

Escapees, Modernity Seekers, Private Traders: Yugoslavia and the Westernization of Polish Tourists, 1956–1989

Paweł Sowiński 

ABSTRACT

The author envisions the Polish experience of socialist Yugoslavia as a gateway to Eastern European modernity. Drawing on a variety of sources—private letters, oral histories, press reportages, visuals, communist state records, and private archives—the author aims to define and locate the practices and imaginations of Westernization in the reality of Polish tourism to Yugoslavia. He claims that transnational tourism created hidden corridors for Polish escapees from the transcultural Silesian region. Tourism gave a chance for Jewish families to unite after the wave of persecution in Poland in 1968. While a lot of attention was focused on commercial tourism as the main driver for East-West tourism, the author argues that it was rather an illegal emigration opportunity to the West that was the most “desirable good” for Polish tourists en route to Yugoslavia in the 1960s.

KEYWORDS: Cold War, Poland, Silesia region, Yugoslavia, tourism, westernization, modernity, mentality, travel writings

Declaration on Possible Conflicts of Interest

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Prof. Dr. Paweł Sowiński, Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Science, sowinski@isppan.waw.pl,
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3853-895X>

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1 Introduction

Nowadays, the idea of “Western” or “Eastern” has been somehow blurred and displaced by the globalization of brands and the expansion of tourism worldwide. The story of one Australian woman traveling at an unknown point in time in early twenty first century from New York to Australia could be illustrative of this new, increasingly interconnected world in which it is much harder to say what comes from where. She stopped at Singapore Airport to discover the uniforms of Singapore Airlines hostesses, designed by Christian Dior, were being sold in the Old Singapore store by a Chinese shop assistant. The airport looked like a mix of culture and inspiration. Oriental orchids were displayed in Greek-like urns. Japanese koi fish swam in a pool surrounded by palms with “artificial, dead or sleeping butterflies” dotted on them, which might be well a sign of Westernization, Easternization, or both. She finally entered the Prayer Room carrying bags from Macy’s New York store to see an “Asian man in a sarong” kneeling and “a burqua-clad woman” praying. The writing on the wall says: “Please remove your shoes, observe solemnness, and board your flight on time.”¹

In socialist Yugoslavia, it was clearer who and what came from where due to the differences in material cultures and styles of life between the West and the East caused, among others, by the division of Europe after the war. People arriving from socialist countries demonstrated their origin by using objects manufactured in those countries—clothes, camping equipment, food, and other products they had brought with them to sell on the local market. A cleaning lady in a Belgrade hotel reported that she recognized Polish people by their clothes and personal belongings.² For some Yugoslavians “the Polish were instantly recognizable by their made-in-Poland cars—Fiat 126p and 125p.”³ Polish women also usually wore different types of make-up than Western tourists, which made them easily distinguishable, even when sunbathing on the beach.⁴ Furthermore, speaking a Slavic language acted as an identifier more intensely than today. Poles usually avoided expensive services like luxury

1 SIMONE LAZAROO: Prelude: Transit, in: LEAN GARTH RUSSELL STAIFF, EMMA WATER-TON (eds.): *Travel and Imagination*, London 2016, pp. 6–8. For a comparable multiculturalism and identity changing process see also the miniseries *Expats* set in contemporary Hong-Kong. LULU WANG [director]: *Expats*, Culver City 2024, <https://press.amazonmgmstudios.com/us/en/original-series/expats/1> (2025-09-16).

2 JERZY LOVELL: *Podróże Polaków: Impresje reportażowe* [Polish Voyagers: Impressions of a Reporter] Warszawa 1969, p. 67.

3 MARIA EWA SZATLACH: Turisticka trgovina između gradana Poljske i Jugoslavije 70ih i 80ih godinach XX veka [Trading Tourism between Poles and Yugoslavians in the 1970s and 1980s], in: MOMČILO PAVLOVIĆ, ANDRZEJ ZAĆMIŃSKI et al. (eds): *Jugoslavija i Poljska u XX veku: Međunarodni tematski zbornik radova sa konferencije Jugoslovensko-poljski odnosi u XX veku*, Beograd 2017, pp. 413–428, here p. 423.

4 SLAVENKA DRAKULIĆ: *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed*, New York 2016, p. 26.

hotels and restaurants, which catered to wealthier Westerners. On the other hand, on the beaches, everyone probably looked more or less the same, thus mass tourism could be considered as a road to modernity and unification, as it brought people from all walks of life closer together, shortened social and political distances, and led to the development of infrastructure for all incomers.⁵

My aim in this article is to reconstruct and explain socialist Yugoslavia through historical narratives of Polish holidaymakers on the Adriatic shore and beyond. Scientific literature on tourism in Yugoslavia has rarely focused on what this summer tourism could mean for East Central European countries and how people from these countries could be impacted here by the practices, attitudes and products of modernity that flowed from West to East. There are some reflections on shopping adventures and private trade of Eastern European nations in Yugoslavia⁶—the grass-rooted, international efforts by private entrepreneurs to promote free trade beyond frontiers beautifully painted by Dubravka Ugrešić and Slavenka Draculić.⁷ However, scholarship on post-1945 tourism is still rare and tends to concentrate on Western tourism to Yugoslavia.⁸ The innovation of my input is mostly in shifting the debate from Yugoslavia–West relations to Yugoslavia–East relations in the field of socialist tourism.

My story combines, in the words of Pamela Ballinger, “different shapes of memories”⁹—narrative sources like novels, memoirs, press coverage, letters, as well as oral accounts, pictures, and movies produced between 1956 and 1989. Similarly to Ballinger, my work sits outside of one compartmentalized discipline and I have developed an approach that could be both within history

5 KARIN TAYLOR, HANNES GRANDITS: *Tourism and the Making of Socialist Yugoslavia: An Introduction*, in: HANNES GRANDITS, KARIN TAYLOR (eds.): *Yugoslavia’s Sunny Side: A History of Tourism in Socialism (1950s–1980s)*, Budapest 2010, pp. 1–30, here p. 2; CHRISTINE METUSELA: *Beach Tourism*, in: JAFAR JAFARI, HONGGEN XIAO (eds.): *Encyclopedia of Tourism* (2022), https://link.springer.com/rwe/10.1007/978-3-319-01669-6_432-2 (2025-09-16); JONATHAN SPERBER: *The Age of Interconnection: A Global History of the Second Half of the Twentieth Century*, New York 2023, p. 421.

6 WENDY BRACEWELL: *Adventurers in the Marketplace: Yugoslav Travel Writing and Tourism in the 1950s–1960s*, in: ANNE E. GORSUCH, DIANE P. KOENKER (eds.): *Turizm: The Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism*, Ithaca—London 2006, pp. 248–265; MAJA MIKULA: *Highways of Desire: Cross-Border Shopping in Former Yugoslavia, 1960s–1980s*, in: GRANDITS/TAYLOR, pp. 211–237.

7 DUBRAVKA UGREŠIĆ: *The Ministry of Pain*, New York 2006, p. 54; DRACULIĆ, pp. 25–26.

8 IGOR TCHOUKARINE: *Playing the Tourism Card: Yugoslavia, Advertising, and the Euro-Atlantic Tourism Network in the Early Cold War*, in: SUNE BECHMAN PEDERSEN, CHRISTIAN NOACK (eds.): *Tourism and Travel during the Cold War: Negotiating Tourist Experiences across the Iron Curtain*, London—New York 2020, pp. 159–174; IGOR TCHOUKARINE: *A Place of Your Own on Tito’s Adriatic: Club Med and Czechoslovak Trade Union Holiday Resorts in the 1960s*, in: *Tourist Studies* 16 (2015), 4, pp. 386–404.

9 PAMELA BALLINGER: *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans*, Princeton—Oxford 2018, p. 169.

and, at the same time, at the borderlands or crossroads of history, anthropology, memory studies, and social sciences. This approach derives from Holly Case's concept that historians "have always had to know what is going on elsewhere both geographically, temporally and methodologically."¹⁰ Still, the scattered literature body lays a theoretical foundation for what I found in historical sources.¹¹

I take a predominantly narrative approach, with statistical methods supporting my investigation at the margins. There is a significant lack of in-depth statistical materials on Polish tourism to Yugoslavia. More importantly, statistics do not add much to the general framework of my article, which is about social practices and imaginations. Narrative sources allow more possibilities to research Polish tourism from my perspective, even if some discourses are woefully lacking, too. For instance, oral accounts of Polish participants in Adriatic tourism are very sporadic. I came across only a few mentions of Poles staying in Yugoslavia that were not mainly focused on tourism, when searching *Dom Spotkań z Historią* (History Meeting House) in Warsaw, the largest oral stories collection archive in Poland. In Polish oral memory collections, there are only traces of Polish returnees, not those who fled for the West to seek new life while on holiday in Yugoslavia.

