

Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia

Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

"Clean, Friendly, Profitable"?

Tourism and the Tourism Industry in Varna, Bulgaria

Carla Bethmann



LIT

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The Varna region of the Bulgarian Black Sea coast has been a popular holiday spot for Bulgarian and eastern European tourists since the 1960s. Since the collapse of socialism and the subsequent privatization of the tourism industry in the 1990s, it has become a destination for mass tourism where hundreds of thousands of western European and Russian tourists spend their beach vacations. The book traces how Varna’s resorts lost the elite status they held in the Eastern Bloc and became a destination for European and international mass tourism; and it investigates the consequences that this change in tourist flows has had for workers, entrepreneurs, and the general population throughout the region.

As an ethnography of the postsocialist transformation of Varna’s tourism industry, the book focuses on two field sites and their symbiotic relationship: Golden Sands, the largest and most dynamically developing resort in the region, and the nearby city of Varna, an urban tourist destination. Changes within the tourism industry are intricately connected to wider social and economic issues including the growing stratification of Bulgarian society and processes of marginalization and exclusion; notions of hospitality and the challenges of creating and sustaining a “hospitable city”; and the re-shaping of Bulgarian national identity between “Europe” and the “Orient”. Close attention is paid to petty trading, retailing, and consumption in the resorts and the city; to the relationship between tourism and property market development; and to the contested memories of socialism and their strategic use. Throughout the book, the analysis engages with the anthropological literature on postsocialism as well as with multidisciplinary approaches to tourism and urban studies.



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(all photographs were taken by the author, May-October 2007)

Foreword

The resorts which developed in the 1950s in the neighborhood of Varna, along one of the most beautiful stretches of the Black Sea coast, remained largely unknown to Western tourists in the socialist era, though they were highly appreciated by visitors from all over the Soviet Bloc. Golden Sands, the principal focus of Carla Bethmann's book, epitomized the values of the People's Republic of Bulgaria and of socialism more generally to provide culturally rich and restorative holidays to all citizens. In terms of aspirations and in at least some domains of practice, this recreational complex deviated from more "Fordist" models of tourism in the Western world. The end of Todor Zhivkov's Communist Party rule and subsequent privatization of the hotels have transformed the industry, which continues to provide a fascinating window into social values and socio-economic change. Bethmann's study is based on a total of more than a year's participant observation and countless interviews with workers and managers at every level. She offers especially rich detail concerning labor markets, but also retailing (notably petty trade) and the changing property market. By 2006, in the midst of her research, Bethmann found that labor shortages of skilled workers were beginning to make themselves felt, though competition was keeping wages down. Bulgarian resorts were firmly rooted at the bottom end of the global market. The upshot is that, in key respects, resorts like Golden Sands buck the more recent trend of a decline in packaged beach holidays. Nowadays, Bethmann reports, "Fordist mass tourism is alive and well" in "enclaves" which cater primarily to northern Europeans and Russians whose wants are limited to sunshine, sex, and cheap alcohol (though they may also be willing to attend the occasional staged folklore performance).

In addition to contextualizing her data with reference to the multidisciplinary literature on tourism, Bethmann combines several anthropological frameworks in very productive ways. First, she makes a valuable contribution to studies of postsocialist transformation, not only with astute analysis of the political economy of the new "predatory capitalism", but also by documenting the subjective experiences of loss and nostalgia experienced by workers old enough to recall the lofty ideals espoused in socialist days. Touristic development in and around Varna, both during socialism and after its demise, has had more spinoffs for local people than parallel tourist economies have had in other parts of the world where profits from the tourism "bubble" accrue mostly to foreigners. Domestic ownership still prevails following privatization, but many citizens who took their subsidized beach vacation for granted before 1990 can no longer afford such holidays.

Secondly and just as interestingly, Bethmann raises more general issues concerning collective identity and the symbolism of the Balkans and the

Orient. Bulgaria has always served as an excellent vantage point to view the moral geography of Europe and its eastern neighbors. Few western Europeans know more about Bulgaria's history than that it was once part of the Ottoman Empire and later part of the Soviet Bloc. Many visitors find it hard to overcome old stereotypes and recognize this small state as a full member of the European Union. Some of the ancillary phenomena of contemporary tourism reinforce negative images; for example, the proliferation of disorganized petty commerce and prostitution. Tourism workers, however, continue to uphold an elevated evaluation of civilized Europe vis-a-vis the dirty, polluting Orient. They formulate their own negative stereotypes of Gypsies and Turks, who are nowadays conspicuous among the petty traders. Bethmann brings the frameworks of postsocialism and Orientalism together to show that the Marxist-Leninist regime has bequeathed some rather bourgeois notions of culture, available to be invoked today by citizens who are uncomfortable with the excesses of the new market-dominated society and seeking to redefine what it means to be Bulgarian and to be European.

Bethmann's investigations of Bulgaria's postsocialist tourist industry also contribute to the anthropology of work on several fronts. Again diverging from trends elsewhere, she finds that the general prestige of jobs in Bulgaria's tourism sector has remained high. The preponderance of females is a reflection of their supposed aptitude for work in this sector and a valued legacy of the emancipation they experienced under socialism, rather than an indication that these jobs are poorly paid and "marginal". Incomes remain relatively good, though it has become harder to survive for the entire year on the basis of what one can earn in the high season. However, income is not the main motivation for many of those who come to Varna for seasonal jobs: opportunities to hang out with foreigners and enjoy the endless discos may be stronger incentives. Staff value the opportunities for personal development (particularly in the form of learning languages) and simply the pleasure to be found in a working environment in which the boundaries separating work from "play" are fluid. There are moral hazards to be sure, but Bethmann argues that resort workers do not form a "subculture", nor even an "occupational community". The sector is extremely diverse, but even at the bottom end the "envelope salary" is disappearing as formality increases, in line with changing labour market conditions. "Connections" remain important in securing jobs, especially at the higher levels, but able individuals can advance rapidly, especially if they are young, attractive, and do not belong to an ethnic minority.

The privatization processes of the 1990s transferred most of the valuable properties into the hands of "mafia" and brought enormous dislocation. Thanks to new investment, mainly from German tour operators, eventually

significant modernization was achieved. The career of Slava, a female hotel manager, exemplifies the frustrations experienced by those who sought to "work normally" throughout these years, when their knowledge and skills were rapidly devalued. Golden Sands is contrasted with the nearby resort of Albena, where working relations have been more confrontational, partly because the latter was privatized as a package. Junior staff and guests pay a heavy price for greater continuity in management, in terms of the persistence of a "socialist mentality" and poor service. The concept of social class seems increasingly relevant as the differentiation of the industry intensifies. Some individuals have become very wealthy and Gypsies exemplify a new "underclass". The varying axes of differentiation within postsocialist Bulgarian society are skilfully woven together by the author, who leaves the reader to reflect on whether the gulf between the core of the local staff and their inebriated proletarian customers from abroad might also be theorised in terms of class difference.

Tourist retailing at Golden Sands ranges from young stall vendors to upmarket shops and entrepreneurial grandmothers who sell their crochet work. The last group might be taken for illiterate villagers, but it turns out that they are more likely to be urbanites who speak good Russian and need to eke out their pensions. The stall traders have a low status, but for their part they try to shift the blame for reducing Bulgaria to an oriental bazaar on to tour operators, who encourage tourists to bargain and thus drive prices down. Fixed prices are taken to be a marker of civilization, while tacky goods and touting stand for Asia. Bethmann's review of slights, insults, and harassment leads into the topic of sex. If female prostitution has increased since 1990 (and is associated by the Bulgarian majority with the Gypsies), male *glarusi* have become less conspicuous, partly because foreign goods can nowadays be obtained through other channels.

In the second part of the book, the focus shifts away from the beaches to the city of Varna itself and to a comparative look at the hospitality industry in the Varna region. In the city of Varna, tourism and hospitality are linked to the city's "commercial gentrification" and myriad new forms of consumption, both by foreigners and by native residents. The Varnentsi are proud of their hospitable disposition, which is facilitated not just by the favourable climate but through the availability of more "third spaces" than is usual in North America. The social and economic relations of these spaces are crucial: Bethmann finds that these are not adequately addressed in Jacques Derrida's theorizing of the perennial tensions of hospitality. She continues her exploration of the aesthetic dimension when she turns to look at "distinction work" in upmarket shops. Workers in such air-conditioned oases look askance at nouveau-riche customers, whether foreign or local,

who do not know the appropriate codes. The rise of self-service stores and shopping malls is threatening Bulgarian traditions of over-the-counter service and the future status of jobs in the retail sector seems likely to decline; but high prices and Western brands are associated with Europe, and so the familiar East-West polarities are reinforced in these settings.

Although the mixed clientele of businessmen, international consultants, backpackers, and cultural tourists in Varna is very different from those who patronize only the beaches, hospitality workers in the city share much of the worldview of their resort counterparts. I was struck by the finding that, despite the clichés of "socialist mentality" and the particularly poor image of centrally planned economies in the service sector, hotel workers in both locations maintain that a more *personal* mode of service provision was actually accomplished in socialist days. In comparison, the guidelines of the latest management theorists are artificial and alien because they treat the guest as paying customer rather than as a person. It is easy to dismiss such comments as (*N*)*ostalgie* and no doubt some of Bethmann's interlocutors have sanitized their memories of life before 1990. Her discussion of the importance of "connections" does not eliminate the possibility that, for many people, much of the time, the personal and "holistic" relations of socialism were largely a sham, necessitated by the economy of shortage, rather than authentic representations of a less predatory society. However, the detail that she provides concerning changes in scale, in the ratio of tourists to hospitality providers, and in the importance of profit and economizing, all suggest that these dichotomous narratives must be taken seriously beyond the level of subjective recall. She quotes an old East German joke to good effect: "the Communist propaganda about capitalism turned out to be true!".

In her last chapter, Bethmann reviews changes in the real estate market, which was in "gold rush" phase when she began her main field research in 2004. Noting the comparative literature concerning second homes and "retirement migration" in Spain and France, she points out that Bulgaria has a long history of *vila* (comparable to the Russian *dacha*) ownership, as well as very high levels of home ownership overall. Due to the increase in rural-urban migration, the village properties acquired by foreigners (above all the British) are not necessarily attractive to locals anyway. Nonetheless prices around the city have clearly risen as a result of foreign purchases. The fact that not many of these buyers settle permanently does not make the trends any easier to stomach for locals such as Iveta, whose principled opposition to the foreign acquisition of property, especially when it is a speculative investment rather than a commitment to residence, leads her to reject a job as a broker. For many expats, unable to speak Bulgarian, this is the only sector of the economy open to them. The financial crisis which set in at the end of

Bethmann's fieldwork reduced the numbers of visitors and the prices for real estate. However, being already entrenched at the bottom end of the market, Varna was able to recover faster than other destinations from this global recession and Fordist tourism remains central to the future of both the city and its hinterland.

Tourism has been one of the most buoyant sectors of Bulgaria's post-socialist economy and I have touched on just a few details of the wealth of materials presented by Carla Bethmann in this book. It is a long time since I have read a monograph based on fieldwork data that shed light on so many of the key *–isms* of our age: capitalism and socialism, for sure, but also Fordism, Orientalism, and Maria Todorova's concept of "Balkanism". These ingredients blend to form an intoxicating beach cocktail! At the end it is good to learn that, in spite of the privatization of beaches and increasing surveillance, each year from May until the end of September central Varna retains its attractive cosmopolitan ambience. Bethmann's overall evaluation of the world-historical changes which she addresses so meticulously is subtle, finely balanced, perhaps slightly blurred; this resembles the stance taken by the Varnentsi themselves.

Chris Hann

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This book would not have been possible without the tourism workers in Varna, Golden Sands, Albena, and Sveti Konstantin who, despite their busy schedules, took the time to talk to me, to answer my questions, and to share their insights into tourism in Bulgaria. I am deeply grateful for their generous hospitality, their kindness and support, and their interest in my work.

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Note on Transliteration

Several accepted systems exist for transliterating the Bulgarian Cyrillic alphabet into Latin letters. In this book, I will use the Bulgarian Streamlined Transliteration System that the Bulgarian government made mandatory for official use in 2009.

To Christian Marschallek

(1976-2011)

Introduction: "Varna Exists Because of Tourism"

"When I think of Varna, I think of summertime, of life in summer. A never-ending summer". This is how Nadezhda[1], a 22-year-old student of economics who spent her vacations working as a hotel receptionist in the nearby tourist resort of Golden Sands, described her city. Varna, proudly called "Bulgaria's seaside capital" by its people, the Varnentsi, is located on the shores of the Black Sea in the north-eastern part of Bulgaria. With an official population of about 350,000, it is the country's third largest city after Sofia and Plovdiv.[2] In summertime, however, the number of people in the city doubles or even triples. This is due to the hundreds of thousands of tourists visiting it, as well as to the large numbers of seasonal workers attracted by the tourism industry.

"Varna exists because of tourism", said 35 year-old Selena, the marketing manager of a high-star hotel in the city, and many Varnentsi would agree with that statement. The tourism industry is a major provider of jobs that support entire families, and it contributes to the economic development of the entire region.[3] Tourism brings huge numbers of foreigners to the region, who spend their money in the resorts as well as in Varna. Wherever they go, tourists consume numerous goods and services, from food, drinks, and souvenirs to transport, communications, and banking. The taxes paid by hotels, restaurants, retailers, and other businesses related to tourism fill the

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[1] All personal names are pseudonyms, as are the names given for individual hotels. Actual resort names are given as they appear in international touristic offers and advertisements.

[2] City officials have repeatedly claimed that Varna's actual population numbers at least one half million. According to them, many new inhabitants are not reflected in the statistics because they do not officially change their place of residence and thus are not registered with the municipality.

[3] In this book, I use the term Varna *oblast* to denote the administrative unit (corresponding to NUTS 3 statistical regions of the European Union) as depicted in the map on page 8. I use the phrase "Varna region" more loosely; in the case of tourism, I use it to describe the area within comfortable commuting distance from Varna (for workers), and serviced by Varna airport (for tourists).

city's coffers. And, of course, tourism makes the city lively and colorful in the summer months. "I love Varna! It's the best city in Bulgaria, a gathering place for all kinds of people", said Zhaneta, a 21-year-old hotel manager, and Yasna, who worked as a barkeeper in Golden Sands, added, "Varna is fantastic! So many different people, and there is always something going on here". In the summer season, Varna is vibrant with its street life in full swing, its open-air cafes and restaurants filled with guests, its beaches crowded with locals and visitors alike, and in the evenings, everyone taking to the streets and promenading in the city center and the seaside park. The winter, on the other hand, is viewed by many Varnentsi as a time when their city is hibernating, awaiting the start of a new tourist season and the arrival of visitors from all over the world.

After extolling the numerous ways the tourism industry benefits Varna, Hristina, a 50-year-old employee of an accommodation agency who had worked in tourism all her life, concluded, "It's clean, it's friendly, it's profitable – what better industry could there be for our city?". She compared tourism to manufacturing and the heavy industries and praised it as a cleaner, more environmentally friendly alternative. Echoing representations of tourism in the socialist period as well as the current views of many Varnentsi, she emphasized its contributions to international goodwill and cooperation and, on a more mundane level, the opportunities it offers the Varnentsi to meet and interact with foreigners. Most of all, she enthused, tourism is a profitable industry; foreigners spend their money in the region, enabling many Varnentsi to earn an income and improve their living standards.

As the following chapters will show, Hristina is not alone in seeing tourism and the tourism industry in a very positive light. However, in recent years, the problematic issues associated with mass tourism have come increasingly to the fore in Varna. Environmental impacts such as the pollution of air and water, the destruction of natural coastal and marine environments, high levels of power and water consumption, and coastal urbanization are leading many Varnentsi to contest characterizations of tourism as a "clean" industry. Likewise, the increase in clashes between tourism workers and tourists indicates that encounters of locals and "strangers" may generate relations of mutual respect, acceptance, and cooperation, but they may also produce conflict and rejection. As for the financial benefits of tourism, this book will demonstrate that while the industry does indeed enable many Varnentsi to make a living, the incomes and profits derived from it are widely perceived as declining, leading many tourism workers to look for work abroad or leave the industry and try their luck in other sectors.

For better or worse, in large ways and small, tourism affects the lives of the Varnentsi and the development of their city. This book examines the

impacts of tourism in Varna: from job provision to inner city commercialization and resort urbanization; from notions of hospitality to practices of shopping; and within discourses about Bulgarian-style capitalism – the ramifications of tourism are numerous and multifaceted, and they permeate the everyday lives of the people of Varna.

The Bulgarian Tourism Industry – A Brief History

The history of the Bulgarian tourism industry began more than 60 years ago with the construction of the Black Sea resorts Druzhba (Sveti Konstantin), Golden Sands, and Albena in the Varna region, and Sunny Beach near Burgas. Built in the 1950s and 1960s for the purposes of "social tourism" (see Minnaert, Maitland and Miller 2011), they were initially intended as holiday resorts for Bulgarian workers. Throughout the socialist period, tourism was heavily subsidized by the Bulgarian state with the goals of facilitating the recreation of the Bulgarian workforce, familiarizing Bulgarian citizens with the achievements of socialism, and furthering the social cohesion and solidarity of the population and its identification with the socialist state. The socialist state expected seaside holidays to produce better workers and better citizens. In the 1970s, the coastal resorts increasingly became a destination for international tourists, the majority of whom came from the socialist countries of eastern Europe[4], but there also was a significant minority from the capitalist states of western Europe. This so-called economic tourism yielded significant revenues for the Bulgarian state, particularly hard-currency earnings that could be invested in other sectors of the economy. In the 1980s, however, the influx of western European tourists stagnated due to the aging resort infrastructure, the increasing shortages of goods and services, and the comparatively poor service quality.

The collapse of socialism heralded profound changes for the Bulgarian tourism industry. In the 1990s, both international and domestic tourism experienced a dramatic decline. As economic conditions in eastern Europe worsened, many east Europeans were unable to afford foreign travel and those who could preferred the newly accessible Mediterranean destinations. West European tourists stayed away as well because of the destabilization of the political and economic conditions in Bulgaria, and the eruption of ethnic and political conflicts in nearby former Yugoslavia. At the same time, the

[4] Throughout the text I use eastern Europe as a synonym for Europe's formerly socialist states. Although I have used the terms more or less interchangeably, my use of eastern Europe is also meant to convey the importance of symbolic geography and the influence of Balkanism and Orientalism on the operation and development of the tourism industry in postsocialist Bulgaria

domestic tourism market collapsed completely due to the breakdown of the Bulgarian economy and the sharp decline in living standards.

In 1997, the crash of the Bulgarian financial sector led to a change of government and the start of economic reforms that began to stabilize the country's economy. The subsequent privatization of Bulgaria's tourism industry was followed by a modernization of the coastal resorts that provided a catalyst for a strong growth in tourist numbers.[5] Today, the Bulgarian Black Sea resorts boast hotels that are among the best in Europe, a highly educated and trained workforce, and a reputation as being among the most popular destination in eastern Europe.

In Varna, tourism is praised as a motor of development that made significant contributions to the city's economic boom. Varna enjoys a reputation as one of Bulgaria's most prosperous cities and that offers a high quality of life.[6] In the 2000s, it had one of the fastest rates of growth in Bulgaria[7]; the salaries in the city are among the highest in the country; and the unemployment rate is among the lowest.[8]

But is tourism really an unqualified success? In recent years, the costs of unfettered tourism development have increasingly become apparent. In the resorts, the development of the infrastructure has been outpaced by the rising numbers of tourists, contributing to environmental degradation. Changing tourist flows and a growing reputation of Bulgaria as a cheap destination have led to an influx of low-spending charter tourists, resulting in diminishing revenues for local tourism sector businesses. International tourism is strongly seasonal and most resort workers lose their jobs – and thus their incomes – in the winter months. At the same time, tourism has contributed to rising consumer prices in Varna, making it one of the cities with the highest living costs in Bulgaria.

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[5] The term "modernization" (*modernizirane*) in this context describes the renovation, upgrading, or reconstruction of resorts and individual hotels to conform with the latest standards and fashions advocated by international touristic agencies and organizations.

[6] In 2007 and 2008, Varna was voted "Bulgaria's Best City to Live In" in national polls organized by Darik Radio and the daily newspaper *24 Chasa*.

[7] This is reflected in the statistical data. In 2009, Bulgaria's north-eastern region had a GDP per capita of 7,836 levs, which was the second highest in the country (NSI 2011a). In the same year, the Varna *oblast* received 1.64 billion euros in foreign direct investment, an amount surpassed only by Sofia (NSI 2011b). Its average annual salary of 7,159 levs was among the highest in the country, which is remarkable considering the large share of seasonal work, and of semi-formal employment in tourism (NSI 2011c). The unemployment rate of 4.3 per cent was below the nationwide average of 6.8 per cent (NSI 2011d).

[8] Prices are given throughout the text in local currency. In 1997 the Bulgarian lev was pegged to the Deutschmark and, with the replacement of the Deutschmark by the euro, its peg changed to that currency at a rate of 1.96 levs to the euro.

Research on Tourism and Postsocialism

In the last 30 years, tourism and its effects have been studied in a growing number of academic disciplines.[9] Initially, it was the tourists themselves who were at the center of scholarly attention. Tourist typologies were devised, revised, and refined, and tourist motivations were studied and theorized (Cohen 1979; Dann 1981; Krippendorf 1986; MacCannell 1999 [1976]; Graburn and Barthel-Bouchier 2001). Anthropologists were particularly interested in tourism in the global south, its impacts on local populations, and the economic, social, and cultural changes it brought about (Turner and Ash 1975; Crick 1994; Ness 2003; Little 2004). They documented the costs of tourism development and challenged the ardent promotion of tourism as an ideal instrument of relatively easy and rapid economic development (de Kadt 1978; Jenkins 1980, 1994; Oppermann 1993; Brohman 1996). The growing interest in tourism brought about an extension of the breadth and scope of research topics under the heading of "tourism studies".[10] While mass tourism in the global south continued to be of interest, a growing number of studies focused on more "marginal" and "exotic" forms of tourism such as backpacking, adventure tourism, eco-tourism, ethnic tourism, sex tourism, and various forms of "dark tourism" (Causey 2003; Tucker 2003; Brennan 2004). Recent studies have also drawn attention to the roles played by tourism in the production, consumption, and marketing of cultural heritage; in the transformation of cities into spaces of leisure and consumption; in the role of leisure and tourism spaces for the branding and marketing of cities and regions; and in tourism's role in mediating the inter-urban competition for capital, visitors, and new inhabitants (Judd and Fainstein 1999; Colantonio and Potter 2006; Minca 2006).

Within this rich literature, there is a surprising shortage of ethnographies of European holiday resorts and mass tourism. In Europe alone, millions of people spend their annual summer vacations in the beach resorts lining the Mediterranean coast, and despite proclamations of the end of mass charter tourism and the advent of post-Fordist modes of travel concomitant with the rise of postmodern consumerism (Torres 2002; Aguiló, Alegre and Sard 2005; Claver-Cortés, Molina-Azorín and Pereira-Moliner 2007)[11],

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[9] For overviews, see Graburn (1983); Cohen (1984, 1988a); Crick (1989); Nash and Smith (1991); Nash (1996); Burns (2004).

[10] For overviews, see the volumes edited by Seaton (1994); Shaw and Williams (2002); and Singh (2012). Shifts in the foci of tourism research are reflected in the changing "buzzwords" in the field; in the 1980s, "authenticity" was a central concept, later on it was "sustainability", and in the 2000s a "mobility turn" has appeared (e.g. Pons, Crang, and Travlou [2002a]; Hall and Müller [2004a]; Sheller and Urry [2004]).

[11] See also chapter 1.

charter tours to seaside resorts are still extremely popular. A large share of Europeans continue to spend their summer holidays at beach locations with an itinerary that revolves around the traditional "three S's" of sun, sea, and sand, possibly supplemented by spirits, sex, and savings. In the early 2000s, the sustainability of these coastal resorts has increasingly been questioned, and the environmental, social, and economic costs of coastal mass tourism in Europe have been foregrounded in a number of studies that seek ways to make these resorts more sustainable and to reconcile tourism with the rights and interests of local communities as well as the aims of environmental protection and preservation (Boissevain 1996; Boissevain and Selwyn 2004; Bramwell 2004a). But the number of ethnographic accounts focusing on the operations of the tourism industry in these destinations is still limited.[12] There is an even more noticeable gap in the literature concerning the seaside resorts in the formerly socialist countries of eastern Europe. Coastal mass tourism has a long tradition in the Baltic states, the former Yugoslav countries bordering the Adriatic, and the former socialist countries bordering on the Black Sea, yet studies of beach tourism in both the socialist and the postsocialist periods are scarce.[13]

This book aims to make a contribution towards closing these gaps in the literature. By focusing on the operations of the tourism industry in the Varna region, it contributes to the corpus of ethnographies of resort-based mass tourism and its impacts on local populations. It also documents the effects of tourism development on the city of Varna, particularly the transformation of its urban fabric and environment.

The accelerated tourism development in Varna occurred at a time when the region was still in the throes of the drawn-out postsocialist transformation process. The postsocialist transformation of eastern Europe has been studied extensively and from a variety of vantage points. After the collapse of socialism in eastern Europe, scholars displayed a heightened interest in the region, and there was a surge of research on all aspects of the postsocialist transformation. Initially, it was particularly the political and economic changes in the formerly socialist countries that attracted attention. Researchers and policy-makers debated the best ways to accomplish the transition to democracy and a market-driven economy[14], discussed the costs and merits of a "big bang" versus a slower, more incremental mode of transi-

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[12] Such as Scott (1995, 1997, 2004); O'Reilly (2000); Macleod (2004); Andrews (2011).

[13] A special edition of the *Annals of Tourism Research* edited by John Allcock (1990) gives an overview of the state of tourism in eastern Europe before the collapse of socialism. Major trends and issues in postsocialist tourism development are summarized in Hall (1991a, 2004); Hall, Smith and Marciszewska (2006).

[14] For an overview, see Roland (2000).

tion (Adams and Brock 1993; Balcerowicz 1995), and analyzed the successes and failures of individual states in accomplishing these goals (Offe 1997; Braun and Barany 1999). They investigated the rise of entrepreneurs and the formation of new elites (Eyal, Szelényi and Townsley 1998; Hatschikjan and Altmann 1998; Higley and Lengyel 2000), the fate of industrial enterprises, industrial work and labor relations (Waller and Myant 1994; Clarke 1995; Crowley 1997), as well as the rise of informality, corruption, and the changing meanings of social networks and "connections" (Grabher and Stark 1996; Ledeneva 1998, 2006; Altshuler 2001; Pancheva 2002).

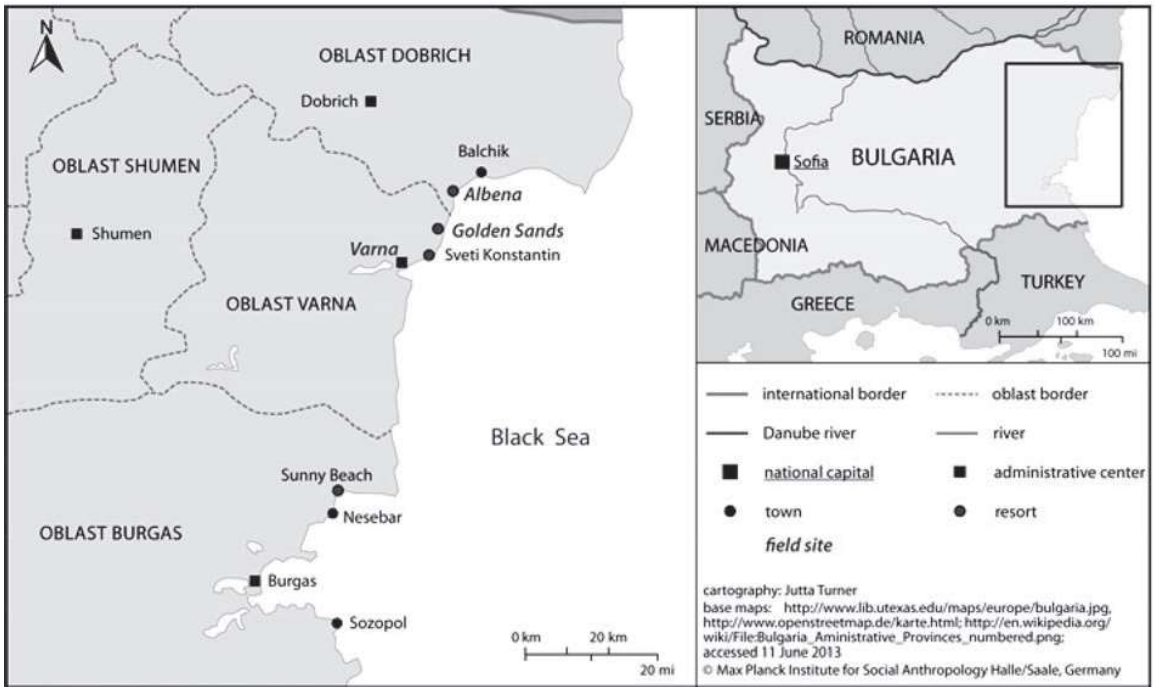
The social and economic burdens of the transformation were another focus of research. The effects of collapsing state institutions and failing social safety nets (Blank 2004; Ganev 2007), the impacts of the destruction of whole industries and of the huge industrial enterprises that had employed millions (Burawoy, Krotov and Lytkina 2000; Rainnie, Smith and Swain 2002; Kideckel 2008), and the consequences of large-scale privatization for the populations of these countries (Kideckel 1995; Dunn 1999, 2004) were studied as well as changing livelihoods of rural and urban communities and households (Creed 1998; Berdahl 1999; Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Hann 2001; Humphrey 2002; Mandel and Humphrey 2002; Caldwell 2004b), the impacts of the transformation on women, gender roles, and gender relations (Corrin 1992; Bridger, Kay and Pinnick 1996; Ghodsee 2005), and the increasing fragmentation and polarization along the lines of social class, ethnicity, and religion in eastern Europe (Lemon 1998; Allina-Pisano 2009; Ghodsee 2009).

Since the 1990s, eastern European cities have been important research sites. Due to ease of access and a belief that the effects of the postsocialist urban transformation would manifest most starkly in capital cities, the latter have attracted a large share of researchers (Kovács 1994, 1998, 2009; Sýkora 1994, 1999; Bodnár 2001)[15], but recently there has been an growing number of studies of second- and third-tier cities and towns (Lehmann and Ruble 1997; Riley 1997; Polanska 2008). The impacts of political, economic, and social changes on the urban fabric and urban livelihoods have attracted much scholarly attention (Andrusz, Harloe and Szelenyi 1996; Bodnár 1998, 2001, 2007; Shevchenko 2002a, 2002b), but a number of researchers have also focused on the construction of urban identities and images, and on the marketing of urban heritage and the past in these cities (Bitušíková 1998; Mitchneck 1998; Stenning 2000, 2005; Young and Kaczmarek 2008). But even though some of the most researched cities in the region, such as Prague and Budapest, are also among its most popular urban tourism destinations,

[15] See also chapter 6 of this book.

there is a surprising dearth of research focusing on urban tourism in eastern Europe.[16]

This book will look beyond the tourist resorts and examine urban tourism in Varna and the ways it has shaped the transformation of the fabric of the city and the livelihoods of its people. More broadly, it will explore the complex ways that mass tourism has shaped the postsocialist transformation in the Varna region as well as the impacts of the postsocialist transformation on tourism and the tourism industry in Varna. Changes in tourism, as I will show, are intricately connected to wider social and economic issues including the growing stratification of Bulgarian society, ethnic stereotyping and economic exclusion, the challenges of creating and sustaining "hospitable cities", and the re-shaping of Bulgarian national identity between "Europe" and the "Orient".



Map. Fieldsites in Bulgaria.

Itinerary

This book consists of two parts. The first part examines tourism and the tourism industry in Golden Sands, the largest and most dynamically developing resort in the Varna region. Golden Sands exemplifies a path of tourism development that most of Bulgaria's established coastal resorts followed

[16] But see Hoffman and Musil (1999); Bunzl (2000); Light (2000a, 2000b). Some analyses of the spatial, economic, and social restructuring of capital cities occasionally mention the effects of tourism in passing.

after the collapse of socialism, and it throws into sharp relief the challenges and issues with which they are grappling. To highlight its characteristics, Golden Sands is contrasted with Albena, a smaller resort with a unique ownership and management structure that has enabled it to avoid many of the problematic issues plaguing other coastal resorts in Bulgaria, while simultaneously creating new opportunities and challenges.

After a short introduction to the first part of this book, chapter 2 focuses on work in the tourist resorts, its changing images, and its attractions and drawbacks as perceived by the resort workers. Chapter 3 describes the privatization of Golden Sands and the effects that privatization had on resort modernization and changing tourist flows. The fourth chapter turns to the retail sector and the work of traders in Golden Sands, delineating the evolution of retailing in the resort and showing how vendors are held responsible for resort "Orientalization" and the decline in affluent middle-class tourists. Chapter 5 traces the urbanization and emerging problems of Golden Sands back to the fragmentation and insufficient regulatory oversight and control following privatization.

Tourism in Varna is at the center of the second part of this book. Not only are resort and urban tourism linked in multiple ways, but Varna is also a popular site of tourism, leisure, and recreation in its own right. As such, the city receives a much wider variety of visitors than the resorts, and its hospitality industry is more diversified and segmented. Part two thus compares the organization and practice of tourism in both locations; explores the complex interactions of the tourism and hospitality industry and the wider urban economy; and discusses the effects tourism has even on those Varnentsi who are not directly involved in the industry.

Chapter 6 serves as an introduction to the second part of this book and discusses the three faces that Varna presents to the world as a postsocialist, tourist, and hospitable city. Chapter 7 explores the changing retail landscape in Varna. It describes various types of retailers and the ways they are affected by the influx of transnational companies and foreign tourists, and it highlights how local notions of consumption, identity, and social status are both expressed and actively constructed in Varna's retailing sector. Chapter 8 turns to the hotel industry in Varna. It analyzes the notions of hospitality that prevail in Varna's tourism industry as expressed in discourses about service quality. These discourses also reveal critiques of mass tourism and resort commercialization, and of the subordination of social relations to the pursuit of profit that is perceived as occurring both in tourism and in the wider society. The ninth chapter continues the investigation of Varna's accommodation sector and of notions of hospitality by focusing on commercial homes and their operations. Varna's real estate industry and its manifold

links with tourism are at the center of chapter 10. It takes a closer look at the development of the region's property market and the role of real estate agencies, and it analyzes the causes and social consequences of the property market boom. The conclusion examines the impacts of tourism on Varna's urban environment and beyond – to consider how even Bulgarian national identity is negotiated and reflected through tourism.

This book is a study of the tourism industry in the Varna region, but it also treats tourism as a foil illustrating the negotiation, contestation, and representation of wider issues concerning the past, present, and future of Varna and Bulgaria. Tourism is one arena where concerns such as the interpretation of the country's socialist past, its future development, and its position in relation to others such as "the Orient" and "Europe" are negotiated.

Questions about the meanings of the national past and future and the (re-)negotiation of national identities are particularly salient in postsocialist societies. For people Bulgaria, as elsewhere in eastern Europe, the collapse of socialism triggered sweeping and comprehensive changes. It called into question everything in which they used to believe and how they had lived their lives; the end of socialism raised many questions about the past as well as the future of whole countries and the communities within them. In a study of the formation of a post-Soviet Russian national identity, Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson have used the concept of the "critical juncture" to characterize such moments in history, described as temporally and spatially limited periods of time, "where dramatic circumstances call existing political, economic, and social arrangements into question. Not only do critical junctures loosen the normal inertia-bound, path-dependent ties among and within political and economic institutions, but they create the possibility for significant redefinitions of national history and identity as well" (Forest and Johnson 2002: 527).

Who are we as a people? Who do we want to be? What kind of future do we desire for our country? These questions are not just debated in the political arena; they pervade the everyday lives of ordinary people throughout eastern Europe, and they become even more pressing in locations affected by mass tourism. This is because tourism, by its nature, entails encounters of locals with "strangers". The Varna region is annually visited by hundreds of thousands of foreigners, and it would be hard for any of its inhabitants to completely avoid meeting and interacting with at least some of them. For the Varnentsi, this poses the question, "In extending hospitality to the other, how should we define our individual, communal, or national self?" (Molz and Gibson 2007b: 1). While most encounters of tourists and locals are fleeting and mundane, they nevertheless entail multiple negotiations of

self and other. The participants seek to project a specific image of themselves as individuals and as representatives of a community, while at the same time, they are confronted with the views that others hold of them.

In this context, two concepts are of particular relevance with respect to this book. The first is the concept of "Orientalism" introduced by Edward Said (Said 1994 [1978]), and subsequently critically debated, refined, and applied in a wide range of disciplines and fields of study. With respect to the Balkans, "Orientalism" has been utilized by a number of authors who have described and analyzed the adoption of Orientalist as well as self-Orientalizing discourses by various ethnic and religious communities in the region. The production of a hierarchical system of knowledge about the Balkans that privileges the West has also been analyzed within the conceptual framework of Orientalism (Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992; Bakić-Hayden 1995; Pilbrow 1997; Neuburger 2004). However, while Orientalism draws on the long academic tradition of Western Oriental studies,

> The problem of the Bulgarian looking for his image in the European mirror, unlike that of Said's "Oriental", was that quite simply he was missing there: he was not part of European history, European science was not interested in him, to Europe he was a "nobody". That was an identity problem very different from the one that the Orient, distinguished by lengthy accumulation of erudite studies, was faced with. And, beyond any doubt, it was one that strongly affected both the Bulgarians' strategies for situating themselves in the world and their worldviews (Mishkova 2008: 244).

To address the specific features of "Orientalism" in the Balkans, Maria Todorova coined the term "Balkanism" to describe the result of the historical process through which the geographical region of the Balkans came to be negatively demarcated in the European imagination. She traced the differences between Orientalism and Balkanism in Western accounts, and concluded that while they portray the Orient as Europe's complete opposite, the Balkans are construed as an ambiguous category on the periphery of Europe, an "incomplete self" (Todorova 1994, 1997).[17]

Any discussion of Orientalism in the Balkans also requires interrogating the concepts of Europe and the West. As Vasiliki P. Neofotistos has aptly noted, Balkanism stands in a dialectical relation to the essentialized production of "the West"; "Westerners define 'the Balkans' as Other just as people from the Balkans define 'the West' as Other" (Neofotistos 2008:

[17] See also Neofotistos (2008). In a similar vein, Larry Wolff (1994) has traced the invention and construction of "eastern Europe" by enlightenment scholars and philosophers; its present-day manifestations are discussed in Kuus (2004).

20).[18] Within this framework, "the Balkans" are associated with conflict, antagonism, and a lack of order. "The West" is depicted as a realm of cooperation and order which produces and exports democracy, peace, and stability to the Balkans. In its self-identification vis-a-vis the Balkans, the West assumes a relation of systematic inequality between the two regions and the dependency of the Balkans on the West. In Bulgaria, Europe epitomizes the West; Europe specifically references modernity, prosperity, and high culture. As Diana Mishkova noted in her study of the spread of knowledge about Europe in Bulgaria and its effects on Bulgarian visions of Europe in the nineteenth century: "On the level of normative ideology… for the last three centuries the meaning of 'Europe' has been coextensive with modernity – with the *idea of Europe* as a symbol of cultural superiority and power" (2008: 252, original italics).

As described in the following chapters, many Varnentsi do indeed associate the idea of Europe with modernity, peace, and stability, as well as with economic progress and prosperity. They believe that in order to secure a stable and prosperous future for Bulgaria, and a "European standard of living" for its citizens, the country must become "truly European", that is integrated into "Europe" not just politically, but economically and culturally as well. There is, however, a pervasive undercurrent of fear that Bulgaria is still far from reaching that goal. In order to do so, all Bulgarians must, individually and collectively, strive to become "more European" by overcoming and eradicating the "Oriental" traits and features that are "holding back" their country.

In their encounters with tourists, tourism workers in Varna often seek to project an image of Bulgaria as a modern, forward-looking European nation, and of themselves as modern, cosmopolitan, and hospitable Europeans, but these notions do not remain unchallenged. With their words and their actions, tourists may well imply that they still see Bulgaria as a poor and backward country in the European periphery, or even as a part of "the Orient" or of the underdeveloped "third world".[19] The complex, negotiated,

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[18] See also Pilbrow (1997); Razsa and Lindstrom (2004); Volčič (2005). James Carrier has used the term "ethno-occidentalism" to describe "essentialist renderings of the West by members of alien societies" (1992: 198).

[19] National identity and the interpretation of a nation's past are also relevant with respect to the marketing and promotion of tourist destinations. Advertising and marketing campaigns necessitate the creation of a coherent image that selectively foregrounds specific characteristics of a destination while ignoring others. The resulting images may affect tourists' perceptions of a destination, and inform their reactions to the conditions they actually encounter when visiting it. Certainly this is the case in tourists' routine perception of Bulgaria as "third world", in which the complex realities of international relations during the Cold War are ignored in favor of a simpler bi-furcated model of developed and undeveloped countries.

disputed, and contradictory nature of Bulgarian national identity is also apparent in debates about the nature and assessment of the country's socialist past and of its present social and economic order. As among so many other east European populations, a growing share of Bulgarians is afflicted by so-called post-Communist nostalgia. The quality and causes of this nostalgia have been summarized by Maria Todorova:

> It is not only the longing for security, stability, and prosperity. There is also the feeling of loss for a very specific form of sociability, and of vulgarization of the cultural life. Above all, there is a desire among those who have lived through communism, even when they have opposed it or were indifferent to its ideology, to invest their lives with meaning and dignity, not to be thought of, remembered, or bemoaned as losers or slaves (Todorova 2010: 7).

People who experience "post-Communist nostalgia" do not necessarily wish for the return of socialism. Positive memories or longing for certain aspects of life under socialism, such as full employment or free healthcare, does not equate with their approval of the entire system. On the contrary, Gerald Creed has suggested that post-Communist nostalgia only appeared in Bulgaria after a return to socialism became impossible, and after socioeconomic conditions improved after an initial sharp decline. From this perspective, nostalgia is not about bringing back the past, but about using the past to comment on the present and to express hopes and fears about the future.[20]

In this book, I will show how in Varna, the socialist past is invoked to comment on and contrast it with the present. Thus, some Varnentsi remember the socialist period as an era of security and prosperity, while they view the present as characterized by poverty and insecurity. Others look back to socialism as a time of oppression and shortages, and praise the present as offering freedom and unlimited opportunities for consumption.

In tourism, too, the socialist past is mobilized to comment on, negotiate, or question the current development of the industry. This is the case when tourism workers lament declining standards of service provision after the collapse of the socialist state, or when they accuse their superiors of

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[20] Creed (2010) described the Bulgarian experience of the transition, and particularly of the "socioeconomic liquidation" it involved, as a "psychosocial trauma" that may well be portrayed as a "national syndrome". Temporal distance was necessary before this trauma could be conceptualized in a way that validated the socialist past; furthermore, it could well be argued that for a long time, many Bulgarians were too busy with ensuring their mere survival to be able to spare the energy for nostalgia. According to Creed, "the new resonance of the concept of nostalgia indexes a tipping point, where there is still lived memory but little hope or even desire for return because of an exhaustion of options and some improving hope for the future" (2010: 37). This may explain why postsocialist nostalgia emerged in East Germany much sooner than in Bulgaria.

practicing "socialist-style management". Unfettered resort development is widely decried as a mark of "predatory capitalism", and compared to the planned development under socialism. In the same vein, resort workers denounce the cheap mass tourism that has taken hold in the region, and nostalgically remember the "better class of tourists" visiting Varna in the socialist period. In the following chapters, issues such as these will repeatedly be discussed, thus shedding some light on the complex processes of negotiation and contestation surrounding the dynamic formation of a Bulgarian national identity, and of interpretations of Bulgaria's past and future.

Notes on Research and Terminology

Research for this book was carried out between June 2004 and October 2008. In this period, I made eight trips to the Varna region, for a total of 13 months of ethnographic fieldwork. I gathered information through participant observation, numerous informal talks and conversations, and selective interviewing. Although my research addresses the anthropology of work, I chose not to structure my participant-observation through work in any particular segment of the tourist industry. In this way, I chose to exchange experiential knowledge of working conditions for a better understanding of the distinctions and interconnections between the restaurant, retail, hotel, service, and property sectors. I also conducted 62 semi-structured interviews with people working in the tourism industry that I recorded and later transcribed and translated. I gathered the majority of my data on frontline workers such as vendors, waiters, barkeepers, or receptionists through informal conversations, later supplementing this information with interviews. Informal conversations were particularly productive with these workers because they often have long lull periods in their daily work when they welcome opportunities to chat. I generally initiated conversations in Bulgarian but used English or German with workers who wanted to practice their skills. Managers, business owners, and real estate brokers have a highly structured workday, and in the tourist season, they are extremely busy. Requesting an interview was often the best way to approach them as it enabled them to make some room in their schedule whenever convenient. These interviews took between one and two hours and were often followed by informal conversations and, in some cases, further socializing. Many interviewees recommended friends and acquaintances in the industry with whom I should talk; snowball sampling played a particularly large role among managers, many of whom are extremely well connected. Quotations throughout the text are from conversations that were recorded with my interlocutors' consent. Ethnographically gathered data were supplemented by a review of newspa-

pers and of tourism-related websites[21], as well as of statistical data published by the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute, the National Tourist Agency, and Eurostat.

Doing fieldwork intermittently instead of in one stretch had both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, the tourism industry in the Varna region develops very dynamically, and spreading my research over several years gave me the opportunity to observe changes as they occurred from season to season.[22] On the other hand however, it made it harder to establish lasting ties with my informants. Part of the tourism workforce in the region is transitory; in the resorts, labor turnover is high and seasonal workers often change their workplace from one season to the next. That made it difficult for me to keep track of some of my acquaintances in the industry. In the end, it is probably fair to say that my relationship with my informants often was not unlike that of many tourists with the tourism workers they encounter. With some, I spent a couple of very enjoyable and informative hours deep in conversation, but I never met them again. Others became friends for the duration of my stay, but we lost touch once I had left. And with still others, I developed friendships that long outlasted my time in Varna.

The similarities between tourists and anthropologists have often been noted (see Errington and Gewertz 1989; Crick 1995; Galani-Moutafi 2000; Burns 2004), and they became particularly apparent in my interactions with the Varnentsi. The people living and working in Varna are apt to categorize and treat any western European foreigner as a tourist, and they infer foreigners' nationality from their language, demeanor, manner of dress, and general appearance. Thus, in the streets of Varna and the resorts, and in my daily interactions with providers of goods and services, I was recognized and treated as a (German) tourist. That was often advantageous as I experienced first-hand how tourists are categorized and treated in service interactions and in non-commercial encounters with the Varnentsi. It also made me aware of

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[21] I did an exhaustive survey of the national dailies *24 Chasa* (Varna edition) and *Sega*, and the Varna-based dailies *Chernomorie* and *Cherno More* for the period 1989-2008. The national dailies *Monitor*, *Trud*, and *Standart* were perused more cursorily.

[22] For example, when I started research in 2004, apart-hotels did not yet exist in Golden Sands, hotels offering all-inclusive packages were an exception, and there was no shortage of qualified labor. In Varna, there were still only a few small hotels, and the boom of the real estate sector was just beginning. Doing fieldwork from 2004 to 2008 also allowed me to observe the changing attitudes of the Varnentsi towards their country's accession to the European Union. In 2004, hopes were high for the accession's positive effects on "ordinary people", while two years later, skepticism and fears concerning increasing prices dominated local conversations, and there were widespread anxieties in the tourism industry that rising prices would have negative ramifications on Bulgaria's competitive position vis-a-vis other summer sun destinations.

many scams, ruses, and cons aimed at tourists, and of numerous informal and sometimes illegitimate activities surrounding tourism.

In this book, I will often speak of tourism workers as "hosts" and of tourists as "guests". The "host-guest paradigm" (Aramberri 2001) has increasingly come under critique as empirical studies have demonstrated that the binary opposition inherent in these categories cannot be upheld; both "host" and "guest" are fluid and contested social roles, and people rarely hold these roles exclusively even for the full duration of an interaction marked as "hospitality". Furthermore, some researchers have argued that the paradigm is irrelevant to contemporary tourism that is based on monetary exchange and commercial relations. Indeed, by using the terms "hosts" and "guests", commercial relations are obscured and tourism is romanticized in a way that is reminiscent of the promotion and marketing efforts of an industry that understands hospitality as the commercial provision of tourist services (Aramberri 2001; Sherlock 2001; McNaughton 2006).

Nevertheless, I will intermittently use the term "guests" to denote "tourists" and "customers" in the following chapters for two reasons. First, many of my interlocutors in Varna's tourism industry chose to speak of "guests" when they talked about their "customers".[23] And second, the usage of the term "guest" marks the aspirations and efforts of workers in the touristic industry to provide genuine hospitality. Even though they do provide their services for payment in a commercialized context, workers also sometimes offer "genuine" private hospitality, and often perceive tourists as "guests" and even potential "friends".

Throughout this book, I will also speak of Varna as a postsocialist city and of Bulgaria as a postsocialist country. There are debates on whether or not it is justified to use the term "postsocialism" more than 20 years after the collapse of socialism in eastern Europe (Sakwa 1999; Humphrey 2001; Stenning and Hörschelmann 2008; Creed 2011). I will do so for two reasons. First of all, as I shall demonstrate, the legacy of socialism is still visible in the urban fabrics of Varna and of the resorts, and it continues to affect the people living and working in both locations in many more intangible ways as well. Middle-aged and older Varnentsi grew up in socialism, and they received their education and vocational training in the socialist Bulgarian state. As we shall see, tourism workers of these generations are important players in the local tourism industry, and they contribute to shaping its course of development. To them, as to many older (and even some young) Varnentsi

[23] Workers in the accommodation and catering sectors overwhelmingly used the terms "guests" (*gosti*) and, in the resorts, "tourists" (*turisti*) to denote their customers. Workers in the retail and real estate sectors, on the other hand, preferred the terms "customers" (*klienti*) or, when applicable, "tourists".

who do not work in tourism, socialism is still an important frame of reference that continues to inform their views as they appraise and evaluate the present state of their city and their country.[24] The current development of the city and the resorts, and their paths to the future, have been shaped by the choices and decisions made immediately after the collapse of socialism, that is in a period that was undoubtedly "postsocialist". As I will demonstrate, it is particularly the consequences of the privatization process that continue to influence resort development today, and will likely do so in the future.

Furthermore, there is a widespread feeling among the Varnentsi that the "transition" is not (yet) over. Hopes were high that Bulgaria's membership in the NATO and, later and more importantly, the European Union, would signify both its "return to Europe" and a "return to normalcy". Today, many Varnentsi still feel they are not "living normally". The collapse of socialism entailed a shattering of old certainties, and in Varna, as elsewhere in eastern Europe, people are still looking for stable ground. Or, as Mira, a 43-year-old women working as a housekeeper in a hotel in Golden Sands put it, "Transition, transition… I hate this transition! It has cost me the best years of my life, and it never seems to end!".

[24] Hence, my usage of the terms "postsocialist" and "postsocialism" foregrounds the continuing influence of the material and immaterial legacies of socialism in Bulgaria as well as the importance of the socialist past as a frame of reference for the present. This is not to deny the heterogeneity of the former "socialist camp" or of the (postsocialist) countries of eastern Europe.

PART ONE

Chapter 1
Enclavic Resorts and International Mass Tourism

This chapter provides a framework for the first part of this book by introducing two issues affecting resorts like Golden Sands: their enclavic and homogeneous nature and the shift from Fordist to post-Fordist tourism. After a brief description of the three main resorts in the Varna region, I will outline the characteristics of enclavic tourist spaces. As the targeted tourist segments affect the nature of resorts, the next section offers an overview of the tourist flows that Golden Sands attracts. The economic costs and benefits of resort enclaves are then delineated with reference to the specific circumstances in Golden Sands. The last section of this chapter provides a summary of the debates about the rise of post-Fordist tourism and the decline of "established" modes of Fordist mass tourism.

The Resorts

When the Varnentsi talk about tourism in their region, they often refer to its three largest, most established resorts: Sveti Konstantin, Golden Sands, and Albena. Sveti Konstantin is the oldest among them and on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast more generally.[25] It is located about nine kilometers northeast of Varna and sports sixty hotels dispersed in a park-like landscape.[26] The resort has a reputation as a quiet vacation spot for families with children and the elderly who value its abundant greenery, its gently sloping beaches, and its comparatively sedate nightlife. As it is blessed with a number of mineral water springs, it was used as a spa and health resort even in the

[25] The full name of this resort is Sveti Konstantin i Elena (Saints Constantine and Elena); in the socialist period it was called Druzhba (Friendship), a name that is still used by many older Varnentsi.

[26] According to the NSI (2011e), in 2008, Sveti Konstantin's 60 hotels had 10,844 beds (i.e. an average of 180 beds per hotel). The resort registered 155,562 arrivals that year, 52.2 per cent of whom were foreigners, which is the lowest share of the three resorts. Foreigners stayed for an average of 8.4 nights and the average revenue from their overnight stays was 40 levs per night.

socialist period, and today, it continues to attract its share of spa and wellness tourism. Sveti Konstantin remains popular with domestic travelers, many of whom arrive for short-break holidays.



Plate 1. Beach promenade in Golden Sands.

Further along the coast, 18 kilometers north-east of Varna or about half an hour by public bus from the city center, is the largest resort in the region. Golden Sands (Zlatni Pyasatsi) has been called the crown jewel of Bulgaria's tourism industry. It was established in 1957 and today sports ninety-five hotels built along a four kilometer stretch of sandy beach.[27] This resort is not as quiet and relaxed as Sveti Konstantin; it has a vibrant nightlife that in the peak season attracts a younger crowd arriving for the sun, the sea, and the party. The hotels in Golden Sands, ranging from relatively modest three-star places to luxurious five-star establishments, offer a wide range of services, from balneological treatments to medical and dental care, fitness and wellness programs, water sports, and various sorts of entertainment. In the last two decades, Golden Sands has experienced dramatic changes and a very dynamic development. Due to its size and its role as an innovator, many of

[27] In 2008, Golden Sands had 95 hotels with 36,588 beds (an average of 385 beds per hotel). It registered 486,868 arrivals, 85 per cent of whom were foreigners. Foreigners stayed for an average of 6.7 nights. The average revenue from their overnight stays was 41 levs per night. See NSI (2011e).

the issues, challenges and debates surrounding the evolution of Bulgaria's coastal resorts are cast into a particularly sharp relief in Golden Sands. Hence, this resort will be my main case study in the following chapters.

Albena, 30 kilometers north of Varna, has 37 hotels. As they have a large number of beds, the resort attracted roughly the same number of arrivals as Sveti Konstantin in 2008.[28] Among the Varnentsi, Albena is widely considered as the resort in the region that has best preserved its original architectural style. Due to its unique management and ownership structure, which will be discussed in chapters 3 and 5, it has succeeded in avoiding the urbanization and commercialization that plague other resorts to a greater or lesser extent. Albena is thus viewed as the most "unspoiled" resort in the region, and it attracts a growing share of domestic tourists. It is favored by families and the elderly, and has successfully occupied a niche as a resort for athletes and tourists valuing sports and outdoor activities.

Resorts as Tourist Enclaves

The resorts in the Varna region and Golden Sands in particular, are strongly dependent on international mass tourism for their survival, and this is reflected in their design, in the services they offer, and in the ways they are marketed and promoted. All of them are, to a greater or lesser extent, enclavic and homogeneous tourist spaces.

According to Tim Edensor (Edensor 1998, 2006), enclavic tourist spaces are characterized by a series of features that contribute to their isolation from their environment. They have clearly marked boundaries; access to them is controlled in order to shield tourists from unpredictable and potentially unpleasant encounters with the local population and from the unfamiliar, exotic, and overwhelming environment outside the enclave. Tourist enclaves are homogeneous concerning both their infrastructure and their visitors – international mass tourists. Inside the enclave, all facilities conform to international (i.e. Western) standards with just a touch of the "exotic" in the form of "watered-down" and carefully controlled local features such as local plants and animals, local dishes adapted to Western tastes, and carefully staged folklore shows. Tourist enclaves are spaces of consumption, designed to seduce visitors to consume food and drink, trips to local sights, and activities ranging from shopping to water sports to nightlife and entertainment. Tourists are induced to sample carefully sanitized and controlled

[28] In 2008, Albena had 37 hotels with 14,544 beds (an average of 393 beds per hotel). It registered 123,650 arrivals, 77 per cent of whom were foreigners. Foreigners stayed for an average of 6.9 nights. The average revenue from their overnight stays was 38 levs per night, but in 2009, it had dropped to 26 levs. See NSI (2011e).

expressions of local culture like crafts and arts, shows, and simulations. Hence, tourist enclaves are highly regulated, sanitized, and aestheticized spaces that are produced to appeal to the tourist gaze. Any potentially distracting, disturbing, or disrupting factors are kept out or repressed. This is accomplished by extensive systems of regulation, control, and surveillance that contribute to the homogeneous character of the enclave. The high prices of the goods and services on offer act as a barrier for locals and domestic tourists, thus furthering the enclave's isolation from its surroundings and from the local population (Edensor 1998, 2006; Schmid 2008).

As I will show in more detail in the following chapters, the resorts in the Varna region display all the features of tourist enclaves to some extent. Resort boundaries are clearly marked and the access roads feature police checkpoints. Inside the resorts, behavior is controlled and regulated by a number of methods, from private security guards and police patrolling the streets to security cameras and CCTV systems that monitor public and semi-public spaces. Hotels, restaurants, bars, and entertainment facilities aim to adhere to international standards in their design, their offers, and in the quality of their services.[29] Particularly in Golden Sands, hotels are generic spaces that could be located anywhere in Europe. Restaurants offer a standard fare of Western(ized) cuisine that includes unremarkable variations of pasta, pizza, french fries, and schnitzel; the "Bulgarian" dishes on offer are prepared without the heavy use of oil and garlic that characterizes local cuisine and are served without the bread that is the ubiquitous in Bulgarian home cooking. Bars and discotheques blast out the latest summer hits from the German and British charts. In fact, if it were not for the evening Bulgarian folklore shows staged by the hotels, Golden Sands could just as well be located in any Mediterranean country offering the same sun, sea, and sand mass tourism product.

Tourist enclaves have also been described as "utopic" and "liminal" spaces (Causey 2003; Ness 2003). The former term emphasizes their extraordinary character and their openness to possibility, fantasy, and desire. Resorts are spaces apart from tourists' everyday, quotidian lives; they are realms of many possibilities, spaces for play, enjoyment, and leisure. Trans-

[29] International standards may be described as consisting of three elements: 1) standards that are defined, implemented, and monitored by international and national agencies. They mostly relate to issues like licensing, certification, and quality control (e.g. ISO norms and hotel and restaurant star classifications); 2) standards that are monitored and, in some cases, enforced by international companies such as tour operators (e.g. issues relating to the kinds of services provided and their quality); 3) unregulated elements such as aesthetics that produce the generic "feel" of many tourism industry businesses. In all three cases, the dominance of Western agencies and companies in the global tourism industry also means that most of the international standards also reflect Western standards and preferences.

gressions of ordinary norms of behavior are possible here, and tourists can playfully explore new roles, identities, and ways of being. "In-betweenness" is another feature of tourist enclaves. They are betwixt and between the familiar and the exotic, home and away, work and play, reality and fantasy. This liminal status encourages the playful exploration of new and different ways of being; it is captured in the concept of the holiday as "a time out", a temporary break from ordinary life. In the same vein, tourists may be conceptualized as liminal beings, removed from everyday life and its mundane concerns. As we shall see in the following chapters, Golden Sands could well be described as a utopic, liminal space. The resort is a space for play and for leisure, but the transgressive aspects of tourist behavior have increasingly come to be contested among resort workers and locals.

The Tourists

It is with respect to its customer segments that Golden Sands displays the characteristics of an enclavic tourist space most distinctly. While Albena and Sveti Konstantin receive a larger share of domestic tourists, Golden Sands is a resort catering specifically to foreigners.[30] Tourist flows have seen some changes since the beginning of the 2000s, and the focus on foreign mass tourism has become even more pronounced. The underlying causes of this process will be explored in chapter 3; here, I will just delineate some general trends.

Under socialism, the majority of visitors to Golden Sands came from countries of the then-Eastern Bloc, and a smaller segment from western Europe. Today, these proportions are reversed. Golden Sands receives tourists from all European countries, but Germany, Britain, and Russia are the most important markets in terms of both numbers of tourists and their spending habits.[31] Even under socialism, (West) German and British tourists had been an economically important target group of Golden Sands. Although their share was relatively small compared to that of eastern European visitors, they were highly valued and usually received the best accommodation and services because they provided Bulgaria with much-needed hard cur-

[30] Domestic tourists were responsible for just 7.4 per cent of overnight stays in Golden Sands in 2008 and 9.0 per cent in 2009. In Albena, their shares were higher with 13.8 per cent in 2008, and 20.9 per cent in 2009. See NSI (2011e).

[31] In 2009, the NSI (2011f) registered 9,472,345 overnight stays by foreigners in commercial accommodation in Bulgaria. The citizenship of these visitors was registered as 22.9 per cent German, 12.7 per cent Russian, 9 per cent British, 8.6 per cent Romanian; 8 per cent came from the Scandinavian countries (including Danish, Finnish, Swedish, and Norwegian citizens). Although their shares may vary, these are the economically most important foreign visitor segments for all Bulgarian coastal resorts.

rency. In the 1990s, their numbers dropped sharply, but after 2000, they rapidly increased again. The share of Russian tourists and those from the former Soviet Union was large until and throughout the 1990s. After 2000, the Russian segment has continuously fluctuated in line with changing visa regulations, particularly after Bulgaria's entry into the European Union (EU). Scandinavians have started visiting Golden Sands in greater numbers only since the 2000s. Many of them are young budget tourists who are attracted by the resort's nightlife and the comparatively low price of alcohol. After both Bulgaria's and Romania's EU accession in 2007, Romanians have begun to visit the Varna region en masse. The influx of Romanian tourists has highlighted a major shortcoming of resorts that cater primarily to guests who arrive on charter flights: the resorts lack adequate parking facilities for cars. The changing tourist market thus intersects in critical ways with the problems of infrastructural development described in chapter 5.

The composition of visitors to Golden Sands varies in the course of the tourist season. In the shoulder season, that is in May-June and September-October, the elderly, and among them the Germans, are predominant. This is immediately noticeable in the resort's ambience. German *Schlager* music and the golden oldies sound from bars, cafes, and market stalls. Elderly tourists stroll up and down the streets and sit on the benches spaced out under the trees. Stalls selling souvenirs, handicrafts, jewelry and homemade produce do a brisk trade while the tattoo and piercing parlors are deserted. The tourists sunbathe and take long walks, but the beach is not as crowded as in the peak season. In the mid-afternoon, cafes are filled with guests having coffee and fancy cakes, as is customary among many German pensioners. The nightlife, on the other hand, is more subdued. Bars and discotheques close earlier, fewer prostitutes roam the streets, and inebriated tourists weaving down the streets or passing out on the park benches are not as common. The elderly tourists often take trips to Varna and other places of interest in the region, and they attend cultural events. They also consume services such as balneological, wellness, and medical treatments. Many of them are regular guests who have been returning to Golden Sands for many years.

In the peak season in July and August, Golden Sands' clientele is more diverse. Couples with children and groups of young people predominate but the elderly are present as well. Most tourists arrive for a typical beach vacation, and the youths are additionally attracted by the vibrant nightlife, the cheap alcohol, and the opportunities for romance and sex. In fact, in the last decade, Golden Sands has gained a reputation as a "party resort" for young people, at least in the peak season.[32] The atmosphere is

[32] In September 2010, the German tabloid *Bild* ran a series entitled "Golden Sands – More Boisterous than Ballermann (Mallorca)" (Goldstrand – Wilder als der Ballermann) on its

exuberant and there is an incessant din assaulting the ears. Tourists spend their days on the often crowded beach where jet skis drone from the sea, parachutes glide overhead, and the latest summer hits blast from the beach bars. In the evening, people stroll down the streets, shopping and people-watching. Shops, restaurants, and bars are open late into the night, and the nightlife is in full swing. The bars and discotheques are crowded, and groups of young people waving beer bottles and the occasional blow-up doll roam the streets, frequently being approached by the numerous prostitutes. Organized pub crawls take place every night, while the hotels offer entertainment programs attracting a more sedate clientele.

Domestic tourists are conspicuously absent in Golden Sands. They are discouraged by factors such as the coincidence of the major vacation period in Bulgaria with the peak season in the resorts when hotel rooms are reserved for foreign tour operators. They also tend to avoid resorts that are dominated by foreigners. Many domestic tourists prefer staying in small family-run hotels, in commercial homes or in second homes. Some favor the southern Bulgarian Black Sea coast where prices are said to be lower. The most important reason for their absence from Golden Sands, however, is that many simply cannot afford it. My acquaintances often commented along the lines of, "Yes, Golden Sands is very nice, but it's much too expensive for us!". The fact that many Bulgarians are unable to afford Golden Sands led to considerable resentment at times. How can it be, I was asked, that Bulgarians cannot stay in a resort that is part of their own country? How is it possible that a resort that used to be "owned by the people" under socialism is now the playground of foreigners who consider it a dirt-cheap vacation spot, while many Bulgarians can only dream of staying there? The loaded issues of ownership and entitlement were raised by Svilen, a former policeman who supplemented his meager pension by working as a security guard in a currency exchange office in Varna. In a voice filled with bitterness, he told me:

> Under socialism, I was a member of the Komsomol [Communist youth organization] as it was customary at that time. And we built Golden Sands! We used to go there on the weekends and do voluntary work. These voluntary labor campaigns were called *sabotnik*. We were the ones who built that resort! Without us, Golden Sands wouldn't exist. It belongs to me as well! But today, I cannot even afford to have a coffee there. That's what our country has come to!

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website, complete with video clips depicting youths praising the resort's opportunities for wild and uninhibited partying, flirting and sex, its cheap alcohol, and the beautiful girls it attracts. In January 2011, the British tabloid *Sun* introduced the Top 10 value places for holidays 2011. Among them was Bulgaria, with the header "Cheap food and drink and good value lodgings – but bear in mind that the tourism infrastructure is in its infancy".

A sense of deprivation is particularly prevalent among older Bulgarians for two reasons. On the one hand, these people bore the brunt of the transformation; they were strongly affected by the economic collapse of the 1990s and the widespread poverty resulting from it. By the time of my research in the 2000s, they were pensioners or approaching retirement, often with extremely limited financial means. On the other hand, they grew up under socialism where rest and recreation were considered basic rights of all citizens[33], and where a dense network of state- and union-subsidized holiday homes, campgrounds, and hotels served the recreation of the socialist workforce. Throughout their lives, the annual summer vacation by the sea could be taken for granted; it was viewed as something to which a Bulgarian citizen was entitled. The costs were not an issue because these vacations were heavily subsidized and besides, most people were not short of money, they were short of opportunities for consumption. That came to an end in the 1990s, and the loss was felt keenly. It was a loss of entitlement, of quality of life, of a familiar part of the yearly routine that offered a break from daily drudgery. Many viewed it as yet another symptom of their country's decline. Older Varnentsi often commented resignedly, "Before [1989], we had money but we couldn't travel freely. Now we may travel wherever we want, but we don't have the money to do it!".

Economic Effects of Tourist Enclaves

The enclavic nature of tourist resorts has been found to have a number of economic consequences on the local and national levels. In the 1960s, tourism was heavily promoted by international agencies as a tool for development. Due to its reliance on existing resources such as warm and sunny climates, the natural environment, and a friendly and hospitable local population, as well as the supposedly low initial capital investments it required, tourism was viewed as an easily accessible development option, particularly for so-called third world countries. The adherents of the "diffusion model" of development contended that growth poles (either geographic locations or economic sectors) must be established from which impulses for growth would spread through the national economy.[34] Tourism was regarded as a sector with a high potential for development and growth. Tourists would spend their money directly in the destination, contributing to the national

[33] The Bulgarian constitution guaranteed all citizens the right to rest and recreation. Article 74 of the 1947 Constitution reads: "Citizens have the right to rest. This right is secured by limiting the work day, granting an annual paid holiday and by the establishment of a wide network of holiday homes, clubs, and other establishments". This passage is almost identical in the Constitution of 1971, where it is found in Article 42.

[34] See Oppermann (1993) for an overview.

income, and parts of the revenues could be invested in other sectors of the economy, thus subsidizing their development. Tourism would also have many linkages with other industries, and hence high multiplier effects (Jenkins 1980, 1994; Brohman 1996).

However, a number of empirical studies in "third world" destinations soon shed doubt on these optimistic views. They revealed that in many cases, the positive economic effects of tourism development may be much more limited than previously assumed, and that high social, cultural, and environmental costs may be incurred. The creation of tourist enclaves has repeatedly been found to lead to the emergence of "parallel tourist economies" with a low level of linkages to other economic sectors (Komilis 1994: 69). The majority of the goods and services consumed in tourist enclaves are not produced locally and the tourists rarely leave the "bubble" of the resort. Mass tourism, in particular, has been found to either exacerbate existing regional spatial and economic disparities or to create new ones. Due to its enclavic nature, areas in the rural hinterland devoid of natural or cultural attractions rarely benefit from it, particularly where the infrastructure is rather poorly developed (de Kadt 1978; Oppermann 1993).

Mass tourism is often capital-intensive and the initial investment costs are high. As a result, many tourist resorts are under foreign ownership and management. International tour operators control their marketing as well as the transportation of the tourists to their destination. Mass tourism destinations are thus heavily dependent on foreign transnational companies that are often in an oligopolistic position. This contributes to the leakage of substantial shares of the revenues which may be exacerbated by profit repatriations and payments for imported goods and services. Although the development of tourism does create jobs, many destinations initially lack a highly qualified workforce with experience in service provision more generally, and in the tourism industry in particular. Hence, many resorts hire locals for unskilled jobs at the lowest income levels, whereas the well-paid management positions often go to expatriates, leading to further financial leakages. Local entrepreneurs, who tend to operate informally, are often removed from the resorts because they are seen as bothering or annoying the tourists (Woodcock and France 1994; Eisenstein and Rosinski 2003; Papatheodorou 2006).

International mass tourism destinations are dependent on highly volatile source markets. The preferences of tourists are fickle and a destination that is fashionable in one year might be out of favor in the next. Tourist destinations are also highly vulnerable to international tensions, to local and regional conflicts, and to natural disasters. These vulnerabilities are aggravated by the mutual substitutability of sun, sea, and sand destinations. If a destination is perceived as unsafe or lacking in security, tourists will travel

elsewhere. Furthermore, tourist flows are highly dependent on the economic conditions in the tourists' source countries; economic downturns may quickly be followed by a drop in tourist numbers (Jenkins 1980; Hitchcock and Putra 2007).

As we shall see in the following chapters, some of these features apply to Golden Sands, while others are absent. From its beginnings after the Second World War, tourism development in Bulgaria was state-planned and state-sponsored. In the Stalinist period, the emphasis was on the development of domestic tourism, and its goal was a social one, namely, the recreation of the socialist workforce. Only in the 1960s was tourism discovered as an instrument for economic development by the Bulgarian government. At its height in the 1970s and 1980s, international tourism was a profitable sector that subsidized other industries and made a significant contribution to the Bulgarian economy. After 1989, tourism was treated as a priority sector in the anticipation that it would continue to play a positive role. Much in the tradition of the diffusion model of development, it was viewed as having the potential to become a growth pole that would stimulate the development of other economic sectors. The earnings from the tourism industry were expected to help service Bulgaria's huge foreign debt and contribute to the modernization and development of the country's desolate economy. Due to the decline of tourism in the 1990s these objectives could not be achieved, but following the privatization and modernization of tourism assets, the sector has shown a considerable rate of growth, and today it is one of Bulgaria's most important industries (Bachvarov 1997a, 2006; Kasatschka and Marinov 2003.

In the Varna region, the economic benefits of tourism are much more pronounced than in many of the "third world" destinations described in previous studies. This is due to several characteristics, some of which are a result of the pre-1989 development of tourism, while others are owed to the specific form taken by the privatization and modernization of the Bulgarian tourism industry. First of all, after 1989, Bulgaria did not have to develop tourism from scratch. From socialism, the country had inherited a pre-existing, albeit rather decrepit, tourism infrastructure, a highly skilled and experienced workforce, and a number of resorts that were established brands among both eastern and western European tourists. During privatization, the majority of tourism assets were acquired by domestic investors; thus, domestic ownership is predominant in the coastal resorts. As a result, revenue leakage is much reduced. Due to the existence of a highly qualified workforce, Bulgarians hold the overwhelming majority of jobs at all levels of the occupational hierarchy. Expatriate managers are a rarity; in fact, resident

foreigners find it almost impossible to get well-paid jobs in the Bulgarian tourism industry.

Bulgaria's coastal resorts have excellent public transport connections to nearby cities, towns and other resorts, and tourists can easily go on individual shopping and sightseeing trips, which many, in fact, do. Tourists thus spend their money not only in the resorts but in nearby villages, towns, and cities. Locals may either establish businesses in the resorts and in the surrounding areas visited by tourists, or they may benefit indirectly, for example by supplying hotels, restaurants, and shops, offering transport services, or undertaking construction and renovation work. In other words, on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, tourism has excellent links with other sectors.

However, Bulgaria's coastal resorts are strongly dependent on international tourists and thus vulnerable to changes in demand. Because the country's main competitive advantages vis-a-vis other sun, sea, and sand destinations are the low local and package prices, its tourism industry is highly susceptible to the effects of changes in the price structure both in Bulgaria and in competing destinations. Furthermore, the vast majority of international tourists arrive on charter tours which are paid for in their countries of origin. Coupled with the increasing trend towards all-inclusive packages, this leads to lower revenues for local businesses as well as for the state coffers.

Fordist and Post-Fordist Tourism

Tourism scholars agree that mass tourism experienced its heyday from the 1950s to the early 1980s. Due to increases in leisure time and disposable incomes, heightened mobility through the spread of car ownership, the advent of cheap air travel and improved transport and communication infrastructures, as well as growing life-spans and higher incomes in old age, international tourism became accessible to large sections of the population of northern and western Europe. They preferred traveling on charter tours, usually taken in the summer months, and spent in a Mediterranean beach destination. These charter holidays were sold by large, vertically integrated international tour operators who capitalized on the economies of scale derived from standardized mass holiday products aimed at price-sensitive consumers. In the established Mediterranean resorts, the mass consumption of charter holidays by tourists from northern and western Europe resulted in staged authenticity and a growing McDonaldization and Disneyfication (Urry 1990; Torres 2002; Bramwell 2004b).

In the last two decades, however, scholars have increasingly posited a shift towards "post-Fordist" modes of tourism. In line with the rise of the postmodern consumer-citizen, today's tourists are viewed as more sophisticated, experienced, and quality-conscious. They are said to be looking for an

individual holiday experience away from the crowds, preferring destinations offering not just sun, sea, and sand, but a healthy environment as well as a rich cultural life and historical heritage. Post-Fordist tourists are independent and flexible, seeking new and exciting holiday experiences and preferring "alternative" forms of tourism. They reject the established mass tourism destinations with their overcrowded, urbanized, and environmentally deteriorating resorts.[35] Post-Fordist tourists tend to take a number of shorter breaks instead of one long annual (summer) vacation, their motivations for travel may vary widely, and their loyalty to particular destinations is not pronounced (Poon 1994; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Aguiló, Alegre and Sard 2005).

On the supply side, the post-Fordist shift is expected to lead to an increasing fragmentation and specialization of the tourism market. The market dominance of the large international tour operators will wane; instead, small, specialized companies are going to emerge, offering a wide variety of products and components that allow consumers to assemble their own individual holiday product. Likewise, the golden age of the established Mediterranean holiday resorts is assumed to be over and they are viewed as having entered the "decline phase" of their development cycle. Characterized by a high degree of urbanization, overcrowding, and environmental degradation, and offering solely the familiar sun, sea, and sand holidays, they will be abandoned by post-Fordist tourists in favor of newer, unspoiled destinations offering opportunities for cultural, heritage, ethnic, or nature tourism in addition to the sun and the sea (Urry 1995; Ioannides and Debagge 1997, 1998; Agarwal 2002).[36] Among tourism scholars, there are lively debates about the possibilities of restructuring these resorts to make them more attractive to post-Fordist tourists, thus initiating their regeneration and rejuvenation. However, it has also been proposed that for some established resorts, renouncing mass tourism would be unfeasible (Sharpley 2004a, 2004b; Alegre and Cladera 2006).

Yet there has also been considerable debate about the actual scope and extent of post-Fordist tourism. Scholars doing research on established Mediterranean resorts have classified them as being in the "decline phase" of their development for decades, yet dropping visitor numbers and revenues have frequently turned out to be temporary, caused by changing economic conditions in tourists' countries of origin or in the destination countries. These resorts have proven surprisingly resilient, and they continue to annually

[35] Such as Benidorm and Magaluf in Spain, Rhodos in Greece, Rimini in Italy, Aya Napa in Cyprus, or Antalya in Turkey.

[36] On the "tourist area life cycle" or "resort cycle", see Butler (1980); Agarwal (1997); Priestley and Mundet (1998).

attract millions of visitors (Williams and Shaw 1998; Claver-Cortés, Molina-Azorín and Pereira-Moliner 2007; Litvin 2010). Several authors have also questioned the existence of a clear delineation between Fordist and post-Fordist modes of tourism. Some have posited intermediate categories combining elements of both, such as "neo-Fordist" tourism (Ioannides and Debbage 1997, 1998; Torres 2002; Aguiló, Alegre and Sard 2005). Others have questioned the spread of post-Fordist tourism, suspecting a marked academic bias against banal forms of mass tourism and a preference among tourism scholars themselves for more "prestigious" or "exotic" modes of travel such as cultural and heritage tourism, eco- and agro-tourism, or adventure tourism. Pau Obrador Pons, Mike Crang, and Penny Travlou stated in their introduction to a volume on cultures of mass tourism:

> Mass tourism offers a distinctive form of entertainment – more "vulgar" and "corporeal" – that clashes with the sophistication and detachment of middle class forms of travel, the values of which underpin dominant conceptualizations of tourism. The significance of the banal in tourism has been systematically overlooked by dominant perspectives which have privileged the exotic and the spectacular. … In downplaying the banal, dominant perspectives have reproduced a social hierarchy of travelers and tourists, thus sanctioning a set of ideological and social distinctions that is as much a stake in class distinctions as an actual description of tourist practices (Pons, Crang and Travlou 2009b: 5; see also Edensor 2006).

As the following chapters will demonstrate, in Golden Sands and the other resorts in the Varna region, Fordist mass tourism is alive and well. In the last decade, Bulgaria has gained a reputation as a cheap summer sun destination, with the vast majority of international tourists arriving on package tours. In fact, contrary to the trends posited by the proponents of "post-Fordist tourism", and despite attempts to encourage diversification into alternative modes of tourism, Bulgarian industry experts have observed a decline of tourists' interest in the historical, cultural, and natural attractions of the region. Representatives of Varna's tourism industry nostalgically remember the middle-class tourists of the 1980s who combined beach vacations with visits to sights of historical and cultural significance, and they bemoan today's predominance of low-spending tourists who arrive on all-inclusive packages and spend their vacation circulating between the beach, the pool, and the bars and discotheques, looking for the "banal" pleasures of a perfect tan, cheap alcohol, and, perhaps, a holiday fling. Despite scholarly predictions concerning a rise of post-Fordist tourism and a decline of established sun, sea and sand resorts, Golden Sands and the surrounding resorts remain popular among international tourists, hundreds of thousands of whom arrive

in the Varna region every year to enjoy the sea, the sun, good food and cheap drinks, the vibrant nightlife, and the numerous opportunities for shopping and entertainment.

Chapter 2
Images of Resort Jobs: "You Can Always Find Work in the Resorts"

Tourism is a major industry in the Varna region, and when asked about its impacts on the city and its inhabitants, the Varnentsi unanimously cited the provision of jobs as its most important benefit, as in the following conversation:

> C.B.: What do you think is the effect of the tourism industry on Varna and the people living in the region?
> Nadezhda: Well, it's extremely important for Varna. And for people living in the region of Dobrich, a medium-sized town to the northwest, and in Shumen, as well. We have many colleagues who come from Dobrich, Shumen, and Varna. Most students from these towns work in Golden Sands. There are many people who have been working in its hotels for 20 or 30 years. And to tell you the truth, if there was not any tourism, if there was not this period of six months, we would not have anything to do. It is very difficult to find these kinds of jobs in the city itself.

This statement was made by Nadezhda, a hotel receptionist, in the summer of 2006. In our talks, she repeatedly emphasized that tourism provides an income for the majority of Varna's households, and that without tourism, unemployment in the region would be much higher. Most Varnentsi I talked to during 2004-2006 expressed similar sentiments. Considering the rather poor reputation of hospitality industry jobs in western Europe, I found resort workers' enthusiasm for their work striking. They emphasized the higher-than-average incomes that could be earned in tourism, the beautiful environment of the resorts, the fun that could be had working in teams of mostly young people, and the numerous opportunities for meeting new people, making friends, and falling in love that these jobs offered.

This state of affairs is in line with what Kristen Ghodsee reported in *The Red Riviera: Gender, Tourism, and Postsocialism on the Black Sea* (Ghodsee 2005). Ghodsee vividly described how under conditions of high

unemployment at the turn of the millennium, even the most menial jobs in the Bulgarian tourism industry were highly coveted and jealously guarded by workers; how job openings in the resorts attracted hundreds of applicants; and how the mobilization of connections was often necessary to get such a job. While most of Ghodsee's respondents saw working in tourism in a very positive light, and assured her that they did indeed enjoy their work, Ghodsee suspected that the high rates of unemployment and the general poverty of large parts of the population contributed to these positive attitudes insofar as many Bulgarians probably saw having any job as being better than having no job at all.

However, the labor market in the Varna region had changed dramatically between the time of Ghodsee's fieldwork and my own. By 2006, Varna had become a boomtown with a rapidly growing economy, attracting large investments by both national and international companies. One result of this strong growth is a larger supply of jobs and a higher demand for qualified labor. Especially in the service industries, the competition for qualified workers has intensified. Employers increasingly vie for young people with university degrees, foreign language proficiency, and some work experience in the service sector. During the mid-2000s, the attractiveness of resort work seemed to be in a definitive decline. One reason for the declining attractiveness of resort jobs compared to work in other sectors is its seasonality. While many high school and university students may be looking for a summer job only, those who have graduated and are in the process of permanently entering the workforce prefer non-seasonal jobs offering them a steady and secure income throughout the year. Another reason lies in the wages paid in tourism. While they have been steadily rising in recent years, they have still been outpaced by those paid in other sectors. Combined with the advantages of a permanent job, this leads many prospective candidates to look for work outside the tourism industry.

A further drain on the workforce is caused by labor migration. Bulgaria has been suffering from high emigration rates for many years, and it is mostly the young and highly qualified members of the workforce who choose to leave. The tourism industry is hit especially hard because many of those who are fluent in western European languages and have some work experience prefer spending the summer season working in tourist resorts in Spain, Italy, Austria, or Switzerland where incomes are much higher than in Bulgaria. These processes have contributed to an increasing labor shortage in the tourism industry, and particularly in the tourist resorts surrounding Varna. In the first week of June 2007, for example, several hotel managers in Golden Sands reported that there were still 20,000 open positions in the resort. With the peak season approaching, and the competition for qualified

workers heating up, these managers were rather pessimistic about the prospects for filling these vacancies.[37]

This chapter focuses on the workers in Golden Sands. It aims to give an overview of the wide variety of jobs available in the resort, of the prevailing working conditions and their effects on workers' attitudes towards these jobs, as well as the impact of the changing labor market on working conditions and attitudes. Later chapters will return to these issues by describing work and the working conditions in the accommodation and retail sectors of Golden Sands. In the first section of this chapter, I tell the stories of five resort workers in order to illustrate the broad range of available jobs and point to some of their common features. The second section describes four ways to find a job in Golden Sands and their changing importance in the last decade. The third section explores workers' views of resort jobs and their perceived advantages and drawbacks, while the fourth section focuses on the remuneration of resort work. The last section of this chapter places my findings in the broader context of research on work in the hospitality industry, and compares the images of tourism work perpetuated in much of that literature to those held by resort workers in Golden Sands.

"We Really, Really Try to Do Everything for the Tourists!" – The Resort Workers

A resort like Golden Sands provides a wide range of jobs that have only the most basic similarities in their location, their service orientation, and their main customer segments.[38] They may be differentiated according to two main criteria: the level of customer interaction they require and their seasonality or lack thereof.

High levels of customer interaction are a feature of so-called frontline or interactive service jobs. In Golden Sands, jobs in this category, such as hotel receptionists, vendors, waiters, and bartenders, predominate. Foreign language proficiency is their most important requirement; the workers have to speak English, and either German or Russian. They also need to have an aptitude for emotional and, in many cases, aesthetic labor. These "skills" and their ramifications for the workforce will be discussed at length in chapter 7; suffice it to say here that "emotional labor" comprises an ability to induce and convey "positive" emotions such as friendliness, helpfulness, warmth, and kindness, and "aesthetic labor" encompasses an ability to embody the image befitting the work or the company, such as the relaxed, laid-back

[37] The consequences of the labor shortage for resort hotels will be described in chapter 3.

[38] On work and labor relations in international tourist resorts, see also Camacho (1996); Baldacchino (1997); Adler and Adler (2004).

bartender in a beach bar or the serious and competent professional at the reception of a high-star hotel. The income of frontline service workers often consists of tips or commissions in addition to their salary.[39] Work that involves little customer interaction may be skilled (e.g. cooks), or it may be unskilled (e.g. housekeepers), and it is remunerated accordingly.

The other main criterion that differentiates jobs in Golden Sands is their seasonality. Higher management jobs in the resort are non-seasonal, as are the core positions in the very few hotels and restaurants that operate year-round. The majority of work is, however, seasonal; some resort jobs are available for the entire tourist season, and others are available in the peak season only. Seasonal jobs are characterized by long working hours, but their remuneration is higher than that offered in similar positions outside the resorts.[40] They are often semi-formal; in addition to the wage stated in the formal work contract, the employee receives an undeclared "envelope salary" (Williams 2009).[41] In many cases, workers are trained on the job. This is one of the reasons why seasonal jobs are attractive to high school and university students. Another reason is that their availability coincides with the summer break of Bulgarian schools and universities. Employees in higher management positions work non-seasonally. They usually have a degree in tourism or economics and years of work experience. This is also an effect of legal regulations specifying the formal education, work experience and foreign language proficiency required of restaurant and hotel managers. In addition, they need to have computer, organizational, and communication skills. Managers work long hours as well, but their working hours are usually more regular; in the off-season, they conform to the legally stipulated eight-hour workdays. Their salaries are above-average, and often they receive additional benefits such as bonuses or paid leave.

