Citizens of the socialist countries travelled (and traded) already in the mid-1950s in the sixties the phenomenon reached mass scale, but only in the seventies did it acquire a completely new significance. Never before had so many Poles, Czechs, Hungarians or Rumanians travelled abroad, and for no price would they resign that privilege.¹ All in all, they didn’t have to. The permission for relatively free movement was a conscious method of easing the strained social unrest within the Bloc. A trip to Varna or Zakopane helped one to forget for a while that apart from the Black Sea there is also the Mediterranean, and that although the Tatra Mountains are very high, the Alps are higher. Thus, travel procedures were gradually simplified, and, as a result, by the end of the seventies citizens of a socialist country needed only an identity card to visit one of the «brotherly» states.

Poland played a specific role in this process. On the one hand, the communist authorities undertook measures to liberalize the travelling regulations, both to socialist countries (from the 1950s) and to the West (from the beginning of the 1970s). A trip to Western countries was also possible after having documented the possession of a specified sum of hard currency kept in an official bank account (which resulted in the development of strategies aimed at acquiring hard currencies). On the other hand, the quick increase in real income of the Poles at the beginning of the seventies (the highest in all socialist countries) spawned an increase in social aspirations and consumption demands – to a degree beyond that which the country’s economy could handle, leading to a crisis that was already apparent in the middle of the decade. The empty shelves in the shops predisposed the people to compensate for the inability to purchase wares in state-owned markets with unofficial trading activity. It is little wonder then that during the 1970s «tourist commerce» underwent a period of dynamic change, both in terms of quantity and

¹ The example of Poland is telling: while 2.7 per cent of the (statistical) population travelled outside the country in 1970, only five years later the percentage rose to 25 – Central Archives of Modern Records (Archiwum Akt Nowych – AAN), Central Committee for Physical Culture and Tourism (Główny Komitet Kultury Fizycznej i Turystyki – GKKFiT), AAN GKKFiT 11/58, fol. 4.
quality. In comparison with the former decade, the number (and the character) of the persons concerned increased many times, the geographic scope of the journeys broadened, the type of wares traded changed and the overall goal of the trips became different (increasingly focusing on financial gain). During the 1970s, a solid foundation was laid for the unofficial commercial activities of the socialist societies in the last decade of the existence of the Soviet Bloc. The period of unofficial commercial exchange was opened by the year 1980, when the awakened travelling (and consumption) aspirations of the people started to encounter ever more serious economic and political barriers (because the «Polish August» influenced not only Polish citizens). The milestones of the decade were set (also from the point of view of «tourist commerce») by such political events as the introduction of the martial law in Poland, and the coming to power of M. Gorbachev, who initiated the perestroika. The natural ending date of the period was the year 1989, which finally changed the political map (as well as the economy) of the region. In the case of Poland, the «touristic» breakthrough preceded the political one. Starting in 1989, the Poles could keep their passports at home. So, it is no surprise then that in 1989, three times as many Poles went abroad than in the preceding year (19,313,000 versus 6,924,000). The differences in quality were also substantial. If at the beginning of the decade we can still talk of «tourist» peddling, at the end of it, we are faced with a huge (encompassing considerable capital), highly specialized, indeed professional, commercial activity. This activity increasingly tended to cross the boundaries not only of the Eastern Bloc, but of Western Europe as well. Whereas at the beginning of the 1970s we deal with «travellers» (Reisende), in the next decade, we encounter «Euro-travelers» (Euroreisende).

1. The 1970s: Tourist Trading

The processes that developed throughout the 1970s would be difficult to comprehend without a brief look at the previous decade. In the 1960s, the commercial activities of tourists were usually improvised and hardly professional; their main goal was the compensation of travelling costs (thus, the slogan «We are too poor to spend our holidays in our own country» became popular in Poland). In the mid-1970s, the situation was different; even an official dispatch of the Central Customs Office dealt with «commercial-tourist season» (instead of using the term «tourist
season», estimating that the percentage of «real» tourists reached perhaps twenty) and with «professional tourism», without any special explication of what was meant by these expressions. More and more legal actions for smuggling were instigated against persons with a higher education and nobody was surprised when whole families were involved in such dealings. Two aspects are striking in the reports of the Soviet, East German, Czechoslovak or Hungarian customs services during the years 1976–1980, which listed the names of the Polish citizens who broke customs regulations. First of all, the percentage of women is very high, and secondly, the people apprehended «red handed» came from all over Poland, including small towns and tiny villages. For a great many people, commercial activities across the borders were no longer a method of repairing the home budget during vacations; these operations became a major source of income. «Out of every train coming from Poland», wrote a Polish journalist in 1977 about the Budapest railway station Keleti, «there emerge two to three hundred peddlers. They make no attempt to persuade anyone that they came with tourist goals. They do not try to hide that they came to trade. Among them, one sees distinguished ladies and underage prostitutes, gentlemen holding official positions and youths. [...] They have steady quarters in the vicinity of the Keleti Railway Station, their own locations at market-places, their areas of expertise in which they specialize. Many of them treat these dealings professionally, as their chief source of income. They come regularly, on fixed days of the week.»

Cross-border travelling intensified to a mass scale and became so «diversified» that Polish consular and customs authorities lost the ability to effectively control it. At the end of 1972, for instance, it was not unusual for around 2000 persons to board a train to Budapest (several times more than the regulations permitted), which rendered any effective control impossible. The Polish consul in Moscow wrote at the end of the same decade: «The diversified character of the forms of tourist exchange between Poland and the Soviet Union, the decentralized character of travelling and the constantly increasing number of people journeying make any kind of complex evaluation of the tourist phenomena by the Polish consular agencies in the USSR impossible.» Similar comments came out of Budapest, Sofia, Prague and Berlin.

9 Pietraszek, «O niektórych problemach».
Tourist «smuggling» started to acquire a kind of institutionalized status. After the introduction of free tourist travelling between Poland and the GDR in January 1972, whole «smuggler groups» appeared in the towns on the Polish side of the border, which as a rule were used (and/or organised) by persons coming from «various regions of Poland, who enrolled people from Zgorzelec and the vicinity frequently working in the GDR».¹¹ A «cottage industry» type of organization started to function, in which the investor provided the persons travelling with the wares, tickets, etc., and later on received the money from the transactions or the goods that were brought back. This system was in practice not only on the Polish-German border. One of the Polish smugglers (an engineer by profession) who operated on the trail to Rumania explained to a German reporter how it worked. During the transit through the USSR, in the vicinity of Gorodok (Polish: Gródek Jagielloński; the last larger town on the way to Lviv), somebody would activate the safety breaks on the train. The traders on the train (usually numerous) were awaited on the spot by local peddlers in motorcars. The jeans brought from Poland, for example, were exchanged for wares that were needed in Rumania. When the delayed train finally made it to Lviv, which was 30 kilometres away, the Polish traders transported by their Ukrainian counterparts in their motorcars were already awaiting it at the railway station.