The historical sources I examined do not wholly penetrate the topic, but they are well diversified. Tourism files can mostly be found within the Archives of Modern Records (*Archiwum Akt Nowych*) in Warsaw. Among the many official documents on organized tourism during the socialist era, one has to distinguish the so-called "special notes" on Polish vacationers who refused to return to Poland from package tours in Yugoslavia. A collection of these special notes reflects the tour guides' first-hand perception of holidaymakers who turned out to be escapees in Yugoslavia. I found nearly 200 notes in the source material. They cover the years 1964–1970, a time when the communist regime in Poland imposed restrictions on travel to the West. The records of escapees constitute a valuable archival finding. This is the only systematically gathered dataset that gives an insight into grass-root, covert actions to cross the border illegally. Special notes list escapees by name, place of residence, and include dates and other information vital to uncover the story. However, escapes that occurred before 1964 are not recorded at all, and some after this time are missing, too.

For my research, I explored Polish and Western press reportages, written memoirs, novels, documentary films, and pictures. Transnational archives are represented by Open Society Archives (OSA) in Budapest. Also, my explorations into the Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance (*Instytut Pamięci Narodowej*) included a few memoranda on Polish escapees who traveled via Yugoslavia to the West, prepared by the office of the Polish Home Secretary. The paper dives deeper into the story of Marcin Kula and his wife

10 HOLLY CASE: *History Hacking and Down Time: Some Thoughts on Where Someone Has Been and Where Someone Else Is Headed* [presentation on a conference in Budapest, 2023-09-08], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xlHEUdGn1M> (2025-09-13).

11 BALLINGER, p. 266.

Małgorzata, who traveled to Yugoslavia in the summer of 1972. This approach is problematic insofar as such stories are selective and unverifiable, as comparable accounts are absent from the records. However, historical sources are often not representative samples. In the context of an authoritarian regime, sources by private individuals are rare, fractured, and asymmetrical to the more numerous and well-structured sources produced by the state power. Kula's oral account is thus used here to counterbalance the dominant state perspective.

The reason why I highlight Kula's memories is because he supervised my PhD research on vacationers in socialist Poland in the early 2000s. Under his scientific scrutiny, I published on the subject of tourism, mostly in Polish.¹² Now, more than 20 years later, I have revisited this field of study by reconnecting with him using a more personal method, and on the grounds of a new line research on tourism conducted in English language. In the Yugoslavian context, I place him not only as my intellectual mentor, but also as a storyteller. This entanglement reflects a duality within contemporary history, where we are situated closely to the stories we tell. This duality inevitably leads researchers of the contemporary past to turn to oral history sources. The approach reflects, I hope, Kula's eagerness to take up social studies and, specifically, the historical sociology program he has developed in his writings from the 1980s until now.¹³

2 Meeting and Departure Sites

After World War II, tourism slowly recovered, but it was not until 1956 that Polish travelers joined the growing tide of international tourism to Yugoslavia. The thaw in international relations between Washington, Belgrade, and Moscow triggered a wave of Eastern European tourism to Yugoslavia. Yugoslavian leader Josip Broz Tito played a vital role as a bridge builder between the West and East. The new era of tourism was initiated from the top down. Nikita Khrushchev and Tito vacationing together in September of 1956—one week in the Brijuni Islands and one week in Yalta—was a clear political sign that more visitors would be welcome in the future.¹⁴ As destalinization in Eastern Europe intensified quickly after September 1956, the number of Poles journeying to the West jumped rapidly. According to official statistics, the number of Polish persons travelling to Yugoslavia exceeded 30,000 per year in the 1960s. This

12 PAWEŁ SOWIŃSKI: *Wakacje w Polsce Ludowej: Polityka władz i ruch turystyczny (1945–1989)* [Vacation in People's Poland: State Politics and Tourist Movement, 1945–1989], Warszawa 2005.

13 MARCIN KULA: *Kartki z socjologii historycznej* [Pages from a Historical Sociology], Warszawa 2014. – I wish to thank Małgorzata and Marcin Kula, emeritus professors of Warsaw University, for photos and conversations that inspired me to take up this topic.

14 SVETOZAR RAJAK: *Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in the Early Cold War: Reconciliation, Comradeship, Confrontation, 1953–1957*, Oxon—New York 2011, pp. 3, 151; JOŽE PIRJEVEC: *Tito*, Warszawa 2018, p. 477.

number rose to 200,000 in the second half of the 1970s with the largest ebb in 1982 (only 6,000 travelers) and the largest number of departures in 1988 (202,000).¹⁵ A more detailed investigation on who exactly from this group was travelling as tourists is complex to carry out. Still, it is safe to say that most of them came to Yugoslavia for leisure purposes—either partly or entirely.

Yugoslavia offered meeting venues for people who could not meet elsewhere in Europe, divided as it was by the Iron Curtain. Yugoslavia's coastline served as a destination for Polish-Jewish families to reunite and take a vacation. After the Polish communist authorities cracked down on resistance members in 1968, they did not get passports quickly.¹⁶ Yugoslavia was one of the few places where Polish police did not restrict movement so much. This created an opportunity for the unemployed historian, Stefan Meller, and his wife, Beata, to meet up with family members who had been living in Western Europe for a long time. Meller had been active in the 1968 youth protests and, after 1968, was under constant Polish police surveillance. Under these unfavorable circumstances, the Mellers were able to take a few weeks off to travel to Yugoslavia's "safe spaces"¹⁷ to meet their family. After Poland gained independence in 1989, Meller was appointed Polish foreign minister, which gives the story an interesting follow-up,¹⁸ akin to Jeffrey C. Goldfarb's theory of the "politics of small things"—whereby small actions invisibly increase our autonomy and shape our life trajectory.¹⁹

Yugoslavia served as an escape route or *Fluchtweg*²⁰ for those who wanted to reunite with their families in Western Germany. Most of the escapees spoke German and presented themselves as travelers with solid connections to Germany. As the example of Henryk Dzierżan from Zgorzelec suggests, some Silesians turned to the German consulate in Zagreb for help. Henryk Dzierżan and his wife Jadwiga decided to leave before they took a trip to Yugoslavia and arranged their escape with Henryk Dzierżan's mother, who had already left for Germany. When in Yugoslavia, the Dzierżan family boarded a train to Austria

15 Statistical data from: Rocznik Statystyczny Głównego Urzędu Statystycznego (GUS) 1969, p. 501; 1985, p. 498; 1989, p. 495; statistical info on comings to Yugoslavia from Poland (1977), in: Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej (AIPN) [Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance], Warsaw, sign. IPN BU 1594/549.