To illustrate the broad range of jobs available in the resorts, the diversity of workers they attract, workers' motivations and their attitudes towards their jobs, I will introduce five resort workers and describe how and why they came to work in Golden Sands. All five workers entered resort work before 2006 when the labor market was characterized by high unemploy-

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[39] Gerald Mars and Michael Nicod (1984: 8) described the income of hospitality industry workers as a "total rewards system" comprising "formal rewards" such as formal pay and subsidized or free food, beverages and lodging, "semi-formal rewards" such as tips and commissions, and "informal rewards" arising from "fiddles" and "knock-offs". For a critique of the "total rewards system" see Johnson (1983).

[40] Compared to western Europe, the wages in Bulgaria are generally lower, as are the living costs. Significant differences exist within the country as well, especially between urban and rural areas. As described in the introduction, wages and living costs in Varna are among the highest in the country.

[41] On semi-formal businesses more generally, see also de Soto (1989, chap. 3); Cross (1998).

ment, low wages in other sectors, and strong competition for tourism jobs. The salaries paid in Golden Sands have seen a marked increase since then, but so have the living costs in the region.

Karina: "I'm not Working for the Money, I Want to Meet People!"

As a student in a prestigious high school specializing in foreign languages, Karina had the language skills demanded by employers in Golden Sands and thus easily found a job in the resort. She was fluent in both English and German, although she preferred to speak English even to German tourists because she felt more comfortable with that language. Karina was living in Varna in a house owned by her family with her mother, who worked as an accountant, and her younger brother, who was a high school student as well.

In 2006, at the age of 16, Karina first began to work in Golden Sands. She sold jewelry and souvenirs in a street stall, working 15 hours a day, and earning a daily wage of 15 levs. The following year, a friend told her about a job handing out flyers for a karaoke bar. She went to see the bar owner, and he just told her to be there the next day and start working. She did not get a work contract, but they agreed that she would work 7 hours a day and earn 15 levs that would be paid in cash after her shift. She had no specified days off, but if she did not want to work for a day or two, she just had to notify her boss. Every day, Karina would take up her station in the "party street", armed with a sheaf of leaflets, and approach passers-by, inviting them to visit the bar she was touting. Her boss regularly did his rounds, assuring himself the girls working for him made a proper effort. If they did and the place was crowded as a result, he would pay them a bonus of five levs each.

Even though she was often tired and exhausted, Karina liked her job. She enjoyed talking to foreigners, learning more about them and their ways of life. She met new people every day, and she made many friends, both among the tourists and among her colleagues. The job gave her the opportunity to practice and improve her foreign language skills. Karina said that before she had started working in Golden Sands, she felt shy or nervous when she had to speak English, but her job forced her to overcome her self-consciousness and helped her to be more relaxed and self-assured when speaking to foreigners. She expected that her improved language skills would benefit her studies, and she hoped she would get better marks in school. In a few years, she would take her university entrance exams, and she hoped that her language practice during work would improve those scores as well. Karina worked as a tout for two and a half months, eventually quitting because she wanted to attend a German language course. She used the money she had earned that summer to buy books and clothes, and to pay for a school trip she took with her class the following winter.

Yasna: "What I Like about the Job? The Sociability, Working with People, Meeting New People!"

In 2006, Yasna worked as a bartender in a medium-sized hotel in Golden Sands. She had originally trained as a nurse but then discovered that her salary would barely cover her living expenses. After hearing that nurses were much in demand in Germany, she decided to look for work there. She first went to Germany as an au pair in order to learn the language, and after that, she worked for one and a half years as a nurse caring for the elderly. She returned to Bulgaria in 2005. In the spring of that year, a friend who was the chief receptionist of a hotel in Golden Sands called to tell her that the hotel was looking for a bartender fluent in German. Yasna successfully applied for the job and worked there for the summer. When the season was over, she went to the United States where she had found a job as a waitress on a cruise ship. Later, her former employer in Golden Sands called to ask if she would work for the hotel again the following summer. So she returned in June to work as a bartender in the same hotel.

Yasna's work contract stated that she would work in the hotel's pool bar for the legally mandated 8 hours a day, 6 days a week, for a salary of 180 levs per month. However, a verbal agreement stipulated that she would work 12 hours a day and receive a salary of 300 levs. In reality, her shifts were often longer than that. She was to open the bar at eleven o'clock in the morning, but often she had to start even earlier to help serve the breakfast. The bar was supposed to close at eleven o'clock in the evening, but in fact it stayed open for as long as there were guests. After they left, Yasna and her colleague had to clean the bar and close it down, which meant that they often got off work after midnight. In addition to her regular income, Yasna received tips from the tourists. The hotel also provided her with free food and lodging. Yasna loved being able to interact with the tourists, chatting and getting to know them, and she enjoyed learning about their lives. That was her main reason for accepting the job, since, as she put it, her salary was "not enough to live on, barely enough to exist".

From a long-term perspective, Yasna viewed emigration as the only way to achieve a comfortable life. She said she loved Bulgaria, but with incomes being so low, it was simply impossible to live well without constantly worrying about money as her parents did. Thus she was planning to go back to the United States after the summer season in Golden Sands.

Stoyan: "The Job I Have Now – It's Just a Way to Pass the Time"

When I met him in 2004, Stoyan was 54 years old. With his grey eyes, light complexion, tailor-made suit, and flawless Oxford English, his appearance

was more that of a London businessman than of a restaurant tout. In the late 1970s, Stoyan had trained as a tourism manager with Balkantourist, a job he had held for some years before becoming dissatisfied. Stoyan eventually undertook additional training with the navy, and in the 1980s started working on a boat monitoring the water quality in the Bay of Varna. Later he signed on with the merchant navy, traveling around the world on its ships. But he eventually quit because he felt he was getting too old for the demands of constant traveling.

In 2004, Stoyan had started working as a tout for a very large restaurant in one of Golden Sands' busier streets. Stoyan was extremely good at his job because he did not approach people with ready-made phrases, but talked to each one of them individually, making small talk, telling little jokes and anecdotes, answering their questions, and often getting them involved in long conversations, especially when his boss was not present to supervise him. Even tourists who did not end up patronizing the restaurant – and those were the vast majority – went away with smiles on their faces, and not the scowl that was the usual reaction to encountering a tout.

Stoyan worked eight hours a day, split between the lunch hours and dinnertime. His relations with his boss were strained; the restaurant owner complained that Stoyan did not attract enough tourists to the restaurant, but Stoyan argued that he could not force people to enter, and that approaching them too aggressively would just deter them. He pointed out that the competition among the numerous restaurants in Golden Sands was stiff, many of the tourists could not afford to frequently eat out, and besides, a lot of them had either full or half board in their hotels. Stoyan viewed his job as better suited for a younger man. He would have preferred "more sophisticated" work, but considered that it was hard to find at his age. He was not very satisfied with his work, but said that at least it gave him an opportunity to meet people.

In 2004, Stoyan had great plans. He wanted to establish a small tour company with a friend who had been living in Germany and spoke the language fluently. They were planning to buy a minibus and offer trips to sights in the region. He would guide the English-speaking tourists and his partner the German speakers. When I pointed out that there seemed to be quite a lot of these companies and asked if a business like that could be profitable, he told me that some tour company owners made so much money in three months that they could easily live on it for the rest of the year. However, these plans never came to fruition, and three years later, Stoyan still spent the summer season working as a tout in Golden Sands.

Nadezhda: "We Can't Travel Abroad, and the Job Gives Us a Chance to Meet Foreigners"

In 2006, 22-year-old Nadezhda worked as a receptionist in a large hotel on Golden Sands' beachfront. She was living with her parents in Varna in an apartment they owned. Her older brother had just finished his university studies, and was now working for an electronics company. Her father, a former engineer in the navy, and her mother, a former doctor, were both pensioners, but her mother was considering going back to work because their combined pensions were too low for the family to live comfortably. With the earnings from her summer job, Nadezhda wanted to pay for her university studies in management.

After she graduated from high school in 2004, Nadezhda had started looking for a job in Golden Sands. She was invited to a job interview by one hotel and hired as a receptionist. This surprised her because even though she was fluent in German, English, and Russian, she had no prior work experience and did not know anybody working for the hotel. Nadezhda had learned everything she needed to know about her work on the job. She praised the team spirit in her hotel and the people working there, and she clearly appreciated her colleagues' help in training her. She enthusiastically described how at the beginning and at the end of the season all hotel employees had a huge party, and how throughout the season workers went out together on their days off.

Like all of her colleagues at the reception desk, Nadezhda worked for two days in a row, twelve hours a day, the first day on the day shift, the second on the night shift, followed by two days off. Her contract stipulated a salary of 276 levs per month, but she hinted that she received an additional envelope salary. Furthermore, the receptionists often received tips from satisfied guests, and these could amount to an additional 80-120 levs per month in the peak season.

Nadezhda said she loved her job because it gave her an opportunity to meet and talk to foreigners. She told me that the receptionists' rapport with the hotel guests was quite good, especially in the shoulder season. When it was quiet, many guests came down to the reception desk for a chat, and some would even call the hotel at the beginning of the season to ask who would work at the reception that summer. Nadezhda commented favorably on the working conditions in her hotel, even though the salaries were slightly lower than in others. Her only complaint was that working for twelve hours in a row without an opportunity to sit down and rest was very exhausting. But she also pointed out that it was not advisable to complain about that too loudly, since there were always plenty of others willing to do her job.

Tsvyatko: "Now I Have the Position of Manager, and I Am Free to Do Whatever I Like"

When I met him in 2006, Tsvyatko was 25 years old and in his last year of Scandinavian studies at a Sofia university. Throughout the summer, he was living in an apartment his family owned in Varna. Tsvyatko had decided to study philology because he wanted to work for his country's diplomatic corps. Working in tourism was originally just a way for him to earn some extra money that would help pay for his studies. In 2002, he had started working as a hotel porter. The year after that he went to the United States, and upon his return, he got a job as a hotel receptionist in Golden Sands. One of his superiors was impressed with his dedication to work, and since she had landed a job as a general manager in another hotel, and was now gathering a team to work for her, she asked him to join her. He accepted the position of chief receptionist. At some point, the hotel owner talked to him, asked about his plans, and offered him the position of the contracting manager for the next season. For Tsvyatko, that represented a turning point, and when he accepted that job, he made a conscious decision to work at building a career in tourism.

Because he had no formal education in tourism or economics, Tsvyatko strove to educate himself by reading as many books on tourism management as he could. To some degree he could also fall back on the experience and insights he had gained working at the reception. Tsvyatko viewed his job as demanding because he had to negotiate very hard with the tour operators to achieve advantageous terms for his hotel. His language skills certainly helped him with that – he vividly described the astonishment of the representatives of Scandinavian tour operators when they encountered a Bulgarian who was fluent in Swedish and Danish. Tsvyatko said he had originally been attracted to tourism by the opportunity to meet foreigners, talk to them, and learn about their cultures. But in his new position, he soon realized that tourism is first of all a business, and he admitted his initial surprise at the importance of that aspect. He told me that he rather disliked the commercial side of his job, but on the other hand, he cherished the fact that as a manager, he had more freedom in decision making and greater autonomy than someone working in a lower position.

In addition to working as a contracting manager, Tsvyatko informally covered the position of front desk manager as well, and thus he worked extremely long hours. He earned about 800 levs a month even though his

contract only stated the minimum wage of about 180 levs.[42] It was going to expire at the end of the season, and Tsvyatko hoped that it would be renewed as a non-seasonal contract with a higher salary.

The above stories highlight the diversity of jobs available in Golden Sands, and they illustrate some pathways into tourism work, and some of the attitudes people have towards resort work. As the examples of Nadezhda and Karina show, resort work is highly attractive for high school and university students, most of whom are still financially dependent on their families. Students take these jobs as supplementary income, but they also value the opportunities for practicing and improving their language skills and for meeting and interacting with foreigners. From their perspective, the seasonality of resort jobs is actually an advantage, as it enables students to reconcile work with studies.

As the above case studies show, up to 2006, many resort workers worked semi-formally, and their work contracts did not reflect their actual working hours or remuneration. Employers could reduce their contributions to workers' health insurance[43], pension and social security payments this way, as well as the taxes to be paid by both employers and employees. Employees tended to accept this practice without complaining; in fact, it used to be so widespread in all sectors of the economy that some employees regarded it as fairly normal. In the 1990s, the general collapse of state institutions and state control combined with the processes of economic restructuring and privatization that resulted in high rates of unemployment led to an upsurge of the grey economy in Bulgaria. As economic conditions deteriorated, people were happy to get any job at all, and they were certainly not going to complain about working semi-formally.

This situation began to change after 2005. Generally speaking, informal and semi-formal employment is still more prevalent in tourism than in other sectors[44], and it is particularly widespread in the resorts. This is an effect of seasonality, and of the resulting instability of the workforce. Within the tourism industry, however, there has been an overall decline of informal and semi-formal employment as a consequence of tightened state control and the enforcement of existing regulations following the stabilization of Bulgaria's economy and its legal and institutional framework. The increase in

[42] Bulgaria has a statutory minimum wage. In 2007, it was set at about 180 levs, and it had increased to 270 levs in 2012. The average monthly salary was about 430 levs in 2007, and about 750 levs in 2012.

[43] The health insurance of university students is covered by their university.

[44] Several authors have commented on the prevalence of informal employment, the underreporting of salaries, and tax evasion in the global tourism and hospitality industry. See Wahnschaft (1982); Baldacchino (1997); Madden (1999); Vandegrift (2008).

formal work arrangements also reflects the adoption of western European business practices by Bulgarian tourism companies, and the changing labor market situation in the region. Under conditions of labor shortage, highly qualified workers may choose employers who offer them an enforceable work contract. Furthermore, completely informal work is much rarer than semi-formal contracts, and both occur more often among seasonal workers than among managers with non-seasonal jobs. This is due to the fact that it is easier to conceal the actual working hours and remuneration of temporary and seasonal workers, and it is probably easier for the authorities to scrutinize permanent employees than those who are only present for a few weeks of the year.

However, before formality becomes an issue, potential workers first have to find a job in a tourist resort. In the next section, I will describe how people go about finding work in Golden Sands.

"If You Are in the Tourism Industry, You Can Always Find Work!" – Getting a Job in Golden Sands

There are four main ways to get a job in Golden Sands: responding to an advertisement, making an unsolicited application, finding a job via friends and acquaintances, or being re-hired by a previous employer. While the first two involve more formal channels, the latter two are preferred by people with prior experience in the tourism industry or with good "connections".[45]

Hiring for the resorts in the Varna region begins in February-March, when the local newspapers and the relevant internet sites are brimming with advertisements for "help wanted". In Varna, a newspaper called *Pozvanite!* (Phone in!) specializes in the publication of job advertisements and open positions are advertised in the city's employment agencies and on the internet as well. Applicants looking for work and lacking useful connections start their search by browsing these ads. Especially those who seek a job that requires no previous experience have a good chance of finding it by answering one of them. The second way to find a job in the resorts is by offering an unsolicited application. When the hotels start hiring, applicants may go there and leave their resume at the front desk. If the hotel has a vacancy and the resume sparks the manager's interest, the candidate will be invited to an interview. The two remaining options for getting work in the resorts involve "connections". When employers have to fill vacancies, the first thing they

[45] In conversation, people either used the Bulgarian term *vrazki* (connections, links) or paraphrases such as "knowing someone" or "helping someone". For example, Nadezhda, whose story I told above, was surprised that she was hired as a receptionist even though she "did not know" anybody working for the hotel.

usually do is to contact their acquaintances who might be prospective candidates or who might know of someone who has the necessary skills and qualifications. The fourth way of getting a job in Golden Sands has already been mentioned several times in the above stories. It involves either workers contacting the employers they have worked for in the previous season, and asking if their job is available again, or employers seeking to re-hire the previous season's employees. Hence, applicants with prior experience and connections within the industry are at an advantage when looking for a job.[46] All of my interlocutors were adamant that employers prefer hiring workers who are known to them personally or recommended by trustworthy and competent employees or other acquaintances within the industry.

These hiring practices affect the composition of the workforce and the opportunity structure for various groups of employees. Applicants lacking prior experience and industry connections tend to be offered entry-level jobs; thus, many high school and university students are being channeled into these positions. However, they greatly improve their chances of getting the same or a better job in the following season. Students may start building a network of industry acquaintances that might later help them find better jobs. They also start gaining the work experience that is one prerequisite for further advancement. This is illustrated by Tsvyatko who started working as a hotel porter and rapidly advanced through the ranks to become a manager. The evidence suggests that the role of connections increases the further employees climb the career ladder. None of the managers I talked to had gained his or her position by way of responding to a job advertisement. All of them were either promoted within their company, had previous connections with someone from the management team, or were recommended for the job by mutual friends and acquaintances.

The Bulgarian tourism industry is characterized by relatively low entrance barriers, and that is another effect of employers' hiring practices. As the above stories demonstrate, a good command of foreign languages is the only indispensable requirement for work in the resorts. Since many employees are trained on the job and since, except for top management positions, prior work experience is often more highly valued than a formal education in

[46] Several researchers have noted the importance of personal networks or "connections" for both employers seeking to hire staff and employees looking for a job, as well as their impact on staff turnover in the European hospitality industry; see Mars and Nicod (1984); Sosteric (1996); Baldacchino (1997). The existence of strong networks of workers controlling access to open positions is considered an important characteristic of occupational communities; see Bearman (2005).

tourism, it is possible for anyone with a high school degree and foreign language skills to build a career in that field.[47]

The changing labor market conditions have had a marked effect on employers' hiring practices in recent years. As long as the competition for resort jobs was strong, using connections was an important strategy for prospective employees. Under conditions of labor shortage, employers still prefer hiring people known to them personally or recommended by mutual friends and acquaintances. But as it becomes more difficult to find qualified workers in this way, employers increasingly have to resort to using job advertisements. Whereas in the early 2000s, hiring was concluded before the start of the season, and finding a resort job after April-May was nearly impossible, in 2007 there were still many vacancies in May-June, and jobs were available even in the peak season. Indeed, the rates of labor turnover in the middle of the season have increased markedly since skilled employees who are not satisfied with their working conditions can always find a job elsewhere, leaving a vacancy that might be taken up by someone else. Thus, the role of "connections" is changing. Under conditions of high unemployment, they were used by employees to find and keep good jobs. As the competition for qualified labor became fierce, however, "connections" were increasingly used by employers trying to find skilled and reliable employees.

"If You Want to Have Fun, You Should Work in Golden Sands" – The Pros and Cons of Resort Jobs

It is apparent from the previously cited stories and comments of resort workers that they value their jobs for a number of reasons. The opportunity to meet and interact with foreigners was universally considered one of the most important benefits of resort jobs. Even though changes in tourist flows during the 2000s have led to an influx of a type of tourist that resort workers view as problematic, and conflicts and clashes with tourists occur more frequently[48], the workers I talked to still saw their frequent interactions with foreigners as one of the most pleasant aspects of their jobs. Interaction with foreigners was closely related to another feature of tourism work that was often highlighted by my interlocutors: the worker's own personal improvement. Young employees specifically value their jobs because they offer opportunities for improving language skills, getting more confident in deal-

[47] Nevertheless, due to the specific skills and qualities required for tourism work, and especially work in frontline service positions, there is a definite preference for educated members of the middle class (see the conclusion to chapter 3), while at the same time, older workers and members of ethnic minorities are often disadvantaged.

[48] See chapter 4.

ing with foreigners, learning about foreign cultures, and generally contribute positively to their personal development.[49]

Beyond the twinned benefits of interacting with foreigners and improving their own skills, many workers emphasized how much they enjoyed the atmosphere prevailing in Golden Sands. In a resort that is geared towards enjoyment, entertainment, and fun, the boundaries separating "work" from "play" easily become fluid and permeable. Frontline staff may be drawn into the activities of tourists, and a certain amount of bantering, flirting, and fooling around may be an integral part of their jobs. But even those whose work requires a more "serious" demeanor praised the team spirit and the heightened sociability among colleagues in Golden Sands. Workers often go out with their friends and colleagues after work, visiting bars or clubs, or dancing the night away in one of the many discotheques. They have huge parties at the beginning and the end of the season, and many kid around, joke, and laugh in their daily work.[50] Younger employees repeatedly pointed out that they loved working in Golden Sands because it offered so many opportunities for "having fun". As Zhaneta, the manager of a hotel in Varna put it: "Well, if you want to have fun, an interesting job by the sea, lots of parties, and nice colleagues, you should go and work in Golden Sands. There you can make extra tips, meet interesting people, perhaps fall in love. Things like that".

"Being able to help people" is another feature intrinsic to service sector jobs that some resort workers emphasized as something they genuinely enjoyed. Managers also view themselves as problem-solvers, and they often described the dynamics and challenging nature of their work as something they particularly appreciated. Ivanka, the 43-year-old general manager of a hotel in Golden Sands, summarized the advantages of working in the tourism industry as follows:

> I think it is my calling. Tourism is my calling. I really became involved in it accidentally, so to speak. I studied German language and literature first, because I wanted to become a translator. It was really a coincidence that I worked as a receptionist for my first season in Albena, and that I stayed there afterwards. But I like the contact with

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[49] They often used the verb "*realiziram se*" which is similar to the German "*sich verwirklichen*" in its connotations of self-fulfillment, personal development, and a striving to fulfill one's potential; the English "self-realization" captures some of its meanings.

[50] The fluid boundaries between work and play in the hospitality industry have been noted by many researchers. They have been cited as an important factor contributing to the job satisfaction of employees (Marshall 1986); as a manifestation of the prevailing "workplace culture" or "workplace community" (Prus and Irini 1980; Shamir 1981); or, particularly concerning the habit of "unwinding" after work, as facilitating the socialization and training of new workers (Sosteric 1996).

> so many different people. I like that I can learn something about their mentality, their customs and traditions. These mentalities and ways of thinking are so different – I really enjoy that. But I enjoy the contact with the employees as well. I try hard to see if they have personal problems, to help them if I can, to support them. And I love the fact that there are always new people who have a desire to develop in a direction I really like – tourism and the tourism industry. And if the guests have complaints, I like to sit down with them and talk about it because that helps me learn new things as well. About myself, too. To what extent I can react adequately. It is a challenge, immediately to do something about it, to find a solution. And that is something I love, the dynamics. I am not the kind of person who could sit in an office every day from nine o'clock until five o'clock.

Although most resort workers enjoy their jobs and perceive many tangible and intangible benefits to working in Golden Sands, they also have a clear notion of the disadvantages of resort jobs. The most striking of these is seasonality, a feature that was emphasized by many as the major drawback. Nadezhda voiced it this way:

> More and more people visit Golden Sands. That is very good for us because we have work, and it means that in the next few years more jobs will be created. But the drawback is that these jobs exist only for part of the year. They do not exist for the entire year, but just for six months. And after six months we are out, and all the hotels are closed. Right now, I am studying, but of course I need money in the winter too. And there are a lot of people who are not students, who have to support a family. It is a real burden for them to know that the end of the season means no money. That is something that has not changed, unfortunately.

For some workers, seasonality is an incentive for seeking a job in a city-based hotel or restaurant, while others leave the tourism industry altogether and pursue a career in another field. These processes have contributed to a labor shortage in the resorts after 2006. Seasonality does not affect all jobs in Golden Sands; as I have noted above, top management positions are non-seasonal. Moreover, a limited number of hotels and other venues in the resorts operate around the year, employing a team of core workers on non-seasonal contracts.[51] Apart from that, some workers, notably high school and university students, value resort jobs exactly because they are seasonal. These people are looking for a summer job, not for permanent employment. Nevertheless, the seasonality of resort jobs prevents many workers from

[51] See the section on hotel seasonality and its consequences in chapter 3.

choosing a career in tourism, and it is seen as a distinct disadvantage by those who are looking to tourism as their main source of income.

Other drawbacks frequently mentioned by resort workers are the long and often inconvenient working hours. For those workers who commute to and from their workplace, particularly at night when public transport is infrequent, the negative effect of long hours is exacerbated. This feature was often emphasized when workers compared resort jobs to tourism jobs in Varna. Furthermore, employees are required to work on weekends and holidays, and this has repercussions on their social lives. Like Zhaneta, a hotel manager, many also pointed to the frustrations inherent in having to work in the midst of people who are on holiday and have nothing to do but pursue their own leisure.

> The worst thing is that you have to work 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. There is no such thing as holidays, birthdays, or anything else. You are just involved with the hotel all the time. And it is really… I have not had a summer vacation for five years, probably. And at the same time, I am the one who makes the holidays of other people possible. And that is really hard, it is really time-consuming. But at the same time, it's a really nice thing to do.

To summarize, resort workers are aware of the advantages and disadvantages of their jobs. And while the drawbacks, particularly of seasonality, prompt some to look for work in Varna or entirely leave the tourism industry, others choose a career in tourism because the advantages appear to outweigh the disadvantages. However, there is one major factor influencing the job satisfaction of resort workers that I have so far neglected to discuss, namely, the incomes earned in the tourist resorts. They will be considered in the next section.

"We Used to Earn Enough in the Season, but That Has Changed" – The Incomes of Workers in Golden Sands

It is difficult to make general statements about the incomes earned in Varna's tourist resorts. Some jobs are seasonal, others are not. Some workers receive tips, commissions or other benefits, others are on a fixed salary. Resort jobs also comprise an entire spectrum, from the poorly paid, unskilled work of bathroom attendants, housekeepers, or porters to the highly skilled, well-paid work of top managers. Furthermore, the incomes earned in tourism are often just one component of the overall household income.

In Varna, as elsewhere in Bulgaria, many households derive their incomes from a wide variety of sources. Household incomes often include a combination of wages earned in the formal or informal economies; rent

derived from property; profits from small-scale trading activities; social benefits like pensions, child allowances, or unemployment benefits; or financial support from parents or from family members living abroad. Hence, the money earned by a worker in Golden Sands may be just one part of the overall income of his or her household. The following example will illustrate this point.

Zlatko: "Tourism Was More Profitable Twenty Years Ago!"

In 2004, when I first met him, Zlatko was in his early fifties and had been working as a lifeguard in Golden Sands for many years. He sometimes nostalgically recalled the "golden years" of tourism in the 1980s, when the resort was visited by a "better class of tourists" and when his job offered many additional benefits, the most important being the opportunity to obtain hard currency and consumer goods from western European visitors.[52] Spending his days lounging at the beach and talking to tourists, he knew and befriended many of the regular guests of the resort. He often went out with them after work, and had even visited some of them in their homes in western Europe.

Zlatko worked in Golden Sands every year from May to mid-October. Lifeguards work in teams of two, each team manning one of the stations. One of them must be always present between nine o'clock in the morning and five o'clock in the evening, but they otherwise have a lot of autonomy in their job. For example, when it is raining, they may leave early or not work at all because after even a short downpour the beach is usually empty of tourists. Days-off are negotiated with one's partner; the important thing is that when the beach is crowded, there is always at least one lifeguard on duty.

Zlatko was also an artist, specializing in the crafting of religious icons. As Zlatko described it, it was in the off-season when "his muse" came to him. In the winter months, he worked in a small studio in his apartment. According to Zlatko, it was no longer possible to make a living as an artist, let alone as an iconographer. Bulgarians in general and the clerics in particular did not have the money to buy icons, and as a result, the craft had declined after 1990. Zlatko's buyers were mostly foreigners, many of whom he had first met in his capacity as a lifeguard. He sold about one icon a month,

[52] He told me that in the 1980s, the lifeguards had informally divided up the beach, each lifeguard having his own sector where only he was allowed to approach tourists with offers of friendship, guidance and "services" like exchanging currency. See also the section on *glarusi* in chapter 4.

earning 300-600 levs depending on the quality of the work, his own relationship with the buyer, and the buyer's financial means.

Zlatko was married and had a teenage son. His wife held a job as a health inspector, while his son still went to high school. In addition to his lifeguard salary, that of his wife's, and the income from his craft, Zlatko also received a small pension. In the 1980s, he had worked as a miner for some time and thus become eligible for a pension at the age of 45.

Zlatko and his family owned their apartment in a pre-fabricated high-rise block in one of Varna's newer neighborhoods. In 2002, the family had bought a second apartment for a sum that at the time was roughly equivalent to 10,000 euros. Two years later, the apartment was already worth 30,000 euros and its value continued to increase in the following years.[53] However, the family had decided not to sell it but to transfer it to their son once he wanted to establish his own household. In the meantime, it was rented out to a Bulgarian family. Zlatko's household thus derived its income from multiple sources, only two of which were waged work. By Zlatko's own report, the family could live "well enough" on their aggregate income and did not have to worry about money.

While Zlatko's household was financially independent, the next example is an illustration of the circumstances of the many young people coming to Varna as university students. For most of them, the financial support they receive from their families comprises the largest share of their overall income.

Maya: "Varna is an Expensive City, but I Chose to Live Here Anyway"

In the summer of 2006, Maya was 22 years old and studying for a BA degree in tourism at the University of Economics in Varna. She came from Sliven, a town in central Bulgaria, but had been living in Varna for the three years she had studied there. Her mother was a primary school teacher and her father, who had formerly worked in the construction industry, had quit his job a few years previously to take up farming on the family's land, growing vegetables and fruits for their own consumption and selling the surplus. Maya's parents paid her living expenses and tuition fees; they additionally supported Maya's aged grandparents with money and agricultural products, and with household help.

When she had first arrived in Varna, Maya had been lucky to find an apartment close to the university. It had two rooms and a bathroom, and was

[53] See also chapter 10 on the development of the property market in Varna.

shared by four female students. Since it did not have a kitchen, they had to do all their cooking on a gas stove on the balcony if they did not want to face the costs of eating out. When Maya first arrived in 2003, the monthly lease for the apartment had been 200 levs, but by 2006 it cost 300 levs. Still, the four of them considered themselves fortunate since the rents for similar apartments in the neighborhood were even higher. They attributed the fact that their lease was at the lower end of the market to the excellent rapport they had established with their landlady.[54]

To increase her budget, Maya spent her summer breaks working for a travel agency in Golden Sands. The agency had seven offices, five of them in Golden Sands and two in the surrounding resorts. Maya had found her job in the spring of 2003 through an advertisement; since then she had returned to work every season. In the summer of 2006, Maya worked 13 hours a day, selling tickets for day-long and half-day excursions, renting out cars, giving information to tourists, and when business was slow – handing out information leaflets to those passing by outside the office. She earned 25 levs a day which she viewed as an average salary for that type of job. Maya's monthly income from her job amounted to 600-650 levs, which was above the national average. So in the three months of her summer break Maya earned a considerable sum of money that helped cover her expenses and reduced the strain on her family's budget. Apart from the financial benefits, Maya liked her work because she could meet foreigners and talk to them, and she was very satisfied with the working conditions and the way she was treated by her boss.

The seasonality of resort work is not an issue for youths like Maya who focus on their studies for most of the year and only work during the summer break. It is, however, problematic for those resort workers who must support themselves and their family on a seasonal salary. Older tourism workers wistfully told me that in the 1990s, the incomes that could be earned in the resorts were so high, and the costs of living in the city so low, that it was possible to live comfortably throughout the year on the money earned in the summer season. But for most resort workers, these times are long gone. Therefore, it is the goal of those who aspire to a career in tourism to secure a non-seasonal job.

The recent changes on the labor market have contributed to the shift in the perception of the salaries paid in the resorts. In my data, I found that until 2006, workers valued resort jobs for offering above-average incomes, but from 2007 they began to note that even though resort incomes might be on par with, or higher than those offered for tourism jobs in Varna, or for work

[54] See also the section on rented apartments in chapter 9.

in other sectors, they are nevertheless seasonal and not enough to compensate for the months of unemployment in the off-season.

The following excerpt from a conversation with Zhaneta summarizes these developments:

> Zhaneta: In the summer, Varna's unemployment rate is two per cent. That means the only people who are not working right now are adults who do not want to work. At the moment, the economy is growing very, very rapidly, and there is a great demand for employees. A couple of years ago, if you wanted a job, you had to compete for it with many others. But now, employers offering a job do not know who to hire because nobody applies. There is a huge demand for employees right now.
>
> C.B.: Why is that so?
>
> Zhaneta: Well, I think the first reason is that previously people were really, really poor. They were even eager to clean the streets for 200 levs or so. Now, they have more money. When you tell them, "I have a job, I am offering you a salary of 300 levs", they say, "Oh, no, that's not for me! I want to work in an office, I do not want to work hard, and I want a huge salary!". That is the attitude of young people today![55] And secondly, the economy is growing, many companies are involved, and they all need employees.
>
> C.B.: Would you say the salaries in tourism are lower than in other sectors?
>
> Zhaneta: Yes, I think so.
>
> C.B.: Is that one of the reasons why people prefer to work in other industries?
>
> Zhaneta: Yes. But on the other hand, they like tourism because they know there are extra benefits such as tips, and other ways to make some extra money.

In the following section, I will describe how the incomes of resort workers and the changes in the relative structure of salaries are related to the changing images of tourism work.

Exploitative, Degrading, and Poorly Paid, or a "Privilege"? – Images of Work in the Hospitality Industry

What struck me most when I was reading the English-language sociological and economic literature on hospitality industry work was the low prestige ascribed to these jobs. It is unclear to what extent these academic texts

[55] It has to be mentioned here that Zhaneta herself was 21 years old.

reflect popular views, and whether or not their appraisal applies equally to the entire spectrum of hospitality industry jobs. The fact remains, however, that the overwhelming impression is that of a very poor image, so much so that some authors even speak of "occupational stigma" (Wildes 2007). The following excerpt from a widely cited study of hospitality industry employment summarizes the prevalent attitudes:

> On the basis of the evidence reviewed in this book, a sufficient conclusion would be that despite a general lack of wide-ranging empirical data, there is some measure of agreement that hotel and catering work is largely exploitative, degrading, poorly paid, unpleasant, insecure and taken as a last resort or because it can be tolerated in the light of wider commitments and constraints. This is not to deny that there are many employed in a whole variety of work tasks who value their position and gain much satisfaction from their employment. Anyone who has even a moderate acquaintance with the industry is familiar with the many workers at all levels, "the addicts", who work long hours in poor conditions for relatively little financial reward and for whom criticism of the industry is regarded as heretical. It remains to be demonstrated however as to whether these happy circumstances apply to anything more than a minority of the workforce (Wood 1992: 154).[56]

From the discussion in this chapter it should be clear that a vast majority of workers in Golden Sands would not agree with such sweeping assessments of hospitality work as generally exploitative, poorly paid, or taken as a last resort. They value their jobs for the opportunities they offer to meet and communicate with foreigners, and to help people, for the pleasant working environment and the team spirit among co-workers, for the many opportunities for "having fun", and, especially in the case of managers, for the varied, dynamic and challenging nature of their work. This does not mean that workers accept these jobs uncritically or consider criticism of the industry "heretical". On the contrary, especially seasonality and the long and inconvenient hours were frequently cited as the main drawbacks of resort jobs. The incomes earned in the resorts are seasonal, and they may not be as high as those available in some other sectors in Varna, but they are still significantly above the national average and the average for the Varna region. Furthermore, work satisfaction is not dependent on income alone. Students, in particular, often emphasized that they did not "work for the money", but because they wanted to meet people, have fun, and improve their language skills. Of course, for those who are financially self-supporting, the remunera-

[56] See also the overview by Guerrier and Adib (2002).

tion of their jobs is an important consideration. I would maintain, however, that it is not the only factor affecting worker's attitudes towards their work, and that the perceived advantages of resort jobs significantly influence how employees view their jobs and the satisfaction that they derive from them.

A study by Yasemin Besen of teenage employment in suburban America came to a similar conclusion (Besen 2006). Besen studied the experiences of teenagers working in two suburban coffee shops. The jobs these teenagers held are viewed by many scholars as highly undesirable "bad jobs", characterized by poor working conditions, long hours, and low pay. As typical "McJobs", they involved de-skilled, standardized, and routinized labor that left no room for employees' autonomy, creativity, or initiative (see Ritzer 2008). The teenagers, however, saw their jobs in a completely different light. They defined them as "being fun", and viewed them as an opportunity for socializing with friends and acquaintances, for meeting new people, and for expressing their individuality and creativity. The coffee shop served as their meeting place, a center for the dissemination of important information, and as a space where they were free of adult supervision. Coming from affluent families, these teenagers were not dependent on the income derived from their work, and hence the money they earned was only of secondary importance to them. Besen concluded:

> situations that appear [to analysts] to be clearly unequal and exploitative may not necessarily be experienced that way by the persons involved. Daily experience of work is socially constructed – that is, created through people's interactions and interpretations. Teenagers act based on their perceptions of the job: in this case, these jobs are not perceived as "jobs" but rather as social spaces of interaction, devoid of external adult supervision, where they feel they have discretion and control. These findings regarding the suburban teenage workers of the coffee shop provide a necessary corrective to some of the taken-for-granted objectivist perceptions of work (Besen 2006: 335f.).

The same may be said for the workers in Golden Sands; in addition to enabling them to earn money, they view their jobs as providing them with opportunities for social interactions with colleagues and foreign guests, for improving themselves, and for having fun.

Similar findings were reported in a study by Edith Szivas and Michael Riley, who analyzed labor mobility into tourism during the postsocialist economic transformation in Hungary (Szivas and Riley 1999). They found that employees viewed tourism jobs as very attractive. Those who had moved into the industry from other sectors were satisfied with their new work; they reported having greater job security, better career prospects,

higher incomes, improved living standards, and a higher social status than in their previous work. Consequently, Szivas and Riley concluded that although tourism served as a refuge industry for some workers, it was a first choice for others. Thus, it appears that generalized statements about the "bad" character of jobs in the hospitality industry are inappropriate; researchers should take into account the local context and the experiences and perceptions of the workers themselves.

Apart from the allegedly "largely exploitative, degrading, poorly paid, unpleasant, insecure" nature of work in the hospitality industry, its workers' "deviance and marginality" is another much discussed topic.[57] Many scholars view the two as linked: hotel and catering jobs are undesirable, and thus they attract those whose "deficient" education, skills, work experience, or personal issues prevent them from entry into more prestigious sectors. They also believe that workers are "out of phase with the rest of society" due to their working hours which gives rise to a sub-culture rejecting the norms of outsiders. Finally, the workforce is mainly composed of immigrants, young people, and women; "marginals" in terms of nationality, age, or gender. Additionally, people "running away from something" are often attracted by the living-in arrangements of hotels. Together, these factors are said to facilitate the development of a workplace community and a community subculture with its own norms and rules of behavior.

However, these explanations cannot be applied to the tourist resorts in the Varna region. It is true that many resort workers are "out of phase" insofar as they often have to work when others have their free time, and they cannot go on vacations when others do. This, however, does not result in them being fundamentally "out of phase" with the rest of society for several reasons. First of all, most resort jobs are seasonal, and when the season is over, resort workers return to their schools or universities; they take other jobs; or they stay at home. Hence, even if their jobs make it harder to share the social lives of their families and friends, they resume these activities in the off-season. Those who have non-seasonal resort jobs, such as managers, have more regular working hours, they do not usually work night shifts, they normally get at least one day off per week, and in the off-season, they return to a normal workday of eight hours.

Being "out of phase" with the rest of society, a blending of work and leisure, marginality, and strong ties among members have been described by a number of scholars as characteristic features of occupational communi-

[57] For example, Roebuck and Frese (1976a, 1976b); Prus and Vassilakopoulos (1979); Prus and Irini (1980).

ties.[58] According to John Van Maanen and S.R. Barley, an occupational community is a "group of people who consider themselves to be engaged in the same sort of work, whose identity is drawn from the work, who share with one another a set of values, norms and perspectives that apply to but extend beyond work-related matters and whose social relationships meld work and leisure" (Van Maanen and Barley 1992: 281). Members of occupational communities tend to see themselves in terms of their occupational roles. They share a common work-based self-image; they have work-based friends, interests and hobbies; and new members are socialized to share their attitudes and values.

It is questionable whether the workers in the hospitality industry in the Varna region can be said to form an occupational community. On the one hand, strong ties and a blending of work and leisure are indeed prevalent. As I have shown, employees' connections play a vital role in their search for jobs and in the development of their careers, and many resort workers do socialize with their colleagues outside work, with some of these co-workers turning into friends. In fact, I have met some exceptionally well-connected individuals, usually higher-ranking managers with a long career in tourism, who knew virtually everybody of significance in the sector. On the other hand, it is doubtful whether resort workers share common values, norms, and perspectives beyond work-related matters, and they certainly do not form a sub-culture rejecting the norms of outsiders. While many of them develop and maintain close personal relationships with their colleagues, the workers in resorts like Golden Sands are at the same time deeply embedded in social relations outside their workplace and they share the norms of "mainstream society". This is even more true for seasonal workers, especially those who view their work as a one-time, temporal, summer job. I would thus conclude that there is a certain sense of community among resort workers that is based on the shared characteristics of work in the tourist resorts, and the issues related to it. It is more pronounced among non-seasonal workers and those who have chosen a career in the hospitality industry, but relatively weak among seasonal, temporary workers. However, due to the wide variety of jobs in the resorts, each of which involves a whole host of specific demands, skills, and challenges, and because of the transitory character of parts of the workforce, it would not be justified to speak of an occupational community of resort workers.

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[58] For overviews, see Salaman (1971); Van Maanen and Barley (1992). Occupational communities have been observed in a wide variety of occupations, for example among engineers (Bechky 2003); musicians (Becker 1951); fishermen (Horobin 1957); and software engineers (Marschall 2002). On occupational communities in the hospitality industry, see Riley, Lockwood, et al. (1998); Lee-Ross (2004); Sandiford and Seymour (2007).

Concerning the composition of the workforce as a reason for the supposed marginality and deviance of workers in the hospitality industry, the Bulgarian coastal resorts do indeed employ high percentages of women and young people. This is a consequence of labor market conditions before and after 1990, of the cultural and social capital these groups possess (Bourdieu 1986), and of the demands of the industry itself.

In Bulgaria, work in the hospitality industry per se is not seen as gender-specific, and resort workers emphatically denied that resort jobs are somehow particularly suited to women. Workers did point to specific jobs that were viewed as gendered; housekeeping, for example, is considered as an exclusively female job, while men are thought to be the more proficient bartenders or cooks, although a woman holding such a job is considered perfectly acceptable and not unusual. There was general agreement, however, that the majority of resort workers are, indeed, women.

The feminization of Bulgaria's hospitality industry is the result of long-term processes described in detail by Kristen Ghodsee (Ghodsee 2003, 2005). Under socialism, women were strongly encouraged to become part of the labor force, resulting in socialist countries having some of the highest rates of female participation in the workforce worldwide. Female workers were channeled into the service industries, among others, and as a result, the Bulgarian tourism industry could be viewed as a female niche on the labor market. Workers who were allowed to work in the country's international tourist resorts were highly educated, proficient in foreign languages, and they received extensive training in their respective fields. In the resorts, they had regular contact with Western foreigners, and they had access to hard currencies and to much-coveted Western consumer goods.

Ghodsee found that after 1990, the knowledge and skills of these female workers became highly valued resources. They had a more extensive knowledge of "the West" than most of their compatriots; they spoke Western languages, knew about Western business practices, and had contacts to Western foreigners. In other words, they possessed large amounts of valued cultural and social capital that others lacked. Consequently, in the 1990s, when unemployment peaked and many of the men who had lost their jobs in other sectors of the economy were competing for work in spheres that were formerly considered as female, these female resort workers kept their jobs and were not squeezed out by men pushing into the field. Since their hard currency savings were inflation-proof, many resort workers did not lose all their money to inflation, and some of them successfully started their own businesses, while others kept their jobs in the resorts where their skills and their knowledge were in high demand.

Many of the resort workers who had received their education and training in socialism still held higher management positions in the 2000s. With their long experience in the industry and their extended networks, these women are highly valued employees and the teachers and role-models of many younger resort workers. Their strong presence in the upper levels of management prevents the creation of a so-called glass ceiling; younger women's advancement is not blocked because of gender discrimination, and "old boys networks" inhibiting women's careers do not exist.

According to my findings, the long-term processes resulting in a high share of female workers in the resorts are reinforced by the demands of the tourism industry itself. Employers actually prefer hiring young female employees for frontline positions, as they are viewed as having an aptitude for emotional and aesthetic labor. Young women are considered as more attractive and pleasing, and employers hope that their presence will help attract more guests. The women, in turn, gladly accept these jobs (which are often tipped) because they offer them an opportunity to earn a very good income (as in the case of waitresses, for example), or because they are seen as a possible starting point for a future career in tourism (as for receptionists).[59]

Similarly, the strong presence of young people in the resorts is a result of their structural position on the labor market, their cultural capital as well as of the demands of the industry. Many resort jobs are uniquely suited to young people who are still students. Because of their seasonality and the low level of skills and experience they require, they are not attractive to older and more experienced workers. Students, however, are often looking for entry-level summer jobs, and they find them in the resorts. High school and university students also possess cultural capital that is much in demand in the tourism industry; namely, they speak foreign languages and they have computer skills. And finally, employers often prefer hiring young people, especially for frontline positions. Again, they are considered as more attractive and, in a resort like Golden Sands that has a reputation for its vibrant nightlife and the many opportunities for "having fun", young people who get into the spirit of things are seen as the group of employees best matching this image. Thus, far from being marginal workers ending up in undesirable jobs, the strong presence of young and/or female resort employees can be explained by long-term processes on the labor market, the demands of the tourism industry, and by the opportunities resort jobs afford these workers.

But what do the resort workers think about the image and prestige of their jobs? From the discussion in this chapter, it should have become apparent that a general answer to this question is impossible. First of all, the

[59] See also chapter 7.

tourist resorts in the Varna region offer a wide variety of jobs, some of which have a distinct position in the status hierarchy of jobs, while others have a rather fuzzy image if any at all. Secondly, the image and prestige of a job is in the eye of the beholder, that is it is influenced by the aspects that are valued or disliked by (potential) employees. For example, young people who value sociability and "having fun" view working in Golden Sands, a resort geared towards excitement and entertainment, as very prestigious. This was brought home by Zhelka, a receptionist in an apart-hotel in her early twenties. When I asked her about the pros and cons of working in Golden Sands, she exclaimed: "One advantage is that you work in Golden Sands! It's a privilege!". Thirdly, the image and prestige of resort jobs are by no means immutable. As I have demonstrated, changes in the local economic conditions and on the labor market have brought about a shift in the perception of resort jobs among the local workforce.

For the majority of resort workers, their jobs are neither "exploitative, degrading and poorly paid" nor "a privilege". Instead the truth lies somewhere between these two extremes. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, Bulgarian workers value jobs in the tourist resorts for a variety of reasons, and although the perception of tourism is changing, the industry is still seen by many as providing desirable summer jobs offering a good income, opportunities to socialize and have fun, or as representing an attractive field in which one may build a long-term career.

Chapter 3
Resort Privatization, Modernization, and the Hotel Sector: "Our Hotels Are the Best!"

For the Bulgarian tourism industry, the year 1989 represented a watershed. The Bulgarian Black Sea coast had a long tradition of mass tourism by that time, but the industry experienced decisive changes in the following decade. Under socialism, the sector had been state-run, state-organized, and state-controlled. It was dominated by the Balkantourist Corporation, a state monopoly that in 1989 controlled over 65 per cent of the country's hotels and 82 per cent of all hotel beds, and employed about 36,000 people. The large tourist resorts like Golden Sands and Albena were semi-autonomous parts of Balkantourist. Each resort was a unit with its own property, funds, and decision-making powers. However, their currency and investment plans were decided by the Bulgarian Association of Tourism and Recreation (BATR), a government department directly subordinate to the Council of Ministers. Furthermore, Balkantourist was responsible for negotiating foreign contracts and managing the Bulgarian tour operators abroad. And finally, like all sectors of the Bulgarian economy, tourism was subject to economic planning. The plans and their targets were set by the planning authority and handed down to BATR, which was then responsible for the distribution of the targets to its individual members, the resorts among them, and for helping the members to fulfill their plan targets. Thus, on the micro-level, resorts such as Golden Sands and Albena were managed as individual units, but they were ultimately owned and controlled by the state (Pearlman 1990; Harrison 1993).[60]

This changed after the collapse of the socialist state and with the privatization of the Bulgarian economy. The transition from a plan-based to a market-based economy was a huge task that had to be accomplished in the midst of political and social upheavals, with hardly any recourse to previous

[60] On tourism in Bulgaria in the socialist period, see also Diney (1978); Enev (1984); Carter (1991).

experience and in the knowledge that in the short run at least, the negative impacts on the population would be severe. In the tourism sector, the goal was the rapid privatization of existing assets, preferably to reputable foreign investors. Before that was possible, however, a number of choices had to be made. What would be the basic units to be privatized? Resorts? Parts of resorts? Or individual properties and plots of land? What privatization method should be chosen? Sale? Auction? Voucher privatization? Employee-management buyout? And on what criteria should these decisions be based; what were the goals to be achieved? Generating as much revenue as possible for the state coffers? Ensuring the long-term sustainability of the destination? Maintaining present employment levels? The decision-making processes were often complex and opaque as the actors involved in them were governed by a wide variety of motives and represented disparate interests, and many of the available options were contradictory (see also Ghodsee 2005).

In this chapter, I will focus on the consequences of the choices made during privatization and the trajectories of resort development that followed. In order to illuminate the depth and scope of the effects of privatization, I will describe two resorts in the Varna region where it occurred in radically different ways. In the first section, I will take a closer look at Golden Sands where hotels were privatized as individual units. I will describe the privatization and modernization process in that resort and its ramifications for hotels' relations with foreign tour operators, the subsequent tourist flows, and the reputation of the resort. After that, I will turn to Albena, a resort that was privatized as an undivided whole, and has since been under central ownership and management. I will show how central resort management offers many advantages concerning efficiency and profitability but may, at the same time, be detrimental to labor relations. In Albena, there is a deep rift between resort workers and management.[61] In the concluding sections I compare the characteristic features of both resorts and point to their similarities and differences.

[61] I had not originally planned to do research in Albena, but after noting that workers in Golden Sands consistently compared and contrasted the two resorts, I decided to spend a few weeks there in the fall of 2008. Unfortunately, only one member of Albena's resort management team agreed to talk to me. My perceptions and interpretations of the attitudes of Albena's management should thus be treated with caution. I feel justified in including them here nevertheless since they were corroborated in many informal talks with "ordinary" resort employees as well as a number of published materials and sources on the internet.

"It Was like a Gold Rush!" – The Privatization of Golden Sands

The privatization period in Golden Sands can be roughly divided into two phases. The first, from 1991 to about 1997, was characterized by the reorganization and decentralization of the entire Bulgarian tourism industry which affected Golden Sands as well. The organizational groundwork for resort privatization was laid in this phase, but the majority of hotels still remained in the hands of the state. The majority of privatization deals took place in the second phase, from 1997 to 2000-01, when these hotels where acquired by private companies and individuals.

At the beginning of the 1990s, both government experts and Western advisors believed that tourism would be a priority sector in the transition to a market economy. They assumed that tourism would make a major contribution to the national economy, and help to service Bulgaria's foreign debt with its foreign currency earnings. The decentralization of tourism began in 1990 when BATR was transformed into the Committee for Tourism. In 1991, the entire structure of industry was in the process of reorganization. The state-owned tourism enterprises were split up into distinct economic units and their properties distributed to some 130 newly created joint stock companies; the majority of the shares in these companies were initially retained by the state (Harrison 1993: 527-32).

At this early stage, it was assumed that Bulgaria's resorts would be more attractive to investors if they were split. Kristen Ghodsee has described the process:

> Not only would smaller pieces be easier to sell and generate more revenue for the state budget, smaller pieces also meant more privatization transactions, which equaled more opportunities for bribes. The process of deciding how resorts were to be broken up was utterly opaque. Ministry bureaucrats assigned the value of the individual pieces and could adjust the prices upwards or downwards for a fee. An investor could buy a state enterprise valued at five million dollars for two million dollars if he paid a one-million-dollar bribe. The decisions of the privatization agency were discretionary, and minute procedural errors could be used to disqualify bidders who were not "favored" investors (Ghodsee 2005: 129).

Due to the high incidence of corruption, and because Bulgaria was generally viewed as a risky location for foreign investments, the coveted investments by Western tourism companies never materialized. The Bulgarian economy was in a state of collapse in the mid-1990s, and it also turned out to be extremely difficult to find legitimate domestic investors. The only ones who could afford to buy existing hotels or build new ones were the so-called mafia – companies or individuals who in the 1990s started to accumulate

large amounts of money in illegitimate ways such as extortion, racketeering, prostitution, the smuggling of embargoed goods into former Yugoslavia, or the "secret" or "hidden" privatization of state assets. These groups saw their investments in the tourism sector as a way to legalize their money and their businesses, and to ensure future profits. At the same time, the privatization of Bulgaria's tourism industry was also used as a way to reward individuals or groups close to highly-placed officials and members of the political elite.[62]

In Golden Sands, only a small number of hotels could be sold in that first phase. Until 1997, the majority of hotels were still state-owned. These hotels had to cope with severe problems. Most of them were run-down which made it hard for them to compete with newly-built or recently privatized and renovated hotels operated by the private sector. It was abundantly clear, though, that the state would not invest in their modernization. Their managers also had to cope with a sharp drop in tourist numbers and the breakup of the resort's marketing and contracting structures.

Tourist flows changed profoundly in the 1990s. The dramatic slump in the numbers of tourists from the former Eastern Bloc, the traditional clientele of Bulgaria's coastal resorts, and the complete collapse of domestic tourism coincided with stagnating or decreasing numbers of visitors from western Europe (Bachvarov 1997a; Kasatschka and Marinov 2003). The authority of Golden Sands' marketing and contracting department that under socialism had been responsible for negotiating contracts with tour operators was reduced as a result of the decentralization of Bulgarian tourism and the beginning of privatization. Hotel managers were forced for the first time to independently negotiate with tour operators. While most of these managers had been working in the Bulgarian tourism industry for many years, they did not have any experience with contract negotiations in the context of a free market (Pearlman 1990; Harrison 1993; Ghodsee 2005). The difficulty of their situation was exacerbated by a reduction of their negotiating power: while a marketing department responsible for an entire resort has a relatively strong position in negotiations with tour operators, the position of the marketing and contracting manager of a single hotel is much weaker. As a result of these simultaneous processes – the drop in foreign demand for Bulgarian

[62] Similar processes occurred in the privatization of the tourism industries in other former socialist countries. In their analysis of tourism during the postsocialist transition in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Williams and Baláž (2000) found that in Slovakia, foreign investments in tourism were sparse due to the country's poor reputation as an investment location. The majority of tourism assets were thus acquired by domestic investors who were often individuals and companies close to the ruling party. See Ghodsee (2005: 127-35) on the problems associated with the various forms of privatization in Bulgaria, and a description of the privatization of Sunny Beach and Albena.

holidays, the chaos and uncertainty associated with the beginning of the privatization process, the resort's aging hotel infrastructure, and the growing competition from private hotels – most of Golden Sands' state-run hotels experienced severe problems in that period.

In 1997, hotel privatization in Golden Sands began in earnest. Only a few hotels were privatized through employee-management buyouts[63]; most hotels in the resort were auctioned off or sold. When the process was completed in 2000, only the resort infrastructure and six hotels remained in the hands of Golden Sands plc, the successor of the former state firm. Krum, a destination manager for a large tour operator, summarized the privatization process as follows:

> Well, before, that is, under Communism, before the changes, the entire tourism infrastructure, the hotels, everything, belonged to Balkantourist. Balkantourist was the state company responsible for the tourism industry. After the changes, the resorts were transformed into separate joint stock companies, and that was when the privatization process started. These joint stock companies sold the hotels they owned and the attendant infrastructure to private investors. They used auctions for that. There was an auction and… . Well, of course, the first ones who had the right to choose the best objects were the members of the executive board of the joint stock company. It was like that! And then, little by little, the hotels were sold, and the empty plots as well. And then, the rapid development of our resorts started in about 2000. The old joint stock companies were left only with the general infrastructure, the public infrastructure, that is, streets, underground facilities like the water supply and sewerage, and a few hotels they kept for themselves.

The privatization of the Bulgarian tourism industry led to an influx of "outsiders" into the sector. Most of the new hotel owners had no professional experience in the tourism industry, as Gavrail, a spokesman for a trade organization explained: "In the beginning, some owners came from other parts of Bulgaria, from regions without tourism. And they believed they could tell their people what to do, they thought tourism was like any other business. But in tourism you need certain skills and qualities; it takes more than just money. You have to know about service!". In order to run their newly-acquired hotels professionally and profitably, these owners had to hire "experts", that is the former employees of Balkantourist who had received a formal education and extensive training, and possessed significant experience in the tourism sector. Many former state employees thus found jobs in

[63] In this form of privatization deal, the company – in this case the hotel – is purchased by its managers and employees.

the private sector, and a de-professionalization of the Bulgarian tourism industry was avoided.[64]

However, there were still clashes between new hotel owners and their management. Owners frequently attempted to cut the operational costs of their hotels. The employees of privately-owned hotels often received lower salaries and fewer benefits than their counterparts in state-run hotels, and "mafia-owned" hotels in particular had a reputation for informally employing staff.[65] Practices like these led to conflicts between owners and management as managers were well aware that low salaries and high rates of staff turnover resulted in a poor service quality. These issues were particularly pertinent in the first few years after privatization; in recent years, the increasingly tough competition for customers, the decline of the informal sector, and changing labor market dynamics have led to a decline of informal employment.

Another issue of contention between owners and management was and in some cases still is the extent to which owners should be involved in running a hotel. According to managers, owners often tried to directly interfere in the minutiae of hotel operations instead of leaving the operational details to the management. Hotel managers often complained about owners seemingly incapable of trusting management to do its job or demanding things that were either impossible or damaging the reputation of the hotel in the long run.[66]

Despite the numerous rumors about certain hotels in Golden Sands being owned by "the mafia", hotel managers in the mid-2000s cared little about how owners actually acquired the money they invested. A common sentiment was something along the lines of "It is unfortunate, yes, but as long as

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[64] See also Ghodsee (2005 chap. 4) who gives a more detailed description of these processes. Legal requirements concerning the education, training and language skills of hotel mangers contributed to the perpetuation of socialist-era professional standards and to the prevention of de-skilling.

[65] See also Ghodsee (2005 chap. 4).

[66] One example is the practice of overbooking which is widespread in the hotel sector. Managers walk a fine line between trying to achieve maximum occupancy rates and overshooting the mark by accepting too many bookings. Some hotel owners apparently demand an occupancy rate of a constant one hundred per cent throughout the peak season. That is impossible to achieve because the arrival of new guests depends on incoming charter flights and on the success of tour operators in marketing the hotel. If the tour operators sell fewer rooms than originally anticipated (or if customers fail to show up), the hotel will have free capacities. Front desk managers try to compensate by overbooking accordingly; hence, peak season occupancy rates fluctuate around 90-95 per cent. However, if owners pressure them into accepting too many bookings, some guests will inevitably have to be sent to other hotels. In the long run, that will tarnish the hotel's reputation among guests and tour operators alike; the latter will most likely look for partners elsewhere.

they let us do our job it does not really matter who they are or how they got the money". A more detailed comment on this issue was provided by Ivanka, the general manager of a hotel in Golden Sands. Ivanka also lamented the fact that privatization procedures were not transparent and raised the issue of taxes and tax evasion.

C.B.: What do you think of the rumors about "the mafia" owning hotels in Golden Sands?

Ivanka: Well, I think we cannot really say any more that we have a mafia here, and that we are scared of it. That has changed in the last few years. At least, that is my impression. It has faded away. There was a time, in the 1990s, when people were being blackmailed, when there was extortion and racketeering. If you had a small company that did a good business you were forced to pay certain people in the underworld. Things like that. That sort of thing does not happen anymore. Or maybe I just do not perceive it like that anymore.

I know many of the colleagues working in the hotels here. I know almost all of them because I have been here in Golden Sands for all these years. And I can tell you that most of these people are professionals in their area of expertise – hotel management and so on. But ownership is another matter entirely. It is one thing how a hotel is run, but who owns it is an entirely different matter. If the owner wants to run a normal business, and hires people who are professionals, then I think it is all right. Well, it is unfortunate that it was bought this way, that a person like that owns it. But the important thing is what you are aspiring to, whether you are striving to offer good service, attract more guests, and improve the reputation of Bulgaria, of Varna, and of Golden Sands as destinations. I am not really sure who owns what, and you cannot really look that up anywhere. There are many rumors, that is true, but most of the colleagues working in the hotels here know what they are doing. And from that perspective… .

C.B.: So you are saying it does not matter how the owners acquired the money as long as they let management work professionally and do not interfere.

Ivanka: From that perspective, yes. The taxes are another issue. As long as you are really paying them… . Well, that is a matter of accountancy. We do not know how these things are handled in other hotels. I can only talk about our hotel, I do not know about the others. As long as you pay those taxes so the economy is being stimulated and there is development… .

> Of course, it is a pity that some hotels have been bought with dirty money, but is that really true? Who can tell? It was never brought to light. Rumors are one thing, but the truth is unfortunately something that is hard to… . Something you have not seen with your own eyes is difficult to… I do not know. Perhaps it was a mistake of the Ministry of Economics. After the privatization, there were no records saying something like, "This hotel was bought by that person for that amount of money". That is information you can only get from your friends in the industry. In fact, there is a kind of registry, a place where you can see what company owns a hotel. But I think nowhere in the whole world could you find out from where the money for such a deal really came. I do not think that is a specifically Bulgarian problem.

After privatization foreign tourism companies began to operate in Bulgaria. German tour operators, in particular, showed a great interest in the coastal resorts, although they were still hesitant to invest directly by buying or building hotels of their own. Instead, they mostly chose to offer the Bulgarian owners loans for the modernization of their recently-acquired hotels. In return, the hotel owners would exclusively work with these tour operators for a certain number of years, keeping prices stable in that period.

Krum delineated the modernization of Golden Sands after asking me when I had first travelled to Bulgaria. When I replied that I first had been in Golden Sands in 1990, he answered:

> Well, in that case you know what the Black Sea coast used to be like, what it looked like, and how much it has changed in recent years. We mainly owe that to the German tour operators who invested in the modernization of the infrastructure and of the hotels. I think it started in 1995 with the renovation and refurbishment of the first hotel here in Golden Sands. After that, it happened in waves, and others joined in as well. After privatization, German tour operators invested in the renovation and modernization of the hotels, and they also bought plots and built new hotels. Later on, other markets started investing in Bulgaria as well, the English, and, to a smaller extent, the Scandinavians. But mostly we owe it to the German tour operators that we have these really modern hotels and facilities now. They selected their partners, saying, "Okay, we give you the money for the renovation and modernization, and you will give us the beds for our future guests. Our investments will be amortized by the services you render us".

Apart from providing hotel owners with loans for the modernization of their hotels, the tour operators offered two other things that were equally impor-

tant: know-how and a steady supply of tourists. This becomes clear in the following statement by Miroslava, a hotel marketing manager in her mid-forties:

> I would say the big rush for Bulgaria from the German market – which is, in fact, our main source market – has been going on for some time now. Perhaps ten years. And that is because the big German tour operators started to… . I would not say "invest" because they only offered loans to Bulgarian hoteliers after the privatization. They gave them loans to renovate their hotels. But in return, the hoteliers had to sign a contract stipulating that they would work exclusively with them for five years, keeping the prices stable. In the very beginning, it was a good step because people did not have enough money to invest, to renovate their hotels. And the German tour operators came here and helped the hoteliers with know-how – that was important, too – and of course by giving money. And a third important thing, I would say, was that they sent customers here. So everybody was happy.

The involvement of the German tour operators and, later, their counterparts from other countries, had several important ramifications which continue to exert an influence over the development of Golden Sands. One of them was a strengthening of the position of Germany as the most important source market of the resort. Although there is a diversification of source markets, the Bulgarian coastal resorts, including Golden Sands, are strongly dependent on the German market.

Another consequence was that tour operators gained a strong influence on the modernization process itself. As Miroslava continued to explain, they pressured owners to build much larger hotels with a higher capacity.

> But the drawback was that the big tour operators pushed some of the hoteliers to build quite large hotels. In the end of the day, that was not a good thing because it led to changes in the general appearance of the resort. It spoiled the natural landscape of Golden Sands. That was thanks – and I mean that ironically – to the big tour operators. They pushed it. Now they are crying, "Why did you build these huge hotels?". But I would answer, "The hoteliers built them because you asked them to do it!". And I would say that was quite a negative step.

The construction of large new hotels resulted in an increase in the number of beds and rooms available in the resort, and in lower average occupancy rates for most of its hotels. Furthermore, as Miroslava stated, it changed the general appearance of Golden Sands, triggering a process of resort urbaniza-

tion and commercialization.[67] Other tourism professionals agreed with Miroslava's views but argued that at the same time, the individual privatization and sale of hotels to many different owners resulted in more investments and a more rapid modernization.

In conclusion to this section, I will recount the story of Slava, a hotel manager. In describing her career, it highlights many of the issues covered in this section.

Slava's Story

> Slava: It was a coincidence – if there is such a thing – that I applied for admission to the Institute for Tourism in Varna many years ago. That was my second choice, so to speak. The first one was German language and literature studies, but that did not work out at the time. I do not regret that now because I love mingling with people. And that is the reason why I have declined many an offer for a very attractive office job over the years. Because I really love my work. So, as I said, that was many years ago, in 1981.
>
> And then, after I graduated… . Practical training was a part of our studies. We did it with students from East Germany, from the vocational school for gastronomy in Leipzig. They came here to Golden Sands, and we went to Leipzig and were assigned to various restaurants associated with the Leipzig Trade Fair. The work there was organized in an entirely different way. And I still remember the words of my boss at that time who was in charge of the restaurant Falstaff. He said, "Mass tourism destroys service quality!". It does not matter whether it concerns buffets or the feeding of large groups of people. At that time, the Falstaff had to feed groups of 500 people in an hour. In a situation like that, it does not make a difference if you are an excellent waiter. Your only concern is that everyone gets their meal while it is still hot. But the Falstaff was a great restaurant, really. Does it still exist?
>
> C.B.: No, it was closed a long time ago. It is an amusement arcade now.
>
> Slava: Well, I really took home only the best memories of that time. The service there was superb; everything was perfectly attuned, from the kitchen to the service, the reception, the bar, and everything else. It was outstanding. And after that experience, I decided to choose the hotel business as my specialization – my field of study had been accommodation and catering. And that is what I have been doing for

[67] Chapter 5 explores this issue in more depth.

many, many years now. After college, I worked in another sector for a year. And then I started studying tourism at the Economic University of Varna, a correspondence course. I graduated in 1991. But I had been working the whole time.

C.B.: In Golden Sands?

Slava: In Golden Sands. I worked as a receptionist in the Hotel Andromeda for nine years; first as a receptionist, and then as the front desk manager. And then, in 1992, I accepted the position of the hotel manager in the Hotel Aquarius. I stayed there for five years, in that hotel. Those were difficult times. The entire quota of the hotel, its whole capacity, was under contract with a foreign tour operator which went bankrupt. The Aquarius had opened very late, in the spring of 1992. And we had to try and find guests on our own, which was not one of the typical tasks of a hotel manager at that time. It used to be the job of Balkantourist, they had this department for room allocations with subsections for Germany, Benelux, and so on. But it was interesting. I think those five years were the hardest of my entire career. And then, slowly, the time of these management contracts started to come.

C.B.: Management buyouts?

Slava: Not really. Well, Balkantourist offered each hotel manager the opportunity to establish a company for managing the hotel. They continued to bring in the guests, but we had total control over our expenditures. Our revenues were split between Balkantourist – for advertising and so on – and us, the hotel managers. And so each one of us could see how good she really was as a manager, what she was really worth. I worked under these conditions for three years, and it was not easy. I was in the Hotel Cassiopeia for a year, and after that I managed the Hotel Orion.

By the way, that was really hard. I mean, the Orion used to be one of the best hotels in Golden Sands, one of the top places. It was considered one of the flagships of the resort. As a young receptionist you barely dared to apply for a job there, you just went around on tiptoes in that place. And I was terribly scared that I would not manage to run such a famous hotel. But I did it. I did it! And no matter how hard it was, I am not regretting those years because they have given me a lot of experience.

The Orion was already put up for privatization. And I somehow did not want this hotel, this symbol of Golden Sands, to fall into the wrong hands. And so – it was something crazy I did! – I wrote a letter to the Mövenpick chain, asking if they would not somehow be in-

terested in buying the hotel. And they wrote me back! A colleague of mine told me, "Well, if you ever need a real boost to your ego, you should frame that letter and put it up on your wall!". They replied! Very courteously, they said they were more interested in city hotels and besides, for them Bulgaria was way too risky as an investment location at that time. But they thanked me for the nice letter and so on. And I had written that on a whim; I had no experience in correspondence. Just like that! Well. Later, the Orion was unfortunately sold to two Lebanese businessmen. And I think its standard, nowadays, is not exactly what I would expect from a top hotel.

C.B.: And how did you get here, to this hotel?

Slava: After the Orion, I worked in the Hotel Centaurus for two years as the hotel manager again. That was a very good hotel, by the way. But back then it had several owners. And those were the times when you really… . Well, the expression "too many chiefs and not enough Indians" – that's absolutely correct! And they did not come from this line of business; they did not have any clue about it. They did not have any criteria to evaluate our work, they could not value it. Each one of them, they were just issuing contradictory orders and demands all the time.

C.B.: Where did they come from if they were not from this line of business?

Slava: From Plovdiv. They came from Plovdiv; they were producers of rose essence.

C.B.: And they bought the hotel?

Slava: Yes. I worked there for two years. And the next two years I worked as the general manager of the Hotel Pegasus. That was in Golden Sands as well. It was still the old Pegasus, a two-star hotel, but it was huge. And somehow it worked, and it worked pretty well. But that way of thinking, just economizing, saving, reducing costs, reducing staff, cutting down on salaries, hiring people who were prepared to work for a pittance… . Well, the ideas of the owner were rarely compatible with the ideas of the management. Unlike in foreign countries where usually, when you own a hotel you entrust it to a management in which you have faith. You trust them, and you are not constantly focusing on petty details, you focus on the larger events. In Bulgaria, we are still far from that. And so I quit. That was in the winter of 2003.

And in 2004 I decided to apply for a job with a big international hotel chain. I was almost 40 years old and I thought, "It probably won't work", because they preferred young people. But I got a job as

> the front office manager in one of their hotels on the southern Black Sea coast, in Sunny Beach. And, well, I can honestly tell you that I liked it. For each job there was a distinct position in the hierarchy, and it was possible to work just normally, with all those standard forms they had, with all the standards associated with the various positions. There were a lot of good things, positive things, I have learned from them. But at that time, that chain did not have a regional director for Bulgaria. And somehow it annoyed me that nobody bothered to come to us at the end of the season, to shake our hands, and say something like, "Okay, you've done a good job. It is not the policy of our company to provide our employees with jobs for the winter, but we would be very happy if you would be available again from 1 April, if you would be willing to work for us again!". They did not do anything like that.
>
> And so, after the end of the season, I came back to Varna. And I met a couple of friends and acquaintances from the industry who were interested in learning what things were like in such a hotel chain. For us Bulgarians that is interesting because most of the hotels here are independent. And I happened to mention that I would be willing to accept a job for the winter. Because I was not tired at all, the work was much easier under the conditions created by that chain.
>
> And the next day, a friend called me and said, "Did you know, there is this company that will soon open a new hotel. Why don't you apply for the position of the hotel manager?". She did not even know where the hotel would be, what kind of hotel it would be, she just knew that it would operate throughout the year. And so I got in touch with them. Two days later I went to the big interview with the owners. Three days after that I had the job. And so I have been working here since the hotel was opened. It is a business hotel, more of a business hotel than a tourist hotel. Which was a bit unfamiliar to me, it was new. Concerning the market segment, the people we serve. But I really love it.

Slava's story illustrates the difficulties of the privatization period, and the many challenges hotel managers faced at that time. It also demonstrates the dedication and devotion of many middle-aged hotel managers to their chosen field. These managers are highly invested in the welfare of their industry, but not only that; they actively care about their country, their resort, and their hotels. Slava wrote her letter to Mövenpick not because she expected to benefit personally if the chain decided to buy the Orion, but because she cared about the fate of a hotel she considered a showpiece, a flagship of the resort. For her, it embodied the positive features of Golden Sands and of the

Bulgarian tourism industry more generally, and she hoped that an investment by a prestigious international hotel chain would help garner the interest of other reputable investors, thus ensuring a prosperous future for Golden Sands, while at the same time serving to recognize and acknowledge the achievements of the Bulgarian tourism industry thus far.

Hotel managers like Slava are highly-trained and experienced experts who take pride in their work and their achievements. Under socialism, they received a formal education in tourism that was complemented by a lot of practical training, and building on that foundation, they successfully navigated the sometimes chaotic decade of privatization and modernization. Like Slava, many managers took it as a challenge to successfully manage a hotel under uncertain and constantly changing conditions, as a chance to prove their own worth as managers. Looking back, they view the decade of privatization as having provided them with a valuable learning experience, having given them a chance to grow as people and as professionals. Those who went through that time are confident in their own abilities; like Slava, they are always willing to add to their knowledge and experience, whether by working for a foreign chain or in other ways. They approach foreign industry experts with the expectation that they are their professional equals, and they resent the notion that foreigners would need to come to Bulgaria to teach them how to do their job. While Slava admired the organization of work in a foreign-owned hotel, and learned a lot for her own future career, she was bothered by the lack of recognition of her own good work and that of her Bulgarian colleagues on the part of the company, and she resented the lack of respect for her abilities and experience that this lack of recognition implied.

Hotel managers like Slava maintain extended networks that cut across the Bulgarian tourism industry and the various resorts in the region. Many of those who are part of these networks consider themselves professionals who are committed to and deeply invested in a career in tourism. They have trained or worked together, and they meet to socialize and to exchange news and gossip about everything that is going on in their field. These networks disseminate information about vacancies and possible job candidates, and they keep their members informed about new developments and innovations in the industry. But they also contribute to the creation and strengthening of a shared sense of community. The members of these networks have the same structural position within the industry, a similar work ethos and orientation to work and, like Slava and Ivanka (who was quoted above), they share a notion of what it means to "work normally".

The notion of "working normally" held by these hotel managers arises from their self-conception as professionals. "Working normally" means that

hotel owners appreciate the expert knowledge and experience of their management and trust it to run the hotel smoothly and efficiently. Owners who have no experience with tourism and attempt to run a hotel on the same principles as a factory prevent them from working normally and achieving high standards in service provision. Managers argue that service is vital to the tourism industry, and that human interaction cannot be managed like production on a factory line. The cost cutting that is part of drives for standardization and efficiency would force them to hire inexperienced and untrained workers which would have negative repercussions on service quality, and ultimately on the reputation of their hotel, the resort, and the entire destination.[68] Hotel managers resent owners who do not accept their advice, and attempt to get directly involved in running the hotel despite their lack of know-how. "Working normally" means working for owners who trust management; it means having the owners set realistic performance targets, and checking management's work, but otherwise leaving the details of implementation and realization to the experts.

"Working normally" also means working under reasonably stable and predictable conditions. The notion of "working normally" is, in this sense, an implicit comment on the conditions prevailing throughout the privatization and modernization process. In that decade, hotel managers operated in a chaotic and unpredictable environment: the industry underwent fundamental changes, existing institutions were torn down but not immediately replaced, tourist flows changed irreversibly, and everything was pervaded by uncertainty over the fate of individual workers, their hotels, their resorts, and their country. Having mastered these challenges contributes to creating a sense of community among managers, and at the same time, it is a foundation of their self-esteem as professionals and experts.

As professionals who deal regularly with transnationally-operating companies and international travelers, hotel managers like Slava must constantly be aware of the latest trends and developments in the tourism industry. Many of them travel to other European and global destinations; they frequently participate in conferences and trade fairs; and they are in touch with foreign tour operators, airlines, and other transnationally-operating tourism companies. Thus, they are well-informed about the international (i.e. Western) professional standards relevant to their work, and they constantly measure themselves, their hotels and their resorts against these standards.[69] This second sense in which "working normally" may be understood thus

[68] The issue of service quality is very important to managers and hotel workers. It will be discussed in more detail in chapter 8.

[69] See chapter 1 for an explanation of the regulated and unregulated aspects of international standards.

refers to internationally accepted working and business practices and standards concerning issues such as quality, the organization of work, training, education and professionalization, as well as the political, economic and institutional frameworks affecting the industry.

The prevailing view among hotel managers in Golden Sands is that in terms of knowledge, skills, and experience, they are on par with their western European counterparts. The same applies to "their" hotels; due to the recent modernization process, they are among the best in Europe concerning their design, fabric, furnishings, and amenities. In their view, the shortcomings of Golden Sands are a result of factors outside their control. These factors are the focus of the next section.

"We Have Become a Cheap Mass Tourism Destination" – The Changing Image of Golden Sands

The privatization and modernization process in Golden Sands has strongly influenced the characteristic features that the resort hotels now display. One particularly characteristic feature is that the hotels work almost exclusively with foreigners. Although international tour operators were initially reluctant to invest directly in the resorts, their decisions concerning partnerships and cooperations with hotel owners had a lasting influence on the ensuing tourist flows.

All hotels in Golden Sands are strongly dependent on foreign tour operators. Contracts with them are usually made a year in advance. Most hotels do business with several tour operators at the same time, allocating each of them a certain quota of their rooms for the next season. Prices are individually negotiated between the hotel and each tour operator. Hotels try to sell all of their rooms for the entire season, aiming at maximum occupancy rates, although this goal is usually not attained. However, once the contracts are closed, the hotel has committed a significant share of its capacity to the tour operators whose task it is to market and promote the hotel, attempting to attract as many tourists as possible.

This arrangement has both advantages and disadvantages for the hotels. One advantage is that planning ahead becomes much easier. Based on their contracts, managers are able to anticipate periods of peak occupancy as well as those when they will still have free capacities. Knowing that a certain percentage of their rooms are already allocated gives them more security. Management can also externalize costs for advertising and marketing the hotel. But the strong reliance on charter tourists has drawbacks as well. One is the limited control over consumer prices. Once a hotel has committed its rooms to a tour operator, it has no further influence on the rates that tourists

pay for its rooms. Furthermore, the scope for accommodating guests who are not customers of that operator is limited. Hence, Golden Sands can accommodate very low numbers of individual or domestic travelers.

The dominance of international tour operators has also initiated a trend that is considered highly problematic by all resort workers: Golden Sands is marketed as a cheap destination for budget-conscious beach tourists. Many of the older resort workers who have been in the industry for decades contrast the tourists coming to Golden Sands today with those of former times. Like Zlatko, the lifeguard whose story I told in the previous chapter, they nostalgically remember the "better class of tourists" staying in Golden Sands in the 1980s:

> Tourism here is really going downhill. Before [1989] the tourists were of a higher class. They were not necessarily rich, mostly they were middle class, but they were more cultured, more stylish, they had more elegance. In the evenings they walked on the promenade, the women wearing evening dresses and carrying elegant purses, the men dressed in suits. The whole promenade was fragrant with perfume! Today, there are only proletarians – the lumpenproletariat. Doctors, lawyers, and artists used to stay here, but now these people spend their vacations elsewhere. They will not return. Today's tourists have neither manners, nor style, nor do they have money. Before, there were passenger ferries running between Varna and Nesebar and Sozopol, and even to Istanbul. They were always full. Today there is no such thing, nobody is interested in something like that, in culture, because these tourists are not cultured (Gmn. *unkultiviert*).

Why resort workers have such fond memories of the tourists of "before" becomes clear when one listens to them talking about today's tourists. In describing the characteristics of some nationalities, resort workers often use terms like "good tourists", "true tourists", or "real tourists", contrasting them with others who are apparently considered not as "good".[70] The following conversation with Violeta, a travel agent with more than forty years of experience in the tourism industry, offers an example of this rhetoric.

> Violeta: This summer has not been very good, if you compare it to the last year and the year before that. There are many reasons for that. This summer, there have been fewer German tourists and fewer

[70] When speaking Bulgarian, resort workers used terms such as '*istinski turisti*' (true tourists), '*palnotseni turisti*' (fully-fledged tourists), '*kachestveni turisti*' (high-quality tourists), '*nekachestveni turisti*' (tourists without quality, i.e. of low-quality), '*bedni turisti*' (poor tourists); in English, they mostly spoke of "good tourists", "bad tourists", or "poor tourists". The "cultured" tourist referenced above by Zlatko belongs to the category of *kachestveni turisti*.

> Scandinavians and more Israelis, French, and Romanians. These groups are poorer. The Germans are coming here in certain periods now, in May-June and in September-October, which means in the peak season there are fewer of them. And they are the best tourists, together with the English. They are the most stable group of tourists in the tourism industry. I have known them since 1965. But now their share is getting smaller. People from all over the world are staying in Golden Sands now – Russians, French, Israelis… . But the vital nationalities, the Germans and the English, they are not here anymore. And the Scandinavians have been fewer this year as well.
>
> C.B.: So that means you prefer the Germans and the English as customers, is that right?
>
> Violeta: And the English-speaking Scandinavians, yes. Because they are true tourists. You cannot expect too much of the Israelis. They do not arrive for tourism; they do not use the sea or the beach. They only come here for the casinos, to gamble. They are just walking around in the streets all day; they do not go to the beach. They are walking around all day, shopping, and so on. Perhaps they go to the city sometimes to buy things at Metro or another hypermarket, and then they return. That is all they are interested in. They are not real tourists.
>
> C.B.: And the Russians?
>
> Violeta: The Russians are good tourists, they are like the Germans. They are doing everything – shopping, dining out, and going on trips and excursions. They like everything. But this summer they were very poor as well. And there were fewer of them.

Violeta's description illuminates the key characteristics of "good" or "true" tourists. Most importantly, they are not poor, and while they do not have to be wealthy either, they should at least have enough money to pay for more than just their tour package. "Good tourists" take part in a wide range of activities. They spend time on the beach, but they also go on sightseeing trips, do some shopping, and patronize the resort's bars and restaurants. "Good tourists" are moderately well-off and reasonably cultured – in other words, they are members of the middle class. This view is corroborated by Gavrail, the spokesman for the trade organization quoted earlier:

> It would be better for us if more affluent people came here. Like those who used to stay here in the 1980s. The Germans, for example: middle-aged people, families with children, ordinary workers and white collar workers, pensioners who arrived in the early and late seasons. People came here for the beach, but not exclusively for the beach. They took some trips as well, maybe to Nesebar or Balchik or

> wherever. Or in September, October, they arrived for balneological treatments. So, middle-class tourists who spent their money here.
>
> Now, because of the large supply of beds at low rates, we have tourists who come here because it is cheap and they can afford it. Before, they came to Bulgaria because they liked it, because it was good. The Romanians travel to Bulgaria now because in Romania it is not cheap. As soon as things will be better in Romania, they will stay there. And you cannot compare these Romanians to the tourists from before [1989], to those who used to stay here. We exchanged those against a stronger influx from the Scandinavian countries and others who are attracted by the alcohol, by the low cost of alcohol, and by the supply of other things you can buy cheaply. You know what I mean... .

Thus, resort workers feel that the "good" middle-class tourists of the 1980s have been replaced by visitors who are either attracted by the availability of cheap alcohol and, in some cases, sex, or because they simply cannot afford a vacation elsewhere. And while resort workers have differing views concerning the position of various nationalities on the good tourist/bad tourist spectrum (except for Germans and British who are universally seen as "good tourists"), they agree that Bulgaria has become a cheap mass tourism destination. They lament the substitution of large numbers of "lower-quality tourists" for the smaller numbers of "high-quality tourists" that used to stay in Golden Sands.

Two interrelated explanations were offered for this development. The first is a lack of segregation of different "classes" of tourists. Even Golden Sands' four- and five-star hotels are not exclusive to a more affluent clientele, which deters these more desirable guests from staying there. Slava made this observation and contrasted the excellent condition of Bulgaria's hotels with its reputation as a cheap destination:

> It is funny, right now Bulgaria is one of the countries with the newest hotels. It is one of the top ten in the world. But we do not have the guests who would be comfortable in many of these hotels. How can I put this? Two-star and four-star hotels have essentially the same rates. Or, to put it another way, they have the same class of guests. There is no difference between them; or almost none. Somehow I have the impression that we are a cheap destination. And I think somehow all of us are to be blamed for that, not just Balkantourist.

There is no segregation of the different "classes" of guests because there is almost no difference in the room rates of lower-star and higher-star hotels.

That is another ramification of developments in the privatization and modernization period.

The increase of hotel capacity following the modernization of Golden Sands resulted in an oversupply of hotel beds, enabling the tour operators to push for lower prices. This situation was exacerbated when previously undeveloped areas on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast were opened up for tourism development. In recent years, new hotels and micro-resorts have sprung up all over the coast. The hotels in Golden Sands are thus not just competing with each other but with hotels in other areas as well. As a consequence of the large supply, tour operators may find it difficult to sell the rooms they have been allocated. They might be forced to lower their rates, selling a room in a four-star hotel for a price more befitting a two-star hotel. Thus, hotels receive a mixture of guests from various socioeconomic backgrounds who often have paid widely diverging prices for the same tour package.

In the following quote, Miroslava describes the interrelated causes of Bulgaria's image as a cheap destination. She names an additional reason: the country's poor reputation in western Europe resulting from negative media coverage and residual perceptions from its socialist past. Like many other hotel managers, she calls for active intervention by the state and a better marketing of the destination:

> Tourism is deteriorating because of the image of the destination. This is also due to the tour operators – because of them we have become known as a cheap destination. And of course it is not prestigious any more to travel to Bulgaria. Not anymore. Even for people who have enough money to stay in a good hotel. But the tour operators are pushing for lower prices with the result that in the same five-star hotel, you will find people who are, for example, businessmen and someone who is coming… who is just a housemaid. And that should not happen.
>
> If we want to be a prestigious destination and improve our reputation, the tour operators should not push the prices down to that extent. Because the service cannot be good if the prices are low. And people will not be happy if the service does not correspond to the expectations of the customers, of the high-level customers who might come here. If you push that much for low prices, you have no guarantee that you will have good service. And of course that will reflect on the sorts of people you get as customers because with insufficient service you will not have high-level customers and return guests.