The goods bought in the USSR were traded in Bucharest for jeans. On the way back, the sympathy of Rumanian customs officers was ensured by bribes in «Kent» cigarettes (which in Rumania acquired the role of hard currency). Polish-Ukrainian trading was resumed on the train route in the vicinity of Lviv. Jeans, for example, were willingly exchanged for gold. In Warsaw, the goods brought back were delivered to the person who organized the whole enterprise. Such journeys, undertaken two to three times a month, allowed for a decent living. The introduction of martial law in Poland in December 1981 put an end to this business and the Polish engineer lived off «a meagre salary, hoping that the travelling regulations will be liberalized once more».¹² Doubtless, he was no exception.

The example described above illustrates several typical phenomena for the «tourist trading» of the 1970s, which were developed and perfected in the subsequent decade. The process started with professionalization, next came the widening of its geographical scope, finally the foreign lands were psychologically «domesticated» by the Poles, i.e no longer treated as alien and unknown. While in the 1960s an average Polish tourist seldom visited countries outside the European

¹¹ «Lańcuszek», Wiadomości Celné 17 (June 1975), 20.
section of the Communist Bloc, in the 1970s travelling to European capitalist states (where traditional destinations like Austria, Italy and France were supplemented by Greece, Finland and Sweden), Turkey or the Middle East (e.g. Syria) became commonplace. To a large extent visits in those latter places restructured the (Polish) trading strategies in socialist countries, particularly in the states visited in transit by the constantly growing wave of motorized tourists. Some of these travellers stopped in Lviv to vend wares lacking in the USSR (jeans, wigs, clothing) and buy the goods that would sell in Turkey (sporting equipment, engineering tools, etc.). City soon became a notable centre of illegal trading, which before long found its reflection in the smuggling (and diplomatic!) language with the new idiom «the Lviv transit». Others undertook several earlier trips to Hungary or Rumania, where they had a «friendly» place to store the wares destined for sale later on in Turkey. These operations, which were increasingly complicated in nature (and simultaneously more profitable), became an introduction to the transactions conducted on the same routes on a truly mass scale in the 1980s.

During the 1970s, the trading endeavours of the Poles tended to be more and more focused on acquiring hard currencies, as the role of hard currency in Poland continued to grow in importance. In 1973, the authorities launched a network of «Pewex» shops, open to the general customer, which traded for hard currencies (equivalent to «Intershops» in the GDR, «Berioska» in the Soviet Union or Czechoslovakian «Tuzex»). Starting in 1976, people were no longer required to declare the origin of the hard currencies deposited in special bank accounts (the possession of which – as already stated – facilitated getting a passport and travelling to the West). Interestingly, the origins of hard currencies were not necessarily connected with travel to capitalist countries; they could also be acquired in socialist states, where the exchange rates against domestic legal tender were markedly lower than in Poland. Thus American dollars, German marks, etc., were brought in from Hungary, the GDR, Bulgaria and Rumania.

An American dollar bought with Hungarian forints, Czechoslovak koruna or GDR marks was noticeably cheaper than when acquired with Polish złotys. As a result, a black market for socialist currencies rapidly developed. This black market was also stimulated by one more factor – the fact that gold was the ultimate object for hoarding. Gold could be profitably bought for instance in Vienna or in Trieste, not only for the dollars smuggled out of Poland, but for Hungarian forints (not without cause dubbed «the Carpathian dollars»), for Czechoslovak koruna or Hungarian forints, for German marks or American dollars.

13 AIPN, MSW Biuro Paszportów 21052, fol. 2 – 5, KW MO in Przemyśl to the Head of the Passport Bureau, 19.1.1978.
Bulgarian lev. This lead to a slightly schizophrenic situation when it paid to sell US dollars in Poland, buy socialist currencies and smuggle those out to the West. Such operations were complicated in relation to the current exchange rates, for example, when at times the Soviet roubles sold well in Hungary, thus making it profitable to go to Vienna through Budapest, where forints were purchased to be taken out to Austria to buy golden coins.  

On the one hand, the black market created a huge demand for socialist currencies in Poland and an increase in their prices; on the other, it also stimulated the influx of tourists from these countries. During the 1970s (on account of the appearance of up to 30,000 Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Bulgarians, Yugoslavians and East German citizens), the local marketplace in the city of Nowy Targ in southern Poland would turn into an enormous money-changing institution. The incomers predominantly brought their home currencies with them, the selling of which at black market exchange rates made purchasing Polish goods (foodstuffs, textiles, car parts, sports and audio equipment) extremely profitable. The socialist currencies, which in this way illegally entered Poland, were also illegally taken out of the country, this time by the Poles. This applied largely to the Hungarian forints.

In the 1970s, unofficial, private trading became an acknowledged, and probably the most popular, platform for mutual relations between the societies of the socialist countries. But, in spite of the huge scale of the turnover and of the numbers of the people moving back and forth, the relationships formed were not strong. The most durable contacts were established by the Poles in Budapest, which in the 1970s was already «the traditional smuggling and transit centre, where the interests of criminals organizing international smuggling from the Arab countries, Yugoslavia, Austria, Italy and Germany crisscrossed». The Poles did not dominate in these activities; rather they were middlemen and petty retailers (although, as it was already emphasized, they had a foothold in the «local criminal element»).

They also made up a small percentage of the people active in the Hungarian illegal market exchange. The behaviour and goals of the majority of these dealers are well described by two press reporters (one from Hungary and one from Poland), who at the turn of 1978 and 1979 disguised themselves as peddlers from the other country, the Hungarian playing the role of a Pole trading in Budapest, and the Pole

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18 Ibidem.
playing the role of a Hungarian in Katowice. Their observations revealed a high similarity of conduct between the groups. The active players (buyers and vendors) at the railway stations in both cities were interested only in profit: sell dear and buy cheap. All the marketing strategies, including the establishing of contact with the other side, were aimed at that goal. Only the price (with the full intent of buying and selling at minimal costs) mattered in the dealings; no other contact was sought by both sides of the deal.\textsuperscript{20} One can assume that within the whole of the Communist Bloc, such relations, as those between the Poles and the Hungarians, were no exception.