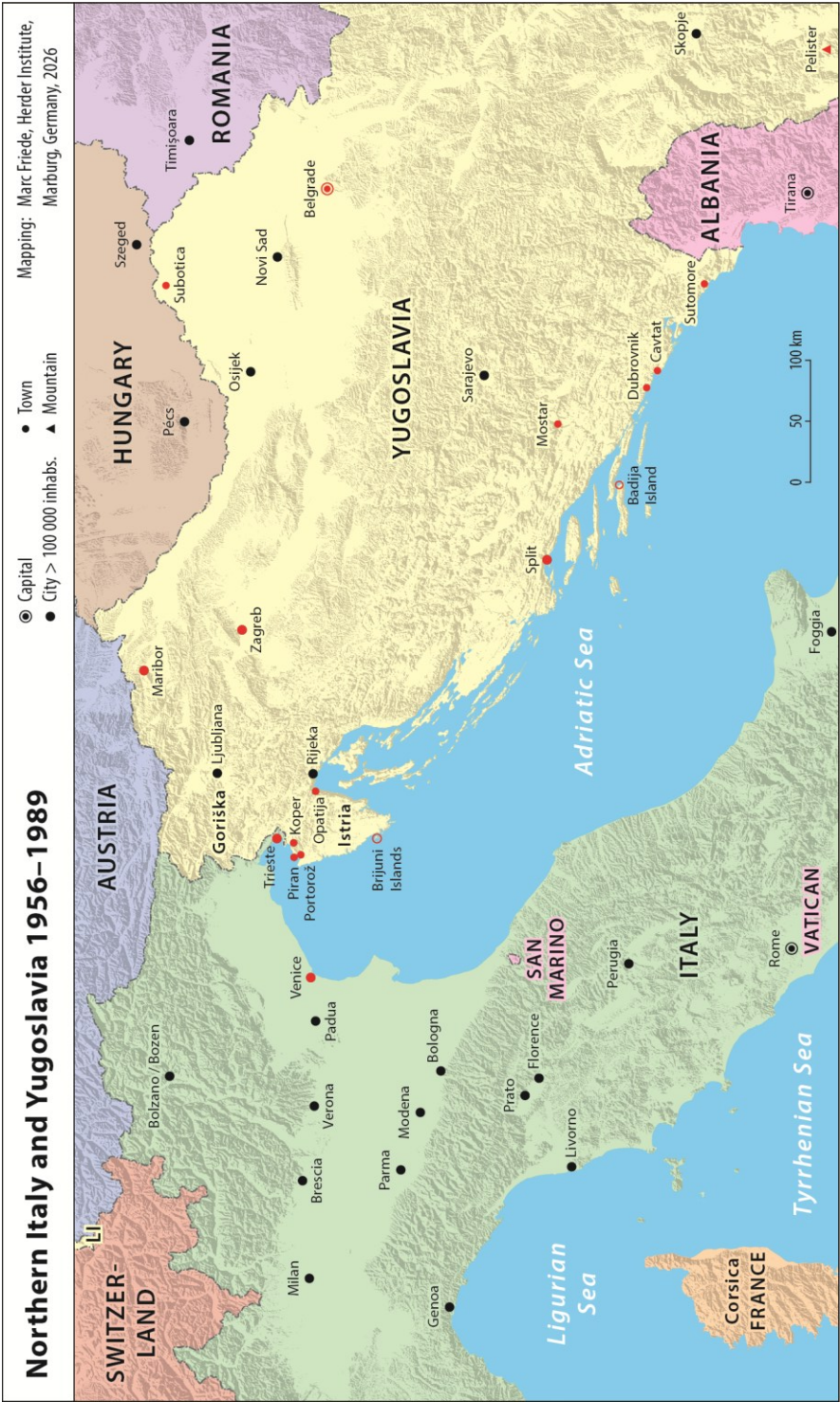
16 Interview with Małgorzata and Marcin Kula dated 2023-05-27. Marcin Kula accompanied his friends Stefan and Beata Meller on the 1972 trip to Yugoslavia. Małgorzata Kula was an intern in Skopje, Macedonia. Notes from the author's private archive.

17 KURT SCHOCK: *Civil Resistance Today*, Cambridge 2015, p. 166.

18 STEFAN MELLER: *Świat według Mellera: Życie i historia—ku wolności. Ze Stefanem Mellerem rozmawia Michał Komar* [The World According to Meller: Life and History. Towards Freedom. Michał Komar in Conversation with Stefan Meller], Warszawa 2008.

19 JEFFREY C. GOLDFARB: *The Politics of Small Things: The Power of the Powerless in Dark Times*, Chicago—London 2007, pp. 23–35.

20 EVA ROSSMANN, SUSANNE SCHOLL (eds.): *Fluchtwege: Neue Texte über Fremdsein und Heimat*, Wien 2016.



and passed the border safely and legally.²¹ What can be learnt from other Silesian escapees is that they built a social network that extended to external helpers—West Germans.²² The Silesia region had witnessed several waves of exile since World War II. These groups of migrants served as a bridge for the next waves, creating a transnational support network at a grass-root level. A German part of the network mailed letters, parcels, and money to Silesians in Yugoslavia, or, as in the above-mentioned case, German Silesians ventured by car or train from West Germany to look for their compatriots and intercept them.²³

Zagreb was one of the main gateways for Silesians fleeing to Germany. For Józef Steiner, born in Budkowiec Stare (Alt Budkowitz), an escape to West Germany meant silently leaving a Polish organized tour. In Zagreb, he simply walked away from the group.²⁴ A group of three Silesians just jumped off the through train in Zagreb quietly, and then disappeared into the town, says another report on missing tourists.²⁵ A group of nine Silesian escapees also left a Polish package tour in Zagreb for what was supposed to be a day trip to Mari-bor, but ended up getting caught during an illegal border crossing to Austria. They were detained and escorted by the police to a Polish tour bus, which headed back to Poland shortly afterwards.²⁶ Certainly, there were very unlucky circumstances that the report was silent about. According to Dariusz Stola, a Polish historian, Silesians did not face prosecution in Poland for border trespassing in Yugoslavia,²⁷ but no one examined their fate closely. The Polish secret service likely put a stop on their passports to restrict their movements.

21 Memorandum on Polish tourists denied reentry to Poland from Yugoslavia, 1970-07-30, in: AIPN, sign. IPN BU Gd 00105/8, vol. 1 and 2 (on-line), pp. 95–96, 98–99.

22 Special note by travel guide Świdzki on planned escapes by Silesians and West German helping Silesians to leave Yugoslavia, 1966-06-22, in: Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN) [Archives of Modern Records], Warsaw, Główny Komitet Kultury Fizycznej i Turystyki (GKKFiT) [The Main Committee for Sport and Tourism], sign. 17/28, p. 151.

23 Special note by travel guide Wojciech Lauer on Silesians who left a package holiday tour in Yugoslavia, 1966-06-25; special note by travel guide Henryk Leźnicki on Silesians getting help from West Germans in Yugoslavia, 1966-10-7/22; special note by travel guides J. Biernacki and L. Bąkowa on West Berlin letters to Bronisława Knapik, 1965-07-7/25; special note by travel guide Stanisław Walis on Silesian vacationers in Yugoslavia getting money transferred from West Germany, 1966-10-05, in: AAN, GKKFiT, sign. 17/28, pp. 128, 140, 53, 143; special note by travel guides Ewa Czarnecka and Gabriela Kazimerczak on two Silesians receiving a parcel with, supposedly, passports to leave Yugoslavia, 07-07-1969, in: AAN, GKKFiT, sign. 17/173, p. 78.

24 Special note by travel guide Zbigniew Unger about Józef Steiner leaving an organized tour of Poles in Zagreb, 1964-10-09, in: AAN, GKKFiT, sign. 17/29, p. 75.

25 Special note by travel guide Anna Skowerska about Bernard Deditius, Irena and Zygmunt Jakubczak leaving the tour in Zagreb, 1965-06-28, in: AAN, GKKFiT, sign. 17/28, p. 70.

26 Special note by travel guide Anna Szczepańska on an unsuccessful attempt to escape to the West from a bus tour in Zagreb, 1964-09-17, *ibid.*, p. 100.

27 DARIUSZ STOLA: *Kraj bez wyjścia? Migracje z Polski 1949–1989* [A State without Exit? Migrations from Poland, 1949–1989], Warszawa 2010, p. 211.

Polish sources on escapees took the form of short notes and did not go deeper into the personal trauma exiles might have felt. Leaving their homeland could not have been easy, particularly for older Silesians who had been born before the war in German and Silesian-speaking communities. The very enigmatic remarks from reports on escapees' strange behaviors just before leaving²⁸ might be a small trace to help us uncover their emotional responses—fear, uncertainty, awkwardness—but official sources reflected, in the first place, the perspective of the communist state with its ambition to dominate over people. A short memo about some escapees landing in prison in Koper (Slovenia) was overshadowed by organizational difficulties relating to monitoring would-be escapees.²⁹ Just a sentence or two was written about Silesian Alojzy Leszczyk, a villager from Reńska Wieś (Reinschdorf), who was shot dead by Yugoslavian border troops on the border to Italy, but there were no further traces, and reports did not delve into the devastating impact on individuals.³⁰

A more human-oriented perspective on *Fluchtwege* is hard to produce due to the lack of sources generated by escapees themselves. Many Silesian escapees were menial workers who lacked much education and were neither engaged in identity politics nor politics of any kind. Polish authorities, however, perceived those walkaways in nationalistic terms. The above-mentioned Józef Steiner did not speak Polish well, the report says. He spoke the Silesian dialect and fluent German. So, he felt he did not belong to the Polish nation. Another report noted that one group of Silesians started to speak German to one another, and this was a clear sign for the report writer that they would be strongly motivated to leave when they arrived in Yugoslavia.³¹ It is very possible that such escapes were motivated, not by questions of national belonging but by disappointment with communism and its economic malfunctions. Yugo tourism created corridors to escape communism forever, also for Poles with no connections to Germany. Most of them left Yugoslavia for West Germany, Italy, and Austria.³²

28 Special note by travel guide Janina Matyszkiewicz on two Silesians who spoke Polish poorly who fled during a holiday at the Adriatic Sea, 1970-06-18, in: AAN, GKKFiT, sign. 17/173, p. 28.

