



## ORIGINAL PAPER

# An Incursion into a Staged Past: Bucharest's Communist Heritage as a Tourism Product

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### Abstract

The present article explores the way in which in the present postcommunist period the recent communist past, local heritage, history and memory, are being presented to foreign visitors as tourism products. The core of the paper is the notion of communist heritage and the analysis of its various uses in the sphere of the Romanian incoming tourism industry. The article is based upon content research of the itineraries of Bucharest communist heritage tours, with a focus on Bucharest's immovable heritage from the communist period, as it is presented in online touristic materials by local travel agencies and tour guides targeting foreign tourists. Moreover, the study offers an overview of the way Communist heritage tourism in Bucharest may indicate, through its uses of the local immovable *communist heritage*, a new stage in dealing with a long unwanted past.

**Keywords:** *communism, postcommunism, heritage, tourism, Bucharest*

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## Introduction

Postcommunist Romania's coming to terms with its socialist past is an ongoing process and represents a complex and rich material of research. The relationship between the two Romanias, the one hidden behind the Iron Curtain from 1948 until 1989 and the post-revolutionary one, their identities and national heritage can be studied from multiple points of view. The dimensions of the present study allow but sketching the edges of a very interesting process: the interpretation of heritage, communist heritage in this case, and the associated rewriting of history for touristic purposes – the active actors of this process are tour guides, travel agencies, tourism institutions, national and local authorities and tourists themselves. Focusing on the way communist heritage is portrayed as a tourism product, the article employs as main research method content analysis of online materials of travel agencies and tour guides presenting their offer of *communist heritage Bucharest tours*. The wide scope of heritage will be confined for the present study to the material, immovable aspects: monuments, buildings and groups of buildings, sites, all associated to various degrees with the Romanian communist period.

## A framework for communist heritage tourism

In a globalized world, where mobility is omnipresent, social networks are transnational and frontiers lose their traditional sense (Giddens, 1991), tourism takes a variety of shapes, but can widely be defined as follows, according to the UNWTO: "Tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes." Out of the sea of tourism categories, the present article will focus on the inbound tourism in Romania and a specific niche, that of communist heritage tourism (Goeldner, Ritchie, 2012: 3). In order to define the concept of heritage and in particular the way communist heritage is understood in this article, a couple of references from the literature can be useful, starting with a highlighted UNESCO definition: „The cultural heritage may be defined as the entire corpus of material signs – either artistic or symbolic – handed on by the past to each culture and, therefore, to the whole humankind [...]" (Jokilehto, 2005: 4-5). Narrowing down the concept of cultural heritage to a series of categories described by Capot et al. (2012, apud Stănciugelu, Țăranu and Rusu, 2013), the present article will concentrate only on the certain aspects of the communist heritage: immovable cultural heritage (historic monuments, buildings) and museums and public collections. For its uses in present article, the notion of communist heritage is, as seen by Stănciugelu et al. (2013), "a cultural legacy composed of tangible and intangible elements that have historical, cultural and social significance that became and functioned as forms and aspects of legitimacy of the communist political power". The authors add that this type of heritage is historically defined, ideologically infused, concentrated in urban areas and found many times in relationship with specific propaganda mechanisms. To begin with, the communist heritage has a high political charge in regards to tourism – both positive and negative portrayals can be politically instrumented, as Stănciugelu et al. (2013) note – and a controversial nature, due to the game between acceptance and rejection of communist heritage as part of the national heritage (Ivanov, 2009). Caraba (2011) underlines in the literature review in the „*Communist Heritage Tourism and Red Tourism: Concepts, Development and Problems*” article the two different types of tourism developed around the communist heritage used as a tourism resource. The first type is red

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tourism, introduced in China in 2004 and based on visits to sites associated with communist leaders and heroes, comprising an important educational element, as well as nostalgia.

