

Tourism research in the German Democratic Republic

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Abstract

So far, East German tourism research has been studied little by the history of science. Tourism science saw the light of day around 1930 in Berlin. During the Cold War, in the GDR it gained a notable quantitative extent that finally equalled the research in the 'capitalist' part of Germany. Initially, theoretical questions played a prominent role, but then – like in the West – tourism science became a strictly applied discipline. Part and parcel of the planned economy, its focus was on the parastatal social tourism: holiday making was seen as a means to improve the health of the 'workers and farmers' through 'recreation' and – unspoken – as a means to

stabilize the political system. Thus, it became a centrepiece of consumer policy (like in Nazi times). Research successfully helped to steer and expand the 'recreational system'. However, demand grew faster than supply and, even worse, people remained cut off from the glittering West. Despite vast subsidies and very high travel intensity, discontentment with travel opportunities reached a level that essentially contributed to the collapse of the GDR in 1989. Tourism researchers warned from that growing tide of discontentment and left no stone unturned – in vain.

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