In the face of what was described above, the implementation in the summer of 1980 of the electronic «Anti-Smuggler» system, which was supposed to «collect data and statistics on the violations of customs and currency border regulations», acquires a symbolic status, demonstrating the depth of the «trans-border revolution» of the 1970s.\textsuperscript{21} The data acquired by this system over the next few years nevertheless provided limited and single-sided observations (referring predominantly to Polish citizens).

As it has been mentioned above, the economic crisis, which was mounting in Poland since the mid-1970s, resulted in restrictive customs regulations introduced by the neighbouring countries. But it was only the events triggered by the strikes in the coastal cities of Poland in August 1980 that brought about the much more serious restrictions on travel. East German authorities were the first to react with a unilateral decision. Effective 30 October 1980, the agreement that allowed for crossing the Polish-GDR border without a passport or a visa was suspended. Transit to the West was permitted, but individual visits were allowed only with an official invitation. At the same time, a propaganda campaign aimed at discouraging trips to Poland was launched. As for Poland’s neighbours, Czechoslovakia also unilaterally suspended the freedom of travelling (but only on 4 December 1981).

Anxious over getting infected by the «Polish virus», and afraid that the Poles who no longer had access to the shops in the GDR would turn in hoards to the Czechoslovak stores, Prague undertook other measures to limit the influx of «tourists» from the north (including regulations limiting money exchange and prohibition of «taking out the products for black market purposes»). Czechoslovak authorities, just like the Germans, also discouraged their citizens from visiting Poland. Unofficially, managers of state-owned firms were advised not to sponsor tourism to


\textsuperscript{21} AIPN, MSW II, Biuro Paszportów 104/778, GUC to KW MO, 17.03.1981.
Poland and all advertising of trips to Poland ceased. Meanwhile, travelling to other countries like the USSR, Hungary, Bulgaria and Rumania was promoted to such an extent that travel agents could hardly meet with the business objectives they were required to fulfill. As a result, in the summer season of 1981, there appeared in Poland only five per cent of the tourists from Czechoslovakia that were anticipated for that period.22

Other socialist countries also chose the way of «gradual elimination» of visits from and to Poland. Hungarian authorities limited the total amount of forints destined for foreign exchange with Poland to such an extent that there was not enough cash, not only for individual tourists, but even for the people travelling with the state-owned agents.23 Although the propaganda in Hungary was not as aggressive as in Czechoslovakia, the GDR or the USSR, it nevertheless discouraged many Hungarians from visiting Poland. Another important factor in this respect was the rise in the cost of living in Hungary, which resulted in a decrease in tourist traveling in general. It is little wonder then that in 1981 the drop in tourist arrivals in Poland from Hungary totalled 74.8 per cent in comparison with 1979, and 68.2 per cent in comparison with 1980.24 Soviet authorities started with limiting organized tourism (in both directions), and between May and June 1981, there followed a drastic fall in individual travelling due to a new restrictive policy in issuing permissions for inviting Poles and visiting Poland. Transit regulations also started to be observed with hitherto unknown severity, which limited Polish trips to the Balkans.25 As a result, «long before the introduction of martial law and the closing of the Polish borders, personal movement between Poland and the USSR was reduced to a fraction of what it was during the preceding years».26 The only country to receive more Poles in 1981 than in the earlier years was Rumania. This can be attributed not so much to the liberalism of its authorities, as to the payments owed by Rumania to Poland, and the will to regulate those debts with tourist services. At the same time, Rumania, like other socialist countries, undertook measures to limit access of the Poles to her currency.27

But the barrier that turned to be really effective in stopping trans-border movement of Poles was the introduction of martial law in Poland on 13 December 1981. If from the Warsaw government’s perspective military rule closed the borders (at least) with the socialist countries only temporarily, for Berlin, Prague and Moscow it provided the convenient pretext for cutting off the travelling for a much longer

22 AAN, GKT, 10/53, fol. 119–120; AMSZ, DK 22/87 w-12, Annual Report of the Consular Division of the Polish Embassy in the Czechoslovak Republic, 1981.
23 AAN, GKT, 10/100, fol. 8.
24 AAN, GKT, 10/102, fol. 58–59.
25 AMSZ, 19/91 w-20, Consulate General of the Polish People’s Republic in Kiev to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 15.04.1983.
26 AMSZ, DK 22/87 w-7, Consulate General of the Polish Peoples’ Republic in Kiev, Annual Report, 1981.
27 AAN, GKT, 10/100, fol. 39.
period. Taking into consideration that the resumption of tourism would to a certain degree compensate for the rigors of the military rule, Polish authorities relatively quickly undertook measures to return to previous personal exchange regulations. «When travelling to capitalist countries is stopped», they argued, «widening the possibilities of visiting socialist states […] will be a calming element in the situation in Poland, and will help in providing for the social needs of the citizens.»  At the same time, they planned to lessen the pressure on the consumption market in Poland by sharing it with the better-supplied socialist countries through «allowing for the entry of deficit wares through the tourists». This would drain some of the resources accumulated by society and shield the empty Polish internal market without special investment and fiscal strain.

According to the assessments of the Passport Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the resumption of individual travelling to socialist countries was possible already in May 1982. Theoretically, this should have been easy because none of the bilateral agreements were repealed (only unilaterally suspended). But firm opposi-

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Table: International tourism to/from Poland, 1979–1981* (socialist countries)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Foreign tourists in Poland based on border-crossing data; in '000s</th>
<th>Polish tourists abroad based on border-crossing data; in '000s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>788,6</td>
<td>716,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>84,8</td>
<td>67,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumania</td>
<td>58,1</td>
<td>39,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czechoslovakia</td>
<td>1763,7</td>
<td>1548,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDR</td>
<td>4799,8</td>
<td>3403,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>419,6</td>
<td>331,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
<td>189,6</td>
<td>87,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (socialist countries)</td>
<td>7925,5</td>
<td>6118,5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Source: AAN, GKT, 10/100, fol. 33–43.
tion in this respect was encountered from the socialist partner countries, which were worried that democratic ideas would not spread to their lands, and reluctant to allow the Poles to tip the balance of their internal markets. None of the «brotherly» countries were therefore hasty in resuming the former liberal border regulations. Czechoslovak border control would frequently go as far as to break international law and refuse entry to people with valid passports and invitations. The same governments also continued to convince their own people that travelling to Poland was still impossible.\(^{30}\) Whereas, in 1981, 8,530 persons visited Ukraine, one of the chief destinations of Polish tourists, only 365 were permitted to enter in 1982. Not a single «friendship train» travelled from Poland to the USSR in 1982.\(^{31}\) Movement across the rivers Oder and Lausatian Neisse was practically only kept alive by the Polish employees of East German firms. At the same time, Hungary, displaying increasing interest in Western tourists, was least eager to welcome visitors from the poor East (not only from Poland, but from the GDR as well). As a Hungarian Secretary for Tourism was to express in his interview with Der Spiegel: «Hungary does not belong to the region of socialist tourism.»\(^{32}\)