29 Special note by travel guide Jadwiga Kaczmarek on escaping Silesians caught by the Yugoslavian border control and imprisoned in the border town of Koper, 1965-06-09 to 1965-06-27; special note by travel guide Aleksander Mniszek on would-be escapees and difficulties in keeping an eye on them, 1965-06-26 in: AAN, GKKFiT, sign. 17/28, pp. 64, 66–68.

30 Włodzimierz Reczek: Notatka w sprawie odłączeń od wycieczek do Jugosławii organizowany przez polskie biura podróży. [A Note on Persons Who Left Trips to Yugoslavia Organized by Polish Tour Operators], 1965-07-13; Special note by travel guide. W. Wilczyński on Alojzy Leszczyk, who was shot dead while escaping to Italy, 1965-07-12, *ibid.*, pp. 40–41, 57–58.

31 Special note by travel guide Eryka Bałuch about nine Silesians leaving the Polish organized tour in Zagreb, 1964-09-17, in: AAN, GKKFiT, sign. 17/29, p. 102.

32 Multiple reports by Polish tourist guides on Polish escapees, 1970, in: AAN, GKKFiT, sign. 17/173.

Yugoslavian soft border policy created international incidents for the Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych (Ministry of the Interior). For the Polish authorities, those going away from Yugoslavia to capitalist countries were considered unsanctioned exits. Poles were not allowed to transit through capitalist Austria, which was indicated in passports.³³ Yugoslavian border security forces sometimes reacted harshly towards escapees but the latter were often creative enough to hire local people to get them through.³⁴ Their journeys did not always go smoothly, however. One note shed light on the desperate attempt by some Polish tourists to leave Yugoslavia by land without any passports, money, or external help.³⁵ This happened mainly because of narrowing channels for legal emigration in socialist states. Polish authorities often denied individuals passports for personal use in order to prevent Polish vacationers escaping from organized trips (instead, a so-called “collective passport” would be issued for the whole group).³⁶ Still, escapees could sometimes count on the Yugoslavian police’s passiveness and general reluctance to launch investigations into disappearance of Polish tourists.³⁷

The Yugoslavia border regime was less heavy than Soviet Bloc frontier governance.³⁸ Polish travelers could buy a one-day ferry trip to Venezia from one of the Yugoslavian ports and not come back.³⁹ For Silesians on organized tours in Yugoslavia, the Istria Peninsula was the most popular departure point for trips to Venice by bus.⁴⁰ The mainland footpaths to the West also offered a way for escapees to traverse the coastline to Trieste, an Italian enclave encircled by Yugoslavian territory. In the 1960s, some holidaymakers made it to Trieste

33 Memorandum on Polish tourists denied reentry into Poland from Yugoslavia, 1971-06-18, in: AIPN, sign. IPN BU 01194/8 (on-line) t.1, pp. 361–363. I would like to thank Dariusz Stola for his comments on Polish-German escapees from Yugoslavia.

34 STOLA, *Kraj bez wyjścia?*, pp. 210–211.

35 Special note by travel guide Wanda Jaklewicz on Silesians who were released from prison, returned to the group and went missing again, and local police who did nothing about it, in: AAN, GKkFiT, sign. 17/28, pp. 49–50.

36 DARIUSZ STOLA: *Opening Non-Exit State: The Passport Policy of Communist Poland, 1949–1980*, in: *East European Politics and Societies* 29 (2015), 1, pp. 96–119.

37 Special note by travel guide Elżbieta Griszczak on Silesians escaping from Zagreb and the slow reaction of Yugoslavian police, in: AAN, GKkFiT, sign. 17/173, p. 177; special note by travel guide Wanda Jaklewicz on Silesians who were released from prison, returned to the group and got lost again, and local police who did nothing about it, in: AAN, GKkFiT, sign. 17/28, p. 49–50.

38 BRACEWELL, p. 250; SZATLACH, pp. 417–418.

39 HENRYKA WUJEK: *Związki przyjacielskie [Friendly Relationships]*, Warszawa 2014, p. 81; memorandum on Polish tourists denied reentry into Poland from Yugoslavia, 1971-06-18, in: AIPN, sign. IPN BU 01194/8 (on-line) t.1, pp. 361–363.

40 Report by travel guide Helena Zajbert on one Pole who went missing during a one-day trip to Venice, 1962-10-22, in: AAN, GKkFiT, sign. 17/25, p. 18; special note by travel guide Wojciech Wójcik on nine people who escaped from a trip to Venice, 1966-09-07, in: AAN, GKkFiT, sign. 17/28, p. 147.

with no checks due to relaxed border surveillance.⁴¹ Another way to leave was to turn to Western tourists for help, and sometimes a spontaneous love affair with a British woman in the nearby Yugoslavian town of Opatija could even be a solution. Car trunks were also rarely checked by the border guards.⁴² All those escape practices around Dalmatia's "boundary space"⁴³ can be regarded not as leisure but rather as relaxation turned resistance and hidden in plain sight.⁴⁴

Those who chose to remain might have needed cultural intermediaries who could help tourists to familiarize the local realities. For this, Polish-German encounters over the Iron Curtain in Yugoslavia give a good example. In Montenegro's Sutomore, off the season, the beaches became deserted. By October, only Polish and German tourists would still be arriving to enjoy the southern Yugoslavian sun. They did not talk to each other, however, because of a lack of a common language. Vlasto Bonz,⁴⁵ a talented local entrepreneur, acted as a broker between these visitors and Yugoslavian locals. His unique interpersonal skills could be explained partly by his cosmopolitan background. He was of Croatian, Hungarian, Jewish, and Turkish descent. Apart from his native Serbo-Croatian, he also spoke German and Turkish passably and demonstrated a good knowledge of Polish thanks to his Polish wife Hanna. Not only did he bring refreshment drinks to the beach, but also a cheap money exchange service for German and Polish vacationers at his bar "Bonz," which was open 24/7.⁴⁶ Offering more competitive rates than in the bank, he was able to stimulate an increased consumerism among German tourists. Polish petit traders—after they sold their goods—willingly bought the German marks to take back home. German marks could either be exchanged at Bonz's bar or directly on the beach. Bonz circulated among German sunbathers who wanted to have more dinars for their holiday expenses.⁴⁷ His money-exchanging enterprise represented, quite literally, a space of change and challenged the official banking system.

41 Special note by travel guide Stefania Łozińska on Polish people who escaped to Trieste, 1966-10-31, in: AAN, GKKFiT, sign. 17/28, p. 139; special note by travel guide Zbigniew Kuczera on two Silesians crossing the border to Trieste illegally, 1966-08-03, *ibid.*, p. 175.

42 Special note by travel guides Justyna Kaczorowska and Józef Warchlewski on Antoni Miller leaving the group for good because of a love affair with a British woman, 1969-09-01, in: AAN, GKKFiT, sign. 17/173. For the Polish Ministry of the Interior complaints about the soft Yugoslavian border and the Yugoslavian government's reluctance to make it harder to cross, see: Ministry of the Interior memo on Polish-Yugoslavian talks on the border governance system in Yugoslavia, 1975-12-05, in: AIPN, sign. IPN BU 1594/549.

43 BALLINGER, p. 20.

44 JAMES C. SCOTT: *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, Yale 1990, p. xi.

45 STANISŁAW HARASIMIUK: *Po sezonie* [Off-Season], in: *Tygodnik Kulturalny* 25 (1981), 12, p. 14.

46 *Ibid.*

47 *Ibid.*

No matter how hard Bonz tried to introduce this systemic change, many spaces in Yugoslavia remained unchanged for centuries. This resistance to change can be attributed to the universal “upland-lowland divide.” In the mountains, the old patterns of life are usually conserved due to territorial factors or “natural defense” that made those areas inaccessible or unattractive to forces of change.⁴⁸ The mountainous area that today forms part of North Macedonia was an excellent example of the peripheral area where shepherds pastured their cattle in the wilderness, and one Turkish villager, named Dejele, rode a horse to assist a few brave Polish souls trying to reach the Pelister summit.⁴⁹ Here, nomadic Roma people pushed their wagons—self-sufficient and cut off from lowland modernity.⁵⁰ Indigenous patterns of life also survived well in Bosnia and Hercegovina, where Marcin Kula together with Beata and Stefan Meller made an upland excursion to escape for a while from the holiday resorts and crowded beaches. Being off the beaten track meant twisty and narrow roads and breathtaking vistas. Kula remembers seeing smashed cars that had plummeted and been left down in the valleys, a trace of those who had never made it to their destination, symbolic of the wreckage of a civilization.⁵¹

3 Images of Modernity

Most of the visual representations of the Yugoslavian Riviera depict scenes of happiness and safety—beaches full of sun-bathers and swimmers, clearly a sign of well-being and prosperity. State media—which catered to a wide audience—created a joyful vision of summertime, with no trace of the bleak moods and emotional pain experienced by Silesian escapees. The “Polish Film Chronicle,” a short movie series created by the state-owned Movie Production Company (Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych i Fabularnych), presented Yugoslavia as a model country from which Poland could learn in terms of planning for improvements. The series presented the idea that tourism in Yugoslavia was fueled by the Yugo car industry and roads networks that were far better than in

48 STEPHANIE MAWSON: Escaping Empire: Philippine Mountains and Indigenous Histories of Resistance, in: *American Historical Review* 128 (2023), 3, 1211–1243, here pp. 1211–1215.

