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New Europe College

Str. Plantelor 21

023971 Bucharest

Romania

www.nec.ro; e-mail: nec@nec.ro

Tel. (+4) 021.307.99.10, Fax (+4) 021. 327.07.74



DIANA GEORGESCU

Nations and Nationalisms (N+N) Fellow

Born in 1975 in Romania

PhD in History from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2015.
Thesis: *"Ceaușescu' Children:" The Making and Unmaking of Romania's Last Socialist generation (1965-2010)*

Affiliation: Assistant Professor of Transnational Eastern European Studies in the History Department of the School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies at University College London

Grants and Fellowships: from the Fulbright U.S. Scholar Award (2019), Max Weber Programme, European University Institute (2014-2015), Mellon-Council for European Studies (2013-2014), the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (2011), and the Social Science Research Council (2008-2009)

She has participated in major international conferences in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, and France and has delivered invited talks at the University of Cambridge, University of Pittsburgh, University of Sheffield, and University of Amsterdam

Diana Georgescu's research in socialist and postsocialist studies has been published in major journals in Slavic and Eastern European Studies like the *Slavic Review* and *Südosteuropa. Journal of Politics and Society*, gender history (*The Journal of Women's History*), and volumes on travel writing

“FOR FRIENDSHIP AND PEACE:” SOCIALIST ROMANIA’S INTERNATIONAL PIONEER CAMPS IN THE AFTERMATH OF WAR (1949-1959)

Diana Georgescu

Abstract

Situated at the intersection of studies of socialist internationalism and youth, this paper explores the origins and character of Romania’s international pioneer camps and youth exchanges in the immediate postwar decade, from 1949 through the late 1950s. It examines the role played by the Soviet model of socialist internationalism in the development of Romania’s camps and youth exchanges as well as the diplomatic, pedagogical, and medical aims international pioneer camps were expected to fulfill for Romania’s fledgling regime of popular democracy. The few existing works on the evolution of mass youth organizations and the reforms of education in Romania assume the existence of an all-powerful regime and party, who enforced these measures from above, having centralized state power and nationalized property and economic resources. Through an examination of the first international camps organized on the Black Sea Coast and in the Carpathian Mountains in Romania, this study nuances such views, suggesting that the newly created youth and children’s organizations – The Workers’ Youth Union and the Pioneer Organization – were precarious party structures, which lacked politically trustworthy and ideologically trained cadres as well as material and administrative resources to assume full control of the country’s youth in the immediate postwar years

Keywords: socialist/Soviet internationalism, cultural diplomacy, international pioneer camps, children and adolescents, Cold War

Scholarship, Methodology and Research Aims

Socialist internationalism was a central aspect of state ideology and practice in the Eastern bloc and across the socialist world after the Second World War. Reflected in socialist pedagogy, this tenet was central

to the socialization of children and adolescents into the inextricably linked sentiments and values of socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism. Socialist internationalism for youth took a variety of forms in the socialist world, ranging from major celebrations like the World Festival of Youth and Students (WFSY), which was organized every two years by the Soviet-dominated World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), to international pioneer camps bringing together early adolescents in self-managing child republics meant to cross national and ideological boundaries, humanitarian aid provided to refugee children, international sports, science and arts competitions and exchanges, and even pen pal correspondence or articles on foreign children and youth in children's and youth magazines.

Despite its centrality to the socialist project of youth upbringing and foreign policy, socialist internationalism has long been neglected as a topic of scholarly research because it clashed with the perception of the Eastern bloc as a world isolated behind barbed wire under Soviet domination, a world of immobility and homogeneity. A number of transformations in the social sciences more broadly and historical research in particular conspired to make socialist internationalism a topic of interest over the past two decades. This new interest has been driven by the turn to transnational and global histories, both of which aim to transgress methodological nationalism in the study of various historical phenomena and account for the circulation of people, goods, and ideas across national, imperial, and cultural borders.¹

A second shift involved the growing interest in "soft power" or "cultural diplomacy" as an alternative to high politics and military confrontations in Cold War studies, particularly among historians. This historiographical trend first focused on East-West exchanges, questioning the notion that the "blocs" were monolithic and proving that the "Iron Curtain" was significantly more porous than previously acknowledged.² These studies were anticipated and coexisted with works on youth subcultures in the Eastern bloc that had long explored the circulation of musical trends and lifestyles across the Iron Curtain and thus the porosity of the border between East and West.³ With the shift to research on cultural diplomacy came a renewed focus on exchange not only in sub- or counter-cultures, but also in the official culture of state socialist regimes as well as an increasing interest in how Western trends and lifestyles were adapted locally across Eastern Europe.⁴

Studies of cultural diplomacy tended to focus on the immediate postwar decades and the Soviet Union, but soon broadened to include “smaller” players in Eastern Europe and the poststalinist period.⁵ These works fed into new and vibrant scholarly fields, including studies of exchanges within the so-called Second World and, more recently, exchanges between the Second and Third World.⁶ One of the signs that this scholarly field is growing is the diversity of historical approaches, ranging from studies of socialist elites and their projects like Dragostinova’s *The Cold War from the Margins* to works on grassroots “citizen diplomacy” and everyday practices of socialist internationalism like Applebaum’s *Empire of Friends*.

