

SOCIETAL APPROACH TOWARDS THE SOCIALIST HERITAGE IN BULGARIA

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Abstract: *The paper propose a conceptual framework of societal attitudes towards the socialist heritage in Bulgaria as a country with controversial socialist legacies in the field of tourism. The analysis aims to investigate the different expressions of societal approach to the heritage of the communist period of Bulgaria and what is the attitude, feelings, actions of the society towards this heritage in the post-communist times.*

Keywords: socialist heritage, tourism, societal approach, concept

ОБЩЕСТВЕНИ НАГЛАСИ КЪМ СОЦИАЛИСТИЧЕСКОТО НАСЛЕДСТВО В БЪЛГАРИЯ

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Резюме: В статията се предлага концептуална рамка за анализ на обществените нагласи към социалистическото наследство в България като туристическа дестинация. Предложената рамка позволява идентифицирането на различните прояви на обществените нагласи спрямо социалистическото наследство степенувайки ги градивно от любов до омраза в посткомунистичния период.

Ключови думи: социалистическо наследство, туризъм, обществени нагласи, концепция

The socialist heritage refers to the heritage created between 1944-1989 and as attraction for foreign tourists. It is different from socialist realism, propaganda art and dissident art. From tourism demand perspective these distinctions are not always clear and often leads to misunderstanding. The socialist heritage is considered as the one created, supported and funded by the regime, as well as the regime's opponents which resulted to the dissident art and heritage, part of so called underground culture during that period.

In the field of Tourism the main issues related to communist (socialist) heritage are linked to the:

- Interpretation
- The attempt to create the new European image
- The negative attitude against the old regime
- Emotional involvement
- Politically dependent (ideology) inconvenient e.g. Nazi

period in Germany

In Bulgaria, for relatively long period 1990 – 2010 there was lack of government interest and investment in developing socialist heritage tourism. This aligns with the political regime after the 90s and the movements against previous regime and controversial societal attitudes. There is no single approach for categorization of socialist heritage places and sights in Bulgaria, but mainly these are linked with the commemoration of the birth or death of communist leaders; activity of Partisans; glory of the Soviet Union and the Red Army, Russian-Bulgarian friendship; public buildings architecture; Monuments; Commemoration of specific moments, battlefields, etc.

The Social Attitudes and Feeling (SAF) concept was created out of a longitudinal research of the communist heritage treatment in Bulgaria for the period of 1990-2020.

The model is based exclusively on the observations of how Bulgarian society treated its own heritage accumulated during the socialist period of time and before this, during tsarist Bulgaria when communist movement was extremely strong fighting the fascists regime established in the country between 1930-1940s. After the collapse of communist in 1989, a large part of this heritage was abandoned, destroyed or, in contrary preserved and safeguarded.

The amount of communist and socialist artefacts, monuments, administrative, residential buildings was impressive, in fact it was inseparable part of the cityscape of Bulgarian cities, towns and villages. After the 90s the cultural heritage - considered as burdened or carrying unwanted symbols or heritage of previous political period, were strongly affected and suffered purposeful destruction, vandalism, physical degradation in the beginning of so called post-communist period. The radical changes in political regime as it was in Bulgaria and all other Eastern countries, entering from socialist to democratic regimes in the 90s, influenced and changed the understanding of darkness making it even more sensitive. The controversial different types of government, conducted policy and substitution of social and cultural values, reflected into the contemporary interpretation and understanding of "difficult heritage" (Logan & Reeves, 2008), (Dujisin, 2007), (Light, 2000).

After the changes of 1990s and transition to the democracy these sites/attractions were charged with different type of attitude, associated as memories and landmarks from the past political regime. The communist/socialist regime shaped the monumental and urban planning architecture obliterating everything from the former period embracing a new "post-socialist" identity (Voukov, 2007). The reverse process initiated soon after the democratic changes (Iankova K. Mileva S., 2014) with different level of severity and extremes. Using these societal acts as a grid, we were able to link them with the expression of the member's society regarding the socialist heritage. That is how, we were able to seize the full spectrum of feelings and attitudes that have led to it treatment in a positive or negative way.

We identified 5 types of societal attitude and feelings (SAF): Hate; Animosity; Indifference, Sympathy and Love. These approaches are closely related to acts on behalf of the society (and governments) that impacted strongly the life and the death, the management and the lack of it of this heritage (Iankova K., Mileva S., 2020).

— Love, related to the feeling of nostalgia and past experience (Ivanov and Achikgezyan, 2017) and leads to conservation and the perpetuation of the heritage in question like for example socialist art museum Sofia and the majority of the Black Sea Resorts.

- Sympathy, related to the acceptance and integration of the build heritage within the cities/villages landscape (e.g. Dimitrovgrad, Pernik, Madan in Bulgaria, the numerous open air monuments related of the WW2 in all ex-socialist territories); Most of this heritage has become inseparable part of the cities landscape.
- Indifference is attitude leading to abandonment and slow deterioration of the heritage - e.g. Buzludja the national network of all communist movement museums in Bulgaria (Iastrebinski; Vela Peeva; etc);
- Animosity is associated with assault, vandalism, mockery, undermining and ridiculing or twisting, symbols, stories, memories. For example, the assault and vernalisation of the monument of Soviet army in central Sofia and all monuments and places object to confrontation and tension in the society.
- Hate related to complete destruction of the Mausoleum of George Dimitrov; destruction or permanent dismantling monuments, communist/socialist symbols such as pentagram, hammer and sickle from the administrative or residential buildings etc.

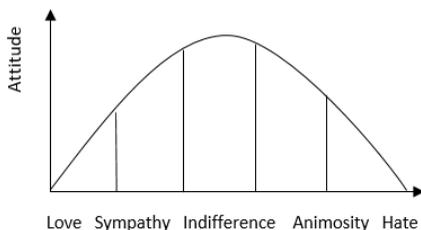


Figure 1 Societal attitudes and feelings model

Source: (Iankova K., Mileva S., 2020)

We noticed that Bulgarian society, depending of the political factors and other socio-economic process in the country changes its perceptions and attitudes towards the communist heritage over the time and related temporal dimensions. Not all times the five types of feelings from the spectrum are lived and expressed with the same strengths and directions within society; it is also possible that in the same society two or more feeling cohabite in parallel often in the same location.

Various feelings and attitudes can also burst and fade, or exist in latent or dormant state and while the right social conditions take place to burst again or be suffocated or disappear. The analyzed past reveals that the societal attitudes can change and vary in time. For example, in Bulgaria the societal mood towards the socialist heritage was Love before 1989, then turned very fast into Hate for the decade of 1990s, the most flagrant expression was the destruction of the Mausoleum of Georgi, Dimitrov, then gradually returned to mixture of Love and Sympathy and animosity in the first decade of 2000. The second decade of 21 century was characterised with occasional eruptions of Hate and Animosity manifestations of which the vandalism of iconic monuments of the soviet Army in Sofia and “Aliosha” monument in Plovdiv being the most flagrant acts representing these feelings. All these were accompanied with latent attitude of indifference on behalf of some part of the population for the full period of observation 1990-2022. The indifference is visible of the long decay of monument and buildings as it is the Monument of Buzludzha.

The Societal Social Attitudes and Feeling (SAF) concept however is applicable of all types of heritage. The concept is applicable for all types of heritage and all national contexts and especially those who represent contested and controversial historical periods that still generate vivid debates, strong passions amongst the members of a society.

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