49 EWA AND JANUSZ RYGIELSCY: Tam gdzie kończy się Jugosławia [Where Yugoslavia Ends], in: *Światowid* (1978), 7, pp. 30–31, cited from a press clipping, in: AAN, *Telewizja Polska S.A.: Zbiór Wycinków Prasowych*, [Press Clippings of the Polish Television] (ZWP), sign. 16/306.

50 KRYSTYNA PISARKOWA: W kraju najstarszej kultury słowiańskiej: Korespondencja z Macedonii [In the Country of the Oldest Slavic Culture: Correspondence from Macedonia], in: *Przekrój* 39 (1972), 1433, pp. 6–7.

51 Interview with Marcin Kula, 2023-05-23. Notes in the author’s archive; letter from Kula to the author, 2023-11-08. See also: Polish press articles on terrifying Yugoslavian roads and the yearly death toll in Yugoslavia (roads deaths) in 1970s, in: AAN, ZWP, sign. 16/306.

Poland. The increasing volume of traffic still left the landscape relatively unimpacted.⁵² Polish amateur movies from the 1960s—uncensored, raw materials from home archives—offer more private images of Polish holidaymakers exploring and sightseeing in Yugoslavia in a very independent manner. Those films show experiences of ordinary tourists hitchhiking on the roads, staying at camping sites, preparing food from cans, and visiting nearby markets.⁵³ At the same time, those amateurish movies are more enigmatic due to the lack of sound and poor quality of tapes.

Imagining is rather about perceiving otherness⁵⁴—in this case, mostly feelings and opinions Polish tourists generated about Yugoslavia—than about practical actions taken by escapees as described in the previous subchapter. And, in this sense, Polish short movies poorly depicted Yugoslavia's majestic landscapes or the atmospheres of places. Narrative sources are more frequent and explored deeper things that Poles did not have at home—the Renaissance façades of historical buildings, cypress trees, olives, and the orange groves of the Yugoslavian coastline. Polish reporters admired summer vibes there: luxury hotels full of visitors soaked up the sun on Hvar Island, where there are clear skies for most of the year, giving the place a sense of *dolce vita*. The warm evenings made vacationers flock to the old town *palazzos* to eat alfresco and stroll along boulevards.⁵⁵ In Cavtat, south of Dubrovnik, beautifully positioned on a peninsular, Polish tourists, cooled by the Mediterranean breeze, could enjoy the deep green vegetation, which has since become more sparse due to droughts and wildfires caused by rapid climate change.⁵⁶ But back in 1960s, fruit-filled gardens, figs and chestnut forests were densely seeded along the coast road heading south. Old pine trees laid their branches down to meet the dark azure waters of the Bay of Kotor.⁵⁷

For Kula, who travelled alone on holiday in this area, the Yugoslavian coast offered the natural beauty he could not get in Poland. The Adriatic was warmer than the Baltic Sea and everything in Yugoslavia seemed to be more colorful

52 Migawki z Jugosławii [Short Documentary from Yugoslavia], in: Repozytorium Cyfrowe Filmoteki Narodowej, PKF 29/85, 1985-07-16, <https://repozytorium.fn.org.pl/?q=pl/node/9417> (2025-09-16).

53 PAWEŁ GÓRNY: Archiwum Rodziny Górnych [Archives of the Górny Family] (1966), in: Polskie Archiwum Filmów Domowych, sign. PAFD 0031 018, https://filmy-domowe.artmuseum.pl/katarzyna_gorna_k03_t08/ (2025-09-16).

54 GYÖRGY PÉTERI: Introduction: The Oblique Coordinate Systems of Modern Identity, in: GYÖRGY PÉTERI (ed.): *Imagining the West in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, Pittsburgh 2010, pp. 1–12, here p. 2.

55 ZDZISŁAW WRÓBLEWSKI, TADEUSZ KARWIŃSKI: Hvar: Kolorowe miasto [Hvar: The Colorful Town], in: *Dokoła świata* 34 (1962), 452, pp. 12–13.

56 AJIT NIRANJAN: Hellish Heat and Primal Fear: Croatian Fire Fighters on Frontline of Climate Crisis, in: *The Guardian*, 2024-10-11, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/oct/10/hellish-heat-primal-fear-croatian-firefighters-climate-crisis> (2025-09-16).

57 Information on the Cavtat area taken from the Polish tour operator PTTK program in 1963, in: AAN, GKkFiT, sign. 17/26, pp. 163–164.

than the greyness he experienced in Poland. Moreover, Yugoslavia impressed him more than Bulgaria, which he imagined to be a typical beach destination without any sightseeing opportunities. He clearly was not the only Polish traveler to construct the image of Yugoslavian otherness.⁵⁸ The Polish fantasies of Yugoslavia were also rather boosted by fancy Western cars and solid infrastructure—modern petrol stations and highways of a kind that had not been built in Poland yet.⁵⁹ Almost every press report on Yugoslavia made mention of the many private cars there.⁶⁰ These were still rare in 1960s Poland, where tourist movement was heavily dependent on buses and trains. Seeing the German tourists flocking to Yugoslavia was a transformative experience for Małgorzata Czajkowska, a Polish journalist, as she had never seen so many Germans before.⁶¹ Some of them might have been Polish-Germans who chose Yugoslavia because of their Slavic connections.⁶²

Journalism offers a lot of insights into Yugoslavia, as it was a prosperous country. For Alicja Solska, Yugoslavia was a country that generated impulses of modernity by investing hugely in tourism infrastructure. New resorts and modern facilities attracted a lot of tourists which was a source of fascination but also a cause for some worries (overcrowded beaches). Solska found something stylish in the Yugoslavian attitude towards tourism and money. “They could profit from tourism like no one else.”⁶³ Tourism-driven growth stemmed not only from Yugoslavia’s openness, but also from opportunities available to Yugoslav casual workers in Western Europe. The Westernization of Poles in Yugoslavia was linked to, and largely shaped by, the Westernization of Yugoslavs who had lived and worked in Germany, Great Britain, Sweden, or the United States. Those ex-pats flocked to Yugoslavia to spend a summer in their home country, parking their new Volvos, Mercedes and Fords in front of luxury hotels “to give proof of their success.”⁶⁴ Or they would drive through the backcountry in their new, comfy, and air-conditioned Chevrolets in the hot summer to bring a taste of modernity to the remote villages of Vojvodina.⁶⁵ Some of

58 Emails from Marcin Kula to the author, November 2023.

59 ZBIGNIEW ISAAK: Na Jugosłowiańskim szlaku... [On the Yugoslavian Trail...], in: *Widnokreśli* (1962), 12, pp. 69–71.

60 JERZY POMIAŃSKI: Jadran i Adriatyk [Jadran and Adriatic], in: *Nowa Kultura* (1957), 48, pp. 1, 7; WIESŁAW SZYNDLER-GŁOWACKI: Pod znakiem “Crveneje Zastavy”: Jugosłowiańskie Zapiski [Under the Sign of “Cervena Zastava”: Notes from Yugoslavia], in: *Życie Gospodarcze*, 1977-06-05, cited from a press clipping, in: AAN, ZWP, sign. 16/306.

61 MAŁGORZATA CZAJKOWSKA: Morze ze słońcem w herbie: 2 tys. kilometrów przez Jugosławię [Sea with the Sun Emblem: 2,000 Kilometers across Yugoslavia], in: *Odgłosy* 6 (1963), 48, pp. 1, 5.