On Romania in particular, research on international exchange and mobility has focused on encounters with the West, particularly in the sphere of youth subcultures and the period of liberalization of the 1960s and 1970s.⁷ Although not all studies explore the notions and practices of socialist internationalism, there are now more ambitious works on socialist Romania’s exchanges with the Global South in fields as diverse as culture, higher education, or medical expertise and Romania’s humanitarian projects during the Cold War.⁸

This paper will focus on the organization of international pioneer camps as a particular manifestation of socialist internationalism centered on youth exchanges in postwar Romania and the Soviet bloc. Unlike the World Festivals for Students and Youth, which make the subject of several studies on youth and socialist internationalism, international pioneer camps received significantly less attention.⁹ The exception is the Soviet model camp at Artek, which has been explored by various short studies, ranging from Catriona Kelly’s analysis of the ways in which the Soviet Union deployed child diplomacy during its existence to Matthias Neumann’s article on youth exchanges between the United States and the Soviet Union in the poststalinist period.¹⁰

This paper shifts the focus to a small socialist state in Eastern bloc, exploring the origins and character of Romania’s international pioneer camps and youth exchanges in the immediate postwar decade, from 1949, the founding year of the Romanian Pioneer Organization, through the late 1950s. It examines the role played by the Soviet model and understandings of socialist internationalism in the development of Romania’s camps and youth exchanges as well as the diplomatic, pedagogical, and medical aims international pioneer camps were expected to fulfill for Romania’s fledgling regime of popular democracy. The few existing works on the postwar evolution of mass youth organizations and the reforms of education in

Romania assume the existence of an all-powerful regime and party, who enforced these measures from above, having centralized state power and nationalized property and economic resources.¹¹ This study nuances such views, suggesting that the newly created youth organizations like The Workers' Youth Union (Uniunea Tineretului Muncitoresc, UTM) and the Pioneer Organization, which the UTM ran through its Pioneer sections, were precarious party structures, which lacked politically trustworthy and ideologically trained cadres as well as material and administrative resources to either replicate the Soviet experiment or assume full control of the country's youth.

To address these research goals, this paper draws on the official youth and educational press of the 1940s and 1950s, examining the ideological representation of socialist internationalism, international pioneer camps, and the centrality of the Soviet model. The analysis focuses on content as well as strategies of authenticity of Soviet inspiration in journalistic writing, which included publishing articles in the form of letters and diary entries allegedly authored by adolescent pioneers who participated in international camps. The paper juxtaposes these journalistic sources against archival material from the party and youth organization collections, particularly reports of activity, which document the obstacles that UTM activists from the organization's "pioneer" and "international" sections encountered in their efforts to organize international pioneer camps at home and facilitate the participation of Romanian pioneers abroad in analogous camps organized in the Soviet Union and fraternal countries in the 1950s. Where available, the paper also relies on interviews with former pioneer participants in international camps.

The Soviet Model of Socialist Internationalism for Children and Youth

The network of relations among pioneer organizations in Eastern Europe started developing in the immediate postwar years, a period dominated by political unrest, lack of qualified cadres, and economic difficulties. International pioneer camps were among the cultural measures meant to project the notion that the still vulnerable communist governments in Eastern Europe formed a united socialist front and testify to the superiority of the Soviet model of state provisions for the young.¹² In the aftermath of war, international camps were organized under the banner of peace,

understood as antifascism and – indicative of the deepening of Cold War tensions – as anti-imperialism. Camps were also popularized as particularly effective forms of internationalist education for children. As the vanguard of the communist party and its regime, children and teens were expected to develop strongly interconnected sentiments of socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism.¹³

In the immediate post-war period, socialist patriotism was defined by opposition to bourgeois, conservative, reactionary, and imperialist nationalism, which had been disqualified by association with nazism and fascism before and during the war. One of the defining characteristics of socialist patriotism was its allegedly class-based character, i.e. its association with the proletariat. In this view, children were expected to feel unbounded love and loyalty for the working class and its political representative, the Romanian Workers' Party (Partidul Muncitoresc Roman, PMR) as well as for the progressive heroes in their country's past.¹⁴ Defined in opposition to the reactionary xenophobia of bourgeois nationalism and derived from its rootedness in the proletariat, another major tenet of socialist patriotism was its compatibility with proletarian internationalism, broadly defined as friendship, cooperation, and solidarity with the world of proletariat, regardless of nationality.¹⁵

It was in this spirit that Romanian children and teens were encouraged, throughout the 1940s and 1950s, to cultivate friendship and solidarity with the children of other regimes of popular democracy in the Eastern bloc, particularly the Soviet Union, and the children of "fellow travelers," the proletariat in Western capitalist countries. Welcoming the organization of an international camp on the Black Sea coast in 1952, a journalist for the youth press insisted on the centrality of this pedagogical goal both in formal education and informal practices such as international camps. "[Pioneers]," she argued "are taught in schools to love the peoples fighting for the same holy cause of peace, the children from The Great Land of Socialism, the Soviet Union, to love children from countries of popular democracy. They are taught to love the children of the working class in capitalist countries, countries subjugated to American imperialism, children whose lives are full of tears."¹⁶

By comparison to late socialism, which inaugurated a discourse of national independence, international camps in the postwar decade distinguished themselves through what can be called "Soviet-centrism," the openly acknowledged and encouraged imitation of the Soviet model of internationalism for youth. The Romanian communists' indebtedness

to the Soviet model in the organization of international pioneer camps, epitomized by the Artek camp in the Crimean Peninsula, manifested in diverse ways. These ranged from the very notion that the camp constituted a self-managing collective to combining medical rehabilitation with ideological education, to encouraging campers to write letters of thanks to Stalin, to the fact that many rituals and interactions in Eastern European camps were carried out in Russian, which was meant to serve a sort of *lingua franca*, even when there were no Soviet pioneers present.