On the other hand, the attractiveness of Poland for East German, Czechoslovak and Hungarian citizens waned. Until 1981, it relied much less on the beauty of the countryside, or the uniqueness of the cuisine than on the possibility of relatively uncontrolled vacationing and, most predominantly on the opportunity of making profitable purchases. Now, with highly valued cosmetics unable to be found, with the radio-transmitters and tape recorders produced on Western licenses unavailable and with the customs control far more restrictive, the economic appeal of travelling to Poland declined rapidly.\(^{33}\) With respect to illegal trading, the Polish police and consular reports in 1982 are exceptional, for the problem practically ceased to matter!

But marginalization does not mean extinction. It only means that for several years the trans-border trading changed its appearance. Given that the internal market in Poland was in a state of near-catastrophe, it once again paid to bring in wares instead of currency. Until the moment in 1983, with the lifting of the martial law, tourism started to flourish again, the trading function was taken over by the Polish contract workers, in particular those who were employed in the GDR. For a considerable number of these Gastarbeiter the job in Germany was simply a source of money to finance the trading that furnished the major part of their income. This is properly illustrated by the following facts: by the official exchange rate, the GDR

\(^{30}\) AMSZ, 19/81 w-19, study: «Individual Travel to the Czechoslovak Republic», 27.6.1982.

\(^{31}\) AMSZ 19/91 w-20, Consulate General of the Polish People’s Republic in Kiev to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13.6.1983.

\(^{32}\) AAN, GKT, 10/103, fol. 104, Polish Embassy in Budapest to the Consular Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9.2.1984.

\(^{33}\) AAN, GKT, 10/35, 64–66, Information Concerning Selected Problems of Tourist Traveling to the Czechoslovak Republic, September 1982.
mark in 1983 was worth 17 zlotys. At the same time on the black market in Poland, it was valued at 60–80 zlotys (although at Berlin Alexanderplatz it could bring 100 zlotys). But if we consider purchasing and reselling chocolate, one mark could bring in up to 200 zlotys; shoes – 250 zlotys; pepper – 250 zlotys; baking powder – 300 zlotys. The farther the wares travelled from the border, the higher were the profits (the best were attained in Warsaw, Gdansk, and in Silesia). Everybody profited: the «private importers», the middlemen, the owners of small shops where the goods were sold to the public. The Polish authorities were also satisfied. As a high-ranking officer of the People’s Militia from Gorzów Wielkopolski (a town near the Polish-GDR border) put it, the trading activities of the Poles employed in Eastern Germany «produce conflicted feelings», but at the same time they bring substantial profit to the Polish state by «enriching the internal market and bringing foreign currencies to the state budget». He only proposed that these activities be regulated by introducing price limits or by taking over the buying of the products by the state.

3. «Domestication» of the Foreign Lands

Trading activity is easily quantified, for example, by turnover or profit (or penalty). But the process of «domestication» of foreign lands (also the socialist ones), and the creation of common planes of interest, needs and niches is far more difficult. In theory at last, the contract workers had the greatest chances of carrying out that process. They stayed abroad for long periods of time, remained in contact with foreign societies on an a daily basis, and interacted with representatives of these societies in relationships not always formal, frequently formed on economic grounds. But the creation of common planes of interest did not necessarily limit itself to contract workers. Earlier there existed a group of Poles who had ties (mostly economic) in Budapest, Berlin or Lviv. While travelling was relatively easy, these ties were not very strong. But the moment the borders were closed in December 1981, the «loose people», who dwelt abroad in socialist countries – frequently illegally – were in a sense coerced to start cooperating with the local milieus more closely.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the group of Polish «residents» in Budapest was estimated to number between 60 and 70 people. It broke down into the «Keleti people» and the «people of the city». The former operated among the Polish tourists, while the latter were connected with local criminal gangs. Over time, the geography of the socialist «free areas» changed. On the one hand, their location hinged upon the changing strategies and trading routes; on the other, there existed

36 Przybyłowicz, «Kontrabanda».
37 For a literary description of this phenomenon cf. H. Sekulski, Przebitka (Olsztyn, 2001).
38 «Rzucają cień na polskich turystów», Życie Warszawy, 28.6.1982
a growing conflict between the consumption tendencies of society and the legal regulations. Although in the second half of the 1980s the loosening of travel regulations put literally millions of people on the trading trails, the freedom of movement was greatly limited by the requirement to have the so-called «currency booklets» and to document the sources of the socialist currencies that were in possession (frequently sold to the public by the state-owned tourist agencies not in real money, but in the form of special talons, or vouchers). It was no surprise then that a transit tourist who was supposed to go to Bulgaria or Turkey would stay in Hungary for months, or even years, organizing from there trading trips to neighbouring countries. Thus, the Poles who lived in the town of Szolnok specialized in mediation in coffee trading between Vienna (where it was bought for $ 3.50 per kilo) and Rumania (in particular the town of Timisoara), where it was sold at twice the profit. When the average salary in Poland at the time approximated $ 20–30 (by the black market exchange rate), the profits made on this trading would bring in several hundred dollars. At the same time, the middlemen were treated by the Hungarians from provincial towns as very good customers, who rented quarters, patronized restaurants and used local transport. Thus, until they refrained from dealing in currency, their illegal presence was tolerated.39

But the real aristocracy among the Polish unofficial traders in socialist countries were the residents of the Bucharest «Dunavea» Hotel, who dealt in currency. The location of this hotel near the Gara du Nord railway station was not incidental. During the second half of the 1980s, the shops in Rumania were even less supplied than those in Poland. The Polish transit trains to Bulgaria therefore acquired the character of travelling stores. The passengers, after having sold their wares to Rumanian peddlers, sometimes came into possession of large quantities of Rumanian leu, which was of no practical use to them. At that moment, the Polish money traders would appear, offering to buy the leu at exorbitant exchange rates. The money acquired in this way was later offered to Rumanian currency traders at normal black market rates.40 The question of the non-financial costs of these activities remains open.

