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INTERLOCKING OF URBANITY AND RURALITY IN THE POPULAR CULTURE OF EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

Editorial Note

Zdeněk Nebřenský – Karel Šima

The historical narrative of nation building in East Central Europe has highlighted how national movements have linked the city and the village (see e.g. Hroch 2000: 156–161). The linear process of urbanization as a part of modernization has relied on a logic that interlocks rural and urban spaces in this region (Jemelka 2014, Brzostek 2014). Whilst on the one hand, both capitalist and state socialist modernization have brought an influx of rural migrants from the countryside to urban centers, this has, on the other hand, given rise to numerous artistic and social activities that have fostered an interest in rural space and culture (e.g. folklorism, (agro-)tourism, rural sentimentalism). It is only from this perspective that we see the emergence of tensions between popular culture rooted in traditional folk culture, cultural activities stimulated by new technologies, and the everyday life strategies of urban communities and subcultures. During the 20th century, different political regimes brought to the fore either rural or urban segments of the population, which in turn had a significant impact on popular culture. Taking this as a starting point, this thematic issue is focused on the question of an in-betweenness that could be dubbed “rurbanity”, comprising such phenomena that challenge the simple urban/rural split (Todorova 2009: 47–48, cf. Halstead 2008: 2–4).

Thus, in-betweenness is here understood in both static terms – that is, rurbanity as intersection of urban and rural areas, including experiences of withdrawal, uprooting, and dislocation – and dynamic terms, as a process of breaking mental boundaries, of dis-identifying with one’s state of mind and as the beginning of the transformation to another state (Haney 2002: 96–97). As an analytical category, in-betweenness focuses our attention on transitional phenomena and periods between urban and rural space (such as the *Gründerzeit* of industrial capitalism in 1860s, Stalinist modernization in the 1950s, or post-communist transformation in the 1990s), when rurban migrants played an exceptional role in the liminal moments of social and economic processes

(Berend 2002: 49ff., Cotkin 1997, Horváth 2017, Lebow 2013, Thomassen 2009: 17–19, Horvath – Thomassen – Wydra 2009). Because of their ambiguous background, migrants lose their binary orientation and move into the middle stage between the city and the countryside. Many of them might no longer mentally hold on to their past world, but have not yet begun the physical transition to their future one, which they will possess when they settle into the new environment. On the contrary, some of them might hold on to their physical settlement, while their mental transition to the new stage has already finished.

In any case, during a liminal stage, most stand at the “threshold” between their previous way of structuring space, time, imagination, and a new way, brought on by the transition.

Such an approach re-interprets the past, the present, (and perhaps) the future of East Central Europe in important ways, reflecting that East Central Europeans were always part of the very processes of urbanization, migration, and globalization they hoped to stabilize. On the one hand, it highlights the seminal role of emancipated subjects like migrants (“backward peasants”) from the countryside to the city in generating early and influential – albeit highly contested – coexistence models, suggesting that national narratives may be best understood from these contexts. On the other hand, however, it shows how East Central Europeans dealt with “urban” and “rural”, “modern” and “traditional”, and “progressive” and “anachronistic” to negotiate their uncertain identity.

The present issue aims to consider new approaches to the study of the urban/rural divide from the perspective of popular culture. Besides decentering the classic narratives of urbanization, migration, and globalization, which focus on the dichotomy of “base and superstructure”, it seeks to operationalize concepts that rearrange our understanding of the urban/rural split – approaches that took shape during long periods, yet remained unstable throughout.

While East Central European urbanization, migration, and globalization have been widely studied by the social sciences, popular culture has rarely been considered as a peculiar topic that serious scholars should deal with. When popular culture was eventually explored, it was framed in the simplified binary contexts of the Eastern and Western models of modernity. We would rather see the East as “a convex mirror” of the West, mirroring the West in a much wider horizon that it can see itself. Articles in this issue do not understand (popular) culture as the proverbial “cherry on top”, but as an imaginary point where the asymmetries of power crystallize. To the extent that popular culture arose in response to such asymmetries (high/low, colorful/uniform, rich/poor,

complex/rudimentary, agriculture/industrial, state socialism/capitalism, free market/state control, civilization/alienation etc.), we are interested in how popular culture could be problematized vis-à-vis its normative status in modern East Central Europe. We are interested, too, in how East Central European popular culture was confronted with the collapse of communist dictatorships, post-socialist transformation, the crisis of the global economic system, and the rise of nationalism (Sakwa 2009). Did popular culture serve to naturalize and legitimize existing authorities (of state, church, business, etc.), or was its purpose to subvert and to liberate? Was or is popular culture the motor of hybridizing between the urban and the rural space, between the café and the pub?

In her article, Michaela Rudyjová explores the mobility of artists between city and countryside in present-day Slovakia. She asks what is the impact of this shift on artistic expression, process, and sociability? She investigates three cases of mixing urban and rural artistic endeavors that played a significant role on the contemporary Slovak art scene. She analyses the case of young artist Andrej Dúbravský, who relocated his artistic activities to a Slovak village, Fero Guldán, who moved from the seat of Director of Slovak National Gallery to a small town near Bratislava, and the very phenomenon of Zaježová community, an almost hippies-like community in central Slovakia. Rudyjová shows how relocation in these spaces of in-betweenness affects the whole process of artistic creation, presentation, and reception.

In her thought-provoking article, Irena Šentevska analyses the phenomenon of the “peasant ghetto” (*seljački geto*) in Serbian hip hop. Here, the contrasting characteristics of this urban subculture, with roots in New York’s Bronx, and of a strong rural identification with marginality within the Balkan unstable context are amalgamated. Šentevska approaches this hybrid musical field in two steps. She asks what are the emic conceptualizations of “ghetto”, and then she tries to identify different levels of the urban/rural divide in Serbian hip hop. According to her, this musical genre could be seen as a critical commentary of today’s Serbian society, with its legacy of post-Yugoslav isolation and inwardness. The in-betweenness of “peasant” hip hop is further stressed by the regular contact of these performers with the turbo folk music scene, juxtaposing the originally urban subcultural milieu with the music popular in the Serbian countryside, linked to various folk traditions.

In his article, Jiří Fialka sheds new light on the “Slušovice miracle”, an extraordinarily successful village in Czechoslovakia during the late state socialism. The rapid and exceptional growth of this village located in a peripheral

region of East Moravia was fueled by the synergic efforts of the local authorities and the local collective farm that fully utilized the slowly opening conditions of socialist economy in the 1980s during the perestroika period. The entrepreneurship of the originally agricultural enterprise was expressed not only by widening the production commodities (including computers), but also by developing a specific hybrid type of popular culture. Fialka chooses three examples of public events that reshaped the originally rural public festive culture into a mixture of national pop star and TV glamor and of traditional folk public festive elements: horse races, TV contests, and and “discos”, or nightclubs. He argues that in this case, popular culture was used by the main actors to legitimize their shift from a village to a town, and to build a new urban cultural imaginary. After the fall of the socialist regime, the whole system of economic and social growth largely based on nepotism and corruption broke down, but paradoxically, it was not until this new era that Slušovice gained the official status of municipality.

In the last article, Hedvika Novotná, Dana Bittnerová, and Martin Heřmanský bring into the fore the case of the competition of the best Czech village (“The Village of the Year”), which has been taking place in the Czech Republic since 1995. They argue that this kind of “virtual rurality” brings together global and local politics, expert discourses and global morality, practices and representations, etc. They conclude that the present rurality is constructed around the discursive frameworks as a territorially- and socially-bounded space, as roots and continuity, as a rural idyll, and first and foremost, as the image of social cohesion that covers all other frameworks. They point out the mutual relatedness of these discourses, and show how they enable each other.

In his discussion paper, Michal Lehečka asks several questions about hybridity in the rurban space on basis of his experience from a local Czech village. He proposes to conceptualize the social problem he observed there as “social and geographical solitude”, which is fueled by the global interconnect-edness of late capitalism. In his opinion, this solitude has three dimensions: micro-social within the local community, national infrastructural disparities, and local impacts of global capital mobility that creates feelings of exploitation, solitude, and invisibility.

Following this short summary, we can conclude that in this volume, the topic of rurbanity is addressed from different angles, and that various disciplinary perspectives on different levels succeed in widening our over-simplistic binary view of the phenomenon. The split between rural and urban should not be seen as fixed or stable, but rather as a process that is negotiated again and

again in different situations. In some cases, we observe very subtle nuances that require careful analysis and critical reflection of political and social contexts.

The attempts to “re-villagize” villages are often driven by strong nationalist sentiments: villages, as seen from within this discourse, bring people closer to their national origins and legitimize the role of rural space in postmodern society. Perhaps this element distinguishes the post-socialist concept of “the best” or “the proper” village from the highly modernist view of state socialism that tried to “modernize” the socialist village. Through this imaginary, postsocialism seems to return to the way national movements of the 19th century constructed national communities in East Central Europe. While these historical constructions of the nation through the prism of rural traditions are well-researched, particularly for the 19th century, and have thus become a matter of common knowledge, in the postsocialist context, we can only offer the first insights into their meaning and role. Nevertheless, following the contribution of Michal Lehečka, contemporary countryside in East Central Europe can easily fall into the trap of a negative in-betweenness – a solitude caused by not taking part in postsocialist urban growth while simultaneously having lost the traditional bonds of community life.

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FACES OF RURBAN MOBILITY OF SLOVAK ARTISTS (PRELIMINARY STUDY)

Michaela Rudyjová

Abstract: *This paper focuses on the phenomenon of the mobility of artists from the city to the countryside in the context of rurbanization. It examines contemporary forms of artistic mobility that tend to be a new source of inspiration for artists, but at the same time also a stimulus for the general processes of rurbanization. The paper presents a preliminary investigation in terms of three case studies. The first one concerns Fero Guldán, a freelance visual artist, writer, sculptor, and painter; the second one focuses on Andrej Dúbravský, currently one of the most outstanding young Slovak visual artists; and the third case study deals with the Zaježová community, located in a widely spread-out village that attracts different forms of artistic activities. Research relied on the snowball method to extensively map the mobility of Slovak artists. The paper brings up such questions as what were the artists' motives for leaving the city and moving to the countryside; if and how mobility affected their manner of artistic creation, the nature of their works of art (types of artefacts, topics, or colours), and the ways in which these works of art are distributed (for example, changing concepts of exhibitions) and received (types and attitudes of audiences); and what are the forms of artist associations (groups, communities). Even if all three of the cases have their own particularities, we can see that all but one of these attributes are changing. Painting techniques, topics, and colours have changed, as have the concepts of exhibiting art, but forms of association do not seem to be affected much by moving to the countryside. Furthermore, the Zaježová community has broken the binary opposition of urban vs. rural by creating a form of life and associations that go beyond the pub/café split.*

Keywords: *Central Europe; rurbanization; visual arts*

Mobility of artists to countryside is a phenomenon that has existed in different environments, and in different periods and it has always had different peculiarity. Famous example is Paul Gauguin who repeatedly moved from big noisy cities such as Lima, Paris and Copenhagen to little countryside in Pont-Aven in France. He also lived for a time on the island of Martinique and the last part of his life he spent on the Marques Islands. His reasons to move out of Europe and out of big cities, too artificial and conformal to him, were the frustration and absence of recognition as well as bad financial situation (Paul Gauguin). We can find a similar example in Slovakia, Martin Benka (1888–1972), the Slovak greatest national artists who was awarded highest public recognition for his life's work, for pioneering contribution to the development of Slovak painting and for igniting interest in the Slovak region and people.

Benka changed his working environment several times. He went to Prague in 1909 and stayed there for few years learning, practicing and painting. Nevertheless, his true place of inspiration were villages and nature in the north part of Slovakia, Orava. As Benka said “Two temples of visual artists: Studio and nature” (Baranovič 1988). In the studio the artist is alone, undisturbed, retired from the world and freed of disturbing circumstances. Benka in his reflections talks mostly about nature and not directly about village as such, but from his description we can understand the word “nature” as a rural environment and the activities associated with it. In particular, he often depicts hard work of the Slovak people in the fields, their various occupations, their habits and traditions.

Nowadays, taking into consideration the fact that most of artists live in cities and concentrate in urban spaces, many researches and their publications explore the question of the role of artist in the urban change, and the question of the artists' impact on the urban economy, the ongoing processes of gentrification and regeneration. As stated by M. Murzyn-Kupisz and J. Dzialek “artists may exert an impact on the economic, social, cultural and ecological aspect of urban development” (2017), and may cover different type of roles that operate in urban space, such as cultural producers, employees, entrepreneurs, co-operators.

The topic of leaving the city for the countryside shares some features with the trend of leaving the city and going into the nature. It differs in the place where artists go. Under this trend we can distinguish the nature as the element of inspiration for the artist. Worthwhile movement is Land art, popular in America in the '60s of the 20th century. It is based on working with earth and its relocating. In that case nature is becoming their substance – *materia*

– which serves for producing their artwork. It arose as a reaction of resignation on the conformant practice of presenting the artefacts in galleries (Čarná 2007: 3). Another semi-trend is “Return to nature” mostly existing in former Czechoslovakia from the late sixties until eighties. The artists, who refused to give in to the dictate of social realism, were banned from public presentation of artworks and they could not exhibit in official venues. Therefore, for them the nature has often become their stable living environment, but their departure was not as voluntary as that of American land artists. For them the nature and countryside existed as a part of conceptual and action activities. It gained a character of celebrations, rituals but also of an introvert communication and intimate relationship with nature (Čarná 2007: 12).

Furthermore, the trend of artists communities living in the villages can be observed all over the world. The villages already exist or are being created. To name a few – Yuanmingyuan, Songzhuang and 798 in Peking (Huang 2011); artist-in-residence programmes in rural areas in Ethiopia (Craen 2013); rural art village Saksalanharju in Finland (Jong 2009); or Wutai New Village in Central Guangxi (Qin – Yang 2014). At any rate, contemporary artists are able to explore the potential of mobility in different forms, for instance attending different venues, symposiums, workshops, artists-in-residence programs. As discussed by Witzgall, Vogl and Kesselrin, the artists can also “examine the phenomena of tourism, migration, and mobile labour, as well as the structures, sites, and border zones of mobility movements or the influence of new communications technologies on the behaviour” (2016). The authors take the idea further, and they see the artists’ examination of mobility as parallel, separate research approach (Witzgall – Vogl – Kesselrin 2016).

In the conditions of highly industrialized and urbanized countries, mobility of the urban population to the countryside shows various forms and functions. This paper focuses on the phenomenon of mobility of artists to the countryside in the context of rurbanization, which is an ongoing process of ever higher importance. Rurbanization is defined by S. Mahajan as “a process of altering rural forms with pre-selected urban patterns and lifestyles, which creates new genetically altered rurban forms” (2010). It was first named by French researchers Chapuis and Brossard during a census in 1982. They described the trend of migration to rural areas located nearby many of the major cities as a rurbanization (1989). Today, rurbanization is observed in some countries in Asia, Africa and South America but also in Europe. It is a slow change and growth process of transformation of rural areas by introduction of certain urban characteristics. As

maintained by N. Lichfield, rural villages “are not suburbs. [...] They have an autonomous economic, social and political base. They provide their inhabitants with an opportunity to live in a closely knit community, without the isolation common to purely rural areas” (1979). This process of changes should not be exploitative, but rather regenerative, restorative and revitalizing. It is neither generic, nor straightaway, nor standard process of change. Its uniqueness is in its complexity, variation, plasticity and adaptability (Mahajan 2010).

Focusing on artists, their passage from city to countryside can present some positive qualities, such as inspiration for their artworks, and from the opposite perspective, this mobility can also be a stimulus for the general processes of ruralization. The paper focuses on the first part of the question, namely on the contemporary forms of mobility of artists from the city to countryside, which tend to be a new source of inspiration for artists.

Considering the paucity of academic literature in this area that would systematically address this phenomenon at present in Slovakia, our paper presents a preliminary investigation in terms of three case studies. In the next step of research, we would like to continue by using the method of “snowball” and map further this phenomenon in Slovakia. Our case studies cover Fero Guldan, Andrej Dúbravský and Zaježová. We bear in mind following questions: what are the artists’ motives for leaving the city and moving to countryside, if and how mobility affects the manner of artistic creation, nature of works of art (kinds of artefacts, topics, colours), ways of distribution of works of art (e.g. Change concepts exhibitions) and its reception (types and attitudes of the audience), forms of association of artists (groups, community).

The first case study concerns the unique multi-faceted artist Fero Guldan, who decided to live in a remote area near a smaller town called Svätý Jur near Bratislava. In the years of the communism he lived in Bratislava, and he engaged in public life. He stood close to the founding of a democratic political movement in Slovakia “Public against the Violence” in 1989, for some time after the Velvet Revolution he worked as a director of the Slovak National Gallery. From the late 90ties till now, he considers himself to be a freelance artist, writer, sculptor, and painter (Guldan 1995).

In Bratislava, he is famous for his numerous artefacts and sculptures. For example, the statue Memorial for unborn children near the Blue Church in 1997, which emphasises the efforts for the protection of life after conception and for prevention of abortion (Epocha 2012), a four-meter sculpture Memorial to victims of fascism and communism in the centre of Bratislava or the gateway



Figure 1. **House of Fero Guldán.** Source: Petra Áčová, *Nový Čas Nedela*.

to Jewish tomb of Chatam Sofer¹. He is the author of statues for White Crow Awards (Kováčik 2014)², he exhibits at many places in Slovakia but also in Europe for example in Antwerp as a part of the European Capital of Culture 1993, in Baltimore, Brussels, New York, Paris, Prague and Vienna. He dedicates himself to many activities – “reconstruction, electrical wiring, wooden benches with metal support, sanctuary, fount, murals from different coloured and shaped tiles, and even a monumental picture of Christ (Abraham 2014).

His choice of moving out away from the city to the countryside was influenced by the desire for freedom and independence. As he likes to describe his way of living: “When financial demand of surviving falls, then freedom can increase. All my saved energy can be invested in what I really want to devote to. One does not need to be a slave of made up requirements of this day and age.” (Čorná 2005). Thanks to his minimalist approach resulting in financial modesty

¹ In 1942 the Jewish cemetery was destroyed because of a tunnel road under Bratislava Castle and only 20 graves of important rabbis were saved, in 1982 the tunnel began to serve trams and in 2002 Chatam Sofer Memorial was built above the site.

² White Crow (*Biela Vrana*) is an award to people who contribute to public life by performing responsible and valorous civic actions, who are defending truth, justice and public interest even at the cost of undertaking risk, condemnation or injustice. More about White Crow <http://www.bielavrana.sk/award.php>.

this artist sees the possibility to dedicate the time to his artistic activities, and he doesn't need to adapt to the modern consumer society (Čorná 2005). The reuse of materials, local stone, plastic bottles in cement concrete only reflect the general attitude of the priorities in his life. To him, comfort means that he does not have to spend time pursuing material goods and superficialities, instead of that, he can dedicate his time and energy "to the artistic work, and real values" (Slovenská architektonická revue 2004). Another reason, that he states, is rush, bustle and too many people in the city who did not allow him to concentrate on his work. Moving to the countryside increased his focus on creating.

Change of life environment as well as working environment in case of Fero Guldán, changes not only the work process but also the results of this creation. In the city his artistic activities were located mainly in the basement studios with little windows, from which only legs of passers-by could be seen. He took turns at several studios, a warehouse without any view, another studio of group of artists in the basement without windows that was enclosed only by depressing grey apartment buildings (Slovenská architektonická revue 2004).

On the other hand, the place where he moved is completely different. His artistic vision is manifested also in his house, situated near vineyards, 3 kilometres from Svätý Jur. It is built from recycled materials literally for a few dollars. The dominant feature of the current rural dwelling is his observation tower from which the view often inspires him to the themes of his work. The view is completely different from the city environment: clouds, their pink colour when the last rays illuminate the sky over the horizon of Small Carpathians, play with the light, nothing from this was possible in the dark studios. The view to 50 kilometres around in the country allows him to explore different landscapes, an impulse can be provided also by early morning haze and mists that create different visual effects. "The painting is light, so it is an incredible joy" (Čorná 2005), the artist confesses.

This artist never studied classical visual arts, but construction engineering. Maybe that's what allows him to look towards ever different and innovative directions. For the production of new artworks he uses tons of objects such as steel string, a piece of wood, fragment of glass, that are lying around the yard (Getting 2011). Often he combines several techniques in ways of which the result may seem to be impractical.

It is the moving from the bustling city to an open area that helped him to improve his own painting technique he calls *patinated assemblage*. It consists of



Figure 2.
Guldán's painting *Waiting*.
110 × 100 cm. Source: www.soga.sk.

creating a sculptured relief of diverse materials and real objects that is covered with a multi-coloured film of oil. Then follows the so-called “painting with fire” that wouldn’t be possible without the open space and environment he has. The final phase is the artist’s own interpretation by his personal imagination (Šebanová 2012). It is a creation in which the shares of chance and one’s own expression are in balance (Kultúrny magazín 2015). As stated by Soga, the Slovak auction company: “... his artistic creation has borrowed from remote guidance by lyric abstraction – gestural painting, while the aspect of playfulness and of carelessness- thoughtlessness of creative act is being emphasized” (Soga). Besides the paintings, inherent in his work are also sculptures, drawings, illustrations, mosaics of rubble ceramics, steel welded objects, etc.

His decision to leave Bratislava to the slopes of the Little Carpathians is also reflected in the actual places and the environments of exhibitions. His art, even though he left the city, is still visible in many places in Bratislava, cafés, his mosaic decorates antique shops like for instance the shop called Secession, close to Reduta (Guldan 2012), place of Slovak philharmonic. But his work has become also interesting in terms of regional institutions. The cross sectional exhibition of his artistic production simply named *Fero Guldan* was located in the Small Carpathian Museum in Pezinok, little city close to his dwelling. The exhibition captures the concentrated path of life of Fero Guldan as a recognized artist, author and sculptor. The visitor can appreciate diverse painting on canvas and wood, drawings, book illustrations, texts, feuillets, interviews, objects, sculptures, mosaics, photographs of exterior realizations with architects (Pezinok city 2013). Since this is a famous painter, his artworks are spread also across a private distribution network. As reported by Fedor Gál, Slovak politician, sociologist, prognosticator and entrepreneur living in Czech Republic: “Me and my wife bought his first image for 1500 crowns from him 25 years ago [...] In the years that followed, I received from him dozens more ... I gave some of them to relatives and friends” (2006). Therefore, besides the exhibitions in galleries or in the open public space, his artworks find his audience also through private relationships.

Regarding the question of meeting other artists, Guldan is considered to be a man solitaire, and he admits that in his generation he has not found a partner or creative camp-follower, with whom he would concede on same trends and style of creation. According to him, he likes to work with writers and poets, nevertheless he defines himself to be an inventor and individualist and he concludes: “A certain loneliness is normal” (Čorná 2005).

The second case study focuses on one of the currently most outstanding young Slovak visual artists, Andrej Dúbravský. Dúbravský represents the artist of the 21st century, who entered the world of visual art not only because of his work, but because of the uniqueness of his personality. This 28 years old artist studied at the School of Applied Arts, Department of stone statues, and the Academy of Fine Arts and Design, Department of Painting and Other Media. In 2012, he won the award of PAINTING 2012, organized by VUB Foundation. He is represented in the Slovak National Gallery. He held several successful solo exhibitions in Bratislava, Prague, Berlin, Los Angeles and elsewhere (Stolárik 2014).

The Exhibition experiments directed by himself – in a closed butcher shop (No Ambitions, 2011), the island of Zlaté piesky (Golden Sands, 2012) and a scenery of flooded subway depot of planned Bratislava metro (The very exciting mysterious aquarium, 2013) – seem like a more natural environment for the work of Dúbravský. His artistic interests match the current principles of popular culture. As Prague Jiří Švestka Gallery describes, narcissistic self-presentation and examination of his own identity through the concentration on male body, paintings dominated by eccentric themes like homosexuality, self-gratification, or intergenerational affairs are typical imprint of his artworks.

Andrej lived alternately between New York and the Slovak Republic, Bratislava. Anyway, in the summer 2015 he decided not to stay in Bratislava, because he did not want to work in the complex of studios without windows, situated at Koliba, Bratislava. He figured out that he needed a change of the environment and that it would be appropriate for him to go somewhere to the countryside, where he could paint in the afternoon and evening, as it suits him best. He bought an old house in Rastislavice with entire crop, near the village where he used to go for holidays to grandmother and where he still has a few friends (Németh 2015). He built the studio in the summer kitchen, and decorated it with the rural objects such as the pieces of fence, plants, on the wood he hung the sausages.

Experience of rural life inspired him to the topic of his exhibition Rural Desires at the City Gallery of Bratislava, and it completely changed the concept of the exhibition. The countryside environment influenced him to the point that he changed the original idea of exhibition – that was the theme of internet, Instagram pictures and virtual reality – and he reflected local customs and traditions in his approach to creating (Németh 2015).

In his earlier images an object depicted in many variations was a young half naked boy with a bunny ears that has been representing the symbol of sexuality



Figure 3. **Andrej Dúbravský in Rastislavice.** Source: Andrej Dúbravský, DenníkN.

and animalism. After a summer spent in the countryside where the scenery consisted of fruit trees and plenty of vegetables, his paintings also changed. Objects become apples, different fruits, and symbols of corn, straw hats, sun and summer. The element of young boys still persists but their identity changes. They become farmers with a blade of grass in their mouth. The motives of paintings could be even identified with the feeling of socialist realism, for which was typical the celebration of work (Citylife 2015). In his artworks Andrej also represents the clichés that are connected to the romantic portrayal of villages. He wants to deny or refute them in his own way, that's why we can often face lascivious pose of naked boys, overweight or extremely skinny people. With this pictures artist threatens the rural idyll.

The colours also change. Before when he was working in unlighted studios he often used black. Now, in the process of creation, the artist uses a variety of pesticides and herbicides, which have been left in the house by original owners. It contains iron that gives the image brownish-red colour. As he explains: "when I am painting in the garden, fruit trees and vegetables are everywhere. I cannot



Figure 4. The exhibition "Rural Desires". 2015. Source: Andrej Dúbravský, SME.

use only black colour, as I used to do in dark studios in the United States or in Bratislava. Never before I would have thought that someday I will paint cherries or apples" (Lacková 2015). In addition to painting, Dúbravský displays very expressive pottery vases, based on the Baroque motifs of chubby cherubs (Hudec 2015). His vases, however, are decorated with his typical rabbit characters.

Andrej Dúbravský changes the concept of distribution and reception of his visual art in this particular exhibition *Rural Desires*, the author's first solo project in Slovakia. He himself recognizes it as the beginning of a new creative period. The exhibition was installed in Mirbach Palace on two floors with entirely opposite approach to the installation.

On the ground floor there are images installed in a traditional way that represent men and coloured fruit. The central space is filled with vases that are located on bales of straw or in corners with corn cob. In a completely different way his art gets to the audience on the second floor in the attic. Dimly lit space fenced by a wire net offers an experience that is in contrast to the first floor. Here a visitor can see paintings hung in the shadow or a too high, dried sunflower

leaning against the wall, corn, tents, barrel of cabbage, and sound of crickets. Spatial installation can be perceived also by other sense, and that is the sense of smell. Atmosphere is complete with omnipresent smell of bacon and sausages that are hanging in space, and fat dripping from them. The rural environment becomes more credible (Lacková 2015).

As different reviews show, the author has managed to bring authenticity of villages and transform the exhibition space in the garden. The viewer can perceive it and he is looking for connections between objects. Visitors can find on this exhibition the continuity with his own perception of village as an environment, where he spent a period of his childhood. The viewer is walking in the garden, which can be often “an open air museum of memories of childhood in the countryside” with their parents or grandparents, says Dúbravský (Lacková 2015). The exhibition is a mirror of what he was living some time former the exhibition (Stolárik 2015). Concerning the argument of Dúbravský’ association with other artists, we can only state the fact that the life in a village of fewer than 1,000 inhabitants offers several types of relationship. From the moment he arrived to the village, local people know him and greet him and chat with him above the gardening. The available literature does not offer any answers on the question of closer relations communication with other artists.

Third study case rather than deal with specifically one person it focuses on one of the aspects of the community “Zaježka”³, which is located in Central Slovakia in widely spread out village Zaježová, near the town of Zvolen. This community brings together people who declare that they want to live freely, to protect the local landscape and nature, to make life more valuable. This almost abandoned area started to regain an active life functions in 1991, when a few NGOs began to operate and they were concentrated on traditional crafts, folk architecture. They were trying to live sustainably in a rural environment. Their activity began to attract many people, some of them have settled there permanently. Today, in this area you can meet different people, newcomers who have been here for over 10 years, recent newcomers, people in rented houses, guests, participants of various courses, or tourists (Zaježka o nás 2015).

In the process of populating Zaježová, on one hand there is a tendency of people leaving the city precisely because of the village’s specifics, in this case, into very specific area. On the other hand, we see that their arrival also brings elements of the city. It can be observed in their job description. Their main

³ More information available at <http://www.zajezka.sk/sk>.



Figure 5. **Village of Zaježová.** Source: www.zajezka.sk.

source of income is not farming, although it is quite evident in the forms of small gardens and orchards where residents grow food for themselves. Besides this, there are programmers, teachers, artisans, environmentalists, people devoted to personal development, education, organize seminars. This way of clustering and individual but interdependent cohabitation/coexisting embodies certain Genius Loci.

Zaježová offers different places and the people dedicate themselves to various activities. Traditional farm of eco-community Sekier; an educational centre Zaježová; a primary school Zaježka for children of grades from 1 to 4; the Brána community; Socrates Institute primarily designed for university students from any field, for future artists, journalists, scientists, lawyers, economists; an initiative for local protected areas; the Food Bank, food production and Permaculture gardens in Zaježová aiming to reduce food cost (Kašiak 2014, dec. 5) and testing the sustainable lifestyle in reality (Kašiak 2014, dec. 13); a forest kindergarten; natural building, and Zaježová Community, which represents a form of rurbanization where the process is being pushed forward

by the individuals of community and not by government. Members coordinate and run collective work on public projects (bus stop renovating, waste separation, planting tree and plants, constructing playground etc.), local parties and regular celebrations, excursions of families, local involvement in protection of environment, etcetera.

From the point of view of art, festivities are very important. Smaller festivals are organized in the village throughout the year⁴. The most important is a festival called Celebration on Meadows. The program consists of concerts of all genres, dance performances, film screening, lectures, meditations, exercises, belly dance, workshops, crafts workshops for carpentry, wood carving, pottery, metalwork, demonstrations of traditional crafts, theatre, games for children and others (Zaježka Letná slávnosť 2015). The emphasis is on interactivity – the blurring of boundaries between performers and spectators. Visitors come to camp, enjoy the informal concerts, workshops, presentations. All events take place in the open meadows Sekierska that allows various forms of art to find its stable place.

The Festival is attended by all who are closed to Zaježka. Young people as well as families with children, people living in the cities and local folks or philosophers. It is a relaxing informal meeting of friends. They are encouraged to interaction and participation on the common production, which highlights the community-based character of this natural open space festival. Even though their PR and promotion is rather small, it is a highly popular festival. As reported by the official announcement (Zaježka Letná slávnosť 2015), attendance is above 700 people.

In this locality, we can observe one notable phenomenon, namely that the locality itself tends to attract the artists, the journalists, the filmmakers, the musicians, the photographers. In 2004 the student film called “Zaježka – Place of Sunbeam” (in Slovak *Zaježka – miesto slnečného lúča*) (Priehradník 2004) was made about local settlement Zaježová. In 2014 three students from the Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica produced a short documentary “Sekier” (Pavlička, Matejová, and Vašicová 2014) about one generation of inhabitants in eco-community Sekier. In 2012 Slovak band Chill on the Sun moved to Zaježova where they recorded their album Polo My. As they revealed: “It is an incredibly charming and inspiring place [...]. The focus of recording captures the unique

⁴ Detailed information about events can be found at <http://www.zajezka.sk/sk/article-categories/kultura-umenie>.



Figure 6. Festival “Celebration on Meadows”. Source: www.zajezka.sk.

atmosphere and etheric sound space (Král 2015). The environment is especially suitable for photographs even amateur or professional because yearly there are many occasions for this creative activity. These are the examples of how the locality of Zaježová can be a source of inspiration for artists.

Visitors can experience Zaježka for themselves in different ways. As a tourist one can try hiking, biking, cross-country skiing. Besides this, one time per month there is an organized excursion around the community to understand their life better. One can participate in workshops, seminars, summer camps, organized by the education center Zaježová. More traditional is Eco community Sekier. One can also come as a volunteer and help the community in exchange for accommodation and food, especially during seasonal work in the area of Zvolen.

The form of meeting acquires a new dimension compared to urban or rural pure forms, or cafés and pubs, respectively. Artistic and other discourse takes place in the local tearoom on Polom or in the Čarovare vegetarian cuisine, in educational centre, or in private homes of community members. The locality Zaježová breaks the binary opposition urban versus rural, or café versus pub, respectively. This opposition leads to a form of life that is more advanced than the pub or café.

We studied the artists' mobility mainly from the perspective of the impact of countryside on the artists rather than the other way around, that is how artists can change the space of the village they live in. Bearing in mind all three case studies, we can see that the declared reasons why artists leave the city and go to the countryside are the need for change and inspiration from rural environment. The intensity of inspiration by nature is different when the author lives in a village from when he lives in a city and goes to the nature occasionally (Stolárik 2015). Further reasons cited are searching for freedom, nonconformity and the new way of life. This transition of artists changes the aspects of creation of their artworks in terms of colours, techniques, objects and nature of creation. In two cases, it modifies also the distribution of artworks. In case of Dúbravský it is the place of exhibition and in case of Zaježová it is the form of events' venues – the open area of Sekier meadows. Analysing the change of reception (the audiences), it remains partly the same as the audience from urban cafés, and partly is the art consumed by people living in the close surroundings.

Moreover, all three cases differ in the particulars of settling in the countryside: Guldán is settled for more than 25 years, and he still lives there; Dúbravský spent in his house with the garden only one summer and the period of stay of

artists in Zaježka is also very variable. In the research, it would be interesting to go into detail on both artists Guldan and Dúbravský, and to expand on the question of forms of association with other artists and with people from the locality.

On the example of only three case studies it is not attainable to determine broader universal trends or phenomena. Yet we can agree that all of them present same similar features, which break the standard bipolarity: urban-vs-rural and café-vs-pubs. It is not valid and there are other forms beyond this division, as shown by Zaježová area.

We can presume, that the mobility of artists is their individual choice, and that their interest is not for the revitalisation of the village in the first place, but for their inner motives that can be diverse for all of them. Therefore it is not possible to address some general tendency on these three case studies, that would show correspondence between presence of artists in village and some of the processes as gentrification or regeneration (even if the case of Zaježka presents some features of gentrification process). Nevertheless, associated effects can be counted on both positive, it can be an inspiration for others to move to the countryside, or for the dwellers to remain, etc., but also it can bring some negative aspects, as well as it still can remain intact as the local inhabitants can ignore the presence of artists, or as the artists live in solitude and secrecy.

The research shown in this paper is in the initial phase. It provides a preliminary study to the further mapping of the phenomenon of rurban mobility of artists in Slovakia by using the method of a snow-ball, which will focus on greater number of artists and will research broader the subject in question. Understanding the role of artists' mobility to countryside, its peculiarities and its associated effects can be a helpful element in the current examination of processes of rurbanization.

Michaela Rudyjová is a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Cultural Studies, Faculty of Arts at Comenius University, Bratislava. She obtained her Master's degree in Economics and Management of Cultural Heritage and Arts, taught at the inter-faculty of Economics – Arts and Philosophy at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan in 2012. Her dissertation examines a metamorphosis of art in public space through case studies of selected Slovak cities. Her works concern the mobility of artists in the process of rurbanisation, differences in cultural studies in national traditions, along with changes of art in public space and its contexts in post-socialist conditions.

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THE PEASANT GHETTO: SERBIAN HIP-HOP REVISITS THE COUNTRYSIDE

Irena Šentevska

Abstract: This paper traces the development of the Serbian hip-hop scene in its ever-changing social context from the late socialist 1980s, through the wartime 1990s, to the transitional 2000s, focusing on local conceptualizations of the notion of the ghetto and different ways in which hip-hop reflects the rural-urban divide in Serbian society. From rapping in rural dialects to satirically praising narco-agriculture, Serbian rappers have made quite a unique contribution to the hip-hop “Internationale” as a global movement with distinct origins in the New York City neighborhood of the South Bronx. Their concept of the peasant ghetto (seljački geto) is, at the same time, a form of social commentary on the state of the rural communities in the country and a diagnosis of present-day Serbia as a closed society with a legacy of international isolation following the Yugoslav wars and a peripheral and deprived position in the modern global world order. On the other hand, the substantial interactions and mutual influences between the Serbian hip-hop and turbo-folk scenes emphasized in this paper are another indication of the problematic distinction between urban and rural in the Serbian cultural context, at least in the realm of entertainment and popular music. The relationship between these two genres becomes even more interesting if hip-hop is observed as a distinct cultural foreign import with an indisputable urban background and turbo-folk is understood as the sole home-grown form of popular music in Serbia with now-remote rural origins.