In the immediate post-war years, when pioneer organizations in Eastern Europe were busy learning from the Soviet experience, the model of internationalism offered by Artek, which opened its doors to pioneer groups from all Soviet Republics, but remained closed to all but a few foreign delegations and honorary guests, was that of “the friendship of the Soviet peoples.”¹⁷ In his memoir, *Model Children: Inside the Republic of Red Scarves*, Paul Thorez, the son of Maurice Thorez, the secretary general of the French Communist Party, commented on the absence of a cosmopolitan atmosphere at Artek in the 1950s: “Artek wasn’t as cosmopolitan then [the 1950s] as it came to be afterwards because cosmopolitanism wasn’t in favour then. Foreigners did come to Artek, but really they barely trickled in. There were some tiny delegations from Czechoslovakia, Poland and China – those certain friends! – but only a handful of other, special cases. Boys and girls from the Soviet Union were in force, enjoying the charms of the Crimea.”¹⁸ As scholars have pointed out, the climate of “increasing isolationism marked by overt ‘spy mania’ and suspicion of the outside world” characterizing the Soviet Union in the 1930s “increased in virulence after the Second World War,” accounting for the fact that the socialist internationalism for youth promoted by the Soviet Union was an ancillary form of Soviet patriotism.¹⁹ English and Russian language propaganda brochures advertising Artek as the finest Soviet health resort for children in the mid-1950s featured groups of rosy cheeked pioneers from all over the Soviet Union, boasting that the camp welcomed children of seventy nationalities.²⁰ Much like pioneers from Union Republics, the occasional children delegations from China, Vietnam, Bulgaria, the German Democratic Republic, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania were counted among the seventy nationalities that visited the camp, being assimilated into the big socialist family headed by the Soviet Union.

The Romanian press of the 1950s echoed these representations of Soviet-led socialist unity. On the celebration of thirty years since the

founding of Artek, for example, the youth press reproduced Soviet articles noting that “Artek’s most common guests are pioneers from the countries of popular democracy. They arrive in large groups, not only to rest, but also to see how Soviet pioneers live, study, and rest.” Socialist internationalism was often illustrated by images of groups of Soviet and Eastern European pioneers competing in sports contests or dancing their respective folk songs as a form of unity in diversity: “Romanian pioneers dance a jolly dance, Bulgarians sing ‘Ianka, partizanka, while a small Chinese pioneer performs ‘the sword dance.’”²¹

Articles by Romanian pioneers and journalists also presented Artek as a superior model of internationalist education for Romanian and Eastern European pioneers and their organizations throughout the 1950s. Titled “I Strive to Resemble the Dear Soviet Pioneers,” an article framed as a letter from an enthusiastic Romanian pioneer on return from a summer spent in Artek in 1951 evoked the Soviet camp as the paradigmatic learning experience and site of internationalist friendships: “In the wonderful Artek in the Soviet Union, we met our dear friends, the Soviet pioneers.... We learned so much there. They welcomed us with love and care, sharing their scarves and insignia with us. We often talked about school, we told them that we learn their language, the language of Lenin and Stalin, in school.”²² Similarly, the press emphasized the inspirational Soviet model when it presented other Eastern European camps the Romanians attended such as the GDR camp on the shores of the Werbellinsee lake.²³ Much in the same way, an article suggestively titled “Bulgarian Pioneers To Have their Own Artek” described the ambitious preparations for a new international camp site in Bulgaria as a successful embrace of the Soviet model. The preparations included the erection of six groups of buildings to host the camp management and over a thousand pioneers in the “Golden Sands” on the shores of the Black Sea in the middle of a spacious park.²⁴

Postwar International Camps: Between Ideological Representation and Lived Experience

Despite the international camps’ lofty goal of strengthening the friendships among Eastern bloc pioneers, they also fulfilled a more practical goal in the postwar period. Both national and international pioneer camps designed after the Soviet model functioned simultaneously as medical rehabilitation centers and ideological schools for the children of cooperative peasants

and the working class, being staffed with nurses and cooks alongside teachers and pioneer instructors. The flagship Soviet camp at Artek was opened as a health resort for children in 1925 and continued to monitor children's minds and bodies through a carefully controlled regimen of sleep, food, and exercise throughout its existence.²⁵

Similarly, early press accounts of Romanian pioneer camps, focused as much on the virtues of collective life as they did on the food menus allegedly featuring five meals a day (including meat, fruit, and sweets), the daily intakes of calories and vitamins, and the ideal balance between rest and physical exercise, measuring the camps' success both in terms of the children's gratitude to the Workers' Party and the number of pounds gained in weight.²⁶ The climate of "clean air, serenity, beautiful natural surroundings, and parental surveillance" was meant to contribute as much as diet and exercise to the shaping of robust bodies and personalities.²⁷ Reminding its readers that children were nourished in mountain camps or "Black Sea resorts at Eforie, Vasile Roaită, Costinești and Techirghiol that had been previously enjoyed only by gluttonous boyars and their sons," *The Education Gazette* completed the image of the paternalist state with references to the ongoing process of state nationalization of assets portrayed in terms of an unprecedented democratization of space and resources under the new "people's democracy."²⁸

