

Chapter 5

Travel and Exposure to Western Culture

ABSTRACT

There are various reasons countries sometimes choose to regulate travel both in and out of their borders. During the Communist Era, countries in the Soviet bloc restricted travel mainly to prevent defection, and out of fear that people would realize life might be better outside the iron curtain. This chapter examines the impact travel restrictions had and shows they were largely unsuccessful in preventing exposure to Western ideals and culture. Many examples are given that show that without even having to travel people in Czechoslovakia and Hungary were learning through radio, television, books, and film how life was different in the West. Through personal remembrances, this chapter illustrates the effect of travel constraints and why people view the ability to travel freely as one of the main advantages of communism falling.

INTRODUCTION

The ability to travel freely is often taken for granted in the Western world. With a few exceptions, Westerners are allowed to travel pretty much anywhere at any time. While Central and Eastern Europe now share this luxury, it was not very long ago that citizens of former Soviet bloc countries faced many travel restrictions. This chapter explores the motivations behind limiting travel, the methods used, and whether or not it was effective. It focuses on people living in Czechoslovakia and Hungary during the Communist Era and

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their individual experiences. Predominantly through personal interviews, it is determined whether travel restrictions had the same effect on everyone, and whether restricting travel successfully sheltered people behind the iron curtain from Western culture and ideals.

This chapter will first examine how travel has been restricted historically and how it continues to be restricted today. Some of the restrictions pertaining to travel will be examined, including specific restrictions present in Czechoslovakia and Hungary during the Communist Era. Next, the motivations for imposing travel restrictions will be discussed, along with whether the restrictions accomplished the goals—for example, preventing infiltration of Western culture—they intended to.

It is also examined whether people are able to be politically socialized towards democratic values by indirect exposure to Western culture. For example, what impact does exposure to radio, television, movies, books, and movies have, if any? The possibility is considered whether people can learn about Western culture and democratic values without ever leaving their country.

Throughout the chapter, the impact of travel restrictions on citizens will be illustrated with personal examples. Conclusions will then be drawn about the effects of travel restrictions on society and whether the restrictions worked the way the Communist Party hoped. Additionally, it will be determined how exposure to Western culture either directly or indirectly affected people's socialization towards democracy.

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

There has been a recurring debate about whether people have the right to leave their own country. Most scholars agree the ability to leave one's country is a right people should have; however, most also think this is not the most important right people have (Dowty, 1987; Whelan, 1981). Different countries and multinational organizations have approached freedom of movement in various ways over time, with the level of freedom fluctuating depending on external factors. After the atrocities of World War II, the newly formed United Nations (UN) passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which included several statements related to freedom of movement.

Article 13 of the Declaration states:

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