62 HARASIMIUK, p. 14.

63 ALICJA SOLSKA: Bieg nad morze [Run to the Sea], in: *Trybuna Ludu*, 1964-06-15, p. 4.

64 BRIGITTE LE NORMAND: *Citizens without Borders: Yugoslavia and Its Migrant Workers in Western Europe*, Toronto et al. 2021, p. 3.

65 MELINDA NADJ ABONJI: *Tauben fliegen auf* [autobiographical novel], Salzburg—Wien 2011, pp. 1–10.

them could hardly be recognized as Yugoslavians since they had taken on a multinational, overlapping identity that belonged to more than one territory.⁶⁶ According to Stanisław Harasimiuk, Yugoslav ex-pats looked absolutely Western in their smart casual clothes.⁶⁷

Yugoslavia stood out as a country where modernity met tradition. Zbigniew Isaak's photo composition of natural sites and urban spaces of Slovenia in the early 1960s depicted this tendency.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, Slovenian coastal towns like Koper, Piran, and Portorož dazzled Wojciech Giełżyński with their vivid cosmopolitanism. "One can play roulette and baccarat in casinos"—an indulgence not on offer in communist Poland.⁶⁹ Marian Gadzalski discovered Belgrade: a city of modern factories and housing districts but also with a marketplace where traditional villagers—including women wearing headscarves—sold fresh fruits.⁷⁰ Henryk Chądzyński shifted attention to the edges and enclaves of modernity still encircled by the vast areas of traditional culture. A Western-style, ultramodern printing facility could be found in Kosovo, a region of peasants with a low level of education, where traditional ideas dominated and there was a lot of hardship. As in Poland, Yugoslavian modernity was a relatively new phenomenon, not fully rooted in the manners and behaviors of the local population. For Chądzyński, the proof for this was excessive littering in the Japanese garden built in the luxury hotel where he stayed.⁷¹ However, the garden could well have been littered by foreigners.

Yugoslavia's westward trajectory was symbolized by the free circulation of Western currencies—West German marks, Italian lira, and Austrian schillings—among its people.⁷² An unnamed journalist retained the image of luxury hotels around Dubrovnik built by West German investors to accommodate German tourists there.⁷³ Another Polish witness of Yugoslavia's modernization marveled at the sight of hotel infrastructure near Split—big, spacious hotels with saloons, night clubs, mini-golf, and bars open round the clock.⁷⁴ These

66 LE NORMAND, p. 6.

67 HARASIMIUK, p. 14.

68 ZBIGNIEW ISAAK: Kolorowe góry [Colorful Mountains], in: *Dookoła świata* 9 (1962), 461, pp. 12–13.

69 WOJCIECH GIEŁŻYŃSKI: Gdyby co dzień odwiedzać inną... [If You Visited a Different One Everyday...], in: *Panorama*, 1975-03-09, cited from a press clipping, in: AAN, ZWP, sign. 16/306.

70 MAREK GADZALSKI: Kolorowe miasta: Belgrad [Colorful Cities: Belgrade], in: *Dookoła świata* 10 (1963), 505, pp. 8–9.

71 HENRYK CHĄDZYŃSKI: W jugosłowiańskim kalejdoskopie [Inside the Yugoslavian Kaleidoscope], in: *Życie Warszawy*, 1977-05-10, cited from a press clipping, in: AAN, ZWP, sign. 16/306.

72 HENRYK ZDANOWSKI: Każdy dinar pachnie jednakowo [Every Dinar Smells the Same], in: *Polityka*, 1972-11-18, cited from a press clipping, in: AAN, ZWP, sign. 16/310.

73 Z. D.: Jugosławia w słońcu [Yugoslavia in the Sun], in: *Profile* 65 (1974), 8, pp. 10–13.

74 ZBIGNIEW MICHTA: Na miodowej łące u bożka szczęśliwej chwili: Wrażenia z Jugosławii [In the Honey Meadow of the God of Happy Moments: Impressions from Yugoslavia], in: *Pobrzeże* 6 (1974), 68, p. 28.

facilities represented a Western style and scale of modernity, which Polish seaside resorts clearly lacked at that time. A tourism journalist named Adam Czarnowski retrospectively praised the former Yugoslavia for its world-class infrastructure.⁷⁵ What fascinated Marcin Kula, however, was the opportunities available on the Adriatic Coast for tourists travelling alone. Yugoslavia offered cheap accommodation in private rooms and good contact with the local population, uncommon in the Soviet-Bloc tourism industry. He recalls Yugoslavian women approaching tourists on the streets of seashore towns and shouting “soba, soba”⁷⁶ [free rooms, free rooms].

Memoranda of Polish tourism organizations confirm the reflections on Yugoslavian modernity mentioned above. In the view of the Polish state-run tour operator *Orbis*, Yugoslavia attracted Polish travelers because of the high standard of service compared to Bulgaria and Romania.⁷⁷ In Polish tourism official records, Yugoslavia was listed alongside capitalist states, not socialist ones. The same phenomenon can be noticed in a Polish Ministry of the Interior Memorandum from 1970, declaring that separate passports be issued for those traveling to capitalist countries and Yugoslavia as opposed to the passports issued for travel to socialist countries. This move somehow reflected the Polish experience of Yugoslavia being closer to the West than to the East.⁷⁸ This image of the Yugoslavian West had a more powerful effect in the times of economic decline when the aspirations of holidaymakers were growing. By the end of the 1970s, Polish travelers had begun to see Yugoslavia as a desirable tourism destination where everyone wanted to go but only few could afford to visit.⁷⁹

Collective touristic experiences offered by Polish travel agencies proved prohibitively expensive. A two-week holiday package in Yugoslavia cost more than 20,000 *złoty* per person (more than four times the average monthly wage).⁸⁰ High costs continued to limit Polish tourism to Yugoslavia for de-

75 Interview with Adam Czarnowski, recorded by Łukasz Filipek, 2008-04-19 to 2008-04-25, in: Dom Spotkań z Historią, Archiwum Historii Mówionej [History Meeting House, Oral History Archives], Warsaw, sign. AHM_0695, https://audiohistoria.pl/nagranie/916-ahm_0695 (2025-09-14).

76 Interview with Marcin Kula, 2023-05-24. Notes from the author's private archive.

77 Polish organized tourism operations in 1976, in: AAN, Zjednoczenie Gospodarki Turystycznej “Orbis” [Consortium for Tourism “Orbis”], sign. 11/11, p. 67; Jerzy Wolski: Reports on tourism personnel education in Yugoslavia, France and Austria, 1975, in: AAN, Instytut Turystyki [Tourism Institute], sign. 1/1723, pp. 1–53.

78 Budget execution document for 1980, in: AAN, Centrala Turystyczna “Orbis” (CT “Orbis”) [Tourist Center “Orbis”], sign. 5/1, pp. 78–81; Memorandum of the Passport Department, Polish Ministry of the Interior, 1970-02-02, in: AIPN, sign. IPN BU 1594/549.

79 Petitions by different Polish factories to be permitted to send their employees to Yugoslavia for holidays on an exchange basis that did not involve money, in: AAN, CT “Orbis,” sign. 8/12, pp. 1–192.

80 ROMAN STANOWSKI: W krainie winnic, fig i turystyki [In the Land of Vineyards, Figs, and Tourism], in: Dziennik Bałtycki, 1979-10-13/14, cited from a press clipping, in:

cares. At the end of the 1970s, however, money shortages caused by high national debt began to be felt more intensely. The economy was suffocated due to the lack of interchangeable currencies.⁸¹ Polish authorities must have acknowledged the fact that some Yugoslavian tourist agencies operated on a free market basis, which made their services cheaper than Polish state-run operators.⁸² This was precisely what Wendy Bracewell coins “the market socialism or consumer orientation.”⁸³ Yugoslavia represented the most market-oriented approach to tourism within the communist countries. However, this turn to the West did not prevent Yugoslavia from being affected by the crisis of socialism, which hit the country in the 1980s.⁸⁴

Polish tourism also suffered—perhaps even more—from the decrease in income at the time of the crisis.⁸⁵ Overwhelming industrialization led to the collapse of the ecosystem vital for the capacity to profit from tourism.⁸⁶ Under these circumstances, at the end of state socialism, the definition of modernity changed. In the late 1980s, for Polish journalist Michał Książarczyk, the best option for spending summer in Yugoslavia was to take a bike and plunge into the nature of the Brijuni Islands nature reserve. He enjoyed birds singing all around him as he rode through the pine forest. Wildlife was always close to him as he approached the safari park at the northern part of the Veliki Brijun Island, a vast area where native deer, roe deer, and fallow deer roamed. Tito would often visit nearby Vanga Island. He gifted camels, giraffes, mouflons, and llamas (given to him by state guests from all over the world) to the national park of Brijuni. What mattered most to Książarczyk was not basking in the sun on the crowded beaches but the environmental message printed on the tourist map: “We are proud of uniquely beautiful Yugoslavia. Help us preserve and protect this beauty.”⁸⁷

AAN, ZWP, sign. 16/306; for statistical data on an average wage in 1979, see: Polish *Rocznik Statystyczny GUS*, 1980, p. 111.