While the press focused on the regime of popular democracy's unprecedented care for the young, party and youth organization records indicate that camp organization was seriously affected by the tensions and competition for resources, both symbolic and material, among various party and state factions. In particular, ideological and medical authorities disputed the extent to which vacation sites were expected to function as "colonie sanatorială" (sanatoria) devoted mainly to the medical rehabilitation of sick children or "tabere" (camps) expected to provide educational and ideological training. In the early 1950s, for example, the reports of the party's youth organization complained that the medical authorities running camps in places like Sinaia and Făget (Timiș) refused to accept their pioneer instructors on the managing committee or to follow their proposed camp program of ideological and sports activities: "Please clarify urgently," they asked their superiors, "if we are running a pioneer camp or a sanatorium in Făget. The comrades from the Ministry of Health said they cannot approve a schedule of camp activities because the children there are sick and asked that the Ministry should confirm in writing whether this is a camp or a sanatorium."²⁹ These disputes were

not just local misunderstandings, but the stage of negotiations between restructured state institutions like the ministries of education and health and emerging party structures like the UTM regarding their legitimate domains of influence (children's health vs children's ideological education) and the resources they were entitled to (medical rehabilitation or vacation sites) in order to carry out their mission.

Reflecting the diverse ideological and medical goals of international camps, the PMR assigned their organization to UTM, whose "Pioneer" and "International" sections collaborated with the ministries of education and health as well as the "Vacation Houses" (Case de odihnă) section of the Union Confederation (Confederația Generală a Muncii, CGM) to run the camps. Despite the emphasis on the success of pioneer exchanges in establishing an atmosphere of peace and friendship and representing the new regime of popular democracy abroad in the mainstream and youth press of the 1940s and 1950s, archival records and interviews suggest that the youth organization encountered numerous material, personnel, administrative, and ideological obstacles in ensuring a smooth camp experience for children and adults. International camps abroad in the Eastern bloc suffered from similar problems.

The Romanian Pioneer organization started its international relations with a modest exchange of forty pioneers with the Bulgarian Septemberists in 1949, its founding year, following the induction of the first pioneer groups into the organization, at a time when the organization counted only twenty to fifty thousand members aged nine to fifteen. According to the youth organization's report, Romanians received Bulgarian pioneers at a camp in Lipova, in Romania's Banat region. Press accounts of international and national camps were traditionally framed as letters from pioneer participants likely to give the account a sense of authenticity. On its first international camp, the party's youth press published a letter allegedly sent by a Romanian pioneer, the daughter of a worker from the Grivița factory, a site associated with the interwar history of workers' strikes and thus with a tradition of communist activism. While initially worried about how they would communicate, Romanian and Bulgarian pioneers soon realized, the pioneer's letter tells us, how much they already had in common: "We were walking the same right path of pioneers in the Soviet Union, being led by comrade Stalin's wisdom, he who is the pioneers' dearest friend."³⁰ Russian initially functioned as the main language of communication, symbolically emphasizing the importance of the Soviet center, giving way to the pioneers' native languages only later in their

encounter: "We could understand each other well from the very first day. We all knew, as much as we studied in school, Russian. So, we spoke Russian. Then we started learning each other's languages during breaks and at night, when we were guarding the camp."³¹

In their turn, the Romanians spent a month in the international camp in Varna, where they were meant to represent their country proudly and develop friendships with Bulgarian, Soviet, and Hungarian pioneers, who represented the postwar regimes of popular democracy, but also with French children, who gave Romanians a lesson in the struggles of living under a capitalist, imperialist regime.³² Reflecting the immediate postwar atmosphere, the report noted the Bulgarian camp's lack of organization, translators, and educational materials. A recent interview with the orphaned son of a stakhanovist miner from Valea Jiului, who participated in the 1949 exchange, indicates that the pioneers' selection was primarily conditioned by their social background and need for support in addition to school performance: "I was selected because I had good results in school, but what weighed most was the fact that my father died when I was only twelve in a mine accident in Lupeni.... In 1949, Valea Jiului was well seen by the center for its hardworking, stakhanovist workers who were beating production records daily."³³ While official reports insisted that pioneers learned the importance of "the struggle for peace," the interview indicates that war games were pervasive among children whose whole camp experience was structured around war games. Pioneers remember spending every night guarding their tents, but being taken prisoners and marched to neighbouring camps with all their possessions by Bulgarian pioneers in the vicinity.³⁴

The Romanian Pioneers' international agenda became more ambitious in the 1950s, when it planned to invite delegations from the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Albania, the German Democratic Republic as well as France, Greece, and Italy to an international pioneer camp in the Carpathian Mountains designed to accommodate eight hundred pioneers in two subsequent sessions.³⁵ By the summer of 1951, records show that the youth organization hosted two modest international camps, one in the Carpathians and another in large tents in Mamaia, known as a spa resort on the Black Sea. In 1952, the Mamaia camp accommodated one hundred and eighty children, including pioneers from Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the GDR. Enhancing the international(ist) atmosphere, the festive opening of the camp in Mamaia was attended by Czechoslovakian, Hungarian, Bulgarian

and French workers spending their vacations on the Black Sea. The camp program was established in collaboration with foreign adult instructors, including the decision of conducting all pioneer rituals in Russian.³⁶

