with Countries in the Global South", in *History of Communism in Europe*, vol.12/13, 2021-2022, pp.71-88, Kristin Roth-Ey (ed.), *Socialist Internationalism and the Gritty Politics of the Particular. Second Third-World Spaces in the Cold War*, London, Bloomsbury, 2023 on the relationship between socialist Eastern Europe and the Global South; on international tourism see: Adelina Ștefan, *Vacationing in Dictatorships: International Tourism in Socialist Romania and Franco's Spain*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2024.
7. See for instance: Gail Kligman, Katerine Verdery, *Peasants under Siege: The Collectivization of Romanian Agriculture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, Constantin Iordachi, Dorin Dobrinu, *Transforming Peasants, Property and Power: The Collectivization of Agriculture, 1949-1962*, Budapest, Central European University Press, 2009, Dan Cătănuș, Octavian Roske, *Colectivizarea Agriculturii, Represiunea*, vol. 1, 1949-1953, Bucharest, INST, 2004, Dennis Deletant, *România sub*

- regimul comunist*, București, Fundația Academia Civică, 2004, Dennis Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania 1965-1989*, Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, 1995, Alin Mureșan, *Pitești. Cronica unei sinucideri asistate* Iași, Polirom, 2011, Dennis Deletant, *Teroarea comunistă în România. Gheorghiu Dej și statul polițienesc, 1948-1965*, Iași, Polirom, 2001.
8. Romanian National Archives (henceforth ANIC), Fondul Institutul Român de Relații Culturale cu Străinătatea, RFG, 224/1955-1958, folio 14.
 9. *Ibidem*, folio 15.
 10. ANIC, The Institute for Research and Development in Tourism, 1/1956, folio 2.
 11. *Ibidem*, folio 5.
 12. ANIC, Council of Ministers Collection, file no. 29/1961, folio 46.
 13. Note about the propaganda work of NTO-Carpathians, 15 Apr. 1963, ANIC, CC of PCR Collection, Propaganda Section, file no. 21/1963, folio 3.
 14. *Ibidem*, folios 3-4.
 15. ANIC, Fond Consiliul de Miniștrii, Consiliul Economic, file no. 227/1965, folio 37.
 16. *Ibidem*, folio 37
 17. *Ibidem*, folio 38.
 18. *Ibidem*, folio 45.
 19. *Ibidem*, folio 47.
 20. *Ibidem*, folio 48.
 21. ANIC, Fond Institutul Român de Relații Culturale cu Străinătatea, Italy, file no 313/1960-1966, folio 21.
 22. ANIC, Fond Institutul Român de Relații Culturale cu Străinătatea, Austria, 31/1961-1963, folio 7.
 23. *Ibidem*, folio 9.
 24. ANIC, Fond Institutul Institutul Român de Relații Culturale cu Strainătatea, West Germany, 241/1968, folio 3.
 25. *Ibidem*, folio 4.
 26. ANIC, Fond Consiliul de Miniștrii, Cabinetul Anastasie Joja, dosar 25/1959, Note asupra calității materialelor de propagandă turistică ESPLA, folio 4.
 27. Rudy Koshar, "What Ought to be Seen: Tourist Guidebooks and National Identities in Modern Germany and Europe", in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 33, no. 3, (Jul 1998), p. 325.
 28. *Ibidem*, p. 339.
 29. Șerban Cioculescu (ed), *La Roumanie- Guide Touristique*, Bucharest, Editions Meridiane, 1967.
 30. *Ibidem*.
 31. *Ibidem*, p. 63.
 32. Le musée Peleş a Sinaia, București, Meridiane, 1961.
 33. *Ibidem*, p.12.
 34. *Geographical Outline of the Socialist Republic of Romania*, București, Meridiane, 1966.
 35. AMAE, 1972, file no. 1236, folio 6.
 36. *Ibidem*, folios 7-9.
 37. *Ibidem*, folios 9-10.
 38. *Ibidem*, folio 10.
 39. *Ibidem*, folio 10.
 40. AMAE, Fond Egypt, 1946-1970, file no. 95. (an exhibition of folk art), file no. 137 (international exhibition of dolls), file no 723 (exhibition of rugs and upholstery).
 41. AMAE, Fond Egypt, 1946-1970, file no. 76, folio 2.
 42. AMAE, Fond Egypt, 1946-1970, file no. 95, folio 3.
 43. AMAE, Fond Egypt, 1946-1970, file no. 95, folio 20.
 44. *Ibidem*, folios 31-32.
 45. In 1952 a coup toppled King Farouq who was replaced by a military leadership formed of Mohamed Naguig and Gamal Abdel Nassar. The two officers were part of the Free Officers Movement that

claimed to foster Arab nationalism and to abolish British colonial influence. In 1954, Gamal Abdel Nasser became the de facto ruler. He was elected as president in 1956 and ruled until 1970. Soviet Union and other socialist states tried to turn Nasser into their ally as they hoped to turn Egypt on their side of the Cold War.

46. AMAE, Fond Egypt, 1946-1970, file no. 95, f. 29.
47. AMAE, Fond Egypt, 1946-1970, file no. 137, folio 21.
48. *Ibidem*, folio 22.
49. AMAE, Fond Egypt, 1946-1970, file no. 160, folio 104.
50. AMAE, Fond Egypt, 1947-1970, file no. 191 and file no. 192.
51. AMAE, Fond Egypt, 1946-1970, file no.239, folio 7.
52. AMAE, Fond Egypt, 1946-1970, file no. 160, folio 106.
53. AMAE, Fond Egypt, 1946-1970, file no.239, folio 4.
54. *Ibidem*, folio 6.
55. AMAE, Fond Egypt, 1946-1970, file no.235, folio 90.
56. *Ibidem*, folio 91.