

CONFERENCES

THE FIRST BALTIC STATES ANTHROPOLOGY CONFERENCE 'DEFINING OURSELVES: ESTABLISHING ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE BALTICS'

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The 1st international conference on socio-cultural anthropology 'Defining Ourselves: Establishing Anthropology in the Baltics' was held at the Vilnius University, October 3-5, 2003 by Lithuanian Anthropological Association in collaboration with the Vilnius University, Nordic Council Information Bureau in Vilnius and other research institutions in Lithuania and other states of the Baltic Region.

The aim of the conference was to develop an understanding of anthropology in the region, by sharing experiences in being an anthropologist and doing anthropology in the post-Soviet Baltic region. It was important to analyze already defined scientific research directions on anthropology here and to share information concerning new perspectives of this science in the Baltic States. There were discussed the social and cultural problems, urgent for transition societies and where socio-cultural anthropology investigations might be invoked.

The plenary sessions were presented by professors Jonathan Friedman, Christopher Hann, Finn Sivert Nielsen and Steven Sampson. About 60 participants of the conference presented 27 papers here. They came from 10 countries and the main part of them there were representatives of the Baltic Sea Region states.

The leaders of the conference Organizing Committee Dr. Vytis Čiubrinskas and Prof. Romas Vaštoka (representing the Vilnius University, Lithuania) displayed social and cultural changes in contemporary Lithuanian societies and indicated socio-cultural anthropology possibilities on their own research agendas. The niche, which in the presence of westernization, appearance of market economy and globalization splits was filled partly by physical anthropology, ethnology or sociology disciplines, might be productively explored by perspectives of socio-cultural anthropology. This way we will be able to make comparative and qualitative investigations to define the conditions of personality in the transition society.

Prof. Chris Hann (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany) presented scientific research directions at this Institute and emphasized importance of investigations on post-Soviet societies and countries. He stood on position to disassociate ourselves from so called 'European context', still popular in post-Soviet societies investigations. This context stimulates intentions to fetish relations of such Eastern countries with the rest of Europe and to draw cultural borders between Western and non-Western way of living. He criticized universal and homogeneous tendencies in social sciences and preferred evaluation of fundamental similarities and differences in all societies. Anthropological traditions may help to define such differences. According to C. Hann, in cases of post-Soviet countries those traditions should be oriented not only towards European-style societies, but include all Euro-Asian region, where it is possible to find relations between par-

ticular societies, to envisage common their historical and cultural heritage, evaluate reasons of their distinctions appearance.

Prof. Steven Sampson (Lund University, Sweden) used category of *post – post communist* societies, talking about transition states. They try to develop democracies and to inculcate democratic values in such societies and, according to S. Sampson, it is actual to notice particular instruments of those developments, as well as to pay attention to projects, supported financially from outside, by Western institutions at first. Projects, usually provided by local purposive groups, and their realizations might stay as actual research objects. In some cases just real material, symbolic, moral and political interests might be hidden under democracy values here.

Dr. Aili Aareleid-Tart (Institute of International and Social Studies, Tallin, Estonia) described situation of national identity preservation in Soviet Estonia. She marked enough different strategies (initiatives) known in native Estonian societies and in emigration.

Aet Annist (PhD candidate on anthropology, University College, London) raised a problem on 'anthropology at home' in Estonia. She mentioned that social scientists are faced with great changes in transition societies and they have to investigate cultural phenomena put in the shadow of pure economical processes. In this context A. Annist talked about possibilities to explore the activities of country-side societies, including alternative activities, such as country-side tourism, etc.

Dr. Laura Assmuth (College for Advanced Studies, University of Helsinki, Finland) touched the problem of self-identity and adaptability to the changed social environment, actual for ethnic people from Latvian – Russian and Estonian – Russian borderland region. Transitions, followed after crush of Soviet Union including new appearances of state borders generally changed their periphery life. Local people have to solve their belonging to particular national and civil identity problems now. L. Assmuth proposed to see this problem across prisms of ethnic identities, family nets and economical interests.

Dace Dzenovska (anthropology PhD student, Berkeley University, California, USA) having in mind American and British traditions to provide anthropological field-works in exotic and wild lands, noticed that such anthropology has enough strong attitude to Western and non-Western values. In other hand, contemplating perspectives of anthropology discipline establishing in her native Latvia, she admits possible influences of geo-politic objectives and orientations here. In this case necessity of analysis in socio-economical, trans-local and politic interests (especially after the Soviet system crush) may be realized in the way of examining single elements of verbal history, folklore, ethnology, national movements in post-Soviet society. In other hand Latvian anthropologists, having theoretical background from Western science institutions and providing practical field works 'at home' are faced with problems of realization of their western research methods in local science institutions, research objects politization, short finances, their own biographical and cultural engagements, etc.