The Black Sea camp prioritized children's rest and relaxation, featuring a beach and swimming morning routine as well as music and dance programs by campfire at night. Much like official festivities and pioneer rituals, during which Romanian and foreign pioneers thanked the PMR and its leaders for their provisions and care for the young, these activities were often infused with ideological meaning. A journalist documenting camp life for the party's youth magazine, *Scântea tineretului*, noted that during one of the pioneers' evening shows, "The most applauded number was the German song 'Yankees, go Home!' The strength with which the young pioneers of the German Democratic Republic sang this song shows the hatred that the German people feel for the American imperialists who want to plunge them in a new war."³⁷ The camp further engaged children in educational and sporting activities, providing educational activities in reading clubs or circles for naturalists, amateur artists, aeromodelism, sports and sanitary education.³⁸ Pioneers also participated in an intense sports competition under the name of Spartakiad, a term coined by the Soviets as an alternative to the Olympics. International camps further offered opportunities for light entertainment, engaging children in museum visits at the marine school museum in the port of Constanța or the Peleş Castle museum, excursions to Sinaia and the Stalin town in the Carpathians, visits of the capital city, and even ship cruises in response to high demand.

In their report for higher party structures, representatives of the youth organization argued that the camp was successful because it strengthened the friendship between Romanian and foreign pioneers and the attachment and respect for the workers' party and its youth organization. Pioneers, organizers argued, also learned new skills during the camp: although Bulgarian pioneers could not play volleyball on arrival, they defeated competing teams by the end of the camp.³⁹ Finally, the organizers emphasized the beneficial effect that the camp diet and mixture of rest and relaxation with engaging activities had on children's health and constitution: "We also had good results with strengthening the pioneers' bodies. On average, they put on over three kilos. There are some pioneers who put on five to six kilograms. For example, the Bulgarian pioneer, Slavka Mihailova was twenty-seven kilos on arrival and over thirty-three on departure..."⁴⁰

At these early stages, however, reports show that international camps were plagued by significant personnel and administrative problems. Because the committee running the camp included members appointed by various ministries and organizations, ranging from the Ministry of Education and Health to the UTM and CGM, there was little sense of common purpose and responsibility, the UTM's report argued. Some of the teachers running the pioneer circles lacked the motivation to teach, showing evidence of bourgeois mentalities by seeing their camp participation as a vacation rather than a duty. Adult pioneer instructors lacked the ideological and practical skills needed for high level interactions with international guests. Pioneers themselves were also poorly selected, showing little sporting, artistic, or scientific inclination. The most significant problems, however, were blamed on the unions' defective administration of the camp. The administrative directors were sickly and ineffective, mismanaging food and fruit resources, which were then obtained with great difficulties from the unions' "Vacation houses" section. All these drawbacks led UTM representatives to conclude that "This poorly recruited, uneducated, and professionally and politically unprepared personnel caused the greatest difficulties."⁴¹

To redress these problems in the future, UTM activists proposed a number of changes. The first included finding a more suitable location for the international camp in a "more isolated place on the Black Sea coast," away from the dangerous lake lying behind the existing camp, the railway running between the *Canal* and the city-port of Constanța, and the military vehicles patrolling nearby beaches, an indication of the recent war experience and the continued presence of Russian troops on Romanian territory in the early 1950s.⁴² UTM also proposed that the camp committee should be headed by a sole responsible UTM leader and should arrive at the camp ten days before the official start for a five-day training in "practical and theoretical aspects" of camping.⁴³ Pioneers of eleven to thirteen were to be recruited more strictly based on their skills and in significantly higher numbers than foreign pioneers, arriving at the camp for training ten days ahead. CGM's administrative personnel was to be appointed more responsibly and similarly arrive early for a five-day training period. The organizers also requested that the camp should receive all the necessary materials for sports and entertaining activities, ranging from games for children to books and magazines in all languages of the camp, geographical maps of all participating countries, musical instruments, and didactic material.⁴⁴

Throughout the 1950s, the internationalist agenda of the UTM became more ambitious and the search for the best locations for international camps, which were meant to be in picturesque spots, but also secure, isolated and self-sufficient, continued. The UTM planned the organization of two international camps. The one at the Black Sea was meant to host fifty pioneers from Czechoslovakia, twenty-five each from Poland, Hungary, and China in addition to two hundred Romanian pioneers. The mountain camp was meant to host sixty Soviet pioneers, twenty-five each from Albania, Poland, East Germany, and Hungary in addition to two hundred and fifty Romanian pioneers.⁴⁵

In 1954, the international camp in the Carpathian Mountains was organized on the grounds of the former Zăbala/Zabola estate in what was then the Autonomous Hungarian Region. The estate belonged to the Mikes family, a part of Székler nobility, but was plundered during the war and nationalized by the communist regime in 1949, when the family was expelled. The UTM organizers renovated the mansions (known as the old and new castles), built three barracks to serve as accommodation, and cleared the large gardens and artificial lake, using the latter for swimming and nautical sports.⁴⁶ They welcomed guests from beyond the Eastern bloc, including children from North Korea, Finland, Austria, and West Germany.

