

Consumer Politics After State Socialism: Understanding New Anthropologies of Europe

The fall of state socialism in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s marked a profound transformation for the region. For decades, state-controlled economies had dominated these countries, and consumption was tightly regulated and restricted. However, with the emergence of market economies and democratic societies, consumption has become a central aspect of life in Eastern Europe.

This article explores the ways in which consumption and consumer politics have shaped the post-socialist landscape of Eastern Europe. Drawing on recent anthropological research, it examines how consumption has become a site of both resistance and accommodation, as well as a means of expressing identity and agency. The article also discusses the challenges and opportunities that consumption poses for the future of Eastern Europe.



Balkan Blues: Consumer Politics after State Socialism (New Anthropologies of Europe) by Holger Schutkowski

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Consumption as Resistance

In the early years of post-socialism, consumption was often seen as a form of resistance to the legacy of state socialism. For many people, buying Western goods and products represented a way to break free from the constraints of the past and to embrace the freedoms of the market. Consumption became a symbol of individual choice and autonomy, and it was often used to express a sense of national pride.



However, as post-socialism progressed, consumption began to take on new meanings. As markets became more established and Western goods became more widely available, consumption became less about resistance and more about status and belonging. People began to use consumption to

distinguish themselves from others, and to construct their own individual identities.

Consumption as Accommodation

In addition to being a form of resistance, consumption has also been a way for people to accommodate themselves to the challenges of post-socialism. In the early years, consumption was often a way to make up for the shortages and deprivations of the past. People bought goods and products that they had been denied under state socialism, such as food, clothing, and electronics.



A woman shopping in a market in Eastern Europe in the 1990s. Image: Getty Images

As markets became more established, consumption became a way for people to improve their lives and to secure their futures. People invested in education, healthcare, and other forms of human capital. They also bought goods and products that they believed would help them to succeed in the new market economy.

Consumption as Identity

Consumption has also become a way for people to express their identities in post-socialist Eastern Europe. In the past, people's identities were often defined by their work, their social class, and their political affiliation. However, in the post-socialist era, consumption has become a more important way for people to construct their own sense of self.



People use consumption to express their individuality, their social status, and their aspirations. They buy goods and products that they believe reflect their values and beliefs. Consumption has become a way for people to create their own unique identities, and to distinguish themselves from others.

Consumption and Agency

Consumption has also become a way for people to exercise agency in post-socialist Eastern Europe. In the past, people's lives were often determined by the state. They had little control over their work, their housing, or their education. However, in the post-socialist era, consumption has given people a greater degree of choice and autonomy.



A woman shopping for food in a supermarket in Eastern Europe. Image: Getty Images

People can now choose what to buy, where to buy it, and how much to spend. Consumption has become a way for people to express their individual preferences and to shape their own lives. It has also given people a greater sense of control over their own futures.

Challenges and Opportunities

The rise of consumption in Eastern Europe has created both challenges and opportunities for the region. On the one hand, consumption has brought increased choice, autonomy, and agency to people's lives. It has also helped to improve living standards and to create a more prosperous society.

On the other hand, consumption has also led to some challenges. These include:

- **Increased inequality:** Consumption has led to a widening gap between rich and poor in Eastern Europe. The wealthy have access to a wide range of goods and services, while the poor often struggle to meet their basic needs.
- **Environmental degradation:** Consumption has also led to an increase in environmental degradation. The production and consumption of goods and services has contributed to pollution, climate change, and other environmental problems.
- **Social isolation:** Consumption has also been linked to social isolation. People who focus on consuming goods and services often have less time for social interactions and relationships.

Despite these challenges, consumption is likely to continue to play a major role in the future of Eastern Europe. As markets become more established and incomes rise, people will continue to consume goods and services in order to improve their lives and to express their identities. The challenge for the region is to find ways to manage consumption in a sustainable and equitable way.

The rise of consumption in Eastern Europe has had a profound impact on the region. Consumption has become a site of both resistance and accommodation, as well as a means of expressing identity and agency. It has also created both challenges and opportunities for the region.

The future of consumption in Eastern Europe is uncertain. However, it is clear that consumption will continue to play a major role in the region's development. The challenge for the region is to find ways to manage consumption in a sustainable and equitable way.



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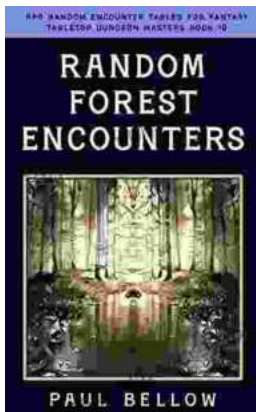
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