

Preface

Sociocultural anthropology is spreading around the world in such a way that it articulates with local history, social conditions and scholarly styles. The 'other Europe' is other in a different way than when it used to be out of bounds for 'capitalist foreigners'. After 1989 revolutionary changes East-Central and Southeastern Europe has entered the post-communist era. Some call it post-socialism, depending whether they believe in the existence of socialism under communist rule. Internationally known anthropological writing on the countries situated between Western Europe and Eastern Europe has been dominated by researchers coming from Western Europe and North America. Without vetting these outputs our volume offers an alternative, a 'perspective from home.' We firmly believe in this perspective's justification because we experience varieties of daily life of post-communism as insiders, citizens whose professional training allows us to examine critically social relations from the position of scholarly analysis. In many ways the result will (have to) be different from outsiders' viewpoint. Let us express the hope that the mentioned difference will be a welcome change and that our 'self-study' ethnographies will find legitimacy even among those who (still) believe in anthropology as strictly studying the exotic others. Actually our volume is an example of studying otherness while studying ourselves as the changes taking place after the fall of communist rule: they are unprecedented, unexpected as well as culturally shocking also for us.

This volume has been the result of countless discussions, preparatory talks and years of correspondence. It should also be seen as one of the products of the Anthropology of Europe, an exciting area study re-invigorated after 1990. For the former 'Other Europe' is now open, rapidly being integrated into the West, in a sense becoming 'European' as any other parts of Europe. The obvious dependency path, however, modifies our east-central and southeastern Europeanness and we are happy to declare that we have something substantial to say to the world community of anthropologists and all those interested in what anthropology has to say to humankind. Some of us met first thanks to the various annual and biannual conferences organised by the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA), an association to which we all belong. We started to formulate our ideas at various EASA gatherings in Copenhagen, Cracow and Vienna but there were other forums as well, such as 'thinktanks' at Florence, NIAS at Wassenaar,

Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin, or the Collegium Budapest. The present team of contributors formed in Dolní Roveň in 2003 and the commitment to putting together this collective volume was made in September 2004 at Litomyšl, in the Czech Republic, where an exploratory workshop on the Anthropology of Europe was funded by the European Science Foundation. The gestation of the book is of course a long process and several participants at these workshop eventually dropped out or could not finish their promised chapters. Nevertheless what we present to the reader here is to much extent representative of the topics which move the post-communist scene in East-Central and Southeastern Europe.

The publication of this edited volume was made possible by the Executive Committee of EASA (2004–2006, 2007–2009), an expert body providing moral support and encouragement from the very beginning. We wish to thank all those who gave us support and believed in the usefulness of our efforts. They certainly know who they are and therefore we will refrain from putting down their names. We trust that the work on the volume was for all of the contributors a satisfactory activity. The editors did their purely honorary/voluntary work with enthusiasm and if there were some disappointments then it is also the fault of less than stable situation around our institutions still experiencing the fall-out of post-communist times and the newly created difficulties as membership in the European Union for many of our states became a reality. It will be on the readers to judge whether our work was worthwhile and the perspective from home justified.

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