While the program was similar to that from previous years, children were engaged in more ideological activities, including the celebration of ten years since Romania's liberation by Soviet troops, nine years since the liberation of Korea and the commemoration of ten years since the assassination of Ernst Thälmann, the leader of the Communist Party of Germany.⁴⁷ Besides the increased ideological emphasis on a common, global communist history, the camp program continued to combine rest and entertainment with educational activities, folkloric music and dance performances, and sports competitions, including chess contests. Indicating the concerns that adult authorities still had regarding children's frail postwar bodies, the report indicates that pioneer instructors worked in cooperation with the camps' medical officials to establish the age-specific and individual capacity for physical exertion.

Much was made of the natural beauty and educational value of the surroundings. Children in the naturalists' circle, for example, collected and indexed dozens of plant and insect species in the area while the entire camp took several excursions. These were complemented by visits to the Peleş Castle, Doftana, the place where many of the communist leaders had been imprisoned before the war, and Bucharest, with an emphasis

on science museums like Antipa and new socialist institutions and urban structures that firmly located Romania's new regime of popular democracy in relation to the Soviet Union. These sites included the 23rd of August Stadium, which was built only a year before for the Fourth World Festival of Youth and Students held in Bucharest, and *Casa Scanteii*, the V. I. Stalin Printing Press, a monumental site built between 1952 and 1956 in the socialist realist style of the Moscow State University to host all printing presses and newsrooms.⁴⁸

The official youth press welcomed the camp as an example of the new regime's care for the young, who were hosted in over three hundred-years old castles nationalized from former nobility, and socialist internationalism, projecting the image of enthusiastic teenagers engaged in friendly exchanges and socialist competitions in sports that only strengthened their friendship and cooperation.⁴⁹ Describing a volleyball match between the Finish and Romanian-Korean teams, the journalist noted that a Romanian player asked for one of his Korean colleagues to be replaced, an act which only encouraged the Korean player to outperform everyone. Commenting on the 1-1 score and enhancing the idea that socialist competition built a sense of collective belonging, the journalist concluded: "Who won? Friendship, as always." Language could similarly pose a barrier to communication and friendship as Romanian pioneers worried how they could welcome the Austrian and German teams when none of them spoke German. The solution came in the form of an Austrian guest who spoke Russian, a language Romanian pioneers were learning in school. Presented as the camp's alleged *lingua franca*, Russian also held symbolic value, underlining the fact that pioneer camps in the Eastern bloc followed the Soviet model of internationalism for youth.⁵⁰

Finally, the article deployed a representational strategy of Soviet inspiration, the child writing letters to comfort worried parents, that they enjoyed life in the camp. The strategy was pioneered in the children's press in immediate postwar period, becoming common in the representation of local, national, or international camps throughout the socialist period. In the camp in Zăbala, a Romanian pioneer received a worried letter from her parents during lunch, and was chastised by her friends for not writing them sooner: "No matter how good their desert cake was, the pioneers left it on the plate to give their colleague a piece of their mind." Pioneers eventually made their friend write a letter reading "it's great in the camp, it couldn't be better" and signed it as a collective to relieve the parents' concerns.⁵¹ The goal of this exercise was to prove that the

pioneer collective was a superior form of child socialization than the child's biological family, indicating that the nuclear family was a remnant of the past that could be overcome.

The official UTM report echoed the congratulatory picture in the official press, noting that Romanian pioneers were properly selected to show sporting and artistic talents and that all children learned to live in the collective.⁵² Much like the article, the report argued for the educational value of the pioneer collective, noting that it exerted a disciplining influence on the unruly Austrian children in the camp. In contrast with the article, however, the report emphasized the continuing shortage of ideologically and pedagogically trained UTM cadres, noting that some adult instructors failed in their educational mission, resorting to physical punishment and demeaning comments in interactions with children or even stealing from colleagues. While many members of the managing committee were active and efficient, others, like the administrative director, "treated problems superficially and often delayed their resolution."⁵³ Organizers also had to deal with administrative problems like the lack of washing facilities and defective water pipes or personnel problems such as the unqualified cook and makeshift kitchen. One of the recommendations for higher ups in the party was to continue organizing the international camp at Zăbala rather than changing location annually, a practice which had prevented gradual improvement of camp facilities. Organizers also recommended that a bus should be assigned to the camp for easy travel and that an entertainment park should be developed on the estate grounds.⁵⁴

Conclusions

Socialist Romania's organization of international pioneer camps in the aftermath of the Second World War followed the Soviet model, gradually integrating the country and its youth organizations in the network of cultural and educational exchanges within the Eastern bloc and across the Iron Curtain, with "fellow travelers," the left-leaning organizations in the capitalist West. Cast as laboratories of proletarian internationalism and world peace in the press, international camps reflected the tensions between the ambitious internationalist agendas of the UTM and the endemic shortages of ideologically trustworthy cadres, and material and administrative resources in the immediate postwar period. Despite these

teething problems, youth organizations in Eastern Europe continued and expanded their youth exchanges in the following decades.

By the 1960s, the youth and children's organizations of the communist parties in the Eastern bloc would perfect the task of showcasing socialist achievement, mobilizing major state resources in order to administer international pioneer camps that were located in extremely picturesque spots and featured modern facilities and specialized personnel. After a decade of mutual exchanges, international pioneer camps would become more standardized, featuring similar programs of political activities, sports competitions, artistic festivals, group visits to museums, major historical sites, the capital cities of the visited country, or sites of socialist progress and achievement such as local Pioneer Palaces, factories, or cooperative farms. Although highly monitored by adult delegation leaders, mediated by translators, and administered by specialized staff, pioneer camps would continue to be represented as experiments in collective living and self-management for children and youth.