The second type is communist heritage tourism, present in the postcommunist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and „using as resources heritage sites related to the communist/socialist past” (Caraba, 2011). While red tourism developed in China as a centralized and planned state initiative, the communist heritage tourism developed in the Central and Eastern European countries firsthand due to external demand triggered by the interest of western tourists. The educational goals of red tourism in China are not to be found as such in the European countries proposing communist heritage tourism, where a mainly negative view of the period is portrayed and authorities have a tendency to ignore this recent past (Caraba, 2011). This phenomenon present in European postcommunist countries can be viewed as a „dissonant heritage” (Caraba, 2011), where a game between privileged remembrance of certain aspects of the past is doubled by officially disregarded elements of national history (Adler, 2005: 1094 apud Baločkaitė). Red tourism and communist heritage tourism include a variety of activities, memorabilia, forms of exploiting the past: from reenacting China's Communist Revolution, to motivational slogans, red flags, sculptures of revolutionary figures and founding fathers, local retro venues incorporating furniture and decorations of those times, with patriotic songs as soundtracks.

It is also worth noting as well the debatable representativeness and adequateness of the use of the term “communist heritage tourism” when referring to the tourism use of local heritage associated to the European Communist past (Caraba, 2011). Increased accessibility (Caraba, 2011) added to the curiosity and cultural interest for the way of life behind the Iron Curtain has increased the number of tourists in the former communist countries, triggering a development of the way heritage tied to the communist past is inserted and portrayed in the tourism industry. To illustrate the diversity in which communist heritage is employed into the tourism industry, I shortly present below two examples present in the former communist countries, in addition to the communism-related museums present in the capitals of the Baltic States, in Budapest, Berlin, Prague. Conceived in the 1940s, Nowa Huta is socialist realist city planned around the steelworks close to Krakow, Poland. Knudsen (2010) studies how the communist heritage tourism developed by the *Crazy Guides Communism Tours*, transformed an undesirable heritage into a staged environment through tourism practices. Changes of political regime are usually associated with an immediate set of measure taken by the new regime to alter the public official discourse told through public spaces (e.g. by changing the names of squares and streets, replacing statues portraying political figures etc.). Memento Park in Budapest, Hungary, opened in 1993 as an open-air museum putting on display statues and symbols of the previous political regime. Its popularity, design and use of communist heritage has had Western commentators remark its similarity to a „theme park” (Knudsen, 2010).

Communist heritage tourism, being a particular niche within the cultural heritage tourism, has only relatively recently caught the eyes of researchers. Light (2000a, 2000b) and Young (2013) have developed several studies regarding the communist heritage, focusing many times on the postcommunist states' relationship with their past, in particular in the view of building new state identities. Contributions from the two authors will help clarify the analysis results in the second part of the article. Earlier research has found that local actors, such as city officials, architects, developers, as well as the majority

of the population seem to be rejecting communist heritage (Light, 2000b; Czepczynski, 2008). However, as we will see in the next section of the article that some of these previous findings might now be in the full process of becoming outdated, as new local projects involving communist heritage stem from the civil society and private sector, while authorities seem contaminated and have opened to the public the Primăverii Palace – the former residence of the Ceausescu family, which is now ran as a state museum. In absence of an official strategy in the Romanian tourism sector regarding communist heritage, the article observes the private initiatives capitalizing on Bucharest’s communist heritage used as part of a tourism products during communist themed tours of Bucharest. Hence, this article aims to analyze a part of the way the Bucharest communist heritage is presented, in online sector by travel entrepreneurs (guides or travel agencies) for foreign tourists interested in a Communist Bucharest tour.