> The image of the country has another part in it. What good have you heard about Bulgaria in recent years? Nothing! It's something negative all the time! And the bad thing is that many people do not know anything about Bulgaria. That is the first thing. The second is that we are still under this label as the younger brother of the USSR. People are not interested in us, they are even afraid to come here. They say, "Oh, what will be there? Just a Communist country! Everybody will be dressed the same!". Like the Chinese, although the Chinese have changed dramatically. But before, it was like that! Even in Europe! So from that perspective I think the government has to improve the image of the destination – the image of Bulgaria! Because Golden Sands, Varna, or whatever – people are first and foremost going to Bulgaria. They are not going to Golden Sands or Sunny Beach or whatever – that is the second or even third level. It is Bulgaria first of all. And what is Bulgaria? Would you come to Bulgaria for your vacation? I do not think so!

"The Resort Hotels Operate Seasonally, That Is Their Biggest Disadvantage" – Seasonality and its Consequences

The dependency of the hotels in Golden Sands on foreign mass tourism and on the tour operators attracting that clientele has a number of consequences for the resort. The most important of these is seasonality, which is a characteristic feature of resort hotels. In the literature on tourism, much has been said about seasonality, and particularly its negative ramifications.[71] In the previous chapter, I have addressed this issue from the perspective of the employees. In this section, I want to focus on seasonality from the point of view of hotel operations.

The first issue related to seasonality from a business point of view is that a hotel's assets remain idle for six months of the year. In that period, the hotel does not make money, but there are still expenditures for its upkeep. Of course, these expenditures are significantly lower than those of the season. Labor costs, which constitute an important share of operational costs, are greatly reduced with only the core management team remaining on the payroll. The same applies to utility bills. Nevertheless, even in the off-season, a hotel still costs money. The second issue linked to seasonality is the high rate of staff turnover. Not all hotel managers I talked to were forthcoming with exact numbers, but reported turnover rates stood at fifty per cent and more, even in high-star hotels.

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[71] See, for example, Butler (1994, 2001); Baum and Lundtorp (2001).

Of course, seasonality is only one of the causes of high turnover rates. Others include the changing situation on the labor market resulting in a labor shortage in the tourism sector, and the growing competition for qualified staff. As a consequence, the salaries that hotels pay have been steadily increasing.[72] The shortage of qualified staff enables employees to compare the working conditions, incomes and benefits offered by various hotels, and choose those they deem most acceptable. By "voting with their feet", they can thus pressure management to offer better conditions. While this is certainly beneficial from the perspective of the employees, it is rather detrimental from the point of view of hotel operations, because it contributes to staff turnover and the negative consequences associated with it. Nevertheless, the salaries offered by resort hotels are in roughly the same range.[73] That is an effect of conditions pertaining to all hotels in Golden Sands: room capacity has increased, supply surpasses demand, hotels thus increasingly compete for guests, which enables the tour operators to successfully push for lower prices. Hence, while employees' salaries and benefits have indeed been steadily increasing, it is simply not possible for hotels to augment them to such an extent as to enable them to compete with other sectors, let alone tourism companies abroad.

Only a handful of hotels in Golden Sands operate non-seasonally; the Hotel Plovdiv is one of them. The Plovdiv has 230 rooms and a total of 500 beds. It employs approximately 130 people in the summer season and 50 in the winter. In the summer season, its guests come from a wide variety of countries, among them Britain, Russia, Germany, France, and the Benelux countries. Its occupancy rate for the period from May to October is about 85 per cent with the hotel often being completely booked in the peak season. About ten per cent of its guests are repeat visitors.

In the winter season, the Plovdiv survives mainly on meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions.[74] It has two conference halls and several

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[72] For example, Ghodsee (2005: 69) quotes the 2003 salary of a receptionist as about 200 levs a month. In 2007, receptionists told me that they received 300-400 levs, and claimed benefits like free transport, free work clothes, free drinks, and at least one meal a day. They also earned tips which could amount to more than 100 levs per month in the high season. In some hotels, their incomes were supplemented by commissions on the sales of excursions or currency exchanges, while in others, receptionists received gratuities for looking the other way when hotel guests brought in dates or prostitutes.

[73] However, there are often considerable differences in the range and scope of additional benefits and perks offered to employees. Furthermore, hotel workers take other factors into consideration, such as interpersonal relations at the workplace, the quality of the working environment, and management-employee relations. The prestige of specific hotels may also be a decisive factor.

[74] A combination referred to as MICE in the tourism industry.

smaller meeting rooms. The majority of its corporate clients are Bulgarian companies. They book the hotel for conferences, seminars, training sessions, and similar activities. Recently, the hotel has started to diversify into the market for sales promotions and presentations. The Plovdiv also hosts events such as a big New Year's Eve party, wedding receptions, and large company dinners. For New Year's Eve as well as for the Easter holidays it is usually booked out by Bulgarian and Romanian guests. Overall, the occupancy rate of Hotel Plovdiv hovers around 15 per cent in the winter. It is not surprising, then, that its managers still view charter tourists as their core target group, and the summer season as the period most important for business.

Although the hotel's two main target groups – business travelers and charter tourists – are associated with the winter and summer seasons respectively, in some cases there are overlaps. If the Plovdiv has free capacities in the shoulder season, they accept business travelers. However, managers are not comfortable with this solution; they feel that the two groups do not mix well, and they are worried that either their business clients or the leisure tourists would suffer from this arrangement. In particular, they find that business clients prefer not to mix with leisure tourists whose hours and needs are often incompatible with their own.

The example of Hotel Plovdiv demonstrates that for the majority of Golden Sands' hotels, operating non-seasonally is not a viable option. The Plovdiv's occupancy rates are very low in the winter season, casting into doubt the profitability of non-seasonal operations.[75]

The off-season activities at Hotel Plovdiv, however, are also representative of the many ways in which the hotels in Golden Sands attempt to increase their occupancy rates and extend the length of the season. The diversification into the market for business travelers and MICE is one of them. In the early 2000s, there were hardly any hotels with conference facilities in the resort, but this state of affairs has changed. The number of hotels providing the facilities and services needed for MICE has increased in line with the growing budget Bulgarian companies allocate to these events. In Golden Sands, MICE may be hosted in the shoulder season when the hotels are not booked out by leisure travelers.

Diversification into wellness and medical tourism is another option pursued by some of the resort's hotels.[76] The region sports a number of hot and mineral water springs, and many hotels are equipped with spa and

[75] There are many rumors and much speculation that hotels in Golden Sands are generally running at a loss, but managers were rarely willing to provide detailed data about their hotels' operations, and instead repeatedly called my attention to their efforts to increase occupancy and profitability.

[76] See Connell (2006) on international medical tourism.

wellness centers offering balneotherapy, medicinal mud treatments, and massages. They try to increase the share of wellness and health tourists staying with them in the shoulder season. Some hotels also open for short periods in the off-season, hosting parties, weddings, and similar events on weekends and during the Christmas and New Year holidays, or accommodating individual travelers over the Easter break.

However, there are factors impeding these attempts at diversification. Those hotels in Golden Sands that are trying to increase their share of conference and business travelers are competing with their counterparts in Varna. In the last decade, a number of hotels targeting business travelers and corporate clients have opened in the city. While both resort and city hotels offer modern conference facilities and equipment, a variety of entertainments, and proximity to the beach, city hotels have the additional advantages of better transport connections, and being closer to the center of business and administration and to the cultural life of Varna. Thus, their comparatively disadvantageous location and their primary association with charter tourism might impede resort hotels' diversification into conference and business tourism.[77]

The wellness and health tourism segment in Golden Sands mainly targets international tourists. Hotels that diversify into this market continue to be dependent on tourists arriving on charter flights; as long as that is the case, the tour operators and the airlines will have a major influence on the length of the season in the resort. Furthermore, resort hotels attempt to commit as much of their capacity as possible to the tour operators, which limits their ability to offer accommodation to individual or business travelers. Thus, attempts to attract these segments are usually confined to the shoulder season when the hotels are not completely booked.

Recently, there has been a new trend in Golden Sands that represents another attempt at diversifying the resort's clientele and extending the season: the emergence of so-called apartment hotels. An apartment hotel (apart-hotel) is a facility consisting of self-catering apartments that offers limited services. These include incoming and outgoing services, that is transfers to and from the airport (if they are not handled by a tour operator), and a reception desk handling complaints, giving out information, and arranging day trips and other activities. However, catering or daily housekeeping are usually not included in the package. Typically, the ground floor of apart-hotels houses shops, restaurants, cafes, or bars, whereas the upper floors consist of residential apartments. An apart-hotel is built by a developer who then uses real estate agencies to sell the (usually furnished) apartments individually.

[77] On the competition for business travelers and MICE, see also chapter 8.

People buy holiday apartments for various reasons but in Golden Sands, they typically choose one of two options. The first is using the apartment as a holiday home for themselves and their family. In that case, it functions just like any apartment in a city; the owners may come and go as they please, whether it is winter or summer. The second option is treating the apartment as a speculative investment, to be sold when its value has increased, and rented out to tourists in the meantime.[78] Upon buying an apartment, owners are offered the services of a letting company. Should they decide to sign the contract, the company assumes responsibility for marketing their apartment. In Golden Sands, that means the letting company offers the apartments it has under contract to tour operators who then advertise and promote them to their clientele.[79]

The increasing popularity of apart-hotels illustrates several trends that have emerged in Golden Sands. First of all, they represent another attempt at extending the season, since the apartments could be used throughout the year. In reality, however, this is rarely the case. Owners who use their apartments as a holiday home have little desire to spend a cold winter in a resort that effectively shuts down during the off-season. Owners who rent their apartments through letting companies still work exclusively with tour operators; hence, they are just as dependent on them, and on the incoming charter flights, as the resort hotels. Furthermore, the services offered to tourists are only provided in the season, making a vacation in the off-season rather unfeasible.

The rise of apartment hotels in Golden Sands could also be interpreted as another attempt to diversify into new market segments with an increasingly varied clientele. Even though apart-hotels are marketed and sold by tour operators, usually as part of a package, they offer a more individualized type of vacation than staying in the more structured environment of a hotel. By serving a slightly more independent and self-sufficient type of tourists, apart-hotels could thus be seen as the harbingers of the wider trend towards more individual modes of travelling that is presumed by the proponents of post-Fordist tourism. At the same time, one of the appeals of apart-hotels is their affordability, especially for larger parties who seek to reduce costs by catering for themselves. They attract precisely those less affluent tourists who have contributed to Bulgaria's image as a cheap destination.[80] Thus,

[78] See also chapter 10 on second homes and holiday homes in the Varna region.

[79] Tourists may rent these apartments either as part of a tour package or as a single component.

[80] In fact, I have been told that some tour operators have pulled out of Golden Sands and relocated their operations to the southern Bulgarian Black Sea coast precisely because its

while resort workers and industry experts alike bemoan the transformation of Golden Sands into a destination for cheap mass tourism, they are, at the same time, contributing to this process, and attempting to profit from it. The proliferation of apart-hotels catering primarily to budget-conscious tourists is only one example.

Another example is provided by hotels that specifically target young "alcotourists", that is tourists who arrive for the beach, the cheap alcohol, and the discotheques and clubs.[81] Although dealing with guests who are inebriated most of the time is not particularly pleasant for the staff, these hotels have nevertheless successfully occupied a market niche, and they are doing very well, as Tsvyatko, a hotel contracting manager in his mid-twenties, told me:

> Tsvyatko: Our guests are a little bit drunk most of the time. That makes things difficult. And because they are drunk, their English is not too good, and we have to constantly repeat ourselves. And our conversations are mostly about having to pay for something they have broken. That is not one of the best topics. "Hello, how are you, my friend? You have to pay for a broken bed!"
> C.B.: Is it really that bad?
> Tsvyatko: It is. There are between 10 and 15 broken items every day. I was astonished. Yeah. I do not know how long you have been here, but this hotel has a specific reputation: here is where young people drink, break, and go.
> C.B.: Does this reputation affect your negotiations with the tour operators?
> Tsvyatko: The reputation is affected by the tour operators. They are sending us these people. They try to blame us from time to time, "You cannot control them". But we say, "No, it is just the people you are sending us! And we are talking about 300 of them!". So the guests… we cannot choose what kind of people are coming here. But the very building and everything in it is designed with these people in mind. Everything is very basic. There are as few things as possible in the rooms, so they can break as few things as possible. Yeah. And we have pool bars and discos. That is all they need. And actually, the interest in this hotel is growing. So, for the next two or three years we will not have problems filling the hotel. It will be full.

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supply of self-catering apartments is larger, and their rates are even lower, making that region more attractive to budget-conscious tourists.

[81] The term "alcotourism" was coined by Bell (2008). See also Jayne, Holloway and Valentine (2006); Jayne, Valentine and Holloway (2008).

In Golden Sands, hotels specifically targeting young alcotourists are the exception. However, the employees of many hotels with a mixed clientele reported problems with groups of young people arriving in the peak season to party. As in Tsvyatko's hotel, the destruction of hotel property by inebriated tourists was one of the chief complaints. Hotel staff often find it difficult to control drunk guests; in these interactions, the requirements of good service often clash with the necessity of keeping the situation under control. Staff must prevent the intoxicated parties from harming other guests, hotel property, staff, or themselves. Managers also worry that the presence of these groups will bother more sedate guests and deter them from returning.[82] In the end, alcotourists are seen as contributing to the deteriorating image of Golden Sands, and to the perceived trend of the coveted affluent middle-class tourists turning their backs on the resort.

A third example for processes contributing to the transformation of Golden Sands into a cheap destination is the introduction of all-inclusive packages by a growing number of hotels. On the one hand, the spread of the all-inclusive package is due to its popularity with tourists. At least in theory, the package covers the total cost of the holiday, thus offering budget-conscious travelers the opportunity to control their expenses. On the other hand, hotels hope to reap the benefits of improvements in cost-effectiveness based on enhanced economies of scale. The trend towards the all-inclusive package is particularly pronounced in Albena. The next section will describe its consequences for the resort, its workers and its visitors, as well as the reasons behind it. They can be traced back to privatization, which in Albena occurred in a way that was radically different from the rest of the Bulgarian Black Sea Coast.

"Our Ownership and Management Structure Makes Us Unique!" – The Privatization of Albena and its Consequences

Among Bulgarian tourism professionals, there is considerable controversy about the pros and cons of various forms of privatization and their outcomes. They often contrast the development of Golden Sands with that of Albena, a resort that was not divided but privatized as a single unit through a combina-

[82] This is another case where the terms "good tourists" and "bad tourists" are used. A "good tourist" in this context is a tourist who causes no trouble, while "bad tourists" are those who drink too much, damage hotel property, are hard to control by the hotel staff, and generally cause trouble.

tion of voucher privatization and management-employee buyout.[83] As a result, Albena is under one central ownership and management, and that, in turn, has its own advantages and disadvantages. As Ivanka explained:

> Well, the 1990s were really the decade of privatization. I mean, of privatization more generally, not just in tourism. I was working in Albena at that time. And really, their concept was totally different from here. They have privatized the resort as a whole, whereas here in Golden Sands, or in Sveti Konstantin, or in Sunny Beach, the hotels were sold individually, with or without the land on which they stand. And both forms of privatization have their pros and cons. For example, if you go for a walk in Albena, you will see that their infrastructure is simply brilliant compared to the other resorts. Because everything is centrally managed they can methodically upgrade the streets, the sewer system, and the waterlines, and maintain the parks and green spaces. The guests really get to feel that. Then again, their hotels are not as good, not as new and modern. As you can see, here, in contrast to Albena, the streets are not really well-maintained and the beach is dirty. But our hotels are the best.

The starting point for the different trajectories of development of Golden Sands and Albena was the privatization process. Like Golden Sands, Albena was transformed into a joint stock company in the first half of the 1990s, with the majority of its shares being held by the state. In 1997, the resort was privatized, but unlike other coastal resorts, the majority of its shares were bought together by the employee-management buyout company, Albena JSC.[84] As a result of the land privatization and restitution process, private individuals also received shares in the resort. The land on which the resort was built had originally been private property that was nationalized by the socialist government. When land restitution started in the 1990s, many former owners and their descendants made claims on plots in the resort. Since returning the land to its former owners was seen as a potential obstacle for further resort development, a deal was made which transferred ownership of the plots to Albena JSC while the former owners received shares in the company in return.

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[83] Voucher privatization was a procedure in which Bulgaria citizens received, for a nominal fee, investment vouchers that could then be exchanged for enterprise shares or in privatization funds.

[84] In 2009, 53.94 per cent of the shares in this company were held by Albena Holding and 20.58 per cent by Albena Invest Holding. These two companies and Albena JSC are linked to each other in a complex web of interlocking ownership patterns. For the sake of convenience, I will use Albena JSC to refer to the company owning and managing the resort. This is in line with the usage on the resort website as well as the resort management's English language press statements and publications.

The modernization of Albena's hotels started even before resort privatization was concluded. At first, Albena JSC used loans granted by tour operators to finance the reconstruction of hotels; as in Golden Sands, the tour operators received a certain capacity of hotel rooms at fixed prices in return. After the Bulgarian banking sector had stabilized in 1998, modernization was financed by means of bank loans. However, modernization took longer in Albena than in Golden Sands; only one or two hotels could be reconstructed each year because the company had to concentrate its limited funds on a few projects, while in Golden Sands, each owner had only one hotel to modernize which, in the aggregate, led to the resort being modernized more rapidly than Albena. The simultaneous modernization of several hotels in Golden Sands under different owners, each with his own funds and construction company, also led to a diversification of architectural styles in the resort. In Albena by contrast, much of the original architectural style has been retained. Thus, many tourism workers in Golden Sands saw the slower pace of modernization as a disadvantage of central resort ownership and management. Gavrail shared this assessment:

> Another type of privatization has occurred in Albena. That resort was privatized as a package and is now under one ownership and one management. This is good. But their financial resources were more limited, and the hotels were renovated step by step. Generally, you could say they modernized two or three hotels every winter. That is the fundamental difference. Albena has in many respects maintained the distinctive look it inherited from socialism. Whereas Golden Sands, if you had seen it ten years ago and then saw it now, you would not recognize it.

Evelina, a member of Albena's management team, suggested other reasons for the different pace and outcome of the modernization process.

> Evelina: Perhaps the pace of modernization is slower here in Albena, but not because of the central ownership and management structure. The reason is that the hotels in the other resorts are not owned by tourism companies, but by companies from other sectors. Hence, the money they invest was not earned in tourism. That is why it is possible for the owners in Golden Sands and Sunny Beach to construct new hotels and modernize the existing ones. Here, the money comes exclusively from tourism. That is why this process is a bit slower here.
>
> C.B.: Do you think the slower pace of modernization is a disadvantage?
>
> Evelina: Well, yes, it is a small disadvantage. Our hotels could be in an even better condition. Perhaps that is a disadvantage. But we have

chosen this path. The hotel owners in the other resorts are from many different sectors, the industries, heavy industries, I do not know what, but they are not from tourism. Whereas our money, this comes from the profits we earn every year, and we reinvest these profits. And bank loans, of course.



Plate 2. Albena beach and a hotel in the resort's distinctive architectural style.

The modernization and upgrading of existing hotels is an ongoing issue. Industry experts estimate that a hotel should be upgraded every ten years because of changing trends concerning hotel facilities, interior design, and amenities. Albena JSC thus has to make long-term plans for its investments, focusing on one or two major projects a year. The point remains, however, that the upgrading of a property is much easier for the owner of a single hotel. As a consequence, Golden Sands has a more "modern" appearance than Albena, with its hotels strongly resembling those in other tourist resorts throughout the world.[85] Of course, whether one views that as a good thing or not is another matter entirely.

[85] On hotels as generic spaces, see Yakhlef (2004).

When I asked Evelina about the advantages of central resort ownership and management, I received the following answer:

> Well, it has several advantages which we emphasized when we prepared for the privatization. You see, most of those who worked in Albena before the privatization are still working here. We have always emphasized these advantages. First of all, it is easier for us to defend our market position. As the owner of so many hotels, we can set our own conditions and get them accepted in negotiations. That concerns both negotiations with tour operators and with suppliers, suppliers of consumables, for example. Furthermore, employees are hired centrally, and we can plan where we employ them, when we need them, and for which positions we will employ them. If it is necessary, they can help out in other hotels. For example, if a certain hotel has low occupancy for, say, two weeks, whereas another hotel is fully booked, we can send the staff of the first hotel to help out in the second, and we do not need to hire additional people. Then, there is the central planning of investments, of how much money is needed, where and when… .We can plan that. What else? Yes, the employees, we can lower our expenditures on labor and supplies. That is quite significant because these are the largest items.

Evelina then added that central management is also an advantage concerning the promotion and marketing of the resort. Participating in tourism exhibitions and trade shows is much more cost effective for an entire resort than for individual hotels and it facilitates targeting specific groups or nationalities. When I inquired about the disadvantages of central management, she commented:

> Well, perhaps there are disadvantages. Sometimes, when certain decisions are to be made, it will perhaps take longer compared to the decision-making process for a single hotel. But concerning the daily operations, our hotel managers have the decision-making power. It is only with respect to larger, more complicated matters that we have to wait for the decision of the executive directors.

Another disadvantage of Albena's central management is linked to marketing and reservations. As Evelina explained, the lack of a software adapted to the specific needs of a reservation system covering more than 40 hotels:

> We have a central reservation system and our reservation office decides when the individual hotels will be opened and closed for business, and which guests will be allocated to which hotels. That is another advantage. We negotiate a contract with the tour operators, and one condition is that we do not have to open the hotels in the low season if the occupancy rates are not satisfactory. In these cases, we

> allocate the guests to other hotels of the same or a higher category. The tour operators are informed about these measures beforehand. And that gives us another opportunity to save costs. Perhaps that is not received equally well by all guests. But the guests know about it, because it says in the brochures that not every hotel will be open in the low season and that they will get a better hotel than they have booked. We view this as an advantage as well, because we can allocate the guests to other hotels in the low season when the occupancy rates are not that high. It is better for the guests, too, because the ambience will not be so good when their hotel is mostly empty. Right now, for example, we are gathering the guests for the last weeks of October in the five-star hotels. And everybody will be happy because none of them has expected to stay in a five-star hotel.

From Evelina's perspective, the main advantage of central resort management is the greater efficiency associated with economies of scale. Indeed, throughout our conversation, it was my distinct impression that management was mainly concerned with increasing efficiency and cutting costs, and that each aspect of resort management was viewed first and foremost from that angle.

For Albena's employees, the management's attention to efficiency and cost-cutting is exactly the cause of their own dissatisfaction, and of what they perceive as the biggest problem of the resort. Albena's employees resent their lack of control over their own working conditions. When they are hired by the resort, they often cannot choose their specific workplace. And even if they are placed in a workplace they like, and where they get along with their co-workers, they can never be sure whether they will remain there or be sent to help in another establishment on short notice. Furthermore, they resent the lack of alternative options. They argue that workers in Golden Sands could always quit their jobs, and look for employment in another hotel if they were dissatisfied with their working conditions. They themselves do not have this option because all hotels in the resort are owned by Albena JSC. They also find it harder to exercise an exit-option because near the city of Dobrich, where the majority of workers live, there are fewer jobs than in the Varna region, and not as many resorts within comfortable commuting distance. Thus, from the workers' perspective, the lack of competition for qualified workers is a distinct disadvantage of working in Albena.

Additionally, many of the resort workers with whom I talked felt that central resort management resulted in a much lower turnover of staff in supervisory and management positions. According to them, many members of the resort management team held their positions before privatization, and

had long lost their connection with "ordinary employees". They argued that it had been ages since any of these managers had worked in a hotel or restaurant; indeed, since many of them went through the early stages of their career in the socialist period, they could not relate to the present-day concerns of ordinary workers. They would focus exclusively on cost-cutting without sparing a thought to its effects on the employees. Such lack of concern would, however, have negative consequences for the resort in the long run: if highly qualified employees left the resort in search of better working conditions, service quality would suffer, and the resort would lose customers as a result. Many employees I talked to also asserted that resort management had a "socialist mentality", expressed in an autocratic management style. Again, they thought that such a management style might drive away qualified workers and hurt the resort in the long run. The employees viewed management as a "clique", a tightly woven group bound together by common experiences that sought to protect its members at all costs. This, in turn, facilitated autocratic management styles and informal and non-transparent decision making. Protectionism also resulted in the jobs of group members being practically guaranteed, irrespective of their actual performance. It inhibited staff turnover at management level, thus preventing the promotion of young people with new ideas and visions.

Resort employees were particularly dissatisfied with Albena JSC's strong promotion of all-inclusive packages. In 2008, more than 60 per cent of the resort guests were on all-inclusive packages, and a further increase of this share was projected for 2009. When I asked Evelina about the effects of this trend, she told me:

> All-inclusive? There is a strong demand for it, and we follow that demand. But the disadvantage is in the growing costs. Because the prices for consumables, for foodstuffs, and so on continue to rise, and that has an effect on the profits we make. After this season is over, we will do an analysis and decide whether or not we will continue on this path. We will see how it has affected our profits. You know, in previous years, the all-inclusive package was very cost-effective; it was highly profitable. But rising costs have complicated matters. I do not know how far they will increase. We are at a critical point right now in that respect. I have told you that our holding includes agricultural companies, and perhaps they will help us lower the costs. Perhaps there are also negative effects on the restaurants and bars in the resort. Up to now we have had quite a few a la carte restaurants, some discotheques, and many bars. But… . Well, as long as there is a demand for all-inclusive, we will attempt to meet it.

In this statement, the economic costs and benefits of all-inclusive packages are foregrounded, whereas their consequences for the incomes and skills of the workforce as well as its effects on service quality are neglected. Resort workers, however, were convinced that Albena's long-term sustainability depended on these factors just as much as on its profitability. Many employees argued that the prevalence of all-inclusive packages destroys quality service and significantly lowers their own income for a number of reasons: For the most part, employees serving tourists who are on all-inclusive packages do not receive tips. The tourists have paid for everything, including service, beforehand, and see no need to give tips. In fact, because they do not pay for anything during their stay, they are not even confronted by the possibility of tipping. Frontline employees thus lose a significant part of their income; in fact, they lose the part that makes their jobs attractive in the first place. At the same time, employees argued, they have no incentive to be particularly nice, friendly, or attentive towards the guests. Service quality also suffers because all-inclusive packages involve a "mass processing" of tourists, which means that service loses its individual qualities. In this way, all-inclusive packages might also contribute to a de-skilling of the workforce. For example, tourists are not served their meals in an a la carte restaurant that requires skilled kitchen and wait staff. Instead, they get their meals in the form of buffets which require a kitchen staff to focus on producing quantity above quality, and a number of unskilled workers who clear the tables. Even the existing a la carte restaurants suffer because they lose customers to the included buffets. Albena's employees believed that highly qualified and skilled employees would seek better-paid and more personally gratifying jobs elsewhere, leaving only an unskilled and inexperienced workforce in the resort.

Resort employees thus, one the one hand, complained about the low incomes they received in Albena as compared to other resorts. These lower incomes were seen as being caused by the absence of competition for employees, salaries that are fixed by a centralized management, and the spread of all-inclusive packages. On the other hand, employees feared a drop in service quality as a consequence of the central allocation of jobs and positions, the low turnover rates in management and supervisory positions, the growth of all-inclusive packages, the de-skilling of the workforce, and lower incomes. These processes would lead to qualified workers eschewing jobs in the resort, thus affecting service quality, which would in turn lead to declining numbers of tourists choosing to spend their holiday in Albena. Most of these issues were viewed as a consequence of central resort ownership and management; employees argued that if there were many different owners

and managers, competition would exist, incomes would be higher, and trends like the all-inclusive package would not be uniformly implemented.

Employee concerns seem to have some foundation. Nearly all the tourists I talked to during my stay in Albena complained about poor service. A large number of them were regular guests who had been coming to the resort for many years. Telling me numerous anecdotes to prove their point, they maintained that service quality had sharply declined, and many of them vowed that they would not return the following year. Tourists were also indignant about ending up in a hotel they had not booked. Particularly those who had spent a little more money in order to stay in a specific hotel were outraged when, upon arriving at the airport, they found out they would end up elsewhere. Thus, I gained the distinct impression that contrary to what management assumed, tourists did not easily accept these measures.[86]

Critics of management policy felt vindicated when the indicators for the resort showed a decline for the period 2007-09.[87] There was a drop in German, Russian, and Scandinavian arrivals that could only partly be balanced by the growing numbers of domestic tourists, many of whom were attracted by special low-priced offers. As in other resorts, the tourists who stay in Albena are increasingly less affluent. Although this trend worries employees and management alike, it is exacerbated by the high share of all-inclusive packages and by the cheap specials targeting domestic travelers. But in the end, it is hard to assess the extent to which dropping revenues are caused by cost-cutting measures and a declining service quality. Especially after 2008, the ramifications of the global economic and financial crisis affected tourist flows all over Europe. Furthermore, the drop in the numbers

[86] The resort management seemed to be mistaken in its belief that tourists were informed beforehand about the possibility of being placed in a hotel they had not booked. Of all the tourists I talked to, none had known about it, and many stated that had they known, they would have chosen to stay in another resort. They had learned of the change in accommodation only upon their arrival at the airport. Many of them had just spent a sleepless night in transit and wanted nothing more than to get to their hotel as quickly as possible. They were furious about the complication and the further delays it caused. Some had deliberately chosen a specific hotel, using criteria other than its star rating (e.g. distance to the beach, noise levels, hotel size, availability of amenities, its reputation for a specific clientele, or their experiences on previous stays in the resort), and being placed in a hotel of the same or a higher star rating did not necessarily satisfy them.

[87] In 2007, Albena recorded 115,545 arrivals, 14 per cent of them by domestic tourists; 751,957 overnight stays; an average length of stay of 6.5 nights; and an average revenue of 50 levs per overnight stay. In 2009, the number of arrivals had dropped by 3.7 per cent, and the share of domestic tourists increased to 29 per cent; the number of overnight stays had dropped by 19 per cent; the average length of stay had decreased to 6.1 nights, and the average revenue per overnight stay had dropped to 26 levs. In Golden Sands, the average revenue per overnight stay had increased from 36 levs to 42 levs in the same period. See NSI (2011e).

of German tourists may well be attributed to the higher prices of charter tours to Albena compared with those to other resorts. This, then, is the downside of the stronger negotiating power of resort management vis-a-vis tour operators: management might be able to push for higher prices, but if these are passed on to the customers, there is a very real possibility that budget-conscious travelers will not accept them, opting instead for a cheaper resort such as Golden Sands. Ultimately, this might even result in tour operators pulling out of the resort and relocating their operations elsewhere.[88]

While Albena presents specific characteristics resulting from its unique ownership and management structure, it also has to grapple with the issues that affect all resorts on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast: the seasonality of tourism and the dependency on foreign tour operators. As in Golden Sands and the other resorts in the region, the majority of Albena's guests are foreign tourists from western Europe and Russia. Hence, Albena is just as dependent on foreign tour operators and on the number of flights to Varna airport, and it has to struggle just as hard to fill its hotels in the low season. In contrast to other resorts, Albena may cut costs by closing down hotels with low occupancy rates and channeling the tourists into those that remain open, but nevertheless, the issue remains. Like other resorts, Albena aims to extend the season by promoting spa and balneological tourism, but the biggest barrier to the success of these efforts is that there are only a limited number of flights that bring in affluent foreign guests in the low season. In response, the resort attempts to attract more individual tourists from Bulgaria and Romania who arrive by private transport. Many of these guests also book their rooms directly with the resort's reservation office, thus completely avoiding any intermediaries.[89] In recent years, the number of people booking their holiday in Albena directly on the internet has increased – a development that is welcomed by resort management because it serves to reduce dependency on tour operators.

Albena also attempts to attract athletes in order to increase the length of the season. Albena is exceptionally well-equipped with all kinds of sports facilities: a multi-purpose gymnasium, soccer fields and tennis courts, a horse riding club, swimming pools, and other water sports facilities. In the early and late seasons, in particular, the resort hosts sports tournaments and

[88] I was told that a large British tour operator had relocated its operations to the southern coast for these reasons.

[89] A growing share of domestic tourists helps alleviate the dependence on international tour operators, but it also means lower revenues as Bulgarians tend to spend less on their holidays than foreigners.

training camps, thus increasing the occupancy rates of its hotels.[90] Whether or not the hosting of athletic competitions is a viable strategy for the long term remains to be seen. But its modern sports facilities and its attractiveness to sports teams represent a distinct advantage that Albena holds over other beach resorts in the region and, perhaps, in the country. As of now, the athletes' share in the total number of guests is rather low, but they do contribute to filling the resort hotels in the low season and perhaps, in the long run, they will also contribute to extending the tourist season.

"Basically, All Coastal Resorts Here Are Grappling with the Same Issues!" – Summary and Conclusion

In conclusion to this chapter, I want to summarize the differences in the development of Golden Sands and Albena, as well as the features that both resorts have in common. In Golden Sands, the division of the resort and the individual privatization of its hotels have led to an extremely fragmented ownership structure. In turn, fragmented ownership has facilitated the rapid modernization of the resort as each individual owner invested in his or her newly acquired hotel, often using money made in other sectors of the economy or loans extended by the tour operators. In Albena, on the other hand, management had only limited funds at its disposal, and thus could reconstruct only one or two hotels at a time. Hence, the modernization process took more time. Albena's hotels have retained common architectural features, giving the resort its own, unique style, but many view this style as dated and worn. In Golden Sands, each hotel has its own style and characteristics, and many of them are still new and shiny, but at the same time, they often have no distinctive features, corresponding to a generic style of beach hotels in international tourist resorts.

Following privatization, Golden Sands experienced a sharp increase in the number of hotels and their capacity, culminating in what many resort workers view as an urbanization process.[91] The growth in hotel capacity shifted the balance of negotiating power in favor of the tour operators due to competition among hotels, and because each hotel commands only a tiny share of the overall supply. In addition, by accepting loans provided by the tour operators, the hotels cemented their dependence on the former, and gave them a larger influence on the further development of individual hotels and the entire resort. In contrast, the management of Albena is in a much stronger position vis-a-vis tour operators as it has the authority over all

[90] For example, in September 2008, the qualifiers for the women's under-17 soccer world championship were held in Albena, and the teams were accommodated in the resort hotels.

[91] Chapter 5 explores resort urbanization, its causes, and its consequences in more depth.

hotels in the resort. In Albena, tour operators cannot force individual hotels into competition against each other; moreover, tour operators must negotiate with Albena because it holds a significant share of the total room capacity in the Varna region.

In Golden Sands, the fragmented ownership structure has entailed a stronger diversification and specialization of individual hotels. Although all hotels in the resort target international beach tourists, some of them attempt to attract the young partying crowd while others focus on families with children; some offer all-inclusive packages and others overnight stays with breakfast; some are specialize in certain nationalities while others receive a mixed clientele. In the shoulder season, many hotels attempt to diversify their clientele by targeting business travelers and wellness or medical tourists. The capacity for innovation is much higher in Golden Sands. Individual establishments often experiment with new features or procedures, and if they are successful, others may copy their lead. In Albena, important decisions have to be made by central management; due to the centralized structure, decision making is slower and more cumbersome. Additionally, the relatively stable composition of the resort management and the top-down decision-making processes result in a lower capacity for innovations, as it is more difficult to introduce or implement new ideas. New trends like all-inclusive packages are instituted across the resort, and hence their impacts are felt more strongly. The specialization of individual hotels is less pronounced, which is exacerbated in the shoulder season when many hotels are closed down and the guests are channeled into a few remaining hotels.

Finally, in Golden Sands the fragmented ownership structure and the competition of a large number of individual hotels for qualified employees have generated better conditions for the workforce. Salaries are significantly higher than in Albena, many employees receive additional benefits and perks, they have more opportunities for advancement into higher positions, and if they are dissatisfied with their working conditions, they can easily find work with another employer in the same resort. In Albena, the absence of competition for employees within the resort, and the shortage of alternative employment in the region have produced poorer conditions for the workers. Salaries are lower, there are fewer benefits, and the opportunities for advancement are more limited, leading to more stable hierarchies, and causing discontent among the resort employees. Ultimately, these processes might lead to a deterioration of service quality in the resort as the best employees leave to work elsewhere, such as Golden Sands.

Despite these differences, however, Albena and Golden Sands have many things in common. The most important is their strong dependence on foreign tour operators. The influence of tour operators on accommodation

providers and on resort development has attracted the attention of academic researchers, and there appears to be a consensus as to its main effects (Laws and Cooper 1998; Bastakis, Buhalis and Butler 2004; Koutoulas 2006). The argument could be summarized as follows: The main advantages for accommodation providers that cooperate with international tour operators consist in the steady flow of visitors that is ensured for the destination, and in the opportunity to externalize marketing. However, this cooperation entails a number of problematic issues that are consequences of unequal power relations. The inclusive tour market in western and northern Europe is dominated by a few large vertically-integrated conglomerates that control tourist flows through distribution channels and airlift capacity. In contrast, accommodation providers are usually small or medium-sized businesses; hence, their bargaining power is much more limited. The bargaining power of resorts is further reduced by the substitutability of most summer sun destinations. Consumers are first and foremost looking for a cheap summer vacation on the beach, and sun, sea, and sand are offered by all beach resorts. The main differentiating feature that consumers refer to when deciding on their destination is the price of the package. Substitutability is also furthered by the standardized facilities and services offered by all hotels in these destinations due to the pressure from tour operators. The marketing and advertising texts used to attract customers showcase generic features and activities, which is in line with the goals of the tour operators. After all, tour operators aim to attract consumers not to one particular resort or hotel, but to any of the large number of resorts and hotels they have in their program. Substitutability and the price-sensitivity of consumers contribute to the creation of a downward pressure on prices in an environment where hotels in the same destination compete with each other and with their counterparts in other similar destinations. Tour operators likewise pressure hotels to lower their prices in the attempt to increase their own market shares and sales volumes. The result is a vicious cycle of depreciated prices and declining quality that is ultimately to the detriment of a resort's long-term sustainability.

The declining quality of resort holidays has occurred across the Mediterranean, and it appears that the privatization and modernization process has set the Bulgarian coastal resorts on the same trajectory. In this respect, both Golden Sands and Albena share a similar predicament. Both resorts mainly target foreign sun-lust tourists, and thus are strongly dependent on foreign tour operators, and on the number and duration of charter flights for their guests. Their marketing by tour operators has led to both resorts having gained a reputation as cheap destinations. This is surprising in the case of Albena. After all, central resort ownership and management should, in

theory, facilitate active marketing strategies and the creation of a coherent image aimed at attracting specific target groups. But so far, Albena JSC has not managed to present the resort as an international destination with its own unique features and attractions. Like Golden Sands, Albena is attempting to increase the length of the tourist season and to diversify into new customer segments, but both resorts are equally hampered by their dependence on their main target group. Finally, although workers in both Golden Sands and Albena lament the reputation of Bulgaria as a destination for cheap mass tourism, and disparage the clientele attracted by that reputation, both resorts contribute to and profit from this trend by instituting and advertising features such as all-inclusive packages, apart-hotels, and the availability of cheap alcohol and entertainment.

Ten years after their privatization, the resorts in the Varna region have become a destination for "banal tourism". Tourists do not choose to spend their holidays in Varna because Bulgaria holds some special interest for them or because of the heritage, sights, traditions, or activities that the region has to offer, but because the tour packages are cheap and the resorts offer sun, sea, and sand aplenty. Resort workers are unhappy with this development for a variety of reasons. First of all, these tourists are not very affluent and thus they are not big spenders. The consequences are felt by the workers whose incomes depend on the money that tourists are willing to spend. Secondly, while resort workers are not overly concerned about the moral ramifications of alcotourism or sex tourism[92], they dislike the constant confrontations with inebriated guests in their daily work and fear that the presence of growing numbers of unruly tourists will drive away the remaining "good tourists". And finally, resort workers resent cheap mass tourism precisely because it is cheap, thus implying their country can offer nothing of value except for the sun, the sea, the sand, and cheap sex and booze. While many Bulgarians are very critical of the economic, social, and political development of their country since the 1990s, they are universally proud of its long history and its traditions and heritage. Tourists' indifference towards heritage sights seems to imply that they – and, by extension, Bulgaria's history and traditions – are of no intrinsic interest or value whatsoever.

Hotel managers and workers take pride in their work that measures up to internationally accepted standards, and they are proud of "their" modern hotels and resorts that compare favorably to those in other European tourist destinations. Their aversion to cheap mass tourism is rooted in a sense of

[92] Resort workers often greet such transgressive tourist behavior with mockery and contempt (see chapter 4), but there are no widespread anxieties about it leading to some sort of "contamination" or "moral degeneration" of the local population.

unease about its ramifications for the long-term success and sustainability of their destination, but there is also an unspoken feeling that high-quality service, modern hotels that are up to the latest standards, and beautiful resorts are somehow "wasted" on tourists who do not appreciate them. Resort workers' longing for a return of the "good" and "high-class" tourists is not just based on economic considerations or on issues of sustainability, but nurtured by a thirst for respect and recognition: for their work and achievements, for their destination, and for their country. At the same time, resort workers' talk about the "good" tourists of yesteryear and the "low-quality" tourists of today reveals the class issues underlying their perceptions of the new visitors that are attracted to the resorts. Access to work in the resorts is strongly based on class, as the skills and qualities demanded in tourism, such as foreign language proficiency and a service orientation, create a strong bias in favor of highly educated members of the middle class.[93] In order to "look good and sound right" to the coveted affluent middle-class tourists, the frontline employees of hotels, bars, restaurants, travel agencies, and upmarket shops must possess specifically middle-class forms of cultural capital. Those who have neither the necessary habitus nor language and computer skills are relegated to low-paying unskilled work in positions without customer contact. They may be hired as chamber maids, kitchen helpers, or bathroom attendants, although even for these low-income jobs, tourism companies prefer hiring educated middle-class workers if they are available.

This is also the reason why resident foreigners find it hard to get jobs in Varna's tourism industry. That is particularly true for British nationals, the vast majority of whom are neither proficient in Bulgarian or in other foreign languages, nor do they possess the necessary middle-class habitus.[94] In a similar vein, workers from the rural hinterland are disadvantaged when looking for resort jobs. Even though they may possess vocational skills, they are still dismissed because they are viewed as lacking the cultural capital that is deemed necessary for working in tourism. They are described as country bumpkins who speak no foreign languages, have no idea how to deliver good service, and lack the manners and the sophistication necessary for dealing with international tourists. These notions are expressions of the rural/urban

[93] Frontline jobs in the tourism industry require an aptitude for emotional and aesthetic labor that is based on a middle-class habitus. See chapter 7, where this issue is explored in more depth.

[94] In response, British residents have created their own niche on the labor market in the real estate sector, where their skills and their habitus are highly valued. See chapter 10.

divide in Bulgaria; they are also manifest in other domains, such as retailing and consumption.[95]

The middle-class values of resort workers are expressed in the ways they talk about the "new tourists" visiting Golden Sands or Albena. In workers' eyes, the large majority of the "poor", "low-quality" tourists firmly belong to the "lower classes", a view that is poignantly expressed in the widespread belief that many foreign tourists are actually unemployed and living on welfare. Their preference for the banal pleasures of the beach, cheap food and drinks, "low-brow" entertainment in bars, clubs, and discotheques, and shopping for cheap merchandise, combined with their rejection of cultural and heritage tourism, affirm their lower-class background in the eyes of resort workers. Meanwhile, the latter firmly adhere to middle-class values concerning consumption and entertainment. They privilege the contemplation and aesthetic enjoyment of activities centered on the "tourist gaze". Favoring modes of heritage and culture consumption that focus on education and "high" culture which are considered to contribute to the formation of a cultured and sophisticated self, they denounce forms of tourism that exclusively revolve around the physical pleasures of lazing on the beach, partying, and drinking. In their eyes, the activities of budget-conscious charter tourists are not just banal, they are also profoundly vulgar.

Hotel privatization and modernization have thus started a trajectory of development that will likely affect Golden Sands for many years to come. However, the issues resulting from these processes have ramifications not just for the hotel sector, but for the so-called auxiliary services as well – restaurants, retailers, and other establishments whose business depends on the customers that are attracted by the hotels. In the next chapter, I will focus on the consequences for the retail sector in Golden Sands, describing how vendors cope in an environment characterized by seasonality, stiff competition, and a clientele dedicated to "banal tourism".

[95] See chapter 7.

Chapter 4
The Retail Sector in Golden Sands: "Everybody Wants a Discount!"

The changing tourist flows that followed the privatization process in Golden Sands had a strong impact not just on the hotel sector, but on retailers as well. For vendors, the influx of less affluent tourists has meant growing competition and declining profits. It has also altered the character of their interactions with tourists: conflicts and clashes with customers have become more frequent, and vendors are more and more frustrated by the unreasonable demands and the inappropriate behavior of foreign visitors. At the same time, other stakeholders in the resort increasingly accuse vendors of driving away the remaining "good tourists" and furthering the Orientalization of Golden Sands by turning it into a bazaar with their ubiquitous stalls and cheap merchandise.

This chapter focuses on retailing in Golden Sands, describing the work of vendors in the resort, and the issues and challenges that they face. Radostina's story in the first section exemplifies the working conditions and modes of operation for vendors who sell their merchandise from open stalls, and it sheds light on the increasingly problematic nature of sales interactions that was brought about by the influx of less affluent tourists into Golden Sands. It also discusses the slights and insults, sexual harassment, and physical assaults by tourists that many resort workers confront in their daily work.

In the next section, Eva's story illustrates the circumstances faced by upmarket shops, and describes the challenges that all retailers in the resorts face. Retailers must cope with distrustful customers, oversupply, tough competition, and a lack of differentiation due to the quick copying and dissemination of innovations. The third section introduces Petya, a *pletachka* (an artisan who sells crochet work) who sells her own handiwork and whose business differs in many respects from that of other retailers in Golden Sands. As handicraft vendors, *pletachki* are viewed by tourists as representing "authentic" and "traditional" Bulgarian village life while in fact, poverty forced these educated urban women into their low-status jobs as vendors.

The last section discusses the discourses blaming vendors for the transformation of Golden Sands into a cheap destination. I will show how and why vendors are linked with parts of the resort that are designated as "Oriental" and thus problematic, and how the merchandise and the sales practices of vendors operating stalls, in particular, contribute to the negative image of trading in Golden Sands.

This chapter therefore explores the relationship between the retail sector and Golden Sands' image as a cheap destination. I describe the effects of the resort's transformation on its retail sector, but I also describe how and why other stakeholders in the resort accuse vendors of bearing responsibility for the resort's ever-tarnishing image. A more thorough analysis of the skills, of the emotional and aesthetic labor demanded in retailing jobs, and of the underlying reasons for the poor reputation of market stalls will be provided in chapter 7.

With respect to their merchandise, the vendors in Golden Sands have much in common with their counterparts in the city of Varna. They offer a wide range of goods: souvenirs and handicrafts, beach paraphernalia, clothes, shoes, jewelry, handbags, fashionable accessories, music CDs, and films on DVD. These commodities may be pirated brands, and they are often cheap imports from the Middle and Far East. Prices are fixed in both locations and vendors do not tout customers or perform sales pitches. The initiative is with the customer, and salespeople quietly wait for prospective buyers to approach them and state their wishes. In contrast to their colleagues in Varna, however, the retailers in Golden Sands operate seasonally. The majority of them are not business owners but hired employees who view their work as a temporary and comparatively low-status summer job. As their customers are foreign tourists staying for a limited time, they cannot rely on a stable customer base, and they are less concerned with attempts at earning the commitment and loyalty of their customers.

The two basic forms of retail venues in Golden Sands are shops and open stalls. The stalls are temporary structures that are dismantled or boarded up at the end of the season. Vendors working in stalls are constantly exposed to passers-by; they are easily accessible to and approachable by anyone who happens past, and they are always watched by the tourists whom they watch in return.[96] As we shall see, this feature of open stalls has a strong influence on vendors' perceptions of and interactions with tourists. Shops, on the other hand, are housed in hotels and permanent structures lining the streets. Some of them sell the same cheap merchandise as open

[96] In Urry's (1990) terms, vendors are constantly exposed to the "tourist gaze". However, as Cheong and Miller (2000) have pointed out, the tourist is likewise vulnerable to the composite gaze of locals and "brokers" who derive a living from tourism.

stalls; their doors are often left invitingly open and their goods spill out into the street. Other shops offer more expensive commodities. They signal their exclusiveness with tasteful displays in their windows, smartly dressed sales-people, and an air-conditioned interior.



Plate 3. Shops and vendors' stalls line the streets in Golden Sands.

Although trading is generally viewed as low-status work in Golden Sands, there are significant differences among vendors. Working in a shop that sells high-quality, expensive merchandise and being a professional salesperson paid by the month is considered more prestigious than working in a stall, dealing in low-quality, cheap merchandise, and being paid by the day. At the same time, all vendors in Golden Sands have to deal with fierce competition, "poor" tourists, and rising wholesale prices.

Vendors in Golden Sands – Radostina's Story[97]

Radostina, a 19-year-old woman from Sofia, had spent her summers in Golden Sands for as long as she could remember. After losing his job with the military, her father opened a souvenir stall in the resort in 1991. From

[97] I first met Radostina in May 2007 when she came to visit her father in Golden Sands for an extended weekend. In September of that year, I spent many hours chatting with her and the vendors at the neighboring stalls.

May to October, he rented a room in Varna where he was joined by his daughter in the peak season. Radostina's mother remained in Sofia and came to the coast only occasionally. The family also owned a small clothing shop in Sofia, but its turnover was so low that it merely supplemented the income they earned from selling souvenirs in Golden Sands.

The family's stall sold a broad range of souvenirs as well as some cheap jewelry, shawls, and headscarves, and decorative plates, dishes, and cups. Radostina took great pride in the latter because she decorated them herself, painting them with colorful patterns and then glazing them. She found it particularly frustrating and hurtful when tourists doubted her assurances that these objects were unique and handmade. After one such interaction, she stated heatedly, "I really hate people not trusting me!". Tourists also distrusted her assertion that the merchandise was cheaper than in Varna, and they regularly attempted to bargain for even lower prices. Indeed, Radostina preferred British, Scandinavian, and Romanian customers precisely because they did not usually attempt to haggle or ask for discounts.

Radostina said that "the problems" with tourists had grown in recent years. Customers were increasingly impolite and unfriendly, excessive drinking had become more and more of an issue, and instances where tourists behaved aggressively or even violently had become more frequent. When Radostina refused to bargain or accept payment in euros, some tourists felt aggrieved and took it out on her. Male tourists often propositioned her, and she recalled with horror some instances where tourists had offered her money for sex. Theft by customers was also a problem. Many of the goods she sold were small and easy to conceal, and in the evening when many customers crowded around the stall, it was hard to keep all of the merchandise in view.

The long working hours in Golden Sands took a heavy toll on Radostina's family. In the peak season, the stall was open seven days a week from ten o'clock in the morning to eleven o'clock in the evening. Thus, Radostina and her father spent most of their waking hours in the resort. They saw Radostina's mother only occasionally, and frequent phone calls were their main form of communication. But Radostina had developed close friendships with some of her stall neighbors. When business was slow, these young people spent their time talking, listening to music, or playing cards or backgammon. Despite the downsides of her job, Radostina loved working in Golden Sands. She praised the beauty of the seaside, comparing it favorably to the heat, smog, dust and congestion in summertime Sofia, and she enthused over the young, fun-loving crowd in the resort, describing it as "a bit of a madhouse", a place where there was always something interesting going on, stating, "It's adrenalin. And I love that!".

But like most vendors in the resort, Radostina felt that business had become less profitable in recent years. In the peak season, her average daily turnover was 500 levs, peaking at 700 levs on good days. In the low season, it dropped to an average of 150-200 levs. Although the gross sales suggest that they were doing a brisk business, the family's costs were higher than they liked: for the 2007 season, the family had leased their vending spot from Golden Sands plc for 18,000 levs; and they also paid utility bills and the cost of transporting their merchandise. In addition, between 2005-07, wholesale prices had surged, but due to the competition among retailers and declining customer spending, the increased costs of the merchandise could not be passed on to their customers. The family's own living costs had sharply increased during these same years, and they worried about the sustainability of their business.

"We Work 8 Days a Week, 25 Hours a Day!" – The Working Conditions of Vendors

Any vendor who has opted to operate a stall in Golden Sands, and leased an appropriate location, must decide whether to do the work himself or hire an employee. Like Radostina's father, many stall owner-operators chose not to employee help, but to do the work themselves with the support of other family members. Some stall owners, however, cannot afford to spend all of their time in Golden Sands; they decide to hire employees. As there is always the risk of fraud or theft, many of them prefer hiring people they know and trust, such as relatives, friends, and acquaintances of the family, or employees who have previously worked for them.[98]

The majority of vendors employed by stall owners in Golden Sands are high school or university students. They earn 20-30 levs a day[99], and some of them receive bonuses or a share of the turnover. Many vendors work informally or semi-formally. When authorities arrive to conduct an inspection to target informal employment or tax evasion, vendors on duty

[98] Employees selling merchandise that is small, cheap, and hard to track may be tempted to leave some sales off the record and pocket the money. Theft by customers is also an issue of great concern to vendors. Employees are responsible for keeping a watchful eye on customers and merchandise at all times; hence many owners deduct the price of stolen items from employee salaries. This may result in substantial losses for the employee; in one instance, customers stole a watch worth 200 levs, resulting in the vendor losing almost half of her monthly income.

[99] This totals to an average of 450-600 levs per month, depending on how many days per week the employee works. Among students, this is considered a good income. In 2007, the average salary in Bulgaria's retail sector was 349 levs/month; the average salary nationwide was 430 levs/month according to data by the NSI (2011g).

usually claim that they do not work for the stall and call the owner to deal with the inspectors.[100]

The long working hours are one of the main drawbacks of retailing jobs in Golden Sands. The conversation turned to this matter one hot afternoon with Radostina and her friends. One of them jokingly suggested that vendors in Golden Sands work 8 days a week, 25 hours a day. Encouraged by the others, he then gleefully explained that the law stipulates an 8-hour workday, but some vendors work 16 hours a day – which translates to 12 workdays a week![101]

Because vendors' wages and working hours are roughly the same anywhere in Golden Sands, most choose their job by other criteria. Will they get along with the owner? Will he deduct from their pay when sales are low, or will they receive bonuses when sales are high?[102] Will he help open the stall in the morning or will he just come in the evening to collect the money? Will he provide transport to the resort? Is there a place to sit down and rest when business is slow? Will they get along with their stall neighbors? These are only some of the criteria people apply when looking for a job as a vendor.

Those who are satisfied with their employer may work for him again in the following season. But there is also a significant amount of labor turnover, even in the peak season. Vendors are always in demand; if they are dissatisfied with their working conditions, they will easily find a job with someone else. As students have to return to their schools and universities in September, they have to give up their jobs or work only on weekends. The vacancies may be filled by unemployed women or pensioners, or the owner takes over for the remainder of the season.

All vendors agreed that boredom is one of the worst aspects of their job. Especially on hot days when the tourists are on the beach or at their hotel pools, the stalls are deserted of customers. Many are abandoned by the vendors, too, who sit in the shade quietly talking, playing backgammon or cards, reading the newspaper, or having a nap. In these slow midday and afternoon hours, nothing happens, time crawls, and the evening seems to be far away. But when the sun has set, the air has cooled down a bit, and the tourists have returned from the beach to their hotels and had dinner, the

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[100] I was told that in 2007, the fine for employing a vendor without a proper work contract was 500-3,000 levs. Owners usually manage to convince inspectors that they have conformed with all legal requirements. Some employees think that the inspectors are bribed when informal or semi-formal employment cannot be concealed.

[101] His calculation was based on working six days per week. A workday of 16 hours is, however, not common; in the peak season, most vendors work 12-14 hours per day.

[102] As owners compete for good workers, deducting from the employee's pay is a declining practice, while giving bonuses is increasingly more common.

busiest hours of the day begin. The stalls are lit like Christmas trees, music booms from their stereos, and tourists throng around the displays looking for bargains. At night, Golden Sands becomes the "madhouse" Radostina liked so much: "It's really fun! At seven or eight o'clock, when everybody is revved up, we dance the *horo* [a Bulgarian folk dance], we sing, we talk bullshit, and we laugh a lot. We love that!". Time flies, and soon, another workday is over and the stalls are closed for the night.

"Where Do They Think They Are? In Turkey?!" – Bargaining in Golden Sands

While most vendors in Golden Sands cherish opportunities to talk to and interact with foreigners, their daily encounters with tourists are also the cause of much frustration. From their perspective, the most problematic aspect of the sales process is the tourists' desire to bargain.

These interactions often follow the same pattern: a tourist approaches the vendor and inquires after the price of one of the items on sale. After being quoted the price, the tourist asks for a discount or attempts to bargain. The vendor explains that prices are fixed and no discounts can be given. The tourist then either leaves, or disputes the statement, or starts berating the vendor. In the interactions I witnessed, it was obvious that tourists dismissed refusals to bargain as a sales strategy designed to drive up the prices, and that they suspected vendors of cheating them. Vendors, for their part, might have already had the same conversation several times that day, and were deeply frustrated by tourists' unwillingness to accept their refusal.

Among the vendors, there are persistent rumors claiming that the representatives of tour operators in Golden Sands advise the tourists that bargaining is a standard practice in Bulgaria.[103] Radostina explained:

[103] I was present at several "welcome meetings" where tourists were greeted by representatives of their tour operator (see Andrews [2002] for a description). These presentations consisted mostly of the promotion of day trips offered by the tour operator or its partners (accompanied by warnings about the dangers of going on such trips with other, cheaper, companies that might not be licensed). Additionally, the representatives always gave very general information about the resort and the region, and issued some warnings about perceived dangers such as pickpockets (in Varna), dishonest taxi drivers (everywhere), and "begging Gypsies" (also in Varna). While I have occasionally overheard tour guides or representatives warning tourists that many commodities sold in the resort are not "genuine" brands but cheap counterfeits, I have never heard anyone suggest that bargaining is a standard practice in Bulgaria or the resort, or that tourists are systematically cheated by vendors. However, this does not necessarily mean that the vendors' beliefs are erroneous, since my own observations were limited to German tour operators.

> Things here are like a chain; they are linked. When the tourists arrive in Bulgaria, the tour operators tell them they must bargain here. That they must bargain here! And that is not good, because by working here, we earn our living for the entire year! When the tour operators tell them to bargain, they will arrive here and ask for discounts. And when we tell them there are no discounts, they think, "What is going on? Why won't they give me a discount?". And that is not good.

Tourists' insistence on bargaining poses a problem for the vendors. If the item in question is small and cheap, they explain that they are just employees, have no decision-making powers, and are not permitted to give discounts. Some customers accept the explanation and pay the quoted price, but others walk away without buying. It is a third group that causes vendors trouble: tourists who respond by starting angry arguments. A refusal to bargain may lead to aggressive behavior and threats by customers, and I was told of several instances where tourists attempted to physically assault vendors. Such attacks are rare, but most vendors have heard of them, and many have experienced incidents where they felt threatened by tourists. In situations like these, they rely for help on their friends and colleagues working in the stalls around them. If an argument escalates a vendor's neighbors try to defuse the situation and avert a physical fight. The certainty that their stall neighbors will support and protect them is vital to vendors' daily work.

Tourists would perhaps be discouraged from bargaining if vendors always refused to give discounts. However, sometimes vendors relent to customers' demands. They may offer discounts on expensive items or for a larger batch, but other factors such as current sales figures, relations between vendor and owner, or the tourist's demeanor and powers of persuasion play a role as well.[104] In any case, bargaining customers always entail additional work as vendors either have to refuse them and then deal with the fallout or negotiate with both the customer and the stall owner who has the final say in these matters. Apart from causing them stress and additional work, vendors resent the tourists' quest for discounts because of its perceived unfairness. They are aware that the merchandise sold in Golden Sands is already cheap compared to the prices in the tourists' countries of origin, and they view attempts to reduce the prices even further as unreasonable. As profit margins have diminished due to price increases, it has become harder to make a

[104] Employees have to call the stall owner and ask permission for giving a discount. If they receive bonuses based on their sales they may be more inclined to pursue the discount, but if their relations with the owner are strained, they may wish to avoid dealing with him and prefer "sticking to the rules". Sometimes, they make the call just to pacify irate customers, demonstrating that while they may be willing to relent, the ultimate decision lies with their (unfortunately absent) boss.

living from operating a stall in the resort. In this light, tourists' demands for lower prices are unacceptable as they threaten the livelihood of all vendors in Golden Sands. Radostina exclaimed angrily: "And we, all the colleagues here, we are very angry about these demands because we have to live on something too. When we go to the grocery to buy cheese and bread and milk, they do not give us a discount either. But we are supposed to give the tourists discounts. Why?".

Similar sentiments were voiced by many vendors, particularly after the price increases Bulgaria experienced in 2006-07. Vendors also felt that tourists' demands for discounts imply that their merchandise has no value. And while they agreed that many of their commodities are indeed cheap imports, they resented the implication that everything they sell is cheap, of poor quality, and lacking intrinsic value. Radostina, for example, did not object to her friends' joking assertion that many of the souvenirs sold by her family were cheap trinkets made in China. But she was filled with righteous indignation when customers suggested the same about the dishes she herself had decorated, thus, in her eyes, devaluing her work: "Everybody wants a discount. We sell dishes that we have crafted ourselves. I have decorated them. And that is a lot of work, a lot of love! And I sell them really cheaply. Really cheaply! And then somebody comes along and tells me, 'Oh, that is too much money. I want a discount. It is not your work!'".

For the vendors, the matter of bargaining is further complicated by its strong association with "the Orient", particularly Turkey. In Varna, bargaining is widely considered a defining characteristic of "Oriental" trading and retailing practices. It brings to mind touts grabbing people off the streets, pulling them into a shop, plying them with useless goods they do not need or want, and then charging an outrageous price for them. Ethnic Bulgarians view such behavior as ill-mannered and "uncivilized", something only an "uncultured" person would do. They consider bargaining a random and irrational way to settle on a price that corresponds to the chaotic and primitive nature of Turkish bazaars. Selling at fixed prices, by contrast, is seen as a rational, straightforward, and neat practice that enables polite and "civilized" sales interactions. Fixed prices are used in Europe and "the modern world", whereas bargaining is widespread in the "underdeveloped third world".[105] In Bulgaria, bargaining may occur in rural markets, but such markets are still viewed as being situated in poor and backward places, and

[105] The notion of "civilized behavior" was expressed in this context by adjectives such as *kulturen*, *vazpitan*, *iziskan*, *uchtiv*, or *zivilizovan*. Modern, developed, progressive (*razviti*, *napredni*) societies and countries were contrasted to backward (*nazadnichavi*, *nekulturni*) societies and countries or to the underdeveloped third world (*nedorazviti strani/darzhavi ot tretiya svyat*).

as being patronized by uneducated and unsophisticated consumers.[106] The overwhelming majority of vendors in Golden Sands consider themselves highly educated and cultured urbanites, sophisticated consumers who do their shopping in Varna's shops, supermarkets, and shopping malls where prices are, of course, fixed.

Tourists' assumption that bargaining is acceptable in Golden Sands thus carries a twofold threat to vendors' self-perception. On the one hand, it implies that tourists view them as touts and crooks like those who roam the bazaars of Istanbul. On the other hand, it indicates tourists' apparent failure to regard Bulgaria as a modern, civilized, European country, insinuating instead that it is part of the poor and backward "Orient". Hence vendors' indignant comments along the lines of "Where do they think they are? In Turkey?! This is Bulgaria, we are a European country!". By refusing to bargain, vendors do not just insist on the value of their merchandise and on their right to make a living. They also demonstrate their "Europeanness", thus bolstering claims of belonging to the symbolic space of Europe.

When talking about tourists' quest for discounts, vendors often mentioned in the same breath that tourists sometimes attempt to pay in euros or British pounds. While this does not occur as frequently and predictably as bargaining, it nevertheless happens on a fairly regular basis. Again, vendors are convinced that tour operators tell their clients that it is possible to pay with euros in Bulgaria and that many vendors would happily accept that currency.[107] While vendors are generally loath to accept payment in euros, they nevertheless do it sometimes, particularly when larger sums are involved or when they are desperate to make a sale. As the exchange rate between the lev and the euro is fixed, they do not stand to lose from such a deal per se. Nevertheless, accepting euros causes additional work for the vendors as they have to change the money back into levs. Because of their long working hours, vendors are often unable to be in Varna during banking hours, and they are forced to exchange the money in Golden Sands. That does result in a loss because the rates given in the resort's exchange offices are significantly lower than those in Varna and additionally, they charge hefty fees or commissions.

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[106] See Kaneff (2002) for a description of trading in a Bulgarian provincial market.

[107] Indeed, I witnessed several instances where representatives of German tour operators reassured tourists who were uneasy about obtaining levs that euros would be accepted in Golden Sands. In these cases, the tourists were not told that businesses are obliged to accept foreign currencies, nor was it implied that they would necessarily be happy about accepting euros. But, the tourists were neither discouraged from attempting to pay with euros, nor encouraged to obtain levs.

In the 1990s, when inflation rates were high and the lev was devalued several times, Bulgarians were eager to obtain more stable currencies such as US dollars, Deutschmarks, or British pounds. The former two actually became unofficial second currencies in Bulgaria. Older vendors like Radostina's father remember that time, and that is one of the reasons why they are offended when tourists assume they are happy to be paid in euros. It implies that Bulgaria is a poor country with a poor economic performance and an unstable currency (as it was in the 1990s). One older vendor indignantly proclaimed, "We do not need their euros, our lev works just fine. We are not some third world country!".

Some vendors are annoyed by the arrogance of tourists' assumption that everybody would happily accept their currencies. After a particularly unpleasant sales encounter, an older vendor burst out, "We have to learn their languages, we have to accept their currencies; they think they can just take that for granted! But this is Bulgaria!". He felt slighted that tourists do not acknowledge important national symbols such as currency or language.[108] Other vendors, however, dismiss the persistent offer of other currencies to the tourists' ignorance. They argue that many tourists just want to spend their vacation by the sea. They end up in Golden Sands because that was the cheapest offer, but they may just as well have gone to Antalya or the Costa del Sol. These tourists do not know much about Bulgaria, nor do they particularly care. They may have heard that Bulgaria has become a member of the European Union, and thus concluded that the euro is the country's official currency. Hence, these vendors assume that tourists attempt to pay with euros because they are ignorant fools who simply do not know any better.

"We Are Not Easy Girls!" – Harassment by Tourists

Among the workers in Golden Sands, vendors as a group are the most forthright about their disdain for the new type of low-quality tourists visiting the resort. Stationed in their stalls along its streets, they are in an excellent position to observe inebriated tourists staggering back to their hotels after a day of heavy drinking, collapsing in the streets, or passing out on one of the benches lining the promenade. While such incidents are recounted with a mixture of glee, mockery, and contempt, drunks harassing the vendors are an

[108] The reverse is also true. Tourists approaching a vendor with a "Hello!" in Bulgarian will be greeted with a sincere smile. Western European foreigners who know at least some Bulgarian phrases are met with great enthusiasm and delight. Bulgarians know that their language is a relatively minor language and that most western Europeans cannot read the Cyrillic script. They feel flattered when foreigners bother to learn some of it, and will greatly praise the tourist's efforts and skills.

entirely different matter. Most vendors have at one time or another been accosted by inebriated tourists. Although actual fights are rare, all vendors know of instances where tourists have assaulted resort workers. Vendors are thus well aware that confrontations with drunk and aggressive tourists may be dangerous; when approached by such customers, they do their best to diffuse the situation and direct the tourist's attention elsewhere.

Drunk customers propositioning vendors are seen as equally unpleasant and risky. Almost all of the female vendors I talked with had been sexually harassed by tourists at one time or another. Most of them do not mind flirting per se, as long as they are treated respectfully. Many enjoy flirting and feel flattered by the compliments they receive. After all, opportunities for flirting and falling in love are widely viewed as one of the main attractions of Golden Sands as a workplace. But when tourists are too persistent, ignoring clues that their attentions are not wanted, their advances quickly become annoying and bothersome. Even worse are drunk tourists who attempt to grab and fondle female vendors; the women are horrified by such behavior and rely on stall neighbors to help them in these cases.[109]

The transgressive behavior of tourists is fostered by the construction of beach resorts as liminal, utopic spaces where "anything goes", and where ordinary norms and codes of conduct do not apply. It is also ostensibly sanctioned by the sexualized atmosphere prevailing in resorts like Golden Sands; hence, a short foray into this subject may be expedient. In Golden Sands, apparently permissive attitudes and the easy availability of sex are epitomized by the highly visible prostitutes roaming the streets. Although there is general agreement among resort workers that sex tourism is not the primary motivation of most tourists, for some it clearly is an incentive, as Nedyalka, a restaurant manager in her mid-thirties, explained:

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[109] However, resort workers' notions about what constitutes "sexual harassment" do not necessarily correspond to those held in Western legal, academic, and particularly feminist circles. Most of the female resort workers I talked to considered flirting and romantic involvement among resort workers, and between workers and tourists as a normal part of their work environment that was in no way reprehensible. On the contrary, many emphasized that the numerous opportunities for flirting, romance, and "falling in love" contributed to making Golden Sands an attractive workplace. Their enjoyment of these activities, however, hinges on being treated politely, respectfully, and as equals. Resort workers tend to define tourists' advances as "harassment" when they feel threatened, feel "treated like prostitutes", or pursued despite making it clear that they are not interested in being approached in such a way (cf. Ghodsee 2005: 146-49). On sexuality in the service industries workplace elsewhere, see also Giuffre and Williams (1994); Guerrier and Adib (2000); Lerum (2004).

> C.B.: Is there sex tourism in Golden Sands?
> Nedyalka: I think so. I think it is a reason for some of the male tourists to come here. There are many Gypsies working as prostitutes.[110] In the center of the resort, there is a new apartment hotel with a very pretty street in front of it – it is lined with trees, there are benches, and so on. And that is where these women are sitting, with their tits hanging out. Sorry for putting it like that, but that's the way it is! It is a little like advertising, and the tourists passing by are always watching them. There are many people who come here because of that. And a lot of prostitutes are working in the party street – you know the street with all the discos and clubs. That is where they are working.

Most resort workers viewed prostitution rather matter-of-factly, concluding that it is just a part of life that exists all over the world. They recognized, however, that the presence of prostitutes, while attracting some tourists to the resort, might discourage others, especially families with children.[111]

Sexual and romantic encounters between tourists and locals are by no means limited to prostitution. It is not unusual for resort workers to have affairs with tourists. Often, these liaisons end when the holiday is over and the tourist returns home. But sometimes, both sides keep in touch, and in some cases, a holiday affair may turn into a long-term relationship, and eventually even result in marriage.

The beaches of Golden Sands are also roamed by the so-called *glarusi*.[112] Like the "beach boys" in other tourist destinations, *glarusi* are attractive young men who prey on female tourists. A *glarus* approaches female tourists on the beach, in bars, or discotheques, and attempts to woo them by paying compliments, buying drinks, inviting them to dance, and offering to

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[110] Nedyalka's use of the term *cigani* (Gypsies) implies that the majority of prostitutes are members of the Roma minority. This is a widespread belief. Prejudice about and discrimination of Roma is prevalent among Bulgarians. "Gypsies" are said to derive an income from all sorts of illegal and morally questionable pursuits – stealing, begging, prostitution, drug dealing, and so on. A common stereotype is that of the unemployed "Gypsy" and his large family living off welfare, child allowances, and whatever money can be obtained by all sorts of underhanded dealings.

[111] Resort workers also worried about the possible effects that the strong visibility of prostitutes might have on the reputation of the resort, and of the country. They argued that in the Western media, Bulgaria is frequently depicted as a country wracked by poverty, corruption and crime, a hub for drug-trafficking, and the country of origin of many prostitutes working in western Europe. They feared that tourists seeing these ladies roam the resort looking for customers would reinforce these stereotypes.

[112] *Glarus* (pl. *glarusi*) is Bulgarian for "herring gull".

show them around.[113] When he successfully establishes relations, the *glarus* acts as the tourist's companion, guide, friend, and lover during her holiday. In return, the tourist pays his expenses, gives gifts and, perhaps, money and, with luck, invites him to visit her at her home.[114] The heyday of the *glarusi* was before 1989 when their relations with tourists provided them with access to foreign consumer goods, fashionable clothes, hard currency, and opportunities to travel.[115] In the last two decades, Western consumer goods have been widely available in Bulgaria, it has become much easier to meet foreigners and travel abroad and, at the same time, tourists have become more numerous, but less prosperous and cultured. Thus, the *glarusi* have been on the decline, and while in the 1980s, the term *glarus* denoted a semi-professional beach boy with access to high-status goods and persons, it is now used less frequently, and in a much wider sense, often describing any man attempting to chat-up women – foreign or local – on the beach. While pre-1989, sexual conquests were only one of the goals of the *glarusi*, they now seem to have grown in importance.

Some resort workers with whom I talked suspected that the easy availability of sex in Golden Sands leads tourists to think that nothing is off-limits, and that all resort workers are potential sexual partners. Such assumptions might help explain the behavior of some tourists, but they are strongly resented by the resort workers:

> Radostina: One day, I was really terrified – I was opening the stall, and a really handsome guy, a good-looking man, came up to me and said, "I'll give you 100 levs, will you come with me to my room?". I started yelling at him. I was terrified! And last year, I had two friends, tourists. Two really nice guys from England. Before they

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[113] Many *glarusi* have tourism jobs that allow them to spend time on the beach and give them an excuse for approaching female tourists; they often work as life guards, bartenders, sports instructors, or hire out boats, jet skis, deck chairs, and sun shades.

[114] See also de Albuquerque (1998); Dahles and Bras (1999); Taylor (2001). According to Pruitt and LaFont (1995), the relationships of beach boys with (female) tourists are qualitatively different from those of prostitutes with (male) tourists in that the former focus on friendship, companionship, and romance. They have coined the term "romance tourism" in order to distinguish the relations formed between female tourists and beach boys from "sex tourism". Herold, Garcia and DeMoya (2001) have critiqued this dichotomy as too simplistic and suggested a continuum of romance/sex motivations that may be applied to both male and female tourists (see also Cohen 1982; Brennan 2004). For overviews of the vast literature on sex tourism, see Leheny (1995); Oppermann (1999).

[115] Some of the *glarusi* of the 1970s and 1980s have an almost legendary status. This is exemplified by the story about one *glarus* who, when asked by his tourist "girlfriend" from western Europe what kind of a gift would make him happy, jokingly replied that he wanted an airplane. Some weeks later, a small airplane did indeed arrive for him. It was, of course, immediately confiscated by the authorities.

> left, they came to say goodbye, and they really shocked and disappointed me. They said that Bulgarian girls are whores, that they are really easy. That was bad, horrible!
> C.B.: Do you have a lot of male tourists trying to flirt with you?
> Radostina: Yes, yes. Because – I do not know why they think that Bulgarian women are easy! We are not easy! We are beautiful, we want to work, we work hard, but we are not easy girls!

Of course, excessive drinking, aggressive and violent behavior, and sexual harassment by tourists are issues concerning all workers in Golden Sands. However, vendors operating stalls are the most outspoken about such behavior and condemn it more strongly than other groups. One reason is that these vendors are approachable by anyone who happens to be passing by. They are an easy target for anyone who wants to talk, flirt, or vent their frustration; hence they are constantly exposed to tourists' aggressions and sexual overtures. And even if they are not targeted directly, their stalls are vantage points for observing everything that is going on, including the excessive behavior of tourists.

Furthermore, unlike hotel or restaurant workers, vendors have nothing to gain from dealing with aggressive or inebriated tourists. Some resort hotels have based their business on targeting alcotourists, and hotel employees may gain from selling guests alcohol or looking the other way when they bring in dates or prostitutes. Likewise, restaurants, bars, and discotheques in the resort increase their profits by creating an environment where "anything goes". Tour agencies organize and sell pub crawls, and the frontline workers of bars and clubs often endure drunk guests or unwelcome advances in the hopes of augmenting their earnings. While they are critical of tourists' conduct, they are aware of the opportunities for profit it entails, and thus are much more reluctant to voice their criticism and disdain. Vendors, by contrast, run the risk of getting drawn into fights and having their merchandise damaged, but they do not stand to gain from interacting with inebriated customers.

Finally, the proportion of workers aspiring to a career in tourism is much lower among vendors than among hotel and restaurant workers. They view their jobs as temporary, and do not plan a career that is directly dependent on the well-being of the tourism industry in the region. Hence, they do not feel constrained by the possible consequences of openly criticizing tourist behavior. Hotel and restaurant employees on the other hand, many of whom wish to remain in the tourism industry, are aware of the resort's precarious status as a tourist destination, and the strong competition it is facing. They fear that public discussion and criticism of excessive tourist behavior might contribute to Golden Sands' image as a cheap destination by

deterring affluent and cultured tourists, and that furthermore, tourists might no longer feel welcome in the resort and decide to spend their vacations elsewhere.

The shift in tourist flows has thus not just resulted in lower profits for the vendors due to declining tourist spending. It has also brought about changes in the perception of tourists. As a tourist resort, Golden Sands has always been a space of play, enjoyment, and leisure, but the shift away from the culturally interested middle-class tourists of the 1980s to the "poor" lower-class tourists visiting the resort today has brought to the fore the transgressive behavior of tourists reveling in the "banal" pleasures of not just sun, sea, and sand, but also of spirits and of sex. As vendors do not have the luxury of watching the spectacle from a comfortable distance, but have to daily interact with tourists who operate under the assumption that for the duration of their holidays, the rules and norms governing polite and civilized interactions have been suspended, it is not surprising that they increasingly view and treat these "new" tourists with contempt. While some vendors react by avoiding or ignoring customers who appear unpleasant or troublesome, others respond by completely withdrawing their emotional labor and keeping all customer interactions to a minimum. Still others occasionally vent their anger by actively insulting customers, using the Bulgarian language on the assumption that tourists will not understand what is being said.[116] Still, most vendors avoid direct confrontations with tourists as ultimately, they, too, depend on them for their income.

Upmarket Shops: Tough Competition and Declining Profits

In the preceding sections, I have described some features of vendors' jobs that are part of the daily experiences of all retailers in Golden Sands: the long working hours often filled with boredom, and the importance of colleagues and neighbors who contribute to workers' feelings of security, help them pass the time in lull periods, and generally add to the "fun" associated with these jobs. All retailers in the resort have to interact with customers looking for discounts and persistently attempting to bargain as well as with the occasional tourist trying to pay in currencies other than the lev. Most traders also deal with inebriated and aggressive tourists and sexual harassment at one time or another. But these problematic encounters are much more frequent for the vendors working in open stalls. In this section, I will introduce an employee working in an upmarket shop. Her story illustrates some further challenges facing the retailers in Golden Sands.

[116] In management theory (e.g. Harris and Ogbonna [2002]), such behaviour is viewed as "service sabotage" that needs to be prevented.

Eva, a woman in her thirties, was the manager of a shop selling expensive gold jewelry. In 2007, she had held this job for six years. She worked in Golden Sands each summer season and in a jewelry shop in one of Bulgaria's ski resorts in the winter. In the 1990s, she used to earn so much in Golden Sands that she did not have to work in the winter season, but these times were gone now.

The season for her shop started in early or mid-May and ended in late September. In terms of sales, the season had become increasingly shorter in recent years. Her shop had three employees in the shoulder season and hired an additional salesperson in the July-August peak. Eva remembered that in earlier years, their sales had been high throughout the summer; even May and September had been good months due to the affluent elderly customers. But now they had their peak turnover in August and sold much less in the low season.

According to Eva, business did not go very well for several reasons. First of all, competition was fierce. Secondly, many tourists preferred shopping in Varna where they believed prices were lower. Thirdly, the leases for shops in Golden Sands were extremely high by local standards. And lastly, fewer tourists were able to afford luxury goods, especially after the sharp price increases.

Eva found her job interesting, and she liked working with beautiful and prestigious merchandise in clean and pleasant surroundings close to the sea. Working in Golden Sands, she could earn more than in a similar shop in any Bulgarian city. Unlike the vendors operating stalls, the employees of her shop were paid by the month. They received the minimum salary as a base salary and a percentage of the shop's monthly turnover on top of that. They thus had a strong incentive to promote sales. In the hopes of increasing their incomes, they accepted long working hours. The shop was open from nine o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock in the evening every day, and its employees regularly worked seven days a week, only occasionally taking-off a day.

Eva and her colleagues rarely had encounters of the kind that bother the vendors in open stalls so much. They were not troubled by inebriated or aggressive tourists, and incidents of customers insulting or harassing staff were extremely rare. Eva attributed that to the more refined and elegant ambience in her shop which discouraged such behavior from the outset. Theft did occasionally occur, and its prevention was of great concern to Eva because of the high value of the merchandise. What bothered Eva most were the distrust and suspicion she frequently encountered. Many tourists apparently believe that all vendors seek to cheat their customers, an assumption that Eva found highly offensive: "Something that I do not like, something

that really bothers me, is that many customers approach us with distrust. They come to Bulgaria and they do not believe we are here to serve them; they think all we want to do is grab their money and sell them something shoddy in return. But it is not like that! And this distrust… it offends us. It is really aggravating!". The distrust shown by tourists concerns both the quality of the merchandise and its price. Much of the merchandise sold in Golden Sands is indeed of a low quality. However, this does not apply to exclusive shops like Eva's, and even open stalls might sell a selection of high-quality, handcrafted goods along with cheaper commodities. But tourists seem to believe that everything sold in Golden Sands is shoddy and overpriced, an assumption that vendors find extremely offensive.

Tourists' distrust of vendors leads them to carefully compare prices before doing any actual shopping. When they are roaming the resort, they often stop at stalls and shops, browsing through the merchandise and asking the prices of individual items. Comparisons are facilitated by the fact that many of the retailers in Golden Sands offer the same or very similar products. Their prices may be the only distinguishing feature; hence, even insignificant price differences may have a great impact on shop turnover. Contributing to the uniform range of merchandise sold in the resort is the practice of quickly copying innovations. A vendor offering a new item that sells very well will find that soon, the same item is being sold all over the resort. This is exemplified by printed t-shirts, one of the souvenirs sold to tourists in resorts throughout the world.

In Golden Sands, too, vendors are selling t-shirts with amusing prints. They often consist of some sort of innuendo, or they are of the "I was here" variety. In 2004, t-shirts fashioned like the football jerseys of the former GDR and Soviet Union, as well as red shirts with the inscription "KGB" were bestsellers. For East Germans and Russians, these designs appealed to widespread nostalgia for the past, while British and Scandinavian tourists bought them because they were exotic and "edgy".[117] Three years later, these shirts had disappeared. In their stead, some souvenir stalls had started selling t-shirts displaying (in Bulgarian) the slogan "Bulgaria of the three seas" and a map of south-eastern Europe, showing the country's greatest expansion under Tsar Ivan Asen II in the 13th century. At the same time, shirts reading (in Bulgarian) "Bulgaria above everything" began to appear and a year later, they were sold all over the resort.[118] These were not as wildly popular as the

[117] On the functions of prints and logos on t-shirts, see Goldman (1997); Kelly (2003); Glass (2008).

[118] The Cyrillic letters read "*Bulgaria na tri moreta*" and "*Bulgaria nad vsichko*". These t-shirts are often worn by Bulgarians with nationalist inclinations, particularly by the supporters of the nationalist party Ataka.

KGB, GDR, or USSR shirts. Nevertheless, foreigners wearing them could occasionally be seen in Varna. It is unlikely that these tourists were aware of the meaning and significance of the slogans[119], and while some Varnentsi found it highly amusing to see foreigners displaying Bulgarian nationalist slogans, others viewed it as just another indication of many tourists' ignorance and stupidity. Vendors, however, argued that the shirts sold reasonably well; that was their only concern.

Due to the large number of retailers in Golden Sands, the similar range of merchandise on offer, and the heated competition for customers, the profits made by vendors have been declining. Like Eva, most retailers in the resort believe that there is an oversupply of shops and stalls, and that individual vendors are suffering as a result:

> Eva: There are a disproportionate number of shops here. It does not matter how many tourists there are, and whether they are poor or rich, whether they can afford things or not, there are simply way too many shops. There are not enough customers for everyone and the leases here are very high.
>
> C.B.: So the competition is stiff?
>
> Eva: It is extremely fierce, and at the same time, many tourists are being told even before they arrive here that it is cheaper in the city. That is not true; when they go to the city and people there recognize them as tourists, they ask the same prices we charge here in Golden Sands. That has been a common practice for a very long time. But still, many tourists go to Varna to do their shopping because they believe it is more expensive in Golden Sands.

Thus, vendors in Golden Sands are aware that they are not just competing with their counterparts in the resort, but with retailers in Varna as well. Most tourists take a trip to Varna during their stay, and while there, they combine sightseeing with some shopping. As Eva stated, many believe that prices in the city are lower than those in the resorts, and thus they tend to do their shopping in the city. The vendors in Golden Sands have a vested interest in convincing potential customers that they would not get a better deal in Varna, but often, the tourists do not believe their assertions. Their distrust annoys the vendors; they feel vindicated when rueful customers return from the city, sheepishly admitting that they were right. But vendors also know that some goods and services are indeed cheaper in Varna, and that many tourists end up doing their shopping there.

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[119] The tourists I talked to did not know the meaning of the slogans; they stated that they had bought their shirts because the Cyrillic letters looked "cool" or "different". Others interpreted the "Bulgaria of the three seas" shirt as an "I was here" statement; they did not realize that the map does not show the country's current borders.

The highly competitive situation affects vendors' profits, and these effects are exacerbated by the influx of "poor" tourists. All vendors noted that customers have had a smaller budget for shopping after 2005. Eva saw a link between the economic conditions in tourists' countries of origin, tourists' living standards, and her sales:

> Eva: Our best customers used to be the Russians and the Germans. But the Germans in particular told me that their country is in a recession; they have less and less money to spend on luxury goods. They say that here, too, everything has grown more expensive. They used to buy jewelry here because it was much cheaper than in Germany. But now it is not that cheap any more. And they certainly have a tighter budget now; they often reserve a small sum for gifts which is not enough for our kind of merchandise.
>
> C.B.: Are there nationalities or groups of customers you prefer?
>
> Eva: I cannot say that we prefer them, but when we look at it from a business point of view, the Russians are the customers who are shopping the most, who are readily buying things. There are many of them, their living standard, especially that of the Muscovites, is very high, and they can afford many things. They are very good customers. Of course, the others are good as well, but generally, the Russians spend a lot more than the other nationalities.

While many tourists are on a tighter budget, shop owners have to cope with rising wholesale prices and high leases. Some have raised their consumer prices, but others were unable to do so amid ruthless competition. Either way, it has become much harder for them to maintain their previous levels of turnovers and profits. This is particularly apparent in shops selling luxury goods like Eva's, but it pertains to all retailers in the resort alike. As we shall see, these issues have an impact on the business of *pletachki* as well, even though it differs in many respects from the cases I have recounted so far.