Each socialist country had its own favourite place to do trade. While the Poles considered Hungary the model economy, for the more industrious Soviet citizens, Poland was such a «promised land». Those of the latter, who had the right to reside permanently in Poland, could also move around the whole Communist Bloc without much problem. They profited from this privilege diligently, trading also in the capitalist lands, and in many cases they took advantage of this opportunity to stay in the West indefinitely.41

4. The Restoring of the «International Trade Activities» (Mid-1980s)

The foreigners residing in Poland, just like the Poles outside of their country, constituted an interesting group, but formed only the margin of the unofficial trading exchange. Trading activities, suppressed under martial law, started to flourish rapidly once the military regulations were lifted and the travel laws loosened. The atmosphere was also favourable for these kinds of activities. While the consumption habits in all of the Eastern Bloc tended to be similar (directed towards Western standards), the differences in the possibilities of meeting the desires of the people in various countries were distinct (and over time increasingly so). The costs of living constantly rose in all of the Communist Bloc. Symptoms of an approaching crisis were evident in all the socialist countries, even in the model economies like the GDR, Hungary or Czechoslovakia. As a result, the unofficial trading exchange from the Adriatic to the Baltic, and from Vladivostok to the Elbe, was conditioned to an even greater extent than in the former period by two factors: scarcity and price.

Once again, Poland acquired a special place on the commercial map of the Bloc. Entering the country was easy, official prices low and the attractive goods difficult to purchase in the official way. Owed to the fact that authorities tolerated a formidable number of private producers (which in the 1980s was strengthened by the new «Polonia» firms\(^{42}\)), among socialists countries only Poland was capable of furnishing the wares, which in the nineteenth century were dubbed the «Nuremberg type products»: haberdashery, clothing, toys etc. The kind of wares that the «key» plants in Brno or Dresden were completely incapable of furnishing. During the 1980s, Poland attained within the Communist Bloc the role of China in today’s global economy (it is also worth noting that a major part of the Polish small production consisted of copying Western wares). Moreover, thanks to the extension of trading routes in the second half of the decade to India and the Far East (Thailand, Singapore), the Poles became a key mediator in the exchange of the products produced there (from clothing to computers).\(^{43}\) «The Polish trader is willing to sell cheap», commented one of the journalists. «The German client is willing to buy at half price the wares, which are expensive or absent in the shops in the GDR. The golden dress belts produced in Poland are much coveted, because women in

\(^{42}\) Starting in 1979, the authorities permitted the use of foreign capital to create companies in selected branches of production in Poland. Establishes procedures were simplified, financial and taxation privileges granted, and the freedom to charge for products was guaranteed. Because most of these firms (in 1988 there were already more than 700 of them, and these enterprises employed over 80,000 workers) were set up by Polish émigrés, they were called «Polonia» businesses. They usually produced clothing, cosmetics and foodstuffs.

East Germany want to be clothed fashionably, while they cannot buy this type of good in their own country. Jeans produced in the vicinity of Łódź are furnished with Western brand labels and sold quickly and in plenty. The electronic watches made by the «Polonia» firms also have no problem selling. […] Apart from this the traders supply their clients on special demand.\(^{44}\)

From the moment in 1983 when the Polish borders were reopened to a wider section of the public, the subject of «tourist trading» returned to the press publications and diplomatic dispatches for good.\(^{45}\) The traders as a whole were increasingly breaking down into two groups: the «traditionalists» and the «progressivists». The former continued the old strategies (reaching back to the 1950s) of peddling cheap and rudimentary products, risking conflicts with customs officers and confiscations. Risk in such operations was high and the effort demanding, while profits were relatively low. The latter group conducted meticulous calculations of costs, profits and losses (with respect to cost, comfort and safety played an increasingly important role). This approach required higher input, especially in hard currency, but returned higher profits, which at the same time were certain. In the mid-1980s, people started to ship video recorders to Hungary, purchased legally for Western currencies. Those were sold in Budapest, or Debrecen, completely illegally, but with double return.\(^{46}\) It also paid to take hard currency to Hungary. In Poland, Western currencies were more expensive, but brought legally into Hungary, they could be sold at black market rates to a known dealer and used to buy (with the acquired forints) appropriate luxurious wares, which drew significant profits when sold in Poland.\(^{47}\)

The improvement in the availability of goods in Polish shops, and the deterioration of the situation behind the «socialist» borders, combined with the favourable price and exchange rate conditions for foreigners in Poland, re-established (and even enhanced) the attractiveness of the country in the second half of the 1980s. The visitors from Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia or Yugoslavia usually had expert knowledge of the Polish market, both in terms of what was lacking and what was available. Thus, they knew what to take in and what to purchase on the spot. Frequently, they did not even bother to pretend they came as tourists.\(^{48}\) In the second half of the 1980s, Hungarian, Yugoslavian and Czechoslovak citizens nearly cleaned out the shops in southern Poland, from Katowice to Zakopane (reaching

\(^{44}\) Faściszewski op. cit.

\(^{45}\) As it was observed in August 1983 in the paper \textit{Trybuna Ludu}, Poles immediately returned on the «old» routes, and were perfectly acquainted with the needs of the Hungarian or Rumanian clientele. «Turyści czy przemycnicy?», \textit{Trybuna Ludu}, 9.8.1983.

\(^{46}\) AIPN, KG MO, 35/185, fol. 206, Przemysł Voivodship Office of Internal Affairs (Wojewódzki Urząd Spraw Wewnętrznych, Przemysł) to the Central Headquarters of Citizens’ Militia (Komenda Główna Milicji Obywatelskiej), 1.4.1987.


Warsaw with increasing frequency). Each of the groups had slightly different trading strategies. The Hungarians, to a lesser extent than during the 1970s, offered their own currency, concentrating on the wares. «The connoisseurs went to the «dens», i.e., to previously encountered peddlers, where goods were exchanged for goods. According to conservative estimates in Katowice alone, there are dozens of such dens, where the goods are promptly exchanged, hand to hand, and the «tourists» return on the same day with the «Polonia» or «Batory» express trains. They bring out practically everything: the proverbial soap and jam. Shoes are also the fashionable stuff, but items of lesser quality, reduced price, or the truly disastrous things from private shops are also exchanged. High prices are paid for t-shirts with «Made in France» labels, which are actually produced near Częstochowa.»

Strategies of the Yugoslavs were more sophisticated. Some of them returned with wares (e.g., cheap electronic watches bought in Vienna), while others returned with currency (exchanged on the spot by Polish currency traders). As for the goods purchased: silver products were favoured or clothing (suits), but also socialist currencies, which were subsequently disposed of in Vienna. As it was calculated in the «Bytom» plant, which produced suits for men, out of the 400 million zlotys turnover for the year 1986, 100 million was made on foreigners. A suit that cost 18,000–19,000 zlotys in Katowice easily brought $100 in Belgrade or Zagreb.