Prof. Jonathan Friedman, representing several Western academic institutions (Centre d'anthropologie des mondes contemporains, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France; Department of Social Anthropology, Lund University, Sweden) noticed great changes both in East Europe societies and in all the West Europe, including USA. Such transitions are conditioned by two opposite causes, acting at the same time: ethnic and cultural fragmentation processes and political and classical polarization phenomena. According to J. Friedman, dominating world centres step by step are losing their power and economical and political powers become dispersed. In the

face of previous hegemonies declines new global elites use to appear instead of national state size elites. J. Friedman names such elites as post-modern cosmopolites and fixes new process of 'horizontal fragmentation'. At the same time politics, based on democracy and ideology values are step by step changed with respectability values, much more suited for the features of globalized elites. He says it is possible to analyse such macro-processes in the frames of socio-cultural anthropology.

Dr. Toomas Gross (Tartu University, Estonia) gave his papers on quite unique theme. Presenting results of his field-works from country-side societies in Oaxaca localities (Mexico) he analyzed confessional conflicts between native Catholics and non-Catholic strangers (newcomers). Together with confessional intolerance here come social and politic factors, and it is possible to define 'pluralism', 'human rights', 'tolerance' discourses in this context.

Dr. Rimantas Jankauskas, representing physical anthropology (Dept. of Anatomy, Histology and Anthropology, Faculty of Medicine, the Vilnius University, Lithuania) agreed with opinion, that anthropology in Lithuania was understood just with biology sciences for a long time. He acknowledged the first rudiments to see here some social aspects in the 19th century. According to him, it was typical to understand anthropology as a science about human bones in Lithuania after the 1st World War. Such stereotype was followed up to the 1960-70-ies. Just during last decades anthropology was used in bio-cultural explorations, especially in collaborations with archaeologists. Anthropology helped to investigate living peculiarities of antecedent humans, palaeodemography, palaeoepidemiology, palaeoecology, studies of genetic ties in ancient societies. R. Jankauskas agreed that biological and socio-cultural anthropologies have to stay in close collaboration at present times, especially in the field of bioarchaeology.

Dr. Roberts Kilis (representative of Stockholm School of Economics in Riga, Latvia) presented applied anthropology perspectives in business. Lecturing economical anthropology at this high school he was able to realise some projects in the fields of marketing, advertisement and planning studies, and some representatives of private business sector were interested in them. These way anthropologists have real possibilities to stay as advisers at private companies, and R. Kilis experience in Latvia points it well.

Neringa Klumbytė (anthropology PhD student at Pittsburgh University, USA) is also one of Lithuanian anthropologists educated in Western Universities. Anyway she also has to provide her fieldworks 'at home'. Investigating two country-side societies (Braziukai and Maksimonys) N. Klumbytė noticed that post-Soviet presence in one hand stimulates national identity identification process, and in other hand has the opposite reaction. Country-side societies are faced with new social problems and socialism nostalgia together with negative attitude towards contemporary life realities has real place here.

Dr. Gintautas Mažeikis (Šiauliai University, Lithuania) talked about imaginative societies in post-Soviet Lithuania, staying as results of distinctive neo-tribalism movements conditioned by society fragmentation, globalism and growing consumption factors. Such examples we see in attempts to reconstruct extinct Baltic tribes (*žiemgaliai*, *kuršiai*, *sėliai*) at present. It reminds new forms of Western cultural and political integration, such as Rotary or Lions clubs. In Lithuanian case such imaginative societies acts in sustentation of ethnographic myths, literature fictions and fits well into post-modern consumption mentality of contemporary Lithuanian people.

Prof. Victor C. de Munck (Department of Anthropology, State University of New York in New-Paltz, USA) discussing anthropology perspectives in Lithuania raised an idea to establish Department of Anthropology in Lithuania. In one hand, according to V. de Munck, outstanding Western

anthropologists would be able to share their theoretical and practical experience, and in other hand they would have perfect basis for their experimental explorations. The exceptional features of such Department should be in position to present anthropology as the science based on systematic methods and variable analysis.