The Work of *Pletachki*

At the age of 67, Petya worked as a *pletachka*, an artisan who produces and sells crocheted decorative tablecloths, embroidered blouses and handkerchiefs, and knitted jumpers and baby clothes. She had been operating a stall in Golden Sands since 1992 when she lost her job as a civil servant in Varna's municipal administration. Petya spent the winters in her apartment in Varna, producing the merchandise she would sell to tourists in the summer season. Taking into account the preferences her customers had shown the previous summer, she designed the items to be made for the next season. Family and friends were involved in their actual production; her daughter-in-law, her granddaughters, and some female friends helped her to crochet,

embroider, and knit all the pieces. But just as she had the ultimate responsibility for the design of her merchandise, Petya was also the one who sold it, sitting in her small stall every day from mid-morning until late in the evening.

Petya said she had started out small with only a limited number of designs, but she had steadily increased the variety of items she had on offer. She now sold mostly decorative tablecloths of many different forms, sizes, and designs. The great pride Petya took in her work shone through when she presented her merchandise, and explained its production, its uses, and the many ways it would beautify her customers' homes.

In the 1990s, Petya had earned very good money as a *pletachka* but business had declined in the years after the turn of the millennium. Like everyone working in Golden Sands, she complained that today's tourists had little money to spend on her merchandise. At the same time, the lease she had to pay for her stall, and the costs of the raw materials she used had increased drastically. But she still felt unable to raise her prices, explaining that most tourists knew them very well and came to her stall knowing exactly how much they would spend. Indeed, many still quoted prices in Deutschemarks, telling her things like, "But I *know* that this is 20 Marks!". Petya feared that by raising her prices, she would lose customers as the tourists would either buy nothing at all, or buy crotchet work more cheaply in Varna.

Petya said that her best customers were the Germans, the Russians, and the Scandinavians. She explained that these nationalities knew and understood what she was offering simply by looking at her merchandise. Others, much to her chagrin, insinuated it was machine-made, and doubted her word when she assured them that everything she sold was created by her and represented true handicraft.

Petya saw the growing share of eastern European tourists staying in the resort as one of the reasons for her declining profits, as these nationalities were not interested in her merchandise. She believed they did not appreciate her work, either because they had no money to spend on it, or because it was available more cheaply in their own countries. For Petya, the season of 2007 had not been a good one. Her turnover was low compared to previous summers due to the tight budgets of the cherished German, Russian, and Scandinavian tourists. Nevertheless, working as a *pletachka* still offered Petya the opportunity to earn an income that enabled her to lead a comfortable life, and even support her family. Petya deemed herself lucky; she knew she was better off than many others of her age.

Pletachki like Petya differ from other vendors in Golden Sands in several respects. The most obvious difference is that they produce their own

merchandise. These women are entrepreneurs who organize their own work, autonomously deciding what items to produce, how to present and sell them, when to work, and for how long. Unlike employed salespeople, they have no secure income; their earnings depend entirely on whether or not people buy their handicrafts.



Plate 4. *Pletachki* selling crochet work in Golden Sands.

Another marked difference between *pletachki* and other vendors in Golden Sands is their age. While most vendors are in their teens or twenties, *pletachki* are usually elderly women. Indeed, when Petya spoke about her colleagues, she frequently used phrases like "we grannies" or "the other grannies". While most of these "grannies" have been working as *pletachki* for many years, they often know only a few phrases in English or German.[120] They can state prices in the tourists' languages, and they know a few phrases to praise their merchandise, but they are unable to have longer conversations with their customers. Their interactions with tourists are thus more func-

[120] Like most of their generation, these women learned Russian at school. Some of them speak it quite well, while others are at least able to make themselves understood due to the similarities of the Bulgarian and Russian languages. But many of them never had any formal training in English or other west European languages, and while they have picked up a few phrases and expressions over the years, their language skills are usually quite limited.

tional than those of other vendors; conversation is limited to the business at hand.

In contrast to most businesses in Golden Sands, the income of *pletachki* is high in the shoulder season. Petya explained that her best customers are the elderly who appreciate her crocheted tablecloths, are more inclined to decorate their homes with them, and have more money to spend on them. The younger tourists arriving in the peak season usually have children on whom they spend most of their money. Those who buy her crotchet work intend to give it as a gift to parents or elderly relatives. Hence, her business peaks in the period that other resort workers view as the slow season.

Another striking difference between *pletachki* and other merchants in the resort is their attitude towards competition. By the time I started asking Petya questions about her business, I had become familiar with the complaints about that issue. I also knew there were quite a number of *pletachki* in Golden Sands who, at least to my unpracticed eye, all sold the same merchandise. I thus fully expected Petya to lament the fierce competition among them. But, much to my surprise, no such complaints were forthcoming. Instead, Petya calmly explained that all *pletachki* in Golden Sands know each other and many of them are friends who do not begrudge each other their income. Besides, their stalls are spread over several locations in the resort, enabling each of them to receive an adequate share of customers. And while all *pletachki* sell decorative tablecloths as their main product, each specializes in a particular style of crocheting, and thus offers particular designs, forms, and sizes. Hence, they each occupy their own small market niche. Petya described how tourists looking for a decorative cloth for their dinner table, for example, have a clear notion of the size and form they want, and often prefer a certain design over others, thus approaching the vendor selling items that match these specifications. Petya concluded: "We only compete for the best quality and design. Who is the most skilled? Who makes the most beautiful items of the best quality? That is what is important to us!".

While Petya was adamant that *pletachki* in the resort do not compete for customers, her attitude towards her counterparts in Varna was quite different. Considering the high value she put on craft skills, it was not surprising that she framed her statements in the language of quality. She explained that the *pletachki* in Varna are much older, have poorer eyesight and less nimble fingers, and thus that their merchandise is of a lower quality, and of a much smaller range, than that which is available in Varna. She also consistently deemphasized the price differences between both locations. In contrast to other vendors, *pletachki* do not put price tags on their merchandise, making it much harder for customers to compare prices and shop

around. From my observations of their sales interactions, it appears that in Golden Sands, similar items are in roughly the same price range. But within this range, prices are flexible, depending on the *pletachka*'s assessment of the customer. Seemingly affluent tourists with no preconceived notion of the cost of this kind of merchandise are quoted slightly higher prices than those who know exactly what they want to buy and at what price. Furthermore, when a *pletachka* is desperate to make a sale, she might be more inclined to lower the price or give a discount when asked for it. Overall, however, the prices of crochet work are much higher in the resorts than in the city. This is a consequence of the high leases *pletachki* have to pay in Golden Sands. Their counterparts in Varna pay minimal leases or none at all, enabling them to sell more cheaply. *Pletachki* in Varna thus have an edge in the competition for customers. They emphasize their low prices when negotiating with potential buyers, whereas *pletachki* in the resorts either deny the existence of a price difference, minimize it, or acknowledge but justify the difference by stressing the superior quality of the merchandise sold in Golden Sands.

Like other vendors in Golden Sands, *pletachki* thus face the constant threat of losing customers to their competitors in Varna. Furthermore, they too must cope with high leases, a shortening of the season, and "poorer" tourists. These factors have led to a decline in their profits, but even though her business had become less profitable, Petya was quite satisfied with her work. She stated, "I do my work because I want to do it, I do it with love, and it comes from my heart. And it makes me happy when people come here, see something they like and buy it. That gives me great satisfaction and happiness".

Women like Petya defy notions of an older generation being caught in a "socialist mentality". Held by western European tourists and by some younger Bulgarians, these views regard the elderly as being adverse to change and to risk-taking, as unable or unwilling to adapt to the new times, as incapable of providing for themselves, and as expecting the state to take care of them.[121] However, the *pletachki* have responded to unemployment or retirement not by calling on the state to help them, but by successfully adapting to the market economy, and finding new ways to make a living. They have created a market niche that makes it possible for them to earn an income, take responsibility, and provide for themselves and their families. In that sense, they are true entrepreneurs who bear the responsibility for their own lives, and use the opportunities that present themselves to improve their situation.

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[121] Views such as these are widely spread in the former socialist countries of eastern Europe. See Dunn (2004) for a vivid description of such notions in Poland.

In many ways, the *pletachki* in Golden Sands are similar to the arts and handicraft vendors described in the anthropological literature on tourism. They sell the products of a craft with a long tradition in the region. The items they produce are rooted in that craft tradition, but they are modified according to tourists' preferences. *Pletachki* take great pride in their craft skills which they demonstrate by creating beautifully designed merchandise of a high quality.

Tourists often perceive the *pletachki* as particularly "authentic" because they seem to embody images of the "eastern European granny" foreigners know from television. Clad in headscarves, long skirts and blouses, wearing aprons or smocks, and spending their days knitting and crocheting, they appear to be remnants of an older, more authentic Bulgaria: village-bound, poor but self-sufficient, and steeped in tradition. The sober reality is lost on the foreigners: most *pletachki* are modern urbanites who used to work in the administration, the public sector, or the service industries. It was the economic collapse of the 1990s that plunged them into unemployment and poverty, and forced them to adopt survival strategies such as trading. Like Petya, many of them find deep pride and satisfaction in their work, they enjoy being admired for their skill, and it makes them happy to create and sell something that will make their customers' homes more beautiful. But at the same time, they are forced to trade because their pensions are too low to cover the cost of living. For many *pletachki*, selling crotchet work to tourists is a profitable business that nevertheless represents a social decline. Their former jobs offered them financial and social security, along with the recognition due to valuable and productive members of socialist society. Working as *pletachki*, on the other hand, they have an unpredictable income, they lack security, and as vendors, they are accorded a much lower social status. The status of vendors and their perception by other stakeholders in Golden Sands are an outcome of the evolution of the resort's retailing sector, as will be discussed below.

Trading in Golden Sands – Oriental Bazaar or European Market?

Like Petya and Radostina's father, many vendors in Golden Sands began their businesses in the 1990s. At that time, the collapse of the Bulgarian economy, rising unemployment, and the steep decline in living standards pushed many people into trading. Shuttle traders travelled to Turkey, Greece, and farther afield; they brought back cheap consumer goods that were sold in large open-air markets to a population hungry for fashionable consumer goods yet unable to afford the merchandise of the stylish new shops and supermarkets appearing in the cities. While these traders fulfilled an important function by providing Bulgarians with affordable consumer goods, they

were also morally suspect because of the socialist designation of trading as a non-productive occupation or "speculation"; the largely informal and unregulated character of their activities; the considerable share of ethnic minorities among them; and the perception of open-air markets as ambiguous sites populated by dishonest and deceitful vendors, thieves, pickpockets, and racketeers.[122]

In the 1990s, two forms of private trading existed concurrently in Golden Sands. On the one hand, vendors had the opportunity to lease shops or sites for open stalls from Golden Sands plc. The process of awarding the leases was rather opaque, and there were numerous scandals and allegations involving relatives and friends of the resort management being awarded the best locations, applicants for leases being forced to pay large bribes, and the unilateral and unsubstantiated termination of leasing contracts. Vendors who obtained a lease, however, gained an opportunity to make hefty profits by selling cheap imported merchandise to foreign tourists who paid much more for it than the locals. The business of these vendors was semi-formal as they had regular supply channels, had formally leased their premises, and perhaps even paid part of their taxes.

At the same time, mobile vendors roamed the streets and beaches of Golden Sands. Their activities were much more informal; they did not pay fees to the resort management, they did not have licenses, and they certainly did not pay taxes. Most of them were, however, forced to pay protection money to the racketeers controlling the resort, and those who sold their goods on the beach had to pay a fee to the holder of the beach concession.[123] Mobile vendors were under constant threat of raids by the police and the resort's security forces. Their situation was thus much more precarious than that of shop and stall owners. But still, mobile vendors in Golden Sands earned a good income, and anyone with some facility in foreign languages and goods that were attractive to tourists could enter the business. The privatization and modernization of Golden Sands, however, brought a decline of the mobile vendors. The new hotel owners did not want crowds of traders beleaguering the entrances to their premises, and they feared that

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[122] Shuttle trading (or "trader tourism") in Bulgaria is described by Konstantinov (1996); Konstantinov, Kressel and Thuen (1998) also contains some material on Varna's largest open-air market. See also the section on open-air markets in chapter 7.

[123] Beaches in Bulgaria are state property; concessions to private individuals or companies are granted by tender for up to ten years. The concession holder has the right to manage the beach, which includes granting access to businesses such as restaurants and bars, companies renting out water sports equipment, or providers of beach chairs and umbrellas who have to pay rent or a set fee to the concession holder. The concession holder is in turn obliged to pay concession fees to the state, to provide rescue and lifeguard services, and to ensure the cleanliness of the beach.

constantly being surrounded by mobile vendors might discourage tourists. Hoping to eliminate the competition, shop and stall owner also supported the removal of mobile vendors from the resort. Furthermore, tourism professionals in Golden Sands agreed that mobile vendors were not appropriate for a modern, civilized, European resort. The propagation of these views coincided with intensified government efforts to curb the informal economy and pressure entrepreneurs in the informal sector to formalize their businesses. Coupled with the increased policing of the resort's public spaces, these campaigns eventually resulted in the disappearance of mobile vendors from the resort.

Today's landscape of retailing in Golden Sands is a result of these processes. Some of today's shop or stall owners began as mobile vendors and used the capital they accumulated in the profitable 1990s to open their own shops. Some owners from the 1990s expanded their business by investing their profits in acquiring additional premises. Still others left the retail sector entirely.

The arguments used in the campaign against mobile vendors are very much echoed today in the views many tourism professionals hold concerning the retailers in Golden Sands. Trading is generally considered low-status work in Varna, although retailing jobs and their reputations are differentiated according to type of retailer, location, merchandise and remuneration.[124] But no one with whom I talked characterized vendors as generally reprehensible individuals of questionable moral integrity or denounced trading as "unproductive" or "speculation". Vendors were described as "just workers" or "ordinary people trying to earn some money" by doing a not particularly desirable job. Tourism professionals did not disapprove of vendors or retailing as such; instead, they criticized specific characteristics of retailing in Golden Sands such as the range of merchandise sold in the resort and its presentation, as well as the oversupply of vendors and their congregation in specific locations. The following statement by Violeta, a travel agent in her mid-sixties, is fairly typical in this respect:

> C.B.: In your opinion, is all the trading here in the resort a problem?
> Violeta: It is not a problem but it is not pretty. It is not nice either. There are a lot of vendors here, and there is a lot of kitsch. We should have a small amount of retailing which is pretty, tasteful, and of a high quality. There is no need for so many vendors; there are not that many tourists here. The foreigners do not like our merchandise. Some of it is pretty – jewelry, souvenirs, Bulgarian crochet work; they like that. The other stuff, that is what they all have in their own

[124] See also chapter 7.

> countries. Jeans and shirts and t-shirts and jackets are not in demand. Nobody is buying them. The whole of Europe is filled with that sort of stuff. Much of it is coming from Turkey, and it is in no way pretty or nice. I do not like it!

Violeta differentiates between the tasteful, high-quality merchandise exemplified by the arts and craft products that are unique to Bulgaria, and cheap, low-quality commodities that are mass-produced in Turkey and sold all over Europe. The predominance of the latter is viewed as giving the entire resort an air of cheapness and substitutability, and as attracting consumers who do not care for quality and uniqueness but focus on the low price of a product. But it is not just the large quantities of cheap merchandise sold in the resort that contributes to this image; it is also the large numbers of retailers, as Traycho, a 60-year-old restaurant owner, noted. According to him, vendors clutter the beach and the promenade and ruin the appearance of the entire resort:

> The beach is under concession, and it is not used prudently, intelligently at all. As a result, the sanitary conditions on the beach are very poor. There are numerous stalls there selling virtually everything, and they are not keeping it clean. A large resort must have a perfect beach promenade that is open to the sea, with all the retail and catering venues being on the far side, so the sea is visible. Currently, the area around the beach is too crowded, and it is not well-maintained. It divides Golden Sands into two parts. The part north of the Hotel Admiral is the European part, and the part south of the Admiral, where we are, is the Asian part.

Thus, in Traycho's eyes, factors such as cleanliness and tidiness, and the number and location of retailing and catering businesses contribute to the appearance of a resort, effectively dividing Golden Sands into two parts. The area he describes as "European" is characterized by newly-built or recently modernized hotels interspersed with small spots of greenery, by well-maintained streets and pathways that are lit at night, by a relatively small number of retailers, and by some of the best restaurants in the resort. The beach is less crowded as there are fewer bars and fast food stalls along it. In contrast, the area he refers to as the "Asian" part prominently features an open-air market where stalls and shops are interspersed with restaurants, bars, and fast food stalls. At night, this is a noisy and crowded space with hundreds of tourists milling about, touts approaching them with leaflets or restaurant menus, numerous beach bars trying to attract customers with loud music, and a Ferris wheel and carrousels that contribute to the carnivalesque atmosphere. The hotels in the upper part of the "Asian" end of the resort are slightly older, and appear less modern and exclusive; the pathways are not as

well maintained and fewer of them are lit at night; and a number of construction sites mar the landscape.

The "European" part of the resort is thus modern, spacious, park-like, and has a moderate number of high-quality retail and catering establishments. It represents the way the entire resort should be: modern, cultured, and well-maintained. The "Asian" part, on the other hand, is a noisy chaos of shops, stalls, bars, and restaurants where everybody tries to attract customers. It is crowded, disorderly, cheap, and tacky – attributes that ethnic Bulgarians often ascribe to "the Orient". Traycho's views on it were by no means exceptional. Describing the same area that Traycho had designated as "Asian", Nayden, a restaurant owner in his early fifties, explicitly linked it to the Orient:

> The most important issue that the resort is facing right now is the infrastructure. The infrastructure, and these stalls that are everywhere. They are ugly; they do not have a nice exterior. It looks like an ordinary market in a city. And in a resort there should not be anything like that, with such an unsightly appearance. People do not like it. Over there, no matter where you go, there are stalls selling fruits and vegetables, portraits, souvenirs, clothes. That is simply unpleasant. It is just a very ordinary-looking part of the resort. It does not look like a resort. It looks like a bazaar, something out of an Oriental country.

The "Oriental" appearance of the resort is reinforced by the large number of restaurants it contains. Many of them employ touts who are responsible for luring in customers. Restaurant touts need to have exceptional communication and interpersonal skills. They have to be fluent in several languages and they must be very proficient in applying customer typologies. As potential customers approach, touts strive to correctly identify their nationality in order to address them in their native language. Armed with a menu, they then approach the tourists and try to cajole them into entering their restaurant.[125]

Restaurant managers and owners have mixed feelings about touting. Many are not really convinced of its merits, and suspect that touting may actually alienate potential customers. But they fear that eschewing this practice might put them at a disadvantage vis-a-vis their competitors. One restaurant owner-manager explained that he would never employ a tout because touts are ill-mannered and intrusive. Being approached by them would make the tourists feel pressured and ill at ease, and ultimately frighten them away. However, he admitted that when his restaurant was empty, the servers would stand outside, and attempt to lure in passers-by. He went to

[125] See also Stoyan's story in chapter 2.

great lengths to explain how that was different from "real touting": his waiters were cultured, well-mannered, and well-dressed individuals who would not pressure the tourists but rather invite them inside politely. If the tourists declined, they let them be, wishing them a nice day, and an enjoyable vacation. Nevertheless, he emphasized that ultimately, he would prefer the prohibition of all forms of touting in Golden Sands.

The restaurant workers' sense of unease with respect to touting has several reasons. First of all, it is simply not a common practice in Bulgaria. Ordinarily, restaurant employees wait for customers to enter the establishment. Furthermore, the practice is strongly associated with "the Orient". Some restaurant workers who had visited Turkey or Egypt as tourists recounted their own irritation at constantly being approached by touts in these countries. They felt touts are a nuisance, and believed they would discourage the tourists instead of attracting them. And finally, they perceived touting as "uncivilized". They argued that a restaurant should attract guests on its own merits, by offering high-quality food, a pleasant ambience, and excellent service. Approaching strangers on the streets and pressuring them into a commercial relationship is seen as bad manners; it may be common in "the Orient" but it is out of place in a European country. These sentiments are reflected in the following comment by Traycho: "Touts are people who grab you, and try to drag you off somewhere. When the tourists see something like that, they run away and go to the competition. That is one of the worst things we have copied from these… from Istanbul, from the Turks. Over there, they do it that way. But I do not want these people here".

The preoccupation of tourism professionals with the "Oriental" features and spaces of Golden Sands is precipitated by some very real concerns. The resort is becoming a cheap mass tourism destination, and tourism professionals are convinced that it is precisely its "Oriental" characteristics that are contributing to this process by deterring affluent visitors and attracting poorer ones. They believe the coveted cultured middle-class tourists would expect a modern, "European" resort with an unobstructed view of the sea, a pretty promenade, decent restaurants, and a moderate number of retailers selling high-quality merchandise. Only poor, uncultured tourists would be prepared to ignore crowded and dirty beaches, unlit and potholed streets, and a promenade that looks like a Turkish bazaar. And only such tourists would be attracted by tacky merchandise and the prospect of making a bargain on fake designer jeans or imitation brand name shirts.

The calls for the "Europeanization" of the resort and the demands for the eradication of its "Oriental" features are caused by profound concerns about the future of tourism in Golden Sands. Much criticism is leveled at vendors because they are viewed as contributing to the "Oriental" appear-

ance of parts of the resort. With their cheap and low-quality merchandise, and their unsightly stalls overflowing with goods, they are seen as the antithesis of modern "European" retailing operations, and as adding to the crowded, chaotic, and bazaar-like ambience of Golden Sands that deters affluent visitors. Thus, vendors and shop owners are collectively held responsible for the declining class of tourists visiting the resort.

Most vendors join tourism professionals from the hotel and restaurant sectors in deploring the proliferation of retailers in the resort and in demanding a reduction of their numbers. From their perspective, the oversupply of retailers poses a problem because it fuels the competition for customers and contributes to their own diminishing profits. However, vendors do not consider themselves accountable for the "Oriental" appearance of Golden Sands. On the contrary, they refuse to bargain with tourists exactly precisely because they perceive haggling as a defining characteristic of "Oriental" trading practices. While hotel and restaurant managers blame traders for the change in tourist flows, the vendors in turn deny any responsibility for this process. They assert that it is the hotels that attract the "new" tourists by offering low room rates and all-inclusive packages. Restaurants, bars, and discotheques likewise contribute by employing touts and by promoting sex and alcohol tourism. Vendors maintain that they are merely adapting to the new customers and their preferences by offering the cheap merchandise they demand.[126]

Conclusion

There is a parallel between tourism and retailing as forms of mass production and mass consumption in Golden Sands. Tour operators sell cheap, standardized, uniform packages attracting low-class, "low-quality" tourists for whom cheap prices are crucial, and whose holiday destination is easily substitutable by other equally cheap destinations offering the same sun, sea, and sand product. Likewise, vendors are selling a standard range of cheap, mass-produced, low-quality merchandise which may equally be found in other tourist resorts all over Europe and the Mediterranean. While both the "European" and the "Oriental" parts of the resort cater to mass consumption and mass tourism, only the European part is viewed as appealing to educated, culturally interested, middle-class tourists who possess taste and money. These tourists are perceived as spending their holidays not just in pursuit of banal pleasures, but as consuming cultural events, historic sites,

[126] These recriminations reveal quite clearly the fissures running through the resort. Its fragmentation and the existence of various factions promoting their own, particularistic interests will be the topic of the next chapter.

and folkloric performances, as well as high-quality tasteful merchandise that is unique to the region and the country. Due to their consumption habits, these middle-class tourists would treat Golden Sands, and Bulgaria more generally, not just as an easily substitutable destination, but as a destination that offers its own unique attractions. And that, in turn, would make them loyal customers who spend more money and have more appreciation for their destination.

Thus, the debates about vendors and their merchandise are ultimately debates about which segment, or, more specifically, which social class of tourists Golden Sands should attract and how the resort should go about attracting it. All stakeholders in the resort agree that Golden Sands should follow a path of development culminating in the creation of a modern European resort. "Oriental" practices such as touting and bargaining, and "Oriental" spaces such as "bazaars" are perceived as contradicting that goal. With their carnivalesque aspects, their cheapness and tackiness, they are viewed as attracting exactly the kind of poor, low-quality, low-class tourists that contribute to the resort's reputation as cheap in every sense of the word. Yet in their rush to distance themselves from all things "Oriental", tourism professionals fail to realize that these exotic touches may well be a unique feature that attracts middle-class tourists who crave a new environment that still feels safe – something a little different, but not wildly so. At the same time, these debates resonate deeply with identity politics in Bulgaria more generally. According to Tim Pilbrow, a central element in the discourse on Bulgarian national identity is the claim to an identity as a nation within the symbolic space of Europe. Pilbrow identified two conflicting visions of Europe in Bulgaria: "one that regards Europeanness as an exclusive, historically-ordained, organic right; the other as an idea, somewhat synonymous with modern humanitarian values, that has to be nurtured, achieved, and demonstrated through the establishment of democratic institutions, the observance of minority rights, etc." (Pilbrow 1997: 66).

Both of these visions regard "Europeanness" as a highly desirable status, and both present Bulgaria as "not quite European". Bulgaria's organic connection to Europe is perceived as threatened by the presence of ethnic and religious minorities such as Turks, Pomaks, and Roma, who are viewed as displaying traits and characteristics that are considered non-European. The production of a Bulgarian national identity thus involves distancing both the individual and the national self from non-European traits and practices, while adopting those that are viewed as European. This leads to a marginalization of minorities and to the perpetuation of a sense that Bulgaria does not (yet) measure up to European standards. Likewise, the vision of Europe as synonymous with modern humanitarian values presents Bulgaria as "not

fully European" according to criteria that define "Europeanness" in terms of human rights and democratic institutions (Pilbrow 1997).

In both visions, Bulgarian national identity is defined in opposition to "the Orient", a "negatively charged and abstract realm" (Neofotistos 2008: 32) located outside Bulgaria. In this sense, Orientalism is a geographically fixed concept as proposed by Edward Said (Said 1994); the Orient is located to the south-east, in Turkey, and the lands beyond. However, Bulgarian national identity is also defined in opposition to "the Orient within", represented by ethnic and religious minorities that display social behaviors and actions that are considered "Oriental" and thus non-European. From that perspective, Orientalism as a concept is unmoored from a concrete geographic location (Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992; Bakić-Hayden 1995). Finally, Oriental traits and practices may also be found among ethnic Bulgarians such as the vendors and touts described in this chapter. Their business practices are strongly censured because they are perceived as preventing a complete "Europeanization" of Golden Sands (and, by extension, the entire country), and as perpetuating its "Oriental" characteristics; they are viewed as representative of everything that "holds Bulgaria back" from Europe and prolongs its status as "not quite European".

Among the stakeholders in Golden Sands there is agreement about the issues the resort faces following its transformation into a cheap mass tourism destination. However, there are widely diverging views on who should be held responsible for these changes, and on how the resulting challenges should be met. As we shall see in the next chapter, these issues are a consequence of the complex processes of resort development that started with the privatization of Golden Sands.

Chapter 5
Resort Urbanization, its Causes, and Consequences: "Golden Sands Has Become a Tourist City"

In the previous chapters, I have described the hotel and retail sectors in Golden Sands, the changes they have experienced, and the issues and challenges they face. I have traced the transformation of Golden Sands into a cheap destination, and the effects of this transformation on the hotel and retail sectors, particularly the oversupply of businesses and strong competition for increasingly less affluent customers. In this chapter, I will connect these strands by exploring the causes and consequences of resort urbanization and commercialization, two interrelated processes that resort workers view as contributing to the changing tourist flows in Golden Sands.

In the first section, I will describe three manifestations of resort urbanization and commercialization: high building densities and environmental degradation; the oversupply of businesses; and an infrastructure that is inadequate for the large number of businesses and tourists in Golden Sands. In the second section, I will trace the causes of these processes back to the fragmented ownership structure that was a result of privatization and the absence of regulatory oversight and control, and I will explore the factors hampering attempts to curb resort urbanization. The focus of the third section will be on Golden Sands plc and its conflicting roles in the resort. As the owner of the infrastructure, Golden Sands plc could regulate and control resort development, but as a business owner it contributes to commercialization and urbanization. The fourth section describes controversial calls for strengthening municipal and state involvement in resort control and regulation. In the fifth section, I discuss why urbanization is not an issue in the resort Albena. Finally, the conclusion points to some wider issues framing the debates about resort development in the Varna region.

"It Has Gotten Too Crowded Here!" – The Concrete Evidence of Urbanization

In chapter three, I have described the privatization and modernization of the hotels in Golden Sands. I have shown how the resort was divided into its constituent parts, and how the respective hotels and plots of lands were then acquired by individual, mostly domestic, investors. Later, tour operators provided them with loans for the modernization of their hotels, thus gaining a strong influence on the modernization process. Tour operators urged hotel owners to increase their capacities, which led to the construction of bigger hotels with larger numbers of rooms and beds. At the same time, new hotels were built on formerly empty land.

The boom of the tourism industry began after 2000. The demand for the destination Bulgaria was growing, and building and operating a hotel was viewed by many entrepreneurs as a safe, yet profitable, investment. The construction boom all along the Black Sea coast was further aided by the lenient stance of the authorities. New developments were insufficiently controlled and existing rules and regulations were often ignored. In a situation where the economy was still recovering from the disastrous 1990s, unemployment was high, and large parts of the population were still living in poverty, tourism was regarded as a potential lifeline: an industry that would create jobs, attract affluent foreigners who would spend their money in the region, and stimulate the development of other sectors of the economy. Both local and state authorities thus supported the expansion of the tourism industry, welcoming the construction of new hotels, restaurants, and shops all along the coast, even if the builders violated zoning and building regulations or environmental protection laws. This boom and expansion of the tourism industry was initially beneficial to local and regional economies, but its negative ramifications are beginning to be felt now.

The most glaring consequence of this construction boom was the urbanization of Golden Sands. As Selena, a hotel marketing manager in her mid-thirties, explained:

> What I do not like about tourism is… . Well, Albena is the only place here that still is a true resort, a tourist resort. Whereas Golden Sands, it has become a tourist city. It is urbanized. There is no room in Golden Sands, no open space. There are too many hotels, too many buildings. There is no fresh air; there are no trees. And that must be changed. I think the time will come when we will be forced to demolish many of these hotels, as they did in Spain. And that is a shame because a lot of money has been invested, a lot of jobs have

> been created, and all that will be over. But there is nothing we can do about it, unfortunately.

Zhaneta, another hotel manager, agreed with this assessment:

> Well, first of all, these new developments in the resorts, they are out of control. In my opinion, a tourist resort is a place where you go to rest and relax. It is not a holiday if you go to a place that is exactly like the city you have just left, with crowds, and cars, and hotels, and buildings. It has to be quieter. And here in Golden Sands and in all the larger resorts it is just not like that. There are hotels next to hotels, and there is no control of the construction works. That is probably the worst thing right now.

Furthermore, the construction works themselves had a negative impact on tourist flows. In the first half of the 2000s, construction was continued throughout the tourist season. The resort was marred with construction sites, and their noise and dirt bothered the tourists. When the Ministry of Culture and Tourism finally implemented a moratorium on all construction works from May-September 2005, the damage had already been done and many affluent tourists had taken their custom elsewhere.[127]

In Golden Sands, the construction boom resulted in an increased density of hotels. Particularly in the peak season, when most hotels are booked out, the resort is extremely crowded, noise levels are high, and there are no quiet spaces. Yasna, a hotel barkeeper in her late twenties, described the effects of overcrowding:

> Yasna: The elderly often complain about the noise levels here in the hotel. But it is like that everywhere in the resort because they have built so many new hotels while the available space has remained the same. You know, sometimes we joke that when you step unto your balcony, you can shake hands with someone standing on his balcony in the neighboring hotel. It is like that.
>
> C.B.: Do you think it is a disadvantage that so many new hotels were constructed?
>
> Yasna: Yes, indeed! Because… . You know, everybody needs some space in order to feel normal. And when it gets crowded, people will not feel good. It has gotten too crowded here. And when you want a bit of peace and quiet and you are lying in your bed, and there is a drunk passing by outside, and it sounds like he is in the room with you – well, that is not very pleasant, is it? That is what I mean.

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[127] See also Bachvarov (2006). The negative effects of the construction works on tourist perceptions of the destination and their contribution to the decline in affluent visitors were widely publicized in the Bulgarian media; hence, this issue was foremost on many resort workers' minds.

Ivanka, a hotel manager in her mid-forties, was worried about the possible consequences of resort urbanization:

> One of the biggest problems here on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast is that hotels were built in all these open spaces, and that much of the greenery has disappeared. Now, the guests of neighboring hotels can look into each other's rooms. That is something that I find really perturbing. I think we will lose more and more guests because of that. I expect that at some point, they will have to demolish hotels, as they did in Mallorca. Because I really could not accept it as normal to spend my entire summer vacation behind closed curtains, just to prevent those in the neighboring hotel from finding out what my underwear looks like. In my opinion, that is really annoying.

The development boom following privatization had a profound impact on Golden Sands. The increasing density of buildings, the disappearance of open spaces, and the crowded conditions in the peak season have led affluent tourists to seek out new destinations. At the same time, it became apparent that in the low season, there is not enough demand for the existing capacities. Many hotels, restaurants, and bars operate at a loss or have to close down entirely, as Nedyalka, a restaurant manager in her early thirties, pointed out:

> The state of affairs here in Golden Sands was really satisfactory. But then, people started frantically building new hotels and restaurants. And these people have no idea about tourism. They have a lot of money, but they have no clue. They are thinking, "Okay, I will establish a business here, and I will make a lot of money!". But right now, a room in a three- or four-star hotel in Golden Sands can be had for ten euros a night in the low season. With breakfast! That is ridiculous! This year, we have had many tourists from Romania. They have money, and they come here for the weekend, for two or three days. And for some hotels, that is not bad. But still, you have a lot of expenses – for electricity, water, labor costs… . I keep thinking, if there are that many hotels, and many of them are half empty, what is the point? Our restaurant usually closes in the middle of October. But this year, we have closed it down on the first of that month because we cannot operate with a turnover of only 100 levs a day. We cannot even cover our utility costs with that money!

As the previous chapters have demonstrated, there is an oversupply of businesses in the resort that contributes to declining profits and the tough competition for customers. Bars and restaurants, in particular, increasingly employ touts, a practice that is viewed as furthering the "Orientalization" of Golden Sands, and driving away affluent tourists. Maya, a 22-year-old student

working for a travel agency, bluntly stated that even if she had the money, she would never spend her vacation in Golden Sands. When I asked about her reasons, she replied: "I think it is because there are so many shops and everyone is trying to attract you to buy something, to eat something, to travel somewhere, or to go to some disco. If I really wanted to be on a vacation, I personally would not like all that touting and noise".

The rapid development of the coast was accompanied by its environmental degradation. Golden Sands is surrounded by the Golden Sands National Park, and the resort increasingly encroaches on the protected area. Within the resort, too, many green spaces have disappeared. While in 1990, the hotels were widely dispersed among the trees, today the buildings predominate. As Radostina, the vendor whose story I told in the previous chapter, pointed out, Golden Sands uses huge amounts of water and electricity, while at the same time producing vast quantities of sewage and refuse, not to mention litter left on the streets and beaches by the tourists:

> Tourism has negative consequences for the environment. The tourists throw their garbage on the beach, in the sea, in the streets… . And they say we Bulgarians are dirty people! I do not think that is quite true! Tourists… those who come here, I do not know about tourists in other countries, but here, they are really… . When they are here, they see freedom. They can do whatever they want; often there is no police. That is not good.

In the 1990s, no one cared about the environmental impacts of mass tourism, but in the mid-2000s the Varnentsi became increasingly aware of this issue. Many condemned the pollution of the sea and the air, the destruction of coastal areas, and the depletion of natural resources caused by tourism. Some also wondered about the wisdom of heavy development in an area prone to landslides, and pointed to the dangers inherent in this policy.

Golden Sands' inadequate infrastructure is a further issue that is viewed as directly related to the rapid growth and urbanization of the resort. Many tourism professionals considered it to be one of the resort's most pressing problems. As Gavrail explained:

> Well, everybody will tell you that one of the fundamental problems is the infrastructure. Unfortunately we have turned around the logical process of first developing the infrastructure, and then the hotels and restaurants afterwards. We did the opposite; we first built hotels and restaurants, and left the infrastructure for later. And it is not a secret that the streets, the parking lots, the gas stations, the whole infrastructure used by the hotels and restaurants, that it is not very good. It should not be that way. I saw it in Mallorca when I went there a year ago. They had private plots of land, and first they built

> the streets, constructed the water pipes, the power supply lines, all the utility lines, and only after that they started with the buildings. Here in Bulgaria, we did it the other way around.

After hotel privatization, the resort infrastructure remained in the hands of Golden Sands plc, the successor of the formerly state-run firm that had been transformed into a joint stock company. Golden Sands plc is responsible for the maintenance and upgrading of the infrastructure, as Krum, the destination manager of a major tour operator, explained:

> Right now, I think, Golden Sands has a capacity of about 60,000 beds.[128] That is three times as many as in the past, and it was built on the same infrastructure. That is the problem! It follows that one of the most important tasks for the future – for the immediate future – is the improvement of the infrastructure. That is the first priority among all the issues that Golden Sands will have to solve. When I say Golden Sands, I mean Golden Sands plc because this old joint stock company is still alive. And it owns the infrastructure, all the streets, the green spaces and public areas in the resort, the underground facilities, sewerage, power supply lines, and so on. And they really have to invest in the infrastructure if Golden Sands wants to remain a destination that attracts many high-quality tourists.

Later in this chapter, I will discuss the role of Golden Sands plc in more detail. Suffice it to say here that the rapid growth of the resort was clearly not accompanied by a corresponding improvement of the infrastructure, with dire consequences.

Tourism professionals in Golden Sands often linked resort urbanization and commercialization. They argued that in the 1980s, the resort was first and foremost a place of rest where one could spend a quiet and relaxing holiday in pleasant surroundings with a modicum of opportunities for dining out, shopping, and entertainment. In their eyes, the commercialization of Golden Sands began with its privatization and modernization which they often compared to a gold rush.

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[128] Golden Sands has 35,000 beds. Although Krum certainly had access to accurate figures, his inflated estimate is an example of the rhetorical flourish I often encountered when people were describing the magnitude of recent change. In this context, inflated numbers are not meant to be accurate; they are meant to emphasize the point the speaker is trying to make (in Krum's case the disparity between hotel capacity and the capacity of the resort infrastructure). What is important to the speaker is that the listener will accept his analysis of the consequences of the data, whether the topic under discussion is environmental destruction, the changing quality of tourists, or the economic hardships he faces in business or at home.

Resort workers' usage of the term "commercialization" indicates three interrelated issues.[129] First of all, it refers to the changing goals and ideals on which tourism development is based. Under socialism, the social goals of tourism were emphasized. Tourism was meant to serve the recreation of the socialist workforce; hence, domestic tourism was heavily subsidized by the state. Domestic travelers were encouraged to familiarize themselves with their socialist motherland, as well as with the achievements of the socialist state. Although in practice the goals behind the promotion of international tourism were economic in nature its social goals, too, were foregrounded in official statements.[130] International tourism was supposed to further the solidarity of the international working class, demonstrate the achievements of socialism to foreigners, and extol the virtues of a society where exploitation did not exist and everyone worked for the common good.

Today, by contrast, tourism has purely economic goals. Private entrepreneurs establish businesses in the resorts in order to earn a profit. They are perceived as indifferent to the impacts of their business endeavors on society, as having no social or welfare goals; they are viewed as single-mindedly focusing on their revenues instead. As entrepreneurs want to make as much money as possible, and as quickly as possible, they do not care about the long-term impacts of their actions on the sustainability of the resort or Varna as a destination. In aggregate, their individual investment decisions and modes of operation have the unintended consequence of resort urbanization and the deterioration of the natural environment. Entrepreneurs are viewed as focusing only on their own personal gain, while shifting the costs of their actions onto society. As a consequence, it becomes increasingly difficult for "ordinary" people to earn a living under conditions of oversupply, stiff competition, and an influx of budget-conscious tourists into Golden Sands, while the "big businessmen" rake in the money, and move on to greener pastures once they are done, leaving behind only devastation.

Secondly, "commercialization" also describes a changing perception of the basic foundations upon which the tourism industry rests. A beautiful coastline with fine sandy beaches, a clear blue sea, a natural forest, a mild climate, and a hospitable population used to be considered as valuable for the entire society, something that all Bulgarians could and should enjoy and protect in order to pass it on to future generations. This coastline was con-

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[129] Some of my interlocutors, particularly those who had studied tourism management, used either the English term or the Bulgarian *komersializatsiya*, *komersializiram se*. Others used paraphrases such as "transformation into a commodity" (*prevrashtane v stoka*).

[130] Under socialism as now, inbound international tourism was an important economic sector generating considerable revenues for the Bulgarian state; its "hard currency" earnings were particularly essential.

sidered something that should be shared with others, be they domestic or foreign visitors. Today, these features are increasingly commodified. The rhetoric has shifted: national treasures and valued traits of the "national character" have turned into "valuable resources" and "assets" that have to be profitably deployed. This is commercialization in the strict sense of the term; similar processes of commodification have been reported from tourist destinations all over the world (Cohen 1988b; Damer 2004; Bickford-Smith 2009). They are concurrent with a progressive privatization and enclosure: "resources" like the beaches, for example, increasingly come under private control, and access to them is restricted to those who can and will pay for it.

Thirdly, the term "commercialization" describes a change in the locals' perception of and interactions with tourists. Bulgarians pride themselves on their hospitality and assert that tourists should be treated first and foremost as guests. Today, however, tourists are often viewed as cash cows that have to be milked for all their worth. The underlying causes of this shift in perception will be explored in chapter 8. In the next section, I will analyze the impacts of resort fragmentation on the urbanization and commercialization of Golden Sands.

"There Is No Unity!" – The Consequences of Resort Fragmentation

In the first section of this chapter, I have enumerated the challenges and problems faced by Golden Sands in the wake of urbanization. These challenges are frequently emphasized by tourism professionals precisely because they have the potential to seriously interfere with the resort's ability to successfully compete with other resorts on the national and international levels. In this section, I will trace the genesis of these issues, and describe the factors that frustrate attempts to find solutions.

The decision to divide Golden Sands and individually privatize its hotels and land lies at the heart of many of the resort's challenges. Privatization created a large and disparate number of new owners without introducing an agency or institution that would plan and regulate further development, coordinate the numerous interest groups, assert common interests, or lobby local and state authorities on behalf of the resort. The resulting lack of coordination, regulation, and control made the subsequent urbanization possible in the first place, and today it hampers any attempts at dealing with its effects. As Slava explained:

> Our resorts are rather chaotic, whether we are talking about Golden Sands or… . Perhaps Albena is the only resort that has preserved its natural environment and has not developed its open spaces. You

> could say that it still presents its guests with the notion of a perfect holiday. I mean, a holiday where you do not just get a bed and some food in a restaurant, but where you have paths for strolling or walking, where you can ride a bike, or visit some attractions. Perhaps it was not such a good idea to sell the hotels in resorts such as Golden Sands individually. Before doing that, they should have organized some sort of council or something like that. A body that would be responsible for the infrastructure, and has to give permission for developing… . Someone who would be responsible for the long-term policy.

However, such a council does not exist. Instead, the privatization of Golden Sands created a number of disparate interest groups that find it rather difficult to cooperate.

The first of these interest groups consists of the hotel owners. As I have shown in chapter 3, the majority of hotels in Golden Sands are domestically owned, and their owners are often individuals or companies without any previous experience in the tourism industry. To them, owning and operating a hotel is a profitable side line, an addition to their main business activities which usually focus on other sectors of the economy. This may be advantageous to individual hotels because these owners may invest the profits they make in other sectors in their upgrading. But it also means that the owners have neither the time, nor the interest, nor the expertise to look beyond their own immediate interests, and get involved in attempts to improve the conditions in the entire resort. The situation is similar with respect to foreign-owned hotels. They are usually part of an international hotel chain with properties dispersed in locations all over the world. Their hotel in Golden Sands is one of many, and although these companies have a vast experience in the tourism industry, they are prone to focus on their own profits and interests, and will not expend the resources for working to improve conditions in the resort.

Hotel managers are another important interest group in Golden Sands. These people are professionals with a long experience in the tourism industry.[131] Throughout their careers, they have worked for a number of hotels, often in various locations, and this work experience which enables them to take a wider perspective that goes beyond the hotel they currently manage. They are aware of long-term trends and developments in the industry, and because of their stake in the future of tourism, they appreciate the long-term consequences of current decisions and trends. As a group, they are most articulate about the risks and opportunities associated with tourism develop-

[131] See also Slava's story in chapter 3.

ment in the region, and thus they would be uniquely suited to guide Golden Sands' course to the future. However, the fact remains that these managers are first and foremost employees. While they are responsible for running the day-to-day operations of their hotels, negotiating with tour operators, and securing guests for their establishments, they do not make any decisions about investments in their hotels or the resort. In the end, they have no leverage to implement their vision of the resort's future. As a group, they may issue warnings, and point out the possible consequences of further development plans, but they are ultimately powerless before investors bearing lots of money, and promises of more jobs, better incomes for the local population, and higher revenues for the local authorities.

If the hotel owners in the resort joined forces in order to assert and defend common interests, they would certainly be a formidable power with the capacity to curb or reverse the worst consequences of urbanization, but this is prevented by the fragmented ownership structure and the high incidence of owners whose expertise and main business interests lie in other sectors of the economy. Hotel managers, the group that has the expertise for and a stake in taking such action, lack both the political force and the economic power to assert their views and visions.[132] Since the hotel sector is the economically most powerful and influential in Golden Sands, these are the two groups without whom joint action in the interests of the entire resort has only slim chances of success. Both the restaurant and the retail sectors in Golden Sands depend on the hotels for their customers, and the services offered by the hotels have a strong impact on these ancillary sectors. Although both restaurants and retailers are dependent on the hotels, they have no means to exert any influence on them. They cannot compel hotel owners to pursue policies which might benefit their interests, such as reducing the number of all-inclusive offers or attracting more affluent guests to the resort.

Hence, restaurant and shop owners blame the hotel sector for the urbanization and commercialization of Golden Sands. They argue that it was the construction of more and larger hotels that led to resort urbanization and changing tourist flows, and they assign responsibility to "greedy entrepreneurs" who built new hotels to make a quick buck, never realizing that urbanization would affect tourist flows and thus, ultimately, their own revenues as well. From their perspective, the proliferation of shops, restaurants, and bars is a logical consequence of these processes because the larger numbers of visitors brought about a growing demand for ancillary services that was met by these new businesses.

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[132] Not to mention the fact that in the tourist season, running a hotel is a full-time job which scarcely leaves managers time for their personal lives and their families, much less for a time-consuming involvement in politics.

As I have shown in the previous chapter, hotel owners are not the only group that is blamed for the urbanization of Golden Sands and for the problems associated with it. Both hotel and restaurant owners accuse vendors of contributing to its "Orientalization" and commercialization by cluttering the remaining open spaces with their unsightly stalls, and creating a bazaar-like ambience. Likewise, hotel workers and vendors blame the restaurants and bars for resort "Orientalization", pointing to their practice of touting, and their promotion of alcohol and sex tourism which contributes to commercialization, and ultimately deters cultured and affluent middle-class tourists. Thus, while the three main sectors in Golden Sands have a common interest in curbing the negative consequences of resort urbanization, it is the particularistic interests of each of these groups that prevail. The more so as these interest groups are by no means homogenous; on the contrary, as exemplified by the hotel sector, the specific interests, goals, and perspectives of individual owners and managers may be widely divergent, and specific interests will frequently take precedence over those they have in common with others.

The fragmentation of interests within the resort is reflected in the various business associations and organizations in Golden Sands. For owners alone, there are at least three associations: the Union of Hotel Owners in the Golden Sands Resort Complex; the Union of the Owners for the Development of Golden Sands; and the Varna Association of Restaurant and Hotel Owners. In addition, there are sector-specific associations of managers and employees, as well as associations of individuals and companies with a stake in the hospitality industry more generally. Some of them are more active, others less so, and their membership numbers fluctuate. In fact, no one in the resort seems quite sure how many associations actually exist, who their members are, or what activities they undertake. Tourism professionals often enumerated one or two associations (usually the owners' and managers' association most relevant to their field), but they generally seemed to be rather hazy on the association's goals and achievements. The ramifications of this fragmentation are illuminated by the following statement by Sofia, a hotel owner-manager:[133]

> At the moment, there are three organizations in Golden Sands. One is Golden Sands plc, another is an association of the hotel owners,

[133] Like that given by Krum above (see note 9), Sofia's narrative contains inaccuracies that are probably not a reflection of her actual knowledge: she specifies only one of the three abovementioned associations for owners (the Union of Hotel Owners in the Golden Sands Resort Complex), but adds in two other organizations, including mentions an association of hotel managers, to arrive at the standard count of three associations. The number of hotels she mentions is also too low – there are not 70, but more than 90 hotels in the resort.

> and still another is an association of the hotel managers. I am not a member of any of them. Because many years ago, when they were established, I did not like the way they presented themselves, the things they were talking about, the things they wanted to do. Recently, they invited me again to one of their meetings. They are still the same people, sitting in the same chairs, talking about the same things. There has been absolutely no change.
>
> Three groups, associations, and they are fighting all the time. There is no unity, none at all. How could they lobby for anything? I thought that was not right, and I told them you cannot solve a common problem in this way. For example, we cannot submit any proposals to the ministry if we are divided into so many groups – and that is in one resort like Golden Sands. Because seventy hotels divided by three – that way, nothing is going to happen. And it is not even exactly divided by three, you could even say by four, because there are people like me who do not participate in these associations.

Sofia clearly points to the negative consequences of the fragmentation of interest groups in the resort, and the prevalence of particularistic interests: their negotiating power is diminished and they cannot form an effective pressure group.

"They Should Guide Resort Development" – The Role of Golden Sands plc

The lack of cooperation among various interest groups in Golden Sands is further exacerbated by the absence of an effective regulatory authority. Like Slava, who was quoted in the previous section, many owners and managers argued that such an authority should have been instituted before privatization, and invested with the powers to plan, control, and coordinate the further development of the resort. Such a body does not exist, but some tourism professionals like Traycho, a restaurant owner, believe that these powers should be given to Golden Sands plc: "If they manage the infrastructure, in my opinion they should guide which hotel is doing what. I mean, even if you are a hotel owner, you are still connected to the common infrastructure of the resort. And if you decide to do something, to renovate your hotel or build a new one, you should have to… perhaps ask or something. It must be like that".

In 1993, the resort of Golden Sands was transformed into a joint stock company bearing the same name, with the majority of the shares being held by the state. The period 1996-2000 saw the privatization of most of its hotels and restaurants. Only the infrastructure and a small number of hotels, restau-

rants and shops remained in the hands of the company. In 2000, the majority of the company's shares were bought by a consortium consisting of the employee-management buy-out company Zlatni (which acquired 63.8 per cent of the shares), Thomas Cook AG (8.36 per cent) and Agrima Ltd. (3.8 per cent). In 2007, the property of Golden Sands plc included 6 hotels[134], 4 holiday villages, 4 swimming pools, 18 restaurants, a number of shops and shopping centers, sports facilities, service buildings, and, most importantly, the resort infrastructure. Additionally, Golden Sands plc inherited much of its predecessor's organizational structure as well as, at least on the management level, some of its employees.

As a hotel owner, Golden Sands plc differs from other owners in the resort insofar as its hotels are marketed centrally by the company's marketing department. This department was inherited from the former state-run company; as increasingly more hotels were privatized, the department was progressively downsized until only a small, yet highly experienced, staff remained. Marketing its hotels centrally significantly improves the company's negotiating powers vis-a-vis the tour operators. Golden Sands plc also benefits from the long experience of the staff in the marketing department and good business relations with international tour operators. Its hotels are thus considered an important competitor by other hotel owners in the resort.

However, from the perspective of other business owners, the most important function of Golden Sands plc is its role as the owner of the infrastructure. Each business in the resort has to pay fees for using the common infrastructure. Golden Sands plc receives these fees, and is expected to invest the money in improvement and upgrading. As seen above, the prevailing view in the resort is that the infrastructure is inadequate for the existing number of businesses. Much criticism is leveled at Golden Sands plc because its investments in infrastructure lag behind the development of the resort. But Golden Sands plc is not only held responsible for the inadequate infrastructure. Business owners and managers also criticize the company most of all for its lack of transparency and its unresponsiveness to the needs and demands of other businesses. Most of my interlocutors expressed suspicion about how the fees they paid were being used. They were uncertain about whether or not there was a publicly accessible report stating how much money the company had collected, how much it had invested and in which projects, and whether there was a long-term investment plan. This is implied in Ivanka's answer to my question about the role of Golden Sands plc:

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[134] In the fall of 2007, one of these hotels was demolished to make room for a new apart-hotel.

> In fact, we are partners. And like our hotel partners to our right and our left, like our neighbors, Golden Sands plc has its own style of working. What annoys me about it is that they do not sit down with people and talk about things. Something along the lines of: "We have collected this amount of money in fees for the infrastructure; let's talk about our investment priorities, about where we will spend this money". You know, to some extent, Golden Sands plc still has a style of working that is inherited from Communist times, when everything was under central control, and decisions were made at the top without any input from the lower levels. To some extent, they are still working like that. And in that respect, it is not always clear how they manage the fees for the infrastructure, how they distribute and invest that money. But they deal with their own business and we deal with ours.

Hence, one point of contention is the obscurity of decision-making processes in the company. Other business owners and managers did not know how investment decisions were made, by whom, and how they could influence the process. They did, of course, regularly deal with Golden Sands plc, but when they attempted to exert any influence on investment decisions, they tended to use informal channels. Most of them had no idea whether or not formal channels existed for discussing investment issues. Svetozar, the member of a lobby organization, described the situation thus:

> C.B.: Is there anything like an investment plan where Golden Sands plc announces its plans for the future?
>
> Svetozar: According to the privatization deal, there should be such a plan. They are obliged to say what and where they will invest in the following ten years. And maybe they do fulfill their plan. But it is another question what exactly it is they are planning, who makes the plan, and in what it consists. In Golden Sands, there are 80 hoteliers. And they are private owners. They have to get along with the plc. And I am sure they do! But they do not like the situation. And if they do not like it, they should do something. They should organize and defend their interests. But up to now no one has been doing that, and no one is raising the important issues like that of the inadequate sewerage plant, for example. So no one really knows what they are doing with all that money. Of course, there is always some money disappearing. And wherever money disappears, naturally there is not enough left for the important things. But Golden Sands has an investment plan. Yes.

Many business owners and managers in the resort were also dissatisfied with the investments that were actually made by Golden Sands plc. They argued

that investments are concentrated in the center of the resort where they are most visible. Businesses owners outside this core area complained about being neglected even though they paid their fees like everyone else. Due to the aforementioned lack of transparency, many suspected that the company is biased, and that some owners use informal channels to attract investments to their own area of the resort.

> Ivanka: All hotels have to pay fees for using the infrastructure.
>
> C. B.: They pay Golden Sands plc.
>
> Ivanka: Exactly. They own the infrastructure. But the way they distribute that money is rather questionable. It is not clear how they do it, there is a lack of transparency. To some extent, their investment decisions appear to be based on rather subjective criteria. Hence, there are areas around certain hotels that do not look very nice, areas that definitely require investments to maintain and improve them.

Since each and every owner in the resort has to work with Golden Sands plc and is to some extent dependent on it, the people with whom I talked chose their words carefully, particularly when criticizing the allocation of investments. Like Ivanka, they often used euphemisms like "subjective criteria" or "questionable decisions". But however investment decisions are made, everyone agreed that the center of the resort has been favored.

> C.B.: You said that you pay Golden Sands plc for using the infrastructure. Do they reinvest that money?
>
> Sofia: Personally, I did not go there to check where and on what they spend the money. All I can say is that nothing has been done around here, around our hotel. Neither the street lamps, nor the footpaths – they still are in a deplorable state. Perhaps they spend that money elsewhere, and surely there are documents saying where they have invested, but… I can see that in the center… . People around the center say they spend it there. Some say they only have money for the center. The center is beautiful, and that is good, but it is really just one part of Golden Sands. They have to improve other places as well; they have to do the entire resort. I think we have arrived at a point where they have to start with that, because it is in the common interest. It cannot be that I am, for example, a tourist staying in a hotel in the center, and at some point I want to take a walk in the resort to see what it is like. And it turns out the resort is dusty and chaotic on one side but down there in the center, it is splendid – right? – everything is great, perfect. And that is why I think that step by step, they have to improve the entire resort.

A very interesting point was made by one of the hotel owners I interviewed. After I had switched off my voice recorder, we had a coffee and a cigarette

and chatted for a bit. Suddenly, she steered the conversation back to my questions about Golden Sands plc, asking me if I knew the names and locations of the company's hotels. When I enumerated them, and mentioned that they were all located near the center close to the promenade, she said, "And now think about the fact that so far, they have concentrated their investments exactly in that area! Don't you think that is suspicious?". She then pointed out that as a hotel owner, Golden Sands plc surely has an interest in the infrastructure being upgraded around its own hotels, something it could achieve in its role as the owner of the infrastructure. Thus, in her opinion, the company faced a conflict of interests in its investment decisions, leading to an obvious bias. Bristling at the unfair advantage this gave the company's hotels she demanded that ownership of the infrastructure should be transferred either to the municipality, or the state, both of whom would allocate investments more fairly.

Many of the resort workers I talked to also blamed Golden Sands plc for directly contributing to the urbanization and commercialization of the resort. The company owns a number of shops and shopping centers in the resort and is thus directly involved in the retail sector. Even more important, however, is the fact that as the owner and manager of the resort's infrastructure, it controls the access to and the utilization of the resort's public streets, sidewalks, and other open spaces. Hence, it would be capable of curbing the proliferation of vendors and their stalls, and thus one of the factors viewed as contributing to resort Orientalization. Yet instead of limiting or reducing the size and number of plots allocated to vendors, Golden Sands plc fosters commercialization and urbanization by leasing out more and more space for commercial use. The same is true for the beach: the company holds the concession for a large stretch of beach, and is therefore in a position to control the concentration of fast food stalls, bars, and vendors in that zone. Again, like Traycho, many tourism workers accused it of encouraging commercial activities with the intention of boosting its own profits:

> C.B.: And what is, in your opinion, the influence of Golden Sands plc?
>
> Traycho: I am far removed from them; I cannot really say what exactly occurs. But there are a lot of regrettable things. Especially in relation to the infrastructure, there is a lot to regret. The green spaces, the condition of the beach and its maintenance, the sanitary conditions, the cleanliness… . There are a lot of regrettable things here in Golden Sands. The utilization of the beach, for example, is exclusively commercial. Exclusively commercial! Before anything else, they just see the money, the money, the money. And that is the problem.

As a private company, Golden Sands plc is, in the first place, governed by a profit motive. Its primary objective as the owner of the infrastructure, of several hotels, shops, restaurants, and a beach concession, is, as Traycho said, making money. Its ambiguous role in Golden Sands is thus a result of its often conflicting goals and interests. On the one hand, it has, like all owners in the resort (and perhaps even more so) a stake in the future of the destination, and hence a vested interest in curbing resort urbanization and commercialization. On the other hand, however, as a profit-oriented company it must use its assets to the full, which includes leasing spaces on the streets and sidewalks to vendors, encouraging the establishment of businesses on the beach, and perhaps even favoring the areas around its own hotels when allocating investments in the infrastructure. In the light of these conflicting interests, it is highly unlikely Golden Sands plc will solve the problems that face the resort. The company may declare its commitment to goals like ensuring the long-term sustainability of Golden Sands by furthering its "Europeanization" and making it more attractive to affluent middle-class tourists, and, like other stakeholders, it may condemn the resort's urbanization, commercialization, and Orientalization. In the end, however, it has consistently privileged its own short-term profits over these long-term objectives. Hence, some tourism professionals argue that Golden Sands plc is not that different from the "greedy entrepreneurs" in the hotel and restaurant sectors, and should under no circumstances be invested with the power to regulate resort development. Instead, they support the strengthening of state and municipal control.

"The State Should Be Responsible!" – Calls for State and Municipal Control

The ambiguous role of Golden Sands plc is recognized by those tourism professionals in the resort who call for a stronger involvement of the state.[135] The form this should take is controversial; proposals range from rather diffuse and general calls for "help by the state" to very specific notions of what exactly the state should do and where it should intervene. Roughly, these notions divide into three groups: calls for the enforcement of existing rules; demands for the creation of a controlling and regulatory body by the

[135] The concept of the state that emerged in these conversations was often highly essentialized; my interlocutors frequently sounded like they were referring to an autonomous entity that could be enticed to materialize and bestow its support upon the worthy. For the sake of brevity, I will use the term without reflecting on the heterogeneity of state institutions, their diverse interests and goals, or the conflicts and alliances among and between them.

state or the municipality; and calls for a nationalization of the resort infrastructure.

The proponents of the first notion argue that the existing rules and regulations were sufficient to forestall urbanization after privatization and are suitable to curbing its consequences today, but that they have not been strictly enforced. Inadequate enforcement is considered linked to the existence of too many exceptions, and because of the high incidence of corruption, particularly in the privatization and modernization period. According to this line of reasoning, the solution to the current problems in Golden Sands lies in state and local authorities enforcing the regulations more stringently, thus curbing urbanization, and ensuring a prosperous future for the resort. One example for this is the oft-cited issue of building and zoning regulations. In the privatization period, there were no clear rules about which areas of the resort could be developed and which ones should be left undeveloped. When the consequences of urbanization became apparent, regulations were introduced to prohibit development within 100 meters of the water line. But these regulations were not strictly enforced, construction works continued, and today, the beaches are cluttered with bars and restaurants that obstruct the view of the sea (see also Bachvarov 2006).

In addition to the local regulatory authorities, the police are also called on to enforce existing laws, rules, and regulations. The police are expected to prevent theft and assault, and also enforce maximum opening times and noise levels, and perform many other regulatory functions. However, the police appear to have been overwhelmed by the rapid growth of the resorts, the rising tourist numbers in the peak season, and the increase of criminal offenses and misdemeanors, as Slava pointed out:

> For years I have been saying that we should organize some sort of tourist police that enforces compliance with official opening hours, for example, so people can really sleep at night without being disturbed by the music booming from two neighboring bars or something like that. And it really hurts me when I read things like "Sex on the beach not a problem in Bulgaria" in your German newspapers. If you are caught, maybe someone wags their fingers at you, but you will not be punished, there will not be any consequences. We are too lenient in that respect. And that is why things happen like a few days ago in Sunny Beach, where some Irish beat up the guys who hired out jet skis. The guys were just doing their jobs; that includes seeing to it that no one who is totally plastered will go out on the sea. But how can you explain to these drunks that this is in their own interest? There is nothing you can do. But that is really a problem. I mean, the resorts are growing so rapidly, it is impossible for the police to keep

> up, to hire enough people to be in control. There are many thefts, clashes of tourists with employees, all these things.

A second proposal calling for state involvement in resort development demands the creation of a controlling and regulatory body by the state or the municipality. As indicated above, some people argue that Golden Sands plc should fulfill this function. Others, however, point out that this may be unwise since the company is also a business owner in the resort, and thus might be tempted to use its regulatory function to its own advantage. A state or municipal institution responsible for planning and regulating resort development, however, would not be guided by the profit motive. Hence, it would be more impartial and geared towards ensuring a prosperous future for the entire resort, not just for some individual businesses. Like Eva, whose story I told in the previous chapter, proponents of this notion frequently emphasized that the sole objective of private entrepreneurs is making large profits, and that it was their greed, in the first place, that led to many of the resort's current problems; hence, they should not be allowed to control the resort. The state is assumed to be free of such considerations, and would thus be better suited to controlling the fate of Golden Sands.[136]

> C.B.: What are, in your opinion, the major issues that retailers face in Golden Sands?
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> Eva: Well, first of all, there used to be a lot of construction sites here in Golden Sands, and that was unpleasant for everyone. Secondly, there is simply no general policy for the resort, and no plan outlining what is to become of it. Not for the retail sector, not for the services, not concerning further development. Everyone is doing whatever they want to do, there is no strong hand guiding the resort.
>
> C.B.: Who do you think should develop such a general policy?
>
> Eva: Well, surely for a resort like this one, which is one of the most beautiful and largest resorts in Bulgaria, surely the state must get involved. It is simply not possible to let private individuals manage these beautiful beaches and the sea. We cannot let them control everything!

Finally, like Svetozar, some people called for an outright nationalization of the resort's infrastructure, arguing that it was used by numerous private

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[136] The idealized view of the state expressed by proponents of this argument is in a marked contrast to prevailing notions of the state as a threatening, exploitative or corrupt entity that are widespread in Bulgaria. Often, the same people who praised "the state" as the only possible steward of the resort and its future when talking about solutions to the problems of Golden Sands, deplored it as incompetent or indifferent towards tourism at best, or as exploitative and parasitic at worst in other contexts.

companies as well as the public, and thus should be owned and managed by the state or the municipality:

> A big mistake was made here, a huge one. This was not an economic privatization. It was a political privatization.[137] They [Golden Sands plc] bought the infrastructure although throughout the world, the infrastructure is not private, it is publicly owned. By the municipality or something. Right now, they want to do that in Sunny Beach, they want to return the infrastructure to municipal ownership. And in Golden Sands, a second sewerage plant must be built, for example. But it is not possible for Golden Sands plc to do that. That is why the municipality should manage the infrastructure, jointly with the state. In Golden Sands, they do not even have enough space to build parking lots because there are hotels everywhere. And even though they want to, there is no room. That is why Golden Sands has a large number of beds but no corresponding infrastructure. An inadequate infrastructure.

People like Svetozar argue that the state would have more money to invest in the infrastructure, and that it would be more impartial, seeking to improve the resort without giving an advantage to individual businesses. Furthermore, public ownership would simplify the ownership structure, and the negative consequences of overlapping areas of responsibility would be curbed.

Others, however, were quite pessimistic concerning an involvement of the state. After enumerating the many problems that Golden Sands is facing, Svetozar, who was quoted above calling for a nationalization of the infrastructure, burst out with an assessment of the basic cause of all the resort's problems: "Because there is no state here, or the state is just a… a figurehead… you know? It is not here when we need it. It has left us to cope on our own. It should be responsible for these things! But who is doing anything for tourism?! The state is not doing anything. It just rakes in the money, lots and lots of money!". Thus, instead of being the savior of tourism, in the end the state may not be that different from private entrepreneurs: it seeks the short-term benefits yielded by the tourism industry, but it is not prepared to work for its long-term sustainability.

"Albena Is the Only Place that Still Is a True Resort!"

It thus emerges that the fragmentation of ownership in Golden Sands, the many disparate interest groups in the resort, and the absence of a regulatory

[137] Another euphemism; it implies that decisions concerning privatization were motivated not by economic considerations but by political interests, and it alludes to the recurring incidents of corruption and nepotism.

body responsible for long-term planning facilitate resort urbanization and hamper an alleviation of its consequences. It is, perhaps, not surprising that workers in Golden Sands routinely referred to Albena as "the only true resort"[138] in the region. They praised Albena where the central ownership and management structure has made it possible to develop the infrastructure in parallel with the growing capacity of the resort, and where urbanization and commercialization could be avoided.

Hence, when I arrived in Albena, I fully expected its employees and managers to emphasize the absence of resort urbanization and commercialization, particularly since it could be considered a serious competitive advantage vis-a-vis other resorts in the region. However, as it turned out, no such comments were forthcoming. When I talked to a representative of the Albena management team, our conversation focused on the benefits and drawbacks of central resort ownership and management. In Golden Sands, tourism professionals had frequently pointed out that it enabled Albena to avoid urbanization; yet this manager did not once refer to the issue. When I addressed this issue directly with Evelina, she replied:

> That is also an advantage, yes, our guests see that as an advantage. Urbanization does not exist in Albena, and neither does the noise caused by construction works. If we do any construction works, we complete them early so the tourists are not bothered by them. Yes, perhaps our hotels are not that glossy from the outside, but when our guests have been to Golden Sands or Sunny Beach for a season or two, when they have stayed in these resorts, and seen what is going on there, they always return to us.

Other workers I talked with in Albena similarly acknowledged that the lack of urbanization might be an advantage, but it was not one highlighted in public relations or workers' discourse.

I believe the issues of resort urbanization and commercialization were not debated in Albena because they were simply not relevant to the resort, and thus not foremost on its employees' minds. They were eclipsed by other concerns that were much more immediate and thus figured more prominently in discussions of tourism in Albena. On the part of management, the decline in foreign tourist numbers and, even more crucially, the dropping revenues of the company, were much more urgent concerns. Managers thus focused on the drive for efficiency and cost-cutting they had embarked upon in response. Meanwhile, Albena's employees worried about deteriorating

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[138] The Bulgarian word for "resort" is *kurort*, a direct borrowing from German that means "spa" or "health resort". In Bulgarian, the word carries strong connotations of rest, relaxation, and the restoration of health and wellbeing. These connotations are foregrounded in the phrase "a true resort" (*istinski kurort*).

working conditions, and expressed a growing anger and resentment towards the managers whom they held responsible. Thus, when asked about the ramifications of central resort ownership and management, managers emphasized the benefits of economies of scale and the increased efficiency they permitted, while the employees foregrounded their lower salaries, the lack of control over their working conditions, and the deteriorating service quality.

Based on their own experiences in a resort characterized by fragmented ownership, a lack of centralized regulation, and medium- and long-term planning, resort workers in Golden Sands emphasized the opportunities for the careful guidance of resort development that a centralized ownership and management structure would offer, and they drew on Albena to illustrate their point. The employees of Albena, on the other hand, daily experienced the downsides of this form of resort management. They did not particularly care about resort urbanization or its absence, especially since it did not appear to make any real difference to the tourist flows; after all, Albena attracts the same low-quality, budget-conscious tourists as Golden Sands. Instead, workers focused on their own incomes and working conditions, and while fragmented ownership may have deleterious effects on the appearance and the sustainability of a resort, in Golden Sands, the competition associated with it has certainly resulted in better working conditions.

Conclusion

The privatization and modernization of Golden Sands started a process that ultimately led to resort urbanization and commercialization. These two concepts describe a trajectory of change characterized by unfettered development, the ruthless exploitation of limited resources, and a prevailing short-term business perspective that privileges quick profits over resort sustainability. Many resort workers regarded these features as characteristic not just for the development of Golden Sands, but for the Bulgarian economy more generally. Some described these processes in Marxist terms as a "period of primitive capital accumulation". Others used the term "predatory capitalism"[139] to denote economic, social, and business policies and practices that scholars link to the neo-liberal paradigms that have gained dominance in many eastern European countries (Bockman and Eyal 2002; Bohle and Greskovits 2007; but see also Ganev 2005). From that perspective, the

[139] In these conversations, people employed highly emotive language to describe the nature of capitalism in postsocialist Bulgaria, using adjectives such as *hishten* (predatory), *div* (wild, untamed), *alchen* (greedy), or *primitiven* (primitive). The emphasis here is either on capitalism's aggressive, exploitative aspects, or on its excesses and absence of limits or boundaries. The phrase "predatory capitalism" also conveys a sense of people being at the mercy of a ruthless, violent, voracious force.

urbanization and commercialization of Bulgaria's coastal resorts is just another manifestation of "predatory capitalism".

The workers in Golden Sands considered the short-term profit-seeking of individual investors and entrepreneurs, and the absence of state regulation and control as the main causes of resort urbanization and commercialization. They emphasized that these processes were facilitated by the conditions prevailing under "predatory capitalism", as well as by the weak and corrupt state. As I have demonstrated in this and the third chapter, however, urbanization and commercialization were also encouraged by the fragmented ownership structure after privatization, the influence that the tour operators gained with the modernization of the resort hotels, and the absence of an authority responsible for regulating, coordinating, or planning long-term resort development. Ultimately, the combination of these factors led Golden Sands on its specific trajectory of development. Fragmented ownership, dependence on tour operators, and absence of a regulatory and planning authority are features of many beach resorts around the world, and like Golden Sands, all these resorts struggle with the problems of urbanization and all that it entails. It might thus well be argued that the general direction the development of Golden Sands has taken after privatization is not so different from that of many other beach destinations in Europe and North Africa.

Resort workers used the terms "urbanization", "commercialization", and "Orientalization" to describe these processes. The terms are closely linked, yet they connote subtly different aspects of resort development. "Urbanization" refers to the rapid growth of Golden Sands beyond its "natural" limits set by environmental constraints, the existing infrastructure, and the resort's carrying capacity. "Commercialization" describes the shift in emphasis from the social to the economic goals of tourism and the concurrent commodification of its material and social foundations. Both urbanization and commercialization contributed to the changing appearance and ambience of the resort, the oversupply of businesses, and the advancing privatization and commodification of formerly public spaces. Finally, "Orientalization" describes the transformation of Golden Sands from a vacation spot of cultured and affluent middle-class tourists to a destination attracting budget-conscious tourists by indicating the cheapness and poor quality of many of the goods and services on offer, as well as the practices that businesses resort to in order to attract customers under increasingly competitive conditions. In the eyes of resort workers, it was the interaction and concurrence of these three processes as well as the growing influence of tour operators after privatization that ultimately led to Golden Sands' transformation

into a cheap destination attracting budget-conscious, "uncultured", lower-class tourists.

The discussions of Golden Sands plc in this chapter and of Albena JSC in the third chapter point to some wider issues that are still relevant 20 years after the collapse of the socialist state, and a decade after the privatization of the Bulgarian coastal resorts. Golden Sands plc and Albena JSC are both successors of former state-run companies, and both have a centralized management and ownership structure. While Albena JSC owns and manages an entire resort, Golden Sands plc is just one player in a resort featuring many different owners, but due to its control of the infrastructure, it nevertheless has a special role. Both companies have held on to much of the organizational structure of their socialist predecessors as well as some of their former staff, and the managers of both are accused of having retained a "socialist mentality". When business owners in Golden Sands refer to the "socialist mentality" of managers of Golden Sands plc, they allude to top-down, opaque decision-making processes, low levels of cooperation and partnership with other businesses, and an unresponsiveness to their input and their needs. When Albena JSC's employees accuse their management of a "socialist mentality", they refer to an autocratic management style, cliquish behavior, opaque and cumbersome decision-making processes, and a lack of flexibility and adaptability.

At the same time, however, both companies are also charged with exhibiting the excessive profit orientation that many Bulgarians regard as a defining feature of "predatory capitalism". Golden Sands plc is seen as contributing to resort commercialization, urbanization, and Orientalization by leasing formerly public spaces to vendors and other businesses, by neglecting to invest sufficiently in the upgrading of the infrastructure, and by favoring its own hotels in its investment decisions. In the eyes of its workers, Albena JSC's drive for rationalization, efficiency, and cost-cutting does not just contribute to the influx of low-budget tourists, but also to the deterioration of its employees' working conditions. Thus, while Golden Sands exemplifies characteristic features of predatory capitalism with respect to its unfettered exploitation of resources, Albena illustrates another aspect, namely, the "exploitation" of workers. Here, central resort ownership and management have constrained urbanization and commercialization, but at the same time, they have resulted in poor working conditions for the resort employees, and a deepening rift between resort workers and management.

However, these claims and perceptions do not just refer to the state of affairs under socialism or capitalism. They also illustrate that in the domains of business practices and labor relations, as well as concerning wider issues such as the character and goals of tourism and tourism development, ongo-

ing debates, negotiations and contestations may well be couched in terms of essentialized notions of "socialist" and "capitalist" economic practices and policies. In this context, notions of and references to "socialism" and "capitalism" are employed to frame issues that are viewed as potentially threatening the long-term sustainability of tourism in the Varna region. They may be used as shorthand to assess, condemn, or praise business practices and goals, to appraise and criticize the state of tourism in the resorts, and to identify and highlight possible alternatives.

Ultimately, both Golden Sands and Albena exemplify Fordist modes of tourism production. This is particularly true for Albena, a resort that, due to its unique ownership and management structure, is able to utilize economies of scale in its drive to increase efficiency and cut costs. By supplying cheap charter holidays to foreign tourists, both resorts predominantly serve a clientele that embodies the Fordist mode of tourism consumption. They are enclavic resorts offering their visitors a space for leisure and play that is far removed from everyday life. Despite attempts to diversify their clientele and to promote alternative forms of tourism centered on the region's historical sites, culture, and heritage as well as its spa, wellness, and sporting facilities, both resorts have consolidated their reputation as cheap mass tourism destinations, a process that was encouraged by their promotion of all-inclusive offers, alcotourism, and the spread of apart-hotels.

As I have demonstrated, it was a complex web of interrelated actions, forces, and effects that set these resorts on a pathway of development leading to their transformation into cheap mass tourism destinations. Today, that path is taken; Golden Sands and Albena have found their niche on the market for international beach tourism. And although there is much grumbling about the poor, low-quality tourists they currently attract, and much nostalgic longing for the better tourists of former times, ultimately, the tourist resorts in the Varna region are economically successful, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors every year, earning millions of levs in revenues, and providing tens of thousands of locals with an income. As I will show in the second part of this book, they also make a significant contribution to the economic boom that the city of Varna is experiencing.

PART TWO

Chapter 6
"Varna Is a City with Many Faces"

"Varna is a large city, it has many faces", 28-year-old real estate agent Vasil remarked about his home town. In this introduction to part two, I want to focus on three of Varna's faces that are of particular relevance for the following chapters: its "faces" as a postsocialist city, as a tourist city, and as a hospitable city. Considering Varna from the latter two perspectives will introduce some issues that are pertinent to cities as places of tourist leisure and as hospitable spaces, and thus set a framework for the following chapters. Tourism is closely linked to the production and consumption of these types of spaces, but it is also deeply rooted in place. As a place, Varna has been shaped by a history that spans many centuries, and the last seven decades of change and development have left particularly visible marks on its urban fabric. As we shall see, the city's physical structure and organization has a strong influence on the production and consumption of tourist spaces, while at the same time, practices of leisure, tourism, and consumption have marked effects on Varna's urban environment. Thus, I will start by introducing Varna as a postsocialist city.

Varna as a Postsocialist City

Varna is an old city, looking back on a history of more than 2,500 years. It contains the largest collection of Roman remains in Bulgaria as well as some National Revival architecture, both of which are major tourist attractions. Very little of its Ottoman legacy remained after the city was rebuilt in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century. The layout of Varna's inner city dates from the early 1900s when wide boulevards were created and elegant mansions and townhouses built along them. The spatial structure and the appearance of Varna changed decisively again in the socialist period and in the two decades after the collapse of the socialist state; it is on these transformations that I will focus here.

Cities under Socialism

There is a lively debate on whether or not "the socialist city" should be considered a distinct urban form.[140] Even those who argue against such a categorization, however, agree that socialist cities shared a number of characteristics that distinguished them from their non-socialist counterparts in western Europe and North America. Among these are the dominant role of the state in controlling urban change and development; the absence of land markets that created specific spatial and functional patterns in socialist cities; and their comparatively low levels of socioeconomic inequality and spatial segregation (Musil 1993; Smith 1996; Bertaud and Renaud 1997). These features were present in Varna as well, and they influenced the development of the city in the socialist period.

After the Second World War, Bulgaria experienced rapid industrialization and urbanization. As in all the socialist countries of eastern Europe, industrialization with an emphasis on heavy industries was the priority of economic policy, and huge industrial complexes were erected in and around Bulgarian urban centers. This encouraged an influx of rural migrants into cities where they found better-paid jobs and better access to education, entertainment and culture, services, and consumption opportunities than was available in the countryside (Andrusz 1996; Giatzidis 2002). At the end of the Second World War, Bulgaria had a population of six million people, 80 per cent of whom worked in agriculture and only 10 per cent of whom were employed in the industrial sector. By 1956, the population had reached 7.6 million people; one-third of whom lived in cities. Industrialization and urbanization accelerated further in the following two decades, and there was a notable rise in living standards. By 1970, only 36 per cent of the total workforce was employed in agriculture, and half of the Bulgarian population was living in cities. The capital city of Sofia had one million inhabitants and Varna had a population of more than 200,000 (Dinev 1978; Genov 1997; Vassilev 1999).[141]

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[140] For overviews of the debate, see Sjöberg (1999); Kovács (2009).

[141] In 1955, Varna was identified as a "congested city" and restrictions were placed on further immigration and industrial development. The Bulgarian state attempted to alleviate the overconcentration of industry in major cities like Varna and to battle uneven development and its consequences, but with limited success (Hoffman and Hatchett 1977). In large eastern European cities, a combination of immigration restrictions and housing shortages often led to a growth of the surrounding villages and small towns as rural migrants settled there and commuted to their workplaces in the city. The result was the "under-urbanization" of socialist cities: the growth of the permanent urban population lagged behind the growth of urban industrial jobs (Szelenyi 1996).

To accommodate this population growth, urban housing had to be constructed as rapidly and efficiently as possible. Like all socialist countries, the Bulgarian state treated affordable housing as a social right; the basic goal of its housing policy was to provide every household with a decent home at an affordable price. Housing costs were indeed low at 4-5 per cent of household income, but like its fellow socialist countries, Bulgaria experienced chronic housing shortages; in urban areas, the waiting period for new housing could extend to 10-15 years. Demand simply outstripped the state's capacity to organize and undertake the construction of new housing (Hoffman and Koleva 1993; Tsenkova 1996).

The construction of new housing was centrally planned and subsidized by the Bulgarian state which set the prices of land, building materials, and labor. Locally, the municipalities acted as developers and investors, sometimes in concert with state-owned enterprises that sought to provide housing for their employees. Construction was undertaken by large enterprises that used highly industrialized methods of production. This kept housing costs low, but it also produced the socialist housing estates consisting of uniform prefabricated units that surround cities like Varna. Even though these standardized apartments did not take into account individual housing needs and preferences, they were highly sought after as they provided amenities like central heating and running hot water, electricity, and fully equipped bathrooms. Access to these apartments, as to all housing, was controlled by the municipal housing authorities (Vesselinov 2004). It was granted according to need, although citizens that were deemed particularly valuable or productive members of socialist society could be given preferential access to housing, and individual "connections" could also play a role in obtaining it.[142] Since the Bulgarian socialist state focused on the industrialized construction of new housing while neglecting the labor- and cost-intensive maintenance and renewal of the existing inner city housing stock, the latter slowly fell into disrepair. This contributed to the desirability of newly constructed housing, and hence to the ever-growing queues.[143]

In an attempt to cope with the shortages, the Bulgarian state enhanced the role of private housing provision. The share of housing built and financed by cooperatives and private individuals increased steadily, and from

[142] There were always long queues of people waiting for apartments. Besides a demonstrated need for housing, factors such as an applicant's work in an enterprise or profession deemed crucial to the socialist economy; his merits, special achievements, or sacrifices made for the socialist motherland; as well as connections with the Party, members of the local elite, and, particularly, the housing authorities, influenced the allocation procedure.

[143] For similar processes elsewhere in eastern Europe, see Szeleny (1983); Sailer-Fliege (1999). On the east European housing model more generally, see Hegedüs and Tosisc (1992, 1996); Clapham (1995); Pichler-Milanovich (2001).

1981, it was roughly equal to that of the state sector. Still, both housing cooperatives and private individuals faced comparative disadvantages to state enterprises in their efforts to acquire land and finance and when negotiating contracts with construction enterprises; they also had to pay the retail price for building materials. These factors significantly increased their housing costs (Hoffman and Koleva 1993; Tsenkova 1996).

The Bulgarian state encouraged home ownership, but it retained control over the access to and exchange of housing. Housing could be purchased at subsidized nationally-controlled prices, and its sale or exchange required the approval of the municipality. In order to prevent glaring inequalities and an exacerbation of the housing shortage, the number of properties that private individuals could hold was limited to one urban residence and one holiday home per household. In 1985, 84 per cent of the national housing stock was privately owned; in urban areas the share was 78 per cent (Hoffman and Koleva 1993; Vesselinov 2004).[144]

The socialist state's focus on the large-scale construction of prefabricated high-rises inexorably altered the appearance of cities like Varna. Eastern European socialist cities typically consisted of a pre-socialist inner city that was surrounded by a ring of socialist housing estates. Although the latter were supposed to be supplied with a basic infrastructure of retailers, medical services, schools, playgrounds, and sports facilities, state priorities often lay elsewhere, resulting in a delayed or limited provision of these services. As a result, the housing estates were often "dormitory towns": residential neighborhoods with only a limited level of services (Stanilov 2007b).

One of the most significant characteristics of socialist cities was the absence of a land market governing the allocation and use of land. This function was carried out administratively according to the priorities of the socialist state, with long-term effects on the spatial patterns of these cities: socialist cities were characterized by high population densities in the urban periphery, where the socialist housing estates were located, and lower densities in the more central districts. Another effect was the large share of industrial land in socialist cities, and the relative importance of the residential functions of city centers compared to western European and North American cities. The spatial patterns of socialist cities were dominated by a number of rather mono-functional areas: industrial zones that were the workplace for many urban dwellers; housing estates with almost exclusively residential functions; and, beyond that, a "green belt" fulfilling recreational functions.

[144] Among the socialist countries of eastern Europe, Bulgaria was not unusual concerning the levels of home ownership and of private housing production; see Mandic and Clapham (1996).

Only the inner city had a mix of commercial, administrative, recreational, and residential functions, with the latter dominating. The low levels of residential segregation exhibited by socialist cities were another result of the absence of land markets and the absence or severe restriction of housing markets. Urban residential zones tended to have a mixed population with respect to social class, ethnicity, age, and household structure (French and Hamilton 1979; Sailer-Fliege 1999).[145]

In Varna, the inner city had mixed uses in the socialist period with a high share of residential buildings, but also commercial and administrative functions. The city's major sights and important cultural institutions were located in the center. The main industrial zones were located in the west and the south, surrounding the port. The largest socialist housing estates were built in the city's northern and north-western peripheries on hills overlooking the bay. Smaller estates protruded wedge-like into the inner city from the north-east; in the socialist period, they delimited the city's densely developed area. Varna's most important recreational zones were the beaches and the large seaside park, as well the coastal area to the north-east along the road to the resorts, where clusters of holiday homes were loosely interspersed with undeveloped areas of land.

