

Tracing Informality in Southeast and Northeast Europe: Anthropological Perspectives

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

18-19 October, 2018
Riga, Latvia

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18-19 October, 2018
Riga, Latvia

Venues: Day 1: National Library of Latvia, AsiaRes Reading Room (Level M)
[Mūkusalas iela 3](#)
Day 2: EU House Riga, Conversation Room (1st floor)
[Aspazijas bulvāris 28](#)

About the conference:

Both in popular and academic discourses, Southeast and Northeast Europe, though in slightly different ways, lie outside what is often quite unquestioningly considered Europe proper and Europe formal. In the context of EU membership and its aspirations in particular, Southeast and Northeast Europe are considered as regions ripe with informal institutions and practices in all spheres of life.

Taking this discourse as a challenge, the conference aims to employ the anthropological perspective in tracing the interplay between formal institutions and informal practices in the two regions. The papers presented in the conference examine the everyday ways in which people negotiate and navigate various laws, rules, social ties, traditions old and new, perceptions of proper conduct, as well as ideas of what it means to live a good life. By doing so, they bring attention to the analytical divide between the formal and informal and question the validity of this demarcation when talking about processes in the two regions.

The conference's focus on Southeast and Northeast Europe also highlights the gap in the comparative knowledge of the two regions and aims to close it. The event brings together scholars conducting research in both regions with the goal to consider the differences and commonalities in the ways various groups of people live their lives, thus advancing social scientific knowledge of Southeast and Northeast Europe and illustrating the many faces of formality and informality in contemporary world.

Conference language: English

The conference is organized by the Social Anthropology Program of Riga Stradiņš University in collaboration with Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology and the Latvian Association of Anthropologists, with the support of the Baltic-German University Liaison Office.

This conference of the Baltic-German University Liaison Office is supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) with funds from the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic Germany.

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Day 1: Thursday, 18 October 2018

Venue: National Library of Latvia, AsiaRes Reading Room (Level M), Mūkusalas iela 3, Riga

Conference keynote:

Dr. Carna Brkovic

Informality, Clientelism, Patronage, Favors: Anthropological Theories on Getting Things Done

Day 2: Friday, 19 October 2018

Venue: EU House Riga, Conversation Room (1st floor), Aspazijas bulvāris 28, Riga

10:30-10:50 Registration

10:50-11:00 Introductory remarks

11:00-12:30 Session I: **Sites and (Infra)structures of (In)formality**

Francisco Martínez, University of Helsinki

“Urban Sutures in the ‘Hot’ Railway Street Market of Tallinn”

Andre Thiemann, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

“On the Road to Self-government: A Rhythmanalysis of Boundary Work, Infrastructures, and the State in Central Serbia”

Kārlis Lakševics, University of Latvia

“In Search of Home: Tracing Formality at the Margins of Riga”

Klāvs Sedlenieks, Riga Stradiņš University

“(Not) Protected by the Law: Informal Care for Historic Monuments in Njeguši, Montenegro”

12:30-13:00 Coffee break

13:00-14:30 Session II: **Formalizing the Informal – and vice versa?**

Katre Koppel, University of Tartu

“Not Even All Physicians Know Chinese medicine!’: How Chinese Medicine Seeks Acceptance by the Estonian Healthcare System”

Ieva Puzo, Riga Stradiņš University

“Seeking the Good Life: Transnational Academic Mobility from Montenegro”

[Maria Vivod](#), Riga Stradiņš University

[“From an Informal to a Formal Practice: The Case of the Serbian *Slava*”](#)

[Rasa Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson](#), Vilnius University

[“The Field of Individual Religiosity in the East-Central Europe: Anastasian Nature-based Spirituality and Environmental Communalism”](#)

14:30-15:20 Lunch

15:20-16:50 Session III: **Practicing Ambiguities**

[Aimar Ventsel](#), University of Tartu

[“Punk Frontier: Estonia in the Global DIY Network”](#)