NOTES

- 1 For an account of these trends as well as their possibilities and limitations, see Nancy L. Green, “The Trials of Transnationalism: It’s Not as Easy as It Looks” (Contemporary Issues in Historical Perspective), *The Journal of Modern History* 89 (2017): 851–874. C. A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connolly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol and Patricia Seed, “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” *The American Historical Review* 111, 5 (2006): 1441-1464.
- 2 For a discussion of this literature, see the thematic issue edited by Theodora Dragostinova and Malgorzata Fidelis, “Beyond the Iron Curtain: Eastern Europe and the Global Cold War,” *Slavic Review* 77, 3 (2018). For early examples of this trend, see M. David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941* (New York, 2012).
- 3 This is a particularly rich body of literature. Some important titles include Mark Fenemore, *Sex, Thugs, and Rock’n Roll: Teenage Rebels in Cold-War East Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007). Uta Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Juliane Fürst, *Stalin’s Last Generation. Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- 4 See Alexei Yurchak, “The True Colors of Communism: King Crimson, Deep Purple, Pink Floyd,” *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 207-237. Juliane Fürst, *Flowers through Concrete: Explorations in Soviet Hippieland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).
- 5 For the role “small” state cultural diplomacy played in the late Cold War, see Theodora Dragostinova, *The Cold War from the Margins: A Small Socialist State on the Global Cultural Scene* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021)
- 6 For historiography on Second World encounters, see Rachel Applebaum, *Empire of Friends: Soviet Power and Socialist Internationalism in Cold War Czechoslovakia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); Patryk Babiracki and Kenyon Zimmer, eds. *Cold War Crossings: International Travel and Exchange across the Soviet Bloc, 1940s–1960s* (Texas A&M University Press, 2014); Patryk Babiracki, *Soviet Soft Power in Poland: Culture and the Making of Stalin’s New Empire, 1943-1957* (Chapel Hill, 2015). For scholarship on East-South exchanges during the Cold War, see for example, James Mark and Paul Betts, eds., *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonisation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) and Kristin Roth-Ey, *Socialist Internationalism and the Gritty Politics of the Particular: Second-Third World Spaces in the Cold War* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023).

- ⁷ Madigan Fichter, "Rock 'n' roll nation: Counterculture and Dissent in Romania, 1965-1975," *Nationalities papers* 39, 4 (2011): 567-585. See also see Adelina Ștefan, "The Lure of Capitalism: Foreign Tourists and the Shadow Economy in Socialist Romania in the 1960-1989" in *Tourism and Travel During the Cold War: Negotiating Tourist Experiences Across the Iron Curtain*, ed. Christian Noack and Sune Bechmann (London, 2020), 47-60.
- ⁸ See Bogdan Iacob, "A Babel in Bucharest: Third World Students in Romania, 1960s-1980s," *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 63, 3-4 (2022): 669-690. Viviana Iacob, "Caragiale in Calcutta: Romanian-Indian Theatre Diplomacy during the Cold War," *Journal of Global Theater History* 2, 1 (2017): 37-46. Bogdan Iacob, "Paradoxes of Socialist Solidarity: Romanian and Czechoslovak Medical Teams in North Korea and Vietnam (1951-1962)," *Monde(s)* 20, 2 (2021): 117-140. Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu, Irina Macovei, Adrian Neteđu, Carmen Olaru, "Les étudiants africains en Roumanie (1970-1990). De l'internationalisme militant à la commercialisation des études," *Psihologia Socială*, 34, 2 (2014): 117-128.
- ⁹ For monographs on the WFSY, see Pia Koivunen, *Performing Peace and Friendship: The World Youth Festivals and Soviet Cultural Diplomacy* (De Gruyter, 2022). See also Nick Rutter, "Look Left, Drive Right: Internationalisms at the 1968 World Youth Festival," *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World*, Anne Gorsuch and Diane Koenker, eds. (Bloomington, IN, 2012): 193-212.
- ¹⁰ Catriona Kelly, "Defending Children's Rights, 'In Defense of Peace:' Children and Soviet Cultural Diplomacy," In *Kritika* 9, 4 (2008): 711-746. Matthias Neumann, "Peace and Friendship:" Overcoming the Cold War in the Children's World of the Pioneer Camp Artek, *Diplomatic History* 46 (2022): 505-526.
- ¹¹ For studies of the reforms of education, see Maria Someșan and Mircea Iosifescu, "Legile din 1948 pentru reforma învățământului," *Anul 1948 – Instituționalizarea comunismului*, ed Romulus Rusan, (Fundatia Academia Civică, 1998), 439-444. On Romanian youth organizations (including the Pioneers), see Adrian Coflâncă, "Repere pentru o istorie a Uniunii Tineretului Comunist/Towards a History of the Romanian Communist Youth," published as a contribution to the 2006 Presidential Report. Retrieved, April 2023 https://www.academia.edu/5700937/Adrian_Cioflanca_Repere_pentru_o_istorie_a_Uniunii_Tineretului_Comunist
- ¹² ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Organizatorică, file 32/1950, "Proect de organizare a taberelor de pionieri pentru vara anului 1950," 27-30. See also Paul Gh. Popescu, "Activitatea pionierilor în vacanță," In *Gazeta Învățământului*, July 29, 1949, 1-2.
- ¹³ See, for example, Anatole Chircev & al., "Educarea elevilor în spiritul patriotismului socialist și al internaționalismului proletar" *Pedagogia pentru institutele pedagogice* (Editura Didactică și pedagogică, 1964), 265-279.

