

**INFORMALITY, GENDER, TOURISM:
THE CASE OF THE BOROVELTS RESORT**

Ana Luleva

Abstract

The functioning of informal practices as a part of the labour culture and entrepreneurship in two different economic and political regimes is discussed in view of the case of the Borovets Resort. This paper focuses attention on the participation of women in the tourist business in the resort and discusses the thesis that Bulgarian women working in the sphere of tourism are among the ‘winners’ in the transition, in contrast to men working in other fields of the economy. The ethnographic research carried out in the resort in the winter and summer of 2012 and the comparison with previous observations in the same field do not provide evidence to support such a thesis. Viewed in the broader socioeconomic context, the situation of women employed in the tourism sector does not differ considerably from the situation of women employed in other spheres. They live within and are a part of the same gender regime: a common gender ideology and culture. The problematic development of the formal economy, including the field of tourism (regarded as successful), compels men as well as women to search for additional income by working in the informal sector (e.g. the household farm, hourly labour without a contract, self-employment, and so on). Women retain high employment by combining work in the formal and informal economy; however, their situation could hardly be considered a ‘success’. Those working in hotels, the self-employed, and those employed in family businesses evaluate the situation as ‘coping’ or ‘surviving’ in a long-term and harsh economic situation. In order to overcome the unpredictability of this situation, they use all available resources – their cultural, social, and economic capital.

Some of the informal practices which are known from the socialist period lose their meaning under the conditions of the new market economy and free access to goods, but others – such as party patronage, personal loyalty, and purchasing access to sources of income – gain new power and produce an exclusion (of those who are ‘not our people’) from the presumably free market and widely accessible formal procedures.