The Postsocialist Urban Transformation

The collapse of socialism set in motion a transformation process that changed not just the political and economic systems of eastern European countries, but also had pronounced effects on their cities. The implementation of democracy and a market-driven economy, and the privatization of state assets, price liberalization, and decentralization resulted in the emergence of large numbers of private actors operating in cities and reshaping the urban environment. The growing influence of international economic forces and the strengthened global links of postsocialist cities were reflected in their changing urban fabric and socio-spatial organization (Adair et al. 1999; Kovács 1999).[146]

Housing and land privatization brought about unprecedented levels of home ownership in postsocialist cities. In Varna, inner city housing and land were restituted to former owners and their descendants, while apartments in the housing estates were sold to sitting tenants at prices considerably below

[145] However, this does not mean that socio-spatial differentiation was entirely absent, as, for example, Szelenyi (1983) and Kovács (1998) have demonstrated.

[146] For an overview of research on postsocialist cities, see the edited volumes by Tsenkova and Nedović-Budić (2006a); Stanilov (2007a). See also Tsenkova (2009) on housing policy in postsocialist south-eastern Europe.

market value. The privatization process further increased home ownership rates; in 2005, 95.6 per cent of housing in Bulgaria was owner-occupied. At the same time, the breakup of the socialist construction enterprises, the cutting of state subsidies, and the collapse of the banking system in the 1990s led to a sharp drop in housing production. The emergence of land and housing markets enabled individual households with adequate financial resources to acquire housing suited to their needs and preferences. The vast majority of households in Bulgaria, however, could not afford to purchase housing on the newly privatized market – a situation that only began to change in the 2000s (Baross and Struyk 1993; Hirt and Stanilov 2007).

In Varna, as in most postsocialist cities, economic liberalization resulted in a rapid growth of small businesses. Entrepreneurs established small retail and service sector companies that supplied the Varnentsi with a previously unknown variety of consumer goods and services. However, as a legacy of socialism, the inner city lacked the retail and office spaces necessary to accommodate these new businesses. Initially, ground floor and basement apartments in residential buildings were converted into retail and office spaces, kiosks and market stalls were erected on sidewalks or on empty lots, and garages were transformed into shops. In the early 2000s, office and retail buildings were constructed on empty lots by large developers, many of whom were internationally operating companies financed by foreign capital. In some cases, old residential buildings were renovated and transformed for commercial purposes; in other cases, derelict buildings were torn down and replaced by new ones that combined residential and commercial functions.[147]

[147] Hirt and Stanilov (2007); Garstka (2009) describe similar processes in other Bulgarian cities.



Plate 5. City center commercialization in Varna.

Research in eastern European capital cities such as Prague and Budapest has found that they experienced a rapid gentrification process in the postsocialist period. Features of commercial gentrification included the replacement of retailers selling affordable goods for everyday consumption by expensive boutiques, upmarket specialty stores, and international brand stores; the establishment of upscale bars, restaurants, and clubs; and the emergence of "lifestyle services" such as high-end coiffeurs, beauticians, spas, and gyms. Thus, inner cities were transformed into consumption and entertainment spaces for higher-income groups (Cooper and Morpeth 1998; Dingsdale 1999; Nagy 2001).[148] Their commercialization was accompanied by a diminution of their residential functions as residential apartments were replaced by shops and offices. In some eastern European capitals, these processes produced the emergence of central business districts. At the same time, residential gentrification drew an influx of higher-income residents, while the original lower-income residents moved to less desirable neighborhoods such as the socialist housing estates. These processes were accompanied by an accelerating curtailment and privatization of public spaces in cities and by

[148] However, these processes have occurred unevenly across inner cities, and the gentrification of some inner city neighborhoods may well be paralleled by the ghettoization of others; see Bodnár (1998); Polanska (2008).

their growing surveillance, policing, and control (Sýkora 1999; Keivani, Parsa and McGreal 2001; Haase et al. 2008).

While the inner city of Varna has experienced a strong commercialization, infill development, and the renovation and reconstruction of many old buildings, gentrification has nevertheless occurred more slowly than in eastern Europe's capital cities. In Varna, residential gentrification has been delayed by the high levels of home ownership inherited from the socialist period; many of the established residents were unwilling to give up their neighborhoods and their local social networks. Elderly residents, in particular, do not wish to be uprooted, and neither do they want to lose the advantages of living in a central location that offers easy access to the goods and services they need in their everyday lives.[149] The economic collapse of the 1990s strengthened the resolve of apartment owners to hold on to their property because many of them saw it as their only insurance against an uncertain future. Furthermore, many residential buildings in Varna's center are multi-story houses containing a number of apartments with various owners. This makes it harder to sell entire buildings to developers who might want to replace them with office buildings or retailers. Hence, many buildings in the inner city have mixed uses, with offices or retailers on the lower floors, while on the upper floors, the majority of space consists of residences. And while new upmarket shops, bars, restaurants, and lifestyle services have indeed emerged in Varna's inner city, there are still many businesses that provide local residents with affordable goods and services. Residential gentrification in Varna's city center has thus been a slow process and in some central neighborhoods, the residential structure has remained largely unchanged. The consequence is a severe shortage of office and retail space in the inner city, complemented by a shortage of vacant city center apartments.

Significant changes have also occurred in the housing estates on Varna's peripheries. As in many eastern European cities, the socialist housing estates in Varna had only limited services. That changed rapidly in the 1990s with small businesses springing up in the spaces between buildings, in ground floor and basement rooms, or in the apartments themselves.

The attractiveness of the housing estates as residential locations began to wane after 1990. Many housing blocks were beginning to deteriorate as low-quality materials had been used in their construction. Many apartment owners could not afford to invest in the upkeep of their own apartments, and it was often unclear who was responsible for the maintenance and upgrading

[149] There is some urban-rural migration by elderly residents who move to the countryside to benefit from the lower living costs. They usually pass on their urban residence to their children or grandchildren.

of the buildings' facade and common areas; the creation of a legal framework applicable to condominiums was a slow process. Furthermore, the standardized apartments in the estates often did not meet the individual preferences and needs of households; hence, those who could afford it sought housing either in newly erected residential buildings in the inner city that were, however, in low supply, or in the new suburbs (see also Temelová et al. 2010).

Varna's process of suburbanization rapidly gained momentum in the postsocialist period.[150] Commercial suburbanization was exemplified by greenfield developments on the outskirts of the city and along its main transport routes, where large-scale retailers, strip malls and office buildings were constructed. Residential suburbanization occurred in the hills surrounding the city where new residential complexes were built by large development companies, and individual households built new homes. The coastal area between Varna and the resorts was another major focus of suburbanization. Former holiday homes in that zone were converted into full residences, new single-family houses and small apartment buildings have been erected, and family-run hotels, restaurants, bars, small shops, and some larger retailers have emerged. The density of buildings along the coast has grown exponentially, and development is moving further and further up the coastal hills and into the hinterland. It is particularly the more affluent members of the newly emerging middle and upper-middle classes that are moving into the suburbs; car ownership is a precondition for suburban living as in some new developments, service provision is low and public transport connections are still weak (see also Hirt 2008).

The postsocialist transformation of Varna was thus characterized in spatial and functional terms by the diversification of formerly monofunctional urban areas, rapid suburbanization and infill development, and a growing socio-spatial differentiation that mirrors the increasing social and economic differentiation of the Varnentsi. Economic restructuring led to the development of an urban service economy concomitant with a growth of small entrepreneurship and a shift from industry to service sector employment (see also Bodnár 2001; Tsenkova and Nedović-Budić 2006b; Spevec and Klempić Bogadi 2009). Varna's intensified links with the global economy were particularly visible in service sector industries. As we shall see in

[150] On suburban growth and suburbanization in eastern European cities in the socialist period, see Fuchs and Demko (1977); Tammaru (2001); Brown et al. (2005). On postsocialist suburbanization, see Kupiszewski, Durham and Rees (1998); Bodnár (2007); Leetmaa, Tammaru and Anniste (2009). There is also a growing literature on gated communities and defensive architecture in eastern Europe; for example, Stoyanov and Frantz (2006); Bodnár and Molnar (2010); Polanska (2010).

the following chapters, the tourism industry, in particular, has played a major role in shaping the postsocialist transformation of the city.

Varna as a Tourist City

In the post-industrial age, cities have increasingly transformed from sites of production into sites of consumption and centers of the global service economy. This dual transformation entails a growing role for urban tourism and leisure activities even in cities that were not considered conventional tourist destinations in the past (Jansen-Verbeke 1986; Mullins 1991; Eisinger 2000).

Varna as a Heterogeneous Tourist Space

Although the importance of tourism and consumption have grown in Varna as well, this has not produced a sense of rupture in the city's identity as Varna has long been a focal point of the regional tourism industry. This is reflected in its characterization as a "tourist city" by many Varnentsi, such as Znezhana, a 65-year-old market vendor: "Well, we are a tourist city, an old resort. Very old. When I was young, in the 1950s, it had already started. Varna had already started to become a center for tourism. It started even before that".

Urban tourism, in contrast to resort tourism, is much harder to define in spatial and functional terms as well as with respect to the types and motivations of tourists (Shaw and Williams 2002: 244). Urban tourism may be spatially concentrated in a core tourist area, as it is in Varna, but it may just as well be spatially dispersed in the city. Sights and facilities used by visitors, such as cultural and entertainment facilities, historic sites and monuments, accommodation, catering and retail businesses, as well as a tourism infrastructure including such diverse elements as transport, communications, and information facilities, may be produced for and consumed by locals as well. Visitors of cities may have a wide variety of motivations and sources (Jansen-Verbeke 1986; Shaw and Williams 2002).

In Varna, tourism is spatially concentrated in the city center. At the same time, however, Varna's center serves as a residential area; it is the seat of the local and regional administrations; it accommodates the university; it is a transport hub; and, it is the location of businesses that are unrelated to tourism. It may thus be described as a heterogeneous tourist space, defined by Tim Edensor as follows: "Heterogeneous tourist spaces accommodate tourism as one economic activity but are not dominated by it. Tourist facilities coexist with local small businesses, shops, street vendors, public and private institutions and domestic housing. There can be no question of keep-

ing certain people out of the area on the grounds of maintaining a cultivated appearance, and tourists and locals mingle and go about their separate business" (Edensor 1998: 54). According to Edensor, the tourist economy of heterogeneous tourist spaces is labor intensive and dominated by family-run businesses.[151] These small businesses often cannot provide the international standards that are a typical feature of tourist enclaves, and many of them are used by locals and visitors alike. Heterogeneous tourist spaces are commonly found in proximity to tourist enclaves and both are linked by a complex web of relationships. This is also the case in the Varna region, where the resort enclaves are closely linked to the more heterogeneous tourist spaces of the city.[152]

Tourism and the tourism industry in both locations are connected in a number of ways that will be described in more detail in the following chapters. Businesses in both locations compete for qualified workers and for customers and their money. The resorts attract both labor and investments from the city, and most tourists staying in the resorts visit the city during their stay and use its tourist facilities. However, while the vast majority of visitors to the resorts are international charter tourists arriving for a beach vacation, Varna attracts a more heterogeneous collection of visitors. Indeed, there are a number of distinct types of tourists present in Varna, and it is to them that I will now turn.

Classifying Tourists in Varna

The first group, foreign charter tourists, is the most noticeable in the summer months. These are the foreigners staying in the surrounding resorts, most of whom will take a day trip to Varna at some point during their stay. They are an important target group of many businesses in the city center, and because of their sheer numbers, they tend to dominate the streets of the inner city. They are also the most conspicuous; foreign tourists are instantly recognizable by their attire, the items that they carry, and the languages that they speak. While visiting Varna, these day trippers usually do some sightseeing and some shopping; stroll around; and take a drink or a meal in a cafe or a restaurant. In other words, their main economic impact is on retailers, catering, and entertainment facilities in the inner city, and on some transport

[151] Details about the organization of labor in family-owned touristic businesses appear in chapter 8.

[152] Edensor's model is based on the case of India where the spatial, social, and economic separation of the two realms is much more pronounced, and the differences between them are thrown into sharper relief than in Bulgaria. He acknowledges that tourist space is often more hybrid than immediately apparent, and that many tourist spaces are characterized by an interpenetration of enclavic and heterogeneous elements (Edensor 1998: 60).

companies. They also contribute to the lively ambience of the city center that both locals and visitors find so attractive. This visitor type is the most visible and, some people argue, the numerically largest and economically most influential. As a result, they are seen as the "quintessential tourists" by most of Varna's residents. When the Varnentsi talk about "tourists", they usually refer to these foreign charter tourists.

In contrast to international charter tourists, foreign cultural tourists who visit the city specifically for its culture and heritage sites, as well as foreign individual travelers tend to stay in accommodation in the center of Varna.[153] Although their stays are often short, they are an important clientele for hotels and commercial homes in the city. They focus on sightseeing, attending cultural events, and visiting the museums, but they also use the beach and patronize retail and catering venues. Although this form of tourism is on the rise, its share is still much smaller than that of charter tourists. Varnentsi often do not distinguish foreign cultural tourists from charter tourists because they appear and behave in similar ways. The distinction is, however, very important for tourism workers, because cultural tourists represent the affluent and culturally interested tourist segment the industry wants to attract. The number of domestic tourists visiting Varna is considerable, although no one is quite sure how large it actually is.[154] Indeed, the importance of Varna as a domestic tourism destination is implied in the city's designation as "Bulgaria's summer capital", and many Varnentsi I talked to proudly related how, come summertime, all of Bulgaria comes to Varna, making the city the center of the cultural and social life of the country. Two types of domestic tourists may be distinguished. The first are day trippers or people on weekend trips who arrive throughout the year. Their main purpose is shopping, but they also enjoy the entertainment venues, cultural events, and the nightlife. Holidaymakers are the second type of domestic tourists. Like international charter tourists, they spend a lot of time on the beach, but they also have an impact on shops, restaurants, and entertainment venues in the city. Contrary to the foreigners, however, a significant share of domestic tourists stay with friends and relatives, and another large share rent private accommodation, while the numbers staying in hotels in the city are still relatively small. Although they are very important for

[153] As described in chapter 3, in the high season it is difficult for individual travelers to find accommodation in the resorts, whereas the city offers a wide range of accommodation. See also chapters 8 and 9.

[154] According to the NSI (2011h), in 2008 commercial accommodation establishments in Varna Oblast registered 312,974 domestic arrivals with more than one million overnight stays. This data includes the city of Varna and the nearby resorts, except Albena which is located in Dobrich Oblast, and cannot be further refined for the city alone. These figures also exclude day trippers and domestic tourists who do not stay in commercial accommodation.

many businesses in the city, the status of domestic tourists is rather fuzzy. Frequently, they are not even included in the term "tourist"; the Varnentsi rather describe them as "people on shopping trips", "friends and relatives on a visit", or "visitors from elsewhere in Bulgaria".

Another important group, business travelers, has an even more ambiguous status. The Varnentsi, whether directly involved in the tourism industry or not, never describe people visiting their city for business reasons as tourists, and scholarly definitions foregrounding the recreational and leisure aspects of tourism tend to exclude them as well.[155] Nevertheless, business travelers constitute a vital customer segment for many hotels in the city, and they have an impact on shops, restaurants, and bars as well. Their importance is exacerbated by the fact that they arrive in Varna throughout the year and thus contribute to the turnover of accommodation providers and other service sector companies in the off and low seasons. As a result of their presence, many hotels in the city view the winter season as the most profitable, and others, targeting business travelers as well as cultural and leisure tourists, perceive no distinct seasonality.

Lastly, there are the "foreign investors", a term often used by the Varnentsi to describe foreigners who visit Varna in order to acquire property in the region. While their numbers appear to fluctuate in concert with developments on the property market, they are still an important segment for the hospitality industry. They also had a strong influence on regional development by triggering the quite spectacular boom of the real estate sector.

Fordist and Post-Fordist Tourism in Varna

It may well be argued that tourism in Varna possesses more features of post-Fordist tourism than the resorts, and to a certain extent that is indeed the case. Post-Fordist tourism has been associated with flexible and individual modes of travel, cultural and heritage tourism, as well as sophisticated forms of consumption, and in fact, the city does receive a larger share of independent travelers, many of whom spend their time sightseeing, shopping, and sampling the local cuisine. Nevertheless, their importance should not be overestimated. Foreign charter tourists remain the largest and economically most important segment of visitors in Varna. Most of the individual travelers in the city are Bulgarian nationals, and while they do arrive for short-break holidays, and pursue a broad range of activities, that is not necessarily an expression of a postmodern lifestyle. A significant share of domestic tourists

[155] But business travelers are included in the World Tourism Organization (1995: 1) definition of tourists as people "travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes".

spend their holidays in such a way because they cannot afford a longer break, let alone foreign travel. Many of them would probably prefer a two-week package holiday in a Mediterranean resort if only they had the funds. Thus, on the demand side, post-Fordist tourists make up only a small percentage of the overall visitor numbers.

On the supply side, there is indeed a notable fragmentation and specialization of the tourism industry in Varna. However, I would argue that this is, again, not so much due to a rise of post-Fordist tourism, but rather a result of the social and economic heterogeneity of the tourist segments. Furthermore, many service sector companies in the city serve not just tourists, but the Varnentsi as well, and market differentiation is closely related to stratified consumption patterns emerging in conjunction with the growing social and economic stratification of Bulgarian society.[156]

While the various types of tourists who visit Varna are diverse in their places of origin and motivations, they nevertheless share common features. Most importantly, they all consume the city. According to John Urry, tourism involves a visual consumption of place through the tourist gaze, and thus, on the supply side, it entails the production of an aestheticized urban landscape containing sights, signs, simulacra, and staged events (Urry 1990; see also Meethan 1996; Junemo 2004; Mordue 2005). Urban tourist spaces are thus transformed into landscapes of consumption where tourists may consume both tangibles and intangibles – they may eat, drink, shop, promenade, watch cultural events or the street life, or gaze at heritage sights. As the boundaries of tourism, leisure, and shopping have increasingly blurred, these types of activities and forms of consumption are shared by many locals as well (Shaw, Bagwell and Karmowska 2004; Gotham 2005, 2007; Simpson 2008).

In Varna, tourist sights and most of the cultural and entertainment venues are located in the city center, as are many hotels, restaurants, and retailers, and recreational spaces like the seaside park and the beaches. The city center is thus the primary tourist space of Varna, but due to its opportunities for leisure and shopping, it is also heavily used by the locals. The flows of visitors and locals intersect here and the complex web of relations between tourism, leisure, and consumption is most salient. But as we shall see, in Varna, the commercialization and aestheticization of space is more uneven and haphazard, and less planned and stringently implemented than in other tourist cities that are marketed as tourism and heritage sites.

[156] See also chapter 7, where these processes are explored with regard to retailing.

Varna as a Hospitable City

Analyses of the tourist city are concerned with cities as places of touristic interest, with their ability to attract, accommodate, and entertain tourists. The marketing and promotion of tourist cities is directed at potential or actual visitors intending to consume the city as tourists. Usually, urban tourism is limited to some areas of the city, while others, such as residential neighborhoods and suburbs, and industrial and business districts are left out of the tourist circuits. Urban tourism often fuels the creation of distinct tourist spaces: growing tourist numbers may result in a transformation of urban landscapes into aestheticized spaces of consumption; a development that may be accompanied by processes of gentrification and by an intensification of surveillance and control. One consequence is the exclusion of groups that are defined as "undesirable" because their presence is expected to disrupt the aestheticized landscape, to detract from others' pleasure of consumption, and ultimately to diminish the attractiveness of the tourist space and thus its appeal to consumers. "Undesirables" in this context may both be certain groups of visitors such as, for example, low-spending day trippers, or they may be inhabitants of the city, like low-income groups, ethnic minorities, boisterous youths, or the homeless and the poor (Chang 2000; Allon 2004; Mordue 2005).

The concept of the hospitable city, in contrast, foregrounds the notion of a city that is hospitable towards a much wider array of "strangers". It offers spaces that are accessible to any and all of its inhabitants and visitors, facilitating encounters of and interactions among the diverse groups of people who inhabit the city or stay there temporarily. While the tourist city focuses on attracting tourists, usually envisioned as affluent middle-class consumers, to the exclusion of those who do not fit into that target group, the hospitable city welcomes all strangers, whatever their purpose, ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic background. Likewise, it does not produce spaces exclusive to certain groups of residents at the cost of keeping out others. Thus, the hospitable city is inclusive; it is heterogeneous; and it contains an abundance of public spaces facilitating encounters of and interactions among residents and visitors (Latham 2003; Bell 2007a, 2007b; Lugosi, Bell and Lugosi 2010).

Hospitality in the Social Sciences

In urban sociology and urban geography, the concept of hospitality has come to take a central place in debates about "the good city" which may also be characterized as a "cosmopolitan city", or a "hospitable city" (Friedmann 2000). Here it is argued that in postindustrial economies, cities have increas-

ingly turned into spaces of consumption and leisure. Endeavoring to successfully compete with other urban centers, and attract investments, new residents and visitors, cities actively seek to market and promote themselves not just as pleasure zones, entertainment centers, and tourist attractions; they also attempt to create an image of hospitality, conviviality, sociality, and vitality, while maintaining an attractive, livable, and sustainable urban environment for their inhabitants (Judd and Fainstein 1999; Shaw and Williams 2002; Bell 2007b).

In the tourism industry, hospitality is considered an essential characteristic of service providers and of host populations more generally. It is one of the central assets upon which tourism rests; tourist destinations competing for visitors therefore emphasize the hospitality of the local population. Both tourism and hospitality revolve around the provision of food, drink, and accommodation to guests, as is highlighted in the renaming of the "accommodation and catering sector" to the "hospitality industry". Hence, it is not surprising that "hospitality" has become a central metaphor in tourism studies. On the one hand, it is used to describe the commercial activities of the tourism industry, and on the other, to epitomize the social interactions of locals and tourists who are, in this context, reframed as hosts and guests (Smith 1992; Aramberri 2001; Hemmington 2007).

In anthropology, hospitality is understood as a way to mediate kinship, friendship, and hostility.[157] The growing interest of anthropologists in tourism has been accompanied by a renewed focus on hospitality in tourism and leisure settings that is especially pronounced in a number of studies of commercial forms of hospitality (di Domenico and Lynch 2007a; Lugosi 2008, 2009; Pons 2009). Likewise, the popularity of migration studies and, more generally, of research into global flows of people and goods has resulted in a growing number of accounts of how nations and local communities receive all manner of "strangers" (Sherlock 2001; Gibson 2003). Nevertheless, as Jennie Germann Molz and Sarah Gibson have noted, "perhaps because of its wide appeal across disciplines, the concept of hospitality has eluded any attempt to delineate it as a unified theoretical paradigm or ontological framework" (Molz and Gibson 2007b: 3).

Hospitality is a concept fraught with ambiguities, uncertainties, and tensions. The philosophy of hospitality, exemplified by the work of Jacques Derrida (2000), tends to turn the spotlight on the ideal: the notion of unconditional hospitality, freely given and freely received without any ulterior motives or expectations of gain. However, anthropologists and other social scientists have found that in practice, hospitality is conditional; not everyone

[157] For example, Mauss (1990 [1924]); see also Candea and da Col eds. (2012).

is eligible to fill the role of host or guest, and there are limits and restrictions on the ways that hospitality may be offered and received. The provision and acceptance of hospitality entails rights and duties, expectations for the future, and memories of obligations that were incurred in the past; and hospitality is framed by social rules and norms. Hospitality is thus closely connected with notions of status and identity, inclusion and exclusion, and proximity and distance (Heuman 2005; Sheringham and Daruwalla 2007; Di Domenico and Fleming 2009). As Molz and Gibson concluded, "Hospitality is a structure that regulates, negotiates, and celebrates the social relations between inside and outside, home and away, private and public, self and other" (Molz and Gibson 2007b: 3).

In conceptualizing the hospitable city, hospitality is neither limited to "private hospitality" and practices of "hosting" in the private home, nor to the operations of the hospitality industry. The concept of hospitality that is used to describe a city is more akin to that found throughout the social sciences: hospitality refers to more general attitudes and approaches towards the other, and to the manifestations and expressions of these attitudes in practice. It relates to the ways in which "strangers" are accepted or rejected, welcomed or evicted by individuals, communities, and nations. These attitudes towards others may be multifarious and contradictory; they may find expression in ideology and official discourses as well as in everyday conversations; they may be codified in law as well as in unwritten rules of behavior; and they may appear in national and communal institutions as well as in informal practices. In the city, hospitality thus may be negotiated, offered, or denied in a multitude of spaces, contexts, and settings. Practices of hospitality may range from highly formal and elaborate performances to fleeting, mundane encounters and interactions. This perspective on hospitality transcends more rigid notions of "hosts and guests" that underlie many earlier works in tourism and hospitality studies. It rather views "host" and "guest" as fluid and flexible social roles that may be negotiated anew in each encounter, and that may or may not be temporarily accepted or rejected.

Practices of hospitality as related to inclusion and exclusion become particularly salient in cities. They are the places where diverse populations coexist and where social, economic, and cultural diversity may be an immediate and tangible part of lived experience. Cities offer opportunities for encounters and interactions of heterogeneous groups of people, and many of these encounters are framed in discourses and practices of hospitality. Accessible public spaces are particularly important to fostering hospitable attitudes and practices. They are spaces where diverse people learn to coexist and to be open to and accepting of a variety of social experiences and interactions. Hospitality can thus be approached through regimes of inclu-

sion and exclusion in urban public spaces and arenas of participation. Its limits are marked by those groups who are excluded from public spaces, and who do not participate in public situations or modes of coexistence. But what happens to cities when socioeconomic and spatial differentiation and the enclosure of public spaces lead to the gradual disappearance of spaces where heterogeneity can be experienced and where hospitality must be negotiated?

Urban Studies and the Disappearance of Public Space

The evolution and spatial transformation of cities have long been a focus of research in urban studies. Particular attention has been paid to the effects of the growing social and economic differentiation of urban populations, and its ramifications for social cohesion, for modes of social interaction, inclusion and exclusion.[158] In this context, scholars have observed a trend towards an incremental enclosure and disappearance of accessible public space.

Ray Oldenburg, for example, examined how the urban fabric and the everyday practices of city dwellers encourages or impedes sociability, hospitality, and, ultimately, community cohesion (Oldenburg 1999). He coined the term "third place"[159] to describe informal meeting places that are anchors of community life and which foster a sense of community and belonging by enabling interaction and sociability. "Third places" may be commercial establishments such as cafes, diners, pubs or beer gardens, general stores, or bowling alleys which are affordable for a wide spectrum of the population, or they may be non-commercial venues such as club houses, arcades, or public parks. Their importance is that, even if they provide goods and services, they also allow people to "hang out" with each other. Oldenburg noted that "third places" have increasingly disappeared from American cities and suburbs since the Second World War; indeed, urban planning often fails to make provisions for their inclusion in new housing developments. Processes of suburbanization, the dependence of urban dwellers on cars, and the redevelopment and commercialization of city centers, gentrified neighborhoods, and tourist districts have contributed to pushing out "third places", with dire consequences for the cohesion of the communities thus affected.

Approaching the issue of the encroachment on public space on a different trajectory, Mike Davis has explored the roles of architecture and technologies of surveillance and control in the creation of a "fortress L.A."

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[158] For overviews, see Lynch (1994); Robinson (2005); Acuto (2011).

[159] According to Oldenburg (1999), the "first place" is a person's home and the community formed with the other members of his household, and the "second place" is the place of work where many of us actually spend most of our time.

(Davis 1992). Davis traced the destruction of accessible public space in Los Angeles back to the privatization of the architectural public realm, to increasing demands of the middle class for spatial and social isolation, and to a growing preoccupation with "security". The latter is not so much rooted in concerns for personal safety, but in a desire for personal insulation from "unsavory" groups and individuals and even crowds in general; "secure" homes and neighborhoods also index the social status and income of those who live and work there. Davis's work had a strong impact on urban sociology; it triggered an avalanche of studies on urban fortification and segregation that increasingly merged with the wider corpus of works falling under the heading of the "neoliberal city" (Low 1997, 2006; Marcuse 1997).

Whereas Oldenburg and Davis have scrutinized the processes contributing to the constriction of urban public space in the United States, French anthropologist Marc Augé has focused on the global expansion of so-called non-places. These are generic, transitory spaces that lack the rootedness and specificity of place and are unable to engender a sense of belonging in their users (Augé 1995). As spaces like airports, hotels, supermarkets, or highways are neither relational, nor historical, nor concerned with identity, they augment their users' sense of atomization and anonymity. Like the trends identified by Oldenburg and Davis, the expansion of non-places has also resulted in the creation of cities that fail to offer "places for living" and for social interaction.

The common theme in the works of these authors is the disappearance of accessible urban public space that facilitates the co-presence of and interactions among diverse groups of people and encourages the hospitable encounters that ultimately underpin the cosmopolitan nature of cities. Oldenburg's "third places" are closely linked to hospitality; they provide a space where hospitality may be offered and received, and they may even be hospitality industry venues. "Third places" and the social practices they enable are conducive to the creation of a sense of community and belonging, and they help integrate "strangers" into the community. They make an important contribution to shaping a hospitable city where interactions among heterogeneous groups of people are possible and even desirable, and where "strangers" are welcomed and accepted. The "fortress L.A." as described by Davis, on the other hand, suggests the opposite of a hospitable city: a place that is closed off and suspicious of strangers and others, and takes measures to keep them out. Notably, many of the "non-places" examined by Augé are part of the tourism infrastructure. Their lack of rootedness and connectedness is one consequence of travelers' characteristics: they are passing through on their way to or from home, they are always strangers who are never going to stay for long. However, as we shall see in the following

chapters, practices of hospitality may well turn hotels, shops, and other "non-places" into spaces of sociability and hospitality, thus saturating them with meaning and identity, and transforming them into "anthropological place" that is "formed by individual identities, through complicities of language, local references, the unformulated rules of living know-how" (Augé 1995: 101).

Spaces of Hospitality, Spaces of Consumption

Spaces of hospitality and social interaction such as cafes, bars, restaurants and other "third places" play a major role in creating a hospitable ambience in cities or neighborhoods. Yet surprisingly, such venues have rarely been considered in relation to hospitality per se. The philosophy of hospitality tends to ignore them; it views them as far removed from the ideal of hospitality, and firmly belonging to the sphere of profit-maximizing market relations and consumerist exchange. In "hospitality studies", such places are important objects of research, but the social relations, values, and mores underpinning their operations are often neglected due to the discipline's strong emphasis on economics, business, and management (Lashley 2002; Bell 2007a).

Nevertheless, hospitality industry venues play an important role in everyday hospitable encounters. They provide places (and spaces) where abstract and ideal notions of hospitality are negotiated, translated, and acted out in practice. Restaurants, cafes, or bars may not be remarkable or extraordinary places, and they may be far removed from grand notions of unconditional hospitality or cosmopolitan attitudes. But they do provide spaces where everyday interactions among diverse groups of people occur on a small and unassuming scale, and where mundane practices of hospitality forge connections between "strangers", however fleeting they may ultimately be (Latham 2003; O'Mahony 2007; Lugosi 2008, 2009).

Hospitality and cosmopolitanism are encouraged by the specifically urban cultures and lifestyles that are closely linked to spaces and practices of consumption and leisure. In a very mundane way, urban entertainment and night-time economies and their facilities contribute to fostering an "ethics of conviviality" (Bell 2007a: 8) that enables "lighter touch forms of sociality" (Thrift 2005: 145, as cited in Bell 2007a: 15). Therefore, on the one hand, commercial hospitality venues may well have a share in the creation of the hospitable and cosmopolitan ambience of a city. On the other hand, though, the emergence of new eating, drinking, entertainment, and shopping venues serving the production and consumption of particular tastes and lifestyles may be concurrent with processes of residential and commercial gentrification. These processes may involve the production of spaces that are welcom-

ing and hospitable, but only to those who "fit" the target group and have the desired socioeconomic background. Thus, paradoxically, a "trendy" gentrified neighborhood populated by artists, intellectuals, and other professionals in the creative industries who possess diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, worldviews, and lifestyles, may well "feel" hospitable and even cosmopolitan to "strangers" and visitors of a similar ilk, while at the same time, others, such as members of the working class or poor international or rural immigrants, may feel excluded (Jansson 2003; Pollard 2004; Zukin and Kosta 2004; Zukin et al. 2009).[160]

Beyond hospitality industry venues, public spaces such as parks, markets, beaches or even the streets may enable and encourage hospitable encounters. By permitting and inviting interactions among and between locals and visitors of all backgrounds and walks of life, such hospitable spaces foster sociality and conviviality. Their prevalence and patterns of use distinctly affect the ambience of cities, and in everyday life, it is often this diffuse "feel" of a place that makes people feel welcome or rejected (Satler 1990; Drummond 2000; Simpson 2011).

Spaces of Hospitality in Varna

As we shall see in the following chapters, the Varnentsi take great pride in their hospitality towards strangers. In fact, they view hospitality as a virtue that is at the heart of the Bulgarian "national character". Likewise, the perception of Varna as a hospitable and cosmopolitan city is an integral part of its reputation as "Bulgaria's seaside capital", a tourist city, and one of the cultural centers of the country.[161]

As a tourist city, Varna has its fair share of hospitality industry venues, and many Varnentsi earn their living by providing commercial hospitality to visitors. As we shall see, their dealings with tourists are not exclusively based on the profit motive and the expectation of commercial gain. Instead, within the boundaries set by the commercial context, these hospitality workers actively attempt to turn "strangers" into "friends", a process that may be viewed as being at the heart of hospitality.

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[160] Commercial hospitality venues thus contribute to the ambience of specific neighborhoods and cities, an ambience that is, in turn, marketed and promoted in order to attract investors, new residents, and visitors.

[161] The promotional video "Hello, Varna" that features prominently on the website of the "Cultural and Tourist Information Center Varna" emphasizes the city's cultural, entertainment and consumption opportunities with shots of people walking, sunbathing, and playing on the beach; of the vibrant street life, cafes, and restaurants; of the seaside park; and of the city's sights and historical heritage. Varna has underlined its claim to a reputation as a city of culture and hospitality with its bid for the 2019 title of "European capital of culture".

For most of the year, life in Varna is strongly oriented to the outside. Numerous cafes, bars, and restaurants line the city streets, inviting passers-by to sit down, relax, and enjoy the view of the street life. In Bulgaria, as elsewhere, the sharing of food and drink plays a central role in nurturing social relations. Mundane rituals such as having a morning coffee and cigarette with one's colleagues, sharing a meal with friends, or going out for a drink at night are important parts of daily life for many Varnentsi; in the warm season, these activities often take place outside, contributing to the vibe of Varna as a lively, convivial, and ultimately hospitable city.

But it is not just the venues of the hospitality industry that account for this ambience. The city features many public spaces and institutions that facilitate everyday sociability and provide opportunities for social interaction. Small kiosks selling newspapers, cigarettes, and sweets dot the streets, providing refreshments and entertainment as well as offering a place to linger and have a chat. Neighborhood shops are focal points of the community; besides selling everyday necessities, they serve as meeting places where news and gossip are exchanged, and where neighbors cultivate and nourish their social ties. The daily evening promenade draws many Varnentsi and their visitors to the city center. Strolling up and down the pedestrian zone, along the beach and in the seaside park, they frequently stop to greet and chat with friends and acquaintances, to be introduced to new people, or perhaps to sit down in a cafe or on a park bench to watch the spectacle. Likewise, open-air markets, the beaches, public parks, playgrounds, and pedestrian zones provide spaces where hospitable encounters are facilitated and encouraged. Ultimately, it is the convergence of all these elements that makes Varna a hospitable city that continues to attract new inhabitants as well as numerous visitors. It has a key part in the success of tourism in the city, and in the following chapters, we will meet many individuals who contribute to this success by offering hospitality to "strangers" in small and unremarkable, yet highly effective ways.

At the same time, however, we will see that hospitality in Varna is by no means unconditional. Some groups are more welcome than others, and not everyone is offered hospitality to the same extent. Among Bulgarians, Varna is widely considered a livable and even cosmopolitan city that attracts people of many nationalities, backgrounds, and walks of life. However, as the following chapters will demonstrate, among the Varnentsi there is a growing sense of social stratification, fragmentation, and socio-spatial differentiation. While tourism may be said to encourage an ethos of hospitality and a cosmopolitan worldview (as many of my interlocutors actually claimed), it could also be accused of fostering the creation of commercialized and aestheticized tourist space, thus contributing to the privatization of

public spaces and to the exclusion of "undesirables". In the end, hospitality, like tourism, is a double-edged sword: "strangers" may be welcomed with open arms, but they may also be rejected and barred from entering. In the following chapters, we will encounter the many nuances of hospitality as it is negotiated and practiced by ordinary Varnentsi attempting to make a living in Varna's vibrant tourism industry.

Chapter 7
Retailing and Consumption in Varna: "Now It Looks Like a European Market!"

In this chapter, I will describe the changing nature of retailing in the city of Varna. One thing immediately apparent to any visitor is that the city's retail landscape is highly diversified. Little shops and boutiques lining the streets, stalls and booths in open-air markets and on sidewalks, and large shopping malls, superstores, and hypermarkets all compete for customers and their money. The various types of retailers are further differentiated according to their merchandise and its price range, their main customer segments, and their locations. These factors interact to create a complex and diversified retail landscape. This diversity within the sector is mirrored in its workforce. As this chapter will demonstrate, retailing jobs in Varna are highly differentiated according to the skills, knowledge, and expertise demanded of employees, the types of customer service they provide, and the incomes they earn.

The nature of their work situates employees in retailing at the intersection of production and consumption (du Gay 1996). Their own consumer knowledge and experience influence their dealings with customers: personal experience as a consumer impacts how sales clerks understand customer service, how they relate to customers, and how they advise, guide, and educate them. Some retail venues insist that employees model their stock; this enables the retailer to educate consumers in how to use their products, at the same time that it vouches for their desirability by suggesting that the employees are also avid consumers of the wares they sell. Some lifestyle and fashion retailers pick their employees by hiring customers off the floor, thus ensuring that workers themselves are consumers of the merchandise they will be selling as well as identifying with the brand and its associated lifestyle. And finally, it is the policy of many retailers to offer their employees staff discounts, thus encouraging them to become customers of the store for which they work (Prus 1987; Johnston and Sandberg 2008). What is true of

retailing generally is also true in Varna, with the exception that shopping customers are rarely targeted as potential employees.

At the intersection of production and consumption, retail workers are also producers of value. Through their daily work, consisting of often mundane and highly repetitive tasks, as well as through their own attitude and behavior, workers contribute to the production of a desired retail environment. Salesclerks enhance the value of brands by creating an ambience that is attractive to shoppers and that conforms with brand images and the associated lifestyles. Thus, they have a decisive part in producing spaces of consumption (Pettinger 2006; Williams and Connell 2010).

Retail workers have these impacts in cities and regions throughout the world. However, retailing in Varna is particularly interesting for three reasons. First, the increasing stratification and fragmentation of postsocialist Bulgarian society are thrown into particularly sharp relief in the spheres of consumption and retailing. Second, in the last two decades, the appearance of a previously unknown variety of consumer goods in Bulgaria has been paralleled by the emergence of new modes of retailing, both in globally or transnationally operating companies, and in new types of shopping venues such as shopping malls, hypermarkets, and superstores. And third, local and domestic notions of consumption, shopping, and retailing in Varna, and the hierarchies of value associated with them, are complicated by the presence of large numbers of foreigners who do not necessarily share them. This chapter will illuminate these processes by taking a closer look at the changing retailing landscape in Varna and exploring its interplay with local notions of consumption, identity, and inclusion and exclusion. As tourism impacts all aspects of these relationships, the chapter will also highlight the effects that tourism has on Varna's retailing sector by using tourism as a lens to throw a sharper light on the growing social inequality and stratification in the city.

Retailers are part of the service sector and their employees are required to possess a distinct range of skills and capabilities. Due to the social nature of interactive service work, workers' so-called soft skills have a central role in service sector jobs generally, and in retailing particularly.[162] Employees are expected to be helpful, friendly, and considerate in order to provide quality service, and thus to ensure customer satisfaction and, ideally, loyalty. Even in the face of rude, irate, and abusive customers, retail workers should uphold the tenets of good customer service by displaying the correct attitude and behavior, a feat that requires active emotion management.

[162] For an early analysis of the social aspects of sales behavior and the application of "soft skills" by salespeople, see Miller (1964).

The concept of emotion management was pioneered by Arlie Hochschild in her landmark work "The Managed Heart" (Hochschild 1983). According to Hochschild, people are socialized to manage their emotions so they are appropriate to any given situation. This is accomplished by using a set of shared and implicit guidelines that enable an individual to assess a situation and produce the socially expected emotions. Hochschild terms this process "emotion work" when it takes place in the private realm, while "emotional labor" describes emotion management in the commercial realm; emotional labor is emotion management with a "profit motive slipped under it" (Hochschild 1983: 119). Hochschild's study of airline cabin crews focused on how organizations attempt to regulate their employees' emotion management as a part of the labor process, thus turning it into a saleable commodity. Following Hochschild, a plethora of studies exploring emotional labor have been published. Emotional labor has been found to be particularly prevalent in frontline service jobs where employees' appropriate emotional displays are considered as key to ensuring service quality and customer satisfaction.[163]

While numerous studies have explored the emotional labor involved in interactive service work, recent research has found that in much of the service sector, frontline employees are not just supposed to induce and display the appropriate emotions, but to "look good" and "sound right" as well (Williams and Connell 2010). This aspect of the commodification of workers' embodied capacities and attributes has been termed "aesthetic labor". While in emotional labor, employers profit from their workers' capacity for emotion management, in aesthetic labor, workers' corporeal dispositions are appropriated and managed for commercial benefit. This pertains to embodied attributes and capacities such as body language and manner of speaking, physique, complexion, make-up, hairstyle, and manner of dress. In some cases, "attractive" employees might simply be hired to attract customers, but particularly in the case of branded corporations, workers' aesthetic labor contributes to the production of a specific "style" of service, and of a distinct corporate image and brand identity (Warhurst et al. 2000; Nickson and Warhurst 2007; Warhurst and Nickson 2007a, 2007b).

Larger service sector organizations especially tend to extensively train their employees in emotion management and aesthetic labor, teaching them to adhere to rigid, scripted emotion rules and dress codes. Compliance is monitored by both management and customers in order to ensure a consistently high service quality. Smaller organizations tend to rely on employees' pre-existing aptitude for emotion management and aesthetic labor. They

[163] For overviews and critical discussions of emotional labor studies, see Wouters (1989); Bolton and Boyd (2003); Bolton (2009); Brook (2009).

often hire individuals who, by virtue of their personality, appear to be predisposed for service work, and whose "look" fits the image of the organization. Since formal training is often absent in small organizations, employees are instead informally socialized and trained by management, colleagues, and even customers (Pettinger 2005; Seymour and Sandiford 2005).

As this chapter will demonstrate, in Varna, the breadth and scope of skills and capabilities demanded of workers in the retail sector has undergone significant changes since the 1990s. Under socialism, retail workers received formal vocational training with an emphasis on vocational and "technical" qualifications centering on specialist product knowledge, whereas "soft skills" took a backseat in an economy of shortages. Today, the emphasis on "technical" product knowledge is increasingly replaced by a focus on "soft skills", and on an understanding of the symbolic meanings of consumer goods. As I will show, however, this is by no means a uniform process. Notions of the nature of customer service and of the skills and qualities that are necessary to provide it are strongly dependent on the type of retail venue; the variety in approaches to customer service mirrors the fragmentation of the retailing landscape more generally.

In the first section of this chapter, I will thus focus on open-air markets which have a low status both as sites of consumption and as workplaces, and a reputation for providing only minimal customer service. In the second section, I turn to small independent shops in the city center that are characterized by their affordable merchandise and by the personal customer service they provide. The independent upmarket shops I describe in the third section retain an emphasis on personal customer service while demanding high levels of aesthetic labor from their employees. High levels of aesthetic labor are also expected from the employees of the superstores and shopping malls that I focus on in the fourth section, but due to the prevalence of self-service in these venues, the technical knowledge of employees is less important and their emotional labor follows highly standardized scripts. Finally, in the conclusion, I explore the implications of changes in the retail sector as they relate to issues of inclusion and exclusion, notions of public space, and current debates about "skill" in the service sector. The growing importance of "skills" such as an aptitude for emotional and aesthetic labor has affected the composition and stratification of the service industries workforce by privileging some groups and excluding others. The impact of these processes extends beyond retailing; they have a strong effect on the tourism industry as well.

The contribution that this chapter makes to the study of interactive service work is twofold. It will describe retail work under the conditions of over-the-counter service which is still an important aspect of much shopping

in Bulgaria. From this perspective, Bulgaria's postsocialist retail sector contrasts with those of countries in which self-service is prevalent and which have been the focus of most previous research on retail service provision. Furthermore, while numerous studies have explored consumption in both socialist and postsocialist eastern Europe[164], few have considered how retail workers and actual practices of retailing contribute to the shaping of consumption practices and to the social construction of the value of consumer goods. At the same time, this chapter complements chapter 4 in which I have shown how vendors in Golden Sands are blamed for the Orientalization of the resort through the mere presence and proliferation of their stalls, their cheap and tacky merchandise, and their (presumed) trading practices. This chapter will discuss additional factors underlying vendors' poor reputation in Bulgaria: the low social status of open-air markets as workplaces and as sites of consumption, and their notoriety as ambivalent, even dangerous spaces.

My focus in this chapter is on retailing and shopping in the city center of Varna because this is where the flows of local, domestic, and international shoppers intersect and where the differences between various practices of retailing and consumption are thrown into sharpest relief. The findings of this chapter do not apply to grocery shopping and daily consumption. Many Varnentsi do their everyday grocery shopping in small neighborhood shops that often serve as focal points of the community; in addition to selling daily necessities, these shops offer an opportunity to meet neighbors and acquaintances, have a chat, and hear the latest news and gossip. Some of these stores may well be described as "third places", informal meeting places that foster a sense of community and neighborhood.[165]

When shopping for groceries, people tend to favor domestic products, reasoning that they are fresher, tastier, more healthy, and cheaper than their foreign counterparts.[166] Fruits and vegetables are preferably bought in open-

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[164] For example, Fehérváry (2002); Lankauskas (2002); Shevchenko (2002a, 2002b).

[165] See also Coen, Ross and Turner (2008) on small grocery shops as the focal points of a neighborhood. I did no systematic research on the effects of the appearance of Western-style self-service supermarkets on these neighborhood grocery stores. In the neighborhood where I stayed, a newly-established small supermarket was usually empty. My elderly neighbors explained that the imported groceries it sold were more expensive than local products and not as fresh and tasty. Besides, they preferred the familiarity and sociability of the local corner shop where everyday necessities were sold over-the-counter. The younger, car-owning families in the neighborhood went on regular (often weekly or bi-weekly) shopping trips to large supermarkets in the suburbs where they bought non-perishables and bulk items, but they still bought fresh foodstuffs for everyday consumption such as bread, cheese, and butter in the local corner store.

[166] See Caldwell (2002, 2004b) for similar notions in Russia. See Zavisca (2003) on the production and consumption of homegrown fruits and vegetables among urban Russians.

air markets. Small produce markets are scattered throughout the city.[167] They are patronized by people from all strata of society because the produce sold there is fresh and, in some cases, even sold directly by the producers. Its quality is considered as vastly superior to that of fruits and vegetables sold in shops and supermarkets. The larger fruit and vegetable markets in the city center are always busy and many shoppers are regular customers. These markets are truly public, hospitable, spaces where heterogeneous groups of people meet and interact. As we shall see, their perception and use differs markedly from that of open-air markets selling durable goods.

Open-air Markets

In Varna, open-air markets are a common sight. They may consist of just a few stalls at a crossroads, or they may be much larger such as the so-called *Kolhozen Pazar* (Kolhoz Bazaar) where stalls and kiosks offer everything from clothes and shoes to fresh produce, groceries, and household goods. In the city center, three such markets are located in a small park-like area behind the opera house. They are accessible from the main pedestrian thoroughfares, and thus attract both locals and visitors to the city.

The most permanent of the three central markets is a fruit and vegetable market that operates throughout the year. Local residents form its main customer base and many of the stalls have regular customers. Nevertheless, foreign tourists can be seen strolling through the aisles as well, and even though many of them are on a package holiday that includes full- or half-board, they often cannot resist the beautifully arranged displays of fresh fruit. Many vendors take advantage of this fact and offer smaller quantities of fruit ready for consumption, such as tall plastic cups filled with raspberries or strawberries. The market spills over into the neighboring alleys where occasional vendors, most of them elderly ladies, sit on the pavement offering homegrown produce for prices that are slightly lower than those on the market “proper”.

[167] The largest fruit and vegetable markets with the widest choice are located in the city center while many of those in the neighborhoods consist of only a few stalls. Sometimes, sellers and producers just set up on the sidewalk; in the summer, for example, huge mounds of melons are sold on the sidewalks or from the backs of trucks.



Plate 6. Occasional vendors on the periphery of a fruit and vegetable market in Varna.

While the stalls of the fruit and vegetable market stand on the sidewalks of the streets bordering the park, the park itself houses two more markets. The first is a market for books and stationery items. The number of its stalls fluctuates from week to week. It also targets a local customer base and is particularly popular in the weeks before the start of the new school term because its vendors sell textbooks and other materials at lower prices than in the shops. The second market in the park sells souvenirs and gifts on a daily basis. This market mainly targets tourists, and accordingly, the number of vendors is much higher in the summer than in the winter season. One of these vendors is Znezhana, whose story will illustrate the working conditions of souvenir vendors in Varna.

Znezhana's Story

In 2007, Znezhana, a female vendor in her mid-sixties, had been working in the souvenir market for five years. Znezhana was a pensioner and received a monthly pension of 102 levs. It was impossible for her to live on such a small sum, and she was forced to continue working. Znezhana arrived at nine o'clock every morning, unpacked her merchandise – little figurines and trinkets made of glass – and arranged it as attractively as possible. She worked six days per week, generally closing her stall at nightfall, but with

the exact time depending on the day of the week, the weather, and the flow of customers. Znezhana was employed by the stall owner who operated several other market stalls and shops in the city. She earned ten levs a day plus two per cent of the daily turnover.

All in all, Znezhana liked her job. She enjoyed meeting and talking to a variety of people, both Bulgarians and foreigners, and she loved the sociability among the vendors. Over the years, many of them had become friends, and chatting and laughing helped them to pass the time in lull periods. Nevertheless, working as a market vendor had its drawbacks, the biggest of which was the constant exposure to the weather. Whereas the summer heat was relatively bearable in the shade of the trees, sudden downpours forced her to quickly cover her merchandise and to huddle under an awning or an umbrella; in the winter she was exposed to the cold for hours on end. Znezhana also disliked unpacking the merchandise every morning and packing it up again in the evening. Throughout the day, she had to constantly polish the glassware she sold, a mind-numbing task that was nevertheless necessary.

Znezhana's stall attracted international and domestic tourists as well as local customers. In the summer season, the majority of buyers were international tourists, most of whom stayed in the resorts and visited Varna on day trips. Znezhana believed that tourists like to shop in open-air markets. But like her colleagues in the resorts, she was irritated by their habit of asking for discounts:

> The Bulgarian customers are the only ones who pay in the usual way. All the others want a discount. They are always asking for discounts. I do not know why it is like that, but here in Bulgaria bargaining is not a common practice. But they seem to think that this is Turkey or whatever. They are always saying things like, "What is the price? Can you not give me another, a lower one? How much of a discount will you give me? I will not give you ten levs; I will give you six or eight".

In the summer season, Znezhana's daily turnover reached a peak with an average of 300 levs a day, while in the winter season, it dropped to 30-50 levs. In that period, foreign customers were rare, and the number of domestic tourists dropped as well. The cold and windy weather often deterred people from shopping in outdoor markets. Nevertheless, Znezhana believed that due to the lower prices, many Bulgarians still preferred to shop in the outdoor markets. She explained the price differences as a result of the low leases asked for market stalls. The owner of her stall paid a monthly lease of 33 levs, whereas the lease for even a small shop in the city center would have been more than ten times as much. But in the end, it was the tourists who counted for her business success:

> We could not exist without tourism. This business is directly linked to tourism. Especially our stall, it has been established with tourists in mind. Tourists love to shop like this. They like to shop here on the market, not in the shops. And in the shops it has become more expensive, too! It is due to the high leases. They are very high; from 1,000 levs upwards, 2,000 levs. And there is a connection, right? The leases have increased and the merchandise has become more expensive as well.

Despite the advantage of offering lower prices, Znezhana was still anxious about the future. The number of retailers in the city had been steadily increasing. Five years previously, her market had consisted of 70 stalls, but in the meantime, the number had grown to about 100. Throughout the city, a large number of new shops had opened, and many of them targeted tourists as their main customer segment. At the same time, the international tourists visiting Varna had become poorer, and, according to Znezhana, spent less money in the city. In her market, the vendors had responded by erecting new standardized stalls with a uniform design, and by attempting to improve the cleanliness of the area in the hopes of making the market more attractive. Znezhana stated proudly: "It used to be very ugly, but now it looks like a European market!". Nevertheless, when I asked her what she thought the future of her business would be, Znezhana expressed her worries: "It is uncertain. They have built some malls now. A large variety of goods is concentrated there and all the visitors go there. The number of people coming here will drop further, and there will be fewer customers for the rest of us. It has been decreasing already in the last two or three years even though we have the new stalls. But only God knows".

Znezhana's story illustrates many of the issues faced by vendors whose business is strongly dependent on foreign customers. As a result of this dependency, their concerns parallel those of their colleagues in the resorts. Like the latter, they are affected by the growing competition, and the declining affluence of foreign charter tourists. But, unlike their counterparts in the resorts, city-based vendors have a small but significant share of Bulgarian customers as well, enabling them to operate throughout the year. Even though their turnover drops sharply in the winter season, it is still sufficient to secure an adequate income.

As Znezhana pointed out, the main attraction of markets is their cheap merchandise. However, in the eyes of many locals, this is cheapness in every sense; the low price of commodities is seen as a correlate of their poor quality. Open-air markets have a reputation for selling commodities produced in Turkey, the Middle East, or Asia, and these are considered as cheap, shoddy, and unfashionable, and as fakes or pirated brands. Commodi-

ties such as these cannot be trusted. They may appear new and shiny, but customers suspect that they will probably fall apart after being used a few times. At first glance, they may look like the original brands, but they do not have the quality, and one will not gain any prestige from buying or owning them.[168]



Plate 7. Open-air market in the center of Varna.

Open-air markets are thus viewed as selling low-status goods to customers who cannot afford "the real thing", and have to make do with pirated brands and cheap imports instead. They are considered the realm of the elderly, the poor, and the unemployed; in short, consumers who cannot afford the prices in "proper" or reputable shops. Thus, for many Bulgarian shoppers, the attraction of low prices is counteracted by the poor image of open-air markets.[169]

The poor image of open-air markets as sites of consumption is paralleled by their status as workplaces. Among the market vendors are a high proportion of members of the Roma and Turkish ethnic minorities, as well as

[168] Small-scale cross-border trading and its impact on consumer tastes is described by Wallace, Shmulyar and Bedzir (1999); Yükseker (2007). For an overview of the development of open-air markets in eastern Europe, see Sik and Wallace (1999).

[169] Similar notions are widespread in eastern Europe; see Humphrey (1995, 1999); Bodnár (1998); Hohnen (2003).

many pensioners who, like Znezhana, cannot live on their meager pensions. Vendors may be stall owner-operators or they may be employees, as many of the pensioners are. Employed vendors earn low wages for doing a job that can be very arduous. Like vendors in the resorts, stall neighbors often help each other, but nevertheless, especially in wintertime, their work can be very taxing. It is not surprising, then, that these jobs are considered as not very desirable. This partially accounts for the predominance of vendors of marginal or disadvantaged groups who have difficulty finding better and more rewarding work elsewhere. Market trading has low entry barriers; no particular skills are expected of market vendors, and thus even those who are perceived as having no skills are hirable.

The strong presence of ethnic minorities among vendors contributes to the reputation of open-air markets as uncertain, perhaps even dangerous spaces that should be avoided (Konstantinov 1996; Konstantinov, Kressel and Thuen 1998). In the eyes of those who can afford not to shop there, as well as some who do shop there, markets are full of disingenuous and suspicious characters, including dishonest traders, pickpockets, beggars, thieves, and "Gypsies"; markets are "dirty" places full of garbage, stray dogs, chaos, and noise.[170]

From another perspective, however, markets could be described as hospitable, perhaps even cosmopolitan, spaces accessible to anyone; public spaces where people from all walks of life may meet and interact. Open-air markets are not just spaces of commerce, but spaces of intense sociability for vendors, shoppers, passers-by, the idle, and the curious. Shoppers run into friends and acquaintances and stop for a chat; vendors exchange greetings and a few polite words with new customers and have longer conversations with their "regulars". Customers talk about the merchandise, especially its price and quality. Some people just stroll around to see what is on offer and who is around, while others sit in small cafes or on benches to watch the scene. At mealtimes, people congregate around the stalls that sell snacks, little bakeries, and kiosks that sell coffee and cigarettes; and in lull periods, vendors can be seen chatting among themselves, reading the newspaper, or having a quiet game of backgammon. Hence, the "openness" of open-air markets and their stalls contains opportunities for interaction and sociability,

[170] For example, when announcing that I would go to the market, I was repeatedly warned by my host family to safeguard my possessions and to look out for pickpockets, thieves, and cheats. They explained that the gangs of pickpockets operating in these markets target foreigners in particular. These groups, they went on, consist of "Gypsies" who come to Varna for the tourist season, attracted by foreigners' gullibility and propensity to carry large sums of cash in easily accessible places. Alas, foreigners are not as adept at recognizing "Gypsies" on sight as Bulgarians are, and thus often fall prey to their schemes.

but it is also perceived to pose dangers to those who are uninitiated in the ways of the marketplace.[171]

It is the accessibility, sociability, and sensuality of open-air markets that makes them attractive to many western European tourists. They like strolling around in the pleasant weather, looking at the goods on offer, and selecting something to take home. The colorful displays of merchandise; the sight of people shopping, talking, or just passing by; the sound of music, talk, and laughter; the smells of food and produce; the jostling of the crowd; and, perhaps, the taste of some food acquired from one of the stalls – all these experiences together make a stroll through an open-air market an intense experience that may be pleasurable for some and disorienting for others.[172] The contrast to the orderly, sanitized, and predictable retail environment of the malls, superstores, and hypermarkets that predominate in tourists' home countries is striking, and it contributes to the creation of an "exotic" shopping experience. At the same time, western European tourists treat open-air markets not just as spaces of commerce, but as picturesque sights. In the souvenir market where Znezhana's stall is located, tourists often take pictures of the stalls and vendors, thus treating the market not just as a shopping venue, but also as an attraction, worthy of being captured by the camera.

Of course, it is also the low prices that make open-air markets attractive to Romanian and other eastern European shoppers as well as western European charter tourists looking to buy cheap souvenirs, clothes, or accessories. Likewise, the markets are patronized by domestic shopping tourists, particularly those coming from poor rural areas and looking to do their shopping in Varna where the variety of goods on offer is larger than in their hometowns or villages, and where, at the same time, markets provide the opportunity to buy cheaply. Domestic middle-class tourists and business travelers, by contrast, avoid open-air markets due to their poor reputation for offering cheap and shoddy goods to unsophisticated customers.

Small Independent Shops

Throughout the city of Varna, numerous small independent shops and kiosks sell a wide variety of commodities. Many of these shops are concentrated in the city center where shoppers and flâneurs congregate. These retailers are considered as slightly more prestigious than market stalls because they are "proper shops", permanent structures protected from the elements and offer-

[171] On the social and festive aspects of open-air markets, see McGrath, Sherry and Heisley (1993); Pachenkow and Berman (2007); Watson (2009).

[172] On the sensuality of open-air markets, see Buie (1996); Edensor (2006).

ing a controlled shopping environment. Many of them sell merchandise that is similar to that offered by the open-air markets alongside domestically produced commodities and some more expensive Western brands. While their prices are higher than those at the markets, they are nevertheless still regarded as affordable shopping venues.

Many of the small shops are owned by former market vendors who acquired a shop or kiosk or by former shop assistants who decided to open their own business. In addition to managing the business, they often continue to serve customers, but they also usually employ an additional salesperson or two. Working in such a shop, although still associated with the comparatively low status generally accorded to retailing jobs, is considered a significant step above work in a market stall. Salespeople in shops have fixed working hours and they receive a fixed monthly wage plus a commission consisting of a percentage of the shop's turnover. Their income is considered to be "average", and it is well above that earned by market vendors, as the following two stories will demonstrate.

Margarita's Story

Margarita was a sales clerk in a small shop in the city center that sold souvenirs and gifts in the low-to-medium price range. She had moved into retailing in 1998, working for a number of shops in the city's outlying neighborhoods before she found her current job in 2005. Margarita liked her work, and she enjoyed interacting with the customers. She had an appreciation for the merchandise she sold, and she frequently read sales catalogs, brochures, and other information material to improve her product knowledge. In 2007, she earned 400 levs per month plus one per cent of the turnover, which she described as a very good income for a salesperson.

Her shop was owned by a local family. It had two regular employees, with an additional one being hired for part-time work in the summer season when business peaked. Margarita noted the differences between the summer and the winter seasons. In the summer, foreign tourists made up the large majority of her customers and the turnover was high. The shop was always crowded with people, many of whom entered to look around and browse. In the winter season, the majority of customers were Bulgarians, both Varnentsi and shoppers from elsewhere in the country. The numbers of foreign customers dropped, and consisted of Romanians on shopping trips, foreign businesspeople, or ships' crews. Business had its distinct peaks and troughs in the winter season; it was slow in October and November, picked up before the holidays in December, slowed down in January and February, and then increased again in March:

> There is a difference in the work because in the summer, many foreigners are in the city, and we have a lot of work to do. There is more pressure; people are crowding into the shop all day. There is always movement; small groups entering and leaving again. Whereas right now [October] at this time of the day, it is rather quiet. Business is slowing at this time of the year, but later on it will pick up again. I will have a lot of work before the holidays, before Christmas and New Year.

Margarita also noted differences in the demands of foreign and domestic shoppers. She described how Bulgarians mostly looked for gifts that were appealing to them, beautiful things that would look nice in a loved one's home. Many of them were rather price-conscious, even though the amount of money they were willing to spend had increased. This was in contrast to foreigners who attached more importance to the origins of the goods they bought as souvenirs. Margarita explained what foreigners like: "The foreigners mostly want something that was produced in Bulgaria. Or something that says 'from Bulgaria', something linked to Bulgarian folklore and traditions, to take home as a souvenir".

Margarita noted that since 2000, the salaries of salespeople had been steadily increasing. At the same time, owners had started to refurbish and modernize their shops. Many new shops had been established, fuelling the competition for customers and their money. As a result, owners were forced to find new ways of attracting and keeping customers, and many attempted to find their own market niche. There was some differentiation among souvenir and gift shops; some sold expensive arts and crafts, while others supplied cheaper trinkets and gifts "made in China". But Margarita viewed these attempts at differentiation as not particularly successful; she maintained that most gift and souvenirs shops had a similar product range. Price differences were due to location: shops in the center asked higher prices than those in the outer neighborhoods, and shops in the main pedestrian thoroughfares were more expensive that those in the back streets.

Margarita's story exemplifies characteristic features of small independent shops in the city center. First, although they experience seasonal variations in their turnover, seasonality is not as distinctly pronounced as with tourist-oriented open-air stalls in the city or with retailers in the resorts. The turnover for small city shops is subject to a complex pattern with a number of peaks and troughs according to the time of the year, flows of international and domestic visitors, various holidays, and other recurring events such as high school graduations or the start of school and university terms when items that are typically sold in smaller stores are in high demand. Second, these shops attract a more heterogeneous collection of cus-

tomers. Foreign charter tourists are still an important segment, but their influence is not as overwhelming as in the resorts. Hence the less pronounced seasonality and the pattern of business throughout the week. Additionally, the effects of declining tourist affluence are not as strongly felt in these shops due to their more varied clientele. Indeed, like Margarita, many retailers had noticed the increasing prosperity of their Bulgarian customers and the growing importance of that segment of the customer base.

Elena's Story

In 2007, Elena had been working as a sales clerk for 12 years. She would not tell me about her earlier work, saying only that she had initially moved into retailing because she lacked other options: unemployment was high and she had to take whatever work she could get. In time, however, she grew to love her work, particularly the interactions with customers, stating, "I think I could not find fulfillment in any other line of work anymore". Elena described her income as "very good" for a salesperson, and as "average" for Bulgaria more generally. Nevertheless, money was a concern. She complained that the Varnentsi paid "European prices" for consumer goods, while their salaries were "still on a Bulgarian level". Elena would have liked to start her own business, but felt she could not afford that risk as long as she had to financially support her two sons who were about to start university.

The shop in which Elena worked was located in a main pedestrian thoroughfare in the city center. It sold lingerie and underwear, as well as a selection of beachwear, and was owned by a local family that had four other shops in the city. The majority of its customers were Bulgarians, both locals and domestic tourists. The shop had a high percentage of regular customers.

According to Elena, there was a marked difference between the summer and winter seasons, but it concerned not so much the turnover as the number of people visiting the shop. In the summer, more customers came to browse, but they did not necessarily buy anything, whereas in the winter season, customers entering the shop usually made a purchase. The shop depended more strongly on its regular customers in the winter months, whereas in the summer season, there were more walk-ins. Accordingly, the two sales clerks employed by the owners were both present throughout the day in the summer months, while in winter, they worked in shifts with only one employee present in the shop at any time.

Elena's discussion of her work quickly passed to a discussion of customer nationality. Although Bulgarian customers were in the majority, foreigners still constituted a significant customer segment for Elena's shop, and employees had to have sufficient knowledge of Russian, English, and German to serve them. Elena had discovered differences between the various

nationalities, especially concerning their reasons for and practices of shopping. In contrast to Bulgarians, she said, western European tourists know only self-service, and want to browse through the merchandise on their own. Also, foreigners, particularly those traveling on organized tours, generally are more interested in sightseeing than in shopping, so they tend to browse without purchasing. In contrast, shopping is an important part of a holiday experience for Bulgarians. Before making a major purchase, Bulgarian shoppers often compare prices in various cities in order to find the best deal. "Everyone", she said, "is concerned with doing their shopping to their best advantage". She added that Varna attracts many domestic shopping tourists because the range of brands is larger and the prices are often more competitive than those found in other cities.

According to Elena, high leases and high taxes have contributed to the rising retail prices. Prices in Varna are now almost as high as those in the resorts. But she also emphasized the growing affluence of the Varnentsi. It was particularly noticeable in the growing turnovers her shop made in the winter months when it depended on local customers. Elena was certain that this process would have positive effects on all retailers in the city.

Elena's story demonstrates that international tourists are an important customer segment even for those shops in the city center whose merchandise is not specifically targeted at them. The patterns reported by her shop are representative for other retailers in the city selling merchandise attractive to locals, domestic, and international tourists alike. Like Elena, the sales clerks working in these shops are required to speak some basic English, Russian, or German in order to offer better service to foreign tourists who, in the summer season, contribute to their shops' turnovers and profits. Nevertheless, the majority of their customers are Bulgarians, and in the winter season, many of these shops rely on their regular customers.

Like Margarita and Elena, the employees of small independent shops view themselves as professionals whose job consists not just of selling things, but also of advising, guiding, and educating customers. While in many Western countries, the advent of the supermarket in the 1950s heralded the replacement of over-the-counter service by self-service, this process is much more recent in Bulgaria.[173] In Bulgaria, over-the-counter service is still common in many independent shops. The shopper is expected to approach the salesperson, and explain what he or she is looking for; the latter then presents her with items meeting her specifications, advising her on the products and explaining their specific properties until the customer has made

[173] In the United States, supermarkets began to spread in the 1940s and experienced rapid growth after the Second World War, while in the United Kingdom, they emerged in the mid-1950s and rapidly increased their market share in the 1960s; see Humphery (1998, chap. 3).

her choice. This form of service is more demanding on the sales clerk than self-service where employees just stand by to offer assistance to shoppers in need of help. Among the salespeople with whom I talked, those who had worked in retailing during socialism had received vocational training and consider a thorough knowledge of and expertise on their merchandise as well as the ability to advise and guide customers as essential to their work. Those who moved into the sector after the collapse of socialism were usually trained on the job. Like Margarita, many vendors reported regularly reading catalogs and brochures, an activity they genuinely enjoyed, but that also furthered their knowledge of particular commodities or product lines. This improves their ability to advise customers and helps to increase their sales. By using this knowledge in customer interactions, salespeople contribute to consumer education and to customers' integration into consumer society.[174]

In addition to demanding more employee skills and expertise, over-the-counter service also has effects on the appearance and ambience of shops. In a retail environment designed for self-service, the merchandise has to be arranged in a manner that is as appealing as possible, while at the same time enabling customers to easily find the items they seek. This requires either a clearly comprehensible organization of the merchandise or an ambience that entices the customer to explore.[175] In many of the small independent shops in Varna, no such organization is apparent. Where personal service is prevalent, it is enough that the salesperson knows where to find a particular item. Once the customer has successfully been lured into the shop, it is the vendor's job to serve him or her. Since space is at a premium and cannot be "wasted" on elaborate displays, shops are often chock-full of merchandise. Thus, in the upmarket American gift shops studied by John Sherry and Mary Ann McGrath (McGrath 1989; Sherry and McGrath 2001), the merchandise consisted of individual pieces of art and crafts or of commodities produced in small batches. They were carefully arranged in ways that created an artful clutter of goods. The resulting ambience was that of an enticing "fairy grotto" that invited customers to explore and hunt for a unique treasure. Margarita's gift shop, by contrast, sold mostly cheap mass-produced merchandise that was selected on the basis of customers' assumed

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[174] See also Pollert (1995) who describes similar practices of retailing and their transformation in the Czech Republic. However, unlike the salespeople described in her study, the employees of Varna's small independent shops receive commissions and thus have an even stronger incentive to develop rapport with their customers in order to increase their sales. They use many of the rapport-building behaviors described by Gremler and Gwinner (2008).

[175] See Wiseman (1979) for another instance of how the organization of a store affects interactions among customers and between customers and sales clerks. Humphery (1998) describes the consequences of the introduction of self-service for the organization of Australian grocery stores.

preferences.[176] Every available surface was crammed with goods, and though Margarita attempted to present them as attractively as possible, the available space was simply too limited to create a tasteful and refined ambience.

While they are required to have "technical", consumer, and communication skills, the aesthetic labor demanded of the employees in small independent shops is very limited. They are expected to have a socially acceptable appearance concerning attire and grooming, but they are not chosen for their ability to embody a certain brand or internalize a corporate identity. On the one hand, this follows from the type of retail venue for which they work. These small shops sell affordable and serviceable products to customers who do not wish to patronize the cheap open-air markets but cannot afford more expensive retailers. On the other hand, these shops do not belong to larger chains or corporations that seek to create a brand image through standardized retail environments and sales practices. Thus, the employees of small independent shops are valued most for their product and consumer knowledge as well as their interpersonal and communication skills, manifested in their ability to effectively and successfully advise and serve their customers.

These specific modes of retailing and customer service are complicated by the presence of western European tourists whose shopping practices are markedly different from those of domestic shoppers. Whereas the latter are accustomed to over-the-counter service, the majority of foreigners are used to self-service. Like Elena, quite a number of sales clerks confided that they initially found it highly irritating and frustrating to be ignored by foreign customers who proceeded to rummage through the merchandise. Sales clerks also complained about further perceived differences such as international tourists letting their children run free in the shop or attempting to bargain. These issues were often exacerbated by the language barrier; many vendors find communicating with tourists difficult and problematic since their own command of foreign languages is insufficient to express more complicated issues or sentiments or grasp the finer nuances of what a person is saying. Salespeople reported that generally, they liked dealing with and talking to foreigners. But many confided that sometimes, they just breathed a sigh of relief when Bulgarian customers walked in the door because with them, at last, they could have a "normal" and uncomplicated service encounter.

Nevertheless, international tourists are important customers for these retailers. Shops like Margarita's profit from their preference for domestically

[176] The practice of selecting merchandise according to the assumed preferences of the main target groups, coupled with the quick copying of innovations, ultimately contributes to the lack of differentiation between shops occupying a similar niche, and to the increasingly tough competition among them.

produced commodities; foreigners like buying Bulgarian-made products as souvenirs, mementos, and gifts. Small independent shops attract them by virtue of their location in the city center and by their affordable prices. Likewise, the shops attract domestic tourists on shopping trips and local shoppers. Nevertheless, the rising cost of leases and concomitant price increases, the proliferation of retail venues in the city, especially shopping malls, and the competition from market stalls selling similar products for lower prices worries owners and salespeople alike, and contributes to their pessimistic assessments of their future business prospects.

Upscale Independent Shops

Upscale independent shops share some features with their mid-market counterparts, but there are also marked differences due to their more exclusive merchandise and higher price range. Yablena's story exemplifies the working conditions in these stores, and it illuminates the distinction work performed by sales clerks in Varna. Based on Bourdieu's concept of social distinction (Bourdieu 1984), this term has been coined by Amy Hanser to describe "service that centrally involves the production and consumption of social difference" and "produces and recognizes social distinction" (Hanser 2006: 463; see also Hanser 2005).[177] According to Hanser, "service work organized as distinction work seeks to attract customers and win their loyalty by distinguishing a store and its clientele from settings located elsewhere – usually lower down – in the social hierarchy" (Hanser 2006: 466). By working at producing and maintaining the exclusivity of their shops, salesclerks like Yablena, whose story is told below, ensure their continued success in a very competitive retail environment, while at the same time contributing to the production of social hierarchies and to the increasing social stratification in Varna.

In 2007, 23-year-old Yablena had been working for two years in a shop selling upmarket business and formal wear. The shop was located in a pedestrian zone in the city center, and even on the outside, it differed markedly from the neighboring premises. Its windows displayed only one mannequin wearing an expensive suit, surrounded by some artfully arranged decorative items. Upon entering the air-conditioned interior, the theme of understated elegance continued with subdued lights, sparse decoration, and classical music playing softly in the background, and only a limited number of garments on display. Immaculately-groomed sales clerks modeling the

[177] Distinction work in retailing is also described by Crewe, Gregson and Brooks (2003); Wright (2005); and Miller (2006); while Sherman (2003, 2005) has studied it in the hotel industry. A common feature of all these cases is the pivotal role played by cultural capital.

store's expensive suits glided about, politely greeting customers. No price tags were visible anywhere. Overall, the shop conveyed a feeling of exclusiveness, taste and sophistication, an oasis of quiet professionalism away from the heat, harsh light, and noise of the street outside.

With its expensive merchandise, the shop targeted affluent customers who could afford high fashion brands. But its customers were expected to have not only money, but also a refined taste and high level of consumer sophistication. As Yablena explained:

> This is a shop for special customers because its prices are really high for Bulgaria. They are way above the average. Our shop is small and we target the well-off, those who have money and taste. Our customers are, for the most part, wealthy Bulgarians and Europeans, European tourists and businesspeople. Because they are the ones who know the brands we sell. Most Bulgarians cannot afford to shop here, and many of the tourists… well, they are not very cultured. And they are poor.

In this exclusive shop, customers were not classified according to their nationality or purpose of visit to Varna. Instead, salespeople assessed their affluence and consumer sophistication, namely, their knowledge and appreciation of exclusive brands. Nevertheless, foreign business travelers, tourists, and resident foreigners made up a sizeable share of its customers. Accordingly, salespeople had to be fluent in English and, ideally, in another foreign language.

Yablena enjoyed working in such a high-end shop. Her income was high for a sales clerk, mainly due to the percentage of the monthly turnover she earned which boosted her base salary considerably. Like her two colleagues, Yablena was provided with expensive brand-name suits to wear at work. She regarded a thorough knowledge of the merchandise as well as interpersonal and communication skills as most important for her work: "We have to sell, that is our job. And that means when customers enter the shop, we have to assess them and understand what they seek. Then we steer them towards suitable items. You have to match them with a suit or other item. And that means you have to be able to correctly read people, but you also have to know about the merchandise, the brands, and their images".

Although Yablena loved working with prestigious merchandise and took pride in her ability to deal with affluent and sophisticated customers, she felt that her customers' wealth and power often made them pretentious and arrogant: "If you are working with such people, there are always problems. They are always unhappy about something – this is not as it should be, that is not as it should be. Some of them, they can never be satisfied. They make demands, they complain, they treat you like a maid or something.

Some are really nice, polite, they even leave tips. But others… they are horrible". Yablena especially disliked dealing with wealthy customers who lacked taste and sophistication. Although these people could afford patronizing exclusive shops, she found them crass and unrefined. They demanded top-quality service but did not display the manners befitting such highly-placed people in Yablena's eyes, and they often ignored or disregarded the salesclerks' advice. Yablena regarded such customers with disdain, but she could not quite say that they should shop in the open-air markets as she said about the tourists who entered her store clad in shorts, sandals, and cheap printed shirts, nodded to the employees, and then proceeded to browse through the merchandise while their noisy children ran around the sales floor. Such tourists, she thought, were better served in the open-air markets selling the cheap merchandise suited to their pockets and offering a crude level of service that suited their sophistication. Shops like Yablena's are characterized by their exclusiveness. They sell prestigious and expensive merchandise such as perfumes, jewelry, leather or fur products, or international brands. These shops are the preferred retail venues of businesspeople and professionals in the upper and upper-middle classes who have sufficient wealth to buy expensive and high-quality consumer goods. Salespeople in high-end stores need to have a thorough knowledge of prestigious consumer goods. But even more necessary is a refined taste, and the ability to advise and guide customers, some of whom may have the money that buys them access to such venues but lack the sophistication needed to navigate the wealth of brands on offer. As over-the-counter service is predominant in exclusive shops, their employees need to have "technical" skills, too, but they are not given much weight when new people are hired. Shop owners and managers assume that such skills can be taught, whereas taste, looks, and personality cannot. Hence, they prefer hiring employees whose appearance and demeanor "fits" the shop. Workers are thus expected to perform high levels of aesthetic labor. They embody what Lynne Pettinger termed a "style identity" related to the products and lifestyles on sale (Pettinger 2004). Employees' appearance and demeanor must conform with the brands sold in the shop and the ambience that the owner or manager wishes to convey. In customer interactions, employees should demonstrate their knowledge of the brands they sell, and their belief in the brands' quality, superiority, and capacity to create, fit, and express a certain lifestyle and identity.

In contrast to small independent shops, in upscale stores, active attempts are made to create and maintain an ambience befitting the image of the shop and the brands it sells. Interior design and layout, the presentation of merchandise, and other elements such as background music, usually correspond to international standards of retailing; the appearance of these

shops is not much different from that of upscale retailers in western Europe or the United States. The salespeople are part of that ambience, and they contribute to its creation and maintenance.

The customer service offered in these shops corresponds with the high-quality personal service that any international traveller would expect to find in an upscale establishment. The immaculately groomed and dressed salespeople are discreet and unobtrusive; they silently glide through the shop and speak in low voices. In customer interactions, they speak as experts who are well-informed about the merchandise they offer; they convey information on products and brands and advise the customers on what would be most suitable for them. They do not perform overt sales pitches; instead, their approach is subtle and understated. Ideally, they guide the customer without him or her being aware of it. Outwardly, it is the customer who controls the service encounter and the salesperson who owes him or her deference.[178]

At the same time, employees actively contribute to the creation and maintenance of the exclusiveness of their shops. The ambience serves to subtly discourage customers who, by virtue of their lacking financial means or sophistication, taste and style, have no place in such a shop. It does, however, frequently happen that shoppers, especially foreign tourists, miss or ignore these clues and enter the shop nevertheless. In these cases, salespeople attempt to communicate their displeasure without being overt about it. They may at first ignore such customers, hoping they will leave on their own. If that is not the case, they may treat the customer in a dismissive or condescending manner, thus indicating that he or she is not up to the high standards of the shop. Hence, the employees attempt to maintain the exclusiveness of their shops by policing access to them. The skill lies in discouraging "undesirable" customers without being too obvious about it, and without being overtly rude, as that, too, would violate the rules of first-class customer service.[179]

Salespeople working in high-end stores have a vested interest in maintaining exclusivity. While retail work in general has a low status, the latter is influenced by the type of retailer and its merchandise. Work in an upscale shop on one of Varna's central streets that sells prestigious and expensive merchandise is the most desirable for a salesperson. This is so because firstly, these jobs are comparatively well-paid, especially since commissions are considerable due to the expensive merchandise. Secondly, the prestige of

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[178] See also Rafaeli (1989) who describes the tensions resulting from customers' and salespeoples' struggles for control of the retail service encounter.

[179] Johnston and Sandberg (2008) describe a number of techniques that employees of an upscale department store used to control customers and maintain the exclusivity of the store.

the shops and their merchandise adheres to the employees and enhances their own social status. Employees spend their days dealing with high-status merchandise and interacting with wealthy and sophisticated customers. They demonstrably have the skills, taste, and refinement to advise and guide these people in matters of consumption, and even though the structuring of the service interaction puts them in a subordinate position vis-a-vis their customers, they are their equals (and even superiors) with respect to the cultural capital they possess. By demonstrating their taste and sophistication, and by actively performing distinction work, salespeople like Yablena may thus bolster their own claims to an elevated position in the local social hierarchy.

At the same time, they are worker-consumers "who identify with and find pleasure being associated with particular brands" (Williams and Connell 2010: 351). By modeling the stock and wearing appropriate makeup and hairstyles, workers like Yablena display their sense of taste and fashion. While signaling what the customer might look like wearing the clothes sold in the shop, they also demonstrate their own consumer knowledge and competence. Hence, it is not a coincidence that these sales clerks denounce the value of cheap, mass-produced merchandise made in China or Turkey while praising the quality of Western brands. Indeed, shops that target domestic shoppers with Bulgarian-language advertisements of "German-quality products" or by proudly displaying the names of the brands they are selling in their shop windows are ubiquitous in Varna. The desire to own such consumer goods is widely spread throughout the population.

Varna's exclusive shops throw into sharp relief local hierarchies of value centering on the origins and branding of consumer goods, as well as the role of consumption in conferring status to individuals and in constructing and expressing identity and belonging. Western brands are highly valued, denoting for many high quality, style, and durability, whereas consumer goods made in Asia or the Middle East are considered cheap, shoddy, and unfashionable.[180] The acquisition and possession of Western brand-name goods confers status and prestige on the consumer. It shows him or her to be a well-to-do, cultured individual with refined taste and thorough consumer knowledge; in other words, a competent member of the consumer society independent of their actual class status. By demonstrating a successful participation in the market economy and the consumer sophistication considered as quintessentially "European", the acquisition of Western brands

[180] Russian consumers also treat the country of manufacture as an indicator of the quality of commodities (Patico 2001; Shevchenko 2002a). See also Keller and Vihalemm (2003) on similar notions among Estonian; Vidmar-Horvat (2010) among Slovenian; and Vann (2005) among Vietnamese consumers.

bolsters claims of "belonging to Europe"; indeed, it enables shoppers to acquire their very own piece of it.

Thus, on the one hand, value judgments are made by consumers based on the origins of goods, pitting Asian against Western products, each of these categories bearing connotations concerning quality, price, stylishness, symbolic meanings, and status. But they are not homogeneous; the category of Western goods, in particular, is internally differentiated into numerous brands, each of which has its specific associations, symbolic meanings, and reputation. On the other hand, retailers are assessed by consumers according to type, location, service provision, merchandise, and clientele. Market stalls are contrasted with shops, retailers in the city center with those in the neighborhoods, and those selling cheap merchandise to a poor clientele with those selling Western brands to affluent and cultured consumers. This, again, produces a hierarchy in which market stalls like Znezhana's are on the lowest rung and exclusive shops like Yablena's are at the top. The distinction work performed by salespeople reflects these values and, at the same time, contributes to their construction. Hence, there is an interplay of the evolving hierarchies of value concerning consumer goods, practices of shopping and consumption, as well as practices of retailing and retailing venues. They are paralleled by the prevailing hierarchy of retailing jobs, with work in high-end shops such as Yablena's being accorded the highest status and work in open-air markets the lowest.

Superstores and Shopping Malls

Local notions about shopping venues and practices of shopping and consumption are further complicated by the recent expansion of large-scale retailers. In Varna, it is possible to shop for electronics at Technopolis or Technomarket; for hardware at Praktiker, for furniture at IKEA; and for groceries at the Picadilli supermarket chain. Many owners of small shops and kiosks acquire their merchandise from the wholesaler Metro. In June 2008, the Mall Varna opened its doors to reveal international chain stores: Apple, Swarovski, Puma, New Yorker, Mustang Jeans, and Esprit; in 2010, it was joined by the Grand Mall Varna which is "anchored" by a huge Carrefour hypermarket.

This spread of large-scale retailers worries both market vendors and salesclerks in the smaller city shops. Large-scale retailers are perceived as attractive to shoppers because they epitomize modernity and Western practices of shopping; the shopping mall, in particular, is considered a quintessential American shopping environment. Owners of shops in the city center were concerned that these retailers would lure away their customers with lower prices, the promise of easier and more convenient shopping due to the

wide range of products offered in one location, and easy access by car. These fears are not unfounded; a number of studies from around the world have found that the impacts on small independent shops resulting from the opening of large scale retailers are largely negative (Arnold and Luthra 2000; Peterson and McGee 2000; Mutebi and Ansari 2008).

It is questionable whether these venues will have a strong impact on the shopping practices of tourists. Western European charter tourists are unlikely to shop in the new stores located on the city's peripheries. Most of these tourists combine shopping with sightseeing, thus keeping to the city center. Additionally, Western tourists find the shops and markets in the city center charming precisely because of their small size, their attractive location, and because they offer an opportunity for leisurely shopping, interspersed with other activities such as strolling, sightseeing, or visiting cafés. Large-scale retailers are, however, patronized by domestic travelers, by people on shopping trips, as well as by tourists from eastern Europe and the Middle East.[181] These groups are attracted by the lower prices of brand-name products as well as by the wider range of merchandise on offer, particularly when considering making larger purchases.

The arrival of large retailers, however, does contribute to the further stratification of Bulgarian consumer society. The unequal distribution of wealth allows some groups to fully participate in the new opportunities offered to consumers whereas others cannot afford to do so. Due to their limited financial means, many are restricted in their choice of products and shopping venues to those they can afford. For these people, the glittering new shopping malls are, at the most, locations for sightseeing and "virtual shopping" (Gecser and Kitzinger 2002, see also Keller and Vihalemm 2003, 2005; Keller 2005).

Superstores such as Technopolis or Praktiker are usually located on the outskirts of the city. They are selling commodities of an acceptable to high quality but, due to economies of scale and lower leases, they are able to sell at lower prices than the small independent retailers in the city center. Lower prices coupled with a large assortment of merchandise contributes to their appeal to price-conscious local shoppers and shopping tourists.