Keywords: *hip-hop; Serbia; ghetto; urban-rural divide; turbo-folk*

Geto (i)storija: A Very Brief History of Serbian Hip-Hop

During the 1980s rock and pop musicians in socialist Yugoslavia started to experiment with rapping, displaying their awareness of this up-and-coming global musical trend with cultural roots in the South Bronx.¹ The first Yugoslav hip-hop release, the *Degout* EP (Jugoton, Zagreb, 1984) by Belgrade hip-hop pioneers The Master Scratch Band (otherwise a team of electro-pop producers), was recorded in Belgrade's Druga maca studio free-of-charge because the group's music was appreciated at the time as innovative and "radically different." Nevertheless, hip-hop sprouted in Serbia in the early 1980s with the formation of the first "b-boy" groups focused on breakdancing. Many of these "b-boys" were of Romani origin, and thus Serbian hip-hop might have truly emerged in the "ghetto" after all.

Serbian hip-hop tradition has it that in the late 1980s Branko Bojović, also known as Bane Sanšajn, went to the USA on a student exchange, where he found himself at an N.W.A. (Niggaz Wit Attitudes) concert. Thoroughly impressed with the "Black Beatles" from Compton, he sent several tapes back home and, upon returning to Belgrade in 1988, formed the band Green Cool Posse, which later reemerged as Sanšajn (Sunshine). The year 1988 also saw the formation of another pioneering hip-hop band, Who Is The Best, led by Aleksandar Džankić, also known as MC Best, who played an important role in the rise of hip-hop culture in Serbia with the *Geto* radio show he launched in 1992 on Belgrade's Radio Politika.

The early days of hip-hop in Serbia thus coincided with Slobodan Milošević's climb to power. In 1995, when the first official hip-hop albums were released, Serbia was already in a deep economic and political crisis; the country was engaged in the bloody ethnic conflicts that were raging throughout Bosnia and Croatia, isolated under UN sanctions, and practically excluded from the rest of the world. The emerging hip-hop scene felt quite detached from the spectacle of local politics that dominated the public sphere and attempted to form its own "counter-public" sphere, one preoccupied with the daily business of survival under the unfavorable circumstances. While the mass demonstrations in

¹ For example, Du Du A (the song "Hop Ap Du Ap" on the album *Primitivni ples*, 1983), Bijelo dugme ft. Bora Đorđević ("Pediculis Pubis" on *Bijelo dugme*, 1984), Riblja čorba ft. Goran Bregović ("Disko mišić" on *Istina*, 1985), and Đorđe Balašević ("Šugar rap" on *Tri posleratna druga*, 1989). Other prominent Yugoslav artists who experimented with rapping in this period include Dušan Kojić Koja (from *Disciplina kičme*) and Rambo Amadeus.

Belgrade, which lasted from November 1996 to February 1997, resonated with the slogan “Belgrade is the World,” rappers emphatically claimed “Belgrade is a Ghetto.” This voice emerged from the utterly desperate social setting, the result of political isolation and the criminalization of society.² Hip-hop began to communicate political messages to a self-contained population and age group otherwise uninterested in politics, fueling the local counterpart to what Adam Krims refers to as the “cultural resistance industry” (2000: 1). In a social context marked with isolation that constantly exposes everyone to frustration and disappointment (even those with excessive, but temporary and unstable privileges), all people can do is claim a spot within a system they basically disrespect. In the wider context of the changes youth cultures underwent throughout post-socialist Europe, which augmented the sense of loss, disorientation, and degeneration (see Szemere 1996), it was probably hip-hop that raised the loudest (and more or less unarticulated) voice. (For a thorough historical overview of the development of the hip-hop scene in Serbia, see Musić and Vukčević 2017: 85–108; Šentevska 2017a: 246–248). Under the current circumstances of the music industry in Serbia, largely affected by the government’s austerity measures and their devastating economic results, the hip-hop community seems to remain firmly in a “ghetto” imposed by harsh economic circumstances, rapidly decreasing access to mass media and wider audiences (who tend to observe hip-hop as a long-lived, yet passing fad), and the overall competitiveness of the global music market.

Making Sense of the (Imaginary) Ghetto

Already in the mid-1990s, when the first official releases came out, two driving forces centered on the notion of the ghetto powered Serbian hip-hop. I have described them (Šentevska 2017a: 247) as a “centripetal force” – epitomized by stories about a desolate life and its confines – and a “centrifugal force” – expressed by strategies of escape from such a life (either through crime, politics, or show business). The first driving force gave hip-hop a sense of self-containment and pride in representing the local – “hood,” city, country – all perceived

² *Dobro došli u Beograd, mnogo više crno nego belo, / Probaj da se buniš dobićeš utokom u čelo. / BANG, utokom u čelo, čije je to delo / Da moj grad je najveće selo.* – Welcome to Belgrade, it’s more black than white, / Try to rebel and the bullet you will get. / BANG!, bullet in the head; Whose deed it might / be, that bloody hicks are all you have met. Who Is The Best, “Welcome to Belgrade,” on the album *Welcome to Belgrade*, 1996 (Quoted in Vuković 2009: 205).

as a “ghetto.” The second led to innumerable crossovers that set the stage for rapping in any conceivable situation, from “hip hoperas” to reality TV shows and hip-hop versions of the greatest turbo-folk hits, not to mention the overwhelming presence of DJs, graffiti, hip-hop choreography, and fashion across the media landscape. According to musicologist Iva Nenić, the notion of ghetto in the Serbian hip-hop context refers to both the “ghetto” as a part of the city inhabited by members of the middle class with a perhaps overdeveloped sense of belonging to their “hood” and Serbia as a “ghetto” (Nenić 2006: 160–161). This prevailing, yet rather selective conception of the ghetto (which excludes members of economically disadvantaged communities as participants in hip-hop culture) confirms Loïc Wacquant’s observation that in the European context the use and understanding of the term is highly problematic and contestable. According to this French sociologist who has studied contemporary developments in African-American ghettos, “a ghetto is not simply a topographic entity or an aggregation of poor families and individuals, but an *institutional form*, a historically determinate, spatially-based concatenation of mechanisms of *ethnoracial closure and control*” (Wacquant 1997: 343). Moreover, the ghetto is a socio-spatial formation that is *culturally uniform* and based on the forcible relegation of a “negatively typed” population (such as Jews in medieval Europe and African-Americans in the modern United States) to a reserved “frontier territory,” where this population develops under duress a set of parallel institutions that serve both as a functional substitute for, and as a protective buffer against, the dominant institutions of the encompassing society (Wacquant 1997: 343). Put differently, four major forms of racial domination – namely, categorization, discrimination, segregation, and exclusionary violence – qualify a place as a “real” ghetto (Wacquant 1995; see also Venkatesh 2000). Accordingly, what is perceived as a ghetto in Europe (Western and Eastern) usually does not meet the grade. Hip-hop narratives of marginality and their ghettocentric imagery communicate a metaphor, not the real ghetto: hip-hop now dominantly “lives in the ghetto of the white imagination” (Queeley 2003: 2). Searching for the “real ghetto” in Serbian hip-hop is not likely to take us to places that meet Wacquant’s criteria (such as Roma settlements that are real and are ghettos),³ but rather to the middle-class homes of the Eastern European counterparts

³ Even the acclaimed rap duo Gipsy Mafia from Zrenjanin, brothers Skill and Buddy O. G. (Ferid and Emran Ajeti) did not grow up in a Roma settlement (see Vujančić 2016). On the Romani hip-hop culture in Serbia, see Banić-Grubišić 2013.

to “wiggas” (“white niggers”; see Kitwana 2005; Neal 2004; Yousman 2003; Ledbetter 1995).

In the turbulent 1990s (against the backdrop of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia), one part of Belgrade developed a mythical aura of being the ultimate “ghetto within a ghetto,” that is, within “the great ghetto” of Serbia – New Belgrade (Novi Beograd), which is also the mythical birthplace of Serbian hip-hop. Initially conceived as the new administrative and symbolical capital of socialist Yugoslavia, New Belgrade reflected all the political and economic transformations of the country (Backović 2010, Blagojević 2007), becoming in the late-socialist period “notorious” mostly for its “boredom.” Built upon a marshy wasteland between the Danube and Sava Rivers, with scarce public landmarks and largely lacking in content other than apartment blocks and spacious parks, New Belgrade was perceived from both within and without as a “collective dorm.” The 1990s saw a general decline in the quality of life in New Belgrade (as indeed everywhere else in Serbia): along with the general crisis in society and the new (proto)capitalist economy, privatization of housing brought unresolved issues concerning the maintenance of buildings, facades, elevators, plumbing, and so forth. The ageing modern buildings of the “proud new Belgrade” began to be perceived as the “heart of darkness” of the isolated and criminalized Serbia. And it is precisely here where hip-hop entered the picture with the first graffiti art from Blok 45 (Radošević 2009).

Nevertheless, after the political ousting of Slobodan Milošević in October 2000, New Belgrade entered a new era of post-socialist development. Foreign investors from the banking, telecommunications, real estate, energy, retail, and wholesale trade sectors found the area particularly attractive for a number of reasons (proximity to the city center across the Sava River; good transportation and communal infrastructure; plenty of vacant land for development; resolved property and ownership issues; and a well-kept real estate registry, unlike in most of Belgrade’s municipalities, where the ownership registry is rather chaotic as a result of communist nationalization and land speculation in the 1990s). The socialist “collective dorm” / post-socialist “ghetto” has been transformed into the new business and trade center of the city and the country; this part of Belgrade has experienced the most striking changes. Due to the rapid development of New Belgrade, real estate prices here are considerably higher than the Belgrade average (Backović 2010: 145), and with new residential areas affordable only to members of the political, business, and entertainment elite, New Belgrade has been transformed from a “neighborhood as a community”

into a “neighborhood as a commodity” (Petrović 2007: 3; see also Szelenyi 1996). Finally, the question “Is Blok 70 really a ghetto?” was answered by Stevan Vuković in the following terms: “No, it isn’t, except for those whose ghettocentric imagination is running wild” (Vuković 2009: 220).

Just like France’s HLMs (*habitation à loyer modéré*, the form of housing dominating suburban working-class neighborhoods with moderate rents) were transposed in socialist Yugoslavia into urban projects of leveling for the socialist middle class, genre patterns and narratives of French ghettocentric films were adopted by post-Yugoslav filmmakers and, consequently, music video directors. The depiction of Serbia as a closed society, the country’s isolation (rightful or not) from the world, and life in a ghetto are themes that have dominated Serbian cinema since the early 1990s (see Daković 2010a, 2010b). Mathieu Kassovitz’s 1995 “ghetto film” *La Haine* was a major influence. New Belgrade eventually found a place on international movie screens as a “French-style ghetto” in Luc Besson’s productions *Banlieue 13* (2004) and *Banlieue 13: Ultimatum* (2009) featuring David Belle, the founder of parkour.

New Belgrade’s “notorious” tower blocks became a favorite home for overlapping ghetto and “gangsta” film narratives, and with the overall sinking of Belgraders down the social ladder its ugly concrete blocks transformed on screen into realms of crime and anxiety. This imaginary ghetto, however, did not reside solely in the concrete blocks of New Belgrade: “When necessary, it moved downtown or almost anywhere around Belgrade: ‘the ghetto’ was and still is a mobile metaphor for a ‘camp’ for the victims of transition – those who failed to find a proper place in the post-socialist economy” (Šentevska 2017a: 250).

The Serbian version of hip-hop shares with the 1990s’ “subcultures of warriors’ chic” (*potkulture ratničkog šika*; see Marić 1998) a fascination with the mythical *sponzoruše* (sugar babes, or gold diggers) – central characters in “ghetto fabulous” (or “boughetto” or “hood rich”) narratives on living the high life in one’s humble surroundings, adopted from low-income urban America and adjusted to local conditions. This label applies to people who enjoy the “bling-bling lifestyle” based on ostensible glamor without actually possessing anything valuable in material terms. This obsession with material goods and status symbols – money, gold, cars, clothes (or “uptown couture” in general) – gained momentum owing to lifestyle-conscious mainstream hip-hop performers such as Sean Combs, Pharrell Williams, and Jay-Z, not to mention the fashion industry epitomized by brands such as Gucci and Louis Vuitton. The economic resources for maintaining a ghetto fabulous lifestyle normally include

social welfare, family assistance, and various illegal activities. In 1990s Serbia this lifestyle was largely associated with the post-socialist gray economy, war profiteering, and economic reliance on relatives who had emigrated.

Non-Western hip-hop scenes often adopt formal elements from America in a straightforward, “literal” manner. The same applies to hip-hop’s main thematic concerns – the critical reflection of the social reality and representations of cultural identity (i.e., of the ghetto). Typically, we do not “discover music of such violence in places of great misery like Ethiopia or the Congo – unless it’s imported American hip-hop” (McWhorter 2003). The conventional imagery of hip-hop videos supports the major themes of belonging (to the “hood”) and struggle (strategies of survival in a violent local environment). According to Tricia Rose, nothing is more important for a hip-hop video’s narrative than situating a rapper in his (or her) milieu, among one’s crew or gang. Hip-hop videos are typically set in subway trains, buses, abandoned buildings – almost exclusively in African-American neighborhoods – with lavish use of shots depicting favorite street corners, intersections, parking lots, basketball courts, school yards, rooftops, and the familiar faces of local “homies.” Rappers’ insistence on depicting their “homies” and their “hoods” turned the spotlight on the black American ghetto (Rose 1994: 10–11). However, “where the ghetto has been culturally shackled to a negative symbolic configuration of images and ideas, the ‘hood offers a new terminology and discursive frame that can simultaneously address conditions in all ‘hoods everywhere” (Forman 2002b: 65). These genre conventions are widely adopted in Serbian hip-hop videos addressing “hood” subjects. The “hood” as a “floating signifier” of universality generally stands for themes of deprivation and struggle in harsh and often violent (criminal) circumstances. On the other hand, the “hood” as a marker of locality translates into visual tropes of belonging, loyalty, and patriotism. For example, Serbian hip-hop’s affinity for the epic poetry tradition and asymmetric decasyllabic verse occasionally translates into sagas of underworld heroes following the “code of the street”⁴ in the footsteps of epic Balkan figures. See, for example, Škabo’s video for the song “Mare, batice.” Its main protagonist is a contemporary street version of Marko Mrnjavčević, a fourteenth-century Serbian ruler venerated in Serbian, Croatian, Macedonian, and Bulgarian epic poetry who acquired supernatural powers under his “heroic” name of Kraljević Marko.

⁴ The “set of informal rules governing interpersonal public behavior, particularly violence” (Anderson 1999: 33; see also Kubrin 2005 and Keyes 2002).

In urban hip-hop videos, certain visual elements function as anchors that resolve the discrepancies between the metaphorical and the real, the local and the universal. They include

- 1) Cars – symbols of wealth, empowerment, and (even more importantly) social and spatial mobility. Cars are the most effective vehicles for crossing lines and getting out of the ghetto, or wherever else one should get out from. They provide a safe spot where one can observe and reflect on one's natural habitat. Cars are also instrumental in impressing the opposite sex.
- 2) Basketball courts – the supreme symbol of the universality of the local. Where there is realness, authenticity, and community to be expressed, someone must be playing street basketball.
- 3) Rooftops – the ghetto observed from a rooftop somehow loses its borders. The sense of restraint is also diminished (Šentevska 2014: 272).

What qualifies as a ghetto in hip-hop culture is best defined in visual terms. Serbia's version of the ultimate ghetto – the blocks of New Belgrade – provides the most familiar imagery – members of the hip-hop community, local grocers, elderly neighbors, kids, dogs, cars, motorcycles, apartment buildings, skate parks, graffiti-clad walls, and, of course, basketball courts.⁵

As already noted, the imaginary ghetto does not reside solely in the remote suburbs of Belgrade: for example, in the video "Kraj" MC Lud describes the tough life in the very heart of Belgrade, particularly in the neighborhood of Dorćol. Belgrade can also be conceived of as "one big hood": rapper and music video director Đolo and his friends send a message of pride and attachment to their hometown in the video "Moj Beograd," which features many of the city's historical landmarks. In another example, Ding Dong's video "Živela razlika" focuses on the local community members in the Serbian city of Niš (including waiters, dentists, and Chinese shopkeepers): they all perform an impromptu dance based on the track's main topic (sex). Niš has produced some of the Serbian hip-hop scene's wittiest raps (often delivered in the local dialect), in addition to one of the rare Serbian socially conscious rap videos, "Centrifuga." In it, the rappers argue for decentralizing political power in the country and claim that the authorities in Belgrade bear the responsibility for parceling Serbia into ghettos of underdevelopment. A variation on the theme "the whole country is (still) a ghetto" is developed by rappers who address the major question of

⁵ For examples, see Šentevska 2017: 257.

their generation: “Should I stay or should I go?” that is, leave “the ghetto” (Serbia) as an unwilling economic migrant.⁶

In Serbian hip-hop videos with more pronounced “gangsta” themes, even dull and “cozy” neighborhoods may transform into wild zones of (street) crime and the thug lifestyle (Quinn 2005; Watts 1997). (In reality, crime operates on completely different levels.) In the video “Never Walk Alone” by Monogamija and Mikri Maus, Belgrade in its entirety transforms into a nasty “gangsta ghetto”: “Live fast but pray to the Mother of God, *never walk alone* so you don’t end up in a hospital” is the moral of their story. “Gangsta” narratives of survival on the violent streets are often backed with images of urban decay generated by abandoned construction sites or industrial facilities made obsolete in the post-socialist economy. In Škola’s video “Stari grad” we encounter a Los Angeles–style ghetto in the heart of Priboj, a small industrial town on the remote Serbian border with Montenegro. Serbian hip-hop’s enchantment with the mythical figure of the outlaw, as well as contempt for those who “serve, protect, and break a nigga’s neck” (in the words of Ice Cube), often translates into prison and police imagery. The police’s ambivalent role in society (as an object of both fascination and aversion) translates into hip-hop videos where rappers play “bad cop” characters, for example, MC Škabo in the PKS video “Murija.”

The Peasant Ghetto: Serbian Hip-Hop Goes Rural

As we have seen, in the Serbian hip-hop discourse, the “hood” and the “ghetto” are one and the same – metaphorical expressions of life in a closed society with metaphorically elastic geographical borders. These terms can refer to neighborhoods in Belgrade or in any other Serbian town, or the whole city is conceived (and depicted) as a “ghetto-hood”; sometimes the whole country is the ghetto in question. In some cases, though, these labels are applied to non-urban environments, specifically when Serbian hip-hop “revisits” the countryside. Thus, rural environments may equally (and rightfully) qualify as ghettos.

The video “Pozorištanje”⁷ by rap duo D-Fence from Niš (consisting of MCs Marconiero and Joker) might be considered a paradigmatic representation of the cultural dichotomy between the city and the countryside with its use of

⁶ See, e.g., “Ne znam dokle” by Jach ft. LMR.

⁷ Track seven from their album *Urbanizam i renesansa* (2003).

appropriated genre conventions associated with hip-hop as a distinctly urban culture. Dressed in his urban hip-hop outfit, Marconiero represents his “hood,” an unglamorous area of Niš, a city elsewhere described by members of the same hip-hop scene as a ghetto of underdevelopment and a junkyard (I Bee ft. Joker, “Dubretara”). Joker, on the other hand, impersonates an “authentic” peasant and stands for an equally unglamorous rural community, describing the daily routines and hardships of an elderly peasant who, among the other inconveniences of rural life, rarely takes a bath (*retko idem na kupanje*). Although Marconiero admits that he comes from a long line of Serbian peasants, both rappers, each in the dialect of the community they represent, rhyme a list of grievances, complaints about life in post-socialist society, which is equally difficult on both sides of the urban-rural divide – except for those who enjoy its privileges. In keeping with hip-hop’s genre conventions and its emphasis on “realness” (Forman 2002a) and “authenticity” (Judy 2004), the village is rendered here as a “peasant ghetto,” inhabited mostly by poor, dirty, and deprived old people.

This depiction is far removed from the “ethno aesthetics” discussed in depth by Serbian ethnologist Ivan Čolović. According to this author, since the mid-1990s “ethno music” in Serbia has been marketed as a new genre of popular music with folk roots that fortuitously evades the negative connotations of turbo-folk, the overwhelming contemporary folk genre notoriously lacking in artistic value and spoiled by foreign influences. Ethno music is perceived as “national in spirit and modern in form” and even “politically correct from the standpoint of democratic standards, as it partakes in the process of intercultural dialogs” (Čolović 2006: 5–6). Visually, such music is customarily accompanied by idealized rural images of bucolic beauty and environmental harmony (Šentevska 2015: 91–94). As the video “Pozorištanje” (though not altogether immune to ethno-nationalist exclusivity) testifies, hip-hop’s insistence on realness may challenge the ethno-nationalist discourse embodied in the visual imagery of the “ethno village.”

It is not surprising that criticism (to be precise, parody) of ethno aesthetics would come from the hip-hop inspired turbo-folk camp. For example, in his popular satirical song “Cijelo selo šmrče bijelo” (2006), turbo-folk performer DJ Krmak sings about cocaine addiction in a rural setting. Hip-hop inspired turbo-folk performers were not alone in introducing the hip-hop theme of narcotics abuse in a rural environment. Rock band Atheist Rap from Novi Sad exploited the “gangsta” theme of narco-agriculture in their animated video “Dve žetve

godišnje,” which discusses the economic advantages (and legal disadvantages) of cultivating *Cannabis indica* in the fertile flatlands of Vojvodina. The theme has also been adopted by satirical hip-hop acts, such as the collaborative effort between Voodoo Popeye, Big Sale, and Tattoo Locko and their “Distributer vutre” video. In a rural setting, these robust, heavily tattooed Serbian rappers describe quotidian scenes of the gangsta lifestyle centered around farming (and distributing) narcotic crops. Such scenes include shooting a chicken with a M57-TT pistol (a copy of the Russian Tokarev TT-33 semi-automatic pistol) to be grilled for lunch in a vernacular solid fuel cooker. In the song “Indo grasa” Ajs Nigrutin describes the advantages of the small-scale farming of cannabis (on his balcony) in “South Central Kotež” (a remote northern neighborhood of Belgrade), whereas the minimalist video takes him and his “homies” to an authentic Serbian cornfield. In his characteristic easygoing manner Ajs Nigrutin elaborates the theme of the peasant ghetto in his song “Njiva (Seljački geto).” The ghetto in question is a place where one gets up at six o’clock in the morning and spends the rest of the day occupied with hard manual labor and shoplifting from the local grocery shop:

Mučenja ovakvog nema nigde na svetu.

Takav je, brate, život u seljačkom getu.

There’s no such torture anywhere in the world.

Such is life, bro, in the peasant ghetto.

When Serbian rappers revisit the countryside they usually assume the position of sympathetic outsiders who come from urban ghettos and encounter in the villages familiar situations of hardship and underprivilege (see, for example, Voodoo Popeye’s “Preklane na raspustu”). Nonetheless, rare exceptions do exist, such as Joker’s contribution to “Pozorištanice” or Ajs Nigrutin’s insider account of the peasant ghetto in “Njiva.” However, rappers usually maintain a superior position as urban visitors “only passing through,” which is communicated through parody and a humorous approach to village life. This also means that they (e.g., Ajs Nigrutin) rap in the urban dialects of their own “hoods.”

However, the approach adopted by MC Cache (Milan Koprivica Čače) and his singing companion Nemanja Đorđević Đavo from the small Serbian town of Kuršumljia is distinctly different. Although Cache also employs explosive humor in his lyrics, he assumes an insider position as a rapping peasant who describes

the daily routines in the peasant ghetto, delivering his verses in a distinctly rural local dialect; thus he parodies the clash of civilizations between backward rural life in transitional Serbia and everything that hip-hop stands for. As he elaborates: “So far we had only these raps where everyone was (exceptions excluded) singing about the same things... ‘me, brother; ghetto, brother; cars, brother; dope, brother; bitches, brother, and so on. I think that rap can offer much more, because there are lots of subjects which are interesting, but nobody bothers to deal with them” (Cache in Rogović, 2016). Combining the hip-hop traditions of rapping about local ghetto themes and sampling familiar music, Cache and Đavo deal with typical situations in rural Serbia, incorporating popular musical motifs drawn from Serbian turbo-folk hits, hip-hop classics, and international pop tunes into their tracks. In his raps Cache describes a visit to the local marketplace (“Pijačni četvrtak” sampling Coolio’s “Gangster’s Paradise”) and a local village fair (“Na putu za Lukovo” sampling Mile Ignjatović’s “Na putu za ludilo”); the process of making local plum brandy (“Kakvu sam rakiju pek’o” sampling Medeni Mesec’s “Nikad nikom nisam reko”); a flamboyant village party (“Ispratnica” sampling Sinan Sakić’s “Sudbina me na put šalje”); and otherwise not-so-funny topics such as the disappearance of old village schools (“Stara škola” sampling Ana Bekuta’s “Kralj ponoći”) or heating problems during freezing-cold winters (“Dizduvava” sampling DJ Bobo’s “Chihuahua”).

In his use of rural dialect Cache thus departs from the “rapping visitor” approach to the Serbian countryside and Serbian mainstream hip-hop’s treatment of village themes. It may be claimed that he is following a completely different tradition of musically parodying (modern) village life, namely, that of the Yugoslav band Rokeri s Moravu. It should be noted that Rokeri s Moravu were also radically different throughout their long career (1977–2008), becoming a unique phenomenon in the Yugoslav popular music and entertainment industry. Their music represented a radical shift from the then-dominant style of newly composed folk music (NCFM; the historical precedent of turbo-folk), which in its earlier phases constructed an ideal, nostalgic, and romantic picture of the Serbian village and its pastoral world. Village life, which has been significantly changed by modernization, mostly stayed outside that picture. Likewise, the linguistic variety of rural dialects and idioms mostly remained outside the realm of NCFM. Lyricists typically used the standard, neutral Serbian language to describe (almost imaginary) rural life. According to Tanja Petrović, Rokeri s Moravu’s radical intervention took place on two levels: the thematic and the linguistic. They were “rockers” who intruded into the pastoral, rustic world of

the Serbian village in the Morava River Valley. And they consistently performed their songs in the local dialect (the Kosovo-Resava dialect of central Serbia). She notes that “such a linguistic strategy was a major and unprecedented innovation in the musical landscape of the time. They were the first Yugoslav band to consistently use this dialect, and the first to sing about the world of the Serbian peasant using his own idiom” (Petrović 2017: 103). Rokeri challenged idyllic, pastoral images of the Serbian village by bringing in elements of and references to global popular culture (from John Travolta’s disco-dancing to Jane Fonda’s workouts)⁸ and singing about the hybrid reality of the modern village, using parody and unlikely fashion choices as their most distinct trademarks.

As for Serbian rappers, whether they assume the position of outsiders or insiders in the peasant ghetto, they all tend to portray the rural speakers of southern dialects as “pre-modern, ignorant, funny, bizarre people” (Petrović 2015: 123).⁹ According to Stef Jansen, in the Serbian context specifically, the relative social consensus on the backward character of the rural never resulted in a definite agreement as to where one should draw the dividing line between urbanity and rurality: “It was precisely the absence of such a certainty that was constructed as a symptom of underdevelopment” (Jansen 2005b: 162). Hence, following the logic of Bourdieu’s distinction, few people can safely assert their distance from “village mud.” This clash between “mud” and “asphalt” is the central dichotomy of Serbian culture. Asphalt connotes urbanity by birth and ancestry, entailing a generational distance from agricultural occupations. According to Serbian sociologist Ivana Spasić, asphalt does not connote a simple eulogy to the city and the devaluation of the country: “it is rather advocating the necessity of keeping the two apart” (Spasić 2006: 221). Namely, “in internal cultural hierarchies of contemporary Serbia, ‘urbanity’ is a most broadly applicable identity/discursive resource to build strategies of asserting one’s own superiority against ‘others’” (Spasić 2006: 225). Again, *urbocentric exclusivity*, a term borrowed from Jensen (2005a: 267), generates social divisions and low-intensity conflicts whose battleground is, in effect, a mythical city. That is to say that it is neither clear, nor particularly important, whether this city of sophisticated and well-mannered urban dwellers exists or had ever existed in the first place.

⁸ Although hip-hop did not claim a significant place in their arsenal of global cultural references, Rokeri s Moravu did flirt with rapping throughout their long career (e.g., in the songs “Kvarne stoperke,” “Proja,” “SMS,” and “Venčavam se draga popodne u sredu”).

⁹ On the use of southern dialects in Serbian hip-hop, see Petrović 2015: 53–60.

This play with imaginary borderlines manifests itself particularly well in the realms of popular music and entertainment (Šentevska 2017b: 172–177) – in this case, in the mutual affinities and feedback loop between hip-hop and turbo-folk. To begin with, according to the conventions of the hip-hop genre, Serbian rappers flaunt their success mostly at parties featuring a swimming pool (or, alternatively, a river boat or a barbecue) and lots of scantily clad, “ghetto fabulous hos.” In accordance with Tricia Rose’s observation, their “tales of sexual domination falsely relieve [males’] lack of self-worth and limited access to economic and social markers for heterosexual masculine power” (Rose 1994: 15) and reflect the deep-seated sexism that pervades the Serbian music business and society in general. In the evolution of Serbian hip-hop we might trace the transformation of party imagery from innocent teenage gatherings to decadent VIP or gangsta-style parties occasionally featuring celebrity “hos” from the turbo-folk camp (see, e.g., “Pridi mi polako” by Juice ft. Mina Kostić).¹⁰ This celebration of luxury addresses those who are denied traditional paths to a positive self-image, as it seems that self- and social esteem can only be achieved through leading an expensive lifestyle as a coping strategy. As Jeffries notes: “Mainstream hip-hop in this context becomes a form of escapism, as commercially successful rappers invite their audience to identify with a ridiculous and largely staged life of luxury that ordinary people will never experience” (2011: 71).

In their pursuit of wealth and success Serbian rappers have become involved in many “ethnic crossover” projects – working together with world music performers¹¹ and turbo-folk acts,¹² for example. These mutual fascinations and exchanges are well expressed in Juice’s video “Farma drama,” which celebrates his participation in the reality television show *Farma*. Here we can see the notable Serbian rapper in the company of a number of turbo-folk celebrities (including the veteran hip-hop dancer Funky G) amidst tractors and farm animals, and occasionally wearing the traditional peasant costume together with his hip-hop entourage. Turbo-folk receives influences from hip-hop with particular enthusiasm: hip-hop imagery pervades turbo-folk videos in all kinds of imaginative combinations.¹³ Turbo-folk (or turbo-pop) stars and

¹⁰ An interesting cross-cultural collaboration is the song “Ole Ole” by Snoop Dogg ft. Ljupka Stević.

¹¹ See, e.g., “Đipaj” by Cvija with Sanja Ilić & Balkanika.

¹² See, e.g., “Harmonika” by MlaDJa & Big Time ft. Jovan Perišić & Aca Olujić.

¹³ See, e.g., “Ciao amore” by Dara Bubamara ft. Big Ali; “Nema više cile-mile” by Đogani ft. Mile Kitić; “Kraljevi grada” by MC Stojan ft. Aca Lukas; “Muške price” by DJ Shone ft. Emina Jahović & Teča Gambino; and “Gadure” by Milan Stanković ft. Mile Kitić & Mimi Mercedes.

starlets eagerly assume the roles of black ghetto “bitches”¹⁴ or tough thugs, often flirting with mild pornography (see Miller-Young 2008; Shelton 1997). In a recent example, turbo-folk veteran Mile Kitić released a cover of French rap group Sexion d’assaut’s song “Désolé” (from their 2010 album *L’école des points vitaux*). His version, “Paklene godine,” thus launched the newly invented “gangsta folk” genre, which is comparable to other unlikely matches between hip-hop and local music idioms with (more or less remote) folk roots. These Serbian examples, alongside the Albanian song “Katunari Gangsta” (peasant gangsta) by Gjini (actor Bes Kallaku; Tochka 2017: 172–174), Turkish arabesk rappers (Işık and Basaran 2017), and Sakha (Yakutian) rapper Gaudeamus and his ironic descriptions of a Siberian village (Ventsel and Peers 2017: 235), mark the emergence of a new hip-hop “Internationale” that pushes the imaginary and real boundaries of the urban-rural divide and redefines the notion of the ghetto based on local circumstances.

Conclusion

Since the 1990s, hip-hop in Serbia has been powered by two driving forces centered on the notion of the ghetto. One can be termed *centripetal* force (reflections on the desolate life within its confines) and the other *centrifugal* (strategies of escape from the ghetto, either through crime, politics, or show business). The former gives hip-hop a sense of self-containment and pride in representing the local – “hood,” city, country – all perceived as a ghetto. The latter has led to innumerable crossover collaborations, setting the stage for rapping in any conceivable situation, from “hip hoperas” and reality TV shows to “minstrel” hip-hop versions of the greatest turbo-folk hits.

However, as French sociologist Loïc Wacquant and other scholars argue, outside of the context of the black American ghetto (the original home of hip-hop), the “ghetto” may be conceived only as a metaphorical social statement and a metaphorical expression of (collective) deprivation. The history and urban transformations of New Belgrade are discussed in this paper as a paradigmatic instance of the “ghettocentric imagination running wild,” where the social reality of an urban area most strikingly departs from its representations in fictional narratives and, especially, in hip-hop culture. The imaginary ghetto,

¹⁴ Some examples include “E pa neću” by Sandra Afrika; “Mili, mili” by Dragana Mirković, and “U tvojim kolima” by Funky G ft. Juice.

a space with elastic and elusive borders, thus becomes a metaphor; it is a camp for the victims of transition, for those who have failed to find a proper place in the post-socialist economy. What qualifies as a ghetto in hip-hop culture is best described in visual terms; therefore, music videos have been chosen in this study to showcase the different modes of representation and the different ideological positions underlying these representations.

In the Serbian hip-hop discourse rural environments may equally (and rightfully) qualify as ghettos. Elaborated on the fringes of the mainstream hip-hop scene in Serbia, the concept of the *peasant ghetto* (*seljački geto*) is a form of social commentary on the present state of rural communities in the country. At the same time, the peasant ghetto is a metaphorical description of Serbia as a basically closed society with a dark legacy of international isolation during the wars in the former Yugoslavia, which occupies a peripheral and deprived position in the modern global world order.

The peasant ghetto nevertheless reflects a fundamental dichotomy in Serbian society, namely, the assumed deep cleavage between urban and rural cultures. In this paper, the notion of the *ghetto* is identified in this particular context as the point of convergence of the two sides of this cleavage. Serbian rappers, whether they assume the position of outsiders or insiders of the peasant ghetto, tend to portray “modern peasants” as poor, ignorant, funny, or bizarre folk, resorting to parody as seemingly the only adequate (and attractive) way to address the deprivations of the country’s rural communities and peripheral (semi-rural) towns. In a cultural context where urbanity is the most broadly applicable resource for asserting one’s superiority, rappers seem to address rural themes from a superior urban (or semi-urban) standpoint.

The substantial interactions and mutual influences between the Serbian hip-hop and turbo-folk scenes emphasized in this paper are seen as an indication of the problematic distinction between the urban and the rural in the Serbian cultural context, at least in the realm of entertainment and popular music. This interaction becomes even more interesting if hip-hop is observed as a distinct cultural foreign import with an indisputable urban background and turbo-folk is understood as the sole home-grown form of popular music in Serbia with now remote rural origins. The hybrid “hip-hop meets turbo-folk” genre contributes to the new hip-hop “Internationale” that challenges the imaginary and real borders of the urban-rural divide based on local circumstances.

Independent researcher **Irena Šentevska** holds a PhD from the Department of Arts and Media Theory, University of Arts in Belgrade. Her interdisciplinary research focuses on the issues of identity (re)construction in the post-Yugoslav political and cultural contexts, as reflected in the contemporary arts, media, and popular culture. Her articles and book chapters have been published in Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Norway, Great Britain, and USA. Her book *The Swinging 90s: theatre and social reality in Serbia in 29 pictures* was published in 2016. Her second book, *Singing Belgrade: urban transformations, identity construction and music videos* is upcoming from Clío, Belgrade.