81 Petitions by different Polish factories (as in footnote 79).

82 Response by Tadeusz Zygmuntowicz from “CT Orbis” to the motion tabled by the Polish collective food-stores enterprise concerning a no-currency exchange with the Yugoslavian tour agency “Lasta”, 1979-12-12, in: AAN, CT “Orbis,” sign. 8/12, pp. 100–101.

83 BRACEWELL, p. 249.

84 LE NORMAND, p. 26.

85 SOWIŃSKI, pp. 255–262; DANUTA ZAGRODZKA: Po sezonie [Off Season], in: *Polityka*, 1979-09-17, cited from a press clipping, in: AAN, CT “Orbis,” sign. 24/1.

86 Question by Barbara Koziej-Zukowa, Sejm deputy, to the Prime Minister on the negative impact for tourism caused by heavy polluted waters of Gdańsk Bay and Vistula Lagoon, 1981-06-30, in: AAN, CT “Orbis,” sign. 24/3, pp. 53–54; Roman Dysarz, Stefan Iwicki, Romana Przybyszewska-Gudelis, Zbigniew Werner: Straty ekologiczne wywołane rozwojem turystyki i koszty przystosowania środowiska do potrzeb turystyki [Economic Losses Caused by Tourism Development and Additional Costs Generated by Adapting the Environment to Meet the Needs of Tourism] 1987, in: AAN, Instytut Turystyki [Tourism Institute], sign. 1/317, pp. 1–27.

87 MICHAŁ KSIĄŻARCZYK: Rowerem po Broni: Korespondencja z Jugosławii [Brijuni by Bike: News from Yugoslavia], in: *Życie Warszawy*, 1988-06-04/05, p. 7.

4 Trader Tourism

The previous subchapter focused heavily on the communist state media depiction of Yugoslavia, which fails to reflect the true experience of travelers there. Many reflections were simply left unspoken due to the censorship of the Polish and Yugoslavian press. The American media offers a remedy to this silence. *The New York Times* contained a more critical examination of Yugoslavian life from the perspective of transatlantic travelers. American travelogues of 1980s Yugoslavia help to reveal a truer image of the country. While hopping from one island to another, Elaine B. and David B. Ulman spotted the cult of Yugoslavia communist leader Tito everywhere and found it strange: "Tito's picture hung in almost every shop." The American couple also recognized strong influence of Venetian history in the architecture, language, and cuisine of the coast and islands and followed traces of heroic personalities through the windows of an abandoned historical building "where Marco Polo was born" on the island of Korčula. The Americans' fascination with the remnants of the country's Italian period lay outside the version of local heritage that communist tourism wanted to showcase. The couple also discovered a darker side of Yugoslavian contemporary life, the first signs of an upcoming crisis: "To conserve gas, Yugoslavians are forbidden to drive their cars on certain weekdays and weekends."⁸⁸

The experience of harshness is also very much present in Slavenka Drakulić's personal stories of how she survived communism in Yugoslavia. Her reminiscence of communism contrasted deeply with the Polish press image of a picturesque and modern Yugoslavia—a somewhat naïve narrative, heavily influenced by communist censorship. Coming back to the country in late 1987 after a year spent in the United States, Drakulić had a feeling of Yugoslavia as being far from the West, both physically and mentally. In her home city Zagreb, a city refurbishment seemed superficial and wrongly motivated. The modernization was being carried out not to serve Yugoslavians, but to show off to foreigners coming to the town for international sports events. Every time Drakulić returned to her home country, she crossed the border with Austria or Italy. And the distinctiveness of Yugoslavia's Eastern, as opposed to Italy and Austria's Western character remained very clear and sharp in her memory. Traveling to Yugoslavia meant "plunging" into a world of "bumpy, poorly lit roads, dirty toilets in restaurants, a strange greasy smell in hotel rooms."⁸⁹

Transnational tourism led to diverse views relating to Polish adventures in Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia attracted a lot of Western press journalists, whose work offered an outside perspective on Polish ventures in Yugoslavia. In a car-

88 ELAINE B. ULMAN: Island Hopping along Yugoslavia's Adriatic Coast, in: *The New York Times*, 1981-02-01, p. 6, <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/02/01/travel/island-hopping-along-yugoslavia-s-adriatic-coast.html> (2025-12-08).

89 DRAKULIĆ, p. 161.

toon made by Michael C. White for an article in *Time* magazine,⁹⁰ Polish summer peddlers are shown parking their cars on the beach and offering useful goods to bathers directly from their vehicles or from towels they had laid on the beach next to the cars. This image could of course have been a little exaggerated. At least in Greece, the Polish retailers based their car-stall not on the beach but at nearby camping sites, where not only Greeks but also Yugoslavians ventured.⁹¹ A cartoon usually exaggerates in order to attract attention, and it does its job well in depicting the absurdity and irony of the situation. As Kenneth W. Banta, the author of this reportage, noted, for Polish businessmen, summer is no pleasure, but instead a “hectic routine of smuggling, barter deals, and cash transactions with each stop paying for the next.”⁹²

Yugoslavians were by no means passive agents in the story of tourism commerce.⁹³ Residents of the border region of Goriška (Slovenia), north of Trieste, were so heavily immersed in smuggling consumer goods into Tito’s Yugoslavia that the local community decided to open a special exhibition in May 2019 that commemorates this phenomenon.⁹⁴ A popular joke from the late Yugoslav period features a Roma smuggler who carries 88 pairs of Levi’s jeans in his luggage an allusion to official commemorative slogans surrounding Tito’s life, cleverly repurposed by grassroots smugglers operating along the Trieste–Yugoslav rail route.⁹⁵ In the joke, the smuggler is stopped by a Yugoslavian custom officer and questioned about the excessive number of jeans. He responds that he is merely supporting the Communist Party’s memory politics, claiming that his trade honors Tito’s legacy. Even if only a joke, the anecdote highlights the creativity with which smugglers played with official propaganda, bending socialist symbolic language in order to legitimize and expand commercial practices. Such informal trade was particularly intense in the Italian–Yugoslavian borderlands, where geographical proximity and dense socio-cultural intersections created a fertile liminal space for smuggling. People from both sides of the border had lived in one country before 1947.⁹⁶ Historically,

90 KENNETH W. BANTA: Have I Got a Deal for You?, in: *Time*, 1987-09-07, cited from a press clipping, in: Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives (OAS), Budapest, RFE/RL, boxes 1333–1334.

91 PIOTR GŁUCHOWSKI: Polak potrafił: Opowieści z czasów gdy byliśmy narodem handlarzy [The Resourceful Pole: Tales from an Era When We Were a Nation of Traders], in: *Gazeta Wyborcza: Duży Format*, 2024-10-07.

92 BANTA (as in footnote 90).

93 ALENKA ŠVAB: Consuming Western Image of Well-Being: Shopping Tourism in Socialist Slovenia, in: *Cultural Studies* 16 (2002), 1, pp. 63–79, here p. 72.

94 Goriški Muzej, Museum Collection Pristava, n.d.: “Na Šverc! Smuggling in the Goriška Region after World War II.” Nova Gorica, <https://www.goriskimuzej.si/en/permanent-exhibitions/museum-on-the-border/museum-collection-pristava> (2024-07-24). E-mail from Rok Bavčar, Slovenian ethnologist, to the author, 2025-11-06.