Victor C. de Munck also presented another paper about Lithuanian and USA male and female students' attitude to romantic love values. He found similarities and differences of successful and unsuccessful 'love stories' in both testing groups, describing such love models.

Prof. Finn Silvert Nielsen (Institute of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen, Denmark) responding to the conference theme tried to review institutionalization of anthropology in Nordic states. He defined some actual phases in development of modern anthropology, such as establishing of academic and research institutions (1960-70-ies), turn of anthropology to the applied and political oriented sphere (actual for Norway at first), and concentration of anthropology explorations on East and Central Europe societies.

Kari Helene Partapuoli (Dannerhuset Women Centre, Copenhagen, Denmark) talked about anthropological field-works use investigating business enterprises with references to her explorations in Estonia from 1996. She gave examples of such analysis on joint Norwegian-Estonian companies, where wide range of globalization, Western ideology propagation and national identity aspects is presented.

Dr. Ingo W. Schröder (Department of Anthropology, Philipps University in Marburg, Germany) emphasized, that 'traditional culture' and 'traditional religion' are actual as a part of everyday life and become as sources for political processes in contemporary post-Soviet societies with the clear features of socio-political transition and trans-nationalism. That way the main goals of anthropology might be shifted to locality investigations in various globalization contexts. Appealing to results of his previous investigations on North America native Indians, where locality presentations in global public spaces were examined, German anthropologist emphasized possibilities to explore such studies in post-Soviet space (Lithuanian case for example) and this way to analyse problems of 'traditional religions'.

Klavs Sedlenieks (University of Latvia in Riga) in his comments on valuation of objects from Soviet times in post-Soviet period noticed negative position concerning particular elements of Soviet living style in some social research studies. The corruption system (*blatas* in Lith.) might be given here as an example. Presenting some provoking question for the discussion he also mentioned some Soviet elements, staying as new-discovered facts in Western world. New Western administration principles with informal objective relations are placed closely with *blatas* (corruption) system from Soviets.

Aušra Simoniukštytė (anthropology PhD student, the Vilnius University, Lithuania) presented her investigation results on particular local Gipsy societies. She talked about collective memories and individual narrations creating history of Gipsy societies as personal representation in Lithuanian society. Social anthropology, according A. Simoniukštytė, beside social history is able to see construction of Gipsy identity through collective evaluation of particular historical events, some way influenced life in their societies.

Kristina Šliavaitė (anthropology PhD student, University of Lund, Sweden) presented results of her research on Visaginas city (Lithuania) Russian-speaking people from the years 2000-2002. The main problem influenced generally the lives of local people it was European Union request to close Ignalina nuclear electro station, determining mass unemployment and other relative social prob-

lems in the city, where dominate people, arrived here from other USSR regions during Soviet times to work at this nuclear monster and still not integrated into Lithuanian state, society and culture. Those non-Lithuanian speaking people have very low possibilities to be employed somewhere out of Visaginas city and they feel their real risk to stay unemployed in quite near future. Anthropological field-works let us see in this context all their future imagines of such people in sub-groups (different gender, ethnicity, age, experience of Soviet life style, etc.).

Lithuanian origin ethnologist Asta Vonderau (PhD student, Dept. of European Ethnology, Humboldt-University in Berlin, Germany) pointed her view on possible actual objects for anthropologists in the Baltic States. Post-Soviet people, living in social transition realities are faced with changes in local space and national borders. Those new conditions influence their cultural understanding, and anthropologist 'came back home' might stay as successful interpreter of actual social changes.

The anthropology establishing and development perspectives in the Baltic States were discussed in the final discussions of the conference. Mature experience in this field was shared by Scandinavian anthropologists F.S. Nielsen, J. Friedman, S. Sampson, also by Ch. Hann (Max Planck Institute), Prof. Jeanette Edwards (Dept. of Social Anthropology, University of Manchester, UK). Victor C. de Munck (New-Paltz, USA) argued necessity to establish Department of Anthropology in Lithuania, where local and outstanding western scholars might have space for common works. The last summarizing words on anthropology perspectives in Baltics were presented by conference organizers Dr. Vytis Čiubrinskas and Prof. Romas Vaštokas together with Dr. Jolanta Kuznecovienė (head, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas). She raised an idea to establish study programme of social anthropology at this faculty in Kaunas.

The first international conference on socio-cultural anthropology in the Baltics was closed making common photo of all the participants.

Translated by Rimantas Sliužinskas