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Videography

- Ajs Nigrutin, *Indo grasa*.
- Atheist Rap, *Dve žetve godišnje*.
- Cvija with Sanja Ilić & Balkanika, *Đipaj*.
- Dara Bubamara ft. Big Ali, *Ciao amore*.
- D-Fence, *Pozorištanace*.
- Ding Dong, *Živela razlika*.
- DJ Krmak, *Cijelo selo šmrče bijelo*.
- DJ Shone ft. Emina Jahović & Teča Gambino, *Muške priče*.
- Dragana Mirković, *Mili, mili*.
- Đogani ft. Mile Kitić, *Nema više cile-mile*.
- Đolo ft. RBS & Sha, *Moj Beograd*.
- Funky G ft. Juice, *U tvojim kolima*.
- I Bee, Taz, Marconiero & Joker, *Centrifuga*.
- Jach ft. LMR, *Ne znam dokle*.
- Juice, *Farma drama*.
- Juice & Mina Kostić, *Priđi mi polako*.
- Lud, *Kraj*.
- MC Stojan ft. Aca Lukas, *Kraljevi grada*.
- Milan Stanković ft. Mile Kitić & Mimi Mercedes, *Gadure*.
- Mile Kitić, *Paklene godine*.
- MlaDJa & Big Time ft. Jovan Perišić & Aca Olujić, *Harmonika*.
- Monogamija & Mikri Maus, *Never Walk Alone*.
- PKS, *Murija*.
- Sandra Afrika, *E pa neću*.
- Škola, *Stari grad*.
- Snoop Dogg ft. Ljupka Stević, *Ole Ole*.
- Škabo, *Mare, batice*.
- Voodoo Popeye & MC Tattoo Locko, *Distributer vutre*.
- Voodoo Popeye, *Preklane na raspustu*.

THE ROLE OF POPULAR CULTURE IN RURAL-TO-URBAN TRANSFORMATION CONTRIBUTING TO THE “SLUŠOVICE MIRACLE”¹

Jiří Fialka

Abstract: *The submitted article provides inquiry into the role of popular culture in the everyday life of Slušovice – the socialist “center municipality” and extraordinary isle of prosperity in the scarce economy of Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s. It presents research on the popular culture of the formative political environment of state socialism. The urbanisation and suppression of traditional culture in this village was not isolated from the broader context, but was derived from the economic transformation of the local collective farm and its symbolic differentiation from socialism. In these intentions, the study tries to expand the specific dimensions of the emergent popular culture with its emphasis on huge cultural events, showing the hybridity of social life in Slušovice, which was created by the combination of rural transformation and consumer culture.*

Keywords: *Slušovice collective farm; popular culture; everyday life; state socialism*

The period known as Normalization is considered to be a time of stagnation and decline in the economic, political, and cultural fields, especially for the urban population of the Czech lands (see Valeš 2014). However, the situation of rural areas in the 1970s and 1980s was not so sceptical, since the Czechoslovak government managed to achieve satisfactory results in agriculture that were not lagging behind developed countries in the West (see Průcha 2009: 739). An example of a village where rural modernization was particularly remarkable

¹ This study was supported by Charles University, project GA UK No. 235115.

is Slušovice, located in south-eastern Moravia. In the following pages, I will therefore address the role of popular culture in the transformation of a provincial village into a first-class socialist village similar to a town.

As the basis for my analysis of the mutual intersection of rural and urban forms in local popular culture, I chose three case events that took place in the village in the observed period of the 1980s. My aim is to show what attitudes and values these events were meant to direct the spectator towards, as well as what values they attributed to the rural environment.

Social events organised under the authority of the Local National Committee (MNV) Slušovice in the periphery of the inhabited area represent the main contribution to the paper, as was the initial intention of the research. Such events included horse races, discotheques (or, discos), and a TV contest programme with music numbers. The study is not based on anthropological stationary field research, which would be focused, for example, on the social structure and institutions in Slušovice. Apart from using interviews with Slušovice inhabitants, the paper is also supported by written and audio-visual archive materials.² The aim is to introduce different ways of creating a new community ethos in a collectivised village by means of popular culture.

Literature on the modernization of the Czech countryside during the observed period is scarce; it includes classic historical works, as well as works written from a social science perspective. A major contribution to this study is made by the book *Rolník a krajina* (Lapka – Gottlieb 2000); although it mainly reflects the knowledge of Czech private farmers at the beginning of the 1990s, it comprises the specification of urban and rural cultures as well, and it also depicts the image of the socialist country through farmers' points of view and values. A work by Norwegian anthropologist Haldis Haukanes (2004) is also based on interviews from the same period, yet it especially describes the set of values of collective farmers, and thus shows their image that better reflects the traditional sample of rural population. Other important sources include complex works by economic historian Václav Průcha (2009) and sociologist Lenka Kalinová (2012). The concept of tension between the town and the country is relevantly mentioned in studies by Czech historian Lukáš Valeš (2012), Scottish economic historian Nigel Swain (1994), and American cultural historian Paulina Bren (2013). The topic of Czech popular culture between socialism and

² These are materials from the State District Archive in Zlín (SOkA Zlín), the Security Services Archive (ABS), and the Czech Television Archive and the Program Funds (APF ČT).

post-socialism has up until now been addressed primarily in the compilation of works edited by Jakub Machek (2010) and in works by Přemysl Houda (2014).

The aforementioned works help explain certain terms that are used in this paper. These are particularly the terms of rural culture and traditional folk culture. The pair of authors Lapka – Gottlieb (2000: 106–107) consider the following attributes to be the signs of European rural culture – humane relationship towards land (landscape, nature, and soil) and animals, conservatism in adopting new ideologies, immobility of the rural community and thus its territorial delimitation, faith in transcendental powers, and efforts to preserve awareness of rural culture, which is allegedly of more importance to the community than specific economic profit. Besides this awareness, the rural community itself is characterized by family bonds, social control, and cooperation; its form is distinguished by typical songs, dances, clothes and festivals (Lapka – Gottlieb 2000: 112).

The concept of rural culture is, however, only conceivable as the contrast to urban culture, as these two notions are opposed to each other. The features of urban culture are therefore described in the book *Rolník a krajina* using such terms as little social control, individualism, global community, competition, and competitiveness (Lapka – Gottlieb 2000: 108). Just as rural culture is linked to traditional folk culture (yet not only this one), traditional urban values are connected to popular culture, since urban culture can be described as an activity of mass production and reception, which is being spread for commercial and promotional purposes (Machek 2010: 12).

The book's findings about private farmers are valuable, because they create a specific ideally-typical image that can be gradually adapted based on empirical research.³ The field research of Haldis Haukanes is very helpful in adjusting this image; the distinctive feature between the country and the town in social life is determined to be self-sufficient farming and external impression of community relationships in the country, bearing in mind that despite existing stereotypes about urban and rural lives, both lifestyles are approaching each other more or less dynamically as a consequence of the unification of society (Haukanes 2004: 140). It is therefore apparent from the different interpretation of rural and urban

³ The image was ideally-typical since it was created based on a narrow group within the village range; it included people who resisted the pressure of collectivisation and the concentration on agriculture, and also those who decided to do their private business on the returned agricultural land. Most of them refused the radical modernization experiment, and they fell back into the traditional values of the country as described by the authors.

cultures that its evaluation is subjective, and it depends, among other things, on the existential values of both the respondents and the interviewers.

An important term for distinguishing between urban and rural cultures is the term *country*, which covers a broader semantic field than a village. The country is explained by the authors as being located outside of industrial zones, since agricultural production is predominant here (Lapka – Gottlieb 2000: 114). In their opinion, the country represents space also for small- and medium-sized towns that have their own subculture and social functions as well as villages, where social differentiation is not large and informal authorities are respected. It is therefore mainly characterized by the different way of life of a community in a healthy environment that serves both for recreation and a luxurious lifestyle (Lapka – Gottlieb 2000: 114–115). In the following text, I will show to what extent the activities in Slušovice reflected this rather romantic picture of life in the country, meanwhile it is necessary to bear in mind the fact that urbanisation does not take place in a vacuum, and neither did it trigger the described changes.

On the way toward town

Before analysing the individual public events, I will briefly introduce the historical context and the specific situation in Slušovice. In the described period, the Czech countryside was administered within a system of Centres that facilitated access to foodstuffs and material help for collective farms, to better infrastructure, and to housing construction. These efforts in the field of the territorial organization of society were also typical for the broader European space (Hudečková – Lošťák – Ševčíková 2010: 45), although they differed in the level of force used to implement the plans of bureaucratic authorities. In the European context, it was particularly the example of the systematisation of Romanian villages that was infamous for its violent mode.⁴ According to sociologist Jan Tauber (1965: 127), the administrative fusion of municipalities and collective farms was meant to help achieve not only the economic concentration and industrialization of agriculture, but also ideological goals, such as bolstering the party's life and choosing the best workers in the broad area of interconnected municipalities.

⁴ In Romania, 7–8 thousand villages out of 13,123 were planned to disappear in order to remove inequality between the town and the country; the rest was meant to be demolished and 50–55% of it remodeled (see Duta 2012: 8–9).

The convergence of rural and urban areas was influenced by the ongoing unification of society in the whole of Europe, especially by means of secularised education and industrialization (Horská – Musil – Maur 2002). Besides these waves of modernization, the countryside itself was being “modernised” through what is known as the collectivisation of agriculture, which took place mainly in the 1950s.⁵ Its most important material consequence in the 1980s was the existence of agricultural cooperatives in the country called collective farms (JZDs), and state enterprises cultivating some 95% of the country’s agricultural land (Průcha 2009: 750). These were frequently the employers of most villagers, as the population in the originally agricultural country was violently coerced to join the collective farms with the land they worked on (by law, they could not own other land⁶) in the 1950s. This fact – together with the elimination of traditional rural authorities, the abolition of local government structures in the country, and the repression of the Catholic church in particular – lead to the devastation of social life in the country (Rokoský – Svoboda 2013). However, twenty years of building Central Municipalities and their fusion with collectivised collective farms gave a stimulus to the resuscitation of culture in all bigger communities, at least (Průcha 2009: 756). Successfully fused collective farms with hundreds of employees could afford not only investments in modern facilities and the construction of new compounds, they could also support the leisure activities of villagers in cooperation with the Local National Committees (MNVs).

Unsurprisingly, the Slušovice municipality thus entered the public awareness at the end of the 1970s thanks to its very prosperous collective farm.⁷ To create a better picture of the collective farm activities, I present the following facts. The base for creating an agricultural facility was provided by the national fusion of collective farms in 1976; however, the incorporation of neighbouring farms in Slušovice was already occurring through their own initiative every year since 1971.⁸ Among the Czechoslovak agricultural facilities, this one was comparably a rather small agricultural business with 8,104 ha of agricultural land and 3,260 active members, owning 260 lorries, 240 tractors, and planes (Slinták 2012: 43). It consisted of 20 production plants that comprised the

⁵ Due to deliberate violations of the ethics of legal standards, collectivisation took many forms, see Burešová (2013).

⁶ Act 46/1948 Coll. “On the new land reform.” *Parliament of the Czech republic* [online].

⁷ The collective farm in Slušovice is indirectly mentioned e.g. in the well-known 1977 song, *Jožin z bažin* (Joey the Swamp Monster), by the Czech singer Ivan Mládek.

⁸ State District Archive Zlin (SOKA), fund JZD AK Slušovice, Inventory, pp. 4–6.

workplaces of 17 municipalities (Slinták 2012: 43). This agricultural-industrial facility did construction work, it exported calves, syrup extracts, and fertilizers within production cooperation with countries in Western Europe, it supplied the national market with vegetables and computers, and it counted upon the development of microelectronics and biotechnologies (Slinták 2012: 43).

According to the definition of authors in the book *Rolník a krajina*, this would hardly be considered the country, since their country is supposed to be located outside industrial zones with no major social differentiation. For our purposes, the authors' notion is adjusted by Nigel Swain (1994: 89), who does not understand the socialist country as a place for recreation to pursue antique rural activities, but as an area with intensive economic activity, where young, educated people move to from towns. The arrival of specialized agricultural workers then increases social differentiation in the country, although it is still not as diverse as in town (Swain 1994: 89, Průcha 2009: 754–755). According to Swain, this change was made possible thanks to professionalization of the collective farms that also pursued non-agricultural, industrial production. Swain mainly talks about Central Municipalities; he mentions the expanded construction of family houses in the country and his perspective – which is closer to the situation in Slušovice – provides a contrast to Lapka – Gottlieb's view.

The fusion of collective farms and of Local National Committees (thanks to which Slušovice became a Central Administrative Municipality for five neighbouring villages on 1 July 1976)⁹ was also reflected in demographic growth that seems unprecedented at first sight. Between 1970 and 1991, the population in Slušovice increased by 102 %, to 2,760 people living in 506 houses.¹⁰ However, such growth was not exceptional in Czechoslovakia, as it was often accompanied by a decline in the population decline of many neighbouring villages, which is the case of the municipalities within the scope of the agricultural facility in Slušovice.¹¹

It was not until 1996 that the local government in Slušovice managed to formally raise the status of the village to a town. The Act adopted 4 years later

⁹ *Slušovický zpravodaj*, Slušovice: MNV Slušovice, 1976, no. 7; in the 1980s one more municipality came under the MNV.

¹⁰ Population according to census results generated since 1869 in the municipalities and their parts of a selected administrative unit – municipality with extended powers. See “Population according to the census results since 1869 in the villages and their parts”, *Czech Statistical Office* [online].

¹¹ It was thus not only the case of municipalities affiliated to MNV Slušovice, which means that the JZD was a more powerful integration centre than the system of Central Municipalities created later – their main real contribution was to facilitate communication between the JZD and the authorities of the municipalities where the JZD farmed. Ibidem.

set the minimum population of a town to 3,000 inhabitants which was not achieved until 1999 and 2000 in Slušovice; nonetheless, the revocation of the status of a town is only assumed in case of the fusion of two towns.¹² At the time of writing this paper, Slušovice is therefore still formally considered a town.

However, this success in the transition from the rural to the urban environment, as evidenced by the references to the emphasis of the bureaucratic authorities, has greatly helped the formative political environment in which the diligent leadership of the cooperative was well-oriented. The Security Services Archive shows that, in addition to hard work and the combination of lucky coincidences, the political determinants influenced the establishment of the specific local prosperity. This archive, whose materials are to be verified, suggests that the collective farm in the centrally-planned economy had serious problems with fulfilling the indicators of the state economic plan from its own agricultural production. However, with a strong background created by a number of officials¹³ and its own abilities, it was able to generate huge financial gains from non-agricultural production, from which it purchased the illegal products needed for the successful fulfillment of the state economic plan.¹⁴

At the time, when success in business management was not driven by the effectiveness of production itself, but by the support of an authoritative party, the amount of foreign capital, and the public presentation of the economic performance associated with the plan,¹⁵ the collective farm managed to bypass officials who were not inclined to cooperative production and management experiments (Valeš 2014: 475–476), to pacify complaints of part of the public, and, on the contrary, to acquire allies in the communist party and administrative structures, who helped approve the exceptions for direct cooperative trade with foreign firms and to introduce production based on western European methods, while helping to neutralize the work of control authorities.¹⁶ The degree of constraint on state-owned enterprises on part of the state had been reduced in the attempt to introduce perestroika in Czechoslovakia, whereby the cooperative became a publicly declared model enterprise.¹⁷

¹² Act 128/2000 Coll. "On municipalities." *Public Administration Portal* [online].

¹³ Security Services Archive (ABS), f. Object Bundles, sign. RC 26769 BR Part 2, fol. 123–4.

¹⁴ ABS, f. Object Bundles, sign. RC 26769 BR Part 2 Portion 1, fol. 6–7.

¹⁵ ABS, f. Object Bundles sign. RC 26769 BR Part 2, fol. 115.

¹⁶ ABS, f. Object Bundles, sign. RC 26769 BR Part 2, fol. 81, 91–2.

¹⁷ Czech Television Archive and Programme Funds (APF ČT), f. Telemagnetic and Digital AV Records, (František Čuba: Slušovický zázrak, 1999, director Robert Sedláček).

To build a high-profit cooperative in Slušovice, which, among other things, led to the urbanization of the entire village, and in general to gaining power, the management used, inter alia, symbolic connotations of its activities in a specific ideological environment. Defining themselves against a stagnant socialism had taken place not only on the field of economics, but also on the field of pop culture. We will now closely look at some of the events that made Slušovice famous.

Horse Races

In the period of Normalization, cultural life in Slušovice was established primarily by the cultural club, administered under the MNV¹⁸ and by the cultural department of the JZD, which acquired the name Agropublik in 1986. The involvement of cooperative authorities in public events was not just a symbolic ideological gesture, but because of the financial and material possibilities offered by the cooperative society, it was an absolutely necessary and desirable step. The fact that farms have a greater potential to form a community than local governments is indicated by the goals of many political delegations that were not focused on the MNV, but on the administrative building of the JZD. The organisers from these institutions were often very passive, generally for fear of not meeting the ideological expectations of the authorities¹⁹, but also due to the image of exemplary behaviour spread by the media that promoted family life and discouraged people from public engagement (Bren 2013: 166).²⁰ Yet the cooperation between the JZD and the MNV in Slušovice worked very well, as can be seen in their activities; thanks to them, horse races were held every year since 1981 – which came to be the biggest sports, cultural, and especially trade event of the time, not only for the municipality.²¹ Its fame is proved in the article from the local weekly, *Naše cesta*, that describes a record audience

¹⁸ An association of people or groups of people who organise cultural events under the auspices of MNV in their free time.

¹⁹ Each planned event was permitted, among others, depending on information from the Regional National Committee (KNV) seminars about inconvenient and suspicious participants, or from meetings with the Secretary of the District National Committee (ONV) ideological department. In case of non-compliance with the ideological framework, organizers faced the threat of oppression affecting their studies or work (see Houda 2014: 201–202).

²⁰ Yet it also has to be mentioned that social organizations were forced to hold social events because their activity was evaluated (see Houda 2014: 188).

²¹ Václav Průcha (2009: 758) states these were the most popular horse races in Czechoslovakia.

of 55,000 people during the last Sunday horse races in 1986.²² In 1987, this commercial attraction included e.g. performances of the best-known singer of Czech popular music, Karel Gott, meritorious artist Václav Neckář, and Darina Rolincová, a famous singer for children successful in the music charts, as is announced in the article *Karel Gott Visiting Us*.²³

Since such important guests were not exceptional at these events, it raises the questions of what was the aim of the organisers and how the local citizens perceived the events. The literature of the time indicates that horse races (as well as car races held by the municipality) were events meant for farmers.²⁴ Local farmers did not present themselves as farmers during the events, as can be seen from the interviews.²⁵ Most of them participated but very often as organisers (*"I decided to come to help at the bar; we drew beer and earned a lot of money"* /Mr. Pavel/) or as consumers of fun, food, and household articles. An article from 1984 shows it was necessary to marginalize the significance of stalls. The article concludes: *"the large audience in the rainy weather confirms that people have not come only for the shopping and attractions."*²⁶ The author underlines the attractiveness of the horse races, while suggesting the dominant role of consumerism. In fact, it can be said that it was the shopping and attractions that motivated people to come in large numbers to the racecourse even when it was raining.

A minority of people wanted to escape the village before the event started since during the "festivities", it was allegedly no longer possible.²⁷ While "festivals of farmers" were held in traditional village culture, new village culture introduced "festivals for farmers". Famous horses and professional artists performed there for a fee, however, they are left forgotten in the memory of informants in favour of the market stalls that formed the real village culture

²² *Naše cesta*, Slušovice: JZD AK Slušovice, 1986, 8 (77).

²³ *Naše cesta*, Slušovice: JZD AK Slušovice, 1987, 9 (36).

²⁴ *"Horse racing and auto racing are the closest disciplines to farmers, that's why the JZD social authorities pay attention to them. Horse races understood as a festival for farmers gained the popularity of tens of thousands of visitors"* (Hurt 1985: 259).

²⁵ Approximately 12 hours of interviews were recorded in 2014 as a part of the thesis. Personal interviews were conducted by the author; the names of informants were fictionalised with their consent.

²⁶ *Naše cesta*, Slušovice: JZD Slušovice: 1984, 6 (49).

²⁷ Interview with Mr. Pavel; the situation is also captured in historical photos documenting the surrounding meadows full of cars. SOKA Zlín, f. MNV Slušovice, number of increment (no. incr.). 75/07, fol. 93.

of Slušovice.²⁸ After all, the stalls around the racecourse were not built just by coincidence; it could be seen from the range of offered goods how much the organizers wanted to attract spectators. Scarce goods – chips, enamel pots, toilet paper, tangerines and bananas in the summer – lured people and increased the attractiveness of Slušovice, because it provided better services than towns. In this case, the apparent motivation of the host – to make a profit – met with the commercial interests of the performers and the consumer needs of the spectators.

The aforementioned facts show that these events held repeatedly 5–6 times a year in Slušovice in the 1980s were far from traditional folk culture. They were not very likely to concern human relationships toward animals, as Gottlieb and Lapka describe, nor was the village represented here through a faith in transcendental powers, let alone by efforts in preserving awareness of traditional rural culture that should be more important for a village than a momentary economic profit. On the contrary, the aristocratic motif of horse competitions is used here, which covers the whole event in an attractive robe embellished by music performances based on the typical mass popular culture of the time, and it suggests the symbolic divergence of Slušovice cultural events from the officially proclaimed socialist values, which should avoid emphasizing the richness of individual businesses.

Discos in the “Barrel”

Large attendance in Slušovice was also reflected in period magazines. These are the words of the MNV director: “*The number of visitors in Slušovice has been increasing over the last years. Slušovice has made its presence known in the public awareness as a place where everything is the best. Not considering the so-called tourists who come for the exchanges, the situation was very good.*”²⁹ *Naše cesta* also published an article called *Modern Mecca* from the south-Moravian newspaper *Rovnost*, which reads: “*The great boom of JZD*

²⁸ The atmosphere is described in the memorable experience of one witness: “*At eight o’clock in the morning, the stalls opened, the races started at two o’clock, and when I went to the racecourse, everyone was leaving with boxes of chickens. Ninety percent of people left without even seeing a horse.*” (Mr. Kamil).

²⁹ The so-called exchanges (“burzy”) were purely shopping events, no longer covered by any cultural event; again with participation numbers amounting to tens of thousands of people. See *Naše cesta*, Slušovice: JZD AK Slušovice, 1989, 11 (43).

*AK Slušovice made this village and its surroundings a destination for so many tours and excursions, that the attendance figures may dare to compete with many historical and national sites."*³⁰

Apart from the aforementioned organised activities, discos were also very popular; they took place almost every Sunday and Saturday in the Derby Centre in the late 1980s.³¹ Slušovice discos were well-known, as proven by the memories of large numbers of taxis, providing transport to Slušovice for visitors from Zlín, the district administration town at the time, located 12 kilometres away.³² It was probably not just a coincidence that Slušovice discos took place in the periphery of the municipality. This enabled lower social control on part of the municipal authorities, and consequently it provided space for a different kind of social control based on different principles that were applied by the community of disco participants.

Newspapers do not give information about participants' impressions, but rather present the authorities' perspective, showing that discos were described as an essentially negative phenomenon. For example, the article *Nobody Minds* reports that "young people released their energy after the disco on the tables and chairs prepared for the horse races. Where did they leave their good manners?"³³ Both the name and the content of the article appeal to parents and the general public in the municipality, who were reportedly indifferent to this "vice". The 1987 article, *External Meeting of the District Commission for the Protection of Public Order*, illustrates that traditional social control in municipalities was not applicable at the discos; the article states that "critical remarks were directed at the organisational service and controls during the discos. This situation must be instantly rectified and must include the adoption of stricter financial penalties."³⁴

These events with recorded music represent a kind of popular culture that also comprises the collective elements of local culture. Discos demonstrated a loss of relationship toward authentic songs and dances, yet they constituted

³⁰ Ibidem, 1989, 11 (30).

³¹ The imposing Derby Centre located by the racecourse and the object inside – reminiscent of a barrel that gave the building its popular name – were built in 1982–1983 by the construction cooperative JZD Slušovice based on plans of the architect Šebestián Zelina, who allegedly found inspiration for this building in Austria. Interview with Mr. Pavel; "Šebestián Zelina", *Architecture Zlín* [online].

³² Interview with Mr. Martin.

³³ *Slušovický zpravodaj*, Slušovice: MNV Slušovice, 1987 (4, October).

³⁴ *Naše cesta*, 1987, 9 (15).

a community with its own order that required following the rules during musical events. This “degraded” type of entertainment with its loud music, aggressive lighting, and the presented music genres in particular focused only on a specifically modern popular culture – youth culture – contrary to “village parties” following liturgical traditions, that were open to more ages, yet were more limited locally. According to the sources, discos and parties mainly had in common the consumption of alcohol (Houda 2014: 200).

The attributes of urban culture are considered to be individualism and competitiveness of the participants, as stated above; discos, however, do not match this characteristic. On the other hand, this community depends on phenomena (music genres, recorded music) that originated in the urban lifestyle, and we cannot find any deeper message here.³⁵ Despite the authentic experience of dancing, discos are an illustration of a modern consumer lifestyle. In this sense, this hybrid culture is therefore not an alternative to traditional folk culture.

“Let’s Go On” from Slušovice

The last analysed attraction is the TV programme called *Let’s Go On*, broadcasted by the only state TV channel in 1988.³⁶ This contest was a follow-up to the programme *Two from One Town*, where employees of two state companies in one town competed together with singers.³⁷ This game show was one of the rare programmes broadcasted live; it had the same director and presenters, but its form changed so that it could be also applied in smaller towns, where two state companies were not located. The team of employees of the local company competed against the team called *Revue*, which consisted mainly of singers of the official culture. Broadcasting from Slušovice was unique, as it was the first time that a TV crew came to a village. Participating in the competition gave JZD Slušovice wide publicity, and the unusual programme choreography in the open space of the mountainous area in the Vizovice Highlands suggests a lot about the presentation of Slušovice. The repeating motifs of action and comments by

³⁵ The most significant meaning of discotheque hall in Slušovice and discotheque generally was an imitation of a luxurious Western lifestyle associated with drinking Coca-Cola and other foreign drinks, highlighting the hairstyle and wearing jeans.

³⁶ APF ČT, f. Telemagnetic and Digital AV Records (Jedeme dál Slušovice, 1988, director Viktor Polesný).

³⁷ SOKA Zlín, f. MNV Slušovice, no. incr. 22/07.

the script writer himself (*"most songs are written specifically to fit the theme"*) imply that the arrangement of the programme was not done randomly.³⁸

The programme was broadcasted from the area in front of Hotel Slušovice³⁹, in the recreational compound built by the collective farm.⁴⁰ The introduction of both competing and non-competing participants and of singers was combined with folk and country styles. All singers arrived in wagons pulled by horses, accompanied by the sound of folk songs about horses and a brass band, dressed in horse racing gear, sometimes with cowboy hats. By contrast, the local cooperative introduced themselves in racing cars, referring to the successful Agroteam JZD Slušovice⁴¹ and to the material growth that Slušovice had achieved through socialization of the countryside.

When looking at the professional profile of the local team, you do not have the impression of watching a village team, either. In fact, members of the Slušovice team are introduced as representatives of the "modern field of biotechnologies", as the multiple national champion and a participant in the Monte Carlo Rally, the operational director of Agro, an editor of the Agropublik company, a livestock specialist, and a secretary, which all generally indicate "non-rural" professions. Competitions are focused on different business areas of JZD Slušovice. Apart from the competing teams, Agroteam JZD Slušovice is also presented, trying to beat the record in changing car tyres. Other participants include a young jockey on a pony that again refers to the racing stable JZD Slušovice, and selected football players of TJ JZD Slušovice team, who take penalty kicks against players of Sparta Prague, which was the best football team in Czechoslovakia at the time. During the programme, music bands and folk troupes from the region are shown, however, these are not introduced by presenters.

The comments of the two presenters underline especially the material welfare of Slušovice. While showing the prize for the winner, the camera focuses on the prepared car. The presenter responds: *"Oh yeah, Slušovice, that prize*

³⁸ SOkA Zlín, f. MNV Slušovice, no. incr. 75/07, fol. 70.

³⁹ The construction of the hotel at the site called Compound of Health in Všemina – situated in the proximity of both the JZD and MNV Slušovice – started in 1984; the luxurious compound with tennis courts, a swimming pool, and massage rooms was completed two years later. See *Naše cesta*, 1984, 6 (41); Hurt (1985).

⁴⁰ *Naše cesta*, 1987, 9 (33); *Naše cesta*, 1988, 10 (45).

⁴¹ Leo Pavlík, Slušovice racing driver, was a five-time national champion. See "Legends of Domažlice", *Domažlice Daily Newspaper* [online].

is quite appropriate,”⁴² he alludes to the tremendous financial potential of the agricultural facility in Slušovice. When a pump is destroyed during a contest in inflating tyres, the presenter comments it as follows: “*We have a spare one, since we’re in Slušovice.*” A third example of stressing the modernization of Slušovice in the TV popular culture is offered during the penalties that are introduced with these words: “*Tonight, two major football teams are going to play each other, the local Slušovice team is up against the new league champion, Sparta Prague. [...] I believe it will not take long until these two teams meet in the final of the Czech Cup.*” Many people certainly believed that football players from Slušovice would move up to the first league, and thus score a triumph in this field as well.⁴³

Folk culture as a symbol of the traditional country is only covered in the programme in the symbolic welcome with bread and salt and in the Moravian folk costumes in which musicians of the invited brass band are dressed, as well as the female presenter during first minutes of the show. The folk motif appears again after the final results of the competition, again as folk songs with cimbalom music, with interwoven teams singing and dancing together, demonstrating a parody of a folk festival. The most visible instrument of folk music shown in the programme is a cimbalom, not by itself yet, only as the accompaniment of rock and country music.

Rural culture was represented more by the western country style than by traditional local folklore, which illustrates its transformation as a result of influences from abroad. The recurrent motif of horses and western clothes refers to this fact, but also does the country music repeatedly performed by a children’s folklore club, among others. This way, country style in the countryside partially filled the empty space left by traditional folk music (see Huakanes 2004: 108), which lost its importance in the 1950s by being linked to communist ideology (Houda 2014: 13–14, Karásek 1949). Country music in the programme also shows the decline of collective dances that were typical for folk culture. While the aforementioned interwoven dancing teams create the impression of a mocking imitation of a folk festivity, the only serious collective dancing is performed

⁴² At the end, the car brings in the real main prize – a silver cup for the winner, yet it has fulfilled its prestigious role.

⁴³ TJ JZD Slušovice played in the 6th national football league in the season 1978/1979, yet they started the season 1986/1987 up in the second national league. The image of Slušovice as a prosperous place was therefore established also through football as a means of popular culture. See *Naše cesta*, 1986, 8 (62).

by children, which shows a drop of traditional folk culture features to the world of children, and thus points to their degradation.

Nevertheless, thousands of spectators respond to the show composition with frequent rounds of applause and with laughter, i.e. through positive responses. Despite the fact that cameras occasionally captured some noise from the audience, it seems that most people had indeed come to listen to the popular music stars, as they sing their songs with them. This proves the success of this genre, which managed to appeal to the masses just as the state government imagined, and it also showed Slušovice as a municipality capable of handling crowds of people (Houda 2014: 53).⁴⁴

The modernised country is shown to the TV spectator with Slušovice serving as a perfect example, which is also suggested in a period newspaper by one of the performing singers.⁴⁵ Slušovice is introduced with its elements of modern architecture, modern agriculture, industry, infrastructure, as well as curiosities, such as a big boat on the Všemina dam and a discarded plane serving as a restaurant adjacent to the racecourse since 1982.⁴⁶ Slušovice thus became a typical example of a modernised village that fulfils the expectations of the regime about the socialist countryside, while simultaneously absorbing urban and even Western popular culture. Thus, it creates a specific kind of hybrid rural-urban and socialist-consumer popular culture.

Conclusion

The range of activities of the Slušovice agricultural facility was so extensive that it clearly set the pace of the municipality development. A four-lane road ending provisionally in the town centre suggests the alleged plans to rebuild the municipality and transform it to an exemplary villa town.⁴⁷ Yet none of this was completed, and many of the rebuilt parts are no longer in existence, either. This illustrates how the structures of the JZD and the local community were interconnected in the state socialist regime. After the collapse of collective farming, nothing else could integrate the inhabitants as much to work for a common

⁴⁴ *Melodie*, Praha: Orbis, 1976, 14 (3).

⁴⁵ "Slušovice was not chosen by accident for this show. Everybody is wondering whether their collective farmers are really able to do all that." SOkA Zlín, f. MNV Slušovice, no. incr. 75/07, fol. 70.

⁴⁶ SOkA Zlín, f. JZD AK Slušovice, Inventory, pp. 10.

⁴⁷ APF ČT, f. Telemagnetic and Digital AV Records (Příběh slušovického letadla, 1998, director Robert Sedláček); Interview with Mr. Martin.

goal. Slušovice, with its huge expansion and decline⁴⁸, clearly demonstrated the transformation of activities in the country, and thus the notion of the socialist village as one of many parts of the collective farm, whose function was to provide space for its operation.

Collective farms played one of the roles in collectivisation in the 1980s – as the main employer in the municipality, they served as an integration centre, and after destroying traditional social life in the country, they helped to establish a new collective ethos. Urban popular culture in Slušovice and its hybridisation with rural content then made space for active community life, and thus contributed to the success and the development of the local community.

The popular culture shown in the analysed cases reflects many trends. These are mainly the transformation of lifestyle (shopping, horse races, discos), the modernization of the country (housing estates, multi-lane roads), and the prosperous JZD (the constructor and operator of all of the venues where events were organised). Popular culture demonstrates the classic image of the Czech country (hospitality with bread and salt, folk costumes, horses), however, it does not constitute the full tradition.⁴⁹ Apart from the old country, it also represents a new country culture (the modern equipment of JZD, car racing, but also alcohol drinking by minors, as stated above).

Despite Slušovice being located in the country, rural culture is presented here only in a geographical and a community sense. We can see quite a small municipality with its population gathered around the local JZD (they visit and organise its events). By the numbers of people attending the events, the municipality is easily comparable to bigger towns; its material welfare is also significant with its curious buildings, of the opportunities for comfortable consumerism and for leisure activities – which are elements of an urban lifestyle. From the tradition-modernity perspective, the municipality experiences contemporary popular culture with a progressive future vision. We do not learn anything about a desire for tradition, respect towards ancestors or animal care; on the contrary, we can see the inspiration from the West in country music, admiring TV idols, horse race betting, and using animals in a TV show. The notion of social control is transforming as well, since the main role moves from the traditional authorities to the heads of cultural (discos) and working (JZD) groups. There is still

⁴⁸ From autumn 1989 to summer 1991, 101 joint-stock companies were established, acquiring the assets of the former collective farm. SOKA Zlín, f. JZD AK Slušovice, Inventory, pp. 10.

⁴⁹ The “Czech tradition of deliberate forgetting” was present not only in the period of Normalization, its features can also be found in the interwar period and after November 1989.

a need to remember the fact that the aforementioned characters of new culture did not appear in Slušovice under the influence of an ordinary urbanisation process, but as the result of local prosperity shaped by the presence of state ideological authorities.

Activities in the country no longer reflect regional historical elements; if the script writer of a contest programme wants the performance of folk troupes in the country, they have to come from more distant areas. Events do not embody any deeper meaning, as we might expect in traditional rural culture. This transformation is illustrated by the fact that organisers want a show for the audience; they wish to attract as many people as possible, from towns, as well, and these visitors mainly look for entertainment. The loss of the authentic relationship towards songs and collective dances, a mocking parody of a folk festivity, and the transition from the festivities of farmers to festivities for farmers all demonstrate that traditional folk culture has become an exotic past.

The aforementioned facts prove that popular culture did not only reflect the modernization of the country, it also played a direct constructive role in this process, since it offered the opportunity for the municipality and businesses to present themselves on a prestigious level. The censored media that provided access to culture in the country, carrying with it the possibility to partially manipulate the public, created the image of Slušovice as a municipality with an urban lifestyle and with the ability to manage large numbers of people; and by calling it the "Slušovice miracle", it brought fame to the municipality. The media also underlined the integration potential of the population participating in popular activities, which contributed to the success of Slušovice. Last, but not least, it offered the potential of economic profit, which intensified the urban consumer lifestyle and wealth of the villagers even more.

As Slušovice was included in the competition for smaller towns, it organised horse races with the highest attendance figures and one of the few disco nightclubs in the environs, and thus, popular culture gave the spectators and participants the impression that Slušovice was *de facto* a town, and it contributed to the assumption that later on, ironically in the period with no more mass events, when attractive buildings disappeared and trials with the heads of the former collective farm took place, Slušovice finally became a town *de iure*. Slušovice therefore offers an unusually striking example of the rural-urban culture mix.

Jiří Fialka is a Ph.D. student at the Institute of Economic and Social History at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, where he deals with the topic of collective farms in state socialism. He received his master's degree in the field of General Anthropology at the Faculty of Humanities of Charles University, focusing on the theory of nationalism through the analysis of travel writings, and in parallel, he studied Ethnology at the Faculty of Arts, concentrating on the theories of the memory and history of everyday life investigated through the combination of content and semiotic analysis. Currently, his main subject of study is the management of collective farms in the period of neo-Stalinism, especially by way of the example of the Slušovice collective farm.