Consequently, such observations were made with increasing frequency: «A Hungarian in Katowice, or a Yugoslav in Cracow, is the mirror image of the Pole at the Budapest Keleti Railway Station. [...] The sight of a Pole wearing a fox fur coat and a similar hat in the middle of the summer is as common as the prospect of a Hungarian bending over a load of packages full of goods ready to take out of the country in Katowice.»

This was also shown by the statistics. In 1987, more than half (51.7 per cent) of the «currency and customs» transgressions were committed by the Poles, 22.4 per cent by foreigners, and 25.9 per cent by persons unidentified (which renders it difficult to state how many of them were Poles). But in comparison with the former years, the percentage of Polish citizens decreased, while that of foreigners rose, in particular those coming from socialist countries. The number of cases involving Yugoslavians totalled 1,015 (a 24.5 per cent increase in comparison with 1986). For Hungarians, the total was 301 (59 per cent), and for Czechoslovak citizens, it was 170 (67 per cent).

On the other hand, in 1987 the Hungarian customs authorities opened 5,400 cases against Poles – twice as many as in 1986.

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51 Tresenberg, «Przemyt», op. cit.
53 Ibidem, 22.
5. On the Soviet-Polish Border

An important, even constitutive, factor of the unofficial commercial exchange between the societies of the socialist countries in the 1980s was the growing participation of Soviet citizens in these operations. Western-type consumption models were also gaining ground in the USSR, which resulted in the increase in demand for outward symbols of social prestige (particularly with respect to clothing). The opportunities for trans-border contacts during the time preceding the last years of the decade were rather limited. This necessitated the use of mediators, where Poles came into play, because they were able to establish commercial contacts in Lviv, Grodno, Minsk or Moscow more easily than in Berlin or Prague. Another helpful aspect in enhancing unofficial commerce was the fact that some of the transit routes from Poland to Hungary, Rumania, the Balkans and Turkey led through Soviet Ukraine.

The Soviet Union was such an attractive market that even the hand-picked participants of the trips organized in 1982 engaged in trading.54 That same year, the Polish consul in Kiev suggested in a dispatch to his superiors the reassessment of «smuggling» experiences of the previous years «in order to prevent a spontaneous rebirth of the <Lviv transit> with all its negative characteristic features and consequences».55 His concerns proved accurate, because in the following year Lviv regained its commercial position of a «concentration point for trading in wares and foreign currencies».56 The problems were chiefly caused by the transit: while the list of the Polish tourists to the USSR, who between 1 October 1983 and the end of March 1984 got into trouble with the Soviet authorities due to trading, numbered 9 pages and 118 items, the item containing cases involving «transit tourists» was 36 pages long, with 943 entries.57 According to Soviet data, over 430,000 Polish citizens (in 75,740 vehicles) travelled in 1983 through Lviv alone. About 75 per cent of these were young people (25–35 years of age), which allows for the assumption that the youthful age exerted its influence on the creativity, industriousness and ease in establishing contacts with the «locals». Needless to say, those contacts (as it was emphasized) were severely penalized.58

The harsh penalties were nevertheless unable to deter people from trading. Especially when, on the one hand, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR issued on 23 August 1986 a decree enhancing legal measures against unlawful profits, including those stemming from trade, while on the other, shortly after-

56 AMSZ, DK 22/87 w-10, Report of the Consular Division of the Embassy of the People’s Republic of Poland in Moscow for the first half of 1983.
57 AMSZ 19/91 w-20, Consulate General of the People’s Republic of Poland in Kiev to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 20.7.1984.
58 Ibidem.
wards, the Cabinet of Ministers of the USSR published regulations making travelling in and out of the country easier. On 1 January 1987, these regulations were even more liberalized (e.g., by doing away with the limit of permissible crossings of the Soviet borders). It goes without saying that this increased the number of tourists: in 1986 the Soviet borders were crossed by over 800,000 Poles – more than all other tourists from socialist countries combined. In 1988, the number of Polish visitors in Belarus was six times higher than during the previous year (26,000 versus 150,000). In 1989, the number of Poles entering the Soviet Union again rose by 100 per cent and the number of transits by 200 per cent. Thus the Poles secured their position as the nation visiting the USSR most frequently. And vice versa – Poland became the country most frequently visited by Soviet citizens.

Polish domination on the Soviet trails was not only quantitative, but also qualitative. «Interestingly enough», recalls one of the participants of the trading excursions to the USSR, «I don’t remember meeting any Czechs or Hungarians; but sometimes we met traders from other socialist countries». Putting aside the reasons for this absence, the Poles easily found common commercial ground with the Ukrainians, Belarusians and Russians, and developed their activities in various directions. Some peddlers concentrated on trading on the spot, whereas others did it in transit, or both. During 1987–1988, Polish trade developed to such an extent that the authorities of the bordering republics started contemplating how to legalize it and fit it into appropriate channels. At first, they chose the free market method, organizing special marketplaces (in Vilna, Zaslawye by Minsk, Brest-Litovsk, Grodno, among others). The renown of this last place «spread all around the Soviet Union. The bazaar was frequented by people even from Siberia or the Asiatic republics, from which Soviet citizens would come to buy and vend their own articles.» But these marketplaces were soon closed (at least for the incomers). Officially it was declared that the markets harboured a lot of smuggled goods and attracted criminals, with whom the local police forces were incapable of dealing. But the more probable explanation is that the incoming Poles brought with them too many free market ideas, which contradicted the Soviet centralized planned economy. Therefore, special official shops, which were allowed to acquire goods from the Poles and resell them to the Soviet public, took over the function of the bazaars. Nevertheless, the free market demonstrated its superiority by then.