Superstores are harbingers of new practices in retailing and shopping. Most obviously, self-service is dominant in these stores. It entails shifting the work of shopping from the salesperson to the customer; it is now the customer who has to collect information about various products and brands, compare prices, quality, and specific characteristics, as well as to navigate

[181] There are many fewer tourists from the Middle East than from eastern Europe. Their budgets, however, are generally higher; thus, their shopping habits draw disproportionate notice to their actual economic impact.

the store to find and pick the desired merchandise. Shopping in these stores thus demands an entirely new set of consumer skills.

Nevertheless, this transfer of work to the shopper still presupposes the work of employees. The store has to be kept clean and tidy, the stock has to be prepared, displayed, and arranged properly for the customers to be able to serve themselves. Furthermore, even in self-service stores, certain forms of customer service are still practiced. These include routine services such as operating the cash register, collecting money, monitoring the store and the customers, and preventing theft. Some personal services are still performed, although their extent varies from store to store. Such services include ordering and reserving goods for customers, refunding or exchanging returned goods, demonstrating and explaining merchandise to customers, retrieving individual goods from shelves or storage, and advising customers. The extent of personal services offered in a self-service store is dependent on the company policy, but it is also at the discretion of individual employees, and as such, negotiable (Pettinger 2004, 2006).

The work and skills of salespeople in superstores and other self-service venues diverge markedly from those demanded of employees of small independent retailers. As in upscale independent shops, workers must perform high levels of aesthetic labor, but the expressions of this labor are geared towards a specific corporate identity. This is most obvious in their outward appearance: the employees of superstores, for example, wear uniforms in the colors associated with the corporate brand (Rafaeli and Pratt 1993). They are hired for their ability to embody the corporate brand and its attributes, but in contrast to independent shops, employees of superstores deal with customers in scripted, standardized, and predictable ways. After being hired, they take part in training courses where they are taught the specific forms of service behavior demanded by their employer. While they are expected to be helpful, friendly, and polite to customers, these characteristics are expressed in specific and uniform ways, according to the scripts provided by the corporation.

Coupled with the uniform design and layout of these superstores, these practices serve to create a corporate image and identity. As branded stores, superstores aim to be instantly recognizable and customers should be able to navigate them wherever they are, be it in Varna, Moscow, London, or Berlin. At the same time, however, the retail environment of superstores may be seen as exemplifying Marc Augé's "non-places": they are generic spaces without local roots and identity, a quality that is underlined by their indifference towards or even rejection of local practices of retailing and shopping. This contributes to the instant familiarity foreigners feel upon entering one of these stores. Even for previously unfamiliar brands such as the Bulgarian

electronics markets Technopolis, the design, layout, and modes of service are familiar because they are generic and correspond to those encountered in similar stores throughout Europe and the world.

Large shopping malls are the latest addition to Varna's retail landscape, and in the minds of many Varnentsi, they represent the apex of Western modes of retailing and shopping. Malls are considered quintessentially Western, embodying progress, modernity, and urban sophistication, and thus they are viewed as the shopping venues of the young, the progressive, and the professionals who are all oriented towards the future and "the West".[182]

Shopping malls are planned complexes that are developed and marketed as a single unit housing a diversity of retail outlets under one roof. Malls facilitate shopping in a self-contained environment that is controlled to an even larger extent than in superstores. This control encompasses environmental factors such as temperature, lighting conditions, and the soundscape, as well as the conditions of access and the activities deemed acceptable in this environment. Customer flows are subtly steered, loitering is discouraged, and rowdy teenagers are controlled.[183]

The interior of shopping malls is planned to the last detail with only one goal in mind: encouraging consumption. However, in contrast to superstores or small stores, the interior of shopping malls aims to not just provide a space for shopping, but to simulate an idealized version of urban public space by providing spaces for strolling and people-watching, sitting, eating, and entertainment. Apart from shops, shopping malls incorporate entertainment venues such as bars, restaurants and cafes, cinemas, and even "street furniture" such as benches and fountains; they are a simulacrum of an idealized version of a city center. However, the shopping mall is an antithesis to the public space of city streets and markets insofar as it is a space subject to permanent surveillance and control; it is patrolled by security and monitored by security cameras; behavior not in line with its primary purpose of consumption is discouraged both by the design of the space and by the employees guarding it; and "undesirables" are denied access (cf. Goss 1993; Abaza 2001; Voyce 2006). Shopping malls could thus be viewed as a manifestation of the trend described by Mike Davis for the gradual privatization of public space as a result of the middle class's growing desire for forms of social and spatial isolation that mitigate feelings of insecurity and vulnerability and which also function as markers of social and economic status.

As workplaces, shopping malls are very similar to superstores. In both types of venue, self-service is predominant. Shopping malls are privately

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[182] For similar views elsewhere, see Bodnár (2001); Nagy (2001).

[183] Goss (1993) analyzes the structure and functioning of the built environment in malls; see also Manzo (2005).

owned and profit-oriented, and thus their preferred tenants are international chain stores and other franchises that represent recognized labels and brands which are seen as having a strong financial backing and a high level of appeal to consumers. Small independent stores with fewer financial resources are thus disadvantaged.[184] The modes of retailing practiced in globally recognized brand-name stores are consistent throughout the chain with few concessions made to local habits or customs. Brand-name stores aim to be instantly recognizable no matter where they are located. Hence, the store is subject to a total design of which the employees are but one part.

Shopping malls are viewed as modern, Western spaces, signaling "Europeanness", youth, progress and success. They are patronized by affluent local and domestic shoppers, foreign shopping tourists and business travelers; those who feel comfortable in a Western shopping environment and can afford the merchandise sold here. Groups not adhering to this image are excluded in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. Many elderly Bulgarians, for example, are not familiar and comfortable with the predominant modes of retailing, particularly self-service. They may feel intimidated and uncomfortable in such an environment, and, more importantly, they are often unable to afford branded merchandise. The location of shopping malls outside the center, necessitating long rides on public transport for those not owning a car, also contributes to their exclusivity. Other marginal groups populating the streets such as informal traders, beggars, or those simply hanging out, are more overtly excluded by being denied access or removed from the premises by the security staff.

Conclusion

In the last two decades, academic studies of the service sector have started to explore the emotional and aesthetic labor involved in service sector jobs. This has brought about a debate on the actual skills required for such work. There is a shared consensus that in the United Kingdom and the United States, where most of these studies have been conducted, frontline service jobs in retailing attract an overwhelmingly female workforce and have been transformed increasingly into "bad jobs": highly routinized, standardized, and poorly paid part-time work. These studies have also engendered a debate about whether the emotional and aesthetic labor that workers perform in these jobs constitutes an actual skill which should be remunerated accordingly. The debate divides between those who insist that an aptitude for

[184] Ghosh and McLafferty (1991); Goss (1993) describe how the rise of shopping malls in the United States has contributed to a shift from local to corporate ownership of retail outlets and the concomitant spread of chain and franchise organizations in retailing.

emotional and aesthetic labor is a skill that can be acquired in job training, and those who consider the aptitude for such work to be innate or acquired in childhood socialization. The debate is structured along these lines because both sides tacitly agree that only abilities that can be learned through job training constitute "real" skills, and that only real skills should be recognized and remunerated. It is particularly difficult to demonstrate that an aptitude for emotional labor is a learnable skill because it is difficult to measure and certify such abilities (e.g. Burns 1997; Lloyd and Payne 2009; Hampson and Junor 2010).

In the Bulgarian context, however, the distinction of retailing jobs in terms of skill-sets is more complex as the increasing importance of self-service is changing the structure of skills and qualities demanded of the retail workforce. As we have seen, the frontline service jobs available in Varna's retail sector are diverse, and differ in their demands on the workforce. The requirements are lowest in open-air markets, where vendors perform emotional labor at their own discretion, aesthetic labor is practically non-existent, and the product and "technical" knowledge vendors possess is rather limited. In small, independent shops, salespeople's "technical" and product knowledge is highly valued; these vendors should not just have thorough knowledge of their own merchandise, but of the product line more generally, and of how their own merchandise compares to that available elsewhere. Likewise, they must possess high levels of "soft skills", including communication skills and an aptitude for emotional labor, while the demands for aesthetic labor are low. In upmarket independent shops, the "technical" knowledge of salespeople pertains mostly to the symbolic value and lifestyle connotations of the merchandise, as its quality is taken for granted. They are also required to perform high levels of emotional and aesthetic labor, with the latter being valued most in the hiring process. In these three types of retail venues, an aptitude for emotional labor and the possession of "soft skills" is generally in the interest of the employees themselves. This is due to the system of remuneration; as employees receive a commission on top of the base salary, they have a vested interest in selling as many and as highly-priced products as possible, and communication skills as well as the attitude of salespeople are vital to making a successful sale, particularly under the conditions of over-the-counter service.

In superstores and in transnationally operating chains, the technical knowledge of employees becomes less relevant due to the dominance of self-service where the work of obtaining information about products and product lines is shifted to the customer. Customer service is dominated by routine tasks and personal service is minimized. Accordingly, employees do perform emotional labor, but mostly in scripted, routinized ways. Aesthetic labor is

important, as employees are expected to embody the brand and the image of the organization.

In recent years, globally or transnationally operating retailers have captured a growing share of the retailing market in Varna. This has contributed not just to the transformation of retailing, shopping, and consumption in the city, but it has also initiated changes in the substance and meanings of retail work. On the one hand, the technical skills and knowledge of the workforce have become less important overall, while the emphasis on emotional and aesthetic labor has increased. On the other hand, retail workers have experienced a loss of control over the work process. Whereas in market stalls and small independent shops, salespeople often work unsupervised and decide autonomously when and how to perform routine tasks, and how to interact with customers, this is not the case for the employees of large retailers and international chain stores. Workers in these larger stores are subjected to intensive surveillance and control by management and customers; they must interact with customers in predetermined and standardized ways; and they must discipline their bodies to conform with the image that their employers seek to create.

By the mid-2000s, changes in the structure of retailing in Varna were beginning to intersect with local debates about what constituted a "good" job from the worker's perspective and what constituted a good worker from the employer's perspective. Changes in retailing were also interconnected with increasing socioeconomic stratification. It was not clear, however, whether the shift to self-service retailing and its emphasis on standardized emotional and aesthetic labor would have the same consequences as it has had in other places.

If the issues of quantifiable knowledge, autonomy, and control remain central to defining skilled labor in Bulgaria, then the shift towards self-service and a growing share of retailing jobs in large organizations will result in a de-skilling, and not merely a transformation of skills, within the workforce. Furthermore, such a shift might contribute to the transformation of the jobs in Varna's retail sector into "bad jobs" as described above. Poorer working conditions would not just result from the loss of autonomy of the workforce, but from lower wages (because the laborers are "unskilled" or work part-time), and the loss of performance-related pay because self-service retailers do not offer commissions. The consequence would be a pronounced loss of income particularly for the employees of retailers selling upmarket commodities where commissions are considerable and make up an important part of salespeoples' income.

The changing retail landscape in Varna reflects the increasing inequality and stratification of Bulgarian society. Issues of inclusion and exclusion

are revealed in its context as certain groups of shoppers and consumers are associated with certain types of retailing venues. Thus, open-air markets are viewed as the shopping venues of the elderly, ethnic minorities, and the poor; small independent shops are those of the lower-middle class; while shopping malls and international brand-name chain stores are the realm of the well-to-do, young, and professional members of the upper-middle class. Consumers may gain or lose status and prestige according to the consumer goods they acquire and the retailers they patronize.

The growing stratification of society is also reflected in the retail workforce. This issue is especially salient in the case of aesthetic labor. Aesthetic labor is based on particular forms of social and cultural capital or, in other words, it reflects *habitus* which is, in turn, structured by class, age, gender, and ethnicity. The growing importance of aesthetic labor in Varna's retail sector has led to changes in the workforce by favoring young, attractive, middle-class women for jobs in brand-name stores and in upmarket shops. Thus, the share of female students holding part-time jobs in Varna's retailing sector has been rising in recent years. Middle-aged and older women, as well as lower-class workers and members of ethnic minorities find it increasingly harder to get jobs in the new stores. Those with a middle-class background, extensive vocational skills, and a thorough technical knowledge of products and product lines may still find work in small independent shops where these qualities are valued highly. But those who lack such skills or the necessary *habitus* due to their age, class, or ethnicity will only find work in the open-air markets.

These issues are pertinent far beyond retailing; they apply to the tourism industry and to the service industries at large. Employers in hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, and other tourism industry companies prefer hiring educated workers with an aptitude for emotional and aesthetic labor for frontline jobs. The preponderance of young, middle-class, ethnic Bulgarians in the sector is thus reinforced. Those with a working-class background, ethnic minorities, the elderly, and those without higher education are restricted to often low-paid, menial work or jobs without customer contact if they find work in tourism at all. Only at the fringes of the industry, where homogenization and the implementation of "international" and "European" standards are incomplete, may these groups earn a living as entrepreneurs. But their livelihoods, like those of the *pletachki* described in chapter 4 and the landladies discussed in chapter 9, are precarious: they are highly dependent on tourist flows and spending power, contingent on the tacit acquiescence of state and municipal authorities, and vulnerable to competition by larger, more established, and better-funded companies from the core of the industry. Hence, common perceptions of the aptitude of certain groups for

emotional and aesthetic labor structure these groups' employment opportunities in important ways; ultimately, they strongly affect the composition and social stratification of the tourism workforce, and underpin the privileging of some groups and the marginalization and even exclusion of others.

In Varna's retailing industry, it remains to be seen whether the recent influx of young female students will lead to a transformation of the sector into one offering mainly poorly paid part-time jobs. At present, the employees of independent shops still tend to be working full-time. However, the increasing importance of aesthetic labor, combined with the trend towards self-service, the concomitant de-skilling of the workforce, and the loss in income from commissions does not bode well for the future of working conditions in Varna's retail sector.

The retailing sector is not just a site where growing social stratification and fragmentation are mirrored; it is also an arena where social hierarchies are actively shaped and co-created. Retail workers contribute to the construction of consumer hierarchies by policing access to their shops, and by evaluating consumers according to the economic and cultural capital they possess. The employees of upscale shops, in particular, do not just use their expert knowledge and notions of class and exclusivity to control the service encounter. By emphasizing their own cultural capital, they situationally establish their superiority over some of their affluent customers who may possess the wealth buying them access to exclusive shops, but lack the taste, refinement and manners that are viewed as integral parts of the habitus of the higher classes.

In expressing their views on the wealthy consumers who patronize exclusive shops, retail workers articulate notions of consumption that are widespread among the emerging Bulgarian middle class. The normative ideal on which these views are based is that of a "cultured" person characterized by education, propriety, decency, and restraint. In the sphere of consumption, "being cultured" is manifest through displays of good taste and refinement, but also prudence, moderation, and restraint. It is contrasted to the crass and ostentatious overconsumption of the newly rich, particularly the *mutri* (mafia). In the 1990s, numerous jokes made fun of the mafia's ignorance and stupidity, immense wealth, and ostentatious consumption – the combination of which served as the epitome of being "uncultured". Thus, when the employees of upmarket shops decry the lack in manners and taste of their wealthy customers, they are not just establishing their own momentary superiority, but expressing an ideal of a social order that is based on the

possession of specific forms of cultural capital that is distinct from financial wealth.[185]

Operating in a highly competitive market, workers seek to distinguish their own shops from other types of retailers in Varna. This distinction work is always relational. Owners of independent shops seek to establish their superiority over market stalls by emphasizing the personal service they offer and the knowledgeable workers they employ. Employees of upscale shops point to the superior looks, taste, and refinement of both their merchandise and their colleagues in relation to other independent retailers. Meanwhile, the vendors operating market stalls emphasize their affordable prices. Thus, a stratified landscape of retailers is created that is closely related to stratified groups of consumers.

Issues of inclusion and exclusion are especially pertinent to shopping malls. Researchers agree that in the Western world, malls are the preferred shopping and entertainment venues of the middle class, slowly replacing hospitable spaces such as markets and "third places" such as local pubs or cafes. Shopping malls are private property, and as such can never be truly public spaces, accessible to any and all. Some authors have described them as simulacra of public streets and squares while others have found them to depict middle-class notions of idealized public space: orderly and clean; free of the chaos, dirt, and unpredictability of the streets; and spaces where decent, educated, and respectable citizens may meet likeminded people without the unpleasantness of encountering the poor, uneducated, and marginal members of society. Malls are "non-places" unmoored from local history and identity; they are sanitized, generic spaces in which flows of customers are steered and controlled. Scholars have often contrasted them with open, accessible, hospitable spaces like markets that accept and encourage encounters and interactions of heterogeneous groups of people, where people may pursue a wide range of activities, and where the commercial function is just one among many. Such markets are places with deep local roots, implicated in local histories and identities and entangled in social relations.

It would be easy to contrast Varna's open-air markets with the city's shopping malls, and praise the former as truly public spaces while condemning the latter as private spaces of consumption characterized by high degrees of surveillance and control. However, as we have seen in this chapter, although the open-air markets in Varna are indeed intensely social spaces that are freely accessible to anyone, and permit the mingling and interaction of

[185] These notions strongly echo the findings of Jennifer Patico (2001, 2005, 2009), and of Michele Rivkin-Fish (2009) on stratified consumption among the aspiring middle class in St. Petersburg.

diverse groups of people, in reality, they are mostly patronized by poor and marginal members of society, and by foreign tourists looking for an exotic shopping experience.[186] In the literature, markets may be viewed as hospitable spaces, perhaps even as "third places" that facilitate sociability and conviviality and thus foster community cohesion. But in Varna, large segments of the community perceive them as ambivalent spaces at best, and as dangerous and threatening at worst, and consequently do their best to avoid them. The better-off, middle- and upper-middle-class consumers feel threatened by the unpredictability and "openness" of open-air markets, and are wary of the people they might encounter there. They display the desire for spatial and social isolation that Mike Davis has located at the root of the processes culminating in the creation of a "fortress city". Hence, they value the glitzy, sanitized, controlled retail environment of shopping malls, even if they cannot always afford to shop in international chain stores selling Western brands. They may be forced to revert to retailers like small independent shops that are viewed as being only one step above market stalls, but at least here they can be sure that the worst of the riffraff is kept out.

In addition to their cleanliness and perceived safety, the generic and placeless nature of malls, coupled with their symbolic meaning as quintessentially Western retail venues, are precisely the qualities that enhance their attractiveness to Bulgarian shoppers. Varna's malls and the international chain stores they house could just as well be located in London, Paris, or New York: they look the same, they work in the same way, and they sell the same range of commodities and services. The negation of local practices of retailing and commerce this entails is desirable for some Bulgarian consumers. Local traditions and business practices may well be considered "un-European" and "Oriental" (e.g. open-air markets) or as "antiquated" and "behind the times" (e.g. over-the-counter service), and thus not particularly appreciated. Conformity with the West, on the other hand, implies some measure of equality which is coveted by many Bulgarians. When patronizing a mall, they are equal to shoppers in western European or American cities; they are not just second-class consumers or second-class Europeans, but part of a global community of consumer-citizens. Shopping malls are attractive because they offer Bulgarian shoppers an opportunity to – literally and metaphorically – participate in a global market. They do not just "look like a European market"; they are the real thing.

[186] The only exceptions to this are the fruit and vegetable markets of the city that are truly patronized by a wide variety of people.

Chapter 8
Hospitality and Service Provision: "It's the Service that Makes a Hotel Come Alive!"

> "Tourism needs certain skills and qualities; it takes more than just money. You have to know about service".
>
> Gavrail, trade organization spokesman

> "It was our first duty to befriend the guests. That is why they returned to our hotel every year".
>
> Proleta, hotel marketing manager

> "We have many, many guests who regularly stay in our hotel because we are friends. We write each other e-mails, 'How are you doing', things like that. And it is really great knowing that the guests feel good here, not just because of the hotel facilities but because of who we are, because we know them and we want to make them feel good. That is the best thing".
>
> Zhaneta, hotel general manager

> "The guests like it when they come back here and see the same faces. They are happy when they are recognized and welcomed with open arms. Hospitality is a characteristic feature of the Bulgarian mentality, and that is something we have retained, something we have not yet lost".
>
> Ivanka, hotel general manager

The provision of services is one of the central features characterizing the hotel industry. "It is the service that makes a hotel come alive", said Selena, the general manager of a high-star city hotel, as she explained that the most important feature distinguishing her exclusive hotel from others in the city is its exceptional quality of service. She argued that even the most tastefully furnished hotel with the latest equipment and every conceivable amenity can

only be successful if it is staffed by skilled and experienced employees. Such employees serve the guests in a competent and efficient manner, but also actively care for them and do everything possible to ensure their guests' wellbeing.

The crucial importance of service quality in the hotel industry is acknowledged both by practitioners and in the academic literature.[187] It is thus not surprising that the topic was frequently discussed by hotel workers in Varna and Golden Sands. What I found striking, however, were three interrelated issues that emerged in these discussions. First of all, some of the hotel workers' notions of what constitutes good service differed markedly from the views propagated in business and management textbooks. The latter presuppose a purely commercial service interaction, a transaction between strangers acting as customer and service provider, with the provider demonstrating competence and "caring" in standardized and homogenized ways. My interlocutors, on the other hand, frequently and consistently linked good service to notions of hospitality and even friendship; they emphasized the individuality of the parties involved in the service interaction and of the personal relationships they formed. Service was described more in terms of private hospitality than in those of commercial transactions.

Older hotel managers both in the city and in the resorts frequently claimed that service was of a better quality under socialism. This assertion is surprising in the light of academic analyses of service provision in economies of shortage as well as the reports of those who daily experienced it. Furthermore, hotel workers in Varna were adamant that it is impossible for the large resort hotels to provide good service like they are able to do in an urban setting. They often used metaphors borrowed from Fordist factory production when describing service provision in resort hotels, speaking of "production lines" and "conveyor belts", or of "mass processing" and "mass production".

How can these claims be explained? As we shall see in this chapter, hotel workers in the city of Varna use "service quality" as a framework to criticize the transformation of the coastal resorts into destinations for mass tourism. At the same time, their views on service quality contest the subordination of human relations to the pursuit of profit, a feature they consider as

[187] For example, Augustyn and Ho (1998) and the articles collected in the volume edited by Kandampully, Mok and Sparks (2001). In 2004, Dimitar Grozev, former Chief Manager of Golden Sands plc, stated, "Contemporary tourists look not only for sun's rays, beaches or sea. They live very intensively, in the epoch of 'super-things', when everything develops at a dynamic speed. That's why one of the most attractive tasks before all specialists in tourism is to enhance the culture of service, to satisfy needs to the full. The country, hotel or restaurant offering the best service will win. This will become a serious, decisive criterion and everyone should pay attention to it" (cited in Kalinkov and Doychev 2007: 101).

symptomatic of commercially oriented mass tourism and of capitalist relations of production and consumption more generally. They see the elevation of the pursuit of profit as particularly strong under the conditions of predatory capitalism that have marked Bulgaria's recent past.

As accommodation providers, hotels are a part of what used to be termed the "hotel and catering sector" but what in recent decades has increasingly been called the "hospitality industry" in English-language publications. In this context, hospitality may be defined as "the provision of food and/or drink and/or accommodation in a service context" (Lashley 2002: 3). This definition is, however, at odds with everyday notions where hospitality tends to be associated with the home, reciprocity, mutuality, helping strangers, and, most importantly, an absence of monetary exchange and profit motive. Accordingly, terms like "commercial hospitality" that are used widely in the literature contain an inherent tension between everyday notions of "the commercial" and notions of "hospitality".

In the edited volume *In Search of Hospitality*, authors from a number of disciplines explore this tension as well as the various forms hospitality may take. They define hospitality as "a contemporaneous exchange designed to enhance mutuality (well-being) for the parties involved through the provision of food and/or drink and/or accommodation" (Lashley 2002: 3). In his introductory chapter, Conrad Lashley describes hospitality as consisting of three domains: a social, a private, and a commercial one. The social domain "considers the social settings in which hospitality and acts of hospitableness take place together with the impacts of social forces on the production and consumption of food/drink/and accommodation" (Lashley 2002: 5). The social domain thus includes the negotiation and construction of social relations through hospitality; hosts' and guests' value systems and their expressions in the context of hospitality; the norms and rules governing hospitality; and the negotiation and construction of a desired social order through host-guest interactions. The private domain of hospitality is concerned with the provision of food, drink, and, sometimes, accommodation in the private home. It is characterized by hospitableness, by "a genuine desire to please guests and make them happy" (Lashley 2002: 11), but also by notions of reciprocity, and it is strongly affected by the concept of "the home" and its association with issues of gender, the family, privacy, intimacy, and close personal relationships.[188] Finally, the commercial domain of hospitality is characterized by a market-driven relationship between provider and customer. Here, hosts are motivated by the profits to be made, while at the same time, the monetary exchange absolves guests from any feeling of mutual

[188] Private hospitality is the domain most people think of when talking about "hospitality".

obligation and loyalty. Yet the monetary exchange alters the basic host-guest relation: "On receiving genuine hospitality, the individual feels genuinely wanted and welcome. This is not the same as being welcomed as a valued customer" (Lashley 2002: 13).[189]

These three domains of hospitality clearly overlap. Private forms of hospitality may well appear in public and commercial spaces, while commercial hospitality can enter private homes when paying guests are accommodated.[190] It is one goal of this and the following chapter to explore the tensions concomitant with the intersections of the three types of hospitality. The focus of this chapter is on the hotel sector in the city of Varna. I will show how the provision of hospitality in these hotels is clearly commercial in nature, but how individual hotel workers constantly attempt to introduce elements of private hospitality into this domain. Workers bring into commercial transactions a focus on establishing and maintaining personal relationships, expressions of caring and a genuine desire to help and please guests, and strong notions of reciprocity and mutual obligation.

In order to explore these issues and understand why they are articulated by hotel workers in the city, it is first necessary to describe the typical characteristics of city hotels. Only by comparing them to resort hotels, and by highlighting existing similarities and differences between the two hotel types, is it possible to understand the backdrop against which these issues are expressed, discussed, and contested. At the same time, the first part of this chapter provides insights into the hotel sector in the city of Varna, and thus complements the chapter on hotels in Golden Sands. Thus, in the first part of this chapter, I will delineate the characteristic features of city-based hotels, highlight the arenas of competition between city and resort hotels, and

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[189] The tension between "private" and "commercial" hospitality is apparent in this quote. Although Lashley aims to put the three domains on equal footing and to emphasize the necessity of research on all three, his language suggests that he, too, privileges "private" over "commercial" hospitality insofar as he appears to consider the former as more "genuine".

[190] The conception of the three domains of hospitality is analytically valuable because it facilitates the exploration of the tensions resulting from interactions of different forms and notions of hospitality, such as those in play at the hotels and commercial homes described in this chapter and the next. However, the division is also problematic on several levels. First, although it is intended to facilitate the exploration of hospitality in cross-cultural contexts, this tri-partite division is already based on culturally specific notions of the home, work and commerce, and the distinction between the public and private realms. Second, the association of private hospitality exclusively with the private home is deeply problematic. As I demonstrate in this chapter, "genuine" hospitableness which lacks financial motives and is based on a desire to please and care for guests may also be performed outside the home; so too can notions of reciprocity and personal closeness associated with home-based hospitality extend beyond interactions that occur in personal homes. On the other hand, as I show in the next chapter, the private home may well be a site where commercial hospitality is provided.

describe how the target groups of city hotels affect patterns of seasonality and hotel operations. In the second part, I will analyze hotel workers' views on the service quality in both city and resort hotels, and explore how they express the tensions between commercial and private hospitality that they negotiate in their daily work. I will show how the discourse about service quality expresses a growing unease with the current manifestation of mass tourism in the region, and how it contains a critique of a capitalist socioeconomic order that is perceived as leading to the subordination of human, personal, affective relationships to commercial gain and financial profits.

The Characteristics of City Hotels

In Golden Sands, the development of the hotel sector was decisively influenced by the privatization and modernization process and by the increase in hotel size and number that followed it. The same was not the case in Varna. Due to the concentration of tourism in the resorts outside Varna, the city sported only a handful of hotels prior to privatization. They were privatized in the second half of the 1990s, with employee-management buyouts as the most frequently chosen method of privatization. Until recently, the number of hotels in Varna remained limited as investors regarded the resorts as more promising locations for new establishments. After 2005, however, several new hotels have been built in the city.[191] The building boom was caused by several factors, the most important being the increase in business travelers following the recovery of the Bulgarian national economy.

The first and most important feature of city hotels is that they operate throughout the year. Second, the majority of these hotels are small family-run businesses. They usually have between ten and thirty rooms, and employ only a small staff. In many cases the owner/manager and members of his or her family form the core staff. There is only a handful of larger hotels in Varna, and even these have a much lower capacity than most resort hotels; only one hotel has more than one hundred rooms. Most city hotels fall into the three-star category; there are only a few four- and five-star hotels. Third, hotels in Varna have a more diverse clientele than their counterparts in the resorts.

A very important group of customers for all city hotels are business travelers whose numbers have grown in the 2000s. Varna has always been an important transport hub, and industrial, commercial, and business center.

[191] As of 2007, hotel managers estimated that there were about 50 hotels in Varna. New hotels open every year, and those built on the coastal strip between Varna and the resorts are variously categorized depending on the source of information. Some sources also omit from the category of "city hotel" any seasonally-operating hotels that target foreign charter tourists, even when they are within Varna's city limits.

After 2005, the boom of the city's service sector industries in tourism, real estate, finance, trade and retailing, has made it an even more attractive business location. Domestic and foreign companies of all sizes are flocking to Varna for its business and investment opportunities, and their representatives need a place to stay during their travels. In response to this growing demand, numerous small hotels have opened. Many of Varna's hotels have successfully established a solid base of corporate clients. Internationally renowned companies send their employees and guests to the well-established hotels with a high star-rating, supplying them with a steady stream of customers. The smaller, family-owned hotels with a three-star rating receive business travelers from domestic companies as well as independent business travelers. Some also work with the shipping agencies based in Varna who refer their people to them. Despite the short length of their stays, business travelers are valued customers because they are profitable for the hotel, unproblematic in their interactions with employees, and because they represent a steady and reliable customer base.

Another important target group for city hotels are foreigners who intend to buy a property in the region. Although hotel employees usually either identify such guests as "foreign investors" or subsume them within the category of "businesspeople", property buyers constitute a distinct analytic category because the length and frequency of their stays differs from those of other foreign investors or businesspeople. As described in chapter 10, foreign property buyers come to Bulgaria in order to acquire a second home.[192] The first wave of buyers was British, but recently, the share of Russians has sharply increased and clients from other nationalities have appeared as well. Hotels gladly welcome them because, although they may visit only a couple of times, their length of stay is above average. Indeed, many hotels receive customer referrals from real estate agencies.

Tourists are the third important customer segment of city-based hotels. Hotel employees in the city sharply distinguish between the sun-lust charter tourists of the resorts and their own guests, who are mostly foreign and domestic individual travelers, as well as cultural tourists following a circuit through Bulgaria that most commonly takes them from Sofia, to the mountains and several monasteries, Plovdiv, Varna, and finally Veliko Turnovo before returning to the capital.[193] The latter may be on an organized tour;

[192] The population at large tends to equate these visitors with tourists.

[193] In my conversations with hotel employees, there was often considerable confusion surrounding this group, because for many Varnentsi (and particularly for tourism workers), the word "tourist" is strongly associated with foreign charter tourists staying in the resorts. The term thus tends to exclude both domestic tourists and foreign cultural tourists; see also chapter 6.

their main focus is on visits to sites of cultural and historical significance. They arrive in Varna in tour busses and often stay only a for two or three days. In order to attract cultural tourists, many hotels in Varna maintain close relations with tour operators and travel agencies.

Competition between City and Resort Hotels

Conference Tourism

The hotels in Varna compete with their counterparts in the resorts only to a limited extent do to the different customer segments. Nevertheless, there is some rivalry in the market for conference tourism.

In recent years, Bulgarian companies have increasingly started to hold conferences, meetings, seminars, training sessions, and sales presentations in places with an agreeable and representative ambience. Hotels with conference and event facilities have been one such destination. In response, some hotels have upgraded their facilities, and started targeting these customers. In Varna, larger hotels with a sufficient number of rooms to house the participants overnight are likely to attract such events. In the resorts, it is the hotels with a higher star rating that tend to offer conference facilities.

In the competition for MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions), city-based hotels seem to have the edge. First, with their closer proximity to the airport and the train and bus stations, they are more easily accessible than the resort hotels. This is even more the case for guests arriving by car, since, unlike the city, the resorts lack adequate parking lots. Second, the hotels in Varna are closer to a business, administrative, and cultural center; if they are not located directly in the city center, they are within easy walking distance of it. The primary advantage of the resorts rests in their holiday-like ambience and proximity to the beach. In the summer, they offer a vibrant nightlife and many attractions and entertainment options. However, the ability of resort hotels to host MICE is circumscribed by seasonality and by their focus on foreign charter tourists as their main customer segment. They are unwilling or unable to host large events during the high season, and while they may host MICE in the low season if they have sufficient free capacities, they still prioritize charter tourists in booking and in the services they offer. Because the hotels in Varna generally target business travelers they do not have to worry about clashes between different types of guests, and do not hesitate to host MICE and continue normal bookings. They operate throughout the year, and they are always close to the nightlife and entertainment of the city.

But even though the number of hotels offering conference facilities and capable of organizing larger events has seen a marked increase in recent

years, the MICE segment is still small. Varna is an attractive location for such events, but there are a number of obstacles yet to be overcome, as Slava explained:

> I would say that we still lack real event managers in Bulgaria. In March 2007, I participated in a training course where we learned more about the organization and management of large conferences. They told us that it is one of the problems that even the hotels you can book online have not yet published any rates for 2008 and 2009 on their websites, even though the process of organizing a large conference starts two years in advance.
>
> A friend of mine who owns a travel agency is frequently involved in the organization of such events. She says the interest in Varna as a location is growing because we are on the eastern border of the EU. But we need to be more flexible concerning the incoming flights, the airport has to be enlarged, and we need more large hotels in the city. Right now, they are constructing two large hotels with conference facilities – they will have WLAN, large screens, beamers, all the equipment you need, but also banquet services and the other services you need to organize a conference.
>
> I think there are not many travel agencies in Varna that dare taking on the organization of large conferences. They think they are too small for that. You have to organize transport, entertainment, all these things… . My friend says there are many problems, starting with the fact that there is no restaurant in this city where you could stage a folk music and dance show for 500 people. The hosts are prepared to spend 50 euros per person for such an evening, and we could easily do it for 20 euros, but there is no venue large enough to house all these people. These are the problems. And of course, the streets in Varna need to be repaired if the city wants to look like a truly European city, and the most important points of entry – the port and the airport – have to be upgraded.

Even though conference tourism is becoming increasingly important to a growing number of hotels in Varna and in the surrounding resorts, it still concerns only a minority of them. There is, however, another form of competition that has an impact on all hotels in the region: the competition for qualified employees. As we shall see, the characteristics of city hotels have consequences for their daily operations as well as their attractiveness to potential employees.

Employees

For many hotel employees, the most attractive feature of city hotels is their continuous operation. Workers who have finished their education and decided to pursue a career in the hotel sector prefer secure jobs with a steady income. While the majority of positions in resort hotels are seasonal, city hotels offer their employees permanent contracts, no matter what position they hold. Many city hotels also employ university students who are studying tourism or a related field. For these students, a part-time job in a hotel is a way to gain experience in the industry and earn some money, and there is a good chance that they will be offered a full-time job once they have finished their education.

The managers of city hotels emphasize additional features that make them attractive workplaces. These attractions include a short daily commute, a "more serious" and "professional" work environment than that available in the resorts, regular working hours, and the opportunity to continuously develop and improve the hotel. Managers consider the absence of seasonality less crucial for their own choice of a workplace because higher management positions are non-seasonal in the resorts as well.

From the perspective of hotel operations, the non-seasonality of city hotels is considered a distinct advantage. Managers emphasize that staff turnover is much lower than in the resorts because employees have permanent jobs. In resort hotels, workers have to be re-hired, re-trained, and taught the particular standards of the hotel at the start of each new season, but this is not the case in the city. For example, when I asked Selena whether she preferred working for a city or a resort hotel, the 35-year-old general manager of a high-star city hotel responded:

> Personally, I prefer working for a city hotel. First of all, it operates throughout the year. That is important, and not just because we have a secure job – in fact, that is the least important point. But a hotel changes and develops every day. If you close it down for six months it will not develop during that period. It would not be interesting, you would be working in an empty hotel, and you would only prepare for the New Year's Eve party, for example. Personally, I would not find that interesting.

While the year-round operation, short commute, and regular working hours are seen as positive features to employment in city hotels, there are also downsides. The main disadvantage of city hotels pointed out by both employees and managers is the generally lower prospect for individual advancement. Possibilities for advancement are limited primarily by the small size of most hotels in Varna. In a family-owned hotel with only a handful of employees, the opportunities for in-house promotion are very limited; hence,

those who wish to advance their careers must apply for a job elsewhere. The lack of a career ladder is thus a major factor contributing to the staff turnover in these small hotels. The few larger hotels in Varna offer similar opportunities for advancement as the resort hotels, in addition to a more stable and secure job.

Across the Bulgarian tourism industry, and even in the general population, work in resort hotels is considered more "fun", whereas work in the city is more "serious". The difference is attributed to the different groups of guests attracted by each venue: while city hotels target business travelers, the resort hotels attract holidaymakers looking for fun and relaxation. Some managers saw this as an advantage of the city hotels; working there is more serious, more professional, and attracts employees with a suitable mindset. Furthermore, they argued that working in the city is much more pleasant because incidents like guests being intoxicated, harassing staff, destroying hotel property, or starting fights occurs only rarely. Zlatina, a 26-year-old receptionist of one of Varna's larger hotels, said:

> I have worked in both resort and city hotels, and I really prefer working in the city. I do not like the resort hotels. They are mainly working with foreign tourists. These groups, they come here and… . I have a low opinion of them. They are young, they drink too much, they are badly behaved and they get out of line. Not all of them, of course, but still… . And there are too many hotels in the resorts, too many people in one place. Here in the city, the guests are more polite, more considerate. Most of our guests come here on the job; they have work to do; they are business travelers. We can give them more attention, more consideration. In the resorts, people just want to enjoy themselves. It is a very different kind of work.

However, many young people prefer working in the resorts for exactly these reasons, saying that the job is more fun and that being surrounded by relaxed holiday-makers is more pleasant. Like Dunya, a 33-year-old general manager of a resort hotel, they view the more serious ambience of the city-based hotels as a disadvantage and prefer working in a hotel where the guests are on holiday and thus relaxed, carefree, and outgoing:

> I would not want to work in Varna. I like it here [in Golden Sands]. The hotels in Varna are smaller, they have fewer guests, and their guests are business travelers. Their guests are always on the job. Here, on the other hand, people are on holiday, they want to relax and to have some fun, and they usually stay for one or two weeks. I love working with these people, with holidaymakers. And since they stay in the resorts, not in the city, I prefer working here.

Nevertheless, the permanent employment and the more secure incomes in Varna are advantages in the competition for qualified employees. At the same time, city hotels are also affected by the general trend for young and qualified workers to look for better-paid jobs abroad. Although the hotels in Varna provide permanent, non-seasonal jobs, and are thus in a better position than their counterparts in the resorts, like the latter, they cannot compete with the salaries paid in western and southern European hotels. As a result, they too lose some of their best workers to migration.

"There Is No Security" – Hotel Operations in the City

The customer segments and the year-round operations of city hotels impact more than the competition for qualified employees. They also have important ramifications for the operations of these establishments, leading to further differences between city and resort hotels.

Compared to the resort hotels, the hotels in Varna have a more diversified clientele. This is an advantage from the point of view of operations – a hotel may respond to a drop in demand by one customer segment (such as "foreign investors") by intensifying its efforts to attract more guests from another group (such as cultural tourists). Unlike the resort hotels which are at the mercy of international tour operators and the whims of foreign tourists, city hotels have a better chance to compensate for a decline in one customer segment by expanding the share of another. This flexibility is especially valuable since hotels in Varna also lack some of the ability for advance planning displayed by their counterparts in the resorts. As I have described in chapter 3, the resort hotels allocate their rooms to the tour operators a year in advance and then depend on the latter to market the hotel and attract customers. This practice is at the heart of their strong dependence on the tour operators, but it also provides security, making it possible to anticipate occupancy and plan accordingly.

Due to their more diversified clientele, it is much harder for the hotels in Varna to plan ahead and reliably forecast demand. The segment offering the greatest scope for advance planning is MICE. Such events are usually planned and organized months or even years ahead, and the participating hotels thus know long in advance that their rooms will be booked for a certain period of time. The tour operators organizing sightseeing and cultural trips around Bulgaria book their rooms in advance as well. But business travelers and independent travelers may arrive and depart on very short notice, making it hard to reliably plan ahead, as Selena explained:

> First of all, you have to know how a city hotel operates because there is a huge difference between resort and city hotels. Here in the city, we do not have these quotas for the tour operators. We do not

> know how many rooms will be occupied at any given moment; things are more unpredictable. And that makes everything much more difficult – I mean, difficult in the sense that there is no security. For example, today, fifteen of our rooms may be occupied; tomorrow it may just be ten. Occupancy is changing rapidly; it is changing every day. And you never really know what is going to happen the next day.

Nevertheless, based on experience, hotel managers usually have a rough idea of the occupancy they can expect and its seasonal fluctuations. In the winter season, they rely primarily on business travelers. Hence, occupancy is high on workdays and low on weekends. Some of the larger hotels respond by hosting weddings, large parties, and similar events on weekends. However, that option does not exist for many of the smaller hotels because they do not have the necessary facilities. Similarly, occupancy rates are generally lower in those winter months that have a large number of holidays (e.g. in December). In addition to business travelers, hotels with conference facilities also host MICE in the winter. April and May see the arrival of the first charter flights and thus the start of the tourist season. The city hotels receive more of the "foreign investors" looking to buy houses. The spring months also bring the first groups of cultural tourists, and increasing numbers of individual travelers while at the same time, the share of business travelers and conference participants remains high. In July and August, when most Bulgarians take their annual vacations, the number of business travelers drops sharply. For hotels that primarily target this segment of the market, these are the months with the lowest occupancy rates. But city hotels that work with foreign or domestic tour operators and travel agencies can still achieve very high occupancy rates in the summer months by relying on cultural and individual travelers to replace the business travelers. In the autumn months, the share of business travelers grows again, while the stream of tourists tapers off, and the share of foreign investors declines as well.

Irrespective of the season, the hotels in Varna generally have a much higher rate of guest turnover than resort hotels. Whereas charter tourists usually stay for at least a week, the length of stay for business travelers, cultural tourists, and individual travelers is much shorter. This higher turnover also challenges the planning abilities of city hotels. Selena commented:

> Our target group is completely different from that of the resort hotels. In our hotel, we have very few guests who are on vacation. Our guests are usually businesspeople, and they stay for one, two, or three nights. That is a huge difference to the resort hotels where the guests stay for at least a week, and some for two or even three

> weeks. Here, if a guest stays from Monday until Friday, that is a very long stay.

Selena's description of the distinctiveness of operating a city hotel continued to focus on the desires and habits of tourists and businessmen:

> Another difference [from resort hotels] is the location: we are in the city. The typical tourist wants to stay close to the sea and that is not something our hotel can offer. When I was working in Golden Sands, all the guests wanted a room with a sea view, and they said, "When I step out of the hotel, I want to be on the beach!". Here in our hotel, we cannot offer that, and that is why in the summer months, we have lower occupancy rates. As you know, many Bulgarians take their vacations in the summer months; there are fewer business travelers. So it is to be expected that we have fewer guests [in the summer].

While the hotels in Varna lack the security of their counterparts in the resorts, they are also much more flexible. This flexibility concerns pricing as well; city hotels are able to adjust their room rates according to demand and they may offer different rates to different customer segments.[194] Proleta, the 38-year-old marketing manager of one of Varna's larger business hotels, stated:

> The way we operate here in the city is totally different from the resort hotels. We deal directly with our guests. We have to market our hotel, advertise it, and attract guests. Whereas in Golden Sands, I worked with a number of tour operators and they sent us the tourists. I had no flexibility in setting the room rates because rates were negotiated with the tour operators. Here, management has much more freedom in that respect. We can set our rates and adjust them according to the demand. And we can be flexible – different people get different rates; we can give them discounts, and so on. It is better that way, we have more control.

The more diversified clientele of hotels in Varna thus results in their greater independence and flexibility, but it comes at the price of an insecurity concerning their occupancy and turnover in the long and medium term.

City hotels must also do their own marketing, a responsibility which most resort hotels allocate to tour operators. There are several ways of

[194] Hotel room rates are generally graded according to the season and advertised on the internet. Individual travelers and walk-in guests tend to pay the highest rates. Many city hotels offer discounts to certain groups of customers (e.g. corporate clients), for early bookings, and for extended stays. Some hotels also have discounted rates for domestic tourists, a practice that goes back to the semi-official two-tier price system that operated in many sectors of the tourism industry up to 2006, when it was determined to be discriminatory and officially prohibited due to harmonization with EU requirements.

marketing and advertising a hotel: advertisements can be placed in print media, the internet, and billboards; hotels can also be promoted through tour operators and travel and accommodation agencies. Most of the hotels in Varna use a mixed strategy. Hotels may also participate in national and international trade fairs where they may rent exhibition stalls to present themselves to both private individuals and potential business partners. This is a rather costly strategy, feasible only for the larger hotels with substantial marketing budgets, and even these hotels have to choose wisely in which trade fairs to participate:

> The industry is changing rapidly. And if you think you can rest on your laurels, if you think your dusty degree is going to help you any – well, you are sorely mistaken. You always have to be up-to-date on what is happening in the industry. It is a real pity that we are unable to fund our own business trips, trips to the world's top destinations, in order to compare them to our own region. But usually, the owners are not prepared to pay for that, to make that possible. I think that such [comparative exercises] and the participation in trade fairs would be a very good strategy for some hotels. Somehow, we Bulgarians are still prone to think that the state should be responsible for marketing. But it is our job as well. Each one of us – the hotel managers, the owners – has to do his bit. The state is making its contribution but it cannot work wonders. Especially if you are not good enough as a manager, or if you are not willing to spend, say, ten per cent of your revenue on marketing.

In her statement, Slava alludes to a demand the industry has been making for years, namely, that "the state" should spend more money on promoting Bulgaria. Business owners and managers often point to the examples of Greece and Turkey (two of Bulgaria's main competitors). Both countries, they say, have a much larger budget for promoting tourism. While some tourism professionals suspect that demands like these are holdovers from socialism when tourism was state-run and only the state was responsible for marketing and promotion, others justify their demands by pointing out that the state and its citizens both derive considerable income from tourism. They argue that both local and regional populations and the nation as a whole profit from tourism and hence, the state should do anything it can to support the industry. For various reasons, most tourism professionals thus agree that the state should do more to promote Bulgaria as a tourist destination. However, like Slava, some of them have come to the conclusion that support by the state is not the only solution – the industry, too, is required to do its part.

"We Provide Individual Service!" – Discourses about Service Quality

When hotel workers reflected on the similarities and differences between city and resort hotels, one of the issues that frequently came up was service quality. That was not particularly surprising. Their hotels exist in a highly competitive environment, and the quality of service provision is one of the arenas in which a hotel can improve its position vis-a-vis competitors. Discourses about service quality also provide a framework in which tourism professionals are able to voicing their concerns over larger issues such as the current state and development of Bulgaria's coastal resorts or the growth of mass tourism.

The managers of city hotels often emphasized that the service quality in city hotels is much higher than offered in the resorts. They explained this as a consequence of non-seasonality, lower rates of staff turnover, and opportunities this offered for employee improvement and training. Resort hotels, on the other hand, may be forced to hire inexperienced or untrained staff, and they experience high rates of staff turnover which inhibits continuous personnel development.

However, hotel workers in city and resort hotels agreed that service quality is also heavily influenced by the star rating, overall quality, and reputation of a hotel, no matter where it is located. Thus, the employees of city hotels made very critical general statements about the service quality in resort hotels. This criticism was mainly leveled at the resort hotels that cater to the sun, sea, sand, and sex-seeking tourists, "the partying crowd", and the "poor tourists" who have replaced the "better tourists" of the 1980s. But these remarks were often followed by a description of resort hotels that offered high service quality. Notably, these are all four- or five-star hotels that also have a reputation for catering to a more exclusive clientele – namely, the affluent tourists that are viewed as the segment the resorts should ideally attract. In that respect, the comments and views of the managers of city hotels duplicate the dominant discourse in the resorts about their transformation into cheap, "Oriental", urbanized, and easily substitutable summer sun destinations.

Hotel managers often described differences in the service quality at city and resort hotels as a result of the general differences between hotel size and clientele in the two locations. The managers of city hotels emphasized that the smaller size of their hotels entailed guest numbers low-enough for them to care for each guest individually. They frequently contrasted their service to that provided in the huge resort hotels which they described in the terms of Fordist industrial production. They used terms like "conveyor belt"

or "production line" to describe frontline employees who, in the course of their daily work, churn out the same standard responses to the same standard requests again and again. Selena stated:

> You cannot really compare the service quality in Golden Sands to that in the city hotels. Their hotels have 100, 200, or even 500 rooms. And, in contrast to our hotel, they cater almost exclusively to tourists. And under these conditions, their employees cannot… . Well, of course, their employees are friendly and considerate, but they do not have enough time for each tourist; they cannot take the time to get to know them. It is like a production line that is running faster and faster. We, on the other hand, work for the guest; we see him as a person, as an individual. We provide individual service to each of our guests. That is why city and resort hotels are so different, and you cannot really compare them.

The managers of resort hotels did not agree. They did bemoan the effects on service quality of high staff turnover, the shortage of qualified employees, and the compromises they needed to make when hiring new staff. But, they did not consider these issues to be specific to resort hotels; they saw them as pertaining to the Bulgarian hotel industry more generally. Likewise, they were not happy about the building of ever-larger hotels in the resorts, but while they saw their huge size as contributing to resort urbanization, they did not link it to service quality. Instead, like Ivanka, managers in resort hotels argued that due to the more extended length of stay of their guests, they found it much easier to get to know them and their preferences, thus enabling resort hotels to offer top-quality service:

> C.B.: Do you think there are differences between the service quality in city and resort hotels?
>
> Ivanka: Yes, I definitely think so. Our guests stay here for much longer and we know them, we know their habits and preferences. In the city… of course they want to establish a close relationship with their guests, but that is not possible because they only stay for a very short time. And it is to be expected that a conference or business hotel in the city, when a guest arrives and it turns out he needs a larger pillow or two pillows, for example, that they write it down in the guest history and make sure he has that when he returns. I am not saying they are not trying to satisfy their guests, fulfill their wishes. But I think it is much easier to do that in a resort hotel because the guests stay for much longer, and it is much easier to really get to know them. And as a result, we can offer them better service.

In these two statements, both managers imply that "knowing" the guests or "getting to know them" is a precondition for providing good service. These

phrases turned up repeatedly in my conversations with hotels workers, and they were often followed by anecdotes about hotel guests who had become "friends" and returned to the same hotel, again and again. Hotel managers seemed to believe that in order to deliver good service, frontline employees have to "get to know" the guests, their individual personalities, backgrounds, quirks, and likes and dislikes. This requires establishing a personal relationship which enables employees to know the wishes and preferences of their guests; only then is it possible to properly care for them.

Hotel workers in the city argued that the small size of city hotels and thus the small number of guests staying in the hotel at any given time enables them to "get to know" their guests as individuals in a way that is impossible in huge resort hotels. Meanwhile, hotel staff in the resorts insisted that the longer stay of their guests makes it much easier to "get to know them", whereas in the city, guests would leave after a short time, and workers thus do not have enough time to establish a relationship with them. Both, however, agreed that "knowing the guests" was a precondition for delivering good service, and both believed that establishing a personal relationship and "becoming friends" with their guests should be the goal of hotel employees.

Both Selena and Ivanka did not deny the professionalism of their counterparts. Selena said, "of course, their employees are friendly and considerate", and Ivanka said about her counterparts in the city, "I am not saying they are not trying to satisfy their guests, fulfill their wishes". In their eyes, hotel workers act exactly in the ways prescribed by numerous textbooks on service provision; they are friendly and considerate and try to fulfill their guests' wishes.[195] Why, then, do both managers claim that service quality is inadequate in their counterparts' hotels?

Over the years, a number of models and descriptions of service provision and service quality have been devised in the economic and management literature. For example, William B. Martin has described service quality as having both a procedural and a personal dimension. The procedural dimension is mechanistic in nature, and consists of the established systems and procedures of service delivery. One example would be the check-in procedure in a hotel; it is similar in each hotel and the same for all hotel guests, that is, it is fairly standardized. The personal dimension of service quality captures how frontline workers interact with customers, that is, their attitudes, behaviors, and verbal and non-verbal skills. In the case of check-in, the personal dimension would describe the friendly and helpful manner in

[195] See, for example, the volume edited by Kandampully, Mok and Sparks (2001).

which the procedure is carried out, that is, the interpersonal aspects of the interaction (Martin 1987).

Another, more complex model of service quality is SERVQUAL. Developed by three researchers in marketing and service management, SERVQUAL is firmly anchored in the wider framework of applied economics and has come to dominate the discussions of service quality in that field. It has been widely debated and several scholars have modified and adapted the model to specific industries, products, and markets.[196] SERVQUAL describes service quality as consisting of five basic dimensions: reliability, tangibles, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Reliability refers to the provider's ability to perform a service dependably and accurately; tangibles consist of the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials; responsiveness describes the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service; assurance represents the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence; while empathy refers to the caring, individualized attention given to customers (Parasurman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985, 1988, 1991; Fick and Ritchie 1991). The SERVQUAL model is based on the assumption that service quality is indicated by the gap between the expectations of customers and the actual standard of services. Customers perceive service as exceptional when their expectations across the five dimensions have been surpassed; when they are met, service is perceived as adequate; when expectations are not met, service is considered inadequate.[197]

Both of the above models of service quality contain a personal or empathic dimension describing caring and friendliness as important elements of service quality. That is exactly the kind of friendliness and consideration that Selena and Ivanka attributed to their respective counterparts which they both deemed inadequate. I would argue that they consider this kind of friendliness as professional yet insufficient for two reasons. Firstly, they do not share the underlying assumptions about the nature of service interactions on which the above models are based. Instead, they hold the view that ideally, the people staying in their hotels should be considered and treated not just as customers, but as guests. Secondly, these models attempt to define quality service under the conditions of mass production and consumption. My interlocutors, however, criticize mass tourism precisely because it makes it impossible to relate to tourists and other customers as individuals. When they cannot treat

[196] Based on SERVQUAL, Knutson et al. (1991) have developed LODGSERV geared specifically to the hotel industry, and Knutson, Stevens and Patton (1996) have devised DINESERV for the restaurant industry.

[197] This is the so-called confirmation-disconfirmation theory; see Oliver (1980).

customers as individuals, service staff can also not establish the personal relationship that they view as the precondition for delivering quality service.

Both SERVQUAL and Martin's model of service quality are based on the notion that the interaction between service provider and customer is a purely economic transaction. Its participants interact because of a fit between supply and demand. For the transaction to work, the personalities, backgrounds, and other individual features of providers and consumers are irrelevant. Hotel employees should be friendly and considerate towards their customers, as that is part of the range of services offered by the hotel and expected by the customers. But workers are supposed to be equally courteous to each customer, and their friendliness should not depend on their knowledge or appreciation of a customer's individual personality. Customers would be induced to be loyal to a provider when their expectations concerning service standards are met or surpassed; their personal feelings towards individual frontline employees should be irrelevant. This view of service interactions presupposes anonymous and interchangeable providers and customers meeting on the market in an effort to fit supply with demand, and nothing else.

The hotel workers with whom I spoke, however, perceived their relationships with the people staying in their hotels in other terms. When talking about "getting to know" their guests, they consistently emphasized their individual attributes. As in the quotations at the beginning of this chapter, they also repeatedly referred to the service interaction as one that involves turning customers into "friends". Indeed, many of them believed that this was the key to gaining customer loyalty; when hotel guests are treated as individuals and become "friends", they are expected to return to the same hotel in the future. Their view of the interactions between hotel workers and guests is thus in stark contrast to that dominating the international business management literature. While the latter, in the tradition of economics, conceptualizes these interactions as provider-customer relations, my Bulgarian interlocutors in both resort and city hotels framed them in terms of private hospitality that is more akin to gift exchange. Ideally, service interactions should parallel the interactions between hosts and guests in the private home, and thus be based on mutual affection, caring, and reciprocity. These hotel workers consider standardized friendliness (cf. Ritzer 2007) and consideration as inadequate precisely because they are based on a view of hotel guests as interchangeable customers and not individual guests.[198] City and resort

[198] That such views about the importance of personal interaction in service provision are not recent but have a long tradition in the Bulgarian hospitality industry is demonstrated by this 1967 quote by a Bulgarian tourism professional that is cited in a booklet published to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Golden Sands: "Since days of old, visitors to hotels and restau-

hotel workers each perceive some of the structural constraints that the other faces in turning customers into friends, but recognize the common dedication of workers in both sectors to trying to overcome these limitations.

"We Cared More about the Tourists Themselves" – Service Quality under Socialism

In my conversations with hotel workers in Varna and the surrounding resorts, another topic that repeatedly came up was the service quality under socialism. In the Western academic literature, there is a consensus that in socialist economies, service quality was generally unacceptably poor. This is seen as an effect of the economy of shortages; when consumer goods are in short supply, those who control their distribution and allocation are in a powerful position. Under these conditions, the customer is not a person to be courted; on the contrary, he or she has to court the supplier in order to gain access to sparse goods and services.[199] This argument could easily be applied to the socialist hotel industry on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. Indeed, during the socialist period both Western and Bulgarian observers generally agreed that the service quality in Bulgarian hotels was rather poor, and that this was a problematic issue particularly concerning the coveted tourists from western Europe who were sorely needed for their hard currency (Atanasova and Enev 1984; Carter 1991). In the light of these arguments, I was astonished that tourism workers who had started their careers in the 1980s often claimed that the service quality in hotels was much better in socialism than it has been since the transition.

Older hotel workers like Slava enumerated several reasons why service quality had been better in the 1980s. First, they argued, the staff was better trained; hiring a hotel worker without extensive formal training was unthinkable, and in the off-season, when the hotels were closed, employees took courses and classes designed to further improve their training and education (cf. Ghodsee 2005: 99-100). Throughout their careers, workers were encouraged to develop their skills and experience, and those who proved themselves were slowly given additional responsibilities:

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rants must be considered guests by the servicing staff because they are not clients – buyers of some goods or objects, who just have something to eat, to drink, spend the night and pay for these services … .We are going to continue terming our hotel and restaurant-visitors guests, and we are going to have to meet them well, to wrap them up in warmth, open-heartedness and courteousness so that they may feel like real guests" (Kalinkov and Doychev 2007: 67).

[199] See Kornai (1980). The recent upsurge of interest in socialist consumption has resulted in a host of new studies, such as those by Chelcea (2002); Hammer (2002); Luthar (2006).

> You know, I think generally, the service was much better under socialism. The employees were supervised and closely observed and they were given a chance to develop their skills. For example, as a recent graduate without any experience, just with your diploma in your pocket, you were employed in a two-star hotel. And you could prove yourself and then get a position in a three-star hotel, later in a four-star hotel and so on.

Second, the pace of work was more relaxed. Hotels were smaller and thus had fewer guests, and at the same time, they were often over-staffed. As a result, employees were not under as much pressure as they are today, and they had both the time and the inclination for frequent personal interactions with hotel guests. As hotels were smaller, it was much easier for hotel staff to get to know the guests, to view and treat them as individuals, and to establish personal relationships with them.

Thus, better training and a careful honing of employees' skills are one explanation for the conviction that service was of a higher quality under socialism. A second explanation refers to the smaller scale of tourism under socialism; workers argue that the advent of mass tourism led to growing workloads for the employees, increasing the levels of pressure and stress they are under, and preventing them from giving more time and attention to individual guests. At the same time, due to increasing hotel size, the sheer numbers of guests staying in a hotel at any given time prevent workers from really "getting to know" individual guests; they have simply become part of an anonymous crowd.

A third explanation for the view that service quality has become lower during the postsocialist period points to the tensions between the profit motive inherent in commercial hospitality and the ideal of (private) hospitality to which hotel managers adhere. That point is made quite forcefully in the following statement by Slava:

> Under socialism, we cared more about the tourists themselves. Nowadays, we have become more commercial, more profit-oriented. The profit is everything. You know, the idea behind the hotel business is to give each and every guest the feeling that he is unique and of great importance, that he really matters to you. Nowadays, in these huge hulks with 700-1,000 beds, that is impossible. It is just like mass-processing, mass-production. I deeply regret that, it makes me sad. In the 1980s, Golden Sands had an average capacity of about 230 beds per hotel, or something like that. Today, it is much more. They have an average capacity of perhaps 500, 600 beds per hotel. They are simply huge. You cannot offer good service in such a hotel!

In this statement, the tension between notions of private and commercial hospitality is obvious. According to Slava, the focus of hotel operations should be on the guests and their well-being. Slava thus emphasizes elements of private hospitality such as personal relationships and genuine caring in service quality. Such an ideal for service quality does not in itself prevent a hotel from making a profit; but she objects to the current focus on the commercial dimensions of running a hotel even at the cost of the guests' wellbeing.

Statements such as the above form part of the wider discourses about "greedy entrepreneurs" that I have described in chapters 3 and 5. In these narratives it is claimed that individuals or companies that acquired large amounts of money in the 1990s entered the tourism industry with the goal of investing and increasing their newfound wealth. These entrepreneurs are depicted as seeking, above all, quick profits. In their endeavor to cut costs and increase efficiency they did not hesitate to interfere with day-to-day hotel operations and management decisions, implementing policies and measures that would have a negative impact on service. Due to their lack of experience they were unable to grasp the importance of service quality; because their major goal was to realize quick profits, these new entrepreneurs did not care about the long-term consequences that declining service quality, resort urbanization, or increased commercialization would have for the destination.

As indicated in earlier chapters, however, workers also believe that changes in the tourism industry emerged from the fierce competition and economic effects of changing tourist flows. Not only new entrepreneurs, but also companies with long experience in tourism engaged in ruthless efforts to cut costs and increase efficiency.

Older tourism workers like Slava are thus criticizing two intertwined developments that have resulted in an imbalance of private and commercial hospitality. On the one hand, in their daily work, hotel workers are increasingly pushed to see the customer not as a guest but as a source of money. To survive in a highly competitive environment, hotel owners pressure their management to make the guests spend as much money as possible; management is passing that pressure down to the employees; and the employees, too, have a vested interest in encouraging guests to open their purses; after all, many employees gain a significant part of their income from tips, percentages of the turnover, or commissions. As a result, hotel guests are increasingly seen not as individuals to be offered hospitality, but as customers who should be enticed to spend as much money as possible.

Secondly, the pursuit of profit has led to the construction of large hotels in the hopes of capitalizing on economies of scale. For these hotels to

effectively support high numbers of guests, hotel operations have to be increasingly rationalized and standardized. The focus is on efficiency, calculability, and control; what used to be considered a group of individual guests has turned into a crowd of customers to be processed as efficiently as possible in order to maximize profits. This is the process that tourism workers allude to when they use metaphors such as "mass processing", "conveyor belt", or "production line" to describe frontline service interactions in large hotels.

Ultimately, what is important concerning these narratives is not so much what they say about service quality under socialism. To be sure, purely altruistic hospitality as described in philosophical treatises did not exist in any greater measure than it does today. In the 1980s, workers in international tourist resorts certainly had some "profit motives": working in international tourist resorts was a privilege; it offered the opportunity for interactions with foreigners; and those interactions brought information, scarce consumer goods, and hard currencies into the hands of resort workers. Tourism workers continued to benefit from their work in the "ordinary world" outside the resorts. Today, when people tell stories about tourism under socialism, they do it primarily to comment on the present state of tourism in the Varna region.

Narratives about tourism under socialism frame a critique of the negative consequences of mass tourism in the resorts and frame an ideal conception of the relations between service providers and customers as identical to those of hosts and guests. By claiming that the gulf is widening between the ideal service interaction and its possible implementation under current economic constraints, tourism workers re-assert the value that they attach to the personal dimension of host-guest relations. Older tourism workers do not claim that their interactions with tourists under socialism were solely motivated by selflessness and benevolence, but they do insist that they had the time, the opportunities, and the inclination to interact with tourists on a more personal level, getting to know them as individuals and forging genuinely personal relationships. This, in turn, enabled them to introduce elements of private hospitality into the commercial context to a much higher degree than is possible today. The equilibrium of commercial and private hospitality that was reached in the tourist resorts under socialism is today considered as an optimal balance because it resonates with common conceptions of "true hospitality" as a fundamental trait of "the Bulgarian national character". In today's tourist resorts, hospitality has become unbalanced – so much so, that some older tourism workers have begun to wonder whether it still deserves that title.

"Today, the Profit Is Everything!" – Predatory Capitalism, the Pursuit of Profit, and Personal Relationships

The concern with personal relationships displayed by middle-aged hotel managers goes far beyond interactions between providers of goods and services and their customers, and it transcends service interactions in the hotel sector. Indeed, the closer relations among people are remembered by many older Bulgarians as a characteristic feature of daily life under socialism. They argue that under socialism, people were more dependent on each other. In order to acquire scarce goods and services, negotiate the state bureaucracy, and generally get things done, a person needed "connections", that is a network of friends and acquaintances who helped each other to negotiate all the minor hurdles and obstacles that made daily life in socialism more difficult through favors and other forms of help. These "connections" were not purely instrumental but often based on mutual affection, friendship, and trust, and they were framed in the idiom of personal relationships – not in terms of relations of exchange (cf. Wedel 1992; Creed 1998 *passim*; Ledeneva 1998).

Daily life under socialism brought people closer together because they were dependent on each other and needed each other's help. At the same time, many argue that people were closer under socialism because they were more equal. "We were all the same", the argument goes; everyone had a job working an eight-hour day, everyone took vacations on the Black Sea coast in the summer and skiing in the mountains in the winter, everyone had the same aspirations – their own apartment or house, a car, and a color television. People had enough money and the same limited choice of consumer goods to buy with it; they had the same access to education; they had similar dreams, hopes, and aspirations; they faced the same restrictions and obstacles in realizing them; and they followed the same strategies of "retreating into the private" (Konstatinov and Simič 2001) and just "getting by" (Kideckel 2008). People say that they did not view each other so much as competitors but as potential allies and friends: allies in their efforts to get one over "the state" and the people who were assumed to control the conditions of everyday life. As friends, people helped each other through favors and in other small ways to make life a little better and more comfortable.

This idealized image of life under socialism is often contrasted to life in postsocialist Bulgaria. I have heard Bulgarians of all ages compare the current conditions in their country to those in the American "Wild West", describe them as "predatory capitalism", or liken political and economic elites to "robber barons". While many of my interlocutors did not object to the premise that hard work and superior achievements should be rewarded,

they opposed the unfettered gain and shameless enrichment of elites who are seen as grabbing what they can. This gain strikes them as all the more unjust when sections of society that are viewed as deserving a moderately comfortable life – such as pensioners who had worked hard all their lives – are sinking into poverty. The huge gap between the poor and the super-rich was often cited as symptomatic of the increasing stratification of society, and it was pointed to as symbolic of all that is wrong with the current situation. My interlocutors emphasized the constant insecurity pervading the lives of "ordinary people"; no one is sure whether he will still have a job tomorrow, calamities such as a sudden illness can strike at any time and wreak havoc with a family's carefully planned budget, and many do not know how to make ends meet from one day to the next. Bulgarians are perceived as having become more self-centered as a result of the postsocialist transition, busy with ensuring their own survival; they do not have the time or the means anymore to meet with and entertain friends and acquaintances. At the same time, they are viewed as more competitive. They compete for jobs, for opportunities to make money, and for status and recognition. Those who are successful demonstrate their achievements by ostentatious consumption: brand-name clothes, expensive new cars, and holidays abroad. Today, goods and services are freely available to anyone who can afford them. People do not need "connections" anymore, they need money; and their former friends and allies have turned into rivals in the rush to acquire it. People are constantly watching each other, and envy, jealousy, resentment, and distrust are perceived as rampant (cf. Genov 1998).[200]

To be sure, not everyone subscribes to these highly simplified and essentialized contrasts between life under socialism and postsocialism. However, at their core, these narratives express concerns about the same processes that emerged in the narratives of tourism workers: the widening social distance between people, the diminishing importance of personal relationships, and the increased focus on making money. The essential argument is, to paraphrase Slava, that in socialism, people cared more about people; social relations were important and life revolved around them. Today, by contrast, money is of overwhelming importance, and it is pursued even at the cost of one's personal relationships. Thus, when hotel workers condemn the decline of hospitable behavior in the tourism industry and its replacement with a focus on profit-making, they do more than just criticize the construction of huge tourist resorts and the spread of cheap mass tourism. They also address concerns that are widely spread in Bulgarian society, and they take

[200] The sense of bitterness, despair, and hopelessness pervading these narratives shines through in many ethnographic accounts of life in Bulgaria; for example, Creed (2002b, 2010); Ghodsee (2009); see also Iveta's story in chapter 10.

part in multifarious discourses that negotiate, contest, and criticize the current social and economic order in their country.

In these discourses, an essentialized and often idealized image of life under socialism is contrasted to an equally essentialized image of postsocialist life. It is notable that these narratives and the critiques inherent in them revolve around a view of capitalism that in many ways resembles its description in socialist propaganda. That propaganda depicted societies where social relations were subordinate to economic success and regarded instrumentally while their inherent social and emotional qualities were devalued. Socialist propaganda dwelled on the exploitation of the toiling masses by rich capitalists who were depicted as nothing more than parasites feeding on the productive labor of others; it contrasted the excesses of the super-rich with the plight of the poor, the homeless, and the sick. It described the daily life of ordinary citizens in "capitalist countries" as a constant rat race, dominated by fear and insecurity. The citizens of these countries were represented as perpetually busy with making money which would be used to consume increasingly more status-enhancing goods. In such a society, there could be no morality, no solidarity[201], and no altruism. Socialist ideology further maintained that it was scientifically proven that the socioeconomic order of capitalism could not be sustained and would ultimately collapse.[202]

Although these narratives of capitalism describe it as characterized by social distance, personal relationships and "connections" contributed significantly to the success of the "robber barons" who made their fortunes during the privatization of the Bulgarian economy. Under the conditions of weak state regulation, a lack of enforcement, chaotic and contradictory legislation, and fragmented information flows, they utilized their personal networks and connections to channel information, capital, and assets to recognize and make use of opportunities for profiteering. Indeed, the importance of the personal networks of powerful individuals, coupled with the weakness of the state, is one of the main features of "predatory capitalism" as described by my Bulgarian interlocutors. They contend that in the chaotic 1990s, personal networks and connections were essential for the survival of ordinary citizens

[201] The much-touted solidarity of the working class had, in practice, turned out to be sadly deficient.

[202] Of course, most citizens of socialist countries were perfectly aware that propaganda was just that. Some responded by viewing the countries of the "class enemy" as virtual paradises of abundant consumer goods and freedom. The bitterness they felt after the collapse of socialism and the emergence of "predatory capitalism" which left them "the losers" of the transformation is perfectly captured in a joke about the socialist rulers and their propaganda that circulated in the former East Germany in the 1990s: "They had been lying to us for 40 years. How could we have known they told us the truth about capitalism, of all things?".

as well.[203] The narratives about "predatory capitalism" and "robber barons" thus contain an irony: while "predatory capitalism" is said to breed competitiveness and greed, and bring about a society neglecting social relations, it ultimately was the cunning utilization of networks and "connections" that brought the "robber barons" to their positions of power and bolstered the consolidation of the current social and economic order.

Conclusion

In order to explore hotel workers' views on service quality, it is necessary to understand the differences and similarities of city and resort hotels. Hotels in the city of Varna are, for the most part, much smaller than those in the resorts; they operate year-round; and, most importantly, they target various customer segments. They are not as dependent on foreign tour operators and charter flights to Varna as resort hotels and they are more flexible concerning target groups and pricing, but their operations are characterized by greater insecurity. Due to the absence of seasonality, they are attractive workplaces for hotel workers looking for a steady job and a career in tourism. However, the smaller city hotels cannot offer their workers many opportunities for advancement, a fact that contributes to labor turnover.

City and resort hotels tend to focus on different target groups, and they compete for customers only to a limited extent. Nevertheless, the employees of city-based hotels have strong opinions on the state of business in the resorts, and they do not hesitate to point out problematic developments in the hotel sector there. In many respects, their assessment of the state of tourism in the resorts corresponds to that of their resort-based colleagues; they, too, criticize urbanization, commercialization, and their ramifications. However, while hotel workers in the city argue that the seasonal operations, the shortage of qualified workers and, particularly, the huge size of resort hotels make it very difficult for the latter to provide good service, hotel workers in the resorts do not agree with that assessment, claiming instead that the longer stays of their guests make it easier for them to provide high-quality service.

While hotel workers in the city and in the resorts do not necessarily agree about the quality of service provision in both locations as well as in individual hotels, they share a notion of service quality that is based on "getting to know" their guests. Whereas textbooks and the academic literature view service quality as the result of an efficient and competent delivery

[203] On the importance of "connections" for the political and economic elites, see also Ganev (2007). On the role of personal networks for the survival of ordinary people, see Chavdarova (1996); Cellarius (2000, 2004); Chevalier (2001).

of services, and a form of friendliness and consideration that needs to be fairly standardized in order to cope with mass provision, my interlocutors viewed quality service more in line with private notions of hospitality. Hence, their criticism of the huge size of resort hotels is not just based on issues such as the urbanization of the resorts or the ruthless competition resulting from the soaring supply of hotel beds. It is also an expression of disquiet over the anonymity of these hotels and the standardization and depersonalization of interactions between hotel workers and guests which lead to service interactions being more aptly characterized by metaphors alluding to Fordist factory production instead of the host-guest relationship encompassed by concepts of private hospitality.

Claims concerning the changing service quality in the hotel sector thus contain an implicit criticism of the current manifestations of mass tourism in the Bulgarian coastal resorts, as well as of the modes of service provision prevailing under these conditions. When hotel managers describe service provision using terms such as “mass processing”, “mass production”, or “production line”, they criticize the subordination of human relationships to efficiency and profit. In their eyes, the economization, rationalization, and mechanization of hotels are at the heart of an incremental loss of social interactions characterized by human warmth, affection, and compassion. These symptoms of “predatory capitalism” occur in the tourism industry where the desire to provide hospitality is being replaced by a focus on making as much money as possible, and they are just as pervasive in wider society where fragmentation, stratification, competition, and social distance are growing.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that the hospitality provided in hotels in the Varna region cannot be dismissed as purely commercial and guided only by the profit motive. While profit certainly is a consideration for these hotel workers, they strive to introduce elements of private hospitality into host-guest interactions. The balance of these elements is constantly shifting and subject to contestation and negotiation. The tensions occurring at the intersections of commercial and private hospitality will become even more apparent in the next chapter which is focusing on the provision of commercial hospitality in the private home.

Chapter 9
Commercial Homes in Varna: "The Landladies Are Better Off"

In the previous chapter, I described the hotel sector in Varna and compared it with that in the resorts. However, hotels are just one type of commercial accommodation in the city of Varna. Another, very important type is private accommodation, that is private rooms for rent in the household of a local family or rented apartments in ordinary neighborhoods. These premises are different from hotel accommodation in several respects. They are owner-operated and often not professionally run, host-guest interactions are not standardized, and, most importantly, paying guests are accommodated in the providers' private home. Accommodation of this type falls into the category of "commercial homes" defined by Paul A. Lynch: "'Commercial home' refers to types of accommodation where visitors or guests pay to stay in private homes, where interaction takes place with a host and/or family usually living upon the premises and with whom public space is, to a degree, shared. 'Commercial home' therefore embraces a range of accommodation types including some (small) hotels, bed and breakfasts (B&Bs), and host family accommodation, which simultaneously span private, commercial, and social settings" (Lynch 2005: 534; see also the edited volume by Lynch, McIntosh and Tucker 2009a).

The most important distinguishing feature of commercial homes is thus the home setting. The home setting in turn entails a host of other issues, such as the host's construction of and emotional involvement with his home, notions of privacy and accessibility, tensions between commercial and private hospitality; issues concerning gender and gender roles also come to the fore in home-based accommodation. According to Paul A. Lynch and Doreen MacWhannell, commercial homes may be differentiated according to the degree of host-guest separation. A first type would be commercial homes where the owner lives on the premises, and space is shared by visitors and the owner and his family. The tourist accommodation in private rooms that I describe in this chapter belongs to this type. In the second type, the

owners live on the premises, but the space accessible to visitors is separated from family space. Examples would be small hotels and guest houses. And in the third type, the owner does not live on the premises, as in the case of second homes that are rented to tourists. The important characteristic here is "the presence of the host in absentia", signified by features such as furnishings, decorations, or other expressions of the host's personality. The private apartments I describe in this chapter belong to this type (Lynch and MacWhannell 2002: 104-05).

There is an additional continuum of commercial home accommodation. At one end of the spectrum, the commercial home acts as standard accommodation that appeals to budget-conscious tourists as a place to sleep and a base for their holiday. At the other end, the commercial home is an attraction in its own right and a central part of the tourist experience, such as in the case of luxurious retreats or romantic getaways (Moscardo 2009). As we shall see in this chapter, commercial homes in Varna tend towards the "standard accommodation" end of the continuum, although for some tourists, part of their attraction is the opportunity to get glimpses of the everyday lives of the locals.

In this chapter, I will continue the exploration of the intersections between commercial and private hospitality that I began in the previous chapter. While hotel employees attempt to introduce elements of private hospitality into a clearly commercial setting, the tensions between these two domains of hospitality become even more apparent in the context of hospitality provided in commercial homes. Conrad Lashley's model characterized the provision of hospitality in the private home as the defining feature of private hospitality, but the landladies (and landlords) described in this chapter are commercially motivated; they host strangers in their homes in order to make money. This leads to a number of tensions in host-guest interactions, including the issue of whether the two parties are defined as hosts and guests or as service providers and customers.

Thus, in the first part of this chapter, I will describe accommodation in private rooms with a focus on the tensions that arise when commercial hospitality is offered within a private home. Landladies and their visitors define their roles in various ways along the continuum of host/guest and service provider/customer and attempt to shape their interactions accordingly. In the second part of this chapter, I turn to accommodation in private apartments where the relationship between hosts and guests is more remote and the commercial aspects predominate. I will furthermore use the example of private apartments to illustrate how the providers have adapted to the presence of various target groups in Varna; how they have adjusted their business to the seasonality of tourism in the region; and how they have

developed various types of rental contracts suited to specific customer segments. In the last section, I will show that commercial homes constitute a sub-sector of the accommodation market in Varna that is particularly prone to operating semi-formally. I will describe the various strategies that landladies employ in order to remain undetected by the authorities, and how this, in turn, influences their interactions with their guests.

In order to illustrate many of the issues pertinent to the provision of accommodation in commercial homes, I first want to introduce Svetlana. Her story is fairly typical for a commercial home owner in Varna and it helps to illuminate the characteristics of many of these providers, their motivations, and the problems they face.

Svetlana's Story

Despite her age, no one who knew 89-year-old Svetlana Panayotova would have dared to call her frail or weak. Sure, her hearing was not what it used to be, her legs were giving her trouble, and she had an artificial hip, but nevertheless, Svetlana ruled her household with an iron hand. She completed her share of the housework, tended her small garden, and in fall, she could even be seen chopping wood for the winter months.

Before her retirement, Svetlana had been a *pletachka* in a small factory that produced traditional costumes and souvenirs for tourists – beautifully embroidered clothes, tablecloths, and shawls. While proudly showing me some of her work, she reminisced about her days as the head of a brigade of 120 craftswomen, some of whom still visited her. Svetlana had been widowed in her early forties; her husband died in 1960. She had a son in his late sixties who had left Bulgaria for good in the early 1990s, three granddaughters living close to their father in Austria and southern Germany, and four great-grandchildren. Her 62-year-old daughter Maria had stayed with her mother in Varna. Maria had never been married and had no children.

Svetlana and Maria lived in Varna's so-called Greek Neighborhood, one of the oldest parts of the city. The Roman archaeological remains as well as some of Varna's oldest churches are located in the vicinity, and other tourist sites as well as the beach and the seaside park are only a short walk away. Svetlana and her daughter inhabited the raised ground floor of a three-story house they shared with another family living on the floor above them. The house had been built jointly by the two families in the 1950s; originally, it had only two stories, but as both families grew, a third level was added and divided into two small apartments.

Svetlana's apartment consisted of a large living room crammed with furniture, memorabilia, and knick-knacks; an equally crammed dining room next to a small kitchen; a large room dominated by a king-size bed that

Svetlana used as her bedroom in the winter months; another room that used to be a living room but had been turned to use for storage; and a bathroom. Both the bedroom and the storage room looked out on a small garden in the backyard where Svetlana grew vegetables and herbs and tended her roses and fruit trees. The family's second apartment on the top floor of the building had two rooms with two beds and a wardrobe each, a kitchenette-cum-dining room, a very small bathroom, and a large terrace. It used to be Maria's apartment, but when Svetlana grew older and the need for an additional income became more pressing, Maria had moved back downstairs so that her own apartment could be rented out.

Svetlana often remarked how fortunate the two were to have a house in such a central location. With her meager pension, and her daughter unemployed and later a pensioner, they were able to earn some much needed money by renting out rooms. In the winter season, the apartment on the top floor was rented to students or workers on a monthly basis; in 2008, their lodgers paid 300 levs per month plus the costs of water and electricity. In June, with the start of the tourist season, the lodgers were required to vacate the apartment and the rooms were then rented out to tourists on a short-term basis. In 2008, tourists paid 12-15 levs per night per person, depending on the number of people, the length of their stay, and on whether or not they were known to the family. With the start of June, Svetlana also vacated her bedroom and moved to the living room, thus gaining an additional room in her apartment that could be rented out. When demand was great, she and Maria would both sleep on the couch in the dining room and rent out the living room as well. But that was usually a short-term measure – with the apartment full of strangers and Svetlana and Maria penned up in one room, tensions ran high, tempers flared, and everyone breathed a sigh of relief when Svetlana could move back into her own room again.

Over the years, Svetlana had built up a fairly stable customer base. Some of her guests she considered "old friends" who had been spending their summer vacations in Varna for many years. They were treated differently from mere "walk-ins" or unknown customers. Svetlana and Maria occasionally provided them with snacks or small treats such as fruits or flowers from the garden, and sometimes they sat with them in the evenings, sharing a meal and a bottle of wine. These guests often arrived with gifts for their two hosts, and upon their departure, they received gifts in return. In contrast, many of the "walk-in" customers were referred to Svetlana by an accommodation agency. Neighbors, friends, and acquaintances referred customers to her as well. When more tourists turned up on Svetlana's doorstep than she could possibly accommodate, she sent them to friends in the

neighborhood who also rented out rooms, and they did the same for her in return.

As renting rooms to tourists on a short-term basis was more profitable[204], the family's income was much higher in the summer than in the winter season. Maria once remarked that this was unfortunate as in wintertime, their living costs increased significantly. They spent much more on electricity in the winter because the house was not connected to the district heating system and they heated the apartment with electric heaters. Food prices increased and they consumed more hot water. That was on top of their regular expenses in which, due to their age, the costs of medical supplies and services featured prominently.

Both Svetlana and Maria considered themselves poor. To them, the most obvious and potently symbolic sign of their poverty was the lack of meat in their diet. Once, while eating a meal containing some cheap, bony meat, Svetlana suddenly looked up and proclaimed angrily: "We Bulgarians have become like dogs – only bones are left for us to eat". Nevertheless, they knew that others were much worse off, a point that was driven home by the impoverished pensioners that frequently roamed the neighborhood collecting cigarette butts or searching the garbage bins for empty bottles, cardboard, or scrap metal. At least when things got tough, and larger expenses could not be met, such as when Maria had to have major heart surgery or when some window panes in their apartment were broken during a hailstorm, they could rely on Svetlana's son to send money. Both women counted themselves fortunate to be able to rent out rooms, and both agreed that ultimately, they depended on tourism for their very survival.

Private Rooms: Negotiating Hospitality

Svetlana's story conveys several features that are typical of commercial accommodation in rented rooms. Many providers of rented rooms are female pensioners seeking to supplement their meager pensions;[205] guests are usually individual budget travelers; and landladies tend to work with accommodation agencies if they use intermediaries at all. Furthermore, the majority of commercial home owners in Varna are elderly, and among them are many widows. Widows find it especially hard to survive on their pension; providing tourist accommodation in their homes is one of the few avenues open to

[204] Even at 12 levs per person per night, Svetlana earned more than the monthly rent of 300 levs paid by lodgers if four tourists rented the upstairs apartment for only one week.

[205] Accordingly I will use the term "landladies" throughout this chapter, although there are also some landlords.

them for earning an additional income.[206] Age and gender are particularly prominent aspects of providing commercial accommodation in one's own home in the Varna region.

An employee working for an accommodation agency in the Varna train station estimated that 60-70 per cent of the providers affiliated with her agency were pensioners. This figure referred to all of the private housing that was offered for rental, including entire apartments; rooms rented singly within a private house, she added, were almost exclusively offered by pensioners. When I asked her why this was so, she explained that pensions in Bulgaria are low, and that many pensioners have to find ways to supplement them for survival. Indeed, pensioners were one of the groups most strongly affected by the cuts in public expenditures and the dismantling of the socialist welfare system. In the 1990s, pensions rapidly lost their real value as the costs for necessities like water, electricity, food, and medical care skyrocketed. After the economic and political stabilization of the country, pensions have gradually risen, but not sufficiently to meet the continued rise in living costs.[207]

Pensioners thus constitute one of the poorest segments of Bulgarian urban society and many are forced to seek an additional income. This may take various forms: in Varna, pensioners collect empty bottles, cardboard, and scrap metal to sell at recycling collection points; they take jobs as vendors in the city's open-air markets, as library assistants, or as night guards; they produce and sell handicrafts and clothes, homemade preserves and alcohol, or fruits, vegetables, and flowers; or they rent out accommodation. Many also receive remittances from family members working abroad. Pensioners who do not have an opportunity to supplement their income resort to cutting their expenditures wherever they can. Many attempt to save on the costs of food by growing fruits and vegetables in their gardens and backyards, by raising chickens, by making preserves for the winter, and by restricting the amounts of more costly foods (such as meat, milk, or eggs) in

[206] On average, Bulgarian women receive lower pensions than men. Those receiving pensions in the early 2000s had spent most of their working lives under socialism when women tended to hold jobs in low-paid sectors such as the service industries. Furthermore, even when doing the same jobs as men, women received lower salaries. Since the pensions are based on these salaries, women tend to be among the "poorer" pensioners. See Pascall and Manning (2000); Asenova and McKinnon (2007). On the Bulgarian pension system more generally, see Slavchev (2004); Abadjiev (2006). Widows receive only a percentage (about 20 per cent) of their spouse's pension in addition to their own.