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"POP-RURALITY": RURALITY INTERDISCOURSE IN THE VILLAGE OF THE YEAR COMPETITION¹

Hedvika Novotná – Dana Bittnerová – Martin Heřmanský

Abstract: *The Village of the Year in the Czech Republic is a national competition held since 1995, announced annually by the Ministry of Regional Development. Its aim is to promote the "restoration" and "development" of the Czech countryside through communal projects carried out by villagers themselves. Each year hundreds of Czech and Moravian villages enter the competition.*

Being focused on the countryside, the notion of rurality is one of the competition's defining features. But what kind of rurality is it? What are its constituents? How it is performed in the village competition projects? And what are the sources of the forms it takes?

Our analysis of media representations by village competitors (web sites, video presentations, etc.), alongside materials provided for competitors by the Ministry and other participating organizations (competition rules, official documents, etc.) and various media representations of the competition (television reports, etc.), reveals how the discourses involved operate and how they create a certain "ideal" village that is to be seen as a model to be followed.

We argue that the several discourses of rurality interwoven in the representations of villages within the competition (those of experts/academics, public/media, villagers, and policymakers) form an interdiscourse of "pop-rurality", which is a rurality deterritorialized, enriched with shared global (pop-cultural) elements, and re-territorialized again, to then float freely in public (especially virtual) space.

Keywords: *rural anthropology; social representations; imagined rurality; discourse analysis; Czech Republic*

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“The fact that I am here is not just the result of the work of the last years, but rather of a long-term process [...] What we have lived through in recent years – the emotions, the enthusiasm, the effort to get Pysk further – meant for us not only many beautiful shared experiences, but also resulted in this beautiful joint success: the title of ...” (mayor’s acceptance speech upon Pysk being awarded second place in the national round of the Village of the Year Competition, 2016)²

The Village of the Year Competition in the Czech Republic, held annually since 1995, is a joint venture of governmental, non-governmental, and EU institutions for rural community development. The competition is open to municipalities of up to 7,500 inhabitants which have the character of a rural settlement, regardless of whether they have official village status. The competition is held annually in two consecutive rounds, regional and national, the winner qualifying for a biennial pan-European competition. *“The aim of the competition is to try to encourage people living in the countryside to actively participate in the development of their own homes, to introduce variety and diversity in the implementation of village revitalization programmes, and to draw the attention of the general public to the importance of the countryside; the competition also aims to highlight activities of the municipality, their representatives and citizens, who strive not only to improve their home village, but also to develop local traditions and engage in the social life of the municipality.”*³ An expert committee adjudicates the competition directly in the locality. At the same time, the competition lives a virtual life on its dedicated web site, on the web sites of individual municipalities, and on many other sites of virtual space. Competition winners also appear on TV and radio shows.

All these aspects of the competition – the interconnectedness of its real and virtual life, its oscillation between global and local politics, the “expert” evaluation of what it is to be a “proper” countryside community, with an emphasis on global morality (Eriksen 2007: 246–8), and the actors’ practices and their representations – stand at the core of our interest in the Village of the Year Competition in the Czech Republic.

Another motivation for analysing the Village of the Year Competition stems from our ongoing ethnographic research into Slovak villages, begun in 2008.

² Obec Pysk. 2017, February 8. Vesnice roku 2016 Libereckého kraje [video file].

³ Vesnice roku v Programu obnovy venkova. © 2011. O Soutěži [online].

As socio-cultural anthropologists/ethnologists,⁴ our notion of a village at the beginning of this research was that of a specific place with specific actors, ideas, and practices (Hoggart 1990). However, upon gaining deeper knowledge of the dynamics of the field, this definition of countryside/rurality proved insufficient; it became increasingly clear that to adequately interpret our data it would be necessary to employ theories that see rural space in more complex ways. As Cloke (2006: 22) claims: “If at some time in the past, some ‘real’ form of rurality was responsible for cultural mappings of rurality, it may now be the case that cultural mappings precede and direct the recognition of rural space, presenting us with some kind of virtual rurality.”

The term *virtual rurality* is used by Cloke to comment on Halfacree’s (2006) three-fold model of rural space. Inspired by Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) theories of space, Halfacree conceptualizes the totality of rural space as comprised of three interlocking facets: *rural localities*, *formal representations of the rural*, and *everyday lives of the rural* (Halfacree 2006: 51). It is precisely the social representation of the countryside, which is produced and reproduced through the means of various cooperative discursive formations and practices (e.g. Cloke 1996; Mormont 1990; Bell 2006), that emerges as a significant component of the two other facets in our own ethnographic research. *Rural localities* are “inscribed through relatively distinctive spatial practices linked to either production or consumption,” and *everyday lives of the rural* incorporate “both individual and social elements in the negotiation and interpretation of rural life, and which are ‘inevitably incoherent and fractured’” (Halfacree 2006: 51, in Woods 2011: 10). According to Halfacree, the social representation of the countryside “refer[s] to the way the rural is framed within the (capitalist) production process; specifically, how the rural is commodified in exchange value terms” (Halfacree 2006: 51). Halfacree (2006: 50) thus associates social representations of the countryside primarily with those in power, singling out “capitalists, developers, planners, scientists and academics” as those who articulate formal conceptions of space. However, he also points out that “formal representations never completely overwhelm the experience of everyday life – although they may come close – and the extent to which formal representations and local spatial practices are unified is also uneven” (Halfacree 2006: 51–52).

⁴ For more about our ethnographic research and the problem of different perspectives of disciplines and paradigms, see Novotná, Heřmanský and Bittnerová (2010).

This social constructivist model therefore takes into account that “the rural has become deterritorialized, as the meaningful signs and symbols of rurality have become increasingly detached from their referent geographic spaces, and reterritorialized as more abstract significations begin to define the essential nature of rural space” (Clope 2006: 22). As such, Halfacree proposes interconnecting the material and imaginative conceptions of rural space through their intersections in particular practices. Our adoption of this perspective evolved into a need for a deeper analysis of the social representations of rurality, and this we carried out for the Village of the Year Competition. After all, as Cloke points out, “part of the task for rural studies, then, is to identify key practices with which to express both internal and external connections between the material and imaginative worlds of the rural” (Clope 2006: 24).

In this paper we aim to capture the dynamics of negotiations of the “politics of the rural” within the discursive practices associated with the Village of the Year Competition. A key reason for choosing this competition lies in those traces that it leaves behind. Inspired by Murdoch’s (2003) thoughts on the rural as composed of hybrid assemblages of human and non-human actants, we consider both the competition itself and the associated discursive formations and practices as actants involved in the construction of the social representation of rurality. Consideration of both these actants reveals that the social representation of the village is constructed through the negotiation of various discourses, in ways specific to each and elucidated in the course of the analysis that follows.

Our ongoing ethnographic research has led us to the firm belief that academic discourse substantially influences the negotiation of the social representation of rurality, and for this reason we declare from the outset the effect this has on our epistemological position. While internationally there are a number of studies building on the research of contemporary rural space based on social constructivism and post-structural epistemologies of hybrid rurality (see Cloke 2006; Woods 2011), contemporary Czech social sciences have only sporadically theorized the concept of rurality. However, as we suggested above, it is precisely this theoretical background that has informed our choice of the research topic under consideration in this paper.

Since the 1990s in the Czech Republic, literature in the field of ethnology on the subject of the contemporary village is sparse and draws on the long-standing tradition of critical realism or functionalism, understanding the village as a culturally specific space (Skalník 2003, Kandert 2004b, Válka a kol.

2007, Šalanda 2008, Válka 2011, Kłodnicki – Luković – Slavkovský – Stoličná – Válka 2012). The paradigms on which these studies are predicated largely precluded theoretical discussion of the concept of rurality. On the other hand, the conceptualization of the rural in these studies significantly influenced the discourse practices of negotiating the social representation of rurality, as will be shown below.

In contemporary Czech social anthropology the topic of the countryside is rather marginal. Key ethnographic studies of the contemporary village (Kandert 2004a, Haukanes 2004) have not crossed the boundaries of interpretative anthropology. A turning point can be seen in the synthesis of long-term ethnographic research undertaken by Horáková and Fialová (2014), which, through the analysis of the “Dutch village”, thematizes the construction of modern rurality in post-socialist space.

Similarly, in the field of sociology “the work of Czech authors on the countryside is dominated by descriptive approaches, sociocultural definitions appearing only rarely” (Pospěch et al. 2014: 29); for a more detailed account of rural sociology in the Czech Republic, see Majerová et al. (2003). In the context of the ethnography of the post-socialist village, the most inspiring studies have been those of Blažek (2004) and Librová (1994, 2003). Social-constructivist or hybrid concepts of the countryside can only be found in the work of Majerová (2003), in a study by Hruška (2014) that reflects the changes in the paradigmatic and conceptual background of rural sociology and social geography, and in an analysis by Pospěch et al. (2014) of changes in the Czech countryside after 1989. The last-named authors have also written on the Village of the Year Competition in the Czech Republic (Pospěch et al. 2014: 139–152; Pospěch, Spěšná – Staveník 2015). The aim of their study was to deconstruct the image of a “proper” village by analysing the visual self-presentation of competition participants. Drawing on the research tradition of social representations of rurality and discussions of the discourse of countryside and rurality, they theorize the issue on the basis of the rural idyll (e.g. Bell 2006). Pospěch’s study was explicitly drawn on in the study of Kumpulainen (2016), who analysed the same competition in Finland. Kumpulainen, however, points out that “the representation of a rural community is more complicated and multi-dimensional than the timeless and peaceful rural idyll. Rather, according to their [Pospěch’s] study, the image of a good village emphasizes the social and everyday life of local people. The social dimension is obviously an important element when studying representations of communities, and the more interesting question is how social

is represented and with which other elements it is connected” (Kumpulainen 2016: 57). The author further emphasizes “the direction the transformation of rural communities is taking, and how these changes are related to policy-level objectives” (Kumpulainen 2016: 56–57).

Our analysis of the Village of the Year Competition in the Czech Republic focuses primarily on the negotiation of the village’s social representation and the nature of its construction. However, we emphasize Cloke’s (2006: 22) commentary on virtual rurality as an image of a countryside that is not embedded in a specific locality, but rather “floats” in space (Hruška 2014: 590). Virtual rurality – similarly to the countryside *per se*, which cannot be conceived as a single space but rather as a multiplicity of social spaces (leading Murdoch and Pratt (1993) to the concept of post-rurality) – has to be understood in a multiplicity of social representations.

In our analysis we draw on the varied data sources that comprise the traces that the Village of the Year Competition leaves behind in virtual space, specifically those left by winners of the regional and national round of the competition between 2011 and 2017. These include the results of the competition published on the official website, where each of the winners has its own “profile”, consisting of a declaration of the reasons for the award and of representative photos; the self-presentations of the villages, which form part of the competition application process, and which the villages publish on their own websites and/or social networks; videos of the judging committee’s visits, serving as another, usually stylized form of the village’s self-presentation, as well as videos of the usually less formal celebrations after winning awards; and finally, items in the media covering the results of the competition.

For our data analysis we rely on Foucault-inspired discourse approaches (Foucault 2002), in the sense that discourses “represent highly regulated clusters with internal rules that are typical of a given discourse [...] Statements do not exist in isolation: there are structures of discourse that allow them to exist” (Schneiderová 2005: 24–25). While analysing discourse, our background in social anthropology makes us read even this type of data ethnographically, that is, as a multilayered structure, by which, according to Link (as quoted in Schneiderová 2005: 83–84), one “understands discourse in the Foucauldian sense as institutional knowledge, including ritualized forms of speech, ways of acting and power effects. What is important, however, is the concept of interdiscourse, which is defined as a set of all elements of discourse that are

common not just to one special discourse but which can be found in several different discourses. The point is that the discourse elements ‘wander’ and pervade a number of different discourses ...” As Farnell and Graham (1998: 411) point out, discourse analysis is useful in social anthropology because it enables “focusing on the dialogical processes through which persons, social institutions, and cultural knowledge are socially constructed through [spoken] discourse and other signifying acts/forms of expressive performance.” The reason for this is that all of these representations act; they are endowed with and actually employ an agency of their own. After all, as the mayor of Pysk stated in his acceptance speech already quoted in the epigraph to this paper: *“When I joined the office fourteen years ago, I watched with admiration those villages successful in the competition. At that time, it [to win the competition] was an unattainable goal [...] In our first year as competitors in 2005, we were awarded, apparently as an act of compassion, the Green Ribbon for caring for green spaces [...] At that time we did not yet know what needed to be done or how our village should look in order to have a chance of winning the highest awards...”* And before saying this he even invited on stage, among others, *“the person who watched the most videos from the Village of the Year Competition in order to gain inspiration.”*⁵

The Competition

The Village of the Year Competition was inaugurated in the Czech Republic in 1995 as part of a rural development programme organized by state authorities and several NGOs.⁶ The competition is divided into two rounds, regional and national, and the winner qualifies for a similar European biennial competition. In both rounds there is an award for the overall winner and awards for winners in particular categories regarded as important for the countryside.⁷ All winners

⁵ Obec Pysk. 2017, February 8. Vesnice roku 2016 Libereckého kraje [video file].

⁶ Organizers: Office of the President of the Republic, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Regional Development, Ministry of Agriculture, and their regional representations; Czech Landscape and Garden Society, Association of Library and Information Professionals of the Czech Republic, Association of Local Administrations of the Czech Republic, Association for Revitalization of Countryside, Union of Towns and Municipalities.

⁷ Awards: Gold Ribbon (overall winner), Blue Ribbon (for societal life), White Ribbon (for youth activities), Green Ribbon (for environmental care), Orange Ribbon (for cooperation with agricultural enterprise), Hope for Living Countryside Award (for associational and civic activities), Golden Brick of Rural Development Programme (for construction of exemplary buildings).

are given financial awards that substantially increase their municipal budgets. According to the competition web pages, where the rules of the competition are published, the key evaluation categories are: “*policy documents, societal life, civic activities, entrepreneurship, maintenance of construction resources and cultivation of the village image, civic amenities, utilities and energy saving, maintenance of public space, natural elements and greenery in and around the village, landscape management, planned projects and information technology of the municipality*”⁸.

Many of these evaluation categories are applied by the state with respect to citizens and settlements more widely, not just to villages and villagers. The state claims supervision of the administrative agenda, takes an interest in municipal infrastructures, and by means of the competition affirms the philosophy of sustainable development. Integration of the competition into the rural development programme on the one hand brings the Czech countryside within the scope of European Structural Funds, and on the other hand serves as a discursive critique of the “socialist state”, which devastated the Czech countryside (in terms of ecology, social structure, and culture). The competition promotes the reduction of harmful ecological impact and the maintenance of material and immaterial cultural heritage. It also advocates a civic society of active and responsible individuals, who direct their activities for the benefit of society as a whole, while also encouraging educational programmes for children and youth.

Among the competition rules, however, there are several that are specific to villages. In the first place, there is the ethos of locality and the relation of the individual to it. The village is seen as a place where a stable, non-migrating community is closed off from the surrounding world. Cooperation with other localities elsewhere does not feature among the evaluation categories; on the contrary, emphasis is given to internal cooperation and cohesiveness within the village. The village is posited as a place to call home, concentrating all that life has to offer and producing life’s meaning. Integral to the image of the village is local production, particularly agricultural, i.e. local food produce and hand-crafted goods along with their distribution (e.g. farmers markets).

The same ethos of locality underpins the accent placed on *local traditions*. Similarly distinctive is the requirement that the municipality has a *countryside character*. However, nowhere is it defined what is meant by “countryside

⁸ Vesnice roku v Programu obnovy venkova. © 2011. O Soutěži [online].

character”: it is simply assumed that everyone knows. This requirement is however an important one, exemplified by the fact that some small towns appealed to their countryside character as an argument to declare themselves a village for the duration of the competition.

Participation in the competition is voluntary. Every municipality that enrolls in the competition is assessed by a judging committee chaired by the mayor of the municipality that won the competition in the previous year. Municipalities are evaluated on the basis of *“the presentation of the municipality (which also consists of interviews with municipality representatives), the guided tour around the municipality [the committee visit is announced to the mayor in advance], and the supporting materials submitted by the municipality as part of its application for the competition.”*⁹

Even if some parts of the competition take place in the physical world (judging committee guided tours, ceremonial announcement of winners, formal and informal celebrations), all of them leave traces in the virtual space of the Internet. These traces are however endowed with their own agency, and thus the whole course of the competition (also) takes place in virtual space.¹⁰

The competition has its own web pages and Facebook profile. According to the competition rules, winners are obliged to post the status of “Village of the Year” on their web pages. Competitors post their presentations (originally intended for the judging committee) in virtual space, as well as recordings of judging committee guided tours, recordings of victory celebrations or discussions of why they failed, advice to other villages, etc. Successful villages are covered by news reports in public and even private mass media. Representatives of victorious villages participate in public debates on municipal self-governance at a local level. To put it differently, the Village of the Year Competition leaves both institutionalized and spontaneous traces in public space – traces that are a result of intentional selection aiming to represent, but also traces of individual invention and creativity. The competition thus creates a space for establishing knowledge that is used to define the exemplary contemporary village in the Czech Republic (i.e. in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia).

⁹ Vesnice roku v Programu obnovy venkova. © 2011. O Soutěži [online].

¹⁰ One could even argue that these traces are more important in creating the construct of rurality than the events they depict.

Strategies of Representation: How to Make a Village Look Rural

Villages enrolled in the Village of the Year Competition prepare a body of evidence with the aim of persuading the judging committee that the village is a “proper” rural one according to the competition criteria. This is carried out by two means (in addition to the written application documentation, which is not in virtual space, and therefore not included in our analysis): the creation of a presentation video and a guided tour through the village prepared for the judging committee (also recorded on video or by photographs). It is important to emphasize the fact that both of these are not representations of everyday village life but staged performances intended to create a particular impression. Of course, each of these representations uses a different language. The composite video attempts to cover the “positive” picture of the village in a relatively balanced way, while the interactive live performance focuses on dramatic moments aimed at exciting the interest of the judging committee. By analysing both these types of representation for villages that have been successful in the competition, we shall observe how they relate to the discourse of rurality and, therefore, how they at the same time (re)create this rural discourse. Put briefly, the representational strategies that villages usually use are based on materialized and performed traditions (both ethnocultural and/or invented) on the one hand, and on social cohesion on the other. Naturally both of these strategies are intertwined, with either of them being able to take the lead in different situations. Rather than responding to any of the above-mentioned competition criteria, we believe that both these strategies rest primarily on the implicit notion of *countryside character*, i.e. the discursive formations/constructs of rurality, which are at the same time (re)created precisely by these representations.

The Past, Roots, and Continuity: Materialized and Performed Tradition

Josef Kandert (1998: 41; 2004a: 225), based on his ethnographic research on the villages of South Bohemia, distinguishes between two types of tradition. The first is tradition in the sense of the transgenerational transmission of cultural elements or phenomena that can be identified in the “living experience” of villagers; this tradition is not referred to as “traditional” from an emic perspective, but rather perceived as “this is how it has always been done.” The second is tradition in the sense of phenomena and events codified by the world outside of the village per se. However, Kandert emphasizes that not all

practices that are maintained in the locality for a long time need be considered traditional from an emic point of view. According to the discursive concept of rurality and its social representations, tradition is to be understood as a construct in the broadest sense of the word, i.e. as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm 1983: 1). An accent placed on the continuity of the past or, in Hobsbawmian terms, on the illusion of the continuity of the past, appears to have been a key element in the social representations of municipalities that were successful in the competition. The past in this context refers primarily to the “traditional” Czech/Slovak village as a stable cultural system (Slavkovský 2009: 14), a construct of a predictable, clearly structured, safe world (Danglová 2005: 54), which is part of our cultural heritage. In this world “a regulative normativity existed, based on cultural patterns [that] were regarded as the ideal model for life activities of individuals and even whole generations in the respective culture [and at the same time] constituted a criterion for their values petrified by tradition” (Slavkovský 2009: 114). The construction of this system of values and norms can be seen for example in the work of the Czech sociologist Inocenc Arnošt Bláha, who created a model of the ideal type of peasant (in comparison with workers), to whom he attributed “earthiness”. “Earthiness” is then related to two triads: soil–nature–God and lineage–custom–tradition (Bláha 1925, in Lošťák – Hudečková 1995). Another important sociologist of the countryside, Karel Galla (1939), attributed to the Czech peasant “patriotism, diligence, frugality, modesty, honesty, ancestral heritage, land ownership” (Galla 1939). The prototype of the peasant forms a basis for the construct of rurality, which despite all the geopolitical upheavals is still produced and reproduced to this day. Paradoxically, as we shall see, the only feature that has disappeared from this discursive formation/construct of rurality, designated by Danglová (2001) explicitly as a romanticized myth, is that of the “peasant” as a cultivator of the land, i.e. as a farmer. However, the discourse of “depersonalized” or “peasantless” rurality is still (re)produced and (re)constructed through relating to the past on three distinct levels. We shall describe the operation of these levels in the social representations of municipalities in the Village of the Year Competition, which consist of implicit elements of rurality, explicitly expressed references to local history, often in relation to the national discourse, and also the past constructed through various performances.

The most common form of implicit rurality is the *landscape*, be it the landscape in which the village is located or the landscape of the village itself. Video presentations of individual municipalities generally begin with a panoramic view of the village set amid woods, meadows and fields, interwoven with shots of natural scenery, such as woodland edges, water features, views through trees, and close-ups of plants and animals. Landscape is thereby represented by “unspoiled” *nature*: a butterfly on a daisy, a frog under a burdock, the bewitching gaze of a roe deer, a forest spring, a blooming orchard. However, those landscapes that lack poetry, e.g. fields of corn or rapeseed, are deemed inappropriate. “*Nature is beautiful here*,” says the narrator of the village Kašava’s video presentation¹¹. All this is to suggest that proper rural landscape consists in unspoiled nature, where the presence of humans can only be inferred from shots of the village itself. Somewhat paradoxically, this unspoiled nature is in fact a cultural, i.e. cultivated, landscape. Daisies are found on regularly mowed meadows and frogs near springs maintained by human agency, roe deer live in the preserves of gamekeepers, and orchards without the care of an orchard keeper run wild. *Protection of the landscape* and *nature as heritage* that has been passed on to us are thus almost always present in the idea of rurality, at least implicitly. The image of a village set in beautiful natural surroundings also supports the rhetoric of nationalist ideology, for which love of the landscape is one of the attributes of national identity (Hroch 2004). This image also became part of local identity (Roubal 2003), in which picturesque villages under the mountains are regarded as essentially synonymous with home. On the other hand, cultivated fields fit neither the discourse of *conservation*, nor the discourse of *heritage*.

A similar situation obtains for the landscape of the village, i.e. its residential and architectural character. Only the “old”, “original”, “unspoiled” cottages and farmhouses correspond to the local regional character, and these must be “well-tended”,¹² alongside churches, chapels, and Ways of the Cross. The image of the village landscape closely resembles pictures by Josef Lada,¹³ only without any people. It is as if the landscape of the village, both in its residential areas and surroundings, became a kind of open-air museum in which to take

¹¹ Obec Kašava. 2015, August 4. Obec Kašava [video file].

¹² Kovář, Milan. 2014, May 21. Prezentace obce Hošťálková [video file].

¹³ Dostál, Marek. 2014, September 4. Vesnice roku Olomouckého kraje 2014 Nová Hradečná [video file].

edifying walks, improve fitness, and gain aesthetic experiences. However, such a non-problematic image of the village as an integral part of landscape and nature is only manifested in video presentations to a marginal extent. This is curious because rural society/culture grew in close connection with nature: the cycles of nature determined the rhythm of villagers' lives, with even the church calendar based upon them. In this conception, nature was not a subtle commodity, but a strong opponent in the peasant struggle for subsistence/bread. Nature was both a partner and an enemy, which had to be repeatedly bound (Gurevič 1978; Sokol 2004: 40–42). While the landscape of the village itself and that of its surroundings are both inevitably present in the video presentations submitted to the competition, they almost completely disappear from the performances prepared for the judging committee, as if a “picturesque village in the middle of virgin nature” was somehow taken for granted to the extent that there is no need to give it further emphasis.

From implicit elements of rurality we now proceed to the second mode of relating to the past in the Village of the Year Competition that we highlighted above, namely the explicit reference to local history. Obligatory is to give the date of the foundation of the village or the first written record of its existence. Then various mementos of the village's past usually follow, materialized in historical photographs or postcards that represent the character of the village at the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. The architecture and social life of the village in the past is generally shown in this manner (e.g. Kašava). This visual evidence of the village's *continuity* is usually documentary in nature, whether it be a sequence of pictures in the video presentation or on a community web site, or an exhibition of historical photographs organized for the occasion of the judging committee guided tour. This evidence of the past is often accompanied by commentary on the development of the socio-demographic composition of the population or the development of life in the community. Just as visual evidence does not reach much further back than the late 19th century, the same holds for this commentary.¹⁴ Here, however, some of the contestants begin to tread on thin ice. The 20th century is a troubled period in Czech history, in many places seeing a partial or complete change in the country's population, especially during the Second World War. It began with the transfer of ethnic Czechs from the Sudetenland, was followed by the extermination of Czech Jewish and Romani minorities, and ended with the expulsion of most of the German-speaking

¹⁴ Obec Kašava. 2015, August 4. Obec Kašava [video file].

population from Czech territory. These shifts in population were accompanied by severe disruptions to the sociocultural system of villages. The rise of the Communist regime directly influenced the countryside through collectivization, which from 1949 led to the implementation of a centrally planned economy, involving the expropriation of or loss of property rights to farm assets and disincentives to private enterprise or its prohibition. These developments also affected the non-agricultural population of villages (see e.g. Blažek – Kubálek 2008). However, references to these historical milestones are missing from village presentations. Such references would disrupt the *continuity* indispensably bound to rural discourse and jeopardize connections to roots: the interruption of genealogies, both imaginary and real, would lead to the absence of denizen families, casting doubt on the nature of the village as a space of dependable and close social relationships (Kandert 2004a). But at the same time, such a representation of an unproblematic national past is part of Czech national discourse. The “ancestors” left us with a heritage and we are to preserve and develop it; in the end it does not matter who those ancestors were precisely, what matters is the *heritage* that remains. This accent of national discourse is emphasized by references to an acceptable past, e.g. commemorative plaques referring to major historical events (victims of both world wars) or places where famous people stayed, worked, or lived. However, these monuments represent cultural memory, i.e. memory socially codified and embodied in material form (Assmann 2001: 50) and even these codified commemorations of the past rarely appear in the video presentations of villages. What is missing as a rule in these representations is any connection to the second half of the 20th century, the period of Communist Party rule.

What remains is a hazy picture of the past framed by the founding of the village in the distant past and frequently unspecified pictures “from the past of the village” at the end of the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century. How is it possible then to manifest *continuity*, a quality that appears to be significant in the discourse of rurality? This brings us to the third mode of relating to the past, namely by its performance. While implicit or explicit material references to the past are primarily present in pre-recorded videos “about the village”, the construction of the past through performance is present to almost the same extent in both video presentations and recordings of guided tours given to the judging committee. It is therefore important to analyse the strategies behind the construction of (the illusion) of the past together with the strategy of social cohesion.

Jan Assmann (2001: 46–56), in relation to the construction of the past, distinguishes between two types of memory. The first, called cultural memory, is stable, codified by social acceptance, fixed and usually embodied in the form of corpora of texts, images, and rituals typical of a given period, i.e. memory objectified and institutionalized. The vast majority of the above-mentioned representations of the past draw on such cultural memory, or at least implicitly refer to it. The second type of memory Assmann identifies is communicative memory, describing how the past is transmitted on an everyday basis, by direct or closely mediated experience. While Assmann focuses his analysis primarily on speech and scripture, Paul Connerton (1989) concentrates on performative forms of relating to the past. Connerton stresses the relation of memory and body and establishes the concept of habitual memory, which is constructed and transmitted through various commemorative rituals and corporeal practices. Zandlová (2015: 226–240), using the concept of habitual memory in her analysis of the ethno-revitalization movement of the Bulgarian Aromanians, refers directly to “folklorism as a manifestation of memory sedated in bodily/corporeal positions, activities, techniques, movements and gestures” (2015: 303). Based on the analysis of our data, however, it seems that this “embodied memory” is not necessarily just seen in the construction of ethnocultural traditions (whether we call it folklore or folklorism), although it is here where it is most obvious. The key category in this context is *continuity*, or more precisely *roots*. Rather sporadic, but certainly employed, are strategies of a performative construction of the “ancient” past, i.e. a past which is so distant that it can be disconnected from any grounding in historical time or rural discourse. An example is the invention of “Celtic” rituals in the South Bohemian village Holašovice,¹⁵ in which a villager built a complex of megalithic stone circles (called “cromlechs”, inspired by Stonehenge) on a meadow near the village¹⁶ where Celtic fire festivals are celebrated each year.¹⁷ Holašovice, however, can and does relate to *roots*, *continuity* and *heritage* in many other ways (the village was added in 1998 to the UNESCO World Heritage List for its “village character”, exemplifying rural Baroque style). This performed past in the form of an invented tradition is therefore rather a way of subverting the aura of an “open-air museum”, albeit through the construction of an alternative “open-air museum” displaced in

¹⁵ While this data exceed the time span of our research sample, we decided to include these to better exemplify this kind of representation.

¹⁶ Jihobrik, © 2010–2017. O Holašovickém Stonehenge [online].

¹⁷ Obec Holašovice. © 2017. Slavnosti slunovratu a keltská ohňová noc [online].

both time and place (notwithstanding that Celtic settlements in the territory of the Czech Republic have been documented). In contrast to Holašovice, the North Bohemian village of Prysk, affected by an almost total displacement after the Second World War, its population now composed almost exclusively of the newly settled and cottage owners, can only with great difficulty follow up the discourse of *roots* and *continuity*. Yet they also choose the “distant past”, ungrounded in time, or at most partially so, to perform their relationship to *roots* and *continuity*, putting emphasis on achieving *groundedness in local space*. Drawing inspiration from historical postcards from the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century, the villagers decided to chop down the trees on the hill above the village so that the rock underneath was exposed and placed at its peak an inflatable castle, thereby restoring a semblance of its past appearance.¹⁸ The whole performance, from deforestation to inflation of the castle, was held as a communal event attended by the entire village. The case of the stone circles of Holašovice was initially an individual affair, tenuously related to the locality and its history, which, through its adoption by the village and performance of “rituals” on a regular basis, became a habitual memory in the sense of Connerton. The case of the castle of Prysk was a one-time event, which was, however, widely shared by the villagers (according to the available data) and was significantly grounded both locally and historically (at least in part). While Holašovice attempted to create a habitual memory by an invented tradition, Prysk sought rather to establish a place from a non-place (Augé 2010) or even to construct a site of memory (Nora 2010). Such a performed past, drawing on distant history and not adhering to rural discourse, is however more the exception than the rule in village representations. More frequent is the performance of a past that is also in a sense timeless, but that does belong to the repertoire of rural discourse. This repertoire consists of ethnocultural traditions that manifest continuity (imagined or real) based on local folk art and folklore. In their video presentations, many contestants show folk architecture, folk costumes, annual customs, and traditional technologies or products, all to the background accompaniment of folk songs. Folklore demonstrations are also seen as a suitable component of the guided tour given to the judging committee, as for example in the series of examples of local folklore put together by the village of Hošťálková:

¹⁸ R TIMCZ. 2017, July 22. Prysk (2014) [video file]; R TIMCZ. 2014, June 19. Hrad Prysk 2014 [video file].

It started with folk music, during which local slivovitz and pies were served. After this came the mayor's speech, a ride on a horse-drawn wagon, a goat-milking demonstration, a meeting with the beekeeper, who offered mead to the committee, a visit to a log house (roubenka), where a soup from the local cuisine (kyselica) was served, and where there was an exhibition of traditional hand-crafted products and food. The visit ended with a folklore performance by the children's ensemble. Rurality actually evoked sentiments of emotion, joy and pride. This guided tour for the evaluation committee was a well-worked out theatrical performance, where only the mayor (as its director) and the representatives (as his support team) were not in rural “mode” (were not wearing folk costumes, but formal dress).¹⁹

This and similar performances indicate that the construct of rurality based on ethnocultural traditions devised in the nineteenth century and its manifestation are regarded as important by villages and their representatives. Such a “rurality” in the form of folklore confirms that the village has not lost its substance, and by its continuous maintenance the village retains its roots. Folklore serves as a metaphor of uninterrupted continuity. Moreover, folklore is perceived as locally specific while at the same time being part of national discourse. However, this is not an inherent quality of folklore but rather the result of political, scientific and artistic activity during the ethno-emancipation of the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. The aim of these endeavours was not only to find evidence of authentic Czech culture and thus prove the continuity of the Czech nation (Moravcová 2008), but also to include the villager, until that time on the margins, in the society of the nation (Pavlicová – Uhlíková 2011). The inclusion of the villager in Czech society was achieved by constructing an image of the countryside as a place of pure Czechness, in which sprung the creativity of the Czech people and over which reigned high moral values. The glorification of the village and villagers was established by romanticizing folklore. Academic discourse, alongside political and public discourse, contributed to the fact that various manifestations of folklore became part of an invented tradition (Hobsbawm 1983). Because of this, even though it might not be evident at first sight, the performance of folklore is more than just a manifestation of local character: it counts as a proof of a healthy and self-confident local society that has not lost connection to its own *roots* and that has retained its authenticity. Village presentations may further legitimize authenticity by the support of

¹⁹ Kovář, Milan. 2014, May 21. Prezentace obce Hošťálková [video file].

a contributions by experts, such as the following words spoken to the judging committee by an ethnographer who had conducted long-term research on folk culture in the village of Kašava: *“Folklore ensembles started from scratch [in the 1960s] because men from here were leaving for Ostrava long before people in Haná and Slovácko started to take off their folklore costumes and to abandon their customs [...] the representatives show common sense [...] because they have set themselves the sensible goal of making Kašava not only a place of residence for its inhabitants, but also a home, where they can find the roots of their identity.”*²⁰

Even though rural “tradition” has not been continuously preserved in most villages of the Czech Republic, the absence of such a tradition is perceived by villages themselves as a serious disadvantage. Folklore (or folklorism) symbolizes a healthy and authentic society even for municipalities where the continuity of the tradition has been interrupted.²¹ This is accounts for why folklore or revived or newly created ethnocultural traditions are included in village presentations (Toncrová – Uhlíková 2014). For example, Nová Hradečná, a village near the German border, presented a series of rituals that do not originate from the locality, but which draw inspiration from public discourse. As part of their presentation they staged rituals such as the Three Kings, a Masquerade Ball, Burning of the Witches²², Halloween, and St. Nicholas Day, whose form was based on a shared stereotype produced by the media.²³ Municipalities that do not include folklore (ethnocultural traditions) in their presentations (because they do not possess any), comment on this shortcoming, as does for example the mayor of the village of Krásná: *“Of course, it will be difficult to compete with those beautiful Moravian villages. But we will see. Our community is strong.”*²⁴

The manifestation of religiosity, or more precisely Christianity, can also be interpreted as an expression of roots and cultural heritage. Shots of sacred buildings – churches, chapels, and Ways of the Cross – are most often used to

²⁰ Obec Kašava. 2016, September 21. Krajské kolo soutěže Vesnice roku 2016 v Kašavě [video file].

²¹ In many villages folklore was lost due to the selective intergenerational transmission of culture (since the 19th century) or due to population changes (especially after 1945, which saw displacement, migration to cities, and the arrival of seasonal cottage-goers).

²² The Witches (*Čarodějnice*), or Burning of the Witches (*Pálení čarodějnic*), is a ritual of the traditional annual cycle, held on Walpurgis Night (30th April). It consists primarily of burning bonfires to prevent the influence of evil forces, which, according to folk belief, are in effect on that night.

²³ For example, Obec Nová Hradečná. 2014, September 11. Celostátní kolo soutěže Vesnice roku 2014-02 [online].

²⁴ Toman, Petr. 2015, August 10. Krásná je krásná. Porotci zvolili vesnici roku 2015. *Idnes.cz* [online].

illustrate this. However, in relation to habitual memory, it is the commemorative ceremony itself, the church service, which is the most significant. Municipalities with a strong religious practice use footage of worship and the presence of the clergy during the guided tour of the judging committee in order to manifest the stable normative value system with which religion is associated. Local clergymen are also presented as representatives of local society. Both Wallachian municipalities (Kateřinice and Kašava), winners of the competition in 2014 and 2016, respectively, used faith and the local priest as one of the central features of their representations. The connection between faith, the past, and the image of the world order was explicitly formulated by the ethnographer already quoted above during the judging committee guided tour of Kašava: *“There have been three pillars since the days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire [and] if these three columns are in concordance, then [everything] works well. These are the village, the school, and the presbytery.”*²⁵

The notion of continuity does not only involve looking to the past. Presentations often include children, who themselves evoke the future of the village and who will continue as successors in village leisure activities, seen for example in the child apprentice firefighters of many villages (eg. Krásná)²⁶ and in the young musicians of Kašava.²⁷

Social Cohesion: Communality and Originality

Habitual memory, as well as relating to the distant past, to timeless past, or to a past codified as properly rural (manifested in folklore and perhaps also religion), also informs the construction of local identity. We must therefore also consider other forms of performance that take place in the context of the competition by which this habitual memory is formed. An indispensable part of the social representations of municipalities are performances, which within the construct of rurality designated as the “countryside character” emphasize the aspect of social cohesion. Social cohesion is created and consolidated through relationships, feelings of proximity, frequency of interaction, common activity and trust, all of which are necessary for the sharing of group norms and values (Novotná 2010: 33–34). This corresponds with the image of the traditional village community, built on the principle of informal social control and neighbourly

²⁵ Obec Kašava. 2016, September 21. Krajské kolo soutěže Vesnice roku 2016 v Kašavě [video file].