### Research Methodology

Corroborating the present analysis with the results of other studies focused on the same theme, the article is based on content analysis as a main method of research. A definition of content analysis as proposed by P.J. Stone (1966 apud Chelcea, 2004: 263) underlines its validity as a technique of research which makes inferences by systematic and objective identification of certain characteristics of texts. Content analysis presents both a quantitative and a qualitative approach, the present study using as main approach the quantitative approach. Since the year 2010, when the article published by Caraba (2010) identified only one Communist themed tour of Bucharest, the tourism sector has vastly developed with dozens of touristic packages and guided tours being tailored on the basis of communist heritage: over 30 *communist Bucharest guided tours* identified in the online sector for this article. The vast majority of these initiatives is private and aimed at foreign visitors known as special interest tourists. These following 30 tours and their respective itineraries constitute the corpus of focus of the present research.

**Table 1. Bucharest Communist Heritage Tours proposed by local actors**

Nr.	Local actor name, website, tour name	Local actor description
1.	Tour of Communism <a href="https://tourofcommunism.com/about-the-communist-tour-of-bucharest">https://tourofcommunism.com/about-the-communist-tour-of-bucharest</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communist Tour of Bucharest</li> </ul>	Independent tour guide specialized in the Communist heritage tour of Bucharest
2.	Interesting Times Bureau <a href="http://interestingtimes.ro/communism-tour-2">http://interestingtimes.ro/communism-tour-2</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communism Tour [of Bucharest]</li> </ul>	Cultural NGO proposing various themed Bucharest tours, including a Communist Bucharest tour
3.	Unknown Bucharest <a href="http://unknownbucharest.com/bucharest-communist-tour">http://unknownbucharest.com/bucharest-communist-tour</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bucharest Communist Tour</li> </ul>	Independent tour guide specialized in private themed tours, including a Bucharest Communist Heritage tour
4.	Unzip Romania <a href="http://www.unzipromania.com/#!ceausescu/c1woe">http://www.unzipromania.com/#!ceausescu/c1woe</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Story of Romanian Communism</li> </ul>	Travel agency offering a variety of tours across Romania, including a Bucharest Communist themed tour
5.	Rolandia <a href="http://www.rolandia.eu/offers/bucharest-tour-behind-wall">http://www.rolandia.eu/offers/bucharest-tour-behind-wall</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bucharest Tour – Behind the Wall</li> </ul>	Travel agency offering a variety of tours across Romania, including a Bucharest Communist themed tour