[207] The purchasing power of Bulgarian pensions decreased an average of 55 per cent in the 1990s (Asenova and McKinnon 2007), but they were still important as one of the few regular sources of cash, particularly in rural areas where barter had become a predominant form of exchange (Cellarius 2000; Chevalier 2001).

their diets. Others reduce their expenditures on electricity and water (especially in the winter months) by washing in the hot water springs near the beach; by spending the winter days in public buildings such as the library; or by turning off the heat or hot water in their apartments. They limit their use of the telephone to emergencies, and some have disconnected their phones because they cannot afford the standing charge. Many choose between spending their limited funds on medical care, food, or adequate heating and hot water in the winter.[208]

One item absent from the budgets of most pensioners is rent. Bulgaria is a "super home ownership state" with home ownership rates exceeding 90 per cent (Stephens 2005).[209] Home ownership, like property ownership more generally, is highly valued and most young Bulgarian families aspire to it.[210] In a city like Varna that experiences a constant influx of tourists and of temporary and permanent migrants, a house or apartment can be a valuable asset that offers its owners the opportunity to rent out accommodation to tourists or to the newcomers. The owner of an accommodation agency put this most succinctly when she stated: "The Bulgarians have property! They do not have money; they have property! There are people with two, three, even four apartments in this city". Even families that do not own a second home may rent out rooms in their primary residence. As in the case of Svetlana's bedroom and her living room, these rooms are often used by members of the household in the off-season, and vacated with the start of the tourist season. Indeed, some families even move temporarily into their basement and rent out their bedrooms and living rooms.[211]

Providing commercial accommodation is a highly gendered activity in Varna: most of the day-to-day work associated with renting out rooms or apartments is done by women. On the one hand, the greater role played by women in providing commercial accommodation arises from the gendered nature of housework. Especially among elderly Varnentsi, housework is considered a female domain. The numerous chores that routinely need to be done such as cleaning, washing, and tidying play a major role in the accommodation business as well. Even where men are present in a household, it

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[208] Asenova and McKinnon (2007) enumerate three coping strategies Bulgarian pensioners use to make their pensions stretch further: living in multigenerational households, complementing pension income with earnings from small jobs, and migrating from urban to rural areas.

[209] While in 1985, more than 80 per cent of housing in Bulgaria was privately owned, the home ownership rate increased further due to the privatization process. As a result, in 2005, 95.6 per cent of housing in the country was owner-occupied (Tsenkova 2009).

[210] See also chapter 10.

[211] Similar strategies have been reported from other tourist destinations; see Mendonsa (1983).

appears "natural" that a woman should take up the additional chores involved in running a commercial home.[212] Housework also has an important part in the construction and performance of a dwelling as "home" and the provision of hospitality to guests. Many elderly women talked with me about their aspirations of being a good homemaker. They viewed it as a woman's responsibility to create a home that is warm, cozy, and welcoming to others. "Being a good host" also includes providing one's guests with food and beverages whose preparation is, again, viewed as housework and a female task. Thus, women play an important role as hosts; it is one of their responsibilities to make visitors feel welcome and offer them hospitality, and in doing so, they interact closely with the people staying in their homes (cf. Ireland 1993, 2004; Drake and Gurney 2002; Di Domenico 2008). At the same time, the expectations associated with the provision of private hospitality can be a considerable burden for the women of a household. Among Bulgarians, Varna is a popular holiday destination, and those who cannot afford commercial accommodation will often stay with relatives in the city for extended periods of time. For their hosts, who are obliged to make them feel welcome and extend them full hospitality, this means a lot of hard work. The workload associated with accommodating paying guests, on the other hand, is more moderate, as tourists do not expect to be entertained or provided with meals. This explains why sometimes women may prefer hosting tourists to hosting their kin, even though it is rarely acknowledged as openly as by Maria:

> Here in Varna, many people are renting rooms or apartments to tourists. One of the reasons is that among Bulgarians, Varna is a very popular summer destination. Everybody who is living here has to be prepared for their family and friends to visit and stay with them in the summer months, whether you want that or not. You cannot say "No!". And of course you have to extend them full hospitality: you have to prepare their meals, clean up after them, show them around, spend time with them, and generally be a good host. You have to look after them non-stop! It is much easier to host tourists. They do their own thing, they do not cause as much work, and you do not have to look after them all the time. And of course, they pay you, so you can earn some money! That is much better! And [having tourists in the house] is the only excuse that your own friends and family will accept for not hosting them.

Being hospitable is an important social norm; if kin want to come for a visit, no matter how extended, they cannot easily be turned away. However, under

[212] For overviews of the literature on gender and the home, see Bowlby, Gregory and McKie (1997); Gurney (1997); Mallett (2004).

the still precarious economic conditions prevailing in Bulgaria, the need to procure an income in order to secure one's livelihood is understood to take precedence. After all, people who can barely sustain themselves are hardly in a position to offer full hospitality to others. Tourists are a welcome source of income for landladies who have few alternative options; coincidentally, they may sometimes provide an acceptable excuse for women who are less than enthusiastic at the prospect of being burdened with the hard work associated with hosting entire families for an extended summer vacation. At the same time, this is yet another example of the tensions and even conflicts that may occur at the intersections of private and commercial hospitality.

The customers that are targeted by landladies offering commercial accommodation in their private home are primarily individual budget travelers. For these tourists, renting a private room for a few nights is attractive because it is much cheaper than staying in a hotel. Some tourists, particularly young travelers who want to get to know the locals and gain an insight into their lives, prefer private accommodation precisely because they must share accommodation space with its owners. Such tourists are often young independent travelers from western European countries who want to experience "the real eastern Europe". It seems, however, that this segment has waned in recent years. I was told that in the 1990s, when there were no budget hotels in Varna, the number of young western European budget travelers who stayed in private rooms was much larger. These backpackers saw their trips as an adventure and wanted to experience the "authentic Bulgaria" while travelling on a tight budget. They were neither interested in nor could they afford accommodation in the resort hotels. But with the proliferation of budget hotels in Varna and the opening of guesthouses specifically geared towards backpackers, fewer western European travelers now stay in private rooms.

Today, young individual travelers from eastern European countries like the Czech Republic, Poland, or Slovakia choose accommodation in private rooms because it is the cheapest option available. Other tourists have been coming to Varna and staying in private rooms for many years. They are regular guests who often have close ties with the family with whom they stay. Svetlana, for example, regularly rented out rooms to middle-aged couples from Russia, the Czech Republic, or Poland who had been vacationing in Varna since the 1980s and whom she regarded as friends. Two of these couples were even sending their teenage daughters on holidays in Varna, arguing that it was cheaper than a vacation elsewhere, and they could be sure that the hosts would care for the girls and ensure their safety.[213]

[213] With the new visa requirements for Russian citizens following Bulgaria's EU membership, the number of Russian guests has seen a noticeable decline.

In short, most of the tourists staying in private rooms are not affluent. Their length of stay varies according to the kind of vacation they have planned. The young ones are often travelling around Bulgaria or south-eastern Europe, and they usually stay for fewer than three nights. They tend to travel by bus, train, or car, and their schedule is flexible. If they like Varna, they might stay longer than originally planned, but if it does not meet their expectations, they might also leave sooner for more interesting places. The older, regular guests often arrive in Varna specifically for a beach vacation. They spend most of their days on the beach, enjoy the nightlife in the evenings, and occasionally go on day trips to places of interest along the coast. They usually arrive by plane, and since they use charter flights, they tend to stay for either one or two weeks.

Regular guests often keep in touch with their Bulgarian hosts between visits. The guests may send their hosts cards on Christmas or Easter. Both sides describe their relationship as "friendship", stressing its affective and emotional content. They highlight examples of reciprocity and mutuality inherent within the relationship while de-emphasizing its commercial aspects. These guests do not use intermediaries for planning their stay in Varna; they simply call their hosts, ask whether a room will be free and if so, relay the dates of their arrival and departure. They may be confident of getting a room. Landladies prefer known guests as they pose less risk; known guests are less likely to misbehave or cause trouble for the host family. They are also more reliable; while walk-ins might change their mind about the length of their stay or even decide to find other accommodation after taking a look at the room, regular guests know exactly what to expect, and are unlikely to change their plans. Hence, the host family will do anything in its power to make sure a room is available for them upon arrival, even if that includes turning away walk-in customers. If they have several rooms to rent out, the regular guests are likely to receive the best ones.[214]

Walk-ins, by contrast, usually arrive via an intermediary. In Varna, the providers of private accommodation do not equip their houses with signs advertising rooms for rent. Thus, it is unlikely that a tourist wandering the city would succeed in finding accommodation on his own.[215] Instead, the

[214] In his study of the impacts of tourism on an English rural community, Michael Ireland (1993, 2004) described host-guest relationships before the Second World War as characterized by mutuality and spatial proximity. He called this "mutual adoption". Stringer (1981) and Pearce (1990) also mentioned the development of genuine friendships between hosts and guests in the commercial rental of home accommodation.

[215] Since the city is crowded with tourists in the summer season, foreigners wandering around in the central neighborhoods are likely to be ignored, particularly since everyone will assume that they are staying in a resort hotel. Indeed, were a tourist to ask local passers-by on the street to direct him to some accommodation, he would probably be sent to the nearest hotel.

families renting out private rooms usually work with an accommodation agency. The agencies charge a 20-30 per cent commission for their services which is paid entirely by the tourist. Landladies may use this fact in attempting to turn walk-ins into regulars. When a pleasant guest indicates that he may return to Varna for another visit, a landlady may give him her telephone number with instructions to call her directly before the next visit. In this way, the middleman is removed. Both tourist and provider benefit from such direct contact; the tourist pays less, and the landlady ties the tourist to herself, gaining a new regular customer. Only the accommodation agency suffers a loss.

Accommodation providers also receive customers through word of mouth or via others in the neighborhood. The regular guests of a family might recommend their hosts to other friends and relatives, and they might even act as a sort of intermediary by calling ahead and introducing the new customers to the host family. Others in the neighborhood or local friends and acquaintances might also refer tourists to a landlady. As mentioned in Svetlana's story, neighbors who also rented rooms would refer tourists to her if they were fully booked, and Svetlana would do the same for these neighbors. Another way to gain new customers is for landladies to go to the bus and train stations, and to directly approach the arriving travelers. However, this strategy appears to be not particularly successful because, on the one hand, the landladies' foreign language skills are rather limited, and on the other hand, tourists seem to be wary of strangers approaching them and trying to offer them a room.[216]

One form of advertising that is conspicuously absent among those who rent out private rooms is advertising on the internet. While all accommodation agencies in the city have an internet presence, the providers themselves tend to be absent from the web. This is due to the computer illiteracy of many of these elderly people – they do not know how to use a computer; they do not own one; nor are they familiar with the intricacies of advertising. The perceived dominance of English as the language of computing and the internet also dissuades many of those who rent rooms from even attempting to place online ads. The majority of pensioners who offer private accommodation have only limited foreign language skills. Some speak Russian very well, and most are able to get by and at least make themselves understood when talking about basic things to people who speak other Slavic languages

[216] However, while touting is nowadays seen as an unusual (and suspect) measure by accommodation providers in Varna, I was told that it was more widespread in the 1990s when the economic situation was much more dire and more commercial home owners were desperate to find customers.

such as Polish, Czech, or Slovak, but they tend not to speak English or other languages.

Apart from these groups of providers, customers, and intermediaries, commercial tourist accommodation has another distinguishing feature that is most visible in the rental of private rooms. For the duration of their stay, the tourists are accommodated in the home of the host family. The landladies use their home as a business site, allowing complete strangers into their most private domain. As a result, there is a tension between the private aspects of the home as the site of family life and intimacy, and its use for commercial purposes that necessitates the admission of strangers with whom ties have not (yet) been established. Each time a new guest arrives, a new balance between the commercial and private domains of hospitality has to be negotiated, affecting the interactions between the landladies, their families (if present), and the tourists. At the same time, there are no predetermined rules governing these interactions or the use of space inside the home by both the host family and the tourists.[217] On the contrary, the different cultural backgrounds of the hosts and their foreign guests impede the recourse to a shared definition of the situation and to norms and rules of conduct both parties should follow. Such rules have to be negotiated with each new guest who arrives on the landlady's doorstep.

Negotiations between host and guest over the rules of hospitality are hampered by a number of factors. First, communication between landladies and tourists is often impeded by a language barrier. Whereas the landladies' knowledge of Bulgarian and, perhaps, Russian enables them to have at least basic conversations with guests speaking Slavic languages, communication breaks down quickly when it comes to more complex issues. It is even more difficult with guests speaking other languages. Here, most landladies have to resort to sign and body language, increasing the likelihood of misunderstandings.[218] The language barrier complicates the negotiation of rules for both the landladies and the tourists. At the same time, however, negotiations are often hampered by contrasting definitions of the situation as well. Tourists, especially walk-ins staying for a short time, tend to emphasize its commercial aspects; as they see it, they have paid for a room and thus have acquired the

[217] A number of researchers have noted the tensions arising from the commercial accommodation of strangers in private homes. See, for example, Sweeney and Lynch (2007); Benmore (2009); McIntosh and Harris (2009).

[218] Communication with walk-ins who stay only for a short time tends to be limited to greetings and the exchange of factual information and requests (like guests requesting an additional pillow or some dishes). In their interactions with customers who do not speak a Slavic language, some landladies resort to a form of baby-talk, speaking Bulgarian slowly and loudly, carefully enunciating each word and accompanying it with gestures in the hopes of being understood.

right to use it as they see fit. This concerns such issues as smoking in the room, hanging wet clothes to dry, inviting guests, and so on. From the perspective of the landlady, however, that room is part of her home; what tourists do in it concerns her as well. Thus, in non-smoking households the landlady expects her guests not to smoke in the apartment. Most landladies want guests to hang their clothes outside for drying, and they expect to be notified before additional strangers enter their home. But these expectations are not always met and tensions may result, as the following excerpt from my fieldnotes in July 2007 demonstrates:

> Svetlana and Maria have some Czech guests at the moment, and they do not seem very happy with them. The three young men are apparently part of a larger group whose other members are also staying in private rooms in the neighborhood. Svetlana told me they spent the last night drinking with their friends, with everybody being in high spirits and making lots of noise. When Svetlana knocked on their door at three o'clock in the morning to ask them to keep the noise down because others in the house have a job and need their sleep, she found them smoking in the room. She was outraged, complaining that the smell would linger for ages, but she did not dare to tell them to smoke outside. They also insist on using the kitchen – Maria made lots of jokes about men doing the cooking, but she resents having to share the kitchen, complaining about "their foreign food" that "looks and smells unpleasant". Besides, they generally seem to move about the apartment shirtless which makes Svetlana and Maria feel awkward. Maria commented it is obvious they are "uncultured" and do not know how to behave. To top it all off, they have started bringing their friends to their room. Maria is getting really nervous – she dislikes having so many strangers in the house, all of them men. She told me she had started locking her room at night because you never know… . Everybody is looking forward to their departure and to having some peace and quiet again.

Landladies expect tourists to follow the rules applicable to being a guest in another's home, but of course, the foreign tourists are often not familiar with them. To name just one example: In Bulgaria, one takes off one's shoes upon entering a private home, whereas many tourists find it perfectly acceptable to walk around the house in their street shoes. Landladies resent this practice as "dirty" and "disgusting" because it carries dirt from the streets into their home.

As in the extract cited above, a further source of tensions concerns tourists' use of space in the family home. Are they, for example, allowed to use the kitchen? Are they welcome to enter the family's room? Is it okay for

them to wander through the hall clad in nothing more than a towel after having had a shower? Even when landladies employ subtle signs indicating spaces that they consider as private and off-limits to visitors, or practices they see as unacceptable, because of their different cultural backgrounds and expectations, there is no guarantee the tourists will actually be able to decipher these clues.

Tourist accommodation in private homes thus entails for both sides vast areas of uncertainty and multiple sources of tension and potential conflicts. For the landladies, each new guest necessitates a new negotiation of the rules, but these negotiations are hampered by language and cultural barriers. Furthermore, there is a distinct imbalance of power between the two parties that is rooted in the landladies' financial and economic situation. The landladies need any customer they can get because they need the money they earn from the tourists to ensure their own survival. To them, a tourist staying with them for two weeks might translate into the ability to heat their apartment in one of the cold winter months or to buy the medicines they need. Mindful of that, landladies often do not dare enforce their rules. They might try to subtly communicate their disapproval of some tourist practices, but these attempts often fail, either because of miscommunication or because tourists choose to ignore them. Although landladies often complain bitterly about the behavior of tourists, they will rarely confront their guests. In fact, they will tolerate many forms of behavior they perceive as transgressive for fear of losing customers. This, however, does not mean that the landladies are entirely devoid of power. Theirs is the power to make the tourists feel welcome in their homes; as one tourist said, "they can make or break your holiday". But in contrast to the landladies, the tourists always have an exit option – if they are not happy with an arrangement, they can simply move elsewhere.[219]

The relationship between landladies and walk-in guests who stay only for a short time is predominantly commercial. Even though landladies expect walk-ins to show them some courtesy, and behave as guests should, they usually do not invite them to take part in their everyday activities, attempt to draw them into the family's activities, or even to engage them in conversa-

[219] Some researchers have addressed the issue of power in host-guest encounters in commercial homes. Di Domenico and Lynch (2007a), for example, focus on the power conferred to the host by his ownership of the commercial home and the resulting authority regarding matters of access and behavioral conduct. Yet at the same time, hosts must also meet paying guests' desires and demands and thus subordinate themselves to their guests' wishes. However, the power imbalance resulting from hosts' dependency on the income earned by running a commercial home is rarely mentioned in the literature. This is probably due to the fact that the commercial home owners described there tend to be lifestyle entrepreneurs for whom money is only one among several motivators.

tions that go beyond basic courtesy. In other words, they do not offer private hospitality. Likewise, these tourists usually have neither the time nor the interest to intensify their relations with the landladies; they mostly see them as providers of cheap and convenient accommodation, and expect them to provide basic amenities, make them feel welcome, and treat them amiably. Even tourists who hope to gain some insight into local everyday life and, perhaps, to forge a closer relationship with their hosts are hampered by the language barrier, the shortness of their stay and, frequently, by the disinterest of their landladies.

This situation changes, however, for regular tourists, for those who stay for a longer period of time, and for those who indicate that they will return for another visit. Landladies often make an active effort to cultivate regular long-term visitors, particularly if they perceive the individual as agreeable, well-mannered, well-behaved, considerate, and friendly.[220] Landladies might signal their willingness to initiate a more personal relationship by beginning to treat such persons not as customers, but as guests. In these cases, they might start offering private hospitality by initiating longer conversations; offering sweets, fruits, or snacks; inviting the guests into the family room; or inviting them to share meals. If the tourist accepts these offers and responds in kind, the focus of the relationship gradually shifts from the predominantly commercial into the realm of private hospitality; the tourist will not be considered and treated as a customer any more, but as a guest or even friend. The relations between landladies and regular guests, in particular, are characterized by friendship and affection. This is expressed by a blurring of spatial boundaries (e.g. when regular guests are welcome to the landlady's private rooms), the sharing of meals and information about each other's lives, and by the exchange of gifts. But while both parties emphasize their friendship and affective ties, the commercial aspect of their relationship is still present; even though they get the best rooms, and a cheaper rate than walk-ins, regular guests are still expected to pay for their accommodation.

However, the landladies and their regular guests actively downplay the commercial aspects of their relationship, and both sides are distinctly uncomfortable discussing them. When a visit by some regular guests drew near, Svetlana and Maria, for example, talked about how much they looked forward to the visit; how the couple had been coming to stay with them for many years; how much they liked them; and how they had become true friends over the years. When I asked whether their friends would pay for the room in which they would stay, both Svetlana and Maria explained at great

[220] Behaviors and attributes such as these were often summarized by the term "cultured" (*kulturen*). Individual tourists as well as entire nations (or at least national stereotypes) were evaluated according to their level of "culturedness" by the landladies.

length that they depended on the money they earned from renting out rooms for their livelihood and that, much as they would love to let "friends" stay for free, they simply could not afford it. Both agreed that discussing the room rates with friends was extremely awkward, particularly when they had had to increase their rates. Their regulars, likewise, tried to avoid such discussions; since the hosts were their friends, they could not attempt to drive a hard bargain nor did they feel that they had an exit option.

The use of the exit option by tourists is another instance where the tensions between commercial and private hospitality are brought to the surface. It occurs mostly with walk-ins sent by an accommodation agency: upon seeing the rooms, tourists may dislike them or decide that they are overpriced. In other cases, tourists who originally wanted to stay for a longer period of time decide after staying for one night that they are not happy with the room or the family providing it, and would rather look for accommodation elsewhere. Most tourists decline the rooms in very polite terms, attempting to find a justification that has nothing to do with the quality of the room, and avoiding any insinuation that it is not up to their standards, but the rejection stings nevertheless. It does not matter how the tourists justify it, whether they explain that it is too expensive and they cannot afford it, mention that it is in an inconvenient location, or remark that the surroundings are too noisy; the landladies tend to interpret it is a rejection of them personally, and of their qualities as homemakers. In late August 2005, I recorded such an event in my fieldnotes:

> When I left for Golden Sands this morning, I ran into Maria who told me they had received a call from the accommodation agency. A young Russian couple would arrive shortly – they wanted to stay for four nights and since all the other rooms were taken, Svetlana had planned to put them into the sitting room. When I returned, Svetlana grabbed me as soon as she saw me, and asked me urgently what I thought of their living room. At first, I was a bit confused because I had no idea what she was getting at, but I told her I thought the living room was very nice, very homey, and comfortable. Svetlana dragged me off to Maria and triumphantly reported what I had said. She then told me in great detail how the Russians had arrived, taken a look at the room, and then decided to look for accommodation elsewhere, saying it was too expensive for them. Svetlana was extremely agitated; the whole episode seemed to have really upset her. She scornfully said if the Russians wanted luxurious accommodation they should have gone to a hotel, and besides, what did they mean – too expensive? They would not be able to find anything cheaper. But she also kept asking me what I thought about the room, was it not

> nice with its two comfortable couches, a television, and a radio? Was it not a good place to spend one's vacation? It was quite obvious that she took the Russians' refusal of the room as a personal affront, as an indication that her living room somehow was not good enough.

These elderly ladies have very clear notions of the gendered nature of housework, and they consider it the duty of the housewife to create a cozy home where guests and visitors would feel welcome and comfortable. From their perspective, poverty might prevent them from buying new furniture, installing air conditioning, or equipping their home with the latest electrical appliances[221], but it does not mean their home cannot be spotlessly clean, the furniture well cared for, and the appliances well-maintained. Strategically placed knickknacks, doilies, decorative tablecloths, photographs, reproductions of works of art, and bunches of flowers contribute to the homey ambience, and being greeted with a warm smile and offers of a coffee and some cookies or a small snack should make visitors feel welcome. Thus, when tourists choose not to stay after viewing the accommodations, landladies interpret the refusal as a failure of their own efforts in house-making. A potential customer who leaves signifies more than the failure of a commercial transaction on the accommodation market; it also connotes a rejection of a landlady's hospitality, her self, and her home. If a tourist leaves, then the landlady has failed to make him feel welcome or she has failed to create a welcoming and cozy home. The tourists, on the other hand, tend to focus on the commercial aspect of the transaction: they were offered a service or product and refused it because it did not meet their requirements or because they felt it was overpriced. Hence, they refuse the transaction and leave to look for a better offer elsewhere.[222]

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[221] However, they might also be reluctant to replace old furniture or appliances for other reasons. One summer, for example, when Svetlana's granddaughters came for a visit, they were appalled at the old couch their granny was sleeping on, and offered to buy her a new one. Svetlana kept evading the issue and later, she pulled me aside and confided that although she was proud of her granddaughters' kindness and generosity, she found the old couch comfortable and besides, she was used to it, and simply could not bear to throw it out while it was still serviceable. In their study of a Russian flea market, Pachenkow and Berman (2007) report a similar reluctance among pensioners operating as sellers to throw away things that were "almost new" or "could be used again". They interpret it as a coping strategy developed to deal with a shortage of goods that has been adapted to deal with a shortage of money. A similar argument could be made for the elderly landladies in Varna: they own used, but still serviceable furniture and appliances, why not furnish a room with them that may then be rented out and thus generate an income?

[222] However, tourists' stress on politeness when rejecting a room and their efforts to find a justification that does not personally implicate the landladies suggest that most of them are not entirely unaware of the private implications of refusal, even though they foreground the commercial aspects of the transaction.

Incidents such as these demonstrate the precarious and constantly shifting balance between the elements of both private and commercial hospitality inherent in tourist accommodation in private homes. They are also a testament to the constant efforts of both tourists and accommodation providers to negotiate, assert, and contest various interpretations of that balance, and to define the type of hospitality they are performing. In the next section, I will describe commercial accommodation in private apartments where these issues are not as salient due to the greater spatial distance of commercial home owners and their guests.

Private Apartments: Seasonality and Diversification

Private apartments in the city of Varna that are available to tourists are mostly owned and rented out by local families.[223] While the providers are people of all ages and from all walks of life, there are nevertheless some patterns. Like Svetlana, a significant number of the owners are elderly. As I have described above, pensioners have a low income and renting out an apartment is a welcome and relatively easy way to earn some additional money. Many pensioners use the bulk of the money they earn from rentals to cover their own living costs; usually, only a small part of it is re-invested in the apartment. As a result, the apartments offered by pensioners tend to be at the lower end of the market; they are often located in older buildings and in many cases they are equipped with old or previously used furniture and appliances.

A second group of providers consists of middle-aged people like Zlatko, the lifeguard and iconographer whose story I told in chapter 2. These people came by their second apartments in various ways: they might have inherited them; they might have bought them in the 1990s; or it might be the apartment they used to live in before they decided to acquire a new one. Like the pensioners, they do not to view a second apartment as a speculative investment to be subsequently re-sold for a profit. Instead, they consider it a long-term investment, something they could, perhaps, pass on to their children when they start their own families, and in the meantime, it earns them some additional money.

The apartments offered by such middle-aged providers vary widely with respect to their location, their furnishing and their target groups. Some are located in neighborhoods consisting of pre-fabricated high-rise buildings,

[223] Private apartments that are available to tourists include short- to medium-term rental agreements (up to one year) and full furnishing. However, apartment owners have other options for finding lessors; there are also many apartments that are rented unfurnished and on long-term leases to (Bulgarian) individuals or families living in Varna who are not (yet) able to buy their own home in the city. These arrangements are addressed in chapter 10.

the so-called blocks. They are less attractive to tourists because they invoke cliches of drab and concrete socialist housing and because they are often found at a distance from the city center. Others are located in new buildings constructed after 1990 in the city's central neighborhoods. Particularly those that are equipped with new furniture and appliances are very attractive to tourists and fetch high rates. Still others are found in older buildings in the center. Generally, it might be said that the apartments offered by these providers tend to cover the low and medium segments of the market.

Finally, a third group of providers are Bulgarians who have acquired property with the primary goal of renting it out. Some of these owners also expect to re-sell the apartment after a few years when housing prices increase. These providers are often more affluent; they are entrepreneurs, business owners, or people who have an above-average income from other sources, and want to diversify their businesses or invest part of their money in a relatively safe venture. Their apartments are usually well-appointed, and they tend to be found in new buildings in or near the city center. For these owners, the provision of accommodation is not just a convenient way to earn some additional income, but a business in and of itself. They often own several apartments, and these tend to be more professionally run than those of the other groups. Due to their professional management, prime location, and their new and high-quality furnishings, these so-called luxury apartments cover the highest segment of the market.

Just as there is a variety of providers of rental apartments, there are also various groups of customers with their respective seasons. Like Svetlana, providers differentiate between a summer season in June-September and a winter season lasting from October/November – May/June. In the summer season, tourists are the main target group, and in the winter season, students are the main customer segment. In the summer season, landladies prefer international tourists as customers because they rent by the night and they pay the highest rates. The room rates vary according to the location, the quality of the furnishings, and the size of the apartment. As Svetlana does, other providers also adjust their rates according to a variety of factors. Tourists who are perceived as affluent might be quoted higher rates, while regulars receive slightly lower rates; longer stays might be discounted slightly below the nightly rate. Agencies that help place tourists with landladies follow similar guidelines in adjusting their price quotations, often calling a prospective landlady to negotiate the rates by telephone before concluding a placement.

International tourists rent apartments for various reasons. Some of them arrive by charter flight and want to spend time on the beach as well as sightseeing while avoiding the crowded resorts. Others are travelling a

circuit through Bulgaris, and they want to stay in a convenient location while seeing the sites in Varna. Renting an apartment is an attractive option for larger groups such as families with children or groups of friends travelling together because it is often cheaper than hotel accommodation, allows self-catering, and permits the group to stay together.

In Varna, private apartments are usually rented by travelers who are not on package tours and need to make their own arrangements. Indeed, a feature attracting tourists to this type of accommodation is the freedom it offers compared to a hotel. Furthermore, staying in a private apartment in the city provides foreign tourists with opportunities to interact with the locals and gain insights into their everyday lives. While in the resorts, the tourists are mostly surrounded by other foreign tourists and the only locals they might meet are resort workers. In contrast, rental apartments in Varna are located in ordinary neighborhoods: the people that tourists see are going about their everyday lives; and the grocery stores, shops, restaurants, and bars cater to. By staying in a city apartment, foreign tourists have greater opportunities to meet the locals, but they also have the option of staying among themselves; unlike in accommodation in a private room where contact with the landlady and her family cannot be avoided, tourists who stay in apartments may choose when and how to interact with the Varnentsi.

Another important target group of private apartments in the summer season are domestic tourists. Many of them stay with friends and relatives, but for those who do not have this opportunity, renting an apartment is often the most attractive option. The reasons are similar to those of international tourists: private apartments are affordable, particularly for larger families or groups of people travelling together; they allow self-catering; and they provide more privacy than a rented room. Many domestic tourists prefer holiday accommodation outside the large resorts that are dominated by foreigners. Private apartments in Varna offer that as well as convenient access to the city with its beaches and its opportunities for shopping and entertainment. This makes them particularly attractive to Bulgarians from rural areas or small towns and for groups of young people.[224] In the past few years, accommodation providers in Varna have observed a growing affluence among domestic tourists. Valentina, a 20-year-old employee of an accommodation agency, noted, "One trend right now is that the Bulgarians are willing to pay a little more to make the most of their holiday. In the past, they mostly sought cheap accommodation. But now they are looking for

[224] Private rooms or apartments may also be rented for a few days by Bulgarians staying in Varna on other business, such as people caring for a hospitalized relative, parents accompanying future students while they take university entrance exams, house-hunters, or people who have come for a long shopping trip.

something more comfortable and convenient. They save throughout the year, knowing that in the summer, they will go to the sea. As it is in Europe, you know? But here in Bulgaria it has just started". The increased affluence of domestic tourists has contributed to a growing demand for mid-market and upmarket apartments, which in turn has motivated many commercial home owners to invest some of their income into upgrading the rooms and apartments they offer.

A third group that rents private apartments in the summer season consists of resort workers who normally live elsewhere in Bulgaria. Some of these workers get free accommodation at the hotels or restaurants where they work. Others, like Radostina's father whose story I told in chapter 4, find accommodation in Varna for the season. Resort workers prefer cheap accommodation, thus they often rent apartments in locations that are not attractive to tourists. They work long hours and do not have much free time; they use the apartment mainly as a place to sleep, hence its location is not overly important to them as long as it is easily accessible by public transport. Resort workers rent their apartments either for the entire season or for the peak season only. Often, relatives, friends, or colleagues will share an apartment, paying an equal share of the costs. They will attempt to negotiate an agreement with the owner that allows them to pay monthly rates instead of paying per night as is standard procedure for tourists. In these cases, their contracts are very similar to those of students in the winter season.

Nevertheless, in the summer season tourists are the most important target group for the providers of commercial accommodation in Varna. At the end of the tourist season in September/October, accommodation providers turn to targeting new groups of customers, including students, employees of national and international companies, and business travelers.

Varna is home to several prestigious universities that attract students from all over Bulgaria. These students need a place to stay, and private apartments are the most affordable option. Often, friends or relatives rent an apartment together, sharing the rooms and the costs like Maya, whose story I told in chapter 2. Apartments in locations that are not attractive to tourists are rented out to students for the entire year. The owners of apartments in central locations, however, prefer renting to tourists in the summer break when many students return to their hometowns or villages. The contract between the owner and the students is a matter of individual negotiation. Usually, students have long-term contracts, effective from October to May or June. The number of tourists arriving in Varna and the strength of demand for private apartments determine when they move out. When demand is low, they might well stay to the middle or even end of June. When demand is

high, however, they may be asked to move out earlier to make room for the more affluent tourists.

Students generally prefer apartments located in the vicinity of their university or at least with good public transport connections. Since many of them do not have a steady income and do not wish to overly strain their family's finances, they also seek something affordable. Most of them do not mind staying in a place with old and used furniture, dated installations or a small bathroom, and like Maya, some of them will even tolerate the lack of a kitchen. Hence, they rent apartments at the lower to medium-end of the market. They pay their rent by the month, with rents in 2008 averaging 300-450 levs for a two-bedroom apartment, plus utility costs. The rent depends on the apartment's location, its furnishings, the strength of demand, and the negotiating skills of the students. Owners make concessions to people they know, and students who stay with the same landlady for a number of years or have previously known her through family or other connections will often pay a lower rent.

Generally, students attempt to find a reliable landlady offering a nice and affordable apartment in a convenient location. Landladies prefer tenants who can be relied on to pay the rent on time; do not damage the furnishings; keep the apartment clean; get along with the neighbors; and promptly vacate the apartment at the agreed time.[225] If the students are happy with their apartment, they will attempt to establish a closer relationship with their landlady in the hopes of continuing the arrangement the following year. Landladies, too, attempt to tie students who they find agreeable to themselves. In this way, students may become regulars who rent the same apartment each winter season. Such an arrangement is beneficial to both parties since the students get an affordable place to stay and the landlady gains a regular income. Nevertheless, the relationship is rarely as close as that between landladies and regulars staying in private rooms because the apartments are self-contained and landladies and tenants will encounter each other only occasionally, particularly if the landlady does not live in the same house.

A second group of tenants in the winter season are employees of national and international companies who are staying in Varna on a temporary basis. They are in the city for a number of weeks or months before they move back home, and they prefer not to stay in a hotel for such a long time. Their company may rent them an apartment, or ask them to find a place and pay them a rent allowance. The jobs and positions of these employees vary widely, and so do the types of apartment they rent. Construction workers,

[225] They also tend to prefer non-smokers or at least tenants who will not smoke inside the apartment since the smell of cigarettes tends to cling and might deter some tourists.

seamen, or shipbuilders seek simple and cheap accommodation, and stay in apartments at the lower end of the market, preferably close to their place of work. Often, a number of them will share a place. Employees in higher positions usually choose the more upmarket apartments in central locations. At the end of the 1990s, there was a small but thriving market in luxury apartments targeting foreign consultants as well as top-level managers of international companies overseeing the establishment of new branches in Varna. Luxury apartments still fetch the highest rents if let to foreigners, and their owners usually cater to that market exclusively; they do not target tourists. Today, apartments are also rented by mid- and top-level employees of Bulgarian companies who stay in the city for a longer period of time. Although very profitable, this target group is rather small compared to the tourists and students, particularly since the construction of a large number of new hotels catering to business travelers has introduced competition for these customers.

Business travelers are another group targeted by apartment owners. The main difference between them and the abovementioned employees of national and international companies is in the length of stay – business travelers usually stay for a only few days. But due to the appearance of many new small-to-medium sized hotels catering to this segment, the number of business travelers staying in private accommodation has dramatically declined in recent years. Commercial home owners cannot compete with hotels that offer their corporate clients special rates, and assurances of standardized services of a consistently high quality, and thus have successfully cornered this market.

To summarize, rented apartments in Varna attract a wide variety of customer segments. Tourists – both domestic and international – are the largest and financially most important in the summer months while resort workers represent a smaller and less profitable group. In the winter months, students are the most significant segment, and while the rents they pay are much lower than those demanded of tourists, they provide owners with a steady and reliable income. Employees of national and international companies are a smaller group of customers; they represent the clientele for the comparatively small market in luxury apartments and because they stay for weeks or even months at a time, they provide the apartment owners with a good income. Business travelers seem to be disappearing from the market for rented apartments due to the competition from new hotels catering primarily to this segment.

Marketing and Advertising Commercial Homes

How are commercial homes marketed, and how do their owners find customers? Again, there are various possibilities, and providers choose among them according to their own preferences, their financial means, and the customer segments they wish to target. Commercial home owners looking for students or Bulgarian tourism workers as tenants may advertise their services in the newspapers, usually in the section for classified advertisements, or on the internet. Foreign and domestic tourists, however, are better reached through other means; the former cannot read Bulgarian and the latter are unlikely to consult locally circulated newspapers.

Owners of commercial homes may also use the internet to attract customers. In recent years, the number of people using it in their search for accommodation has increased sharply, and furthermore, advertising on the internet is a cost-effective way of reaching a large number of potential customers. However, anyone looking up websites featuring commercial homes on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast will be overwhelmed by the huge number of offers. Providers relying solely on the internet for advertising accommodation risk their entry getting lost in the large number of other, similar, offers. Hence, advertising on the internet is often used in addition to other strategies: a classified ad in a local newspaper may be combined with an entry on a specialized website offering private accommodation; or an apartment may be featured on a website specializing in tourist accommodation while at the same time being offered via an accommodation agency.

Although computer literacy and internet access are widespread in Bulgaria, many of the elderly are not familiar with computers. Hence, they prefer marketing their commercial homes via accommodation agencies. This is advantageous for owners because marketing and advertising are externalized, and their costs are passed on to the customers. Furthermore, accommodation agencies reach the widest variety of potential customers because they use a number of marketing and advertising strategies. They advertise accommodation on Bulgarian and foreign language web sites, enabling both domestic and foreign customers to book accommodation on the internet. Customers may also visit the offices in person; most agencies employ multilingual staff capable of serving domestic and foreign walk-in guests. And accommodation agencies are well-connected with other tourism industry businesses. These contacts help them find customers; access to their networks is also of advantage for accommodation providers who thus have another incentive to work with them. Accommodation agencies are used by customers looking for affordable accommodation, both for short- and long-term leases. They offer a wide variety of accommodation, from private rooms and apartments to vacation homes and hotel rooms, clustering in the

lower and medium segment of the market, with luxury accommodation being more rare. The following story will offer an insight into the operations of such an agency.

Mirela's Story[226]

Mirela was the 57-year-old owner of an accommodation agency in the center of Varna. She had established her agency in the mid-1990s after losing her job in a state-run agency that arranged private holiday accommodation for the members of various occupational unions. When she opened her own business, the contacts she had established in her previous job helped her to build a solid base of providers and customers.

The main office of Mirela's agency was located on a pedestrian street leading from the train station to the main shopping district and the tourist sights. However, it was quite inconspicuous and, on first sight, appeared rather shabby. The office was located in a small recess in the entrance of a residential building, separated from the foyer only by an improvised wooden counter. Its interior was nearly bare and Mirela worked with minimal equipment: file folders, an aged computer, and a telephone. Customers had to stand in front of the counter, almost blocking the entrance to anyone entering or leaving the building. Outside, the office was advertised by a small sign that was easy to overlook; most foreign tourists looking for it followed the directions given in their guidebooks.

In the summer season, the agency arranged accommodation almost exclusively for tourists. Mirela estimated that two-thirds of her clients were domestic tourists and the remainder foreign individual travelers. She accommodated about 300 tourists per month in the low season, while in July and August, the numbers rose to 1,000 per month. Because the summer season was more profitable, she opened a second office in that period, employing two people who received a salary of 200 levs per month plus 20 per cent of the commission on each placement. In the winter season, Mirela worked alone. Her clients were mostly Bulgarians, the majority of whom rented accommodation for a few days while they were in the city for busi-

[226] My acquaintance with Mirela began in June 2004 when I approached her agency as a customer looking for a room during my first stay in Varna. I managed to establish friendly relations with the landladies (Svetlana and Maria) to whom she had referred me; I became their "regular guest" and "friend", and thus had no further need for Mirela's services. However, I often ran into her on social occasions in the neighborhood in which I stayed, where her elderly mother was also living. As many of the elderly women in the area rented out rooms, the rental business was often a topic of conversation during social visits. The direct quotes in this chapter are from a recorded conversation in June 2007.

ness or personal matters. Only a small number of Mirela's customers were students or employees who rented accommodation by the month.[227]

Mirela offered accommodation in private rooms, apartments, holiday homes in and around Varna, and rooms in small family-run hotels. The rates varied according to the type of accommodation, its location, furnishings and conveniences, and the length of stay. When customers arrived, Mirela first ascertained their preferences[228], and then presented them with a number of options, sometimes showing them pictures of the accommodation or, when none were available, describing its amenities and showing its location on a map.[229] When the customer had made a choice, she phoned the landlady asking whether the accommodation was indeed vacant. If that was the case, the customer paid Mirela the agreed sum of money and departed for his accommodation. Mirela took her commission of 20-30 per cent of the money she received and passed the rest on to the accommodation provider. She registered the customer with the municipality and, if the customer insisted on a receipt from the registration, she passed it on to the accommodation provider who then gave it to the tourist. However, this process was not always smooth. Customers might not be satisfied with the accommodation, or they might not get along with the landlady. In these cases, they returned to the agency to complain and demand compensation. Mirela would then offer an alternative or, if all else failed, return the money; she would also attempt to placate the accommodation provider who most likely felt offended and unjustly accused of offering poor hospitality.

Although she was making a living, Mirela's business had steadily declined in the previous years. She attributed the decline to changes in her customer base: the construction of budget hotels and the low prices of package tours for Varna and the resorts had led to a decline in the numbers of foreigners looking for private accommodation. Additionally, at the time of our interview in 2007 there had been a sharp drop in the number of Russian

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[227] The high share of short-term rentals and the smaller share of long-term rentals are a specific feature of Mirela's agency. In other accommodation agencies, I found that the ratio was reversed with the large majority of contracts in the winter season being long-term.

[228] In addition to a customer's stated preferences, Mirela's own judgments entered into this process as well. She told me that in her experience, foreigners desired rooms with upgraded furniture, and often refused simple accommodation with old furnishings, whereas some of the Bulgarians wanted something cheap and did not mind old buildings or dated furniture. Hence, she would not even try to offer these simple rooms to foreigners but leave them for Bulgarian customers instead.

[229] While Mirela was fluent in Bulgarian and Russian, her knowledge of English and other languages was extremely limited. The resulting language barrier could be problematic, particularly when customers wanted more details about the accommodation on offer or when customers were not satisfied and wanted to complain or change accommodation.

customers as Bulgaria entered the EU. At the end of the 1990s, Russians had been Mirela's main clientele in the summer season, but in the 2000s continually changing visa regulations and the competition from hotels had already drastically reduced their share in her customer base.. Furthermore, the competition among accommodation agencies had intensified; in addition to specialist offices like her own, a growing number of travel agencies had begun to offer private accommodation as well. Under these conditions, Mirela had increasingly fallen behind her competitors. The location of her office was a disadvantage; two other accommodation agencies were located right inside the train station and they intercepted the majority of travelers before they even left the station. Her competitors' modern offices also exuded an air of professionalism, making the contrast to Mirela's makeshift office even more obvious and leaving her to appear less professional and trustworthy, particularly in the eyes of foreign tourists.[230] The offices in the train station also employed students speaking Russian, English, and German; their language skills gave them an edge in dealing with foreign customers.

Mirela also competed with landladies who directly approached potential guests. She was constantly quarrelling with the landladies waiting for tourists at the train station or in the streets in front of it; sometimes, she said, they even dragged tourists away from outside her office. Her own success in finding accommodation for her clients contributed to a loss in future business as well; once she helped her clients to find the "perfect" room or apartment, they would, in the future, contact the landlady directly upon their return, and even recommend the accommodation to others, thus eliminating the need for Mirela's services.

But Mirela was also convinced that among Bulgarians, who represented the majority of her customers, there was an increasing prosperity. She described how more people could afford a holiday by the sea using commercial accommodation, and how they are willing to pay more for it, demanding higher quality in return. At the same time, accommodation providers had started investing more money in upgrading their premises, making them more attractive to a discerning clientele:

> Because of tourism, the Varnentsi are more affluent. The accommodation providers are more affluent; they have a much higher income compared to those in some small town where there is nothing. Our pensioners can afford a bit more because they earn money. If they earn just 300 levs, for example, they can pay for electricity in the

[230] On the other hand, Mirela's overheads were much lower; she paid a minimal rent for her office and hired employees only in the high season. She also spent a share of her income on advertising and marketing efforts, even though the returns in terms of increases in her turnover were diminishing.

> winter or buy food. That is essential – for everyone. The landladies are better off, their lives are improved. If they have an ordinary room with two beds, they now can provide it with a TV, with a fridge, things like that. That proves they are more affluent. They can afford to spend money on their rooms, to invest in new furniture, new mattresses; they can buy a fridge, a TV. They improve the quality of their rooms, the demand for them grows, and they will earn even more money.

Mirela concluded that certainly, tourism was a blessing for Varna, increasing the standard of living of its people and giving everyone the opportunity to earn some money.

Informality in the Commercial Home Sector – Poor Grannies and Wealthy Investors

Mirela's story illustrates the operations of an accommodation agency, and it points to an issue of concern to both providers and intermediaries on the market for commercial homes as well as to the municipality itself, namely, the informal provision of private accommodation. Legally, commercial home owners are required to register with the municipality. Their premises will then get a categorization; rooms with a shared bathroom will get a one-star rating, whereas rooms with their own bathroom or apartments get two or three stars, according to their condition, furnishings, and the amenities on offer. The owners pay a fee for the registration process, and receive documents verifying the category and rating of the room or apartment. Their guests have to be registered with the municipality, declaring the length of stay as well as the rate they are paying. If the income earned by an accommodation provider exceeds a certain baseline (in 2007, it was 1,560 levs per year), he or she has to pay taxes.[231]

When an owner starts working with an accommodation agency, he or she will be asked for the registration and categorization papers. Since categorization is awarded according to the standard of the accommodation, it has a bearing on the rates that guests will have to pay and thus provides a basis

[231] For tax purposes, the city is divided into three zones. For one- and two-star accommodation with fewer than 20 rooms, the annual tax is 250 levs per room in the first zone (the wider city center), 150 levs in the second zone, and 25 levs in the third zone. These rates apply to providers whose annual income from accommodation rental does not exceed 50,000 levs. Under certain conditions, a reduction of the tax by 50 per cent is possible, for example, for pensioners who have no other business and no employees.

for the negotiation of rates between the owner and the agency.[232] The documents also serve as proof that the premises are properly registered and the agency will not have to fear repercussions for dealing with informal providers. Furthermore, although someone working for the agency should view the premises before they are rented out, they often do not have the time to do so. In these cases, the categorization serves as an indication of its standard.[233]

Accommodation agencies are obliged to register with the municipality all customers for whom they have arranged a contract. That makes it harder, but not impossible, for the providers working with them to stay in the informal sector:

> Mirela: If you earn more than 1,560 levs in one year, you have to pay taxes. But in fact, those who have a number of apartments or rooms, nice ones, those who earn a lot more than 1,560 levs, they do not want to pay taxes. They do not want any official documentation, either.
>
> C.B.: They do it informally, right?
>
> Mirela: Exactly. That is the big difference. They hide everything. They say, when they rent out the apartments, "No, I will not sign anything!". That is it. Basically, that is it. The difference to the others lies here. Because one granny, how and when is she going to make 1,500 levs? If she makes that much, she will spend some of it on repairs. She can only make 1,500 levs if she has several beds, and she has to have guests all the time. But mostly, she will not make enough to pay taxes or, if she does, she will pay 20 or 30 levs. But those who have a lot more and who make, for example, 10,000 levs or more, they are the ones who do not pay taxes. Because they work with a number of agencies, and in each one they say, "I will not leave my documents here!". And as a tourist, if you do not have your

[232] The rate that the agency demands from customers is first negotiated between the agency and the landlady. The landladies and agents usually agree on a rate with the understanding that there will be some room for negotiation with the customer. For example, if a customer (particularly one who is planning a longer stay) insists on a discount, the agency will phone the landlady and ask her whether she agrees. Or, if a customer looks like he or she could afford to pay a little more (particularly in the case of foreigners who tend to have less of a notion of the general price structure), the agency might ask a slightly higher price. Generally, the rate is influenced not only by the categorization, but also by the location of the accommodation and by the strength of demand.

[233] Actually, the owners of accommodation agencies prefer to personally view the rooms or apartments they offer because if they know the furnishings and amenities in detail, they can more easily assess who among their customers would like them and who would not, thus avoiding complaints. They also like to have pictures of the accommodation as these make it easier to give their customers an impression of the room or apartment they are going to rent.

> own apartment, you try with them. Their apartments are nice, everybody likes them.

In this statement, Mirela distinguishes between "the granny" representing "poor pensioners trying to eke out a living", and those who are already affluent, as evidenced by their ownership of a number of "nice" apartments, and who make even more money by renting out their apartments and evading taxes.[234] Let us look at each of the groups in turn.[235]

Contrary to what Mirela claims, it is quite possible even for a "poor granny" to earn enough to be eligible for taxes.[236] Accordingly, these grannies employ a number of strategies designed to avoid records of their rental income. The first and most obvious strategy is by not registering their rooms as rental accommodation. This strategy has the advantage of the landlady completely avoiding detection by the authorities. However, accommodation agencies may refuse to work with owners who cannot produce any documentation for their premises. The landlady's options for finding customers are thus severely limited.

In the summer season, a landlady may attempt to approach tourists as they arrive on the train or bus station, risking the wrath of the employees of accommodation agencies who view her as encroaching on their business. Agency employees summarily accuse these grannies of offering unregistered rooms. That is, however, the case for only some of them. Others have the necessary documentation, but have a hard time attracting tourists because their rooms are either in a disadvantageous location or of a low standard. By approaching tourists directly, they hope to increase their chances of finding customers. These grannies demand lower rates than the accommodation agencies, because the latter's rates include a commission; that is their only advantage. Otherwise, tourists often distrust people approaching them on the streets, and feel more at ease dealing with professionals who operate from a

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[234] The quote also exemplifies an attitude towards the more affluent that is widely spread among ordinary Bulgarians (i.e. the not-so-affluent). The former are often suspected of having acquired their wealth by morally (and often legally) questionable means – in this case by capitalizing on the competition between agencies who are forced to work with these owners because they have the nice apartments that are in high demand, and by not paying their taxes (even though, in contrast to the "poor granny", they clearly could afford to do so).

[235] Foreign owners constitute a third group of accommodation providers that may operate informally or semi-formally. If they work with a letting company, the latter will by default register its customers with the authorities. But if they recruit guests for their holiday home directly in their home country or rely on the internet or on word of mouth, the local authorities may be bypassed completely. Neither will the property be registered as commercial accommodation, nor will any guests be registered with the municipality.

[236] For example, from October 2006 until the end of May 2007, Svetlana, who may well be viewed as a poor pensioner, rented her top floor apartment to two students for 250 levs/month (plus utilities). With this income alone, she exceeded the baseline amount for tax eligibility.

proper office and speak their language. Nevertheless, accommodation agencies frequently demand that the authorities stop these grannies and remove them from the bus and train stations. Up to now, their demands have fallen on deaf ears.[237]

In the winter season, a landlady offering unregistered rooms can find customers by placing advertisements in the newspapers. Students, for example, do not particularly care whether or not their landlady has registered the rooms they are renting. They do, however, care about the rent they are paying, and the rates for unregistered rooms are low, especially compared to the rates for rooms rented via an accommodation agency.

Another strategy a "poor granny" may use to evade taxes, even if she has registered her rooms with the municipality, is to avoid registering guests with the authorities. This may be achieved in two ways. On the one hand, the landlady may collude with the accommodation agency, convincing its employees to "forget" to register the guests they send. This is easier in the case of small agencies such as Mirela's, where the landladies deal directly with the owner. Furthermore, it only works if there is a longstanding trust-based relationship between the landlady and agency owner. Both parties profit from such a deal because both lower their visible income, thus decreasing their tax burden. But it is risky, especially for the agency. Everyone involved in the sector is quite aware that municipal authorities tend to be lenient towards poor grannies, but they may well clamp down on a professionally-run business that evades its taxes. Due to the growing competition among accommodation agencies, however, the owners are pressured to occasionally accept such deals in order to ensure the loyalty of accommodation providers; after all, they cannot afford to lose too many landladies, and the occasional concession to their needs will tie them more closely to the agency.

A third strategy to avoid detection by the authorities has already been described above in the discussion of the friendship relations that landladies establish with some customers. In this case, a landlady uses an agency to send her first-time guests, but then invites the guests to arrange accommodation directly with her on their next visit. This is another reason why landladies attempt to establish personal relationships with guests they perceive as potential regulars. Not only will they gain regular guests who provide them with a reliable income, they will also be able to bypass the agency that is obliged to register its customers with the municipality. The grannies know that inspections of their premises by the authorities are extremely unlikely,

[237] Nevertheless, every year there seem to be fewer grannies roaming the stations. There are a number of reasons for this: fewer tourists arrive by bus and train; more young individual travelers stay in the city's new budget hotels and youth hostels; and people increasingly use the internet to book rooms or apartments.

and thus the likelihood of getting caught accommodating unregistered guests is negligible.[238]

The second group Mirela implicated in evading their taxes were the affluent owners of nice apartments. They belong to the group of accommodation providers I have described above as entrepreneurs who run a commercial home as a business. Their upscale apartments are managed semi-professionally, fetch high rates, and are in great demand. According to the employees and owners of several accommodation agencies with whom I talked, these affluent owners often work with several agencies at the same time. This increases their chance to find customers for their premises, and at the same time makes it more difficult for anyone to track the number of guests they receive, their length of stay, or the rates they pay.[239] While these apartments are usually registered, and their owners initially produce papers to provide evidence of their categorization, as Mirela said, the owners often refuse to leave their documents with any one agency. Without registration and categorization documents in hand, agencies cannot register the customers they place. The agencies, however, feel pressured to work with these providers; as Mirela stated, it is they who offer the best apartments, the ones that are preferred by the more affluent and discerning customers. Since these apartments are in demand and fetch the highest rates, the income that an agency derives from commissions on placing them is considerable. An employee of another accommodation agency commented: "Grey economy or not, we would have to be mad to refuse that sort of business".

Conclusion

The accommodation market in the city of Varna is much more complex and multifaceted than that of the resorts surrounding it. In the resorts, hotel rooms and apartments in apart-hotels are offered to foreign and, to a much smaller extent, domestic sun-lust tourists by intermediaries such as tour operators and travel agencies. In Varna, visitors may choose from a much wider range of accommodation including large three-star hotels, small but exclusive boutique hotels, small family-run hotels, backpacker hostels and

[238] In the last two or three years, the number of inspections of "accommodation establishments" (*sredstvata za podslon i mestata za nastanyavane*), a statistical category which comprises such diverse venues as hotels, camping sites, mountain chalets, and private rooms and apartments seems to have been increasing. At least, the inspections have been accompanied by greater publicity. Nevertheless, such inspections usually focus on small hotels and guesthouses, probably because it is much harder to prove that a person staying in a private home really is a paying guest and not just a "friend of the family".

[239] In addition, they advertise their apartments on the internet, and thus receive a significant share of customers without using intermediaries.

guesthouses, or private apartments and rooms. Commercial accommodation in Varna is used by a wide variety of customer segments, including foreign charter tourists, foreign individual travelers and cultural tourists, domestic tourists and business travelers, foreign consultants, resort workers, contract workers, and students. Likewise, accommodation providers employ a variety of intermediaries and means to target and find customers, such as tour operators, travel agencies, accommodation agencies, newspaper advertisements, and marketing on the internet. While the vast majority of resort hotels respond to the seasonality of tourism by closing down in the winter season and by persistent, albeit not very successful, attempts to extend the tourist season, accommodation providers in the city have circumvented this issue by diversifying their target groups. For them, tourists are still a profitable and desirable customer segment, but in the off-season, they are replaced by business travelers in the case of hotels, and by students, domestic tourists, contract workers or high-level managers and consultants in the case of private apartments.

To some extent, hotels and commercial homes compete for the same customer segments. The opening of small hotels offering standardized and predictable forms of commercial hospitality has led to a decline in the share of business travelers staying in luxury apartments, and the emergence of backpacker hostels has resulted in a sharp drop in the numbers of western European backpackers staying in private rooms. At the same time, commercial homes are successfully competing with hotels for the most budget-conscious travelers such as domestic tourists, larger groups or families, or eastern European tourists. Commercial homes appeal to foreign travelers who want to gain an insight into the daily lives of the locals, while hotels attract those who prefer greater anonymity and a more impersonal setting.

Establishing a commercial home requires low initial investments, and this is precisely what attracts many otherwise poor pensioners to this option. While they may not have money, most pensioners have property. The same goes for running a commercial home; owners have very low overheads, and they can easily operate semi-formally, thus evading (part of) their taxes, especially since the authorities tend to be lenient towards “poor grannies just trying to survive”. Hence, it is highly probable that in the foreseeable future, commercial homes will continue to be an important part of the accommodation market in the city of Varna.

In the previous chapter, I introduced Conrad Lashley’s conceptualization of hospitality as consisting of three dimensions: social, commercial, and private. Rather than viewing these dimensions as distinct, but intersecting domains, I would propose a continuum, ranging from purely commercial hospitality on one end to purely private hospitality on the other. The mode of

hospitality provision that is prescribed in handbooks for the hotel industry, and rhetorically constructed in the narratives of hotel workers criticizing mass tourism in the resorts, would be the ideal type on one end of the continuum. It encompasses an exclusively commercial hospitality, driven by nothing but the profit motive. At the other extreme is an ideal type of private hospitality, freely offered and freely accepted without entailing any further expectations or obligations. This is the genuine unconditional hospitality depicted in philosophical works but never found in practice (e.g. Derrida 2000; Telfer 2002; Ritzer 2007: 129). In reality, performances of hospitality are negotiated in the nexus of existing motivations, opportunities, and constraints, and may contain both private and commercial elements. Nevertheless, the ideal of private hospitality may be upheld as a model and an aspiration, whereas the specter of purely commercial hospitality may be brought up as a cautionary tale, a perversion to guard against.

Moreover, Lashley's model of private hospitality which is marked, most conspicuously, by its provision in a private home cannot adequately capture the current dynamics of hospitality in Bulgaria's tourist industry. As I have demonstrated in this and in the previous chapter, the Varnentsi emphasize personal relationships, that is "being friends" and "knowing each other", based on mutuality, reciprocity, and caring, as key characteristics of private hospitality. Such hospitality may be performed both in domestic settings such as the private home, and in commercial settings such as hotels, restaurants, cafes, and bars. At the same time, the private home may well be a site of commercial hospitality such as provided by the owners of commercial homes. Thus, in the Bulgarian context, it is not the setting that defines the type of hospitality being offered, but the relationship between hosts and guests, providers and customers.

In this and in the previous chapter, I have explored the provision of hospitality in hotels, private apartments, and private rooms. In all of these settings, the hospitality offered contains both private and commercial elements, and the balance between these elements is a matter of individual negotiation and contestation. Hotels are operated with a profit motive in mind, but their employees persistently struggle to introduce elements of private hospitality into their daily operations. Their success is influenced by structural factors such as hotel size, operations, and target groups, but in the end, individual agency is equally important. Many hotel workers aim to offer a form of hospitality that is commercially motivated but saturated with private elements; ideally, hotel guests should be paying guests and friends at the same time. However, due to the development of a market economy, and the strengthening of mass tourism in the region, the private elements of hospitality are increasingly subsumed under the commercial, a shifting

balance that is strongly condemned by older hotel workers, leading them to question the "hospitality" of their industry.

Private apartments as commercial homes are characterized by "the presence of the host in absentia". Since their owners are not living on the premises, interactions between hosts and guests are limited. Commercial motives are predominant in the provision of hospitality, but private elements are often present. This is especially the case with regular guests, such as students renting an apartment for many consecutive years. Here, the personal relationship of landladies and tenants is an important feature that may impact on commercial aspects, such as when regular guests pay lower rents or are preferred over "strangers".

The tensions between commercial and private elements of hospitality are most obvious in the case of commercial accommodation in private rooms. On the one hand, the existence of such a form of accommodation is an argument against making the private home setting a defining characteristic of private hospitality. On the other hand, however, the setting clearly does influence host-guest interactions. The private home setting may attract tourists who want to gain an insight into the lives of the locals to this form of accommodation. It also influences the expectations of hosts towards their guests, and it leads to uncertainty concerning the roles of the involved parties: are the landladies service providers or are they hosts; are their visitors customers or guests? The home setting also leads to a conflation of the landladies' roles as homemakers and service providers which becomes particularly poignant when the host/guest relationship breaks down; landladies tend to interpret a refusal of their services as a rejection of themselves as homemakers and hosts.

The influence of personal relations on the balance of commercial and private elements in host-guest interactions is particularly salient in private rooms. With the arrival of each new guest, that balance has to be negotiated anew and it may well shift over time as the relationship between hosts and guests develops and changes. With walk-in guests who stay for a short time and do not plan to return, the commercial elements are clearly predominant, while the private elements of hospitality prevail with regulars. Nevertheless, here, too, commercial elements are always present as the landladies are ultimately guided by financial motives.

The predominance of financial motives for running a commercial home is another point where the situation of my Bulgarian interlocutors is different from that of commercial home owners elsewhere. In much of the literature, such individuals are depicted as "lifestyle entrepreneurs" guided by lifestyle considerations as much as by commercial motives. They are described as choosing to run a commercial home because thus they can "be

their own boss"; female owners may choose the work because they can care for their children and their home while still being able to earn some money; such owners may like to "meet new and interesting people" by offering hospitality or simply because it gives them "something to do after retirement". Of course, the income derived from this activity is still important, but it is only considered to be one factor among many (Pearce 1990; Carmichael and McClinchey 2009; McIntosh and Harris 2009). This is in stark contrast to the landladies I have described in this chapter. For them, the income derived from renting out rooms or apartments is their first and foremost motivation; they do not choose this business for lifestyle reasons, but out of necessity. With pensions being as low as they are, they are forced to look for additional incomes, and running a commercial home is their first choice because it is relatively easy and often very profitable.

The existing literature on commercial homes primarily focuses on owners in English-speaking countries who accommodate either domestic tourists or international tourists who speak English as a second language. As a result, the consequences of issues such as language barriers, communication problems, and cultural differences for host-guest interactions are rarely addressed.[240] In the Varna region, however, these issues come to the fore in the case of international tourists – the most profitable customer segment targeted by commercial home owners. Here, language and cultural differences complicate the negotiation of the rules that guide the behavior of tourists in the commercial home. Language and cultural differences makes it more difficult for hosts and guests to balance the commercial and private elements of hospitality, and they make it harder for both parties to establish a personal relationship characterized by "knowing each other" and "being friends".

[240] See, for example, C.M. Hall (2009: 70) who, in his study of exurban commercial homes, addressed hosts' and guests' "shared understandings of exurban realities". Exceptions are Peter Stringer (1981) and Philip Pearce (1990) who mentioned the impact of language and cultural barriers in passim.

Chapter 10

Tourism and the Property Market: "This Is Our Land, Our Home!"

Walking through Varna, one is immediately struck by the large number of real estate agencies in the city and by the ubiquity of their advertisements. No one seems to be quite sure how many of them exist, but industry experts agree that there are hundreds of different companies in Varna alone. Their proliferation is one of the most obvious manifestations of the booming property market in the Varna region during the years 2004-08. Triggered by an influx of foreign buyers of second homes, this boom was closely linked to tourism. The complex nature of these links and the manifold impacts of tourism on the property market will be explored in this chapter. What were the causes of the sudden influx of foreign buyers, and what are its consequences? How were the Varnentsi affected? What is the role of the real estate agencies? These are some of the questions this chapter seeks to answer.

In the first section, I delineate the history of second home ownership in the Varna region by describing the two most common types of second homes in Bulgaria and their development under socialism and after. In the second section, I will discuss the three main groups of foreign buyers of second homes, and outline the development of this sub-sector of the property market. Next, I explore the reactions of local Bulgarians to the influx of foreign buyers and the consequences of their presence. As intermediaries between sellers and buyers, real estate agencies play an important role in shaping the development of the property market. In the fourth section, I will introduce three agencies to illustrate the characteristics and development of the sector which will shed further light on recent changes in the property market. Finally, I will return to the Varnentsi and show how the previously described processes affect their ability to access the market as buyers. Throughout this chapter, I will point to the interconnections of tourism and the property market, and I will highlight areas where the links of the two sectors are particularly close, pointing out their consequences for the local

population, and thus enriching our understanding of the multiple indirect effects of mass tourism.

Although rising property prices are a common effect of tourism development, many tourism studies mention the issue only in passing. Research on international retirement migration, for example, foregrounds the motivations of the migrants who are often drawn to low property prices in the destination areas, but they neglect to analyze the views of and the effects on the local populations. In cities, the transformation of urban environments into leisure and tourism spaces and its consequences for local property markets has mainly been discussed in terms of gentrification. In this chapter, I will analyze the roles and complex interrelations of both local and foreign players on rural and urban property markets. I will also discuss the influence of real estate agencies on market segmentation and their functions as mediators and intermediaries. The contribution of this chapter thus lies in offering an integrated analysis of tourism development and property market dynamics in the Varna region.

Since this chapter focuses on property and the property market, some clarification concerning the terms may be expedient. On the most basic level, there are two types of properties bought and sold on the market for real estate: commercial properties and residential properties. The former category comprises all types of business venues, including such diverse establishments as hotels, shops, storehouses, workshops, factories, and offices, as well as plots of land that may be developed for business purposes. On the following pages, I focus only on residential properties: houses, apartments, holiday homes, and undeveloped plots of land designated for residential buildings. Nevertheless, it has to be pointed out that the distinction between residential and commercial properties, although elementary to the real estate business, and used routinely and unambiguously by the brokers, is by no means as clear-cut as it appears. In fact, residential properties may be used for commercial purposes, as in the commercial home sector. Residential and commercial properties may be housed in the same building; they may even be built by the same developer and marketed together by the same real estate agency.

Of *Vila*s and Village Houses: Second Homes under Socialism

The type of residential property possessing the closest and most obvious links with tourism is the second home. In the tourism literature, a plethora of terms denotes second homes: vacation home, holiday home, holiday apartment, summer house, weekend house, cabin, cottage (Halseth and Rosenberg

1995; Kaltenborn 1998).[241] In this chapter, I will use "second home" or "vacation home" to include most of these variations. I will use "holiday apartment" to refer specifically to apartments in the resorts, often in apart-hotels, the majority of which are owned by foreigners.

Among Bulgarians, ownership of second homes is widespread. The two predominant types are the so-called village houses and *vila*s.[242] The term *vila* may be translated as "cottage" or "weekend house", and it typically describes a bungalow or small house with an attached garden or small plot of land. *Vila*s are often found around Bulgarian cities and towns, particularly in the *vilni zoni*, areas specifically designated for them by zoning regulations. In socialism, numerous *vila*s were situated on the coast between the city of Varna and the resorts.[243] Village houses, on the other hand, are usually found in rural areas. Their use as second homes is, among other factors, a result of the rapid urbanization that Bulgaria underwent in the 1950s and 1960s. In its wake, many villages suffered from a shrinking and ageing population, and an underused and slowly deteriorating housing stock. Subsequently, some of these houses came to be used as second homes, the village houses (*selski kashti*).[244] They tend to be larger than *vila*s and have more rooms, and in addition to the attached garden or plot of land, they often have a yard that may be used for breeding small animals, storage, repair work, or tinkering.

The building and ownership of second homes became more and more widespread in Bulgaria from the mid-1960s onward. Although at that time the existence of second homes could be problematic at an ideological level because it reflected social differences within socialist society, the state still encouraged their proliferation because they helped alleviate the sense of overcrowding caused by the constant housing shortages in urban areas. Furthermore, they channeled off at least some of the demand for officially organized, state subsidized, holidays because they provided a place where

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[241] Second homes may even include trailers, caravans, recreational vehicles, tents, house boats, or sailing boats. See Hall and Müller (2004b); and Müller, Hall and Keen (2004) for an overview of the terminology, the existing literature, and the main themes in the research on second homes. On the motivation of second home owners, see Jaakson (1986); Chaplin (1999). For the effects of second homes on the resort cycle, see Strapp (1988); and Foster and Murphy (1991).

[242] I have retained the Bulgarian spelling of the term in order to avoid the connotation of "stately mansion" associated with the English spelling, and to distinguish these second homes from the villas of the new upper classes in eastern Europe as described by Czegledy (1998); and Humphrey (2002, ch. 9).

[243] The Bulgarian *vila* thus has similarities with the Russian *dacha* as described by Zavisca (2003). Among them is the wide variety of possible physical structures, ranging from small cottages to multi-story houses complete with car park and swimming pool. As with the *dacha*, a *vila*'s primary purpose may be rest and recreation or agricultural production.

[244] See also Bachvarov (1997b).

city dwellers could rest and relax. From the early 1970s, the building and maintenance of second homes were officially regulated (Carter 1991; Hall 1991b).

The number of second homes in Bulgaria grew steadily, and by the end of 1992, there were 402,000 second homes in the country.[245] One in every eight households had a second home. Second homes were acquired and maintained for a variety of reasons in the 1980s and 1990s. Firstly, they were not just used for rest and recreation, but also for the small-scale production of fruits and vegetables; viniculture; and the processing and storage of food. Especially in the 1990s, ownership of a second home and an attached garden or plot of land could make a significant contribution to ensuring a family's supply of fresh and healthy food at a low cost. Secondly, for many Bulgarians second homes were the only viable option for having a vacation away from home. In the late socialist period, there was a shortage of holiday accommodation, and many people had difficulty securing a holiday spot in a hotel, hostel, or campground that was sponsored and subsidized by a trade union or the state. Thus, spending a vacation in one's second home or in that of relatives or friends was a commonly used alternative. In the 1990s, commercial accommodation was increasingly available for individual travelers, but due to the deepening crisis, many Bulgarians simply could not afford it. Domestic tourism was in a deep slump, and the majority of those who could afford a vacation at all chose the cheapest option, that is staying in second homes (Bachvarov 1997b). Thirdly, second homes, like property more generally, are considered a good investment: they are inflation-proof; can be used by the owners, their relatives, and friends or rented out as vacation homes; and, in a property market boom, they may even be sold at a profit.

In the last decade of socialism, the coast between Varna and the surrounding resorts was dominated by *vila*s. Since then, its appearance has undergone major changes due to the tourism boom that started with the new millennium. Many owners of coastal properties have attempted to benefit from tourism by renovating their *vila* and turning it into tourist accommodation. Others have decided to take advantage of the booming property market and the rising prices of coastal land by selling their *vila* to the highest bidder. The new buyers often demolished existing structures and built hotels or bed and breakfasts in their place. More rarely, the new owners were affluent Bulgarians who, after renovating and upgrading the building (often adding a

[245] Of these 402,000 second homes, 212,000 were *vila*s and 190,000 village houses. One-third of them were situated in the areas surrounding cities and towns, while the remaining two-thirds were located in rural areas. Between 1985 and 1992, the number of second homes in Bulgaria had increased by 83,500 (Bachvarov 1997b).

car port and, perhaps, a swimming pool), continued to use it as a vacation home. Still other plots have retained their appearance; they are still used as *vila*s. And finally, many owners of second homes have sold their property to a newly arrived group of buyers: foreign tourists and investors.

"The British Are Leading the Market" – Foreign Buyers of Second Homes

With the new millennium, there was a sudden upsurge in the interest of foreign individual buyers in the Bulgarian property market, particularly in residential properties. This upsurge had a number of interrelated causes. One was the political and economic stabilization that improved the perceived safety and security of foreign investments in Bulgaria. The confidence in the security of foreign investments in general, and of investments in residential properties more specifically, was further boosted when it became clear by the end of 2004 that Bulgaria would be accepted into the European Union. With the approach of the designated date for the country's EU admission, and the increasing harmonization of the Bulgarian legal framework with that of the EU, increasing numbers of foreigners became interested in acquiring property in the country. The media coverage accompanying Bulgaria's admission process contributed to this process by raising awareness of the country and of the conditions awaiting potential investors.

A second cause of the growing interest in Bulgarian properties lay in the general conditions prevailing in the country. Foreign buyers of second homes were attracted by its mild climate, natural environment, rich historic and cultural heritage, and welcoming and hospitable population. Even more important was the perception of Bulgaria as a cheap country. Property prices were much lower than in other, more established, tourism destinations such as Spain, Italy, France, or Portugal. Compared to western Europe, the living costs were significantly lower as well (cf. Bachvarov 2006).[246]

Improvements in technology and transport were a final precondition for the strong foreign interest in the Bulgarian property market. Bulgaria became a viable option for foreign investors with the increased number of charter flights and low cost airlines connecting the country with western Europe and Russia, and a concomitant drop in air fares. At least in the tourist season, daily flights to Bulgaria were available everywhere in Europe, and it took second home owners a mere three or four hours to reach the country.

[246] Factors such as a mild climate, welcoming population, variety of natural and cultural attractions, low property prices and living costs and, particularly for the British, "unspoilt" rural landscapes are reported to be highly important to foreign second home owners in other destinations as well; see Hoggart and Buller (1995c).

New communication technologies allowed second home owners to stay in touch with their families and friends at home, effectively shrinking and bridging the physical distance to their countries of origin (cf. Williams and Hall 2000).

My interlocutors in the real estate sector agreed that British and Irish buyers of second homes initiated the first big wave of foreign interest in Bulgarian properties. Currently, they still represent a significant share of foreign buyers, but there has also been a large influx of Russian investors; in fact, by 2007, brokers were talking about the beginning of a second big wave dominated by Russians. Real estate agents offered a number of explanations for the strong British interest in Bulgaria. They often talked about the "British mentality", as in the following statement by Plamena, a 27-year-old Bulgarian broker:

> The English were the first who came here to buy property. And this is just part of their mindset; it is like a national trend to go to countries that they think have potential and invest, and then sell the properties and invest their money somewhere else. It is curiosity and ambition. It applies to the English and the Irish. They were actually the first foreigners who came to Bulgaria to invest money. After that, people from other countries appeared as buyers, too. Like the Russians.

Rainer, a German broker in his mid-forties, offered a similar explanation and pointed to similarities in the development of the Spanish property market; a comparison that was fairly common among foreign brokers:

> First of all, the British are leading the market – nobody else. No matter what others are saying, the British are dominating the property market. Well, the market for residential properties, not the commercial sector. They have only a small influence in the commercial sector; it is mainly large companies with connections to Germany that are active in that market. Many of those companies have Bulgarian partners or owners but they are working with German capital. But in the residential segment, the British are by far number one. It is the same thing we saw in Spain. At first, the Germans did not dare invest in Spain. The English blazed the trail. They opened the Spanish market, developed it. The Germans arrived only with the third wave. Today, they dominate the eastern coast of Spain, but they started much later than the English. I think that is part of the German mentality. People are careful; they take a long time to deliberate before deciding to do anything, and they focus on the risks. The British buyers, by contrast, are more resolute; they are willing to take risks, and that is why they were the first to arrive in Spain, and here in

> Bulgaria as well. It is the mentality. Germany was never a successful colonial power. They watched and waited while the British conquered the world. It is the same here on a smaller scale. And as a result, the British are the market leaders. They have started the development companies. Today, these companies have a lot of Bulgarian capital, and most of the big British companies have Bulgarian partners and Bulgarian capital.

Foreign buyers of residential properties in Bulgaria have a number of motivations, many of them overlapping, as Kamen, a Bulgarian broker in his mid-thirties explained:

> C.B.: What would you say, for what purpose do these people buy property here in Bulgaria?
>
> Kamen: About three years ago, when it all started, when Bulgaria became a hot spot, it was mostly an investment. It was something interesting to them. It is basically the lower prices that we have. Bulgaria is something that most people from the European Union can still afford. They can come here, spend lots of money, and their money means a lot; it means a lot here in Bulgaria. But it is also the nature, the environment, and the general outlook of the entire… like the resorts and the towns, there are many green spaces which foreigners like, and also the climate is very nice here on the Black Sea coast. We can say that there are several reasons why people buy properties here in Bulgaria. First of all, as a second home. Also as a smart investment, bearing in mind that prices will continue to go up. That was a normal expectation before we joined the European Union: that prices would go up. They are still rising and there is still more room for them to go up. And there are also quite a lot of people who want to live here permanently, who want to retire and come to Bulgaria and have a quiet life.

Hence, there are three main groups of foreign buyers: those who view their Bulgarian property as a speculative investment[247], those who plan to use it mainly as a vacation home, and those who plan to settle in Bulgaria. In reality, there is a lot of overlap between these groups. It is impossible to obtain quantitative data but my conversations with people involved in the industry strongly suggested that the vast majority of foreign buyers anticipated a considerable increase in the value of their property, an assumption that played an important role in their decision to buy. Thus, even if they were planning to use their Bulgarian property as a vacation home, they still treated it to some extent as a speculative investment. Likewise, foreigners

[247] See also Bachvarov (2006) who used the term “small speculators”.

who buy a vacation in Bulgaria may at a later stage decide to permanently settle there, or those who buy in view of their eventual retirement may use it as a vacation home in the meantime.

Although their numbers are comparatively small, foreigners who plan to settle in Bulgaria have received much attention in the Bulgarian media. With the start of the property market boom, there were many reports about foreign couples or families moving to the country, and thus many Bulgarians not directly involved in the real estate sector often focus on that group when talking about foreigners buying property in Bulgaria. The image they usually evoke is that of an elderly British couple having bought an old village house, and moving there to spend their retirement in quiet and peaceful surroundings. The so-called retirement migrants are clearly predominant[248], but there have also been younger families attempting to move to Bulgaria, as Steve, a British broker explained[249]:

> I think a lot of people have realized, word is getting out, like, "Hey, shit, you can live there [in Bulgaria] and it's only going to cost you 100 pounds a week!". Whereas in England you need 250 pounds a week. So I think when people look at what they are getting for their pension… . The people coming here are older people, I would say probably from 50 years upwards. Three years ago, they were younger, couples with children. I would see them in places far, far out. And it is not easy when you do not speak the language. If you have a wife or husband that speaks the language, fine, but if you haven't, you're stumped. How are you going to converse with anybody else in the village? It's exceptionally difficult. They last a year, and then they sell up and go back to England.

As the following statement by Rainer emphasizes, there are close links between tourism and retirement migration; potential migrants first become acquainted with their future destination as tourists; they may acquire a vacation home to try out what it might be like to live in that place for an extended period of time, and later they may decide to make it their permanent home, or sell it in order to buy a more suitable property[250]:

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[248] In recent years, there has been a growing interest in retirement migration, resulting in a number of studies focusing on retirement migration to Spain. See Williams et al. (2000); Gustafson (2001, 2002); O'Reilly (2003, 2009).

[249] I talked to several British brokers, but Steve was the most outspoken among them. I spent a lot of time in his office in the summer of 2007. Our talks were frequently interrupted by the arrival of (potential) clients; Steve did not mind me being present during sales talks and negotiations, as long as I agreed not to record them.

[250] Similar processes have been reported from other destinations. See Hoggart and Buller (1995b); O'Reilly (2000).

> There is a significant number of people who are now starting to think about the possibility of moving to Bulgaria in their retirement. They make the first step by buying a property here. This is closely connected to the matter of living costs. In Germany, the ageing of society and the burdens and expenses associated with that are huge issues; they are viewed as problematic. The growth of the pensions is not on par with the increases in living costs, and under these circumstances, it will be harder for those on a lower income, who will receive lower pensions, to lead a good and comfortable life. So there are many people worrying about that, and some come to the conclusion that they might want to move elsewhere in order to combine the advantages of lower living costs with beautiful surroundings and a sense of well-being. This is one of the typical private customer segments. People are buying a typical vacation home, they are planning to spend their holidays there, they also consider it a beachhead, and they know they can anticipate a marked rise in its value. And later on, as their retirement approaches, they may sell it and buy something larger, or they may decide to enlarge it and move there permanently.

Retirement migrants, the British in particular, are widely considered as the buyers most interested in acquiring village houses.[251] This preference for living in the countryside was met by many Bulgarians with reactions ranging from perplexed incredulity to uncomprehending amusement or even outright derision. A friend of mine exclaimed, "What do they want there? It is a village! There is nothing out there!", and another friend commented, "I don't get it. It's like a joke! All Bulgarians are trying to get away from the village and move to a city, but you foreigners are moving to the villages and you are even paying large sums of money for that! Why?".

Brokers, of course, have a clear notion of what foreigners find attractive about village houses and accordingly, they emphasize the peace, tranquility, and bucolic nature of the Bulgarian countryside. When confronted with the incredulity of my friends, Vasil, a 28-year-old Bulgarian broker responded:

> Of course they do not understand it. For a Bulgarian, what's in a village? There are no jobs, no money, nothing like what is in a city. But a foreigner who has lived in a city all his life, he is totally sick of all the noise and dirt and crowds and traffic. So he comes here, gets a cheap property, compared to, say, a house in an English village which would cost 100,000 pounds, but here it is 10,000 euros, some-

[251] On the importance of myths of a rural idyll for tourism, see Urry (1990); Carmichael and McClinchey (2009).

> thing like that; 15- or 20,000, it does not matter; it's not that much. And as I said, a lot of elderly people are coming here to create something nice for themselves and to live there for the time that is left to them.

Although retirement migrants are foremost on many Bulgarians' minds when discussing foreign buyers of property in their country, in reality, their share is rather low, and very few of my friends knew personally any retired foreigners who had settled in Bulgaria. The reason for that is simple, and was put quite poignantly by a friend who stated: "Quite honestly, I do not know many people who bought land and live here because basically they try to buy property in villages, and I live in the city. So I do not have a lot of experience with them".

As mentioned above, many retirement migrants "test the waters" by buying a vacation home with the option of either selling it later or turning it into a permanent home. Nevertheless, the numbers of foreigners owning a second home in Bulgaria are much larger than those of the potential migrants, and most of them do not plan to permanently move to the country. Instead, they maintain several residences, and the number and duration of their trips to Bulgaria varies considerably. Most of them treat their vacation home as a speculative investment as well and they plan on eventually selling it once the value has seen a significant increase.

In the Varna region, the vacation homes bought by foreigners are of two types. On the one hand, foreigners are buying village houses. Often, they do extensive renovations and repair work on these houses, sometimes with a view to later renting them out to tourists. The other type of vacation home bought by foreigners consists of holiday apartments, most of them in apart-hotels located in the resorts. Russians, in particular, are known for preferring this type of property, but they are purchased by other nationalities as well.

When acquiring a holiday apartment, the buyer is usually offered the services of a rental agency. These agencies work with tour operators and travel agencies, and help foreign owners rent their property to tourists. The owners of vacation homes may also attempt to rent the property out on their own, for example by approaching accommodation agencies or by advertising and marketing their property on the internet. The extent to which a second home is rented out depends on the demand, but also on the requirements of the owners. Some owners do not rent at all; they use their property as a vacation home for themselves, their friends, and family. Others rent out only occasionally, while still others may use their property for merely two or three weeks each year and rent it out the rest of the time. Ultimately, this is determined by a buyer's orientation towards the property, with those who

consider it primarily an investment focusing on its financial returns, and those who see it mostly as a vacation home putting their own needs first.[252]

Whatever the uses to which second homes are ultimately put, they have been identified as a source of considerable profit by developers, real estate agencies, and private individuals. In recent years, growing demand has led to the construction of numerous apart-hotels in the resorts. At the same time, private individuals have constructed new houses or *vila*s along the coast, and attempted to sell them to foreigners looking for a second home, or they have sold their land to developers looking for plots in coastal locations. Ultimately, second homes, whether they be used as (semi-)permanent homes, vacation homes, or considered a speculative investment, have contributed to the rapid urbanization of the coastal areas as well as to the urbanization of many of the region's resorts.

However, this is not the only link between tourism and second homes. As mentioned above, many buyers "discovered" the region as tourists. Some got to know the region and its people, they "fell in love" and decided to buy a vacation home. Others happened upon one of the ubiquitous real estate agencies, discovered the comparatively low prices, and, encouraged by the promise of huge returns, decided to buy. Once they have acquired and started using a second home, some owners continue to view themselves as tourists while others distance themselves from that role and self-identify as residents or locals.[253] But however they view themselves, buyers of second homes are motivated by the same factors that attract tourists to Bulgaria, and they are dependent on the same infrastructure and the same amenities as tourists. Like other tourists, they are attracted by low local prices, the natural environment and climate, and the hospitable population. They rely on flights into Varna's airport (especially charter flights and low-cost carriers); shop in

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[252] If owners decide to charge an agency with marketing their vacation home, they are severely limited in their freedom to use it, as they will always have to check with the agency before planning their own use to find out whether the property has been rented by customers. On foreigners renting out apartments to tourists, see also chapters 3 and 9.

[253] Recent studies of second home owners have undermined the traditional distinction between tourism and migration, and have brought out the complexities inherent in the concept of "home". In her book, *The British on the Costa del Sol*, O'Reilly (2000) attempted to distinguish British migrants from tourists in terms of their orientation to home, identifying four groups: full residents, returning residents, seasonal visitors, and peripatetic visitors. In a subsequent article, she came to the conclusion that "it is impossible to deny their relationship to tourism and the way cultures of tourism impact on their lives. It is also impossible to deny the impact their cultures of tourism have on the surrounding areas, people and things" (O'Reilly 2009: 130). Hence she speaks of "residential tourism", even though the foreign second home owners she studied distanced themselves from tourists, and objected to being classified as such. In Varna, the locals firmly categorize foreign second home owners as tourists and treat them accordingly – whatever their self-conception.

supermarkets that cater to tourists; and eat in the tourist-oriented restaurants. Many of them even stay in the resorts. They tend to spend their money in tourist-oriented businesses because these are the ones where their languages are spoken. And, finally, they attract additional tourists by hosting their families and friends, thus contributing to tourist flows to their location (cf. Williams and Hall 2000; Larsen, Urry and Axhausen 2007).