²⁶ Růžička, Jiří. 2015, September 6. MTJ VIDEO 140 Celostátní komise v Krásné [video file].

²⁷ Obec Kašava. 2016, September 21. Krajské kolo soutěže Vesnice roku 2016 v Kašavě [video file].

assistance, which ensures the moral and existential dependence of its members. The rituals performed by local communities then reaffirm shared values and reinforce the notion of belonging (Durkheim 2002).

According to expert discourse, villagers see and present themselves as a distinctive and autonomous group (Kandert 1998: 37). They are presented as a group that, despite the various interests of their members, demonstrates its unity vis-à-vis foreigners and as a result are not seen to have any disputes (Pospíšil 1997). They see their village as local patriots (Kandert 2004a: 46, Kandert 2004b: 288). This is also shown in village presentations emphasizing the local boundedness of their community. Everything happens within the compass of the village boundaries and the circle of locals, into which seasonal cottage-goers are only admitted if they substantially contribute to the social life of the village (Prysk²⁸). Presentations of successful villages emphasize that everyone knows each other, knows everything about each other, and participates in every communal activity. The mayor always takes the role of guide to the judging committee, while other villagers take minor roles as extras manifesting a cohesive mass. The mayor often acts not only as an expert in the life of his/her village, but also as a person who has the broad support and absolute trust of the villagers. Sometimes the villagers even joke about it, as in Kašava, where as part of the welcome show it was said in jest to the committee *“And if you do not like something, remember: the mayor is always right.”*²⁹ Putnam even claims that such paternalism is important in maintaining social cohesion (Keller 2009: 65). Another aspect in which the boundedness of the village along with its autonomy is manifested is the role played by the village school or kindergarten. The school not only educates the young generation of villagers but also participates in local events, as well as participating in development projects. The image of an autonomous and functioning bounded local community may further be exhibited by the enumeration of successfully implemented projects; the image of cohesion is strengthened by deliberately omitting from such enumerations the names of individuals who contributed to the successful implementation of projects, which are always presented as an achievement of the village as a whole.

The manifestation of the Romantic myth of a cohesive and socially and economically isolated rural community that possesses a distinctive culture

²⁸ Vesnice roku v Programu obnovy venkova. © 2011. Prysk – 2. místo v soutěži Vesnice roku 2016 [online].

²⁹ Obec Kašava. 2016, September 21. Krajské kolo soutěže Vesnice roku 2016 v Kašavě [video file].

(Dangřlová 2001), as described in ethnological literature (see Válka 2011), is realized both by referring to continuity and by demonstrating forms of cooperation common in contemporary society in general. Because many aspects of social cohesion from the past have either been weakened or have vanished (e.g. neighbourly assistance, informal social control, institutionalized affiliation to a church, a lord or common workplace), there has been an increasing need for activities that give alternative ways to integrate people that have diverse livelihoods, economic opportunities and knowledge, and to bridge the parallel membership of villagers in many other social groups. Putnam (in Keller 2009: 64) highlights the importance of the various voluntary organizations based on people's own initiatives for building cohesion in contemporary society. Those organizations form the basis for “the virtue of the community embedded in interpersonal relationships” (Putnam in Keller 2009: 64). It enables people to create “informal contacts between those who feel a certain social, professional, expert or interest-related affinity” (Keller 2009: 67). Social organizations thus acquire not only social but ultimately political importance (Keller 2009: 64).

Therefore it is not surprising that social cohesion is also represented in an array of activities organized by village associations. Although their repertoire varies according to locality, associations unequivocally manifest the involvement of villagers in the social and cultural life of the village. An abundance of organized leisure activities also manifests the notion of a high quality of life in the village. Many associations are presented in direct connection to the continuity of local society. These need not just be folklore ensembles or associations concerned with traditional folk culture referring to a local past: there are also firefighters (showing both contemporary and historical machinery and uniforms), gamekeepers, amateur actors, football players, scouts, and the gymnastics organization Sokol for all ages. The village also represents itself with leisure activities that draw on the repertoires of contemporary state-nationalist and global discourse – sports and dance clubs (cycling, floorball, motocross, skiing, aerobics, Zumba), musical ensembles (brass bands, bell-ringers, contemporary folk bands), civic associations focused on the organization of social life (Krásenské Buchty³⁰, Association of Supporters of Kateřinice³¹). In addition to associations, presentations also often include “flagship” factories and

³⁰ Růžička, Jiří. 2015, September 6. MTJ VIDEO 140 Celostátní komise v Krásné [video file].

³¹ solano620. 2014, September 8. Presentace obce – Kateřinice 2014 celostátní [video file].

production companies, even if what they produce does not have any traditional pedigree. For example, Kateřinice repeatedly presented themselves by their production of hockey pucks,³² drawing on the fact that hockey is considered the Czech national game, through which the national identity is negotiated. Even individuals successful in both local and national sports competitions have their place among the presented activities of the village. For example, Kašava (2016) mentions the outstanding performances of a local junior athlete.³³ During a judging committee guided tour the presentation of villagers' activities usually takes the form of a fair or exhibition panels are used. Each activity is assigned a stand or a panel, and the judges and the audience, respectively, have the opportunity to see the repertoire of activities of each association in one place. However, organized leisure activities are not only presented in such a static form, even if this form is to some degree compulsory. An important role is played by performances, which usually take a collective form in order to express the team spirit of the villagers, and in which villages strive for originality and distinctiveness in order to gain a competitive edge over other villages. Commenting on the guided tour put on for the judging committee, the mayor of Jeseník nad Odrou said: *"They were pleasantly surprised by the overall concept of the presentation [...] that we did not walk them around the village [...] but symbolically moved parts of the locality into the sports complex. They really acknowledged that [...], since they saw it for the first time."*³⁴ However, as Bauman points out (1995: 20), the idea of independent, individual, and autonomous creation is illusory, consisting rather in a selection of a plethora of "prefabricated" elements – it is this selection that makes up the supposed authenticity and originality. At the same time, it is necessary to choose "what glitters the most, what attracts the gaze, what is pleasant to look at..." (Bauman 1995: 45, translated by the authors). Accordingly, villagers have a propensity for ostentatious performances; the vainest villages are also the most successful (see Girard 1998).

In their "hunt for a bit of sparkle" villages put on musical, dramatic, or sports performances that are generally comprehensible, shared, and accepted. Such performances either showcase the activities of local associations, and sometimes of the whole community, or are specially put together for the

³² solano620. 2014. May 14. Prezentace obce Kateřinice [video file].

³³ Obec Kašava. 2015, August 4. Obec Kašava [video file].

³⁴ Jeseník nad Odrou. 2013, September 5. Celostátní komise vesnice roku 2013 [video file].

competition with the aim of creating an atmosphere of cohesion and displaying common social activity. Examples of the former (often drawing on invented traditions) include fire-fighting sports³⁵ (Sebranice³⁶), majorettes (Lkáň³⁷), extracts from theatre plays (Úsilné³⁸), local legends (Úsilné³⁹), Burning of the Witches⁴⁰ (Nová Hradečná⁴¹, Kolečov⁴²), Christian processions (Sebranice⁴³), musical productions of folklore ensembles or bands playing folk, bluegrass, or brass music. Some villages even created their own anthems (e.g. Kateřinice 2014⁴⁴). The latter type of performance often makes use of the media, particularly of present-day pop-culture, such as sketches inspired by film and television about villages and the countryside. For example, footage of judging committee guided tours of Kateřinice⁴⁵ and Hošťálková⁴⁶ in 2014 shows villagers dressed as characters from the film *Babovřesky* by Zdeněk Troška.⁴⁷ However, many scenes transcend the theme of the village and the region and refer to various pop-cultural motifs that do not relate to villages at all. In *Rádlo*, a judging committee was guided by characters from the popular Czech animated TV series, *Mach a Šebestová*.⁴⁸ Another such motif is retro, used, for example, in Kašava, where video footage of a guided tour for the judging committee shows a youth Spartakiad event accompanied by the hit “Poupata” performed by Michal David,

³⁵ Czech: *požární sport*. All Czech municipalities must by law have a volunteer fire department, and local competitions testing fire-fighting skills have taken place since 1967, in this influenced by the fire-fighting sports that began taking place in the Soviet Union in 1937. The competitions, however, retain their popularity to this day.

³⁶ Sebranice u Litomyšle – Official video kanál. 2016, November 9. Sebranice | Oficiální kanál – Návštěva celostátní komise Vesnice roku 2016 | 31. 8. 2016 [video file].

³⁷ archiv old. 2013, June 12. vesnice roku 2013 [video file].

³⁸ FaktorTeam. 2014, October 30. Úsilné – Vesnice roku – komise ČR 2014 [video file].

³⁹ In Úsilné (see note 38 above) the judges were guided around the village by a monk character of local legend.

⁴⁰ See note 21 above.

⁴¹ Obec Nová Hradečná. 2014, September 10. Celostátní kolo soutěže Vesnice roku 2014-01 [online].

⁴² Ďuran, Pavel. 2014, June 20. KOLEŠOV VESNICE ROKU [video file].

⁴³ Sebranice (see note 36 above) organized a Christian procession on the day of the judging committee guided tour, and the large crowd that attended effectively demonstrated the social cohesion of the village.

⁴⁴ solano620. 2014, September 8. Prezentace obce – Kateřinice 2014 celostátní [video file].

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ Krcňák, Jiří. 2014, September 23. Hošťálková Oranžová stuha 2014 [video file].

⁴⁷ A slapstick comedy caricaturing the Czech countryside, which was the most popular Czech film of 2013.

⁴⁸ Čiháková, Zuzana. 2014, December 20. *Rádlo* vesnice roku 2014 [video file].

pop star of the normalization period.⁴⁹ Similarly, in Úsilné a villager appeared dressed in the uniform of the Czech Communist police.⁵⁰ In the field of music villages do not hesitate to draw on global discourse. Video presentations of several municipalities have American country as background music. Videos from Kateřinice feature the local ensemble “Good News Bells” (*Zvonky dobré zprávy*) playing not just the anthem of the Czech Republic but also the anthem of the European Union.⁵¹

But global inspiration is not just limited to music. In Kašava, reference was made to the migration crisis of the time⁵² and Krásná performed a sketch featuring pirates inspired by the film series *Pirates of the Caribbean*,⁵³ while men from Dolní Újezd wearing kilts performed their take on Scottish “traditional” dancing.⁵⁴ The most transparent example of cultural syncretism can be seen in the video “Dolní Újezd žije!”⁵⁵ created for the competition in 2013, in which a story is created from a series of sketches referencing several motifs, both pop-cultural and belonging to invented traditions.⁵⁶

Both music and drama performances oscillate between ritual and play (or carnival). Both of these forms of social interaction offer elements by which social cohesion is established: sharing, common goals, common experiences, and a sense of specificity based on deliberate isolation from others (see McKenna 1994). Ritual and play serve different functions, however, even if both refer to shared norms and values. It is not just a case of ritual being bound exclusively to local discourse while play draws from the media or global discourse. Rituals confirm and consolidate, and eventually also redefine and negotiate the values

⁴⁹ Obec Kašava. 2016, September 21. Krajské kolo soutěže Vesnice roku 2016 v Kašavě [video file].

⁵⁰ FaktorTeam. 2014, October 30. Úsilné – Vesnice roku – komise ČR 2014 [video file].

⁵¹ solano620. 2014, September 8. Prezentace obce – Kateřinice 2014 celostátní [video file].

⁵² Obec Kašava. 2016, September 21. Krajské kolo soutěže Vesnice roku 2016 v Kašavě [video file].

⁵³ Růžička, Jiří. 2015, September 6. MTJ VIDEO 140 Celostátní komise v Krásné [video file].

⁵⁴ Hladík, Stanislav. 2013, September 10. DOLNÍ ÚJEZD ŽIJE [video file]; Vesnice roku. 2013, October 22. Skoti v Dolním Újezdu [video file].

⁵⁵ Hladík, Stanislav. 2013, September 10. DOLNÍ ÚJEZD ŽIJE [video file].

⁵⁶ The video opens with the motif of the chairman and officials of the Agricultural Cooperative alongside Cecilka from Troška's film *Slunce, seno a pár facek* (Sun, Hay and a Few Slaps), followed by a dramatic song from the TV series *Fort Boyard*, during the course of which the villagers assemble. After this, members of Sokol arrive to the accompaniment of the song *Sokolici*, followed by youth in folk costume. Among other motifs are the main theme of the TV series *Nemocnice na kraji města* (Hospital on the Edge of Town), the song “Ne, pětku ne” (No, not an F!) performed by Pavel Horňák, another pop star from the normalization period, and the main theme of the DIY and amateur gardening TV show. *Receptář prima nápadů* (Recipe Book of Great Ideas).

shared by the community (Durkheim 2002). In this respect, many performances by competing villages may be understood as ritual. They often refer to the value of continuity, usually via invented traditions, examples being church services, singing of village anthems (Kateřinice, Kolečov), performances by folklore ensembles, but may also include performances referring to outside the locality, such as the playing of the European Union anthem that we mentioned above. Rituals of individual villages are usually repeated in presentations both on various occasions in the same year (presentation video, judging committee guided tour, victory celebrations) and over the years. From the records, it is apparent that the participants involved perceive such rituals with all seriousness, pride, and emotion.

As well as ritual, villages also represent themselves by means of play; it can be even argued that play is indispensable in their presentations, as was explicitly remarked by the deputy mayor of Pysk. Above all, such play takes shape in the choreography of performances prepared for the judging committee, and the short (often humorous) sketches that flirt with shared values or, even more often, with expected norms. Absurdity is often a factor, as in the pirate performances in Krásná or the car inspections by the throwback Communist policeman in Úsilné. In the mode of play anything goes, which gives another dimension to village presentations. The mode of non-seriousness (Sokol 2004, Fink 1993) enables themes and issues not consonant with the seriousness of rurality to enter village space. Play, firstly, encourages moments of volition and spontaneity (Caillois 1998), which turns out to be a key element in the social cohesion of villagers. Secondly, play helps give a sparkle and glamour to proceedings. The image of the village as a merry carnival consists not just in taking on costume but also in the reliably popular comedy sketch. As such, performing scenes from the Russian fairy tale film *Morozko* (Father Frost), very popular in the Czech Republic, in which the dialogue is exaggerated to an extent bordering on parody, guarantees success (Jeseník nad Odrou⁵⁷). Thirdly, many presentations are able to convey the notion that the village is not only a place of conservative rurality. For example, masks inspired by the musical *Grease* (Pomáda) may feature in the village masquerade (Krásná⁵⁸) rather than masks drawing on (invented) traditions. In several performances prepared for the judging committee, the representation of the village was even in part lifted out of its own time-space and

⁵⁷ Jeseník nad Odrou. 2013, September 5. Celostátní komise vesnice roku 2013 [video file].

⁵⁸ Růžička, Jiří. 2015, September 6. MTJ VIDEO 140 Celostátní komise v Krásné [video file].

set into a non-rural context of play. Examples include performances prepared in Prysk and Hošťálková. In Prysk the nearby football pitch was transformed into an airport with pilots, flight attendants, and passengers.⁵⁹ Hošťálková in the 2017 competition ceased to be an open-air museum, as it was in the 2014 competition, and became a village in which a partisan unit was operating.⁶⁰ However, play does not solely consist of the violation, overturning, or hyperbolic distortion of values and norms, but also lies in the ambiguity of a performance, as is clearly illustrated by the performance of the village's partisan past. Pointedness and novelty, often goals of a presentation, were here created by double entendre and by the transformation of original meanings into new ones. By means of jokes and absurdity, the performers contest their roles as solely being villagers isolated in bounded space. The reversal of values during play opens the possibility for different, often ambiguous interpretations that are connected to a multiplicity of worlds outside of the village. The "Scottish" dancers in kilts mentioned already above can be understood in the context of a South Bohemian village as being a homage to Scotland as well as a joke on account of gender roles. Caricature of village gossipmongers (inspired by Troška's film *Babovřesky*) can be a way to exaggerate the stereotype of a villager, thereby both denying its validity as well as affirming it (Allport 2004: 172).

Social cohesion is clearly manifested, especially in recordings of judging committees guided tours, as a fundamental value of the local community of the village. It is performed at two levels, the first concerning common roots and continuity, and the second concerning collective activity based primarily on the will to be together. This means that society is not cemented so much by shared values as it is by creative activity capable of establishing such values. The values that correspond to the representation of the 19th-century village (related mainly to local and state-national discourses concerning the village) are presented through performed rituals (such as church services, the bread and salt greeting ceremony, erecting a maypole, etc.). The values of modern global society (related to global and state-national discourses transcending the village) are presented through play as a mixture of diverse activities inspired by the various repertoires of media discourse.

The village is presented as an ambiguous place, where polysemy can be harmonized: not by establishing new values, but by making everything part of

⁵⁹ Obec Prysk. 2016, July 1. Vesnice roku v Libereckém kraji [video file].

⁶⁰ Gracliková, Hana. 2017, June 21. Obec HOŠŤÁLKOVÁ – krajské kolo Vesnice roku 2017 [video file].

play. It is precisely in play that local, state-national, and global discourses meet, as well as seriousness and non-seriousness. Play does not impose any values to be revered, and does not create any interconnected moral order of the village. On the contrary, play is a tool which enables the village to be understood as part of national society and global society too.

Judging Committee Representations of Victorious Villages: Legitimation of Rurality

The image/representation of the village is also constructed by the judging committee, the voice of which is heard on various fora. The judging committee determines the winners on the basis of presentations and other materials provided by the competing villages. The committee does not justify its decision but posts its verdict on the competition website, giving a summary of the strengths of the victorious villages, accompanied by photographs of the villages. The judging committee's attitudes and perspectives are also revealed on Facebook, by their assessments of submitted presentations, and at award ceremonies.

Eriksen (2007) draws attention to the fact that the policies of international and even national organizations can affect social reality. He shows how UNESCO, through its statements and recommendations, has an impact not only on how cultural heritage is cared for, conserved and presented, but also on people's attitudes, knowledge and identities. Eriksen further demonstrates that the policy of this particular international organization in many respects refers to or directly draws on expert discourse dealing with issues of ethnic and local culture. The impact of such organizations is considerable, not only because they are part of the bureaucratic apparatus and are endowed with rational-legal authority (Weber 1998), but also due to the fact that, according to Bourdieu and Foucault, dominant discourse is a tool of power as well as a means of its expression. Power is always a matter of relationship, it is “a way in which certain actions modify others” (Foucault 1982: 788). Bourdieu argues that holders of symbolic power, i.e. representatives of a dominant culture, have the ability to construct meanings and reality (Bourdieu 2010). An important role is played not only by institutions but also by experts. However, the operation of power is not unilateral, for “agents apply to the objective structures of the social world structures of perception and appreciation which are issued out of these very structures and which tend to picture the world as evident” (Bourdieu 1989: 21). The village representations that are presented for the Village of the

Year Competition appear to be understandable and objective precisely because they arise from ongoing negotiations between actors. In this it is seen that “in the struggle for the production and imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world, the holders of bureaucratic authority never establish an absolute monopoly, even when they add the authority of science to their bureaucratic authority” (Bourdieu 1989: 22).

Foucault understands power and knowledge as interconnected and inter-dependent, the one instigating the other. Knowledge leads to control and the demand for control requires knowledge. This is the reason why Foucault uses the term power/knowledge, which can be productive as well as repressive (Foucault 2000a). As argued by Duineveld and Van Assche (2011), it is precisely this unity of power and knowledge that contributes to the creation of local politics: “Revisiting Foucault’s concepts of power/knowledge and discourse [enables] a detailed analysis of the process of emergence, solidifying and institutional embedding of new forms of heritage and nature as new discursive objects” (Duineveld – Van Assche: 2011: 79). The judging committee for the Village of the Year Competition is delegated with power and possesses knowledge that is formed in the context of exercising this power. Its power/knowledge is manifested on the Internet not only by the aforementioned websites with their unified and sophisticated design, cultivated language and professional photographs, but also by its demeanour throughout visits to individual villages, be it for the purpose of evaluation or for awarding prizes. The discourse created by the judging committee is unequivocal, having an unmistakably rural character in the spirit of *Volkskunde*, a discipline established through studies of the peasant population and the art of the late 19th and early 20th century. The discourse of rural idyll (Bell 2006) finds expression both in the means of presentation and in the themes that are selected.

The image of the village as comprised of material features is far more prevalent in the representations of the judging committee than in the presentations of the contestants. This is perhaps due to the modes of presentation available to the judging committee (written description accompanied by photographs, in contrast to the video presentations of contestants) and to the discourses of *Volkskunde* and art, the essence of which was the depiction of convincing rural scenes aimed to arouse the viewer’s emotions. Photographs chosen to characterize winning villages are always “picturesque”, either of the surrounding landscape or of the village itself, thereby supporting the idea of a village as set in a landscape of majestic trees, ponds, holloways and other such enduring

natural features. Such images of the village do not make reference to ecology. Statements of the judging committee on the competition web pages speak of “*a picturesque village at the foot of the White Carpathians*” (Kozojídky),⁶¹ or “*a village surrounded by the walls of the Carpathian Mountains, which from time immemorial has lived in some kind of isolation from the rest of the world*” (Kašava).⁶² The importance of history to the village is undeniable; the founding date of the village appears to legitimize its existence. Being grounded in the past is also manifested in stylistic and lexical choices. An archaic style evokes a nostalgic view of the village: “*the picturesque ‘dědina’ [village] of Nová Hradečná is located in the lee of the hill of Bradlo, the place of many local legends, ...*”⁶³ A similar effect is also achieved by the use of dialect (e.g. the vernacular “dědina”⁶⁴ instead of the usual Czech word for “village”). Photographs show buildings and their settings deemed typical of villages in the 19th and early 20th century. Any open-air museum would be happy to have such “stereotypical” photographs in its collection. The language used by the judging committee only serves to corroborate further the importance given to village traditions and folklore: “*The wine cellars and the belfry nearby were built in a way to harmonize with the rural style of the locality, which is indicative of the emphasis the village puts on maintaining its rural character...*” (Kozojídky).⁶⁵

The strategy of depicting a village we have just described shows the village as an exhibit worthy of admiration, not as a place for contemporary everyday life. This explains why there are usually no people in pictures, the only exceptions being situations usually considered rural in an ethnocultural sense (e.g. a carnival). There is a shared notion that the village itself shapes its inhabitants, who as a result possess such qualities as cordiality, openness, and hospitality, which are then positively evaluated by the judging committee. To continue the quotation above describing the village (“dědina”) of Kašava nestled in the Carpathian

⁶¹ Vesnice roku v Programu obnovy venkova. © 2011. Kozojídky – 3. místo v soutěži Vesnice roku 2016 [online].

⁶² Vesnice roku v Programu obnovy venkova. © 2011. Kašava – 1. místo v soutěži Vesnice roku 2016 [online].

⁶³ Ibidem.

⁶⁴ Moravian dialect, etymologically derived from “inherit”, from times when the role of the ruling master/family of a village was often passed on from generation to generation by inheritance.

⁶⁵ Vesnice roku v Programu obnovy venkova. © 2011. Kozojídky – 3. místo v soutěži Vesnice roku 2016 [online].

Mountains, its isolation from the rest of the world “*allows the preservation of its apparent distinctiveness, evident both in the villagers’ manner of speech and their character and warmth*” (Kašava).⁶⁶ Photographs from both official competition websites and Facebook show that the village is inhabited mostly by “fashion models” wearing folk costumes, whose only purpose in life appears to be to preserve and carry on folk traditions, i.e. local customs and the making of traditional dishes and traditional products. Captions to photographs reinforce such an impression of village life, for example one saying that “*local traditions are preserved in the village – a feast in folk costume with roasting of a he-goat*,”⁶⁷ *fašank*⁶⁸, *Mother’s Day*, *Children’s Day*, *wine tasting*, and for over forty years also the October exhibition of fruits and vegetables” (Kozojídky),⁶⁹ and another saying that “*the village is proud of its traditional glass production*” (Prysk).⁷⁰ Tradition is here understood as transcendently present, site/location-bound, and intergenerationally transmitted, this kind of transmission being its essence. When no link is forged to an ethnocultural tradition – either because it is not possible to do so, or because such a link has not been (consciously) created, or a combination of both – this very absence may be appreciated by the judging committee, which still manages to refer to the rural and traditional in such cases: “*Even with its handicap of post-war resettlement, [Krásná] dares to compete with inland villages*” (Krásná).⁷¹

What remains of the past is always connected to the present. The judging committee in their evaluations relate continuity to care of the countryside, restoration of monuments (e.g. chapels, churches), commemoration of history, and maintenance of ethnocultural traditions. Using primarily words alone, the committee must justify the importance of rural representation as a heritage and tradition for future generations. Consequently, continuity is a vital notion for the village, and, as such, it must be actively promoted by the villagers.

⁶⁶ Vesnice roku v Programu obnovy venkova. © 2011. Kašava – 1. místo v soutěži Vesnice roku 2016 [online].

⁶⁷ This feast refers to the name of the village: Kozojídky consist of the words “koza” (goat) and “jíst” (to eat) and can be roughly translated as “Where the goats are eaten”.

⁶⁸ Final days of a carnival festival around Shrove Tuesday celebrated in Slavic countries, in the Czech Republic as Masopust, comparable to Mardi Gras.

⁶⁹ Vesnice roku v Programu obnovy venkova. © 2011. Kozojídky – 3. místo v soutěži Vesnice roku 2016 [online].

⁷⁰ Vesnice roku v Programu obnovy venkova. © 2011. Prysk – 2. místo v soutěži Vesnice roku 2016 [online].

⁷¹ Vesnice roku v Programu obnovy venkova. © 2011. Krásná – 1. místo v soutěži Vesnice roku 2015 [online].

In addition to the image of “permanently revived traditions”, the village is also defined by a “rich social and cultural life”. Statements of such a kind feature in the judging committee’s evaluations of every winning village. For example, in glass-making Prysk *“life is fully enhanced in the village through the activities of sports and cultural associations with the active contribution of cottage owners”* (Prysk),⁷² and in Kozojídky *“social life in the village is of a high standard, even though the village is located near the city”* (Kozojídky).⁷³ Such evaluations by the judging committee always mention the number of associations that are engaged with social cohesion in the community, and thereby guarantee its high level, while referring to the inventory of events and activities that are organized: *“This [inventory] corresponds with a rich social and cultural life, the maintenance of traditional customs and holidays, which are prepared, by civic associations and folklore groups, led by the famous [folklore group] Kašava with the help of the village [officials]”* (Kašava).⁷⁴ What exactly the village focuses on and the nature of the values they pursue is immaterial in this context; purely social, ecological, tourism- or youth-oriented activities are also highlighted, in addition to ethnocultural traditions. Also appreciated in the village by the judging committee are innovativeness and creativity. This can be observed particularly on Facebook, where there are photographs and videos of, for example, performances of a teenage pop-folk band⁷⁵, a children’s song about a leaf beetle⁷⁶, and a Scottish dance.⁷⁷ In 2017 the village Hošťálková was awarded a special prize for a commemoration of its Second World War partisan traditions.⁷⁸ Activities appreciated by the judging committee share in common their village-wide character. There is no room for celebrating extraordinary individuals. All activities must constitute a platform for social gatherings. What is important is the notion of a shared goal and the ability to work together. An emphasis is put precisely on community cohesion in the award speeches of the judging committee: *“We also wish you much love for each other, because it can’t*

⁷² Vesnice roku v Programu obnovy venkova. © 2011. Prysk – 2. místo v soutěži Vesnice roku 2016 [online].

⁷³ Vesnice roku v Programu obnovy venkova. © 2011. Kozojídky – 3. místo v soutěži Vesnice roku 2016 [online].

⁷⁴ Vesnice roku v Programu obnovy venkova. © 2011. Kašava – 1. místo v soutěži Vesnice roku 2016 [online].

⁷⁵ Vesnice roku. 2016, September 13. [Talentovaní hudebníci ze Sebranic] [video file].

⁷⁶ Vesnice roku. 2016, September 13. [Rozinky z Kozojídek] [video file].

⁷⁷ Vesnice roku. 2013, October 22. Skoti v Dolním Újezdu [video file].

⁷⁸ Krajský úřad Zlínského kraje. 2017, June 12. Slavkov byl vyhlášen vesnicí roku 2017 ve Zlínském kraji [online].

be filmed. [...] That you pull together, that cohesion and communality are intrinsically yours – these are qualities that you cannot pretend to have. It must be you!” (Kateřinice)⁷⁹. It is the construct of rurality that guarantees the character of an unspoilt village, and which we might see as a stereotype in the evaluations of winning villages: *“Many associations operate in the municipality and their activities supplement the unique atmosphere and image of the village. A natural philosophy of life and humility emanates from all the village inhabitants. To put it simply, ‘There is a good life in Kačice!’”* (Kateřinice).⁸⁰

The discourse of the judging committee is essentially based on three interrelated pillars: turn-of-the-20th-century national ideology (highlighted through literature and visual art), *Volkskunde*, and communal life policy (Keller 2009). The judging criteria derived from these prove important, despite the fact that the rules of the competition do not declare any of them. In this sense, the discourse of the judging committee supports the representation of the village as a rural idyll. By consolidating the idea of the village as a one-dimensional reality (a contained, coherent culture), this discourse does not concede the multi-dimensionality of worlds that might actually be in existence there (via global cultural flows). As a result, the dominant judging committee discourse on the one hand disciplines the contestants, so they do what is expected of them, and on the other hand also influences other public discourses, particularly media discourse.

After the Competition: Celebrating Victory

Villages that win prizes celebrate their victories in a number of events, video recordings of which are usually subsequently made available in virtual space. One of these is the announcement of the results of the national rounds; then there are the award ceremonies, which are always hosted by the regional or national winner, and are attended by representatives of organizing institutions, including state representatives. More revealing, however, are those victory celebrations that take place in the municipality of the winning villages when the municipal representatives bring back their awards. While the village’s official award ceremony is once again staged, usually in a specially designated public

⁷⁹ solano620. 2014, September 8. Prezentace obce – Kateřinice 2014 celostátní [video file].

⁸⁰ Vesnice roku v Programu obnovy venkova. © 2011. Kateřinice – 1. místo v soutěži Vesnice roku 2014 [online].

area (since the ceremony takes place in summer, it can be held outside, with a stage, VIP tents, refreshment stands, etc.), informal local celebrations (usually without the presence of the judging committee or any other outsiders) ordinarily take place in a local pub or other public space, which need not be adapted to the gaze of outsiders (any rearrangement or decoration not being specific to this occasion but carried out in a like manner to other local celebrations). Although we have significantly less data for these types of representation, it is worth giving brief attention to them because they cast a revealing light on the previously mentioned representations and the construct of rurality created by the competition as a whole. First and foremost, the nature of these informal victory celebrations in individual municipalities may shed light on the following important question: Through which discourses can the lived local identity of competing communities be performed and habitualized and thus be a re/production of constructed rurality?⁸¹

While the official award ceremonies are framed in the same way as performances for the judging committee, and are therefore based on the dominant construct of rurality, informal victory celebrations have a completely different character. The key discursive framework for these informal celebrations is their grounding in the present rather than the past. The past, be it materialized or socially performed, therefore does not play a role in such celebrations: village landscapes (both of residential areas and the surroundings), references to (written) foundation records, monuments, sacred and folk architecture, ethnocultural traditions materialized in local dishes and folk costumes or externalized in stage interpretations of folk songs and folk customs – none of these find a place. This fact was plainly pointed out by a resident of Kateřinice, a village winning an award in 2014, in a voice-over to a video shot showing a pot of boiling sausages, which were being prepared for a local celebration: “*This is what celebrations are really like.*”⁸²

The aim of informal celebrations is above all social cohesion “in practice”, i.e. to celebrate together, to have fun together. The repertoire for this “fun” is therefore chosen to be appropriate to the (actual) taste of the village (majority). Instead of regional dishes, there are globally standardized ones, which are easily prepared in larger quantities (sausages, burgers, French fries, etc.). A diverse

⁸¹ However, even these representations are necessarily involved in the construction of rurality in the form of traces of “villageness”.

⁸² Drábek, Pavel. 2014, September 21. Kateřinice – VESNICE ROKU 2014 – spontální oslava a čekání na starostu [video file].

range of music is played both for listening and for entertainment (dancing). This may include music of various Czech genres (from country and contemporary folk music, through pop of the normalization period, and on to contemporary pop and rock), as well as the repertoire of Czech traditional folk music. Limiting the range to Czech music might occur due to the “demand” of villagers to sing along, thereby excluding non-Czech music. Performances part of such celebrations might include fitness/dance demonstrations by local women (Zumba or belly dance), informal youth activities (diabolo or flowerstick juggling), activities of the local elementary school or art school, or activities prepared by villagers specially for the occasion. Even in villages with some kind of a living ethnocultural tradition, folk costumes or other “traditional” uniforms (those of gamekeepers etc.) never appear during informal celebrations. If there is any local identity manifested through how people dress (suggesting some kind of uniformity), this is done by wearing T-shirts bearing the logo of a local association (e.g. Association of Supporters of Kateřinice⁸³) and never by donning folk costume.

Formal celebrations, where awards are announced by competition officials in the presence of state and regional representatives, are staged to a higher degree and therefore conform considerably more to the rural construct. The announcement of the winners of the national round takes place annually in Luhačovice as part of the International Festival of Children’s Folklore Ensembles called “Písni a tancem” (Singing and Dancing).⁸⁴ This setting explicitly places the competition in the context of ethnocultural traditions – the announcement of winners takes place between folklore ensemble performances. In addition to the announcement of the winning municipalities, there is also an awards ceremony, which takes place in the village that is the overall winner (winning the Golden Ribbon).

The awards ceremony is attended by delegations from all the other winning municipalities⁸⁵ and is organized by the overall winner, who also prepares its script. The awards ceremony is framed by means of the rural construct, which is apparent from the presence of ethnocultural traditions and in some cases also a religious context, and usually also includes some type of performance referring to social cohesion (e.g. the crowning of the mayor of the winning village, as in

⁸³ Ibidem.

⁸⁴ E.g. Vrba, Antonín. 2012, September 15. LUHAČOVICE-finále vyhlašování NEJLEPŠÍ VESNICE ROKU 2012: nejlepší byla vesnice z ČECH [video file]; Zlínský kraj. 2014, September 30. Kateřinice, které zvítězily v krajském kole Vesnice roku, získaly prvenství i na celostátní úrovni [video file].

⁸⁵ The regional round award ceremony is attended by all who won a ribbon; the national round award ceremony is attended by the thirteen winners of the regional round.

Prysk in 2016⁸⁶ or Kateřinice in 2014⁸⁷). Moreover, there is another aspect, absent in the other types of representation we have hitherto considered – a declaration (albeit sometimes inadvertent) that competition activities were actually designed primarily with the competition in mind, the main motivation being the prize money. The financial reward that comes with victory is explicitly mentioned not only in the speeches of politicians at both the regional (Prysk)⁸⁸ and national (Luhačovice, 2015, 2016)⁸⁹ awards ceremonies, but also in official calls for participation in the competition on its Facebook page (Facebook Village of the Year, 2017).⁹⁰ Financial profit was likewise mentioned by the mayor of Kateřinice during informal celebrations of the village’s victory in 2014, the relaxed mood of which was fuelled by the widespread consumption of alcohol, at which he was emboldened to explain his political and managerial strategies to another villager: *“Well, we have problems with the school budget. And every event such as this brings in money for the school, for the kindergarten, for the kitchen ...”*⁹¹

Formal celebrations of victory are carried out in a local-national discourse, in accordance with the construct of rurality, while informal celebrations are rather in a (Czech) glocal discourse fed by various popular sources. Although these informal celebrations are also conscientiously prepared, they are not prepared according to the image of the judging committee or other “strangers”, but on the contrary according to the image of the local inhabitants of the village. These are not attempts to impress the judging committee, but a genuine expression of social cohesion in the contemporary village.

Mass Media: Conventional and Axiomatic Rurality

Media coverage of the Village of the Year Competition includes reports about the winning villages along with interviews with their mayors, in newspapers (both printed and online editions), on the radio, and even on television. However,

⁸⁶ Obec Prysk. 2017, February 8. Vesnice roku 2016 Libereckého kraje [video file].

⁸⁷ solano620. 2014, October 11. Slavnost vesnice roku 2014 [video file].