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6.	Communism and the city <a href="http://communismandthecity.com">http://communismandthecity.com</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Tour</li> </ul>	A tourism project dedicated entirely to Bucharest's Communist Heritage
7.	Open Doors Travel <a href="http://opendoorstavel.com/wp/?page_id=45">http://opendoorstavel.com/wp/?page_id=45</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communist Tour</li> </ul>	Travel agency proposing various themed tours of Bucharest, including a Communist Bucharest tour
8.	Romanian Tour Store <a href="http://www.romaniatourstore.com/bucharest-tours/communist-bucharest-tour.html">http://www.romaniatourstore.com/bucharest-tours/communist-bucharest-tour.html</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communist Tour of Bucharest</li> </ul>	Travel agency proposing various themed tours of Bucharest, including a Communist Bucharest tour
9.	Uncover Romania <a href="https://www.uncover-romania-tours.com/history-tours/communism-bucharest">https://www.uncover-romania-tours.com/history-tours/communism-bucharest</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communist Bucharest Tour</li> </ul>	Travel agency offering a variety of tours across Romania and in Bucharest, including a Communist themed tour
10.	Bucharest step by step <a href="http://www.buchareststepbystep.com/communist-bucharest-tour">http://www.buchareststepbystep.com/communist-bucharest-tour</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communist Bucharest Tour</li> </ul>	Independent tour guide specialized in private themed tours, including a Bucharest Communist Heritage tour
11.	Unveil Romania <a href="http://unveilromania.com/romania-tours/bucharest-tours-communism">http://unveilromania.com/romania-tours/bucharest-tours-communism</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ashes of Communism</li> </ul>	Travel agency offering a variety of tours across Romania and in Bucharest, including a themed Communist heritage tour
12.	Slow Tours <a href="http://romania.slow-tours.com/product/communist-tour-2/">http://romania.slow-tours.com/product/communist-tour-2/</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communism Tour</li> </ul>	Travel agency offering a variety of tours across Romania and in Bucharest, including a themed Communist heritage tour
13.	Walkabout Free Tour <a href="http://bucharest.walkaboutfreetours.com">http://bucharest.walkaboutfreetours.com</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communism Tour (performed by Slow Tours)</li> </ul>	Cultural NGO proposing various themed Bucharest tours, including a Communist Bucharest tour
14.	Bucharest Guided Tours <a href="http://www.bucharestguidedtours.com/bucharestcommunisttour.html">http://www.bucharestguidedtours.com/bucharestcommunisttour.html</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Days of Communism</li> </ul>	Independent tour guide specialized in private themed tours, including a Bucharest Communist Heritage tour
15.	Romania to go <a href="http://romania-to-go.com/bucharest-tours/bucharest-communist-heritage/">http://romania-to-go.com/bucharest-tours/bucharest-communist-heritage/</a> Bucharest Communist Heritage	Travel agency offering a variety of tours across Romania and in Bucharest, including a themed Communist heritage tour
16.	City Compass <a href="http://www.citycompass.ro/en/tours/tours-bucharest-romania/bus_communism_democracy_bucharest">www.citycompass.ro/en/tours/tours-bucharest-romania/bus_communism_democracy_bucharest</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bucharest Tour – From communism to democracy</li> </ul>	Travel agency offering a variety of tours across Romania and in Bucharest, including a themed Communist heritage tour
17.	ABC Travel Romania <a href="http://abctravelromania.com/package/bucharest-communism-tour/">http://abctravelromania.com/package/bucharest-communism-tour/</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bucharest – Communism Tour</li> </ul>	Travel agency offering a variety of tours across Romania and in Bucharest, including a themed Communist heritage tour
18.	Bucharest Walks <a href="http://bucharestwalks.com">http://bucharestwalks.com</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tour of Communism</li> <li>• The Dictator's Dream</li> </ul>	Travel agency offering a variety of tours in Bucharest, including two themed Communist heritage tour, one walking, the other by car
19.	Mr. Tripp <a href="http://mrtripp.tours/the-rise-and-fall-of-communism">http://mrtripp.tours/the-rise-and-fall-of-communism</a> Rise and fall of Communism	Travel agency offering a variety of tours across Romania and in