"Why not Breathe Life into that Village?" – Local Reactions to Foreign Buyers

What, then, are the locals' reactions to this influx of foreign property owners? As may be expected with such a complex issue, there is no uniform view. Generally, the Varnentsi seem to be mostly indifferent towards foreign owners of holiday apartments. While they recognize that apart-hotels contribute to resort urbanization, overcrowding, and environmental deterioration, their critique of these processes is not particularly directed at the owners of holiday apartments. Opinions are much more pronounced and differentiated concerning the buyers of village houses and *vila*s, and it is to these that I shall now turn.

Some Varnentsi unreservedly welcomed foreign buyers of village houses. Hristina, the tourism worker who had praised tourism as clean, friendly and profitable, felt that in daily life, only a person's conduct and neighborly behavior are relevant, whereas nationality is not important:

> Foreigners buy houses in the villages. Bulgarians prefer to live in the city. That is why the villages grow; it is due to the foreigners. And that is good for the Bulgarians, too, because the villages are more attractive and fewer people want to leave them. Besides, the important thing is whether or not a person is a good neighbor. It does not matter if he is Bulgarian, Turkish, or English; when he is a good person, it is no problem to live together. Most of these foreigners are very nice, and they are even trying to learn Bulgarian.

A similar argument concerning foreign second home owners' contributions to the revival of villages was made by Tsvyatko, a hotel contracting manager in his early twenties:

> For a poor village it is a good thing to have three or four British families who will revive life in the village. Who will have money. At least the locals will be happy. And if those houses are unused, as they are, left by the… probably the former owners are either too old or have died, and the young ones have moved to the city. So why not breathe life into that house again? I do not mind that at all.

Others, like Plamena, a broker in her mid-twenties, emphasized that the presence of foreigners helped Bulgarians learn about other cultures and lifestyles, thus enriching their own culture and helping them to become "more European":

> We Bulgarians like foreigners, we are very happy to communicate with other cultures. It is very good for us. These people can teach us a lot about European customs and European traditions, and they bring their cultures here, actually, and they can teach us how to be more European. Because in the Communist period, people did not have information about what was going on behind the so-called Iron Curtain. So people did not have that knowledge and we were more closed off from… . We did not have the influence of western European countries and America and the other countries. We only had contacts with Russia and the ex-Russian Republics and maybe the eastern part of Germany, basically all the countries that had adopted Communism. So people realize that and they are glad to communicate and to have the chance to communicate. And we are really proud of our country, I think, at least of its history.

In a similar vein, Vasil, a broker in his mid-twenties, emphasized that the influx of foreigners was a result of Bulgaria opening to the world: "The thing is, we have opened to the world and so it is up to the world now to come and see our history, our people, our country. And if they want to stay and live here, I do not mind at all. I do not think most of the population would mind".

However, there were other views as well. Most of those who were critical of foreigners buying property in Bulgaria recognized the positive economic effects of the sales, but they felt unsettled by the rising property prices. They were concerned about the consequences of these rising prices on locals and about the implications inherent in the sale of land to foreigners more generally. Nadezhda, a 20-year-old hotel receptionist seemed torn when she reflected on foreign property owners and the meanings of their presence:

> On the one hand, it helps improve the economy because these foreigners spend a lot of money buying property, as well as later on when they stay here. But on the other hand, it is regrettable. It means that instead of us owning our land or houses, supporting ourselves and our economy, these foreigners come here and buy these things that we have owned for many, many years. It is bad, because… since 1989, since the reforms have started, two million Bulgarians have left the country. They are mostly young people, and they are economic migrants. And these are the reasons for that. Of course, it is a good thing that foreigners are buying property here because they

> stimulate not just the economy but our culture as well. They breathe new life into our culture, you know? But at the same time, it is sad, because it means we do not value our land and our country as much as they do. They come here and they ask, "You have a beautiful country, why do you not take care of it? Why do you leave?".

Selena, a hotel manager in her forties was similarly disturbed by the sale of Bulgarian land:

> I do not like it that foreigners come here and buy property. Because this is our homeland, our country, and it should belong to us. The foreigners who buy land and houses have a lot of money, and that has very negative effects on the market. The price of apartments and of land keeps rising and that is something I do not like. I mean, I own my apartment, but because of the rising prices, there are a lot of young people who will never be able to buy an apartment. And that is a very bad thing. I mean, this is where we are different from you Germans, you know? It is extremely important for us to own our home; living for rent is considered as something terrible. That is our mentality, the way we are thinking. And that is why I do not like these foreign buyers.

Maya, a 19-year-old employee of a tourist agency was even more straightforward:

> You know, most of these foreigners are speculators. They buy a house, wait for a year or two, and then re-sell it. And they will get much more money for it than the Bulgarian who originally sold it to them. It does not seem right! And I think most of them buy properties here with this kind of profit in mind.
>
> Personally, if I owned some land here, in this region, I would not sell it. But people are stupid, they are just selling, living on the money they get, because you get a lot of money selling a house or a plot of land. And they do not think of the future too much. But me… I do not know. I am kind of a patriot. I mean, it's our land! It's our country! And it is so small already! You know, Bulgaria used to be much larger, and now it is so small because of all the things that happened about a century ago. And now we are selling our land and everything for a pittance! That is just… . I do not know, I just would not do that.

Of course, the real estate agents I talked to were very aware of these views and dealt with them in various ways. Bulgarian brokers, in particular, tended to dismiss them. A 26-year-old agent exclaimed: "It is Bulgarians who sell their properties to the foreigners, so I do not think [others] have any right to resent them!". And another broker stated: "I really cannot say what people think, and frankly, I do not care. I am in this business; I rather prefer that

people sell and buy properties". Meanwhile, foreign brokers tended to be more circumspect, carefully pointing out the many advantages Bulgarians derived from selling properties to foreigners. Steve explained with respect to village houses:

> It has been mainly in the English press that the Bulgarians are not happy with us buying. I would say – absolutely rubbish. Absolutely rubbish! The number of people coming here to buy to live is minimal. Let's be honest. Let's look at the scenario. Three, three and a half years ago, the village where I live, it was dead. Most people had left, most properties were empty. Go there now, three years later, it's thriving. The school has opened, the shops have opened, instead of selling two or three items they are now selling 150. And why has that happened? Let's look at the scenario.
>
> The mother is in the village, the father has died, basically, the children are renting an apartment in Varna; they are aged about thirty or forty. Somebody comes along to buy mother's property for 35,000 euros. She has never seen this sort of money before! This is like winning the lottery! Somebody comes along, 35,000 euros. Heaven has opened up! She can now afford to come into Varna, and for her son and daughter to buy the apartment that they have rented. So the two bedroom turns into a three bedroom; mother has one of those rooms, basically. So that is giving money back to the city. Mother has come in, she is being looked after, the family is being looked after. The person that has bought her property has renovated it. He always could have knocked it down and built something new. Then the village people are happy, because they have work doing the gardens, doing the building, doing the roof. Everyone in our village that can work is basically working at the moment, every day. Now, for them to be suddenly earning 25 levs a day, when they had been looking three years ago to earn 2 or 3 levs a day, it's a big difference. So the feeling that there is any resentment – there is none.
>
> The only resentment I have heard from the Bulgarian press is the Ataka Party, one of the nationalist parties: basically, Brits coming to take over the country. Absolutely rubbish! It is so minimal! If they knew how many Bulgarians are actually in Britain compared to how many Brits are coming over here, it would be in their favor by a very large margin. So, no, I do not feel any backlash. I have never heard of any animosity from locals to British that are living here. Far, far from it. A local loves it when an English person lives next door to them. They go around, "Ah, we are living next door to an Englishman, we are going to get work, we are going to look after the prop-

> erty!". So from that side I would say they probably… . The villages are changing back to what they were maybe 10, 15 years ago, during the Communist time. I can speak for my village when I say, 11 years ago, when I first went to the village, it was dead. There was no shop, there was no nothing. And now to see that completely changed, probably with 30-odd houses new, houses built, and probably another 15 being built as we speak. Yes. A little village that had nothing has suddenly got a lot.

Thus, there is a wide variety of local reactions to foreigners buying property in the region. On the one hand, people welcome the economic benefits; on the local level, jobs are created in the construction sector and in the real estate sector, among others. Locals help to construct or rebuild second homes, or they are hired to help with property management. Furthermore, foreigners buying properties in Bulgaria inject considerable amounts of money into the economy. That benefits the local economy again, as many of those who sell their property to foreigners use the money they receive to buy a new property for themselves; be it, as in Steve's description, an apartment in the city, or be it a *vila* in an area less popular with foreigners and thus cheaper.

Bulgarians also appreciate foreign buyers' contribution to the revival of villages that suffered considerable population losses in the decades of socialism as well as in the years following the reforms. After 1989, the villages were hit particularly hard by the crash of the Bulgarian economy; many factories and other companies that had been established in rural areas to industrialize the countryside, create jobs in rural areas, and stem rural-urban migration closed in the 1990s. Rural areas were devastated; when their inhabitants lost their jobs and, in some cases, any access to money, villagers reverted to a subsistence economy (Cellarius 2000, 2004; Creed 2002a, 2002b; Ghodsee 2009). As a result, large shares of the rural working-age population left for the cities or abroad. The effects of these processes were more moderate in coastal areas where people could earn some income from tourism. Nevertheless, the influx of foreigners into these villages is considered to contribute to their revival by replenishing the population, injecting much-needed money into the local economy, and stimulating further tourism.

Many Varnentsi with whom I talked also pointed out that foreigners buying village houses do not compete for living space with local Bulgarians. Indeed, they emphasized that Bulgarians prefer living in cities and many professed their puzzlement at foreigners' desire to live in a village. They argued that before the arrival of the foreigners, many of these houses were abandoned and fated to slowly crumble. While in recent years, well-to-do

Bulgarians, often from Sofia or other cities, have shown an increased interest in acquiring such houses as second homes or as an investment, their numbers are small. The general opinion seemed to be that most Bulgarians did not wish or could not afford to buy and renovate such houses, and thus the involvement of foreigners was a good thing.

The negative effect most strongly associated with the sale of local properties is the sharp increase in property prices that is perceived to be a result of the involvement of foreigners. I will address this issue in greater detail below; but in the case of village houses, the negative effects of rising prices on the locals are rather limited. As mentioned, Bulgarians are usually not interested in buying village properties as they prefer living in the city. One might also argue – as several people actually did – that it is the local sellers who are responsible for the rapidly increasing prices of village houses. Several brokers explained that local Bulgarians actually strongly prefer selling their village houses to foreigners, their rationale being that foreigners would be willing and able to pay much larger sums for them than local buyers. As a result, the market for village properties has some characteristics of a sub-market with its own buyer segments and pricing.[254]

However, the influx of foreign buyers of second homes also brings to the fore some deeply-seated fears for the future of Bulgaria. Among the people with whom I talked, a significant number expressed their unease with the sale of property and land to foreigners. On the one hand, like Nadezhda in the quotation above, they argued that ownership of property and land would help Bulgarians to support themselves; selling property would thus deprive them of an important means of livelihood. These views are rooted in the high value Bulgarians put on property ownership. Property is considered a safe investment securing a future for oneself and one's family. It is viewed as something to be used productively; houses or apartments may be inhabited or rented out to people who are less fortunate, land should be cultivated. Property is something to be kept and maintained. It is an insurance against bad times; many Bulgarians vividly remember the 1990s, when owning one's home meant that, at least, one had a roof over one's head that could not be taken away. In the 1990s, owning a second home and renting it out meant having an additional income that could make the difference between bare survival and a moderately comfortable life; owning a garden or small

[254] Keith Hoggart and Henry Buller's (1995a) study of British second home owners in rural France noted similar effects on local economies as well as the creation of a "semi-autonomous housing market". Britons bought rural properties for which there was little demand by domestic buyers; hence, their activities had little effect on property prices more generally. However, in contrast to the Varna region, re-sales were difficult for these owners as British buyers were reluctant to buy from their compatriots. As a consequence, the share of "speculative buying" was much lower than it is in Varna.

plot of land provided food and freed scarce money resources for other purposes. Property is considered as something to be passed on to one's children, not sold to foreign speculators. Selling property, in the eyes of people like Nadezhda and Maya, means forever depriving oneself and one's children of a potential home and of a vital asset. They think that the sellers are short-sighted and greedy. Sellers see the short-term benefits of the money that foreigners are willing to pay for village houses, but they do not consider the long-term damage of the sales to their descendants and perhaps the nation.

For Maya, like many others, the sale of land also triggered deep anxieties about the future of their nation. Bulgaria is a small country as it is, they argue. It is marginal on the stage of world politics, and its fate has always been controlled by larger powers such as Turkey and Russia in the past and, some say, by the United States and western Europe in the present. At the same time, its integrity is seen as threatened from within by a large and, according to some, growing Turkish minority that is suspected of aspiring to independence or reunification with Turkey. Ethnic Bulgarians thus perceive themselves as beleaguered from all sides. Their numbers have been dwindling since 1989, with many of them leaving their economically devastated country to look for a better and more prosperous future elsewhere. Selling property, and especially land[255], to foreigners is seen as contributing to this exodus by depriving people of their livelihood; at the same time it takes yet another shred of control away from Bulgarians by diminishing the size of their territory, and creating a new, but powerful, minority that is much wealthier than the locals, backed by powerful nation-states, and that might, with time, demand more influence and more rights.[256]

"The Sharks Are Out to Get You!" – The Real Estate Agencies

So far, it has emerged that a strong demand for second homes exists in the Varna region. It is driven by foreigners who purchase village houses and

[255] Technically, foreign individuals (i.e. a physical person) cannot buy or own land in Bulgaria; however, there are easy ways around this restriction. As Bulgarian limited companies are allowed to buy and own land, foreigners who want to purchase a plot of land (e.g. along with a village house) first establish a company for that purpose. They are guided through the process by the real estate agencies for whom it is merely routine. Nevertheless, the prohibition acts as a barrier since some potential buyers are deterred by the additional (although fairly low) costs, time, and paperwork necessary to establish a company. Furthermore, as the land is technically owned by the landholding company, its legal ownership and hereditary transmission raise a number of problematic issues.

[256] There are a number of case studies analyzing how second home owners as a group attempt to influence or even control the further development of the communities where their second homes are located. See, for example, one of the earliest studies of the effects of second homes on local communities by Jordan (1980), as well as Mottiar and Quinn (2003).

holiday apartments as speculative investments or as second homes, sometimes with a view to later using them as retirement homes. Although foreigners are dominant in this field, second homes are also acquired by well-off Bulgarians, many of whom have their primary residence in other parts of the country. On the supply side, village houses were initially sold by Bulgarian families. Only later did foreigners enter the market as sellers, either because they had bought a property relatively early and decided to sell a few years later, or because they realized that living in the Bulgarian countryside was not as tranquil, idyllic, or bucolic as they had hoped. Holiday apartments, by contrast, are usually sold by developers and have appeared only recently for re-sale.

Many of the sellers use real estate agencies to find buyers for their property. They assume that agents efficiently offer a property to a wide range of potential buyers, and handle the sales process in an efficient and competent manner. Furthermore, agencies mediate between buyers and sellers, dealing with cross-cultural and language differences, and help both parties to navigate legal and administrative issues that are often obscure to laypeople. By marketing the properties offered for sale, attracting buyers, and channeling them towards specific regions and into specific types of properties, real estate agencies have a strong impact on the development of the property market (cf. Hoggart and Buller 1994). Examining them will shed further light on the dynamics of the property market, its links with tourism, and its impacts on the local population. In the following paragraphs, I will outline the profiles of three small Varna-based agencies, and then discuss the issues emerging from their cases.[257]

Profile No. 1: Chernomorski Dream

The real estate agency Chernomorski Dream was established in 2002 by a Bulgarian businessman who owned a development and building company, and was planning to extend his field of operations. Chernomorski Dream was a comparatively small, but well-established agency with a stable base of clients. It traded in residential properties, selling the luxury apartments built by its sister company, and acting as a broker for the sale of city and village properties as well as plots of land. Like all established companies in Varna, it offered a wide range of service packages and after-sales services, ranging from fully furnishing a property to property management and security. On a very small scale, the company also rented out holiday homes and luxury apartments in the city.

[257] The names of the agencies are pseudonyms.

Chernomorski Dream had seven employees, but in peak periods, staff from its sister company could be sent over to help. Its employees earned a base salary plus a share of the commission on each deal. When hiring new employees, the office manager looked for people with good foreign language and communication skills; she considered expert knowledge about and experience in the real estate sector desirable but not essential since she believed such skills could be acquired in training. All of the agency's employees were in their twenties, reflecting the owner's and office manager's conviction that only young people have a good education, technological affinity, cross-cultural competence, and a "modern" and open-minded outlook. Like the real estate sector more generally, the agency experienced relatively rapid labor turnover among its brokers.

Chernomorski Dream had no specific target group, but the majority of its customers were Bulgarians. Its foreign clients mostly purchased village houses, and only occasionally holiday apartments. The brokers distinguished several sub-groups of Bulgarian buyers. The largest and most important group consisted of young couples looking for a family home. They purchased city apartments and tended to prefer cheaper smaller apartments. They usually financed their purchase with a loan, even though going into debt for many years was seen as a serious burden by many. A second, much smaller group were the so-called investors, described as "businesspeople" or "wealthy Bulgarians" who invested in upscale city apartments in order to derive an income from the rents. The third group consisted of buyers of second homes. They could be local families acquiring a village house to be used as a holiday home; some of them planned to move to the property after retirement, passing on their city apartment to their children. Second homes were also bought by "people from Sofia" planning to use them as holiday homes or, in the case of businesspeople, as a base for their business-related stays in the area.

Over the years, Chernomorski Dream had built a stable base of clients. The agency profited from the owner's wide network of connections in the city's business circles, particularly in the building industry and the property development sector. Sellers offering their properties via the agency were mostly Bulgarians. Many of them chose Chernomorski Dream because the agency was Bulgarian-owned and operated and had a reputation for reliability and fairness. The agency advertised its offers on a professional-looking website through which it found the majority of its buyers. Some properties were also advertised in the agency's office: printouts describing selected properties were taped to the office windows and a small promotional display on an A-frame was placed on the sidewalk in front of the office. Nevertheless, the agency had a rather small number of walk-in clients, probably

because the majority of buyers were Bulgarians who tend to carefully compare offers on the internet before actually approaching an agency, and because the office, although located in the city center, sat in a small street away from the main pedestrian thoroughfares and the main tourist flows.

Profile No. 2: OstWest

The real estate agency OstWest was established in 2006 by a Bulgarian businesswoman with long experience in the sector. She had previously worked for British-run agencies where she had gained the expertise necessary to run an agency targeting foreigners. She had perceived an oversupply of agencies oriented towards British and Irish buyers but noted a shortage of agencies catering to the German-speaking market, and thus decided to occupy that niche.

OstWest had 24 employees, including four native German-speakers, in its Varna-based main office and an additional number working in a call center located in Germany. The employees in the Varna office had, without exception, university degrees, and they were fluent in both German and English. When hiring new staff, OstWest preferred candidates with experience in the tourism industry for their excellent language and communication skills and their previous experience working with foreigners. The owner believed that these "skills" are the basic requirements for brokers; technical and specialized knowledge could be gained through a number of training courses that her employees took before they could work with clients. OstWest preferred to hire young people as they were believed to be more open and flexible.

OstWest worked with both commercial and residential properties, selling plots of land for commercial developments, apartments, and houses. Its Varna office was based in a newly renovated building in the city center, but unlike other agencies, it was not located on the ground floor, nor were there advertisements making its purpose obvious to any passers-by. Its presence was, instead, announced by a discrete plaque by the entrance, and like the building with its understated elegance and professional air, the office was more evocative of a corporate headquarters than of a real estate agency. As a result, OstWest had barely any walk-in clients; nor did it target German-speaking tourists in Bulgaria. Its Varna office dealt with local sellers, as well as with the transactions and paperwork that needed to be completed locally, but its marketing and advertising efforts were directed towards the German, Austrian, and Swiss source markets. Thus, the German office and call center was an integral and very important part of the company, as it was responsible for continually acquiring new clients.

Profile No. 3: Black Sea Properties

Black Sea Properties was established in 2003 by a British expatriate in his late forties and his Bulgarian wife. The couple had originally moved to Varna with the idea to retire early and live-off their existing savings , but they quickly became bored. A friend suggested they move into the real estate sector and even though they had no prior experience, they followed his advice. That was a risky move at the time, because, according to them, "nobody was buying anything back then". For a very short time, they were struggling, but their early move into the sector was soon rewarded. As they recounted it, a television program on buying property in Bulgaria was broadcast in the United Kingdom, producing an influx of British buyers. The boom on the local property market began, and their company was ready to act.

By 2007, Black Sea Properties had 15 employees divided into a sales team operating from an office in an advantageous location in the city center and an administrative team located in a second office in an outlying neighborhood. To safeguard against fraud and embezzlement, the owners preferred employing relatives and friends. Their employees had to be fluent in English, Bulgarian, and Russian. Furthermore, friendliness, enthusiasm, good manners, and good communication skills were considered essential qualities. The owners argued that due to the poor reputation of the profession, as well as the large sums of money involved, potential clients are often nervous and distrustful. The first job of employees is to win the clients' trust and make them feel safe. The administrative staff was on a fixed salary and received bonuses for each deal, while the brokers received the minimum salary, commissions, and a car allowance. According to the owners, it would have been easy to expand their business, hire more people, and open another office. That would, however, increase the pressure to make sales, and in a downturn, the company would quickly have problems. Thus, they preferred to keep their operations small and their overheads low.

In the first years of its existence, the vast majority of the clients of Black Sea Properties had been British and Irish, with only a few coming from other western European countries. Between 2005-06, large numbers of Russians began to appear as buyers, but they primarily patronized the Russian agencies. At the same time, increasing numbers of Bulgarians were looking into properties. Many had received large sums of money from selling a village property and were now looking to buy a city apartment. Some of them preferred using foreign agencies because they deemed them more professional and more honest. In response, Black Sea Properties started to target this group by advertising its offers in Bulgarian as well as in English.



Plate 8. Offices of real estate agencies in Golden Sands.

The cases of these three agencies illustrate several characteristics of Varna's property market and several of the problems faced by the sector.

The first characteristic is the fragmentation of the property market itself. As we have seen, residential properties are bought by two main groups: foreigners and Bulgarians. In Varna, there is a large number of real estate agencies that originally had foreigners as their target group. Usually, these agencies cater to a specific nationality; for example, Black Sea Properties began by targeting British and Irish buyers while OstWest targets German-speakers; several agencies specialize in Russian-speaking buyers. These agencies have several things in common. Most notably, they do most of their advertising and marketing directly in the country of origin of their target group. Like OstWest with its German call center, these agencies seek to acquire customers directly in the source market. Unlike OstWest, however, most of these agencies also try to attract walk-in clients. They maintain offices in the tourist resorts and in the Varna's central pedestrian areas, and they usually have ground-floor offices with large windows facing the street. Particularly attractive offers are displayed in the agency's front windows or on the sidewalks in front of the building where tourists can often be seen stopping and browsing through the offers.

In order to attract clients and engender their trust, many agencies that target foreigners also employ agents from the target group's country of

origin. Thus, while OstWest was established by a Bulgarian businesswoman, it employs several Germans and Austrians. Black Sea Properties was established by a Briton and his Bulgarian wife. In addition to engendering their clients' trust, foreign employees are also hired to help their clients getting acquainted with the local area and its people and settling in. To these ends, real estate agencies offer their clients not just assistance throughout the sales process but extensive after-sales services. Throughout the sales process, the more serious and professional agencies offer services such as airport pickup, hotel reservations, booking guided tours of the city and its surroundings, and recommending restaurants, bars, clubs, or shopping venues. These forms of assistance continue after a sale has been made. All agencies offer service packages that include fully furnishing the newly-bought property, landscaping or gardening, and caring for the property in the owners' absence, which might include regular inspections and check-ups, airing the premises, tending the garden, and grocery shopping in preparation for the owner's arrival. Moreover, real estate agencies targeting foreigners offer to introduce their clients to their compatriots already living in the region, thus aiding their integration into the expatriate community. It follows that real estate agencies have an important role not just as brokers in the sales process but also as cross-cultural mediators. Like tour guides and other tourism workers, they educate their clients about the region and its people (Hoggart and Buller 1994; Bridge 2001; Smith, Munro and Christie 2006), thus shaping their clients' perceptions of and interactions with the local population. At the same time, real estate agencies contribute to the creation of (marginal) communities of (temporarily) resident foreigners (O'Reilly 2000). Foreign brokers are members of these communities themselves, and they provide these communities with potential new members (Buller and Hoggart 1994).

However, foreign buyers are also targeted by agencies that view Bulgarians as their main customer group. Chernomorski Dream is one such example: most of their buyers are Bulgarian, but their website was also available in English, as were the offers advertised in their office window. Chernomorski Dream's use of English in its advertising is a result of the development of the local property market. When the market first expanded, foreigners were the most profitable customer segment; they were able to spend much more money than Bulgarians and they also engaged in less comparison shopping. Thus, they were courted by virtually all the agencies selling residential properties. Even agencies catering mainly to Bulgarian customers had English (and later Russian) websites, and many of them hired British brokers to help them deal with foreigners.

However, the numbers of foreign buyers began to stagnate in 2006-07. During those years, the property market was booming, but many feared a

saturation of the sub-market for second homes. While new apart-hotels were being built, the voices complaining about resort urbanization were getting louder. Many of the best village properties had already been taken by the earliest wave of buyers, and some brokers feared a decline in new buyers. Many properties were put on sale by foreign owners who had bought them as speculative properties at the beginning of the boom or by those who had decided to abandon their "Bulgarian dream" and return home. New buyers were deterred by rising prices, or wanted to wait until the effects of Bulgaria's 2007 EU admission on tourist flows and on the legal aspects of foreign property ownership became clear. At the same time, incomes from tourism stagnated, and many second home owners found that brokers' promises of high returns from renting out their properties had been exaggerated. Stories about cheating and rip-offs by brokers circulated on the internet, deterring new buyers. Many buyers were diverted to the southern Bulgarian Black Sea coast where the boom was just beginning and more first rate properties in prime locations were still available for lower prices.

As foreign buyers became more wary, Bulgarian buyers became increasingly important. In the 1990s and early 2000s, domestic buyers had not been an attractive clientele because they lacked the funds to acquire property, and loans were either hard to secure or unattractive because of their disadvantageous conditions (Tsenkova 1996; Vesselinov 2004). But the economic recovery of the country and the tourism boom in the Varna region contributed to an increasing solvency of the local population. As a result of the stabilization of the banking sector and the economic upturn, loans were more easily available, and they had more advantageous conditions. Furthermore, a significant number of people in the region had sold second homes to the first wave of foreign buyers and now found themselves with large sums of cash to spend. This resulted in an influx of domestic buyers on the property market.

The agencies have responded to these developments. Like Black Sea Properties, many agencies that initially targeted foreign buyers have now created Bulgarian-language websites, display their offers in Bulgarian, and have hired Bulgarian brokers to work with domestic customers. There is thus a convergence in terms of target groups insofar as most established agencies nowadays strive to attract both domestic and foreign buyers. However, the two groups seek different types of properties: the majority of domestic buyers are searching for city apartments to be used as a family home, while foreigners prefer buying second homes in the form of village houses or holiday apartments. This segmentation is still reflected on the websites of many agencies where city apartments are often advertised exclusively in Bulgarian, whereas second homes are offered in English, Russian, or Ger-

man. Some agencies have also started to offer apartments for rent, and here, too, some segmentation exists. Furnished luxury apartments in central Varna are advertised in English and other foreign languages, whereas unfurnished apartments in the outlying neighborhoods are offered in Bulgarian for much lower prices.

The strong fragmentation of the property market at the beginning of the boom offered room for a large number of real estate agencies, and their proliferation was encouraged by additional influences. First, the proximity of the resorts meant that there was a large number of individuals who were well-suited to work in the real estate business; moreover, many of these individuals were eager to have year-round incomes. Selling properties was clearly a very profitable business and drew the attention of entrepreneurs who opened agencies; in turn, the agencies sought employees with excellent foreign language and communication skills, cross-cultural competence, a good local knowledge, working experience with foreigners, and computer literacy; specialized knowledge of the sector or experience was not required.

A second factor encouraging the proliferation of real estate agencies was a lack of regulation. To be sure, there were numerous regulations covering areas such as zoning, construction standards, property appraisal and valuation, along with a host of legal and administrative regulations surrounding the transfer of property rights. Nevertheless, the real estate business itself was under-regulated. Brokers did not have to be registered or even licensed; thus, virtually anyone could become an agent. And indeed, many did.

Interestingly, the real estate sector has also drawn foreigners who found themselves in Bulgaria and, for a variety of reasons, looking for employment. British expatriates, in particular, have gravitated into the real estate sector. Most of them do not speak Bulgarian, and thus are limited in their employment options. Even jobs in tourism are difficult for them to obtain because Bulgarian candidates usually have a better formal education, greater foreign language skills, and prior experience working in tourism.

The real estate business, however, offers opportunities for foreigners to work in their own native language, and requires few other formal skills, training, or experience. Many Bulgarian-run agencies that target buyers from the UK have hired British expatriates in the hopes of increasing their sales. Bulgarian owners believe that these brokers would earn their clients' trust not just due to their shared nationality and language, but also because they are of a similar age and share a working-class background and habitus. Thus, they would be able to reach a kind of accord with their clients that is hard to attain for the often much younger, university-educated, middle-class, Bulgarian brokers.

Steve estimated that in 2007 there were about 300-400 Britons in Varna's real estate sector, with quite a number running their own agencies. The British expats living in Varna maintain close ties with each other, and these extended networks make it possible even for one-man operations to sell properties, as Steve explained:

> There are a lot of people that have come over here doing nothing. But they are still selling properties. Say, you sit down in a pub, drinking, and start talking to the guy next to you. You tell him you are from Germany and you are looking to buy a property. And they say, "Yeah, I know someone selling this great property…". So they are linked to someone who is selling, or maybe to a broker, or whatever. Or if you need a solicitor, they will suggest one to you. Or a notary. Or somebody to look after your property. They know a lot of people. And they are making commission all the way down the line. With the living costs here being so low, you can make a living on that – selling the occasional property, brokering, arranging things… . You will always get a commission.

The influx of entrepreneurs into the property business has created a situation in which a number of established agencies form the core of the real estate sector, and many small "backroom" agencies exist at its fringes. The number of these small agencies is constantly fluctuating; new ones are established while others disappear, and many are largely inactive, selling only the occasional property when the opportunity arises. Hence, no one seems to really know how many agencies there are in Varna. In 2007, I collected estimates varying from 250 to 800 total real estate agencies in the city.

The lion's share of the property market is split among a limited number of well-established and often large agencies. But even smaller agencies have been able to build a sustainable business if they have a solid base of clients; maintain a stable number of sales; establish connections with developers, lawyers, and the local administration; and keep overheads low. Despite their differences, Chernomorski Dream, OstWest, and Black Sea Properties have all been successful by following these principles.

Another important precondition for building a sustainable business is honesty. This topic came up frequently, and brokers told many stories about clients being cheated or "ripped off", describing a wide variety of practices that dishonest agencies use to trick or cheat unsuspecting clients. The "dishonest agencies" were, of course, always agencies other than the broker's own. "The sharks are out to get you!" said Steve, and then explained:

> Steve: Anybody who bought two or three years ago, if they have not doubled [their investment], they did not get the right price. They were cheated. It comes down to the builders cheating, the developers

> cheating, notaries cheating, solicitors cheating. It comes all the way down the line. Property here, with the amounts of money that are being invested, and the opportunities here, it will cause a lot more people quite a few heartaches. And once you are caught, you can do nothing about it. You will lose your money.
> C.B.: What do you think, what is the percentage of people who actually lost money due to cheating?
> Steve: I would say, in the first year [of property ownership] alone, I would probably say 75 per cent. The first year – going back three years ago.
> C.B.: That many?
> Steve: Absolutely! But they are clamping down on it now. Mostly because… . Most estate agents have been slammed on… . There are a lot of websites here, foreign ones, where people can write, "I've bought with so-and-so, do not trust these people, they will cheat you!". There are fantastic stories! You could spend a whole month looking at them!

For a variety of reasons, "cheating" was particularly prevalent at the beginning of the property boom. On the one hand, many foreign buyers spontaneously decided to buy without shopping around, comparing prices, or even familiarizing themselves with local conditions. As they often knew nothing about the local property market, current legislation, or the process of buying a property, they relied completely on their agency to guide them through the purchase. It was thus relatively easy for agencies to sell properties that were not well-suited to their clients' purposes; to raise the price or ask additional fees; and to otherwise profit from their clients' ignorance. Especially in the early years of the boom, many foreign buyers never intended to use their property as a vacation home. The majority of them viewed their acquisition as an investment, planning to re-sell it for a huge profit a few years down the line, and in the meantime earning additional money from renting it out. The brokers fuelled these aspirations by promising extremely high returns; they assured potential buyers that the market would continue to boom, that properties would double or triple their value in a few years, and they pointed to the flourishing tourism industry, predicting that owners would be able to rent their properties throughout the tourist season. In the following excerpt, Steve described his own sales technique:

> People coming to Varna, they have no reason to buy a property. We have so many people that come and look at our windows, and I say, "Are you looking for a property?". They say, "No, no, I'm just looking to see what the prices are". I say, "Okay, why waste your money in England? What do you get in the bank in England? Four per cent.

> Here? You get seven and a half per cent. With property? You are getting 20 or 25 per cent!". They go, "Oh? Could it be that easy? Ah, but I don't want to spend big amounts of money!". – "Then buy a little piece of land for 5,000 euros or maybe 10,000! I've got plenty". "Oh, is that all?". "Yep. And you could form a company and you'd be a managing director!". "God, I'm going to be a managing director of a company!". It's all a game. It's all a big game. You mention that you have to form a company, you'll be the managing director, they can go back to England, "I've got some land in Bulgaria. I'm the managing director of a company there!". They bought a piece of land for 5,000 euros.[258]

It is hard to escape the resulting atmosphere; with their tales, the brokers paint an image of a situation full of rich opportunities, opportunities it would be foolish not to grasp, but they have to be grasped immediately. This all-pervading mood tempted many people into buying, and only later on, when they attempted to re-sell, did they realize that their property was not as attractive as they were made to believe.

The brokers, for their part, have a strong incentive to sell property, whether or not it is in the client's best interest. As they are on commission, brokers personally profit from each deal. Commissions are often considerable since the sums changing hands in a property deal are rather large. Brokers may also be tempted to quote clients a price higher than that asked by the seller and pocket the difference. They may also attempt to deal "on the side" by using their agency's infrastructure, connections, and information to privately connect sellers with buyers and thus secure the entire commission. To crush this temptation at its root, the owners of Black Sea Properties employed only relatives and friends as brokers.

In the real estate sector, stories abound about clients who have been cheated. After dealing with an agency, clients may recount their experiences on specialized customer review websites. On their pages, people can advise others, point to specific risks and pitfalls inherent in the sales process, and warn of dishonest agencies or brokers. The dissemination of this information has two effects. On the one hand, it fuels the mistrust of potential clients and contributes to the entire sector gaining a reputation for dishonest business practices. On the other hand, agencies that are specifically incriminated can quickly lose clients and drop out of business. Over time, disreputable smaller agencies at the fringes of the market have disappeared, while the larger agencies have slowly abandoned such practices to remain in business. Thus,

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[258] Foreigners have to form a limited company to buy land because Bulgarian law stipulates that a foreign physical person is not allowed buy land. See footnote 255 on page 306.

even as the sector's reputation declines, successful agencies are actually increasingly professional. Rainer explained the process as follows:

> The large agencies are working professionally; they are reputable and respectable. Today, they are, without exception, reliable companies that do not cheat their clients. The problem does exist among the small agencies, whether they are run by Germans, Bulgarians, or Britons. These are the "one-man shows"; they are trying to get their share, and often they do bend the rules in the process. They try to do business in their own way. Of course that is not a good thing, but nowadays, it is not a central issue; it is more of a peripheral one. The large agencies are, without exception, professional and reliable. They rarely have any serious problems. Of course, in real estate, as in any other sector, you will always have some problems. Perhaps a client is not happy because the workmanship of the roof tiling is unsatisfactory or something similar. But that is not what I am talking about. I am talking about legal security and protection, dealing with the customer professionally, being reliable and accountable, and paying taxes; these sorts of things. In the first decade after 1989 the situation was absolutely chaotic in that respect, terrible things happened, the way they dealt with clients… . But that is history. In the vast majority of cases that is not an issue any more.

Thus, in the period 2004-06, the mood on the property market in the Varna region was very much akin to that of a gold rush. Huge sums of money could be made, but they could be lost just as quickly. The market was extremely fragmented by nationality on the buyers' side, and as a result, many agencies were established to target very specific groups of buyers. Numerous agencies opened, but many closed just as quickly. The real estate business was extremely unstructured; anyone could establish an agency and there were no clear norms for doing business. Practices that amounted to tricking or cheating clients were widespread. Eventually, however, the sector began to consolidate. A core of well-established agencies emerged and became increasingly professional. This professionalization included the emergence of a uniform set of business practices, general norms and codes of conduct, as well as a set of skills that was expected of entrants into the field. The relatively high rates of labor turnover aided the diffusion of core practices through the sector, contributing to the emergence of standardized ways of doing business. In parallel to these processes, there was an increasing convergence of target groups with agencies increasingly targeting both foreign and domestic buyers.[259]

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[259] An insightful article by Edsel E. Sajor (2005) described very similar processes of professionalization on Cebu (Philippines) that likewise led to the emergence of a core of established

Nevertheless, the conditions of the initial boom period have left their mark on potential and actual buyers. In my conversations with brokers, there were intriguing glimpses into how trust had been won and lost among different groups of buyers during the gold rush period. Brokers working for agencies owned and operated by foreigners sometimes mentioned that a considerable share of their Bulgarian clients preferred using foreign agencies because they trusted them more than their Bulgarian counterparts. They claimed that cheating and rip-offs were mostly done by Bulgarian agencies, and that clients thus had a higher trust in foreign agencies. As Steve explained:

> Bulgarians are now buying from us. That was not a market initially. But Bulgarians now have money. And Bulgarians are coming in here looking for apartments. This is incredible. Two or three years ago, this did not happen. Now they have money. Maybe they sold some land, maybe they sold their village property. They now have money to buy apartments. If they go to a Bulgarian estate agent, the Bulgarian estate agent is going to try to get as much out of them as they can. So they come in to us as well, you see. And they normally say that they get a better deal with us. They look at the prices and then the lucky thing for us is that a lot of the Bulgarian estate agents are adding on the price. So if I offer it for 20,000, they are selling it for 25,000. And obviously the Bulgarians realize this, and that is why they are coming to us.

Similarly, some Bulgarian agents working directly in the tourist resorts claimed that Bulgarians who lived and worked abroad but wanted to acquire a vacation home in Bulgaria preferred working with foreign agencies for the same reasons. It is, of course, hard to confirm such claims, especially since brokers always attributed dishonest practices to other agencies. Nevertheless, such remarks offer a glimpse into the possible consequences of the chaotic conditions in the early phase of the property market boom.

Some Bulgarian brokers also complained about their compatriots who buy and sell property without using an agency at all. They explained that many people find a match on their own, and make the deal using only the services of a lawyer. Again, this was attributed to a lack of trust in the professionalism and honesty of real estate agencies. Of course, the brokers with whom I talked dismissed such accusations as entirely unfounded with regard to their own practices. Nevertheless, they took widespread accusations of cheating as an incentive to prove their own professionalism and trustworthiness. One might speculate that such reactions by potential clients will further

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– and, in that case, licensed – brokers, and a large number of smaller (unlicensed) agents. See also Ghanbari-Parsa and Moatazed-Keivani (1999).

contribute to the consolidation of the sector and the decline of dishonest and unprofessional ways of doing business.

"We Cannot Afford to Buy Property Anymore!" – Local Buyers of Urban Family Homes

Although the market for second homes in the Varna region clearly is an important source of income for developers, real estate agencies, and local sellers, its significance for most Varnentsi is still limited. When talking about the ramifications that the property market boom has for their own lives and plans for the future, my acquaintances were instead focused on another sub-sector, namely, the market for urban apartments and houses. On this market, Bulgarians are the most active buyers and sellers, and foreigners play only a small role. As noted above, many Bulgarians, especially the working-age population, prefer living in the city as it offers more economic, social, educational, and cultural opportunities. At the same time, Bulgarians strongly believe in home ownership; when establishing their own household and starting a family, they aspire to acquire their own home. Consequently, in Varna there is a strong demand for city apartments and houses, and the overwhelming share of it is generated by domestic buyers. Like Chernomorski Dream, many agencies were established specifically with this target group in mind, and in recent years, even those originally targeting foreigners have discovered domestic buyers as an important group of clients.

There was agreement among brokers that a number of problems exist with respect to city properties that arise from socialist and postsocialist processes of urban development. The most pressing of these is a shortage of vacant inner city apartments and commercial spaces. As noted in chapter 7, there has been an upsurge in demand for centrally located commercial and office spaces since 1989. After privatization, existing commercial properties were renovated and upgraded, and some new retail and office space was added through new developments, but the stock of commercial properties still falls short of satisfying the high demand. At the same time, residential mobility in the city center is low. As a result, few properties are available for sale in the city center, and those that are on offer are extremely expensive, further contributing to the skyrocketing property prices.

However, this does not mean that there is a shortage of residential and commercial properties in the entire city. On the contrary, large development companies are building new residential and commercial complexes on the outskirts of Varna. The houses and apartments in these new developments

are often more affordable than those in the city center[260]; the same is true for apartments in the socialist-era housing estates. Nevertheless, the latter are rejected by many Varnentsi due to their uniformity, the poor quality of the building stock, and the often drab environment of the neighborhoods. Suburban houses and apartments, by contrast, may offer more choice and variety, and a more pleasant environment, but they are also found in peripheral locations far away from the inner city's opportunities for shopping, entertainment, and leisure, and they often have very poor public transport connections. Hence, in Varna, inner city housing is preferred by many residents, and city center properties are the most sought-after and fetch the highest prices.

Among many Varnentsi, the high costs of purchasing a home were a source of worry, anxiety, and resentment. Many of my student friends who planned to establish their own households in Varna feared they would be unable to afford their own home. They worried about raising the necessary money, and they were anxious about the burdens that taking up a loan would place on them. The following story illustrates these concerns while at the same time illuminating some of the indirect impacts that tourism and the real estate sector have on the lives of ordinary people in Varna.[261]

Iveta's Story

Iveta was born in a small village in the Varna region. She had attended high school in Varna and afterwards stayed in the city to study economics and management. After getting her university degree in 2004, she held several successive jobs: as a waitress in a restaurant, as a shop assistant in a pastry shop, and as an assistant in a shop where international telephone calls could be placed (from on-site phone booths). I met her in the telephone shop in the winter of 2005.

Iveta was in her mid-twenties and married to a 32-year-old truck driver. In 2005, he received a monthly salary of 450 levs while Iveta earned 200 levs per month. Iveta was constantly worrying about making ends meet.

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[260] Among other factors, the price of suburban properties depends strongly on their location, with coastal properties being the most expensive and those in the hilly hinterland more affordable.

[261] I have included this story in full length because, apart from exemplifying the impacts of tourism and the development of the real estate sector on the lives of ordinary Varnentsi, it also gives voice to those who do not share the generally more positive outlook of the majority the city's working-age inhabitants. As such, it is intended to balance the numerous more positive and hopeful stories I have told so far. Iveta was one of the few people I met in Varna who saw their lives and futures as bleak and utterly hopeless, but attitudes and outlooks such as hers seem to be much more widespread in rural Bulgaria (see Ghodsee 2009). The figures on salaries, rents, and property prices in this story are from 2005.

Concerning her salary, she commented bitterly, "200 levs, that is nothing!". She was dissatisfied both with her income and the type of work she was doing, and was constantly on the lookout for better opportunities. She told me how she had applied for the position of secretary in a small local firm, only to find out that they, too, would pay her just 200 levs. She was very frustrated by that experience because she was convinced that a person with a university degree, English-language and computer skills deserved to earn at least twice that amount. She said, "I have studied for five years. I have invested five years of my life and a lot of money. What for? To work as a waitress?". Iveta had, in fact, worked as a waitress in a restaurant in the center of Varna. She explained how in such a job, she could actually earn much more than 200 levs per month in the summer season as the tourists were very generous tippers, but come fall, she would be out of work again. For a while, she had considered working as a waitress in Golden Sands where her earnings would be even higher than in the city, but in the end, she had decided against it for several reasons. First, she argued, employers were looking for people fluent in English and German, and she did not speak any German. Second, she would be out of work again as soon as the season was over. And third, many tourists treated waitresses "like prostitutes" and she thought she would be unable to handle such treatment. She also recounted how she had applied for a job in a large and well-established real estate agency. Her application had actually been successful, but in the end she had decided against taking the job. She pointed out that it would have been too risky; after all, although brokers could earn a lot of money, they ultimately were on a commission and thus had no secure income. Payments for rent, electricity, and phone bills were due monthly, but who knew whether she would actually manage to sell enough properties as a broker to have a steady income? After all, there was an overabundance of real estate agencies, a lot of competition, but only a limited number of properties to sell and buy.

Iveta was without any hope concerning her own future and that of her country. When I asked her how she saw her future, she confessed that she wanted to have children but had no hopes of ever being able to afford them. "How can we have a child with the little money we earn?", she asked me bitterly, and explained that considering her current circumstances, she could never justify bringing a child into the world. She had no hope that in the next few years her own situation or that of her country would improve in any way. She said that in a city like Varna, for her, at least, it was easy to find a job, albeit a low-paid one, because she was young, well-educated, and highly qualified. But those of her parents' generation had no opportunities at all. "They sit at home and they have nothing", she said, explaining that unemployment benefits were so low that it was impossible to live on them. Still,

conditions in Varna were better than those in the countryside where there were no jobs at all. Her brother had been unemployed for a year and he had two small children. He would never have been able to provide for them without the financial support of their parents, but he felt guilty for imposing on their already limited means. Iveta concluded that life under Communism was much better than today. Even though she was very young at that time she remembered her parents buying her everything she needed, and she could not recall them ever worrying about money. She said that under Communism, her family had money and, even more importantly, security – something they were lacking today. Right now, ordinary people were barely able to survive while the rich were getting richer, living in extravagance and luxury.

Iveta's greatest dream and aspiration was to buy her own home. In 2005, she and her husband were renting a small apartment close to the city center. They paid a rent of 130 levs plus utility costs. Iveta hated living for rent, but she had no hope to ever afford an apartment. In her daily life, she constantly worried about money, economizing in order to be able to pay the monthly bills. She said, "I cannot eat in a restaurant; I cannot go to the cinema; I cannot buy nice clothes. I want that, but how can I do it on a salary of 200 levs?".[262] Buying a home in Varna was more expensive than elsewhere in the country and how – she asked – could she afford an apartment for 20,000 euros when she could barely pay her bills? Taking a loan was out of the question because she would never be deemed creditworthy with the jobs she had and her low salary. Instead, foreigners would come to Varna and buy property. For them, property was cheap while the locals were unable to afford it. She bitterly asked, "So in the end, I will pay rent to a German? How can this be? It makes me really mad! We are Bulgarians, this is our country, but the foreigners come here, buy our houses, and we end up paying rent to them! That is simply wrong!".

Iveta's only hope for improving her financial situation was to work abroad. She had long agonized over the possibility of applying for a job in Britain, but she feared the long separation from her husband and her family. The only reason she considered it at all was the hope it offered her to finally realize her dream: buying an apartment that would be a real home for her family.

[262] Iveta's wishes are not necessarily expensive ones. Going to a restaurant may only mean having a coffee or beer with one's friends; "nice clothes" are fashionable but can be counterfeit brands; cinema tickets only cost 5 levs. To be unable to afford such small pleasures also leads to real forms of social exclusion.

The Consequences of the Property Market Boom

Although the bitterness and despair Iveta felt about her life and the bleakness and hopelessness she displayed when talking about her own and her country's future were rare among the Varnentsi of her generation, her concerns about her ability to purchase a family home were echoed by many other young people. There was a general agreement across all generations and sections of the local population that the property prices in the city had been skyrocketing since the early 2000s, and the costs of buying a home had become prohibitive. Many feared that young people in the process of establishing their own household would have to resort to living for rent. When talking about the causes of the price hikes, many accused foreign buyers. Boyan, a 30-year-old restaurant waiter explained it this way:

> Since we entered the European Union, the living costs have been rising. Apartments, houses, real estate – the prices of everything have skyrocketed. Two years ago, an ordinary apartment cost 20,000, 25,000 levs. Right now, it costs 100,000 levs. There are a lot of English who bought houses here; they continue to buy them, and that is why the prices are rising. And that is bad for us Bulgarians. While you are earning 2,000 or 3,000 euros per month in Germany, people here earn 200 or 300 levs. So there is no way a Bulgarian could afford an apartment for 100,000 levs! That is the problem!

Many of those who blamed foreign buyers for the high property prices acknowledged other, positive effects of the foreign rush for Bulgarian real estate. They pointed out that money was invested, jobs were created, and that the local economy thereby benefited. But this did not alleviate their concerns about the ability of locals to afford a family home, as this statement by Iva, a restaurant manager in her early fifties illustrates:

> All these foreigners coming here to buy property, that is not very good for us Varnentsi because the prices increase very much. The foreigners have more money than we do; they have enough money, they can afford to buy. And accordingly, the market price of property has been constantly rising. That is not good for the people of Varna because now we cannot afford to buy property any more. Our incomes are not large enough to afford buying these very expensive homes. That is one perspective. But at the same time, it is probably good for the economy. I mean, there are so many real estate companies here, and for them it is a good thing. And they, in turn, are our customers, so we profit as well. So their business grows and ours as well. That is not bad.

Another perspective was offered by Rumen, an elderly acquaintance who was retired from the merchant navy. He drew an analogy with similar proc-

esses occurring in Turkish resorts where German retirement migrants had driven-up local prices. Of course, he said, foreigners contributed to the rising property prices in Varna. But then he explained that the prices of urban properties had been going up long before foreign buyers began to appear. After privatization, many houses had been sold to investors who demolished the old buildings and built new, modern houses on the plots, individually selling the apartments and commercial spaces in them. Rumen was adamant that it was not so much foreigners who bought city apartments and houses, but rather Bulgarians, and that they were the ones driving up the prices. In the 1990s, a small albeit significant number of Bulgarians had made quite a lot of money; they looked to property as a preferred investment opportunity. But it was not just the wealthy who bought houses, apartments, or shops in Varna. Even ordinary Bulgarians who had come by some money chose to invest in property. The same applied to Bulgarians who had migrated to western Europe or North America. Some of them bought second homes, but others acquired city apartments for their own use or that of their families. Thus, he concluded, the rising property prices in the city were as much a result of the growing domestic demand as of the general property market boom fuelled by foreign buyers.

I believe that Rumen was correct in his assessment: the influx of foreign buyers of second homes did not directly drive up the prices of city apartments. It did, however, contribute to the boom in urban properties in a more indirect way: by providing Bulgarian sellers of second homes with large sums of money that could then be invested in city apartments and, more generally, by contributing to the mood of a gold rush that created high expectations among sellers and encouraged them to ask for increasingly higher prices. Varna's tourism boom combined with the rapid development of the city more generally affected the urban property market as well by adding to the high levels of in-migration that Varna continues to experience. Both temporary migrants, such as students and seasonal workers, and more permanent immigrants attracted by the economic opportunities of the city are fuelling the demand for city apartments and houses. At the same time, in-migration contributes to the widespread view of property as a good investment. In Varna, purchasing a second or third apartment does not just mean that one's money is invested safely, and out of the reach of inflation, or that a family has ensured the future of its children by providing them with a home when they start their own family. Property ownership also ensures a steady and reliable income, as houses and apartments may be used as commercial homes or rented on a more permanent basis to new arrivals who are rarely able to purchase a home when they first come to the city. As a result,

the Varnentsi are very prone to invest in property, leading to a high demand and thus rising prices.

Conclusion

In the Varna region, as in other mass tourism destinations, there are many links between tourism development and the dynamics of the property market. Foreigners are first attracted to the destination as tourists and some of them decide to buy a second home there after "falling in love" with the region. Other tourists acquire property after coming across one of the numerous real estate agencies, convinced by brokers' promises of the considerable profits to be made quickly and easily by anyone buying real estate in the area. Once they have purchased a second home, whether intended as a vacation home, a retirement home, or as a speculative investment, foreign buyers continue to rely on the tourist infrastructure. They use the same cheap flights as tourists to reach Varna; they eat in the restaurants that target tourists; buy in tourist-oriented shops; and spend their time with the same leisure activities as tourists. Those who rent their properties rely on tourists for their custom, and they use tourist-oriented accommodation or travel agencies as intermediaries. The owners of holiday apartments even stay in the tourist resorts and are limited by the patterns of resort seasonality in both their own use and rental of their property.

The property market boom in Varna contributes to many of the negative consequences that are commonly attributed to tourism. The high demand for holiday apartments has led to the accelerated construction of new apart-hotels, thus advancing resort urbanization and the concomitant environmental destruction. Foreign demand for *vila*s and village houses in prime locations has fuelled coastal development, and it has been one factor in the disappearance of natural areas and undeveloped stretches of land.

However, second homes are just one segment of the property market. Although on the buyers' side, the market in the Varna region appears to be clearly segmented into foreign buyers of holiday apartments and village houses, and domestic buyers of urban properties, there are important links between these two groups. On the one hand, many domestic buyers have originally acquired their funds by selling a village property to foreigners; foreign buyers were thus an important factor in enabling the locals to enter the property market as buyers. On the other hand, with their demand for second homes, foreign buyers have initiated a property market boom that drove up property prices in the entire region. Many Varnentsi are convinced that this caused price hikes for urban residential properties, making them unaffordable for local buyers.

Varna's property market boom has fuelled the local economy by injecting money into it and by creating jobs. One of its most visible aspects is the proliferation of real estate agencies in the city and the region. Many of these agencies recruit their employees from the tourism industry, thus competing with tourism for workers, and contributing to the movement of highly qualified workers out of the sector. Real estate agents act as brokers, but they do more than match sellers and buyers in the sales process. For foreign buyers, they also act as cultural intermediaries. They help familiarize foreign clients with the city and the region, and aid their acclimatization by connecting them with networks of expatriates living in the area. Real estate brokers thus have a marked effect on the creation of communities of foreigners living in Varna. At the same time, real estate is one of the few fields offering expatriates an opportunity to make a living in Varna. While these foreigners are unable to compete for jobs with a local workforce that is often better educated and more skilled and experienced, they have found a niche as both employees and owners of real estate agencies where their ability to connect with their compatriots and earn their trust is highly valued.

The property market boom of the last decade had many beneficial effects on the local economy. At the same time, however, some of its ramifications cause anxiety for many Varnentsi. They fear the loss of control over Bulgarian territory that might result from sales of land to foreigners. They worry that the growing foreign presence in the area might, one day, lead to the emergence of a new minority demanding a voice in local matters. And, they are concerned that by selling property, people risk the future of their children and children's children. In short, the Varnentsi dread losing the ability to determine their own fate, that of their region, and that of their nation.

On a more immediate level, the Varnentsi are concerned that home ownership is increasingly out of reach for young families in the city. Although there is a plethora of factors contributing to the rising prices of urban residential properties, foreign buyers as a group are consistently held responsible by all sections of the population. The property market is thus an arena where people articulate their unease with the presence of large numbers of foreigners in the region, and where they explicitly discuss their fears, anxieties, worries, and concerns about the possible consequences of the annual influx of tens of thousands of foreigners, some of whom might well decide to stay for good.

Conclusion: Tourism, Urban Landscapes, and Spaces of Belonging

In this book, I have examined tourism and the tourism industry in the Varna region from a variety of perspectives. In the first part, I described the development of Golden Sands in the last decade and explored the impacts of resort privatization and modernization. I have shown how these processes have contributed to changing tourist flows as well as to the urbanization of Golden Sands, ultimately leading to a consolidation of its reputation as a cheap destination. For businesses in the resort, declining tourist affluence has meant an intensified competition which, in turn, has had profound effects on the labor market, working conditions, and income levels associated with tourism.

In the second part of this book, I focused on the tourism industry in Varna. Compared to the resorts, the city attracts more heterogeneous groups of visitors and it sports a wider variety and range of tourism businesses. Varna's tourism sector thus offers employment opportunities and a chance to earn an income to groups that due to their age, social class, or ethnicity, have a much harder time finding work in the resorts: members of ethnic minorities who run market stalls, pensioners who rent our rooms, and expatriates who sell real estate. Despite these differences between resort- and city-based tourism, there are some common themes: the growing importance of emotional and aesthetic labor; shared notions of hospitality and of quality service provision; and challenges like the growing competition for customers, the shortage of qualified labor, and the declining affluence of international charter tourists. In Varna, however, the impact of charter tourists may be offset by the growing share of business travelers and the increasing affluence of domestic travelers.

Tourism in the Varna region affects the lives of the Varnentsi in a variety of ways. It provides many of them with jobs and ways to earn a living; it offers them opportunities to meet and interact with foreigners; and it contributes to the vitality and conviviality of the city. Tourism has nurtured

Varna's growth in population and size, boosted its economy, advanced the prosperity of its inhabitants, and triggered a spectacular boom on its property market. However, tourism has also accelerated coastal urbanization; it has expedited the deterioration of the natural environment and the ruthless exploitation of natural resources; and it has contributed to making Varna one of the cities with the highest living costs in Bulgaria.

This chapter provides a summary of the effects that tourism, in resorts and in the city, has had on the growth and development of Varna during the first two decades of postsocialism by focusing on the changes it has wrought in the physical fabric and the urban environment of the city. It also reviews the role of tourism in the construction and representation of a Bulgarian national identity. The ongoing negotiation of identity is both affected by and reflected in the arena of tourism. The chapter also briefly assesses the impacts of the 2008 economic and financial crisis on tourism and likely developments in the near future.

Tourism, Gentrification, and Urban Growth

The rise of mass tourism in the previous decade had a profound impact on the transformation of Varna's urban fabric and environment. Tourism in Varna is concentrated in the inner city, but even though the central area is a tourist space, it is not exclusively used by tourists. It fulfills a number of functions for the Varnentsi: it is the administrative center of the city, a space for work and business, a residential area, and a space for leisure and recreation. Varna's inner city is thus a truly heterogeneous tourist space where visitors and locals alike spend time, occupied with their various pursuits.

Nevertheless, tourism has strongly contributed to the commercialization of Varna's city center. Immediately after the collapse of socialism, new shops, kiosks, open-air markets and vendors' stalls were established in the center. The 1990s also saw the emergence of money exchange offices, travel agencies, and accommodation agencies that catered primarily to tourists, but served the Varnentsi as well. From the mid-2000s, it was mainly the building of family-run hotels and the establishment of real estate agencies that changed the appearance of the inner city, and contributed to its commercialization.

However, the commercial gentrification of the city center has occurred more slowly in Varna than it has in Sofia and other capital cities of postsocialist countries. To date, the central area contains upmarket shops; retailers selling affordable goods to locals and visitors; and open-air markets, vendors' stalls, and kiosks with generally inexpensive merchandise. An abundance of shops still provides residents in the city center with their everyday needs. Expensive restaurants sit side by side with cheap eateries; small bars,

pubs, and cafes target locals and visitors alike; and entertainment venues such as the opera, theater, clubs, and discotheques are all patronized by both the Varnentsi and the tourists. Similarly, the city center offers a wide variety of accommodation options, including upscale four- and five-star hotels, small family-run hotels, and affordable commercial homes. The proliferation of service sector businesses in the center, combined with a shortage of office and retail space, has certainly led to the increased cost of commercial leases; however, this has not resulted in the replacement of affordable retailers, accommodation, and eateries with exclusive boutiques, upscale hotels, and lifestyle cafes.

The slow progress of commercial gentrification in central Varna may be attributed to the nature of the main target groups of these businesses. As I have shown, most of them serve both locals and visitors. Although the purchasing power of the Varnentsi is growing, there are still many who cannot afford to regularly buy expensive goods and services. The same is true for the tourists. The budgets of foreign charter tourists have declined, and most domestic travelers and shopping tourists still have to economize and carefully compare the prices of goods and services. The most affluent visitors to Varna are business travelers, but they account for only a small share of the total number of tourists. Hence, the demand for lifestyle goods and services that has been reported as characteristic for gentrifying areas worldwide is still low in Varna. The existing mix of retailers and service providers thus corresponds to the heterogeneous groups of consumers in the city both with respect to the range and quality of their offers and concerning their price levels.

Likewise, the residential gentrification of Varna's city center has been a slow process, which is again due to several interrelated factors. Firstly, residential mobility is rather low in Bulgaria compared to many western European countries. This is particularly true for the elderly, who make up a significant proportion of inner city residents. Many of them are reluctant to move out of the center which offers them easy access to the everyday goods and services they consume. Neighborhood ties are particularly strong among the elderly; they do not want to give up networks of neighbors, friends, and acquaintances that contribute to their quality of life by providing company, support, and help. Due to the high levels of property ownership, increasing residential rents and leases are not a decisive factor pushing elderly residents out of inner city neighborhoods as is the case in gentrifying areas as in other eastern European tourist cities such as Prague or Budapest. As long as existing residents remain, more affluent tenants cannot move into the city center.

Tourism also had its share in the continuation of the patterns of residential use in the inner city that were inherited from the socialist period.

Tourism has slowed residential change in central neighborhoods by providing residents with the opportunity to gain additional income. The ability to rent out private rooms and apartments to tourists and tourism workers in the summer season raises many pensioners above the poverty threshold and significantly improves their quality of life. As both tourists and other target groups for commercial homes, such as students, have a marked preference for inner city accommodation, landladies have an additional incentive to remain in their existing housing. If they gave up their centrally located properties and moved to more peripheral neighborhoods, landladies would be deprived of an important source of income. Hence, the incomes derived from running commercial homes add to both the desire and the ability of pensioners to stay in their established neighborhoods.

As long as existing residents remain in their houses, Varna's stock of commercial property in the city center cannot increase rapidly. High levels of property ownership combined with residents' unwillingness to move thus maintains the balance of residential, administrative, and commercial properties in the city center. In the postsocialist context, the relative shortage of retail and office space has contributed to the growing cost of commercial leases in the city center.

These processes have contributed to maintaining the mixed use of Varna's city center, and preventing the formation of a central business district with only marginal residential uses. At the same time, however, they have resulted in a marked shortage of vacant inner city residential and commercial spaces, particularly as the infill development that occurred since the collapse of socialism has left barely any plots of land available for further development. Growing rents and leases in the commercial and the residential spheres are the consequence, as well as skyrocketing property prices, paralleled by an extremely low number of actual deals on the property market.

The shortage of available inner city properties has fuelled a suburbanization process. Commercial suburbanization is exemplified by the emergence of retailers and office buildings in Varna's outlying neighborhoods as well as by greenfield developments, particularly in the city's hilly hinterland. While these new businesses have only a small share of international tourists among their customers, their low prices attract locals and domestic travelers, thus constituting a serious competition for many inner city businesses. Their emergence has had a marked influence on the flows of people and traffic in the city, as more consumers patronize the super- and hypermarkets, shopping malls, and other businesses in Varna's periphery. At the same time, these new businesses have magnified the marginalization of low-income, low-mobility groups in the new consumer society.

Along the coast between Varna and Golden Sands, commercial suburbanization has also been generated by the growth of the tourism industry. In the last decade, the coastline has become increasingly urbanized with the construction of numerous new hotels, shops, restaurants, cafes, bars, and micro-resorts. Many of these businesses specifically target domestic and international tourists; they operate seasonally and close during the winter months.

The indirect influence of tourism is also apparent in the residential suburbanization of Varna. The coast between the city and the resorts was privileged in the construction of second homes even in the socialist period. In the 1990s, many owners of second homes along the coast sold their properties to private or commercial investors who upgraded them or replaced them with hotels or commercial homes. Later, second homes along the coast and in Varna's hinterland were increasingly sought by tourists, first from the United Kingdom, and later from other countries. These buyers were able and prepared to pay high prices for local properties, initiating a boom on the residential property market. Foreign second home owners thus contributed directly to the residential suburbanization of Varna by buying or building vacation homes along the coast. They likewise contributed indirectly by injecting large amounts of money into the local economy. Many of the sellers re-invested the profits from selling their second homes into the acquisition of new city houses and apartments, particularly in the suburbs. Thus, although foreigners preferred coastal properties and village houses to second homes in the outskirts of Varna and its hilly hinterland, residential suburbanization in the latter zones still continued apace due to the re-investments of local sellers.

Varna's urban development in the last two decades was thus shaped by the convergence of two simultaneously occurring processes: its postsocialist transformation and the growth of mass tourism in the city and in the surrounding resorts. At the same time, rapid tourism development has fuelled Varna's growth both in terms of spatial expansion and of population growth, and it has bolstered its reputation as one of Bulgaria's most dynamically developing cities.

Tourism, Public Space, and Hospitality

Tourism does not just have an impact on the balance and distribution of commercial and residential properties, it also affects the organization of access to and control of public space. In line with the creeping commercialization of the city center, Varna's public spaces have been gradually encroached upon. Control and surveillance have slowly been strengthened in recent years.

Public spaces in the city center are increasingly being privatized. The most striking example of this process is the progressive privatization and commercialization of the city beaches, most of which are under concession. Before 2005, only a small number of beach bars and mobile vendors served the sunbathers, but after 2007 increasingly more beaches are commercially managed and run. Large areas are restricted, and sunbathers must pay to use the sun beds and umbrellas that line the sand. The numbers of beach bars have seen a sharp rise, and mobile vendors have been barred. Similar processes have occurred in the city center, where the outdoor sitting areas of cafes, restaurants, and bars encroach on city sidewalks. The employees of such establishments control and police even the areas beyond their premises, evicting beggars, mobile vendors, street musicians, and bums that might "bother" their customers. Hotels similarly police nearby public streets and sidewalks.

At the same time, the municipality has strengthened its surveillance, policing, and control of public spaces in the city center. Justified by arguments about the necessity of ensuring the safety and security of tourists, the city center has been "cleaned up" both literally and metaphorically. This has included renovation and beautification schemes, such as the re-paving of streets and pedestrian walkways, the improvement of street cleaning and garbage removal, the planting of flowers and lawns, and the building of a new tourist information center. But the "cleaning" has also involved the installation of security cameras, an increase in the number of police patrolling the city center, and a heightened presence of private security personnel. Urban denizens who are perceived as potentially bothering, troubling, or threatening to tourists such as mobile vendors, beggars, conmen, street artists, prostitutes, and Gypsies have been confined to designated spaces or removed entirely from the areas most frequented by tourists.

Despite these developments, the privatization of public space is less advanced in Varna than in the American cities described in the literature. Surveillance, policing, and control of public space is still patchy. Even in the most heavily touristic areas of Varna's city center, there are still truly hospitable spaces that are open and accessible to any and all. Nevertheless, the growing commercialization of Varna's city center fuelled by tourism has promoted the privatization of public spaces in line with the creation of aestheticized spaces for tourism and consumption. Urban public space has an important role in fostering sociality, conviviality and, ultimately, hospitable attitudes and practices by facilitating the co-presence of and interactions among diverse groups of people and encouraging hospitable encounters. The encroachment on Varna's public spaces, coupled with the growing social and economic differentiation of its population, poses a threat to community

cohesion and solidarity and it undermines Varna's claim to being a truly hospitable city.

The Varnentsi take great pride in their hospitality and their cosmopolitanism, and they welcome the hundreds of thousands of visitors their city attracts year after year. Many of them extol the opportunities for meeting and interacting with people from many different countries and cultural backgrounds. The inner city, as a central space for leisure and consumption, has a lively and cosmopolitan feel to it with people of many nationalities strolling, talking and laughing, doing their shopping, sitting in outdoor cafes and restaurants, and gazing at the crowds. Particularly in the evenings, when locals and visitors are out for the evening promenade, the inner city is alive with people intermingling and enjoying their leisure time. At the same time, use of the inner city tourist space reveals the limits of hospitality in Varna. Some tourists are more welcome than others: affluent middle-class tourists who consume the city's sights and heritage and spend money in its shops, cafes, and restaurants are preferred over alcotourists and those who arrive on cheap all-inclusive package tours. Individually traveling cultural tourists from western Europe are favored over eastern European backpackers. And middle-class domestic travelers and day-trippers are more welcome than visitors from the poverty-stricken rural regions. Likewise, the use of public spaces such as Varna's open air markets throws a sharp light on the tensions caused by the increasing socioeconomic stratification of the Varnentsi. While these spaces are in theory accessible and open to any and all, they are in fact considered as threatening and avoided by those who can afford to do so.

Tourism, National Identity, and Europeanization

The collapse of socialism called into question the existing political, economic, and social arrangements in Bulgaria, and created the possibility for significant redefinitions of national history and identity. In Bulgaria, the opposing concepts of "the Orient" and "Europe" have a central role in the construction of an overarching national identity. Much in the tradition of other Orientalist discourses, the Orient is constructed in Bulgaria as a realm characterized by backwardness, inertia, chaos, and irrationality. The Orient is a space lacking culture, progress, and civilization. Geographically, it is imagined as being located to the south-east of Bulgaria, namely in Turkey and the Middle East. However, the Orient may also be unmoored from a concrete geographical location; in Bulgaria, ethnic and religious minorities displaying "Oriental" traits and characteristics are viewed as constituting an "Orient within" that threatens Bulgarian claims of belonging to Europe.

As an idea, "Europe" is associated with modernity, progress, and civilization; peace and stability; and economic prosperity. In line with local perceptions of the global social order, "Europe", as a part of "the West", is viewed as superior to "the Orient" in every respect – politically, economically, and culturally. The claim that Bulgaria "belongs to Europe" is a central element in discourses on national identity that places the nation within the symbolic space of Europe. Nevertheless, there is a pervasive feeling that the desirable status of "Europeanness" is a goal yet to be achieved. There is a widespread sense among Bulgarians that their country still fails to measure up to "European standards", whether defined with respect to indicators such as political practices and institutions, economic prosperity, or to common adherence to modern, progressive, and humanitarian, values and ideas.

From that point of view, in order to become truly European, the Oriental traits and habits that remain in Bulgaria must be eradicated. Throughout the last decades of socialism, ethnic and religious minorities to whom Oriental traits are ascribed (e.g. ethnic Turks, Muslims, and Gypsies) have been politically, economically, and socially marginalized; they have been symbolically removed from the nation through campaigns to Slavicize their names; and they have even been encouraged to emigrate. Under postsocialism, this marginalization has continued, albeit in increasingly less overt and undisguised ways. My research documents the ongoing rejection of "the Orient" from self-conceptions of Bulgarian identity in relation to tourism. Discourses and business practices in Bulgaria's tourism industry contribute to the economic and social marginalization of many ethnic minorities, and they have further reaching effects on the labor market, on the structure of legitimate business practices, the organization of work, and worker satisfaction.

In Varna's tourism industry, the rejection of all things Oriental, and the ambition of becoming more European pervade the everyday practices of ordinary workers, and they affect their interactions with foreign tourists. When market vendors refuse foreign tourists' attempts to bargain, or when restaurant owners denounce their colleagues who employ touts, they reject behaviors that are perceived as Oriental, and demand adherence to European business practices. The same issues come to the fore when business owners and tourism professionals in Golden Sands condemn the Orientalization of the resort; when vendors in Varna take pride in the European appearance of their open-air market; or when consumers value European shopping venues and consumer goods over their Oriental counterparts.

Tourism is an industry based on encounters and interactions of locals and others. It is therefore an arena in which individual and national identities are negotiated daily in a host of mundane ways. But in this context, notions

of Europeanness and the Oriental may also be employed to make strategic claims in negotiations, and in jostlings for power and influence. Thus, when hotel managers praise their new hotels and facilities that are "second to none in Europe", or when they insist in their professionalism and experience being on par with those of their European counterparts, they demand respect, recognition, and acceptance as equals in the global tourism industry. At the same time, when managers accuse vendors of contributing to the Orientalization of Golden Sands, they effectively blame the vendors for furthering the resort's transformation into a "cheap" resort, ultimately holding them responsible for a problem that is caused by factors well beyond their control. Arguments about the necessity of transforming Golden Sands into a European resort, and eradicating its Oriental features were also used in the campaign against mobile vendors; shop and stall owners supported this campaign because they saw an opportunity to eliminate some of their competitors. Today, similar arguments are brought forward by restaurant owners pushing for a restriction on or the removal of fast food stalls that "clutter up the beach", and "impair sanitary conditions".

Thus, in their daily work practices and in discourse, workers in Varna's tourism industry struggle to become more European for a whole host of reasons. At the same time, their persistent efforts are undermined and counteracted by the structure and organization of the international tourism industry as well as by tourist expectations, both of which are working to re-Orientalize the local setting.

At the same time, tourism workers' claims to Europeanness may well be dropped or quietly ignored when other more immediate benefits are at stake. For example, vendors censure foreign tourists' attempts at bargaining, yet succumb to them when business is slow, and restaurant owners employ touts despite their condemnation of touting as an Oriental business practice. In these cases, entrepreneurs prioritize the profitability of their businesses over resort sustainability which is believed to suffer from Orientalization. Thus, claims to Europeanness and the rejection of Oriental traits and practices are always context-dependent and situationally contingent.

Claims and aspirations to Europeanness are not necessarily based on lofty ideas of national identity and belonging alone. The underlying causes for such aspirations may be more concrete and much more immediate. Within the framework of the global tourism industry, Varna is one destination competing with many similar, easily substitutable, destinations both nationally and internationally. In this environment, adherence to international (i.e. Western) standards in facilities and services is deemed essential, and encouraged or even enforced by local and national stakeholders as well as by transnational companies such as large tour operators. Tourism profes-

sionals firmly believe that important target groups like western European tourists or business travelers expect and demand international standards. Modern, "European" resorts, facilities, and services are thus viewed as a prerequisite for ensuring the sustainability and profitability of Varna's tourism industry.

The degree to which Varna's tourist industry has Europeanized differs between the resort and the city. Europeanization is most consistent and uniform in the resorts. They bear all the characteristics of homogeneous tourist spaces offering beach vacations in accord with predictable international standards, facilities, activities, and services. Varna's resorts are equivalent to those found in other European summer sun destinations. The city of Varna, on the other hand, is a heterogeneous tourist space offering a more diverse array of tourist facilities and services. In the city, Europeanization is more patchy than in the resorts: international standard hotels exist side by side with commercial homes; shopping malls compete for customers with open-air markets and small shops providing over-the-counter service; and restaurants with multilingual staff and international cuisine abut small local pubs.

In the city of Varna, it also becomes apparent that persistent efforts to eradicate Oriental traits and practices may well overshoot the mark. The popularity of the city's open-air markets with foreign tourists suggests the possibility that foreigners value a certain measure of the Oriental and exotic in their holiday experience. By eliminating these exotic aspects, and creating uniformly "European" resorts, the tourism industry may deprive the destination of features that tourists find highly attractive and that contribute to differentiating Varna from other European summer sun destinations. Varna's competitive position on the international tourism market may be strengthened by it being Oriental.

Tourism and the Mobilization of the Socialist Past

The collapse of socialism and the transition to a pluralist democracy and a market-driven economy have also raised the question of how to deal with Bulgaria's socialist past. In official discourses after the turn of the millennium, socialism was depicted as a closed chapter in national history, something that had been left behind for good. In the memories of ordinary Bulgarians, however, socialism lives on. There is, of course, a multitude of evolving, contradictory, and highly contested interpretations of the socialist past; nevertheless, it has framed, shaped, and marked the lives of many Bulgarians, particularly the older generations who spent a significant part of their lives under socialism.

As I have shown in this book, nostalgic memories of socialism emerge in a number of contexts. Among older tourism workers in Varna, it is first and foremost the "better tourists" of the 1980s who are remembered nostalgically. But, more generally, many of these workers argue that tourism work under socialism was better because it was more secure, offering year-round work, opportunities to continually improve one's training and education, and good incomes. Tourism work under socialism was also said to be more rewarding than in the present because it offered opportunities to meet and interact with foreigners of many nationalities, and more importantly, because a central tenant of the work was the importance of treating tourists as guests and turning them into friends. Tourism workers thus took pride in being true hosts – individuals who welcomed foreigners and offered them the warm hospitality that is viewed as a central virtue of the Bulgarian national character. In the postsocialist period, these workers claim that they are now treated as merely interchangeable service providers.

However, in these narratives, the socialist past is not just invoked for its own sake. It is also mobilized to comment on the present. Today, managers must often make do with insufficiently trained and educated employees, many tourism jobs are seasonal, and the incomes earned in tourism are not always sufficient to support a family throughout the year. Tourism work has become more demanding and less rewarding as mass tourism makes it harder to treat customers as guests and friends. Tourism, as many other spheres of life, has grown more commercial and profit-oriented; it is more akin to Fordist mass production, with instances of "true" hospitality few and far between.

Allusions to the socialist past are used to critically comment on the present in many areas beyond tourism. My interlocutors praised the greater equality, social cohesion and cooperation of the Varnentsi under socialism in contrast to the social inequality, polarization, and division that they felt characterized the present. They remembered socialism as a time of security and prosperity for all Bulgarians; in the present, the future is uncertain, and many Bulgarians live on the threshold of poverty. To label these narratives as "mere nostalgia" is to trivialize them; to dismiss the critical views and discontent they express; and to ignore their potential as a source of discursive resistance.

But not all aspects of socialism are seen in a positive light. Tourism workers were especially critical of the decision-making processes and management styles prevalent in the socialist tourism industry and they often invoked these negative aspects and characteristics of socialism to comment on current grievances. Thus, when a company like Golden Sands plc is accused of possessing a "socialist mentality" or holding on to "socialist-style

business practices", its critics allude to a lack of transparency in decision-making processes, and a lack of cooperation and partnership. Similar accusations are made by workers in Albena who criticize their resort's management for its autocratic style, cliquish behavior, opaque and cumbersome decision-making processes, inflexibility, and closed-mindedness. References to the socialist past are also used to justify the marginalization of groups that are viewed as particularly tainted by it. Consequently, the marginal position of the elderly on the labor market is often explained and justified by pointing to their enduring "socialist mentality".

In these cases, allusions to socialism and the socialist past are used strategically by actors and stakeholders jockeying for influence and power, and attempting to improve their positions vis-a-vis other important players. The same occurs in the ongoing debates about appropriate levels of state involvement in the Bulgarian tourism industry. Many business owners and managers both in the resorts and in the city demand more state support for tourism. Higher levels of state involvement are called for in marketing the destination Bulgaria abroad, improving the education and training of the tourism workforce, and in the management of resort infrastructures. No one wishes for a return of the "old days" when tourism was entirely state-run. Nevertheless, those who oppose these demands frequently attempt to denigrate them by accusing their proponents of a socialist mentality, thus implying they are incapable of solving their own problems, and only too willing to shift the responsibility to the state in its role as a paternal provider.

Views of a benign state that could and should increase its involvement in tourism to everyone's advantage are contested by others. Some tourism workers accuse the state of ignoring or having abandoned the industry; others view it as seeking to prey on the tourism industry for its own short-term profit without regard to the industry's future. At their core, the debates about the state's role in developing the tourism industry are concerned with defining the ideal balance of individualism to collectivism, and with establishing the degree of influence that the state should have over the lives and activities of its citizens. These debates thus mirror some of the central issues at stake after the collapse of socialism in eastern Europe. Debates about tourism and the state thus echo the broader arguments between neoliberal forces and the proponents of socialism, social democracy, and a welfare state.

Tourism workers themselves do not identify with clearly defined camps that advocate one or another ideology. Nor are they consistent in their opinions about the state's role in tourism. On the contrary, the lines are blurred and constantly shifting, and the same individual may demand more help by the state in one sentence, and condemn the state as a ruthlessly

exploitative entity in the next. In these debates, assessments of the social, economic, and political systems of both the past and the present are contested and negotiated. This process of contrasting the past and present is strategically used by tourism workers as they attempt to guide the development of tourism in their region, and as the people of Varna seek to forge a prosperous future for their city and their country.

Whither Tourism in Varna?

The 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent global economic recession had a strong impact on tourism in the Varna region. As the crisis deepened in western and northern Europe, consumers began to cut their budgets for leisure and holiday pursuits. Some could not afford foreign travel at all, while others decided that under the current circumstances, a cheap vacation was in order. As a consequence, foreign tourist numbers in the Varna region slumped after the onset of the crisis, but started to rise again in 2010. As tourists were prone to spend less on their vacations, many of them preferred destinations offering affordable holidays, and cheap and all-inclusive packages grew further in popularity. Tourism workers and business owners throughout the Varna region registered shrinking incomes and profits, and many feared they would be forced to go out of business.

At the same time, domestic travel declined dramatically. Those Bulgarians who still could afford a vacation increasingly opted for more inexpensive options. Hotels attempted to meet this trend by offering low-priced packages or special rates for domestic travelers, but despite these measures, the numbers of their domestic guests declined. Commercial homes, on the other hand, profited from this trend; they saw an increase in customers due to their lower prices. Many domestic tourists, however, abandoned commercial accommodation altogether, and stayed in their own second homes or those of relatives and friends.

The economic recession also meant a decline in business-related travel as companies tightened their belts, and cut back on the budgets for business trips and MICE. As a result, in 2010, Bulgarian companies' expenditures on domestic business trips had dropped to less than one-third of their 2008 value. This had a strong effect on the revenues of city hotels catering to business travelers and on the resort hotels that organize meetings and conferences in the low season.

Shopping venues as well as restaurants, bars, and cafes both in Varna and in the resorts were affected by the diminishing budgets of visitors and locals alike. In the resorts, the decline of tourist affluence had been an issue for years, and the crisis further accelerated this process. Service sector businesses in Varna had profited from the growing affluence of Bulgarian

consumers before the crisis. They felt the declining spending power of both the Varnentsi and of domestic travelers especially in the winter months when they relied on them as their main customers. In Varna, more people were forced to shop in the open-air markets and in small independent stores. Hypermarkets offering low prices retained their customer base, but exclusive shops and small specialized retailers in the city center lost customers. Restaurants, bars, and cafes registered declining revenues and shrinking profits as consumers cut back on their budgets for leisure and entertainment.

The crisis also had a dramatic impact on the Bulgarian property market where prices started dropping in 2009. The property market in the Varna region mirrored nationwide trends even though its price levels were still the highest in the country, surpassing even those in the capital. In Varna, foreign private investors who had bought speculatively, hoping for future price hikes, saw the value of their properties plummet. The number of sales offers grew as owners attempted to salvage their investments before their value declined even more. Some of these offers were taken by Russian buyers who seized the opportunity to acquire foreign holiday homes at much reduced prices. Russian property owners thus grew in importance as they started to replace the British and Irish from the first wave of foreign investors. The expanded participation of Russian buyers kept Varna's market in second homes active during the crisis, and they probably cushioned its worst impacts. Nevertheless, foreign private investors lost huge sums of money when the bubble on the property market finally burst.

At the same time, the trade in city-based apartments and homes slowed. Sellers offered their properties for amounts that still resembled those before the crisis began, but they found it increasingly hard to find buyers, as many Varnentsi were reluctant to make such large investments under uncertain conditions. Additionally, prospective buyers hoping for further price decreases decided to wait until property became more affordable.

Overall, the crisis helped to slow the rapid pace of tourism development in the Varna region, but it did not end it. On the contrary, it cemented Varna's (and Bulgaria's) reputation as a cheap destination by leading to a further influx of budget-conscious foreign tourists on the one hand, and to an increase of the numbers of low-priced offers by businesses in the hospitality industry on the other. The result was a rapid recovery of the numbers of foreign arrivals, which are likely to grow further as Bulgaria is one of the destinations that stand to profit from changing tourist flows following the political unrest in North Africa and the Middle East. At the same time, however, the profits of tourism businesses have continued to drop; companies with a strong dependence on domestic and business travelers have been affected particularly strongly by the decline. Due to the spread of low-priced

offers, and despite growing numbers of foreign arrivals, it is thus uncertain whether revenues in tourism will regain their pre-crisis levels.

When Hristina praised tourism as an industry that is "clean, friendly, and profitable", she underlined the most positive aspects of the industry. In Hristina's view, tourism is more environmentally friendly than industrial production; it enables people from different countries and walks of life to come together, get to know each other, and become friends; and it offers many Varnentsi a livelihood and the opportunity to improve their lives. I have shown in this book that there is much truth to Hristina's assessment of tourism. The industry does indeed enable many Varnentsi to earn a living, and it has contributed to making Varna one of Bulgaria's most prosperous cities. The majority of tourism workers do have a genuine desire to work with foreigners and to get to know them; and many of the strangers who visit Varna and the resorts do indeed turn into friends. Tourism may be cleaner than industrial production, and it certainly contributes to the preservation of the region's natural and man-made heritage.

At the same time, there is a flip side to this characterization of tourism. As I have shown, it is equally true that the environmental impacts of tourism are severe as the coast is urbanized and natural resources are overtaxed. Tourism is not always friendly: the scope and frequency of conflicts between tourists and tourism workers increased in recent years. Similarly, the profits that small local businesses and entrepreneurs derive from tourism are on the decline, and the incomes to be earned in the industry have been overtaken by those in other sectors. The assessment of tourism in the Varna region as "clean, friendly, and profitable" is thus increasingly contested.

From the perspective of the proponents of post-Fordist tourism, the Varna region could well be said to be entering the stagnation phase of its destination cycle, and its sustainability could be questioned as it clings to a supposedly outmoded model of cheap charter tourism offering traditional beach vacations. Both industry experts and Bulgarian policy makers are aware of this, and consistently attempt to promote alternative forms of tourism with the goal of diversifying tourism in the region spatially, temporally, and in form and content, as well as with a view to attracting more of the coveted affluent middle-class tourists. But to date, their efforts have met with only limited success.

From another perspective, however, it could also be argued that tourism development in the Varna region has been very successful. The region is well-known, and many of its resorts are established brands. On the international market, Varna has successfully built a reputation as an affordable destination for beach holidays, while among domestic travelers, it is known as a vibrant, cosmopolitan city offering numerous opportunities for shop-

ping, attending cultural events, and enjoying the nightlife, as well as savoring the sun, the sea, and the sand. Despite the numerous drawbacks of extensive tourism development, and despite changing political, economic, and social conditions both in Bulgaria, and in the tourists countries of origin, the Varna region remains a popular destination that continues to attract millions of visitors from Bulgaria and abroad. At the time of publication, the tourism industry in Varna appears to be set on its path. But whatever its future may be, whether the destination Varna retains its current image or creates a new one, tourism is likely to play an important role in the lives of the Varnentsi for many years to come.

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