⁸⁸ Obec Prysk. 2017, February 8. Vesnice roku 2016 Libereckého kraje [video file].

⁸⁹ LUHA TV. 2015, September 24. Festival Písní a tancem a Vesnice roku 2015 [video file]; Ministerstvo pro místní rozvoj ČR. 2016, October 4. Ministryně Šlechtová vyhlásila v Luhačovicích vítěze soutěže Vesnice roku 2016 [video file].

⁹⁰ Vesnice roku. 2017, April 25. Proč se přihlásit do soutěže Vesnice roku [video file].

⁹¹ Drábek, Pavel. 2014, September 21. Kateřinice – VESNICE ROKU 2014 – spontánní oslava a čekání na starostu [video file].

television coverage generally consists of reports of just a few minutes in the Czech public TV documentary series dedicated to the countryside (Náš venkov)⁹² and to folklore (Folklórní magazín)⁹³.

In reporting on the competition results, the mass media de facto reproduce the discourse of the judging committee. In doing so, the mass media further legitimize the representation of the village based on the construct of rurality promoted by the competition, creating a context for the comparison of other reports about villages. The social representation of the village based on this construct of rurality may also be put forward as an axiom – a metaphor or message for all citizens, intended to implant in them a new sense of direction. In this case, the village's social cohesion, local communality and meaningfulness of existence is usually emphasized, as is evident in an interview with the mayor of Kateřinice: *"Our residents respect each other, help each other and cooperate together. Currently we have fourteen associations, the school and kindergarten are run perfectly, and young people have many opportunities to find employment. The children and youth here don't hang around bus stops thinking about what trouble they can get up to."*⁹⁴

This does not mean, however, that the mass media simply reproduce official press releases: the larger the distance between locality and audience, the greater the stereotyping. National newspapers and the main evening news on national TV usually only reproduce what they have been delivered. Regional and local media, on the other hand, add their own topics into reports as well, seen for example in the following excerpt from the Carlsbad regional adaptation of the information from server idnes.cz about the winner that year, the village of Krásná: *"The biggest pain in the municipality, according to the mayor, is its socially excluded locality. However, he predicts that this will not last for long. 'We are solving this problem. We would like to buy up all the real estate and build new flats there. We are also troubled by the condition of the road network, but in this we are certainly not an exception,' revealed Pokorný [...] The mayor has one big dream, and that's an ice rink. 'But it should be an open one, suitable for ice skating. We have to think about it,' he indicated."*⁹⁵

⁹² Řezníčková, Klára. 2014. Smíření nad Odrou [Television series episode].

⁹³ Česká televize. 2011. Vesnice roku Komňa – Slovácký rok v Kyjově [Television series episode].

⁹⁴ Rozšafná, Michaela. 2014, September 21. Starosta Vesnice roku 2014: Těšíme se na evropské kolo, lidé už se učí anglicky. Lidovky.cz [online].

⁹⁵ Toman, Petr. 2015, August 10. Krásná je krásná. Porotci zvolili vesnici roku 2015. Idnes.cz [online].

There is not the slightest mention of excluded locality in all the available documentation for the competition (documents and presentation of the village, recording of the judging committee guided tour, village web pages, local newspapers). Even in the excerpt above the topic does not appear in the direct quotation of what the mayor said but is introduced into the text by the author of the piece. And the mayor is very quick to sweep things under the carpet by stating that the “pain” will be soon eased by buying up property. What will happen to residents of the excluded locality is no longer interesting and the mayor draws attention to other investments – improving the conditions of the road network and constructing an ice rink.

Overall, the mass media are both consumers of public discourse as well as its creators; with the national media being more the former and the regional media more the latter. The winning villages covered in the media might not only be seen as representations of rurality but also as representations of contemporary civil society in general, albeit clothed in rural attire.

Conclusion: Pop-Rurality as Interdiscourse

The aim of our text has been to analyse social representations of the village appearing in virtual space in connection with the Village of the Year Competition. The question that drove our investigation was whether and how the construct of rurality is re/produced in these representations. In other words, what is the nature of the “*countryside character*” which enables municipalities to win the competition, seeing that this notion is nowhere defined in the competition rules? We have argued that this “countryside character” is produced by the competition itself through its own practice, while villages successful in the competition reproduce and perform it, either in the documentation they send to the competition panel or in the activities they put on for the judging committee.

The construct of rurality is negotiated in various kinds of state-national and global discourses, each discourse operating with and on the concept of rurality differently and used by actors in specific ways. On the state-national level, we identified, in accordance with Jones (1995: 38), four distinct discourses: 1) expert (academic) discourse, i.e. scientific research on villages; 2) policymaker discourse, that is, of bureaucrats and/or politicians, 3) media discourse employed by newspapers, radio and television, including such diverse forms of art as literature, music, theatre and fine arts – indeed, any form of popularization;

and, last but not least, 4) the discourse of the village and villagers themselves. However, the social construction of rurality is also informed by global discourse, derived on the one hand from that of policymakers (especially of the European Union and global organizations such as UNESCO or the United Nations) and on the other hand from a kind of globally shared discourse around the construct of rurality which may be inferred from a comparison of our data with those of Kumpulainen (2016). In addition to these key discourse frameworks, we also identified the discourse of both state-national and global popular culture as an important resource for the construction of social representations of the countryside. While popular discourse may not refer directly to the village, it undoubtedly influences the construct of rurality both through its form and by its content.

The currently shared construct of rurality appears to be composed of several key elements, which are rooted in different discursive frameworks, and we have seen its character revealed by analysing the representations made for the purpose of the Village of the Year Competition by the municipalities themselves, by the judging committee and by the media. More precisely, the construct of rurality yields up its nature by attending to the tension between these “formal” representations and representations based on informal celebrations, and by identifying what might be missing in these representations.

The dominant construct of rurality and its basic discursive framework originates in the notion of the village as an independent, *locally (both territorially and socially) bounded and demarcated space*. This construct is based primarily on an expert discourse devised by 19th and early 20th century *Volkskunde*, which defined the village as a de facto isolated unit that is socially and culturally homogeneous, and almost fully self-sufficient in terms of subsistence provided by agriculture. The principle of boundedness and cultural distinctiveness was necessary to interpret the village, which was seen as a bearer of “traditional folk culture”, as a concentration of the ethnic specificity of the nation (Moravcová 2009). Here “unspoiled” folk, the creators and bearers of national values, lived – an idea of a people upon which it was possible to build the concept of the Czech national revival (in contrast to those living in the “corrupt” Germanized city). Even though the expert discourse of that time was obviously determined by the discourse of the policymakers (Czech national revivalists) of the period, discourse of this form is maintained to this day. This is to a certain extent thanks to the expert discourse of Czech ethnology, which emerged out of *Volkskunde* and whose

focus still lies primarily on the study of folk culture, its roots and contemporary forms. In this way Czech ethnology not only reproduces but also legitimizes the construct of rurality originating in *Volkskunde*. Ethnologists (understood as expert scientists) have appeared in some social representations put on by municipalities and emphasize the traditional local and ethnocultural specifics of the village. However, the viability of the village construct as territorially and socio-culturally bounded space is most evident in what is absent from all these social representations (be it those of the villages, the judging committee or the media): there are no “strangers” (in the broadest sense). The village inhabitants and the actors in the representations are “denizens” – locals (regardless of local socio-demographic changes) and ethnically “white” Czechs (certainly not Romani or people of other ethnicities). Even references to cottage-goers appear exceptionally. Neighbouring villages are present only if they can provide performances in which local denizens can participate (folklore ensembles, performances by kindergarten children). This aspect of local boundedness and the superior status of “proper” denizens is exemplified by a comment made during a guided tour for the judging committee that “*the show was prepared with the assistance of a lady from Lidečko*” (Kateřinice).⁹⁶ From the point of view of the discourse of current policymakers it is paradoxical that minimal reference is made to the involvement of municipalities in global economic discourse – town twinning, cross-border cooperation and national and European grant projects are mentioned only marginally. These factors certainly do not contribute to a village’s success in the competition (see the section titled “Judging committee representations of victorious villages”).

The second key element of the current construct of rurality lies in its reference to *roots and continuity*. The source again is the expert discourse of *Volkskunde*, which, according to pre-Romantic and Romantic ideas, sought and established the concept of the “soul of the nation” (as developed by Johann Gottfried Herder, and in the field of art by e.g. Johann Wolfgang Goethe) – or, to put it differently, the roots of the nation. Continuity is represented both materially (folk and sacred architecture) as well as socially (ethnocultural traditions, also materialized in a form of folk costumes, or invented traditions as the case may be). The viability of this construct can again be documented by what is intentionally omitted in representations. Footage is absent of buildings from the second half of the 20th century (such as housing estates, shopping centres, “šumperák”,

⁹⁶ solano620. 2014, September 8. Prezentace obce – Kateřinice 2014 celostátní [video file].

or Brussels-style houses⁹⁷, and virtually any other type of new residential housing). Absent too are references to the causes, processes and consequences of changes in the socio-demographic composition and socio-cultural life of villages over the course of the 20th century. The principle of continuity is based on the fact that the village was founded long ago, and that it carries and maintains an uninterrupted tradition. When such continuity has been disrupted, the village has to draw on other sources to restore its sense of an unbroken tradition (be it the ancient past, a past floating in time, or a performance of the past). Roots and continuity are constructed and manifested in many different ways in the construct of rurality. What they have in common is an air of indisputability, of being unproblematic. In this respect, policymaker discourse seems to be in line with village inhabitant discourse and, to a large extent, also media discourse. The village is represented in accordance with the concept of rural idyll (Bell 2006) as an idyllic, tranquil and safe place, or, more precisely, as a place that has been so since time immemorial. Thus the village cemetery is also omitted from any footage because it simply does not fit into the concept of rural idyll.

The concept of *rural idyll* is dominant in the third main element of the rurality construct – *picturesqueness*. The village is generally portrayed as a “picturesque hamlet set in the bosom of nature”. The character of this representation is primarily based on materiality and presented through the previously mentioned elements of *isolation*, *roots and continuity*. It is another, beautiful, unspoiled world. Again, we can find the discursive sources of this image in 19th century *Volkskunde*, although this time fed not so much by expert (academic) discourse as by contemporary media discourse, particularly by the artistic production of the 19th and early 20th century. It was typical of Romantic and to some extent also of Realist production of the 19th century, as it was for some schools in the first half of the 20th century following on from these movements, to depict the village as a rural idyll. Examples include Božena Němcová’s novella *Babička* (The Grandmother), the novels of Karolína Světlá, the operas of Bedřich Smetana and Antonín Dvořák, and the paintings of Josef Lada, Mikoláš Aleš, Josef Mánes, and Joža Úprka. This even applies to examples of work that included social critique, such as the novels of the Mrštík brothers and of Jindřich Šimon Baar, and Bedřich Smetana’s opera *Prodaná nevěsta* (The Bartered Bride) (Jeřábek 2004).

⁹⁷ Šumperák is a popular name for the “family house of the V type”, the production of which started in the 1960s. The popular name derives from the fact that the first house of this type was built for the director of the hospital in the town of Šumperk. The alternative name of Brussels-style house is owing to the fact that this building project was prepared for Expo 58 held in Brussels.

This discourse and its production have been kept alive and continually reproduced in cultural memory, being taught in schools as fundamental to Czech art, maintaining a strong presence in exhibitions and theatre; even contemporary artists refer to this discourse (even if sometimes critically). Picturesqueness and the rural idyll are preserved in the discursive framework of Czech state-national identity as a key element of collective memory.

The primary creator of the rural idyll in relation to the Village of the Year Competition appears to be policymaker discourse (through the judging committee representations). Media discourse (here not so much art as the mass media – newspapers, radio, television and new media) reproduces the representation of the judging committee almost without reservation. The construct of rurality as the picturesque is thereby translated, by words and pictures, into a truly ideal form of rural idyll. The principle of this construct can again be gleaned from what is absent from representations: there is no sign of any factory farming, industrial zones, or industry of any kind, no wind power plants, no waste disposal sites or waste separation containers, no suburban areas, no deprived areas, no social conflict, no marginalized individuals or groups, and none of the elderly, infirm, or unemployed. Nature trails are the only permitted incursion on picturesqueness – admitted into the rural idyll because they are routed along events of history (symbolizing *roots and continuity*) and/or natural landmarks (playing an important role in presentation of the landscape).

Nevertheless, the most significant element in the current construct of rurality appears to be *social cohesion*: should it be difficult to employ any of the other elements of the rurality construct then social cohesion can be used in their place. Performance by the village for the judging committee demonstrates both the principle of self-sufficiency and the local boundedness of the municipality; performance establishes roots and continuity as well as picturesqueness, i.e. the rural idyll. For a village at the turn of the 20th century social cohesion was an existential necessity, because agriculture-based subsistence without mutual co-operation, in the form of assistance from neighbours or agricultural cooperatives, was not economically viable (Válka 2011). Today, however, now that private farming has ceased for villages to be the dominant means of subsistence, the means of social cohesion have transmuted into various clubs and associations, primarily for leisure activities. Social cohesion is thereby sustained and its continuity represented by the activity of associations united in pursuing common civic goals (firefighters, gamekeepers) or continuing traditions (ethno-cultural, religious). In the social representations of municipalities the carnival,

however, figures as the most important agent of social cohesion. The construct of social cohesion as a shared play originates in the villager discourse. Indeed, social cohesion is given the greatest space in village representations prepared for judging committee guided tours. While the demonstration of social cohesion through play appears to be a modern phenomenon, carnival has a much longer history in rural culture, although its form is usually now petrified in traditions, often ethnocultural (e.g. Shrovetide, Burning of the Witches⁹⁸, etc.). Such carnival traditions may appear in the materials prepared for the competition in the form of videos and photographs as references to the continuity of the village. The plays that villages prepare for a visit of the judging committee, however, often lack inspiration from any tradition, either ethnocultural or invented. After all, these plays are one-off, unrepeatable events with original scripts and are often performed not just by associations well-established in the village but also by ensembles put together purely for this specific purpose. In terms of content, performances may be linked to a given locality (be it through ethnic or religious traditions, reference to local history, or emphasis of aspects of the present), but they tend to be – and often are – completely displaced (deterritorialized). Common to these performances, based on a shared play with carnival elements, is the use of a shared state-national and global discourse. However, this usage largely involves the forms established in these discourses only, not necessarily their content. For example, staging a Spartakiadian⁹⁹ performance or a Labour Day parade does not imply celebration of the Czechoslovak Communist past (to which both are related in collective memory), just as playing pirates does not mean that an inland village has any connection to pirates. Nevertheless, both performances benefit from a widely shared knowledge of phenomena deeply embedded in popular culture, both state-national and global. That these carnival performances are generally understood as hyperbole by everyone involved is indicated by the fact that they are not referred to in any representation created by the judging committee (policymaker discourse, adopted by media discourse), and are neither part of the award ceremonies, nor are they included in victory celebrations.¹⁰⁰ Despite the fact that social cohesion represented by carnival

⁹⁸ See note 21 above.

⁹⁹ The Spartakiad was a quinquennial mass gymnastics event first held in 1955 as a celebration of Czechoslovakia's liberation by the Red Army in 1945.

¹⁰⁰ The only exception to this rule is perhaps the play put on by the village of Hošťálková honouring its partisan past, where, apart from carnival elements, a hall of partisan traditions accompanied by expert commentary was also specially prepared, which resulted in an award from the judging committee. In

elements in practice does not appear in expert discourse, media discourse, or policymaker discourse, it appears to be an essential part of villager discourse. As can be seen on village Facebook pages, villagers watch and comment on each other's performance and try to make their own performance as original, sophisticated and ostentatious as possible. Again, the way social cohesion is manifested as a specific element in the construct of rurality, which substantively belongs to villager discourse, is best documented by what representations are left out. Strikingly absent are images of the peasant as land cultivators and/or farmers. The construct of rurality in the first half of the 20th century was fundamentally based on a culture determined by agriculture, and was for a long time also understood as such by expert and media discourse. Yet it is precisely this element that is rejected by villager discourse. Presumably the role of a peasant/farmer is not one with which contemporary villagers wish to identify, nor one against which they wish to define themselves.

This raises the question of what the relationships between the various discourses involved in the negotiation of the rurality construct are. Although each discourse (expert, policymaker, media, and villager) creates and reproduces the construct of rurality, they are not involved to the same extent. Expert discourse feeds the content of the rurality construct in terms of roots and continuity with “traditional rural culture”, based on local specificity and diversity. Through its expert opinion, materialized in open-air and in-house museums, publications and statements in the mass media, it legitimizes the image of the village as a distinct socio-cultural space, and as necessarily different from other types of environment, in particular the urban. These productions of expert discourse are, in part, reproduced by media discourse (and almost as a whole in relation to the competition itself); however, they are primarily used in the discourse of policymakers, for example, in the representations of the judging committee and politicians' speeches at award ceremonies. Policymaker discourse itself, however, is more ambiguous. There are a number of categories in the competition rules that are only marginally relevant to the rural construct, or even not at all (though we cannot say to what extent the municipalities are really rated by these categories – this is not our goal). By contrast, “countryside character” is seen as a mere footnote to the competition rules, even if – through such notions as local boundaries, roots, continuity, and picturesqueness – it completely dominates the

this case the unproblematic interpretation of the Czech home resistance during the Second World War, uncontested under all regimes, and such unproblematic values as heroism and freedom, were undoubtedly influential, too.

judging committee's representations and politicians' speeches on the occasion of announcing the competition results (see below). The competition itself is based on the liberal ideology of local/sustainable development and is primarily a way of reallocating resources. The power to decide lies in the hands of the judging committee, composed of diverse actors who base their decisions on various discursive frames. Nevertheless, they must create a representation which supports their decision and which reaffirms what is meant by a "proper village" (Pospěch – Spěšná – Staveník 2015). However, such a representation corresponds neither with the categories deemed to be important in the competition rules, nor with the representations presented to the judging committee by the municipalities themselves, which float freely in virtual space. Policymakers thus appear to treat the construct of rurality only as an argumentative tool, and the discursive framework of policymakers is practically missing in public space (although media discourse, judging from the regional press, may find interest in topics such as subsidy policy or cross-border cooperation on the one hand, and social conflict on the other). In other words, the construction of rurality is not in itself an aim of the political negotiations of policymakers, but the rurality construct is used in their political practices, which further reproduce and legitimize it. Villager discourse oscillates between these discursive frameworks. It is based on the discursive framing of rurality of expert discourse, as reproduced by media discourse, while it is forthcoming to the discourse of policymakers to the extent to which it is legible to them. This means that while villages in their presentations openly declare what is publicly available on the official competition website as reasons for being awarded a prize (as can be seen from an analysis of traces), there is an underlying assumption that they also have to fulfil the criteria stated in the competition rules (which are, however, hidden from public view). These discursive frameworks are, however, applied to the local context of the villages to make them comprehensible not only to foreigners but also to villagers themselves. To attain this goal, it uses pop-cultural discursive frameworks, while enriching rurality discourse with an accent on social cohesion in the form of play with carnival elements. Such play can be understood as another way of habitualizing local identity parallel to the formation of habitual memory (Connerton 1989). This dimension, though perhaps only a by-product of the competition itself, carries great significance in that it attracts much attention in villager discourse.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Judging by those representations we analysed, it appears that villages that choreographed a sophisticated programme for the visit of the judging committee, in which carnival presentations

It may seem as though the Village of the Year Competition is a world of its own that produces specific practices bringing particular advantages to all the participating actors. It is undeniable that it brings self-validation to expert discourse. For policymakers it serves as an instrument for political communication and for the reinforcement of power. It confirms the legitimacy of media discourse as a source of dissemination of information. And for the villages themselves, the competition is a possible source of finance, maybe also a mark of prestige, and perhaps a tool for the establishment of social cohesion, too. Whatever the motivation of all these actors (and it should be remembered that we did not carry out ethnographic research in the villages participating in the competition themselves, but only analysed the traces that the competition has left in public space), most significant is that these competition representations (created by competing municipalities, the judging committee and the media) flow through public space with the label of “winners”. And as such they create a specific discursive framework that furnishes other discourses with an image of a “proper” contemporary village.

Mormont (1990), Cloke (2006), Bell (2007), and others have emphasized the concept of an imagined countryside, which is based on the social production of meanings. They claim that differences between rural and urban are the greatest in the realm of the imaginary. The distinct boundary that is perpetuated in the imaginary realm becomes increasingly blurry in the realm of social reality (Cloke 2006). Imagined (virtual) rurality (Cloke 2006) is a representation of a countryside that is not based on any particular location but “freely flows in space.” However, we assert that imagined/virtual rurality is not just rural idyll, just as it is not the universally and equally shared construct of rurality.

Based on our analysis, we argue that imagined rurality is based on an interdiscourse that carries the characteristic features of glocalization (e.g. Robertson 1995). The construct of rurality, which in Czech discourse has been built at least since the 19th century, has been deterritorialized, released from the burden of problematic elements (particularly of the consequences of socio-political change resulting in the disappearance of peasants), enriched with shared global (pop-cultural) elements, and re-territorialized again. We call the outcome of such a process “pop-rurality”. The term pop-rurality is here used to address a (contemporary) construct of rurality that freely floats in public

played an important role, were successful in the competition. Conversely, no villages among the winners of the regional and national rounds “just” showed the judging committee around the village.

(especially virtual) space. And as such, it is freely available to “everyone”. It also represents values and norms that are acceptable and accepted by everyone. Pop-rurality can be thus seized by anyone, and those who grasp it well have the potential to be successful. Of course, pop-rurality may – with respect to its “popular” character, related to taste (Bourdieu 1984) – be variable at its periphery. It draws on actual local, national-state and global discourses and monitors their fluctuation, but only to the extent that innovation can be forced into the framework of a rural construct, namely the construct of the traditional village from the 19th century. This core is then wrapped in other layers, some of them replacing old ones no longer functional in contemporary society.

Pop-rurality, as a shared representation of the countryside floating freely in the (virtual) space of media- and ideoscapes (Appadurai 1990), is based on the representation of the village as an imagined space of objects, relations and practices. What makes the Village of the Year Competition special is that it materializes these images (through the representations of various discourses), fixes them in time and place, and returns them in this form back to the public space of media- and ideoscapes, where they are consumed, to be subsequently reproduced in the following year of the competition.

Hedvika Novotná is a social anthropologist, and is Head of the undergraduate Department of Social Studies at the Faculty of Humanities, Charles University in Prague. She focuses on the construction of individual and collective memory in the case of the Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia after World War II. She also addresses the issue of a discursive framework memory within a collective ethnographic research study focusing on post-rurality in Slovakia, resp. Central Europe. To a lesser extent, she is also concerned with various issues of urban anthropology (urban tribes, continuity and discontinuity of city space etc.). She is also Editor-in-Chief of the English edition of the scholarly journal *Urban People*.

Dana Bittnerová is an ethnologist and socio-cultural anthropologist. Currently, she is working as a research and teaching fellow at the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Education, Charles University (Prague, Czech Republic). She is interested in several issues that intersect at various levels. Besides her research of the post-rural community, her research interests are comprised by migration and minorities and children’s culture (especially children’s folklore). At present, she focuses on research of Roma, and especially on the issues of education within the family. Her second field is the current village in Central Europe.

Martin Heřmanský is an Assistant Professor in Socio-Cultural Anthropology at Charles University (Prague, Czech Republic). His main areas of interest are youth subcultures, rural anthropology, body modifications, and Native Americans. His research has included work on the transgression and agency of body piercing among Czech youth, modes of rurality in a village in southern Slovakia, and the construction of subcultural identity among Czech emos. He currently serves as the President of the Czech Association for Social Anthropology (CASA).

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- Slavkov*, Zlín Region, 2017, 1st place in the Regional Round.
- Úsilné*, South Bohemia Region, 2014, 1st place in the Regional Round.



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The aims of CASA are

- to support the development of scientific research and education in social anthropology;
- to represent Czech social anthropology in relation to the government, public and non-governmental organizations and on international anthropological forums;
- to popularise the achievements of social anthropology among wider public;
- to create and cultivate relations among social anthropologists and specialists of related disciplines in the Czech Republic and internationally;
- to maintain contacts and establish cooperation with similar professional organizations in the Czech Republic and abroad.

To attain its aims, the association organizes specialized conferences, lectures and seminars, prepares and publishes publications, elaborates and presents suggestions concerning the improvement of education and research in social anthropology, and offers the findings of social anthropology for practical implementation. It strives for the improvement of quality of social anthropology and for respecting the rules and norms of science and teaching, and observes the ethics of scientific work. The association assists its members in research and other investigative activities. The association actively cooperates with similar organizations abroad and participates in the global development of social anthropology.

Anyone with a Master's degree in social anthropology or related discipline who is interested in the development of social anthropology and honours the norms and rules of CASA is welcome to become a full member of CASA. CASA is also open to students of social anthropology and related subjects who may attain limited membership.

MICROREGIONAL HYBRIDITY: ON THE (UN)SUSTAINABILITY OF THE URBAN/RURAL DICHOTOMY¹

Michal Lehečka

“Hey bro! Come to my house tonight, there will be some beer, we’ll just hang out and chat about what’s new!”, Bedřich shouted at me when we saw each other while driving my car through the village, and I asked him what his plans are for the evening. “Yeah that would be great, we should tell Zbyněk and the others as well!”, I replied, waved goodbye, accelerated my car, and left for the important interview that I had in the nearby village, where some of my other informants and my relatives live.

Later that day. Evening. End of February. Back in Sudličín, a lost village of 70 inhabitants, that is located on the edge of the Loužná Microregion in Southern Bohemia. My mother lived there before she moved to Prague in 1970’s. Sudličín is therefore a place where I spent a lot of time in my grandparents house during my childhood. The air is filled with ashes falling from the chimneys of the houses. Finally, I am going to meet Bedřich and the other guys from the village that I have known for a long time. The meeting is set up in the Bedřich’s boiler room. The space is filled with the mix of smoke and smell of wet dog hair. After some time, I realize that Bedřich uses the room as a shelter for his Jack Russel Terrier. The dog is named “eponymously” Jack, and he is currently locked in the small cowshed next door. Every time we went out to the courtyard to piss, the dog started to whine, whimper, and scratch at the door.

When you stand in the courtyard and look around, you can see the constant work-in-progress of Bedřich’s world. At first sight, it seems like a complete mess, but if you look more closely, you see that the things in the courtyard all have their proper place and meaning. There are many forester tools, a 40-year-old tractor in disrepair, and you could also hear the tramping and the snorting of the horses from the barn. Horses are Bedřich’s greatest love. All of this stuff put together creates Bedřich’s life. He is, of course, a lumberjack.

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He grew up in the woods nearby the village. His father and mother worked as a foresters, and lived in the former gamekeeper's house. In the eyes of the fellow children from the village, he was perceived as the nice and calm weirdo from the woods. Among the villagers, his family is well-known for the frequent but harmless alcohol excesses of his father, Jeroným. Several years ago, after some years of hard work in the forests all across the South Bohemia region, Bedřich purchased a house in the village from his friend, a long-time private farmer who was moving to another village a few kilometres away from Sudličín. Bedřich moved in with his partner Lotta, their five-year-old daughter, and Bedřich's twenty-year-old step-son. Bedřich and Lotta are not married. This is not uncommon here. Several years earlier, around the time when they got together, they were forced to conceal their relationship for a period, because of Bedřich's father's generally bad reputation. Since then, however, things have gotten a lot better.

When I entered the boiler room, I recognized some other well-known guys. They meet there in the evening a few times each week. I greet František and Zbyněk, fifty- and forty-year-old bachelors, currently working in the local collective farm, in the big cowshed to be precise. Zbyněk is my relative, the son of my mother's cousin. In the corner sits Jaromír, a 35-year-old single, unskilled worker in the local town factory.

Right after I entered, I saw that they were a bit drunk, so I refused to ask them my research questions. Chatting, however, proved to be fruitful as well; we constantly joked and talked about everyday life and their (our) collective memories. Bedřich told me that next summer he is planning to go canoeing the Yukon River in Canada.² At midnight, I went to sleep. They remained until the last bottle was empty. It was a nice evening, because we built a situational safe space isolated from the outside world.

Shortly after this evening, I again counted the bachelors, spinsters, and the singles living in the village, but I stopped counting at the number of twenty. Nothing surprising for me. But then I realized what I had missed before, since I had been focusing mainly on singles – Bedřich is an “exceptional” individual, not only for fighting his family reputation, but also because unlike the many of his local mates, he has a stable partnership and a relatively free occupation.³

² In fact, the dream of Yukon became reality. Bedřich spent several weeks in Canada during August 2017.

³ The description is based on the fieldnotes created in the Sudličín village in the Loužná Microregion, Southern Bohemia, at the end of February of 2017. Common names of the villages, the microregion, and the names of the actors are, of course, anonymized.

This opening fieldnote is a part on the data created during my ethnographic fieldwork in the Czech countryside. In 2016, I was involved in applied research that was focused on the regional conceptualizations and perceptions of the media contents about current migration issues in Europe. During analysis, I realized that the data speak about the specific situations of the villagers and their local strategies and struggle against their feelings of increasing peripherality, marginality, and inferiority. To be precise, instead of migration issues, I became really interested in the socio-economical and infrastructure topics connected to the Loužná Microregion.

In the beginning, I started to wonder about the context and characteristics of the local singles and their solitude. This is not a trend specific only for Sudličín, but is found in many similar villages in the Loužná Microregion.⁴ The regional population⁵ has been constantly decreasing since the mid-19th century. The average age of the inhabitants increased between the 2004 and 2011 from 40 to 44 years. At the end of 2016, 20.8% of the population was older than 65 years.⁶ This is mainly because of the “extinction” of the villagers. Many of the houses in the region are used only by city-cottagers or even remain empty. Younger generations tend to leave the region for bigger cities. Lots of households are lead by those who stayed, single men who have inherited the properties and politics. These people experience continuous abandonment as an omnipresent reminder of the increasing geographical and socio-economical peripherality of this formerly agricultural locality.

The “evening image” depicted in the opening narrative came to my mind again when Eliška, a 68-year-old widow retiree also from Sudličín who worked all her life in agriculture, told me during our interview about the strategies of younger men in the village. She knows it very well. Despite her retirement, she sometimes worked as the waitress in the local pub:

E: “Only a few are coming. The pub is open mainly due to the thirsty old men (most of them are from the city); they have no other place to meet.”

⁴ The Slovakian documentary film Nesvatbov about similar phenomena was shot in 2010. The film takes place in the Slovakian countryside, and depicts the local strategies of getting the local men in contact with women.

⁵ According to data of the Czech Statistical Bureau, the population of the Microregion amounts to 13,708 inhabitants (12/31 2017). For example, in 1869, when the first census for the Loužná Microregion was taken, the population was about 25,000 inhabitants.

⁶ Sources of statistic data are anonymized, but carefully discerned from the available analytical documents.

ML: *“What about the younger guys?”*

E: *“Younger guys from the village? They don’t come here; they prefer buying bottled beer and sit somewhere in a boiler room. They finally come to the pub when they’re drunk enough. But it is a complete mess. Sometimes, they are shouting, arguing with people from Prague. In the past, the pub was full all the time.”* (Eliška, 68, Sudličin, Loužná Microregion)

The tension between those hailing from Prague, “Pražáci”⁷ and some of the local men and women represents a long-term latent conflict. What are the origins of these misunderstandings? Is it because locals only have ephemeral and blurry images of the wealthy city life, and “Pražáci” are stereotyping, mocking, or exoticizing local “rural” life?

The situation is much more complex. Eliška is, for example, rather positive about her contacts with people from cities, especially from Prague, but when speaking generally about her perspective on urban life, she expresses serious tensions and emphasizes differences. She is critical especially when it comes to the issues of local infrastructure, state government, and EU restrictions and quota.

“Several days ago, they said on the TV news that in Prague, buses and trams will be renovated and new ones will be bought. And I said to myself, don’t annoy me! Here? The bus goes only in the morning. They have cancelled the afternoon service. Every time when our children have afternoon lessons, parents have to pick them up by car. On the TV, they still talk about developing the countryside, but they are killing it here. People abandon the villages, and who will be living here? Yes, of course some people from Prague are coming back, but it is not enough.” (Eliška, 68, Sudličin, Loužná Microregion)

Right to Anything

Does Eliška, as well as many others in the village, feel that the voice of the local people is constantly weakened? Is it adequate to say that some locals feel that they are inferior, alone, or even invisible? Let us look at this complex

⁷ “Pražák” and “Pražáci” (in plural) is common and slightly derogative term used for Prague denizens both inside and outside of Prague. In fact, Sudličin also has some weekend inhabitants who hail from Pilsen, but the vast majority of non-locals are from Prague.

phenomenon from the socio-spatial and economic perspective based on actualized Marxist thinking.

In his famous article “Right to the city”, British social geographer David Harvey (2008) explores the prevalence of the neo-liberal urban or “city-like” forms of life and social organization in the globalized world. In the original essay published forty years earlier, Henri Lefebvre stated that “*the revolution of our times has to be urban or nothing*” (Lefebvre 1996). As Harvey says, this notion is coherent with the Marxist point of view – by which the city is the locus and the aggregate of progress. Through these perspectives, the rural world is implicitly condemned to the global urban progress.

Here is Harvey’s definition of the “right”, as the engine of social progress:

The right to the city is, therefore, far more than a right of individual or group access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change and reinvent the city more after our hearts’ desire. It is, moreover, a collective than an individual right, since reinventing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization (Harvey 2012: 4).

What if we replace(d) the term “city” with “countryside”, “village”, or “rural”, etc. Nothing essential happens. It is still the same right. As Harvey puts it “Right to the city” is an empty signifier (Harvey 2012). The concept itself is not about the city, it is rather about the idea of “rights” – essentially a global issue. Therefore, I argue that the urban and rural cannot be perceived separately. That is why this article tries to avoid both past and current theoretical frames of the urban/rural dichotomy or continuum theories (see Wirth 1938, Redfield 1947, Lewis 1965, Hannerz 1980, Hruška 2014).

To be more precise, I consider the urban/rural connections an assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari 1984; Tsing 2005) made of realities, practices, and social constructs that should be partially explored via the mix of hybrid core/periphery processes (Kraidy 2005) that are influenced by the global society and economy flows or disruptions, and mirrored and reflected on the social, ecological and economical microlevel of particular localities. In other words, I would like to discuss my perspectives on a specific case study of a “countryside” locality that I observed through the lens of socio-spatial hybridity which questions the urban/rural dichotomy. I use the term hybridity as a source of opportunities for overcoming the binary thinking that should allow the “*inscription of agency to subaltern and even permit the destructuring and destabilization of power*” (Prabhu 2007).

Origins of “Geographical Hybridity”: Is there a bottom of the labour market?

“The traditional city has been killed by rampant capitalist development, a victim of the never-ending need to dispose of overaccumulating capital driving towards endless and sprawling urban growth no matter what the social, environmental, or political consequences” (Harvey 2012: xv).

Global cities are the original “vehicula” and “loci” of neo-liberal exploitation. But for the recent fluid global capital, the city is not that important. The rural – if it ever was – also is not. The core term in the quotation is, again, not the city, but the “sprawling growth”. The attributes “urban” or “rural” are, from the global point of view, superfluous, but the dichotomy has still its social importance on the everyday level, no matter that it economically does not fit the situation any longer. We should call this socio-spatial process a geographical hybridity.

Contemporary “geography” is based on diverse yet simultaneous processes. The globe represents only one space, but at the same time, the global system *economically (and therefore socially)* hardly engages spatial niches (not only “rural”) that are not sufficiently contaminated, exploitable, and sustainable by the logics of the neo-liberal capitalist economy. How and why are the lives of the people (no matter if from the city or countryside) changed, influenced, and transformed by this dissonant relation between the core/periphery and the urban/rural perspective that is embedded in the processes of multifocal capital dispersion, technological innovation, socialist heritage, or post-socialist transformation?

Throughout the last twenty-five years, the people in Sudličin had to observe how some of the former socialist enterprises bankrupted and some of them were transformed into joint-stock companies. These changes were caused mainly by the decline of agriculture’s position in state policy, by new farming technologies, and also by an influx of foreign capital that introduced three new-built factories located nearby the local centre of Loužná (town of 7,000 inhabitants). Some would say that the locals were lucky. In fact, the global industry “saved” the microregion from even broader and more visible peripherization (40% of jobs in the microregion are of an industrial character). But what is the price for it? This capital is held by foreign companies, which means – from the point of view of many locals – only the money earned by the workers remains in the microregion. Skilled electricity technician and locally well known self-educated photographer

Jan, who has lived in Sudličín all of his life and has worked for twenty years in a shifts at the local car component factory reflected on this unstable situation in the following manner:

“There are lots of others – Vietnamese, Ukrainians. In the factory where I work, I have a problem understanding others – the Spanish are here, as well as Hungarians, Slovaks, Ukrainians, and Poles. We cooperate and communicate with our arms and legs. They are hard-working, but unstable. The people fluctuate a lot. In the past, you had your factory job, and you kept seeing the same people working the machines; nowadays, it is different each week, the question is if it is paying off (...) they (the local workers) are naturally pissed off. There was some foreign agency, and they somehow got to the information about how much they (foreign workers) were paid. The agency employees – they said it themselves but it is not authenticated – had better wages than us. It is unskilled labour and the same for everybody, but then the guy from the agency comes and he earns 6 or 8 thousand crowns (250–300 USD) more than us... People are sorry about this and it makes them angry.” (Jan, 55, Sudličín, Loužná Microregion)

On the one hand, the microregion (and, the foreign workers groups – who are not the topic of the article – as well) should be seen as a space that is partially exploited by the hidden neo-colonial policy bonds connected with the global capital companies. We predominantly feel inferiority towards the unattainable sources of global capital (compare to Delanová 2015). Global capital makes no difference between urban and rural. Temporary contracts, three-shift operations, working restrictions, cheaper foreign workers agencies, a position at the end of production line – this is the everyday framework that nearly every family in the microregion experiences.