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		Bucharest, including a themed Communist heritage tour
20.	Tours of Bucharest/Carpatia Tours <a href="http://www.toursofbucharest.ro/The-Communist-Romania">http://www.toursofbucharest.ro/The-Communist-Romania</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Communist Romania</li> </ul>	Travel agency offering a variety of tours across Romania and in Bucharest, including a themed Communist heritage tour
21.	Travel Maker <a href="http://www.bucharestcitytour.com/The_Last_Days_of_Communist_Tour">http://www.bucharestcitytour.com/The_Last_Days_of_Communist_Tour</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Last Days of Communism Tour</li> </ul>	Travel agency offering a variety of tours across Romania and in Bucharest, including a themed Communist heritage tour
22.	Touring Romania <a href="http://www.touringromania.com/tours/one-day-tours/communism-bucharest-tour.html">http://www.touringromania.com/tours/one-day-tours/communism-bucharest-tour.html</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communism Bucharest Tour</li> </ul>	Travel agency offering a variety of tours across Romania and in Bucharest, including a themed Communist heritage tour
23.	CT Tours <a href="http://www.cttours.ro/bucharest_tours.htm">http://www.cttours.ro/bucharest_tours.htm</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bucharest And The Communist Times: Relics of a By-gone Era</li> </ul>	Travel agency offering a variety of tours across Romania and in Bucharest, including a themed Communist heritage tour
24.	Travel to Romania <a href="http://travel-to-romania.eu">http://travel-to-romania.eu</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bucharest Communist City Tour</li> <li>Communist city tour of Bucharest</li> </ul>	Travel agency offering a variety of tours across Romania and in Bucharest, including a themed Communist heritage tour
25.	Carpatia Tour <a href="http://carpatiatour.co.uk/package/communist-dictator-tour">http://carpatiatour.co.uk/package/communist-dictator-tour</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communist dictator tour</li> </ul>	Travel agency offering a variety of tours across Romania and in Bucharest, including a themed Communist heritage tour
26.	RetroTravel <a href="http://www.retrotravel.ro/ceausescu.php">http://www.retrotravel.ro/ceausescu.php</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A journey into the Romanian Communist dictatorship and Ceausescu's trial and execution</li> </ul>	Multi-day tour in Bucharest and other communist-related destinations
27.	Communist Road <a href="http://www.comunistroad.ro/en/tururi/Communist-Group-Tour.html">http://www.comunistroad.ro/en/tururi/Communist-Group-Tour.html</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dacia Luxury Tour</li> <li>Communist Group Tour</li> <li>Communist Welcome</li> <li>Communist Night Aut</li> <li>Ceausescu Megalomania Tour</li> </ul>	Travel agency specialized on communist-themed tours, offering a 5 different communist-themed tours of Bucharest
28.	Passion for Bucharest <a href="http://passionforbucharest.com/custom-tours/the-communist-past-unfolded-the-scars-beneath-the-iron-curtain">http://passionforbucharest.com/custom-tours/the-communist-past-unfolded-the-scars-beneath-the-iron-curtain</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The communist past unfolded</li> <li>Communism and Religion</li> </ul>	Independent tour guide specialized in private themed tours, including a Bucharest Communist Heritage tour
29.	Occasions Tour <a href="http://www.occasiontours.com/communist-tour-of-bucharest/">http://www.occasiontours.com/communist-tour-of-bucharest/</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communist Tour of Bucharest</li> </ul>	Travel agency offering a variety of tours across Romania and in Bucharest, including a themed Communist heritage tour
30.	Excellence Travel <a href="http://oneexcellencetravel.com/tours_post/communist-tour-of-bucharest/#ad-image-0">http://oneexcellencetravel.com/tours_post/communist-tour-of-bucharest/#ad-image-0</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communist Bucharest Tour</li> </ul>	Travel agency offering a variety of tours across Romania and in Bucharest, including a themed Communist heritage tour

Source: Author's own compilation

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The question that guided the research and the analysis of the itineraries proposed online by travel agencies and independent tour guides on the communism themes is: What are the elements of immovable communist heritage visited in communist-themed guided tours of Bucharest? Below are a series of connected secondary questions, to be developed in a further study: What are the main events that are portrayed in relation to them? How are they portrayed? Who/what is presented as a „trademark” of Romanian Communism? Where does „daily life in the communist rule” come into play? The result of a quantitative content analysis of the itineraries proposed by the tours reveals first of all the frequency with which the objectives are presented as communist heritage. From this first identification of the frequencies of inclusion in the tours’ itineraries, several categories of themes linked to the interpretation of communist heritage can be underlined. The first step was identifying the main attractions and placing them into areas of interest, while the second of a more qualitative nature was to group the attractions/touristic objectives into several discourse categories presenting the communist past. The limits of the research are obvious from the beginning: it focuses only on online materials – although this is the sector where communist heritage tours are predominant, as printed materials present in local tourist-interest venues (hotels, touristic information points etc.) are scarce in comparison with the online options; all online materials analyzed are in English, aimed at special interest foreign tourists; all the tours analyzed here are proposed by local travel agencies/guides, which covers most of the local offer, leaving beside the way Bucharest communist heritage is marketed by foreign actors in the worldwide tourism industry (international travel agencies etc.) and the way the communist heritage is portrayed for the local population.