59 Ibidem, General Consul in Kiev, memo after a meeting in the Consular Department of the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 20.8. 1987.
Repressions would deter neither the Poles nor the inhabitants of Lviv, Grodno or Vilna, who privatized the commercial exchange – unofficially – with Western visitors and established similar shops as the state did before, but private and unofficial.64

In the Polish tourist traders in the USSR during the 1980s, just like in those operating in Hungary, we can observe a modernization of strategies. The trips were now precisely planned: a carefully devised business plan preceded the voyage and the margin left for spontaneity and chance became very narrow. Persons interested in prompt and significant profit would not lose time on the so-called «chain» trading, which consisted of tedious, risky and often dangerous selling and buying in each of the countries on the route. From 1986 (at least according to police reports) traders, instead of shipping the traditional small objects to Turkey or Bulgaria, took currency or products selling for hard currency (bought in special shops) out of the country. In a report sent by the Przemyśl police to Warsaw, we find for example: «Four to five motorcars leave Poland for Bulgaria with vouchers for several days. After arriving, most of the persons busy themselves with establishing trading contacts with local dealers. Out of this group, one to two people go to Turkey with visas (such a visa can be obtained in a consulate in Bulgaria or in Poland) to buy products. After returning from Turkey, they sell the wares in Bulgaria. The average amount of merchandise is 300 pairs of trousers and jackets per car. Buying wholesale in Turkey, a pair of trousers costs around $ 5, while in Bulgaria they are sold for $ 14–15. A jacket costs $ 14 and makes $ 35–40. Shipping 300 pairs of trousers and jackets from Turkey to Bulgaria brings in $ 2,100 in net profit.»55

These profits, in comparison to average salaries in Poland (calculated at black market exchange rates), were enormous. Still, it was retail commerce, with small turnover and profit when compared to the real wholesale dealers, who, one is led to believe, were not so rare. One person, for instance, during several months of 1989 was capable of shipping as many as 304 personal computers to the USSR. During the same year, the passengers of a single cruise on the Black Sea transported 100,000 pairs of jeans, 700,000 items of cosmetic articles, 500,000 meters of fabric, 500,000 electronic watches, and 4 tons of chewing gum. The value of all these wares – only a fraction of which most likely reached Poland – was evaluated by the Soviet customs service at 50 million roubles (ca. 10 million American dollars, calculated at black market exchange rates). It was estimated that only during the last years of the decade, in the Lviv region, Polish citizens made a turnover of one billion roubles.66

65 AIPN, KG MO, 35/185, fol. 170, Przemyśl Voi-
evodship Office of Internal Affairs (Wojewódzki Urząd Spraw Wewnętrznych, Przemyśl) to the Central Headquarters of Citizens’ Militia (Ko-
menda Główna Milicji Obywatelskiej), 4.1.1987. Trading in Rumania was even more profitable, but it was restrained by extremely restrictive bor-
Even if these estimates were exaggerated, the figures are still shocking, especially because they were «initial» sums later multiplied by consecutive transactions. It is little wonder then that during the 1980s the profitability of the operations in the East was just as good as those conducted in Western Europe. The «wholesalers» brought back gold (which gave the best return in the second half of 1988), currencies from the USSR and Soviet roubles. The «retailers», who usually operated exclusively within the USSR, kept to exchanging of wares, returning with, besides currencies and gold, such things as caviar, cocoa, film cameras, fishing rods or colour television sets. As for the TV equipment: in 1988, the Poles transported about 120,000 sets from Lithuania and Belarus alone, prompting authorities in Vilna and Minsk to introduce limitations in their sale and removal.67


The reactions in Prague and Berlin were far sharper, forcing Warsaw to enter into authentic customs warfare (on two fronts at that) in the autumn of 1988. In November 1988, Czechoslovakia and the GDR introduced new customs regulations, the implementation of which assumed the form of «national discrimination directed against the Poles».68 The summoning of diplomatic representatives from both countries to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (which seldom happened earlier) changed the situation only in so far as the border controls became even more scrupulous and excruciating. In reprisal, at the end of November 1988, Warsaw exercised harsh controls over all tourists from socialist countries (including Yugoslavia) who were leaving Poland, and it did so under the pretext of «safeguarding the internal market». The number of articles one was allowed to take out of the country free of duty was limited; persons who violated these regulations were denied entry into Poland or were told either to abandon the wares on the border or surrender them into short term deposit. By the end of November, 81,5 million zlotys in customs duties was extracted (64,4 from Yugoslavians, 2,5 million from Czechoslovak citizens, and 15,6 million from Hungarians). 5,526 persons (the majority from Czechoslovakia: 3,026) were denied entry into Poland at the border. This time, a Polish diplomat was summoned to the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs69 – also to little avail.

This was only, if we stick to military terminology, intelligence collecting by combat. Real conflicts began in 1989 when the Poles acquired practically complete free-


dom of travel, and the «tourist movement peak, which usually came about in the summer, started at the beginning of the year. The liberalization of passport regulations brought immediate results, with millions of Poles travelling both East and West.»

It is still difficult to assess to what extent the liberalization of travelling regulations was motivated by economic issues and the will to at least partially reduce economic tensions through the cross-border activities of citizens. Inflation, which was rapidly degenerating into hyperinflation and impelled people to get rid of the «hot money», only deepened the problems with supplying shops. The American dollar became the basic currency and people rapidly developed strategies for acquiring it. The opening of the borders was immediately taken advantage of to this end, in particular when travelling to West Berlin and Austria was not hampered by need of a visa. Moreover, the transit countries (the GDR, Czechoslovakia and Hungary) provided a place for supplementary trading and could in no way limit the right to pass.

Collectively, the Polish flea markets on Potsdamer Platz in West Berlin, or in the vicinity of Mexicoplatz in Vienna, soon became the largest black markets in Europe, and «the peddlers from the East demonstrated to the astonished locals that they are better capitalists». But the showcase of true creativity was not so much displayed through the Polish commercial invasions of Berlin or Vienna as it was in the tiny town of Záhony on the Hungarian-Ukrainian border. The Soviet-Hungarian agreement, which was concluded in 1985 and concerned small-scale trans-border movement, was finally implemented at the beginning of 1989. The inhabitants of the 30-kilometer belt on both sides of the border were allowed to freely pass from one side to the other using a special one-month valid visa. During the first three months, the bordering regions of Hungary were visited (it would be better to use the term «overrun») by one and a half million people, who spontaneously changed Záhony into a huge Eastern marketplace. The Poles were also quick to appear there, effectively redistributing their wares (not infrequently brought from other socialist countries) among the influx of people from Ukraine.

The commercial activity of the Poles was, for a variety of reasons, increasingly difficult to bear for the authorities in Berlin, Prague and Budapest. On the one hand, the Poles mediated in the exchange of wares (frequently highly subsidized) that were taken from their home markets to the less opulent socialist countries.

71 While in 1987 inflation reached 25.2 per cent, in 1988 it was 60.2 per cent, and in 1989 – 257.2 per cent (chiefly during the last five months of the year).
73 While in 1988 the Hungarian-Soviet border was crossed by 2.1 million persons, in 1989 the total was over 11.2 million persons.
This cost the economies of the GDR and Czechoslovakia considerable amounts of money and opened their governments to criticism from their own people, who started to blame the visitors for the mounting shortages in the shops. But on the other hand, the freely travelling (and trading) Poles were to an equally large extent the source of internal destabilization the GDR and Czechoslovakia just like the news of the political changes in Poland. Thus, the initiatives undertaken at the beginning of 1989 were not so much related to the safeguarding of home markets as aimed at the prevention of social unrest and, consequently, the retaining of power by the communists. Practically all of the countries visited by the Poles engaged in mass propaganda campaigns aimed at the «Polish peddlers».