On the other hand, most of features of the “outside”, “predatory capitalist”, and “progressive” society and economy have become for some of the locals hardly comprehensible. This is, of course, not of their intellects or abilities. The main factor is a *hybrid social distance*, which is an assemblage of everyday experience and of the perception of (social)media contents. This distance distorts and warps itself according to the actual situation. Changes of this distance should be observed on socio-political (e.g. the increasing number of nationalist sentiments and far-right voters) and techno-economical strategies (the refusal to accept “progressive” beliefs, values and strategies). Metaphorically said, power and value structures are constantly trying to persuade everybody that

the gravy train is leaving, so some of the locals react by watching it live on TV, while later try to forget about it and create their own world, holding a beer can in the boiler room.

Components of “Social and Geographical Solitude”

“We believe in doing the right thing in the right way for the right reasons.”

(motto of US company that operates a factory in Southern Bohemia)

So far, the hybrid perspective has been rather blurry. What are the factors that make the rural world of late capitalism different from other forms of geographical and socio-economical peripherality, and therefore even more hybrid? The previously depicted “rurban” situation illustrates that (we are) politically, socially, and scientifically, as well, experiencing the need for the re-conceptualization of the perspectives on exclusion and marginality. I argue that according to the neo-liberal exploitation, there are forms of peripherization that can be defined as a mix of “social and geographic solitude”. Those forms were illustrated by the quotations and field notes in the first half of the text.

This “rural” social and geographic solitude has three interconnected but “frictious” (Tsing 2005) and disrupted components, which are informal and based on the combination of accelerating and opaque social dynamics of core/periphery perspectives of the world and political, material and economic situation of some areas:

1. Micro-social component. It refers to the hybrid life of the community, which is based on the interlocking of rural heritage and global trends and flows. It should be understood as the scene of the emptying village (global migration flows), where some spheres of everyday life are even more outward and mutual, so most people are well-aware of each other’s lives and attitudes. At the same time, the “post-socialist” notion of freedom forces those who desire liberties and still want to stay here to invent and occupy their atomisation “safe spaces”. This means that such non-adaptives are so well-known and occasionally “watched” by the other locals, so their strategies have to oscillate between visibility and invisibility. This illustrates why some local guys don’t go to the pub, but rather sit in their boiler rooms, as well as why the waitress has optioned to have closer bonds with the local “Pražáci” than with some of the locals. These forms of locally encoded sociality are hybrid *par excellence*, because they are based on the frictious processes of negotiation between values of community and individualist-capitalist atomisation.

2. National infrastructural component. National and governmental issues are often perceived through the images of local cores – often cities. Such representations show the local people’s imagined position in the socio-economically no longer existing urban/rural frame of the nation state and politics. These conceptualizations imply the sense of losing the positions held by “old countryside”. Feelings that the past will never return, and that some people are becoming more and more alienated by the city-like processes are best described in Eliška’s quote about the city.
3. The local reflection of global geopolitics and the economic strategies of important regional employers is the third component of this “solitude”. It can be illustrated by the feeling of exploitation, solitude, and invisibility in the context of global capital, migration, and labour strategies. This component shows the framework of the frictious and awkward (Tsing 2005), yet locally-negotiated hybridity that is represented by the melting mosaic of a former rural socialist setting with a mix of post-transformation changes brought by the so-called “western ideologies” – free market, foreign capital, European Union funds and legislation, etc. It is vividly described in Jan’s previous quotation (and is partially present in Eliška’s quoted opinions as well – development topic).

These components are interconnected and inseparable. In general, they create part of an assemblage which structures the local everyday life, actors’ strategies, practices and discussions over people’s lives in the microregion. What holds these three components together is the situational hybridization of urban/rural and core/periphery dichotomies – only this mix is useful in people’s everyday lives. Negotiations of rural characteristics should be seen as an example of filling the “empty signifier” of “rural” with meaning, no matter if socially or geographically. In other words, micro-explosions of rural consciousness depend on the actual environment. Its negotiation is diverse – based on the topics of local community, the perception of the local “Pražáci”, as well as on the transformation issues prescribed to foreign capital companies, to the national government, or to European institutions.

It has to be emphasized that people in the village who were depicted in the article are not formally excluded (in the terms of, for example, advanced marginality, see Wacquant 2008) from the local, regional, national, global society, and they are not in a risky financial situation. Their solitude lays in fact that they are constantly facing the hybrid components of late capitalism

core/peripherality – they feel strong bonds to the land, observe the ageing local community, and diminishing of the local culture, as well as the instability of local labour market. At the same time, they feel that they represent the peripheral but still integral part of the world – they want to participate, they are affected by national policies, geopolitics, and they observe the prosperity of the national economy while taking advantage of the outputs of modern technologies. All of these elements together hybridize them, which means to exclude, separate, as well as connect and engage them from/with the imagined “progressive”, “multi-faceted”, and sometimes “fallen” societies of the leading groups that define the ways of productive living strategies, general taste, and the worldview. TV, internet, Facebook, Tinder, etc. could only augment this unstable and awkward feeling. Is this situation, which evokes some of the features of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) – or, in this context, “*Peripheralism*” – is it the geographic and social (or cultural) otherness combined with the long-term power relations that sets these “artificial” spatial and symbolic boundaries into the hybrid core/periphery flows, and therefore increases some social tensions, policies, and local labour market strategies?

Michal Lehečka received his master’s degree in Social Anthropology at the Faculty of Humanities at Charles University in Prague, where he is currently enrolled in the PhD programme in Anthropology. His long-term specialization lies in the area of urban anthropology, in which he focuses mainly on the topics of post-socialist housing estates, peripherization, the politics of urban development, the socio-spatial distribution of power, and “Right to the City” movements. He is also a member of the applied research studio Anthropictures, z. s., which focuses on transdisciplinary research in the areas of local development (both in the urban and rural environment), migration, and urbanism.

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Announcement of the First Lecture of the Guest of the Journal *History – Theory – Criticism*

Posthumanist History

The editorial board is pleased to announce the first lecture of the official guest of the journal, which will be delivered by **professor Ewa Domanska** (Uniwersytet Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu/Stanford University). It will be co-hosted by the Faculty of Humanities of the Charles University and by the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences on **January 25th 2018 at 17.30** (the conference centre of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Jilská 1, Praha 1).

Lecture abstract:

Since the late 90s humanities and the social sciences have been going through major changes (paradigm shift) caused by a decline of postmodernist influence and the emergence of non-anthropocentric humanities stimulated by a set of variously defined tendencies which can be gathered under the term posthumanism. This talk would consider how the inspirations coming from posthumanism and its iconic scholars (Rosi Braidotti, Jane Bennett, Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour, Cary Wolfe, among others), affect historical reflection and what kind of challenges and opportunities they present to historical studies. As an example, the talk will present the difference between the treatment of animals as an interesting topic of historical research and the possibility of a non-anthropocentric and multispecies historiography inspired by posthumanism and animal studies. The question remains: what would a post-human (or posthumanist) history look like? What is the function of historical theory in the discussion on posthumanism, posthumanities and the posthuman and vice versa – what is the function of posthumanist theories in historical reflection?

MAKING (DIS)CONNECTIONS: AN INTERPLAY BETWEEN MATERIAL AND VIRTUAL MEMORIES OF THE HOLOCAUST IN BUDAPEST

Gergely Kunt – Juli Székely – Júlia Vajda

Abstract: Following Hoskins' often-cited notion of "new memories" (Hoskins 2001), which are generated by traditional media in the broadcast-era, now, in a post-broadcast age, we seem to face yet another "memory boom" (Huyssen 2003), also known as a "connective turn" (Hoskins 2011). Instead of focusing on the consequences of this connective turn, however, in this paper, we aim to conceptualize another kind of (dis)connection: we analyse the interrelatedness of various – digital and analogue, virtual and material – memories. Focusing on the diverse practices of memorialising the Hungarian Shoah, and more specifically, on the controversy over the Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation in the urban, as well as digital space, we do not only show how memories (dis)connect an actual and a virtual community, but also how these different kinds of memories (dis)connect with each other in the urban and digital space.

Keywords: *shoah; digital memory; memorial; counter-monument; Hungary*

Introduction

Following the rapid progress of digital media technologies during the recent years, the academic interest in digital memory culture, including social networking sites, has radically increased (e.g., Erll – Rigney 2009, Garde-Hansen – Hoskins – Reading 2009, Richardson – Hessey 2009, Garde-Hansen 2011, Ernst – Parikka 2013, Rutten – Fedor – Zvereva 2013, Kaun – Stiernstedt 2014, Hajek – Lohmeier – Pentzold 2016). Among these analyses discussing the formation and disformation of memory through digital channels, there are a number of authors who argue for a paradigm shift in memory studies. After Hoskins' often-cited notion of "new memories" (Hoskins 2001) that are

generated by traditional media in the broadcast-era, now, in a post-broadcast age, we seem to face yet another “memory boom” (Huyssen 2003), also known as a “connective turn” (Hoskins 2011). As William Merrin describes in his 2008 post on *Media Studies 2.0*,

In place of a top-down, one-to-many vertical cascade from centralised industry sources we discover today bottom-up, many-to-many, horizontal, peer-to-peer communication. “Pull” media challenge “push” media; open structures challenge hierarchical structures; micro production challenges macro-production; open-access amateur production challenges closed access, elite-professions; economic and technological barriers to media production are transformed by cheap, democratised, easy-to-use technologies.

Even though the issue of digitally disadvantaged people and the overwhelming presence of corporate logic in digital sites must be taken into account (see e.g., Garde-Hansen 2009), the argument is still about a certain kind of democratization of memory through crowdsourcing, as well as a more radical sense of a “history from below” (Thompson 1966). How does, then, the “connective turn” affect memories mediated by older “technologies”, and how do these different historiographies coexist?

Following the line of authors such as Bolter and Grusin (2001), Huyssen (2003), or Jenkins (2006), we aim to analyse in this paper the interrelatedness of various – digital and analogue, virtual and material – memories. For the purpose of our research, we have decided to focus on the diverse practices of memorialising the Hungarian Shoah, and more specifically, on the controversy over the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* (Budapest, 2014) as echoed in the urban, as well as in the digital space. The reason behind our choice of this particular case is twofold: besides the fact that post-socialist cities, especially Hungary, remain rather under-represented in digital memory studies (as an exception see e.g., Pető 2016), the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* can also be interpreted as a case par excellence showing the interplay between the digital and non-digital practices of memorialisation. In this sense, we do not only show how memories (dis)connect an actual and a virtual community, but also how these different kinds of memories (dis)connect with each other in the urban and digital space.

After a historical account of the urban development and symbolic status of Liberty Square (where the memorial currently stands), we divide our paper

into two parts. First, we provide an iconographic reading of the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation*: we closely analyse the black and white low-resolution image of the official design plan, as well as the image of the realized memorial. Second, after this art historical approach, we study various Facebook sites: during our research, we identified eight Facebook pages/groups/events/communities¹ that came to existence as a response to the plan of erecting the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation*. In all of these cases, we conducted a short survey with the administrators, in which we inquired about the initiators, the reasons behind creating the particular site, and moreover, the expected and actual outcome of the online activities. We argue that virtual memory discourses re-facilitated the appearance of a number of material forms of practices at the very site of the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* in Budapest, which then further enhanced the virtual pop-up of “new” memories; in its Hoskins-ian, as well as in its literal sense.

The (In)Accessibility of Liberty Square

The current appearance of Liberty Square offers a peculiar experience for passers-by. There is not a single square in Budapest that has – as Mélyi (2010) has also noted – such a large amount of fences on its ground: a memorial, an embassy, and a playground are all surrounded by the metal structures of cordons. Although we know the story of private public parks with walls too well (see e.g., Zukin 1996), the question of (in)accessibility seems to form an essential element of the history of this square.

The origins of the urban development of Liberty Square go back to Count István Széchenyi’s idea in 1842 of creating a promenade in Pest. As the first public promenade, Széchenyi’s aim was to offer an accessible space for people from different walks of society to meet and to talk. The common usage of the space, he argued (cited in Zichy 1997: 213), would reduce class differences and bring different people closer together. In this way, the primary role of the promenade would have been to function as a space for removing social differences; as a surface of “peer-to-peer” communication.

Yet, following its realization in 1846, the square was repeatedly appropriated by various ruling powers, subordinating the function of the square to convey

¹ A Holokauszt és a családom, A Holokauszt áldozatainak és túlélőinek oldala, A Holokauszt az én történetem is, Holokauszt – vállaljuk fel ami történt, A Roma Holokauszt és a családom, Pycsába a náci emlékművel, Eleven Emlékmű, Menetrend.

particular political messages². While in the period immediately following the 1848 revolution and war of independence, the promenade became associated with Habsburg oppression³, after 1900, the enlarged area of the square was renamed as Liberty Square in allusion to the events of 1848. Although the situation of the new square was fundamentally influenced by the construction of the building of the Parliament on neighbouring Kossuth Square, which also resulted in attaching state functions, primarily financial, to Liberty Square, at the beginning of the turn of the century, the symbolic representations on the square further underlined its connections to the freedom fight. In 1905, the city of Budapest introduced the idea of erecting a memorial in remembrance of the executed Prime Minister Batthyány, as well as a Batthyány Eternal Flame (which was not completed until 1926).

In 1920, after Hungary lost two thirds of its territory, a new chapter in the political utilization of the square was opened. Within the framework of an irredentist cult demanding the cancelling of the peace treaty in Trianon, four statues were erected in 1921 on the Northern, semi-circular ending of Liberty Square. The two-meter high allegoric figures of *West*, *North*, *East*, and *South* represented the cut-off lands of Hungary through various historical symbols. Similarly, a *Country Flag with Shrine* – another piece of the irredentist cult – was built in approximately the centre of the square in 1928. While the 20-meter high pole was standing on a pedestal with a flag at half-mast, which was supposed to remain so until all cut-off territories rejoined Hungary, the pedestal also included a shrine that housed clots of soil from towns of the truncated country, from all counties of historic Hungary, as well as from important Hungarian historical sites. Throughout the 1930s and 40s, several more statues were inaugurated in the same vein on Liberty Square.

The position of these statues, however, fundamentally changed after WWII, when the new political power rejected the idea of what the statues and the *National Flag* stood for: repealing the peace treaty. On February 22, 1945, hardly 10 days after the liberation of Budapest by the Soviet army, a city mayor decree was issued on the erection of a *Soviet Heroic Memorial*. The irredentist statues survived the siege of Budapest in good shape, so at first, they were not meant to be demolished, and the new memorial was supposed to be placed behind the *National Flag*. According to this concept, the square was to be

² On the political, social and cultural significance of spatial representations, see e.g. Connerton 1989, Hutton 1993, Huyssen 2003, Rév 2005, Nadkarni 2006.

³ Several leaders, including Count Lajos Batthyány, the prime minister of the first Hungarian government, were executed in the courtyard of the Neugebäude, located next to the Promenade.

divided into two; on the Northern part, the irredentist statues were to face one another with the *National Flag* behind them, whereas the *Soviet Heroic Memorial* was to stand in the open part in the South. However, the location of the latter was changed by the Soviet city command to create enough space for military parades, and so the *National Flag* was demolished. The *Soviet Heroic Memorial* was inaugurated on May 1, 1945, but it did not gain its current position until early August 1945, when the irredentist statues were also removed. Thus, even though for a few months, the Soviet memorial was surrounded by the semi-circle of the irredentist statues (Póttó 2003: 56 and 112); after 1945, the political message of the square became mediated primarily through the Soviet memorial. While the name of the square did not change, it was reinterpreted by dedicating it to the Soviet army as the liberators of Hungary. The foundations of the socialist system were laid by the Soviet liberation in 1945, but, unlike the Horthy Era, placing a multitude of statues by the one dominant monument did not ensue. Only one socialist-realist statue of a worker and a peasant couple with children was built in 1950 on the fifth anniversary of the liberation⁴. At the same time, even though the end of the war in 1945 truly brought a sense of relief, especially for the Jewish population, which experienced 1945 as liberation, this feeling of Soviet liberation gradually transformed into a feeling of occupation⁵ by many. Nothing underlines this transformation better than the two statues being damaged in the 1956 revolution: while the statue *For Great Stalin from the Grateful Hungarian People* was completely torn down, the star at the top of the *Soviet Heroic Memorial* and the Soviet coat of arms were removed during the revolution, and a Hungarian flag was put in the place of the star. After crushing the revolution, the Kádár regime – put into power by the Soviet Union – renovated the *Soviet Heroic Memorial*, but not the statue honouring Stalin. As opposed to the Rákosi and Horthy regimes, Kádár chose not to use Liberty Square as a political symbol, and did not add a single statue – obviously to emphasize the break with the Rákosi Era in its use of symbols and models.

After the regime change, the symbolic use of Liberty Square showed both stability and change. While the new statues of General Harry Hill Bandholtz⁶

⁴ A duplicate was sent to Moscow for Stalin's 70th birthday in 1949.

⁵ On the ambiguous interpretation of 1945, see e.g., the conference *Europe, 1945: Liberation, Occupation, Retribution* (2–4 June 2015, Moscow).

⁶ Between 1919–1920, Bandholtz was the US representative of the Inter-Allied Supreme Command's Military Mission in Hungary, who was charged with disarming the Hungarian military and supervising the withdrawal of the Serbian and Romanian armies.

(originally erected in 1935, destroyed during socialism and re-erected in 1989), or Ronald Reagan⁷ all questioned the socialist narrative of the square, the *Soviet Heroic Memorial* stayed unaltered in its original place. Even though the presence of the memorial is certainly important for specific groups, especially for former communists who organize regular commemorations there, its presence is experienced as a provocation by many: besides various instances of its vandalization, skinheads wanted to blow it up in 1992, the Movement of Revisionists demanded its demolition in 2002, and the World Federation of Hungarians put up a tent in 2007 next to the statue, intending to stay until Károly Antal's memorial would be removed. While the tent was gone, the tension remained. To counterbalance the Soviet monument, two monuments were erected, one by a group close to the extreme right-wing party, Jobbik, the other by the Christian-national party, Fidesz. While in 2013, the bust of Miklós Horthy⁸ was placed in the Calvinist church at one end of the square, inaugurated by pastor Lóránt Hegedűs (a known adherent to Jobbik), the total reinterpretation of the Soviet memorial was made possible by the 2012 Preamble to the Constitution⁹ (enacted by Fidesz) that brought about the plan of erecting a memorial commemorating the German occupation. As opposed to all other statues and moments, the *German Occupation Memorial*, later renamed as *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* was placed on the long axis of the square – theoretically – counterbalancing the Soviet memorial of “liberation”, but practically putting the two monuments, i.e. the two “occupations”, in juxtaposition. In the interpretation of the authors, the name of Liberty Square acquired a new, antonymic, meaning: officially it became the square of occupation, i.e., the loss of liberty.

From Analogue to Digital Practices

On the very last day of 2013, the Hungarian government decreed the realization of a memorial commemorating the 70th anniversary of the German occupation of Hungary¹⁰ (Közigazgatási és Igazságügyi Minisztérium 2013). By the same token, the government also classified the memorial as a “project of national

⁷ Reagan played a role both in relaunching and in ending the Cold War.

⁸ Horthy served as Regent of the Kingdom of Hungary between WWI and WWII, from 1920 and 1944. In the hope of regaining the lost territories of Hungary, Horthy allied with Nazi Germany.

⁹ The Preamble states that Hungary was not an independent country between the German occupation of 1944 and 1990; therefore it is not responsible for any crimes committed in this period.

¹⁰ Despite being its ally, Hungary was occupied by Nazi Germany on 19 March 1944.



Figure 1. **Demonstration at the site of the Soviet Heroic Memorial in 2014.**
Photo by Sára Gábor.

economic importance”, which not only enabled to evade the authorization of some of the otherwise necessary permits, but also to execute the memorial at an accelerated pace. Even though this high-handed practice unambiguously sheds light on the ever-increasing distance from the original conceptions of an “open” square by Széchenyi, the concept and aesthetics of the *German Occupation Memorial* itself contained a number of contradictions that ultimately could be used to ridicule this practice of writing history from above.

Among the official documents on the realization and execution of the memorial – first *German Occupation Memorial*, then *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* – one could not find many details (let alone a model) on the future appearance of the memorial. Yet, a very vague and indistinct black and

white visualization, along with the sculptor Péter Párkányi Raab's¹¹ description, was enough to launch a series of counter-demonstrations. The image, together with Párkányi's text, became immediately circulated on the internet, and within hours the memorial was literally all over the news. But what do we actually see in this scanned picture and how does it relate to Párkányi's own interpretation? As Péter Párkányi Raab (2014: 18) stated in his description, "the composition consists of two main elements: of the figures of the German imperial eagle and Archangel Gabriel; moreover, it consists of 13 columns, of a doorway with tympanum and architrave, and of inscriptions". One certainly sees some kind of figures in the picture, but besides a feathered creature (perhaps, indeed, an eagle) and a winged character (perhaps, indeed, an angel), in the left bottom corner, there is also a third, mysterious person with an umbrella. What is (s)he doing in the image? What does the umbrella symbolize? Is it a sign of effeminacy, as in Ancient Greece, or a mark of masculinity as in the various theories of Freud? Or is it just an unintentional element of the composition? Looking once again at the image, one also recognizes a structure resembling a Greek temple. At the same time, it is as if the columns at the back faded into the background and constituted the trunks of trees. Is this meant to be a surrealist painting? Or an homage to one of the classical surrealist painters? Párkányi (2014: 18) then continues his description with the symbolic explanation of his composition: "On the monument the figures of the oppressor and the oppressed, the occupier and the occupied appear. [...] They represent two cultures: the one that regards itself as stronger (but in any case more aggressive) overtowers [...], settles on, and swoops down upon the other figure that has gentler and softer lines. This figure is the figure of Archangel Gabriel, who represents Hungary, and who is the man of God, the power of God, and a divine power in the history of culture and religion". The naïve viewer, however, can neither identify the feathered creature with Germany, nor the winged character with Archangel Gabriel symbolizing a Hungary that is victimized. Even though the picture does mediate a limited sense of tension between the dark bird and the light figure, the image may just as well suggest that the light figure welcomes or at least prays to that bird. In a certain sense, the bird, framed by a triangle, even crowns the figure, which is placed in between the rectangular construction: the triangle constitutes

¹¹ On the same day of publishing the measure on the erection of the memorial, the government also contracted Párkányi Raab in order to prepare the description, the concept, and the design plan of the memorial. The deadline for this assignment was set as January 3, 2014.



Figure 2. Official design plan of the Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation.

Source: Párkányi 2014.

a certain kind of roof put on that square. Returning to the description of Párkányi (2014: 18), he also embeds his memorial within the wider context of Budapest. As he states: “The Hungarian and Budapest reference for the figure and sculptural formation of Archangel Gabriel is the main figure on the top of the column on Heroes’ Square, between the kings and the seven chieftains. This figure on Heroes’ Square walks in-between clouds. In my composition he is conquered; he is grounded”. As he goes on, Párkányi (2014: 18) further exemplifies the elements that are supposed to refer to the conquest of the angel: first, in contrast to the colonnade of Heroes’ Square, here, the columns are broken and ruinous; second, in the case of the memorial on Liberty Square, the angel is deprived of one of his wings, thus being unable to fly; and third, in contrast to the angel of Heroes’ Square, who proudly raises the Hungarian crown into the sky, here the orb (another Hungarian crown jewel) is about to fall out of his hands. Examining the image, we are again left puzzled by these references: the columns barely appear as damaged, the wings of the bird seem to be more injured than that of the figure’s, and no apples or any other falling object can be detected in the hands of the angel. The correlation between the elements of

the *Millennial Monument* and Párkányi's memorial remain hidden. Párkányi (2014: 19) then concludes: "In its scale, the angel appears to be unconquerable when compared to the eagle. [...] One has to indicate who (s)he is with, who is the good and who is the bad in the particular situation. We fear not the bigger, but the more aggressive. The two figures are not in contact, they do not touch each other, so I rely on the mapping in the head of the audience". Yet, as we have illustrated in this paragraph, Párkányi may have completely misunderstood and miscalculated the straightforwardness of his memorial – at least of the memorial visualized on the sketchy and rough plan. What about the realized statue, then?

During the period starting with the beginning of the construction of the memorial on April 8 and its delayed completion on July 20, the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* – which was placed in between the entrance of an underground garage and a road with average traffic, moreover with its back to the Soviet Heroic Memorial, i.e., at a rather unfortunate and insignificant spot – gradually revealed its thought-to-be-final ideological and aesthetic form. Even though the memorial remained close in most of its detail to the original design plan of Párkányi, a considerable change – in all probability, due to problems in the statics – also took place: the dimension of the composition was radically decreased. Now, the much lower *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* appears as being almost suppressed by the trees rising over the statue. As aesthete Péter György formulated (Czenkli 2014), the memorial became "too small to be big", further ridiculing its own presence as a "rival" to the Soviet Heroic Memorial (Mélyi 2014).

At the same time, the realization of the memorial did not resolve the ambiguities surrounding the statue; on the contrary, it generated even more, many times conflicting, interpretations. Párkányi, with his self-contradicting interview to Heti Válasz on July 24 (Szőnyi 2014), himself added new fuel to the already existing confusion. Taking into account the elements of the composition, there is barely a section of the memorial that was left without comment: the eagle, the angel, the columns, as well as the inscription all became the subjects of semantic investigation by various left-wing and right-wing organs. Among the parts of the memorial provoking heated debates, the figure of the eagle occupies by all means a distinguished place. According to the initial understanding of Péter Párkányi Raab (2014: 18), the feathered creature corresponds to a German imperial eagle. When Prime Minister Viktor Orbán (2014) connected the eagle to Germany, he likewise strengthened this interpretation. Aside from revealing the anatomical problems of the representation and ridiculing the fact that the eagle appears to



Figure 3. Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation.

Photo by Sára Gábor.

have knees, several art historians nit-picked this interpretation. Both András Rényi (2014) and Katalin Dávid (Sümegei 2014) – who is also a member of the Hungarian Academy of Arts in close alliance to FIDESZ – argued that the German imperial eagle is a coat of arms animal, and as such, it unnecessarily offends the entire German nation. In reaction, Párkányi (Szőnyi 2014) tried to back out of his former position, and claimed that even though the description suggests that the eagle is a German imperial eagle, “in reality it is not, as I did not want to condemn a nation, and that’s why I did not design it in accordance to the German coat of arms animal, but I remodelled it”. Does this remodelled

eagle refer to something else then? Párkányi remains silent about a possible new definition. The ultimate devastating criticism came from art historian Ernő Marosi: at the conference *Historical Memory and Historiography* (organized by The Institute of Philosophy and History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences), Marosi discussed Johann Nepomuk Ender's painting *From Darkness, to Light. The Allegory of the Hungarian Academy Of Sciences* (1831), where Hebe, the Greek Goddess of the Youth, offers the drink of science and art to the Hungarian nation depicted – most surprisingly – as an eagle. The eagle, thus, can just as well symbolize Hungary.

In a similar vein, the figure of the angel also opened up a whole universe of diverse interpretations. While Párkányi (2014) identified Archangel Gabriel with Hungary in his description, Orbán (2014) already designated the angel as a symbol not referring to the innocent state, but to the innocent victims. Later Párkányi (Szőnyi 2014) – most likely trying to manoeuvre between his earlier understanding and Orbán's latest “focus” on the victims – reintroduced a new main character to the story: he shifted the emphasis from the angel to the orb in the hand of the angel, and he defined this orb as the representation of the state, and through the state, the victims. In this sense, the angel – with or without the orb – came to reflect both the figure of the state and the victim. However, while art historian András Rényi (2014) stressed that according to iconographic rules, the angel cannot be an allegory for victims, Roma representatives – in line with art historian Katalin Dávid (Sümegei 2014) – highlighted that Archangel Gabriel represents the will of God (S.N. 2014). For them, this juxtaposition of the angel and eagle suggests that the Holocaust was caused by divine predestination (S.N. 2014).

So, here we are with the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation*. Does the eagle represent Germany then? Or is it merely a bird resembling the German imperial eagle from a distance? Does it refer to Hungary? And what about the angel? Is it a symbol of the innocent Hungarian state? Does it stand for the Hungarian victims? What do the columns signify? According to Párkányi (2014), the columns also “may be humans, lives that are now fragments, but could have been wholes”. But how can columns correspond to victims if they traditionally – as Rényi (2014) pointed out – symbolize transitoriness and not the moment of a tragedy? And who, specifically, are these victims? Do the inscriptions clarify this? While the text *Memorial to the Victims of the German Occupation* now frames the tympanum of the construction, a smaller inscription *In memory of victims* has also been attached in Hungarian, English, Hebrew,

German, and Russian to one of the columns standing aside. Yet, instead of illuminating some of the problems, the issue of inscriptions further increased the feeling of being puzzled: according to Rabbi Zoltán Radnóti (2014), besides using a grammatically incorrect word-order, the Hebrew text mistakenly uses the word “korban” (קָרְבָּן), which primarily refers to animal sacrifices, not to victims¹². The question, thus, remains: who is this monument dedicated to? Do the Hungarians, both the perpetrators and the persecuted, all fall within this narrative of victimization?

During the course of the year of 2014 not only questions accumulated: after the nocturnal completion of the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation*, more and more protest actions took place on the square. However, while protesters kept changing the “image” of the statue, on July 23, authorities crowned the “construction” of the memorial and installed surveillance cameras behind the statue. These cameras, together with the high number of policemen present on the square, definitively rewrite the already complicated structure of the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation*: according to the Hungarian Liberal Party, the cost of securing the square amounted to as high an amount as 88.3 million HUF (ca. 280,000 EUR) up until July 22, 2014 (cited in Czene 2014). While this element clearly redefines the “project of national economic importance” as a project of national security, the footage recorded by the surveillance cameras also narrates a digital history of the memorial.

From Digital to Analogue (Counter-)Practices

The story of the *Memorial to the Victims of the German Occupation*, however, does not end with the discussion of the controversial process of its realization. The argument according to which public works of art are zones of intersecting social activities where the creators (producers) do not define the particular memorial any more than the general public (recipients)¹³ has to be taken seriously to a far greater extent in the case of Párkányi’s memorial. Here, the boundaries between the “politics of authorship” (Schumacher 1995) and the “politics of spectatorship” (Bishop 2012) are unambiguously blurred, pushing the project towards the phenomenon of “participatory heritage” (Giaccardi 2012).

¹² Since then there were more arguments pro and contra using the word “korban”. For more details see Sturovics 2015.

¹³ In this regard, see e.g., the understanding of heritage as a discourse (Smith 2006), or as a performance (Haldrup – Baerenholdt 2015).

After Sándor Szakály's (head of the newly established VERITAS Historical Research Institute) statement that the 1941 deportation of Jews from Hungary to the Ukraine was "only an immigration enforcement procedure", and after the disclosure of the official design plans of the memorial in January 17 and, respectively, January 19, a chain of protests started, whose form and method radically differed from previous actions in the history of Budapest. Certainly, in 2014, traditional and long-established genres of protest were also mobilized: besides political actions, artistic happenings – such as the installation of a huge mirror in front the memorial by *Kréta* or the performance of Viktória Monhor sitting on a chair and screaming for 18 minutes – also took place, but the statue has also been consummated by unknown persons with a piece of black fabric saying "We mourn democracy", and some civilians even threw eggs at the monument¹⁴. Yet, on January 22 something very interesting happened. A Facebook event *The Holocaust is My Story, Too* (*A Holokauszt az én történetem is*) was launched by Júlia Dániel, an unemployed high school teacher inviting her acquaintances' to use January 26, the official Holocaust Memorial Day, to flood the internet with personal Holocaust stories. Discussing how passive or dynamic are memories on Facebook, Richardson and Hessey (2009) argue that social networking sites actively allow sharing and archiving the "self" online. Did the Facebook event *The Holocaust is My Story, Too* serve the same purpose? Instead of inviting her friends to a real event in the outside world, she asked them to act within the area of the cyberspace, and to do it on the very same day. She requested those people willing to join the event to post about their "loved one who was a victim of the Holocaust". She asked them to tell how they were related to these persons, "to recall the place and circumstances of their death", and to share "their photos, their names, or any other details you find important" (Facebook/*A Holokauszt az én történetem is*/About 2014). As if her idea meant to indeed specify and individualize the victims of WWII, and to reveal their origin: their Jewish origins.

At the same time, in parallel to a smaller protest of people in the flesh and blood taking place at Liberty Square, Mátyás Eörsi, a distinguished figure of the former party Alliance of Free Democrats, created a Facebook group, dubbing it *The Holocaust and My Family* (*A Holokauszt és a családom*). The group – similarly to the Facebook event – invited others to tell their stories of the Holocaust. However, in contrast to the former, *The Holocaust and My Family* was set up as

¹⁴ On the various reinterpretations of memorials, also see Kunt et al. (2013) and Székely (2013).

a group where one had to “request” the administrators for permission to join. Even though the group is public, it has a moderator who controls what actually appears on the site. According to the opening statement of *The Holocaust and My Family*, “Everyone, every Hungarian, every Hungarian of Jewish, Swabian, Slovak, Serbian, Romanian, Roma, Croatian, or of other origin, even those who crossed the Verecke pass together with their father Arpad, has a story about their family from the time of the Shoah”. As he continues, “Lately, ‘thanks’ to the government’s memory politics, more and more stories are revealed that have been so far either concealed or kept as family secrets, and which should not sink into oblivion. This is why I opened this Group, and it would be useful for us, for our children, and for our grandchildren to read as many stories as possible about this dark period” (Facebook/A Holokauszt és a családom/About 2014). Then, pretending to talk about practical issues, he tries to reassure and convince those who might be frightened by the group’s openness: he declares that “one of the aims of the group is to break the culture of silence. Our parents, grandparents tried to hide their Jewishness, they tried not to talk about their sufferings, and we saw, we still see, where it lead us. We find it unacceptable that the descendants of the victims keep silent, whereas the children of the sinners are boisterous” (Facebook/A Holokauszt és a családom/About 2014). For those who do not dare to tell their stories under the conditions of this group, administrators offer to share their stories anonymously. Then, as if this passage had resolved all the fears, they – referring to Germany as a model – invite the progenies of victims and of perpetrators, too, as well as people with all kinds of political beliefs. After asking for family stories, they also promise that abuse and indecency will not be tolerated. Interestingly, at the time of the creation of the group, some sections of the description of *The Holocaust and My Family* repeated itself: it is as if the sometimes chaotic sentences had signified the hurry and excitement of the author who is a highly educated lawyer in his sixties. He seemed to be totally thrilled and acted out of passion. Though not absolutely overtly, but his text – besides articulating his faith in breaking the silence of the forbears – unintentionally also reveals his Jewishness. Yet, is there a need to have two similar kinds of “gatherings” on Facebook? Or did it happen just by chance? Is it possible that the organizer of *The Holocaust and My Family* did not have the information about *The Holocaust is My Story, Too*? Did the latter group reach a different group of people than the first one? We cannot exclude it. Or does the difference between a Facebook event and a moderated Facebook group bear such significance that it makes room for both of them?

However, soon after the appearance of the aforementioned Facebook event and group, a Facebook community with the name *The Holocaust – We Shall Take Responsibility for What Happened* (*Holokauszt – vállaljuk fel ami történt*) was also created. In contrast to the group, here, becoming part of the community automatically happens when “liking” the page. Their rather terse introduction “Let us confront what happened...” (Facebook/Holokauszt – vállaljuk fel ami történt/About 2014) seems to implicate that the governmental acts upset not just those who want to remember their own and their ancestors’ sufferings, but also those who would like to address Hungarian responsibility. Yet, why are they so taciturn to tell us more about their conception? Are they worried that there will be no interest for their initiative? Or that they will get aggressive comments denying Hungary’s responsibility?