### **Analysis results: Communist Bucharest as a touristic product**

As Caraba (2010) pointed in the analysis of 39 tours’ itineraries in 2010, most of the general Bucharest tours included the following communist heritage main attractions: the Palace of the Parliament present in the vast majority of the tours, the House of the Free Press, Unirii Square and Boulevard (Former Victory of Socialism Boulevard), Revolution and University Squares. On the only communist heritage tour of Bucharest identified by Caraba in 2010 included the following communist heritage sites as well: Ceaușescu’s tomb in Ghencea Cemetery, Ceaușescu’s residence in Primăverii Neighborhood and the Radio House. As the results of the quantitative content analysis of the Bucharest communist heritage tours indicate, much has changed in only the space of a few years. To begin with, the number of local private initiatives proposing this type of tour themed on communist heritage has exploded and the diversity of the topics and heritage sites, buildings and monuments has increased overwhelmingly.

**Table 2 – Analysis results. Frequencies of appearance in tours’ itineraries of elements of communist heritage as touristic attractions**

Nr.	Main attractions	Nr. of inclusions in itinerary
1.	Palace of the Parliament / House of the People	30
2.	Revolution Square	24

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	(including several attractions: former Central Committee of the Communist Party, Rebirth Memorial, 5 <sup>th</sup> Division of Security, Communist Congress Hall – Palace Hall, Former Royal Palace, Iuliu Maniu and Corneliu Coposu statues)	
3.	Civic Center (with Constitution Square and Socialist Victory Boulevard)	16
4.	University Square / 21 <sup>st</sup> December 1989 Square	11
5.	“Communist neighborhoods” built in communist period	10
6.	House of the Free Press / Scântea House	8

Nr.	Museums	Nr. of inclusions in itinerary
1.	Primăverii Palace – former residence of the Ceaușescu family	6
2.	„Memory as a form of justice” – Permanent exhibition in Bucharest of the Sighet Memorial of the Victims of Communism and Resistance	4
3.	Military Museum – exhibition on the Romanian Revolution	4

Nr.	Religious heritage	Nr. of inclusions in itinerary
1.	Displaced churches during the systematization works on the Civic Center (in particular Mihai Vodă Church)	7
2.	Romanian Orthodox Patriarchy	1

Nr.	Cemeteries and Mausoleums	Nr. of inclusions in itinerary
1.	The Heroes’ Mausoleum in Carol Park	3
2.	Heroes of the Revolution Cemetery	2
3.	Ghencea Cemetery – Nicolae Ceaușescu’s tomb	2

Nr.	Other attractions across Bucharest	Nr. of inclusions in itinerary
1.	Radio House	4
2.	„Carol I” Defense University and socialist statues	3
3.	Circuses of Hunger	2

Nr.	Day trip to Târgoviște	Nr. of inclusions in itinerary



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1.	„Metamofozele unui loc al trecutului” exhibition in the former Military Unit 01417 – trial and execution place of the Ceaușescu couple	3
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Source: Author's own compilation

Caraba's (2010) proposed categories to better understand the way a tourism discourse can be developed around communist heritage are still partially applicable. The main attractions can be divided in the following categories: 1) Attractions related to the Communist regime: Palace of the Parliament, Revolution Square (former CCPC headquarters), Civic Center, House of the Free Press, Radio House, Congress Hall – Palace Hall; 2) Attractions associated with the 1989 Revolution: Revolution and University Squares; 3) Attractions underling the relationship between communism and religion: all the monuments present above in the religious heritage section. However, the current analysis finds that most of the previously neglected areas and sites were integrated in more detailed and longer guided tours studied here. Heritage buildings or sites with significance for the communist period, previously absent or little put on display (Caraba, 2010), are now part of the various itineraries (e.g.: the State's Archives still showing bullet signs from the Revolution, the Heroes Mausoleum in Carol Park, the churches affected by the demolitions and systematizations of the 1980s and the residence of the Ceausescu's, as well as their tombs in Ghencea Cemetery). Moreover, entire new categories appear which develop new themes and provide various interpretations of the communist heritage:

- An “off the beaten track” itinerary, portraying daily life in the communist regime: this category includes visits to the “regular communist” Bucharest neighborhoods built in the communist period (in particular the '70s and '80s), as well the Hunger Circuses (large venues projected to become markets and canteens). These types of itineraries are usually coupled with the displaced churches hidden in the area of the Civic Center behind tall Socialist buildings (Mihai Vodă Church in particular).