95 MAJA MIKULA: Highways of Desire, in: *GRANDITS/TAYLOR*, pp. 211–238, here p. 216; ŠVAB, pp. 68–71.

96 TIMOTHY PHILLIPS: *Retracing the Iron Curtain: A 3,000-Mile Journey through the End and Afterlife of the Cold War*, New York 2022, pp. 299–304.

local people often traversed the borderlands and could make use of this knowledge in times of harsh political restrictions and economic breakdown.⁹⁷

Yugoslavia's private traders operated on longer distance routes, as well. Polish customs statistics enumerated Yugoslavian citizens among the most prolific smugglers in the late 1970s and 1980s on the southern Polish border.⁹⁸ One day in 1983, the train from Poland to Zagreb became a scene of customs crime. According to the Polish Customs Office, a group of 22 Yugoslavian railmen were caught red-handed smuggling goods of high commercial value: fox furs, electronics, dental equipment, amber crafts, and many other items. The group had returned *en couchette* from a five-day trip,⁹⁹ which was presumably perfectly tailored for smuggling purposes. The trip was short but long enough to make fast deals on Polish black markets. The smuggled goods were well hidden in the roof of the Yugoslavian train, and Yugoslavian smugglers—professional railway personnel off duty travelling as casual tourists—had insider knowledge of how and where contraband could be stowed in the carriages they serviced regularly.

The high volume of informal trade can be attributed to the circumstances of late communist period consumer culture. The major shift from the 1960s to the 1980s was that tourism to Yugoslavia became less about national identity and more driven by private trade opportunities. Those private and unregulated trade routes are known in German as *Schleichwege*.¹⁰⁰ As Małgorzata Mazurek and Mark Keck-Szajbel argue, *Schleichwege* appeared on a larger scale in Polish tourism abroad after the border regime was relaxed between Poland and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1972. The opening resulted in a massive influx of Poles to East Germany and vice versa. In Poland, this strategy to shop outside Poland quickly became a social response to the growing economic crisis in Poland, where people had to stand in long lines to obtain consumer goods. Going to the GDR for shopping Mazurek describes as “queue jumping”—a social evasion of standing in a line in front of rather empty Polish shops.¹⁰¹

97 The multiple tales of smuggling from the rich history of the English Channel can be a prime exemplification for this observation. See: PENNY JONES: *Smuggler's Tales: A Brief History of Smuggling in East Devon and West Dorset*, Dorset 1983; *Smuggling and Smugglers in Sussex*, [n.p.] 2022; MARY WOUGH: *Smuggling in Kent and Sussex, 1700–1840*, Newbury 2003.

98 Bulletin on operations by the Polish Custom Office, 1979, 1985, 1986, in: AAN, Główny Urząd Celny [Main Custom Office], sign. 25/150, 25/152, 25/153, 25/154.

99 Bulletin on operations by the Polish Custom Office, 1983, *ibid.*, sign. 25/151.

100 WŁODZIMIERZ BORODZIEJ, JERZY KOCHANOWSKI et al. (eds.): “Schleichwege”: Inoffizielle Begegnungen sozialistischer Staatsbürger zwischen 1956 und 1989, Köln et al. 2010.

101 MAŁGORZATA MAZUREK: *Spółeczeństwo kolejki: O doświadczeniu niedoboru 1945–1989* [The Queueing Nation: An Experience of Shortage, 1945–1989], Warszawa 2010, pp. 107–108; MARK KECK-SZAJBEL: *Shop around the Bloc: Trader Tourism and Its Discontents on the East German-Polish Border*, in: PAULINA BREN, MARY NEUBURGER

The more Polish vacationers profited from small trade, the more it became problematic for authoritarian regimes. Hungary and Yugoslavia considered it illegal for Polish holidaymakers to trade goods, even if they kept their business to a relatively low level. The idea emerged to introduce taxation to stop the free flow of goods (100 dollars transit fee for all Poles crossing the border with Yugoslavia). This was also the state response as the economic crisis grew.¹⁰² The Western press was not only interested in sunny beaches but also what was happening beyond the coastal areas. Travel writer Kay Withers spotted a so-called Polish market in Subotica, the borderland area also known as a smuggling channel of forbidden books to Hungary, free of charge.¹⁰³ Still, the commercial potential of Subotica was far more famous among Poles. "Private traders" with their "attractively priced" commodities united the socialist countries in a way the socialist states did not want to be united because the grass-root trade severely undermined the state running economy efficiency.¹⁰⁴ One local Subotica resident visiting the local Polish market reported to the press: "On the weekends these days you can't move for the crowd."¹⁰⁵

The Western press defended this rising capitalism, though not without some criticism of its esthetics. What was usually not covered in the Polish media was the role of Turkey, which took different paths toward capitalism. Unlike Yugoslavia, Turkey sent police to support Polish traders because, as the Turkish government believed, international trade fueled economic growth and generated prosperity.¹⁰⁶ From the 1960s, Turkey became a model country for Polish private entrepreneurs. Turkish merchants developed a special line of products tailored to Polish needs and tastes. Turkish business also widely advertised in Polish¹⁰⁷ and Polish tourists were welcomed in Turkey so much that Polish authorities discontinued the boat tourism from Golden Sands in Bulgaria to Istanbul due to the large number of escapes.¹⁰⁸ Still, where socialism saw a weakness, capitalism saw opportunities. As Jackson Diehl concluded in his 1987 reportage from Yugoslavia, all Polish traders that stopped—or were stopped—on the border between Hungary and Yugoslavia could "embark on an even

(eds.): *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, Oxford 2012, pp. 374–392, here pp. 374–380.

102 Banta.

103 ALFRED A. REISCH: *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA Funded, Secret Western Book Distribution Program behind the Iron Curtain*, Budapest 2013, p. 90.

104 KAY WITHERS: *For Many Poles, Smuggling is a Way to Make Extra-Cash*, in: *Baltimore Sun*, 1987-08-04, cited from a press clipping, in: OAS, RFE/RL, boxes 1333–1334.

105 EDWARD STEEN: *Bad News for the Polish Flea Market Kings*, in: *Independent*, 1987-10-01, cited from a press clipping, *ibid*.

106 JACKSON DIEHL: *Poles are East Bloc's Travelling Salesmen, from Baltic to Black Sea, They Match Scarce Goods and Buyers*, in: *Washington Post*, 1987-07-29, cited from a press clipping, *ibid*.

107 STOLA, *Kraj bez wyjścia*, p. 378; GŁUCHOWSKI.

108 Reports by Polish package-tours personnel on tourists "separated from the group" (escapes), 1966–1970, in: AAN, GKKFiT, sign. 17/173.

more ambitious venture: a 2,400-mile round trip drive from Warsaw to Turkey.”¹⁰⁹

5 Conclusions

Yugoslavia, in Polish eyes, was predominantly perceived as an integral, multi-ethnic entity. The seashore and modern communities where one could find traces of Italy stand in stark contrast to the Turkish tradition of Bosnia, which looked mysterious to Polish visitors. The Westernization was never far from the Easternization in this country. This entanglement is what made the Yugoslavian experience so unmissable. No other socialist tourism destination was so culturally diverse. Enjoying Yugoslavia’s tourism meant lying on an Adriatic Coast beach and visiting the old Turkish bridge in Mostar on the same day (70 kilometers away). This kind of diversity is now much more challenging to experience with Europe’s existing borders, which separate the European Union from those left behind. Borderlands have become thinner—they resemble strict lines, not wider spaces.

This may sound like a strong voice for Yugoslavia’s exceptionalism or a reflection saturated with pessimism and historical nostalgia. From a broader perspective, however, nothing is wholly exceptional. The Polish tourism experience in Yugoslavia was not the only story. Vacationers in the 1980s reached even more distant horizons—Hongkong, Singapore, Bangkok, and Seoul—trade zones in faraway Eastern Asia that were beyond the imaginations of early socialist entrepreneurs.¹¹⁰ What created the need to make such distant travels was not ethnicity but powerful forces of globalization. So it was in Yugoslavia’s case—for Poles, the Slavic connections were not the most important vehicle for traveling there. From a historical sociology perspective, the economy is a stronger driver than feelings of national belonging. Modernization, technologies, and prosperity are the factors that have constantly taken tourism to the next level.¹¹¹

109 DIEHL (as in footnote 106). For the Polish memory of the Poland-Turkey trade connections, see: KAMIL KOWALSKI, ANDRZEJ PIECZEWSKI: *Turystyka handlowa Polaków w latach 70. i 80. XX wieku: Studium przypadku* [Trade Tourism of Poles in the 1970s and 1980s: A Case Study], in: *Krakowskie Studia Małopolskie* 17 (2012), pp. 123–139, here pp. 133–135.

110 GŁUCHOWSKI.

111 MARCIN KULA: *Polskie powstania historyczne jako przedmiot analizy socjologii historycznej* [Polish Uprisings from the Historical Sociology Perspective], in: *Przegląd Historyczny* 104 (2013), 4, pp. 641–658, here p. 642.

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Additional Material

- Author’s interview with Małgorzata and Marcin Kula; private photos and e-mails from their archive; private e-mail from Andrzej Paczkowski.

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