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- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Lucreția Ilieș, "Viața fericită în tabăra internațională a pionierilor dela Mamaia," *Scânteia tineretului* no 1044, August 29, 1952, 3.
- 17 Paul Thorez, *Model Children: Inside the Republic of Red Scarves* (Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 1991), 29-30. Among the few honorary guests outside the Soviet Bloc, Thorez lists himself and Anita Presto, the daughter of the general secretary of the Brazilian Communist Party.
- 18 Ibid., 29-30.
- 19 Kelly, "Defending Children's Rights," 744.
- 20 See Valentina Lubimova, *Soviet Children at Summer Camp* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1955), 31-40, and Stanislav Furin and Y. Rybinsky, "What is Artek?," In *The Artek Pioneer Camp* (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency, 1975).
- 21 A. Miliavski, "Un rai, dar un rai pământesc, real," *Scânteia tineretului*, June 17, 1955.
- 22 Pioniera Mariana Stan (clasa VI-a, Școala elementară de fete Costeasca), "Caut să le semăn cat mai mult iubiților pionieri sovietici," *Scânteia tineretului*, May 18, 1952.
- 23 "R. D. Germană, Odihna de vară a copiilor," *România liberă*, October 7, 1952, 3.
- 24 "Pionierii bulgari vor avea Artek-ul lor," *Scânteia tineretului*, January 14, 1955, 1.
- 25 Lubimova, *Soviet Children*, 31-40 and *Artek*, (Kiev, 1955), 3-5.
- 26 Al. G. Trifoi, "Viața elevilor în coloniile de vară la munte și la mare," In *Gazeta Învățământului*, July 22, 1949, 3.
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- 28 Petre Lenghel Izanu, "Cum își petrec vacanța la Eforie copiii muncitorilor în colonia de vară a Ministerului Sănătății," In *Gazeta Învățământului*, July 22, 1949, 3. See also "Organizarea vacanței elevilor, o problemă de Stat," In *Gazeta Învățământului*, June 24, 1949, 1 and 4. For an account of the role of after-school institutions for children in the "democratization of space" in the Soviet Union, see Susan E. Reid, "Khrushchev's Children's Paradise: the Pioneer Palace, Moscow, 1958-1962," In *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, eds. Susan E. Reid and David Crowley, (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2002), 141-180.
- 29 ANIC, Fond UTC (UTM), file 34/1952, "Notă informativă în legătură cu deplasarea mea în taberele de pionieri și școlari dela Făget-Timișoara și Căpâlnaș-Arad," 39.
- 30 Elena Pavel (pionieră, elevă în cl VII a Scolii elementare, Grivița), "Pașii noștri, ai pionierilor din R.P.R și din R.P. Bulgaria," *Scânteia tineretului*, March 5, 1950, 2.

- 31 Ibid.
- 32 See ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R. – Organizatorică, file 83/1949, “Raport de activitate a secției centrale de pionieri in perioada 1 iulie – 15 septembrie 1949, 23-24.
- 33 Marian Boboc, “Tot Înainte în Bulgaria” *Ziarul Vaii Jiului*, 2017 <https://www.zvj.ro/articole-40334-In%2BMemoriam%2Bllie%2BBreben%2B%2BTot%2Bînainte%2Bin%2BBulgaria.html> Last retrieved July 17, 2023.
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- 35 ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R. – Organizatorică, file 32/1950, “Proiect de organizare a taberelor de pionieri pentru vara anului 1950,” 27-30.
- 36 ANIC, Fond UTC (UTM), file 34/1952, “Dare de seama privind organizarea taberei internaționale de pionierii, Mamaia, R.P.R,” 110-8.
- 37 Ilieș, “Viața fericită.” The now famous postwar slogan was fresh in 1952, having been first used in 1950 during an East German youth parade.
- 38 ANIC, Fond UTC (UTM), file 34/1952, “Dare de seama privind organizarea taberei internaționale de pionierii, Mamaia, R.P.R,” 110-8.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 The communist regime began the construction of the Canal (lit. channel) linking the Danube to Black Sea ports in 1949, using paid labourers, soldiers, and political prisoners.
- 43 ANIC, Fond UTC (UTM), file 34/1952, “Dare de seama privind organizarea taberei internaționale de pionierii, Mamaia, R.P.R,” 110-8.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 ANIC, Fond UTC (UTM), file 15/1954, “Notă informativă asupra desfășurării activității în tabăra internațională în perioada 9-26 august, 1954,” 70.
- 47 Ibid., 71.
- 48 Ibid., 71 and 73.
- 49 Șerban Voicu, “Însemnări dintr-o tabără internațională de pionieri,” *Scînteia Tineretului* no 1661, August 29, 1954, 3.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 ANIC, Fond UTC (UTM), file 15/1954, “Notă informativă asupra desfășurării activității în tabăra internațională în perioada 9-26 august, 1954,” 70.
- 53 Ibid., 72.
- 54 Ibid., 73.

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