- Remembrance themed sites are also relabeled as touristic attractions - The Heroes' Mausoleum in Carol Park, Heroes of the Revolution Cemetery, Ghencea Cemetery. In the same category can be placed the interior visit of the „Memory as a form of justice” – Permanent exhibition in Bucharest of the Sighet Memorial of the Victims of Communism and Resistance.

- A category by itself is the Primăverii Palace, the former residence of the Ceausescu couple, which was recently opened for the public visits (March 2016). The opening was a success with the local public, while at the same time the popularity of this touristic objective is growing with the foreign tourists.

- In connection to the Bucharest communist heritage comes also the short trip to Târgoviște, at the former Military Unit 01417 – trial and execution place of the Ceaușescu couple. The visit of the museum can be either integrated in Bucharest communist tours or presented as an independent day tour. This heritage site rememorizes the final chapter of the Romanian communist period, with the dramatic events of the Romanian Revolution.

Another aspect worth mentioning is the development of several walking tours themed around the communist heritage. Although most of these tours center around the Palace of the Parliament and the Civic Center area, they also include the University Square/Revolution Square. This design of the itinerary implies for the easy-paced walking tour the inclusion of an alternation of the communist heritage landscape with urban heritage from other periods (e.g. in architectural heritage Art Deco, Neoromanian and

French eclectic are worth mentioning as a contrast to the Socialist architecture). Walking tours themed on communist heritage are available also private tours form. All in all, Bucharest's communist heritage tours gravitate around two main elements. The first one is the Civic Center, with its highlight the Palace of the Parliament being included in all the communist heritage tours studies. The Palace of the Parliament holds a special place in the discussion of communist heritage due to its direct association with the Ceausescu totalitarian regime. In addition to the massive interest shown by foreign tourists and the its promotion by local private initiatives as the highlight of the local communist heritage, as well as a local landmark in general tours, the Palace of the Parliament, still stirs debates among locals. It was considered by locals both the most beautiful (35,6 %) and the ugliest building (10,56%) in the city, which sustains the high degree of sensitivity and polarization around the subject of local communist heritage (NSPAS, 2010).

The second theme is the Romanian Revolution, illustrated by the massive presence in the tours' itineraries of the two main squares associated with the 1989 Romanian Revolution: Revolution Square, itself including various statues, monuments, buildings and sites related to the communist regime, and University Square – one of the essential symbolic spaces of the Romanian Revolution. Bucharest has the largest immovable communist heritage in the country, having undergone major urban changes and a general re-landscaping of the city in the communist period. The systematization plans following the devastating 1977 earthquake have leveled down an area 4.5 km in length and 2 km in width, roughly equivalent of the total surface of Venice (BICC: 2016) of the historical center. Almost 40.000 inhabitants of the area were evicted, historical heritage churches, synagogues and buildings being bulldozed in order to put into place the plans of the Civic Center (Light, Craig: 2013). Hence in Bucharest, the communist heritage – and in particular the built one – can mainly be associated with the second half of the communist period and with Ceausescu's dictatorship and major urban projects. In the light of this particularity of the local communist heritage, part of the tours analyzed here can be seen as focused around Ceausescu related heritage, in other words we are witnessing the *Ceaușization* of communist heritage tours of Bucharest (in Romanian "*ceaușizarea tururilor de patrimoniu comunist*").