In the border regions of the USSR or in cities along the transit trails, like Lviv, limitations were placed on the sale of foodstuffs, so it was now available only to the permanent inhabitants in the vicinity.\(^75\) In January 1989, in the town of Lubmin in East Germany, there was a brutal treatment of the trading Poles, which in the assessment of the Polish authorities carried out to set an example in order to contain the growing phenomenon of illegal peddling by the Polish citizens.\(^76\) Traditionally, it was broadcast that the Poles were buying out the products, which «they themselves are incapable of producing», and that such behaviour would not be tolerated.\(^77\) The climax of anti-Polish actions approached during the first days after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when Polish «tourists» became one of the chief subjects in the media.\(^78\) At the beginning of February 1989, Czechoslovak authorities banned the removal of practically all goods and opened a campaign of «black propaganda» against the Poles.\(^79\) A policy of pursuing petty offenses followed, with police tickets for cars improperly parked, and confiscations of products and money, which in some cases involved instances of physical violence on the part of the Czechoslovak police. At the urging of Austria (the country was plagued by hoards of Polish peddlers), Prague and Budapest also introduced measures against transit travelers. Instances of turning back people from the Austrian border were more than common, as an application of shared transnational responsibility.\(^80\)

76 AAN, PZPR, X/47, fol. 12, Memo concerning the incident in Lubmin, 21.1.1989
77 «In Ost-Berlin droht polnischen Händlern jetzt die Ausweisung», Die Welt, 8.8.1989
7. Conclusions

The Poles, nevertheless, constituted only one side of the problem. Each Sunday, at the same time, when Czechoslovak policemen and customs officers battled with the Polish traders, Ostrava, on the Czech side of the border, was visited by several tens of thousands of visitors from all over Czechoslovakia «interested in the Polish commercial offerings, buying at the market in particular what was unavailable in the shops, i.e., all kinds of jeans clothing, attractive footwear, tape recorder cassettes, video equipment, motorcar accessories. One could practically buy everything from keys to sheepskin coats». This demonstrated beyond any doubt that the ideological arguments were in conflict with free market forces: supply and demand, profitability and loss, price and gain. This leads one to the question of the extent to which unofficial commercial activity of the socialist societies was an expression of free market economy? On the one hand, it is difficult to disagree with Edmund Mokrzycki, who argues that «contrary to popular belief, which took private initiative for the Trojan horse inside the socialist fortress, the private sector was an integral part of the socialist economy, just like the Lenin Steelworks [in Nowa Huta] or the state-owned collective farms». Yet, on the other, if general access is one of the constitutive features of the free market, one cannot help noticing that hardly any other economic phenomenon was accepted to such a large degree by the majority of people in socialist countries. Substantial parts of these societies displayed spontaneous creativity and mobility, worked out business plans of sorts, evaluated scales of profit and loss, amassed funds and, finally, carried out transactions. Even if the unofficial trade did not manage to build permanent contacts between the societies, it did create an «intermediary plane», which broke out of the stiff ideologically ordained framework of previous years. The more or less professional traders spontaneously and unconsciously constructed a bridge between the free and the planned economy, socialism and capitalism, democracy and socialist authoritarianism, the West and the East. At times, as in the case of the «Polenmarkt» in Berlin, they did so quite literally.

The «creative tourism» performed by the socialist societies demonstrated to what extent the people living in the Communist Bloc reflected a system of (compulsorily) communicating vessels, where economics replaced the laws of physics, and the goods lacking in official distribution the water. But while the level of the fluid in a physical experiment levels itself in the case of any transfer between the vessels, in the case of socialist countries, the situation was not so simple. Artificial barriers mounting on political grounds arose, in most cases, in circumstances where the contacts were the most intensive. The transformation, which resulted from the

82 E. Mokrzycki, «Nowa klasa średnia», Studia Socjologiczne 1, 1994, 46.
83 Weber, Der Polenmarkt, 63 – 65.
84 The term was coined by R. Boyes, The Hard Road to Market. Gorbachev, the Underworld and the Rebirth of Capitalism (London, 1990), 189.
events of the revolutions of 1989, did away with most of those barriers. The aftermath of 1989 widened in an unprecedented way the scale of needs and aspirations, but at the same time did not alter the differences in the quality of life. It also did not introduce any revolutionary changes in the methods of the exchange of goods between the traditional (and new) areas of opulence and poverty. One cannot help noticing that when the (more or less) free market finally prevailed, the smugglers had the least amount of trouble in coping with the new circumstances.

Translated by Jacek Soszyński

Pioneers of the Free Market Economy?
Unofficial Commercial Exchange between People from the Socialist Bloc Countries (1970s and 1980s)
The article presents Eastern Central European societies' transnational strategies of dealing with the domestic «Economics of Shortage» which developed during the 1970s and 1980s. In this context, special emphasis is given to the People's Republic of Poland. East Germans, Poles, Czechs, and Hungarians have crossed the borders into neighboring states since the mid 1950s, but only the 1970s brought a radical quantitative as well as qualitative change. The unofficial «Tourism Trade» evolved into arguably the most used platform for multilateral, transnational communication. The number of participants in this «informal exchange» multiplied due to the liberalization of passport and visa regulations. At least for some participants, geographical horizons and goals likewise changed; they often shifted to the professionally organized increase of profits. During the 1970s, the groundwork was laid for the even less controlled development of the next decade: As the long obvious economic crisis in Poland gradually spread to the ČSSR, the GDR, and Hungary, the unofficial, usually illegal, trade reached its peak. Drawn from this perspective, the year 1989 marks the nearly natural end of a development which undermined and thwarted the norms of state socialism from the very start.

ABSTRACTS

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Pioniere der freien Marktwirtschaft?
Der inoffizielle Warenaustausch innerhalb des Ostblocks in den 1970er und 1980er Jahren


Les pionniers de la Libre Economie de Marche?
Échanges commerciaux officieux entre les populations des pays du bloc socialiste (années 1970 et 1980)

Abstracts

la Pologne vivait depuis longtemps, le commerce illégal informel atteint son apogée. Dans cette optique, l'année 1990 peut être considérée comme le point final naturel d'un développement qui a contourné et contrecarré les normes du socialisme étatique depuis le début.

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