Thus, within two and a half weeks, three truly unusual things happened in the cyber space. At the same time, while both the Facebook event *The Holocaust is My Story, Too* and the Facebook community *The Holocaust – We Shall Take Responsibility for What Happened* seem to be having problems with reaching people (the former has only 338 “guests”, and the latter has 65 “likes”)¹⁵, the Facebook group *The Holocaust and My Family* conquered this social media with stunning speed. As of April 2016, the group had 7,100 members, which not only proves the changing characteristics of the demonstration, but also the societal – or at least sub-cultural – need for something entirely new. According to the founder of the *The Holocaust and My Family*, the key to the success of the group was the strict moderation by administrators, ensuring that the group was a much “safer” place to evoke personal and often painful memories. After the creation of the group, hundreds of people shared their – partly never even published – personal and family stories, and similarly, they also showed photos of their dead to the more than 7,000 members of the group and to anyone reading the posts. And there are not only Jews who have stories. There are stories of by-standers who were witnesses to certain events, and of people who helped, too. Yet among the group’s members, there are also people who just sympathize with the persecuted and their descendants, and who feel that this is their issue, too. People, who would like to acknowledge Hungarian responsibility for the Shoah. If, however, there is a need in Hungarians to confront Hungarian responsibility in WWII, why is the Facebook event and community dedicated to this specific objective so unsuccessful? Is it possible that the idea of a Facebook group is much more attractive?

¹⁵ Data checked on 2017–06–25.

As Garde-Hansen et al. (2009) emphasize, digital memories, particularly social networking sites, are appealing partly because they enable to think outside of the box: the categories of producers and consumers, the collective and individual, as well as public and private are overwritten by the combination of these traditional sociological concepts. Yet while we are indeed witnessing a greater personalisation of memory practices in the digital field, alongside with the emergence of the collective as a new networked community, neither the Facebook event, nor the Facebook community seemed to help this cause. Even though the organizer of the Facebook event *The Holocaust is My Story, Too* told us that her idea was to counteract the voices according to which the Holocaust memorial year, and the Holocaust as such, is only the private matter of a few people, she also wanted to avoid “intensive yammering”. Instead, she wanted people to simply be confronted with the presence of the Shoah. As she recalls, this is why she decided to set up an event rather than a group. Nevertheless, according to her, the greatest success of the event was still that it created the opportunity for “weeping together”, and to enable a platform where people could feel the binding strength of their common fate. In contrast to the Facebook event *The Holocaust is My Story, Too*, which functioned as a one-time event, and as such, basically fulfilled its task, the organizers of the Facebook community *The Holocaust – We Shall Take Responsibility for What Happened* seemed to be in hiding. Looking at the page of the community, one does not really find information about who launched it and about who takes care of it. This, for sure, discourages even those who find the page. And probably, this is also a sign of the not-whole-hearted activity of the organizers themselves. Even for the purpose of our research, we were not able to contact them.

After a one-and-a-half-month-long pause in the protests, a flash mob was organized on March 23 on Liberty Square. The protest *Living Memorial – My History* (*Eleven emlékmű – az én történelmem*) was founded on Facebook, and it was attended by a high number of people at the site of the memorial. While organizers called for “creating a common platform in the social media where a grassroots exchange of stories and a dialogue can begin”, they also asked for bringing “memorial stones and candles, small crosses or personal objects that express our emotions, our personal concerns” to the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* (Facebook/ *Eleven emlékmű – az én történelmem*/About 2014). They extended their cyber-space activity and the group also appeared in the “real” public space in “real” person. And their action has left its traces on the square, too: a hat and other items such as candles and pebbles – just like

on the graves in Jewish cemeteries – remained on site, drawing the attention of those passing by in the weeks to follow. Without any organized event, it slowly became a place of a “grassroots memorial” (Margry – Sanchez-Carratero 2011) or a “spontaneous shrine” (Santino 2006) that was frequently visited and crowned with other relics.

Similarly, after the beginning of the construction of the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* on April 8, virtual and “real” activities further emerged. On May 4, stories published on the wall of the Facebook group *The Holocaust and My Family* were read in public by two actors and two actresses. The event was organized by the Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association, and it was held in the former synagogue at Rumbach street. Soon, the recording of the two-hour long event, held in the fully-packed building, was also uploaded to YouTube. Simultaneously, *The Holocaust and My Family* also created another group *The Holocaust and My Family – messages, requests, recommendations, questions, etc. (Holokauszt és a családom – üzenetek, keresések, ajánlások, kérdések, stb.)*, which complements the first group. The reason behind the creation of this second group is the vast number of comments that members would like to post and that do not fit into the framework of the main page. Aside from sharing family stories, people also use the group to find and reconnect people appearing in different family histories, or just to discuss daily events that are connected to the original topic, to talk about related books, films, etc. – the role of this page is to meet these demands.

Nonetheless, on May 13, less than two weeks after the first reading in the former synagogue and in close immediacy to the 70th anniversary of the beginning of deportations from Hungary, there was another reading from the same material. The invitation said that “it is high time to give voice to those stories concealed for many decades. They should find their places among the sentences whispered or shouted. If a manuscript does not burn, the sentences that have been articulated should also exist somewhere” (Notice of the reading marathon 2014). This time, however, authors also had the opportunity to read their own texts, and actors, actresses, and writers replaced only those who wanted to avoid public appearance. The “reading marathon” was meant to run from 6 p.m. until midnight in a middle-sized theatre. Eventually, it lasted to 2 a.m., and was concluded with a joint candle-lighting ceremony of mourning. The growing audience not only filled the approximately 350 seats of the theatre, but some also had to stand¹⁶.

¹⁶ Later, the material was also published in a book (Fenyves 2015).



Figure 4. **Living Memorial.** Photo by Sára Gábor.

On the very same day of the second reading, emails were sent out by Gyula Hosszú, a former secondary school teacher of history who had earlier written a textbook about the Shoah. He and some of his friends set up a new Facebook event, and they invited their acquaintances for a regular commemoration on Liberty Square. *Timetable – 1944 (Menetrend – 1944)* commemorated the deportation of Jews from the countryside: “From the 15th of May until the 9th of July, we will linger from 8 till 9 in the evening for an hour at the fountain at the corner of Liberty Square and Sas Street, in the grassy area. The core of the commemoration is silence; there will be no speeches nor programme. However, there will be signs in an ever-growing number; they will list the cities from where the trains departed and the number of the deportees that were sent off that day. We will also give some historical background of the villages, towns, ghettos, and camps, whose dwellers were deported on that day” (Facebook/ Menetrend – 1944/About 2014). For almost two months, different people gathered in the grassy area every night. They stood there, looked at the horrifying dates shown on the boards, lit candles, or wrote down the names of their family members killed in the deportations. They gave voice to their existence through their silence.

Before the conclusion of *Timetable – 1944*, other projects popped up, too, most notably the *Yellow-star Houses* project organized by the Open Society Archives, mobilizing a large number of people. *Yellow-star Houses* commemorated the 70th anniversary of the forced mass relocation of 220,000 Budapest Jews into almost 2,000 apartment buildings. It commemorated the time when both the houses and their residents were forced to wear the yellow star. As organizers stated in their leaflet, “Together with Budapest residents and the cultural organizations, theatres, and public institutions based in the former yellow-star houses, we are holding commemorations at the 1,600 yellow-star houses still standing today. Starting in the early morning and lasting until the late evening, the aim is to make this 70th anniversary visible across the city” (Csillagos Házak 2014). Free memorial plaques, easily attachable to the walls of houses, were also provided. Even though the Open Society Archives were the official initiator, and they provided some financial support for the project, the peculiarity of the event was that commemorations were primarily realized by activists and the residents of the buildings. The events that were held in about 5 percent of the formerly marked 1600 houses and institutions (museums, synagogues, schools, archives, etc.) turned out to be very different from what the organizing team had envisaged: residents collected data about the persecuted of the house in archives, they presented these findings to other residents, former residents, both Jewish and Gentile, shared their stories and memories from the period, some baked Jewish pastries, some read poems, and some played music. Alongside with the commemoration in the urban space, initiators also set up a webpage (<http://www.yellowstarhouses.org/>) that not only documents the history of yellow-star houses throughout Budapest, but also functions as an interactive map collecting stories about the particular houses. It is as if those who – unconsciously or deliberately – earlier vowed silence had all of a sudden changed their strategy: many seemed to enjoy the feeling of “coming out”. It was the par excellence practice of writing history from below.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, we have demonstrated various (dis)connections between memories mediated by older and newer “technologies”. The paper began with discussing the historical development of the urban site of the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation*, in which we introduced the idea of an open or closed space, as well as set the ground for analyzing the (in)accessibility of the



Figure 5.
Liberty Square.
Photo by Sára Gábor.

memorial itself (in a symbolic, as well as literal sense). We have argued that the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* is inaccessible in various senses: besides the unfortunate location of the memorial, the process of its realization was closed to any public discussions, and the memorial's ridiculous iconography also made its historical message illegible, ultimately also leaving the question of who is this memorial dedicated to (i.e., who are the victims of German Occupation) open. At the same time, we have also shown that this inaccessibility provoked various responses in the digital realm, transforming the memorial – even if through counter-practices – into a more accessible platform in the urban space, too.

Nevertheless, the question arises: can we interpret this case as a successful story of unlocking memories? Did the appearance of digital memories ultimately provide virtual and actual access to history? While the *Living Memorial* still co-exists with the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation*, converting Liberty Square into one of the most exciting spaces of Budapest, authors of this paper ultimately do not argue for the reversal of the previous tendencies of Hungarian memory politics. Not only did the activity on the Facebook site *The Holocaust and My Family* rather slow down after the life stories published within the group were published in book form (Fenyves 2015), but according to recent news (Botos 2017), the Hungarian government is planning to erect another memorial at Liberty Square, now dedicated to the memory of Soviet Occupation, with an almost-ready design plan. We can only hope for more (dis)connections in the digital and urban realm.

Gergely Kunt is a social historian and Assistant Professor at the University of Miskolc, Hungary. Kunt earned his PhD. in history at the University of Budapest (ELTE) in 2013. His dissertation was a comparative analysis of the social ideas and prejudices of Jewish and Christian adolescents during World War II as reflected in their diaries. Currently, he has been granted a Junior Research Core Fellowship (2017–2018) at the Institute of Advanced Studies at the Central European University.

Julia Vajda, senior researcher of the Institute of Sociology at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest is a sociologist and psychologist, who also works as a psychotherapist. Aside from the theory and notion of trauma, the effect of the Shoah on the different post-Shoah generations in Hungary is the core of her research interest. Trained also in psycho-analysis, she works in her methodology with narrative interviews, and in their hermeneutic case reconstruction, she combines a psycho-analytic understanding with the analysis of narrative identity (as Paul Ricoeur uses the term).

Juli Székely is an art historian and sociologist, currently working as a research fellow at the Department of Sociology at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest (Hungary). She did her PhD studies in Sociology at the Central European University (Budapest), during which she was also a DAAD research fellow at the Humboldt University of Berlin. Her research interests lie primarily in the relationship of art and the city, with a special emphasis on public art, (in)tangible heritage, and memory politics in urban space.

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Olivia Angé – David Berliner
(eds.). *Anthropology and Nostalgia*

Berghahn Books 2015, 248 pp.

Recently, one might feel rather overwhelmed by the more or less hysteric claims about a ‘loss of culture’. Verbal threats of ‘losing’ or ‘diluting culture’, traditions, and roots appear in social media, as well as in everyday conversations, or, for example, music performances. For anthropologists, there is nothing new in this pre-apocalyptic rhetoric (as they have themselves used it and spread it in the past), although many have become increasingly uncomfortable with it, says David Berliner (p. 19), who has published, together with Olivia Angé, an edited volume called *Anthropology and Nostalgia*.

Berliner, Professor of Anthropology at Université Libre de Bruxelles, whose main research interests include social memory (2005), cultural transmission, and the politics of heritage (2012), observes that: “losing culture is a nostalgic figure as old as anthropology. As much as continuity is a key idea for social scientists (Berliner 2010, Robbins 2007), our discipline has, from its birth, held on to nostalgia for disappearing worlds, far away or close to home, as in the case of folklorists (Bendix 1997)” (p. 19). In the thought-provoking first chapter called *Are Anthropologists Nostalgist?* (pp. 17–34), Berliner argues that anthropologists hardly escape nostalgic forms of thinking and writing (although many refuse to be associated with the trope of a vanishing culture) because of what he calls *disciplinary exo-nostalgia*. According to him, nostalgia continues to inform major

aspects of the production of anthropological knowledge.

It is exactly this statement in the book which triggered my curiosity the most. Although I find the whole collective monography – which presents various ethnographic case studies exploring how nostalgic discourses and practices work in different social and cultural environments – to be a very interesting and contributive work worth appraisal, I will focus on the Berliner’s chapter, as surely, it is valuable for all anthropologists, as well as other social scientists or historians, no matter their research interest. I would even recommend including it on the list of compulsory literature for anthropology students who are deciding to undertake their first field-work.

David Berliner understands nostalgia as “a specific [emotional and cognitive] posture vis-à-vis the past seen as irreversible, a set of publicly displayed discourses, practices and emotions where the ancient is somehow glorified and considered lost forever, without necessarily implying the experience of first-hand memories” (p. 21). Drawing on Herzfeld’s ‘structural nostalgia’ (1997), he first turns our attention to the longing of immense numbers of young patriots from different corners of the world for a country they have usually not known, and that probably never existed. Then, evoking Arjun Appadurai’s term ‘arm-chair nostalgia’ (1996: 78) for a nostalgia without a lived experience or collective historical memory, Berliner points on examples of lamenting the vanishing of other people’s past and culture during his field research in the Lao PDR (Berliner 2012): from tourists complaining that locals do not even wear their traditional

clothes anymore up to UNESCO experts, whose policies significantly contribute to the dissemination of the trope of a vanishing heritage around the world (p. 19). Therefore, Berliner suggests distinguishing between two basic nostalgic postures: between 'endo-nostalgia' for the past one has lived personally and the vicarious 'exo-nostalgia' for a past not experienced personally, nonetheless triggering affects such as indignation, anger, or pain (p. 21).

Berliner shows how the primitivist exo-nostalgic discourse of 'being late', 'witnessing the disappearing native', or 'they must be studied now or never' and 'documented for posterity', has played a dominant role in the history of anthropology, being found in the ethnographies by Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowski, Edward Evans Pritchard, Marcel Griaule or Claude Lévi-Strauss, among many others. Without minimizing the historical facts of brutal colonization and ethnocides, he points to the fact that the so-called traditional societies were *a priori* thought of as unable to resist changes. Anthropologists mostly portrayed themselves as observers and as the prophetic announcers of a cultural disaster soon to happen. Nevertheless, many diagnoses of cultural loss proved later to be wrong. One example is Berliner's own field research among the Baga fifty years after French anthropologist Denise Paulme's claim of 'being too late' in the 1950s. Berliner interprets this theoretical perspective, which soon became a practice institutionalized in university departments and materialized in museum object collections as a form of critique of the present, as a quality often recognized in nostalgia, be it 'imperialist nostalgia' (Rosaldo 1989) or not.

Anthropologists from the major traditions slowly abandoned this exo-nostalgic posture based on the belief in pristine cultural essences seen as disappearing, and substituted it with a discourse on the 'ability of societies to resist erosion' (p. 25), which manifests itself through a copious use of notions such as memory (Berliner 2005), revival, invented traditions, etc. However, their discourses are, according to Berliner, "still crafted within nostalgic narratives" (p. 27), even if transformed. First, he finds the newer expressions of exo-nostalgia in longing for the 'local'. He sees the notion of 'local' as emotionally loaded, replacing the no-longer-politically correct 'indigenous', and believes that many anthropologists, including himself, have "nowadays nostalgized the particular and heterogeneous" (p. 28). Reflecting on his own field research in Luang Prabang, he claims that "anthropologists still need their 'savages', their particular and heterogeneous locals against the idea of undifferentiated modernity" (p. 29). This theoretical stance reflects itself in the choice of the research subjects and in the insistence on the key method of participant observation. According to Berliner, "participant observation functions precisely as a nostalgic quest for intimacy and sincerity with locals (although actual fieldwork can be riddled with conflicts and lies)." (p. 29). Therefore, he provocatively asks: "Have we not nostalgized our methodology itself?" (ibid.).

Moreover, Berliner sees the disciplinary exo-nostalgia – "an indignation and a theoretical stance in front of irreversible loss" (p. 30) – to be deep-rooted in the anthropologists' long-term attachment to the poor, weak and powerless, facing social

instability, urban poverty, migration, war, and political disempowerment. As some of the examples he mentions, he evokes the supposedly pre-apocalyptic tone in the ethnography of crack dealers by Bourgois (2003) or the call to militant anthropology by Sheper-Hughes (1995) based on the idea that anthropology must be a discipline useful to its powerless subjects of research. For him, it interestingly reveals how nostalgia is a specific form of engagement with the future, crafted within horizons of expectations in the present, intertwined with the hope and desire to imagine another, better world.

Surely, Berliner's well-written text might give rise to some questions: e.g., if his understanding of nostalgia is still not too broad, although the chapter and the book seem to aim for the opposite. However, I find it thought-stimulating, provoking self-reflection (I, indeed, must admit that according to Berliner's chapter, I have been quite exo-nostalgic myself). I do believe that nostalgia in our discipline must be reflected upon, not only because it can reveal a lot about our present theoretical and methodological choices, but also because only then can we try to understand and to interpret the nostalgia of others, which is the aim of the subsequent chapters of the book.

In the introductory chapter called *Anthropology of Nostalgia – Anthropology as Nostalgia* (pp. 1–16), David Berliner and Olivia Angé (who is an Associate Researcher at the Sociology of Development and Change Group, Wageningen University) mention the Czech hero of Milan Kundera's novel *L'ignorance*. Josef is suffering from a 'lack of nostalgia' (Kundera 2005: 87), but Angé and Berliner

observe the exact contrary in many parts of the world: "there seems to be a current overdose of nostalgia, a reaction to the modern 'accelerism' [...]" (p. 2). Proving the editors' statement, the following eight chapters take the reader on a fascinating ethnographic ride to Argentina, Cyprus, Spain, Germany, Lithuania, Russia, and Hungary. Overdosed with so many diverse forms and contexts of nostalgia, one actually might find it a "central characteristic of our age", as one of the reviewers on the back of the book suggests (or at least an "undeniable part of modern experience", as suggested by another).

As much as the Holocaust has become a paradigm for research in memory studies, previous works on nostalgia have been "paradigmatically 'Eastern European'" (p. 1). Therefore, it is not a coincidence that five of the eight chapters deal with Central and Eastern European post-socialist contexts:

Gediminas Lankauskas (who is Associate Professor of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Regina, Canada) describes and interprets an almost surreal 'commemorative performance' of '1984: The Survival Drama' in the Bunker, an experiential-immersive theme park located underground near Vilnius in the fascinating chapter *Missing Socialism Again? The Malaise of Nostalgia in Post-Soviet Lithuania* (pp. 35–60).

Maya Nadkarni (Visiting Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Swarthmore College) and Olga Shevchenko (Associate Professor of Sociology at Williams College) provide an excellent comparative analysis of *The Politics of Nostalgia in the Aftermath of Socialism's Collapse*, drawing examples from Russia and Hungary, locating the

power of nostalgia within the ability of politicians to accumulate political capital out of nostalgic content (pp. 61–95). A different approach to the field of Hungarian nostalgia is undertaken by Chris Hann (Director of the Department of Resilience and Transformation in Eurasia at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle) who revealingly describes the cultural practice of *Crying Back the National Past in Hungary*, and explains why in the case of this country, *Post-imperial Trumps Post-socialist* nostalgia (pp. 96–122), causing an Aha! moment in the Czech reader's mind, puzzled by the seemingly incomprehensible current events taking place not so far away from her.

Interpreting the local boom of private museums of everyday life objects from GDR and the steady reappearance of GDR-era brands, Jonathan Bach (Chair of the Global Studies Program at The New School in New York City) discusses the famous ambivalent phenomenon of *Ostalgie* – the cultural practice of *Consuming Communism: Material Cultures of Nostalgia in Former East Germany* (pp. 123–138). I find his insightful interpretation using e.g. Michael Herzfeld's (1997) concept of cultural intimacy to be very useful. Another example of nostalgia from Germany is presented by Petra Rethmann (Professor of Anthropology at McMaster University, Canada) in her chapter *The Withering of Left-Wing Nostalgia?* (pp. 198–212). Interestingly locating her ethnographic field in the auditorium of a conference entitled *Kommunismus*, organized in Berlin in 2010 with keynote speakers such as Antonio Negri, Slavoj Žižek, and Alain Badiou. On this example, Rethmann explores two manifestations of

'left-wing nostalgia' and their attempt to re-imagine a fair future.

Hunted by a different spectre than communism, Turkish and Greek Cypriots engage in remembering their island's partition. Although we usually associate nostalgia with memory, the important chapter *Nostalgia and the Discovery of Loss: Essentializing the Turkish Cypriot Past* (pp. 155–177) by Rebecca Bryant (A. N. Hadjiyannis Senior Research Fellow in the European Institute at the London School of Economics) studies the relationship between nostalgia and forgetting. According to Bryant, "the object of nostalgia has the status of the forgotten – the lost, the irretrievable, the impossible object of memory" (p. 155). She claims that nostalgia emerges most at times of rapid social change, liminality, and confusion because its basic function is to essentialize – to portray ourselves to ourselves in ways we would like to see ourselves, to portray to us some (imagined) essence that has been irretrievably lost. Therefore, nostalgia represents not a longing for a forgotten past, but rather a *longing for essentialism*, a longing for a simplified, clear, and secure representation of ourselves that appears to have been lost in the reconstitution of the community (p. 156 and 172). It may also be "strategically deployed to define thresholds, boundaries and hence orientation towards the future" (p. 172).

Validating Bryant's statement, the chapter *Social and Economic Performativity of Nostalgic Narratives in Andean Barter Fairs* (pp. 178–197) by Olivia Angé shows how – during economic exchanges between Highland and Lowland peasants in Argentina – the repeated allusions to the ancestors' code of exchange and the

vanishing balanced reciprocity contribute to essentializing ethnic identities in a context of social liminality. Moreover, Angé interestingly reveals how peasants mobilize these strategic utterances (as 'nostalgic discursive devices') during barter haggling to increase their rewards.

Joseph Josy Lévy and Inaki Olazabal (both anthropologists teaching at Université du Québec à Montréal) evoke the very first meaning of nostalgia as a longing for a lost geographical home. In their chapter *The Key from (to) Sefarad: Nostalgia for a Lost Country* (pp. 139–154), they explore the persistent presence of narratives and images of the powerful symbolic object of La llave, the key to the lost ancestral house which Sephardic Jews are said to have carried throughout their exile following their expulsion from Spain in 1492. The story of the key continues to thrive, as it is mobilized by Spanish politicians to restore relationships with Jewish communities around the world, as well as by travel agencies to develop tourism.

The book surely fulfills the aims of its authors to push the discussion around nostalgia in four directions: First, "to clarify the notional fog surrounding the label" (p. 5). Second, to describe "the concrete fabric of nostalgia in interactions, facts of communication, places and times, and through texts, objects and technologies" (p. 7). Third, to capture the transformative aspect of nostalgia as "a force that does something" (p. 9). And fourth, to capture how "nostalgia always carries with it a politics of the future" (p. 11).

Nostalgia has been an ethnographic puzzle for anthropologists, sometimes rather an unwelcome guest. In his prophetic Afterword *On Anthropology's*

Nostalgia – Looking Back/Seeing Ahead (pp. 213–224), William Cunningham Bissell (Associate Professor of Anthropology and Sociology at Lafayette College) recalls his surprise when his local interlocutors in Zanzibar at the turn of the millennium spoke of the colonial urban past in explicitly nostalgic terms. As a US-trained African studies and anthropology scholar immersed in post-colonial critiques, these were not exactly the sort of sentiments he expected to hear – indeed, quite the opposite. Nor, at the time, did he know quite what to do with these discourses, as he confesses: "Should I dismiss these claims? Simply ignore them?" (p. 213). Although at that time, studies of remembrance were undergoing a renaissance across the humanities and social sciences, one would find only scattered references to nostalgia. Thankfully, he turned this puzzle into a research subject (Bissell 2005), and some others did too. I certainly agree with Bissell's (p. 222) view that nostalgia represents much more than just an academic fashion. Its prominence as a topic has a great deal to do with its salience in providing a critical take on the unfolding and uneven dynamics of modernity. And, so long as intimations of crises and change continue to be uttered, anthropologists will still have much to say about diverse ethnographic deployments and dimensions of nostalgia. Obviously, the reviewed book greatly pushed advancements in this field, providing inspiration for future research.

Veronika Seidlová

Where the Countryside met the Town: Latest Explorations of the Ostrava Industrial Agglomeration¹

Jemelka, Martin. *Na kolonii: život v hornické kolonii dolu Šalomoun v Moravské Ostravě do začátku socialistické urbanizace.* Ostrava: VŠB – Technická univerzita 2007.

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Jemelka, Martin. "The Ostrava Industrial Agglomeration in the First Half of the Twentieth Century: Where the Urban Countryside met the Rural Town." Pp. 71–98 in: Borodziej, Włodzimierz, Stanislav Holubec, and Joachim von Puttkamer. *Mastery and Lost Illusions: Space and Time in the Modernization of Eastern and Central Europe.* München: Oldenbourg 2014.

Jemelka, Martin (ed.). *Ostravské dělnické kolonie III: závodní kolonie Vítkovických železáren a dalších průmyslových podniků.* Ostrava: Filozofická fakulta Ostravské univerzity 2015.

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The Ostrava agglomeration is one of the most industrial and populated regions in Central Europe. In the mid-19th century, many industrial corporations in the sectors of coal mining, iron processing, and chemical production arose in the heart of a traditionally residential area. Along with heavy industry, dense railway, road, and transport networks were built by public authorities, as well as by private companies. In the surrounding villages, workers who regularly commuted between their rural home and the urban industrial districts were hired. The economic boom in the 1860s attracted thousands of migrants of a peasant origin, hailing from distant agricultural regions; these were settled in the newly established workers' housing schemes. The housing schemes, comprised of small-scale workers' houses with tiny gardens and yards, hindered classic urban development. The transformation of the Ostrava region from a rural area into an urban space with an enormous ethnic, social, religious, and cultural heterogeneity has left its significant mark in the mental development of local inhabitants.

This mark, characterized by the merging of the town and the countryside, soon became the topic of intellectual as well as scholarly inquiries. Since the 1950s, Marxist historians, geographers, and ethnologists focused on the rise of the modern Ostrava agglomeration, and carried out systematic studies, which have lasted several decades until the present. One very promising scholar who builds on the results of these researchers is Martin Jemelka (*1979). With his inspiring and innovative manner, Jemelka confronts the older conclusions of the historical, demographic, and ethnographic explorations

of the Ostrava industrial region with newly accessed archival documents and qualitative interviews. With the support of conceptual tools from the history of everyday life and the history of working class culture, Jemelka has published and edited several monographs, which have analyzed the problems of urbanization, industrialization, and migration in the micro-historical context.

Jemelka's first monograph (2007), or its rewritten and extended version (2008), respectively, deals with the social and cultural history of the largest and the most populated workers' housing scheme in Ostrava. This housing scheme known as "Šalamouna", named after the powerful businessman and industrialist, Salomon Mayer Rothschild (1774–1855), was erected in the late 1860s and early 1870s. After almost one hundred years of its existence, it was demolished and replaced by prefabricated concrete housing blocks – the most visible sign of postwar modernity and communist utopia. The main focus of the monograph lies on the interwar period, and aside from analyzing the building documentation and the population census results, it includes several unique sources that captured the experiences of former inhabitants of the housing scheme.

As it has been already stated, the leit-motif of Jemelka's work is a blending of the urban and rural world. During the boom of housing schemes in the 1920s and 1930s, industrial corporations preferred the construction of houses with a maximum of eight housing units. Thus, houses were not only hostels for tens of industrial workers, but they also tried to provide a certain level of housing culture and an economic base for the worker's family. The houses

included shelters for domestic livestock, small gardens for growing vegetables and fruits, and corporations also provided the opportunity for renting tiny agricultural fields in the close proximity of the schemes. All this played out in the shadows of mining towers and factory chimneys. Jemelka argues that workers' households evoked a rural past and contributed to the persistence of rural lifestyles and of a traditional peasant mentality in a modern urban industrial society. The housing schemes in general, and the workers' houses in particular, disturbed the long-term patterns of urbanization and urban development. The childhood, adolescence, and maturity of the inhabitants of the housing schemes neither took place in an urban or a rural environment, but rather in the space that could be called "in-betweenness" (Katherine Lebow).

Even though Jemelka has not explicitly used this concept, his monographs have collected many examples of spaces in which "in-betweenness" or "rurbanity" was articulated. The rural past of the inhabitants of housing schemes affected family, friendly, and social ties, which were based on a regional background. Houses in housing schemes were originally settled by male tenants, lodgers, and acquaintances who came from the same village and region. This type of grouping determined the choice of partners, wedding attendants, godparents, neighbors, and colleagues at the workplace. Moreover, the regional background was also manifested in memberships in trade unions, in civic associations, or in religious communities. Some pubs were accessible only to members of a specific regional group, and other denizens were subjected

to physical violence upon their visit. The mapping and topography of such regional affiliation, which sometimes almost delves to the level of particular streets and houses, is probably the most interesting moment of Jemelka's analysis.

In 2007/2008, when Jemelka published his first monographs, historians began to use sociological, ethnological, or demographic surveys from the past as an interesting source for historical analysis. In this sense, Jemelka's approach was in many aspects innovative and promising. However, the fact that Jemelka sometimes accepted the conceptual framework of Marxist ethnographers is problematic. Thus, workers' festivals, habits, sustenance, and clothing are interpreted as an "anachronism" – remnants of a rural origin and background. An explicit reflection and contextualization from the contemporary perspective is missing in this case. Similarly, Jemelka shows very interesting examples of how local dialects and language varieties of rural migrants persisted in the urban environment, as well as how workers of rural origin appropriated their new world through older vocabulary, using excerpts from the daily press, school chronicles, complaints and court files. Unfortunately, Jemelka understands these phenomena in a very static manner, and overlooks their dynamic moments.

During their work on monographs, Martin Jemelka interviewed the former inhabitants of housing schemes and their family members. A selection of collected interviews and memories was published in the separate book called "People from Housing Schemes Tell their History" (Jemelka 2009). The book met extraordinary response from the public: e.g. the

radio version of the publication was read in a series. The book presents the subjective testimonies and personal narratives of people who were born in the housing schemes, and who grew up and spent part of their productive age there. Later, many of them left the housing schemes and moved to new, prefabricated concrete housing blocks. The long-term perspective enabled the author to capture the gradual change of local memory and oral tradition, including the current, mostly distant attitudes of former inhabitants towards the mentioned “rural anachronism”. For example, in 2007, Milada Kaupová (*1928) recalled that the “house scheme was, for us, like a trip to a village”. Moreover, the collected and published interviews also revealed one interesting moment that was not explicitly present in the archival documents, i.e. the existence of “Jews” and Jewish prejudice. Interviewees identified “Jews” through classical stereotypes as shopkeepers, sellers of alcohol, brothel operators, doctors, and lawyers. Interviewees did not distinguish Jews, for example, among ordinary miners and steelworkers. Jews were the others who differed from “us.”

Even though Martin Jemelka described many examples which illustrate the merging urban and rural environment in housing schemes, he did not inquire about their general context. Emotional ties to nature and to animals, holidays and vacations spent outside of the town, economic shortages and the need to find supplies in the countryside during the economic crises of the 1930s, World War II, or under communist dictatorship did not interrupt the relations of the inhabitants of housing schemes with the rural world. The expulsion of the German population in the late

1940s, political campaigns calling for the settlement of borderlands and for an intensive connection to relatives encouraged many industrial workers to the “return” to the countryside after their retirement. In this respect, boundaries between urbanity and rurality were very blurred. It raises the question of the necessity of a more precise definition of “urbanization” and “anachronism”, used by Jemelka for his interpretations.

The themes, methods, and sources which were shown in the exploration of the housing scheme “Šalamouna”, were utilized by Martin Jemelka in the collective research of eighty other housing schemes in the Ostrava agglomeration. The result was a three-volume encyclopedia entitled “Ostrava Workers’ Housing Schemes”, which compiled several thousands of topographic data (Jemelka 2011, Jemelka 2012, Jemelka 2015). All three volumes have a unified structure that makes reading through them easier. A description of the spatial layout allows readers to create a mental picture of where each housing scheme was located, and how the inhabitants traveled to work. The detailed depiction of the building development opens the doors of individual houses, and guides the reader from the cellar to the ground-floors, and provides literal insight into the kitchens and bedrooms of the housing schemes’ inhabitants. What is valuable and unique, though, is that the authors attempted to put the building development of housing schemes into the historical and architectural context, and to show how many houses were typical of their time and corresponded to the housing types of a given professional group or social strata. In the description of the housing

standard, readers are informed about the size of the dwelling unit, about the level of hygienic facilities, and about the introduction of electricity or the connection to the municipal water supply system. These are considered to be attributes which distinguish urbanity from rurality.

When the authors examined the territorial background of the housing schemes' inhabitants, they pointed out the linguistic, regional, social and religious heterogeneity of the Ostrava agglomeration. This heterogeneity affected the specific forms of the nation-building processes in the region, where people from different places of the Habsburg and the German empires immigrated to. The authors point out that work migration has been linked to a whole range of issues which had an impact on the life of inhabitants in housing schemes. Many of the migrants came from poor rural regions, were illiterate or semi-literate, performed unskilled work, and established closed communities. Alcoholism, prostitution, violence, or the Antisemitism evoked by the distinct *habitus* of the Hasidic community manifested. When the authors consider the housing schemes as the proverbial melting pot, they should demonstrate, however, what the result of the melting process was.

Whereas during the capitalist urbanization housing schemes provided respectable shelter to the wage workers, under communist dictatorship, they offered asylum to the Roma dispersed in industrial regions. The Roma were to be "civilized" in the housing schemes in accordance with the ideals of a new socialist man and society. It were the Roma themselves who, in addition to the retired employees of the coal-mining and metallurgical corporations, represented the last inhabitants of the housing schemes

before they were demolished in the 1980s. The housing schemes were removed not only because of their obsolescence, but also because they were considered to be an anachronism of the capitalist past and outdated approach to housing issues for working classes (Jemelka 2013). According to Jemelka, the Roma in the housing schemes appreciated the possibility of living in the middle of the urban environment while maintaining a partially rural life in the separated residential neighborhoods with small gardens and green landscape.

In the tree-volume topography of workers' housing schemes in Ostrava, the intersection of urbanity and rurality is not a primary goal, but a by-product of inquiry into the spatial layout, demographic development, social structure, and everyday life. Jemelka purposefully analyzed the entanglement of the urban and rural space (the creation of a *rurban* environment) in a concise article in English (Jemelka 2014). In contrast to previous examinations of "industrial villagers", i.e. those workers who lived in the countryside and seasonally worked in industry jobs, Jemelka takes into account other types of sources for their analysis, i.e. works of fiction. Stories of poor peasants who were forced to leave the countryside and begin to work in the industrial sector nostalgically recalling the rural landscape, referring to environmental pollution, idealizing the village community, and criticizing urban (im)morality are certainly examples of a classic literary topic. The bards who celebrated the Ostrava region in their poems and novels are not any exception. However, the confrontation of literary and historical narratives that Jemelka has undertaken is quite an inspiring approach to this issue. In general,

Jemelka's previous studies were characterized by a social and economic determinism that served as an interpretative framework. Jemelka did not neglect cultural, mental and folklore motifs in his inquiry; however, he did not research them systematically. They were of secondary importance for his analysis, and he used them for colorful description. Although similar attempts still remain at the half-way mark, one wants to read more. This is a reason to look forward to Martin Jemelka's next monograph.

Zdeněk Nebřenský

Call for papers
for issue no. 2/2018 of *Urban People*

EVERYDAY RACISM IN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

In conducting ethnographic research among diverse populations in East-Central Europe, such as migrants or social minorities, we as anthropologists often encounter experiences and stories of racism. The consistency and cumulative character of such narratives suggest that they can be interpreted through the concept of everyday racism as a critical aspect in understanding migration and integration processes. The concept of everyday racism is not present in academic texts from the region, so the papers in this issue should reflect both fieldwork experience and theoretical considerations; with this special edition, we anticipate sparking a critical debate on this topic in East-Central Europe.

You are invited to submit papers to be considered for publication in the journal. The following themes are of particular interest to the journal:

- ▶ **the materialization of racial/ethnic inequalities and performance of social hierarchy;**
- ▶ **gender oppression;**
- ▶ **performance of whiteness.**

This list is not exhaustive and interested authors are encouraged to contact the editor with alternative proposals.

Submission Details:

Authors are welcome to submit their articles in English. The deadline for submission of your draft article is January 31, 2018; the deadline for your final article is March 31, 2018.

All submissions should be sent to the editors of the monothematic issue, Mario Rodríguez Polo (mario.rodriguez@upol.cz) or Jaroslav Šotola (jaroslav.sotola@upol.cz).