### Conclusions

Heritage interpretation is an essential issue related to the practice of tourism in general, nonetheless it stands out for its paramount importance in the case of communist heritage and its uses in the tourism sector. This is due to its sensitive relationship with the new states that arose from the former communist countries (Light, 2000a, 2000b). Administrative actors have yet to formulate an official pose regarding its communist heritage and its use in the tourism industry, meanwhile interpretations of heritage are provided by other actors. The scene is taken by private actors capitalizing on the cultural interest of foreign tourists, while at the same time civil society projects militate for the remembrance of that past (the best example being the exhibition opened in Bucharest by the NGO Fundația Academia Civică, as a small part of the „Memory as a form of justice” Sighet Memorial). Moreover, this seems to be an underling trend, as civil society initiatives, NGOs and community projects have started proposing guided tours or other activities centered around communist heritage in Bucharest, targeting the local population

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and Romanian visitors (e.g.: guided tours provided by Calea Victoriei Foundation<sup>1</sup>, photography and blogging projects<sup>2</sup>, projections and events themed around the communist heritage or period).

Another interesting theme is the use of nostalgia and retro symbolism in the design of local venues (Social 1 restaurant) or in advertising and rebranding of former communist brands (the Pegas bikes and their shop in central Bucharest are a success, just as other rebranded products, such as the as Eugenia biscuits and Rom chocolate bar have caught the eye of new generations). Duncan Light's (2000b) observation about Romania's communist heritage tourism being created from the exterior, due to the interest of special interest foreign tourists is, as proven from the current research, being countered in recent very years by local private initiatives – in particular local travel agencies and private guides. The desire of authorities to erase the communist past (Light, 2000b) might also be put into question, although the public sector does not engage in Bucharest's case in overt promotion of the communist heritage as such. A note must be taken, however, of the major shift of attitude of administrative actors in relationship with the immovable communist heritage, as shows the case of the successful opening of the Primăverii Palace as a public museum. Another interesting example of an institutional project aiming to bring communist heritage into the public eye and popularize this thematic among the young generation is the Communism in Romania (in orig. *Comunismul în România*) project developed by the National History Museum of Romania.<sup>3</sup> This project highlights the Romanian communist past by means of immaterial heritage. The *Comunismul în Romania* project is online-based and presents, besides the vast photographs collection portraying major events as well as daily life from the communist period, a series of articles related to various aspects of the communist past. Along with the new wave of interpretation of communist heritage as part of national history and culture via tourism practices, we might just be witnessing a very interesting process of re-integration of communist heritage into the national identity and history discourse. In the end, a question is raised and will be undoubtedly followed in the next years: as Bucharest's communist heritage is inextricably linked to the Ceausescu regime, will the representations of Bucharest's communist past be associated mainly with the figure of Ceausescu by interpreting in this direction the local communist heritage?

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<sup>1</sup> Calea Victoriei Foundation (2009, 2013) proposes a series of lectures themed on local history, architecture and culture including such events related to the communist heritage (e.g. Prof. Ph.D. Vintilă Mihăilescu's lecture on *Balconiada or about daily life in communism* and Mirel Banica's lecture on *The red sun – about memory and nostalgia of communism in Romania*).

<sup>2</sup> Two extremely relevant examples of photography-based projects with a major online following are „New and old Bucharest” (in orig. *Bucureștii vechi și noi*), <http://www.bucurestivechisinnoi.ro>, and „The Photography Museum” (in orig. *Muzeul de Fotografie*), <http://www.muzeuldefotografie.ro>. Another blogging project themed on the urban heritage and landscape is „Urban ideas” (in orig. *Ideii urbane*), deconstructing the evolution of the city, including its communist heritage layer (Idei urbane, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> A notable initiative of the project is the fact that the collection of pictures depicting the reality of communist Romania is available for download and private or public use online and in social media, as long as the copyright of the National History Museum of Romania is acknowledged.

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