[Kristina Šliavaitė](#), Vytautas Magnus University

[“We Just Wish to Spread Christmas spirit’: Notions of Help, Respect and Corruption in the Context of Gift Giving to Teachers at Public Schools in Lithuania”](#)

[Elza Ungure](#), Independent Researcher

[“Constructing the Categories and Concepts of ‘Formal’ and ‘Informal’ Practices: The Case of Home Winemaking in Latvia”](#)

[Diana Kiscenko](#), Riga Stradiņš University

[“Everyone Wants to Have Good Relations with the Doctor’: Women’s Reproductive Goals and Relations with Gynecologists in Montenegro”](#)

16:50-17:00 Concluding remarks

Carna Brkovic **[PHOTO]**

Lecturer, Department for Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology, University of Goettingen

Carna Brkovic is a lecturer in Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology at the University of Goettingen, Germany. She is the author of *Managing Ambiguity: How Clientelism, Citizenship, and Power Shape Personhood in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Berghahn 2017) and a co-editor of *Negotiating Social Relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Routledge 2016).

Informality, Clientelism, Patronage, Favors: Anthropological Theories on Getting Things Done

In dominant political and developmental discourses, Eastern Europe is a region where people usually do things in a veering way. Indeed, many people in former Yugoslav countries pursue personal contacts so as to access healthcare or social benefits, all the while complaining about it. How can we understand this? How can we translate the need to engage in veering practices into English: is it a form of patronage or clientelism? An instance of informality? A pursuit of favors?

At stake is not just terminological nuancing – these words are embedded into separate bodies of literature and political debates, with very little conversation between them. Choosing a particular English word to describe these veering practices also means making particular epistemological and political choices.

In this talk, I will discuss several anthropological theories on how people get things done in a veering way. I will argue that any attempt to understand informality in Eastern Europe should approach it as a contemporary practice that is often linked to global processes, rather than as an “ill” firmly located within a particular country.

Instead of seeing Eastern Europe as catching up with the West, we could think of it as a region that points to possible global futures – the politics of life are increasingly becoming regulated through personal favors, informal kindness, and a patron’s care, both in the East and the West. This has serious implications for contemporary understandings of citizenship.

Francisco Martínez

[PHOTO]

Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Helsinki

Francisco Martínez is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki and part of the editorial team of the *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*. In 2018, he has been awarded with the Early Career Prize of the European Association of Anthropology. Among several edited books, he has published the monograph *Remains of the Soviet Past in Estonia. An Anthropology of Forgetting, Repair and Urban Traces* (UCL Press).

Urban Sutures in the ‘Hot’ Railway Street Market of Tallinn

This paper explores how both global capitalism and Soviet legacies have been negotiated in the railway street market of Tallinn (AKA Jaama turg, or Balta). In this site of exchange, Western concepts such as ‘market’ and ‘employment’ took on distinctly different meanings from those applied by policy-makers. Besides an extensive ethnographic fieldwork, in the form of a dozen of interviews and sustained participant observation, I curated an exhibition displaying objects rescued from the market by 23 ‘artists’. The exhibition was organised to contrast assumptions that were taken for granted in the Estonian society, as for instance claims of the market being dangerous, residual and mostly hosting illegal activities. Certainly, the excluded economy present at this street market was often informal and sometimes illegal; yet even so, it proved to reduce social inequality in Tallinn, as well as the distance between the centre and the outskirts. The paper concludes that the market functioned as a social glue for precariously positioned groups in Estonia, for whom uncertainty appears as a key threat. The study of this bazaar also shows how Soviet material and cultural legacies are still relevant to understanding the way people make sense of their lives — to the point that once the market has disappeared, the access of some groups to public space and participation in social life became more difficult, thereby decreasing urban diversity and affecting how people move in the city.

Aimar Ventsel **[PHOTO]**

Senior Research Fellow, University of Tartu

Aimar Ventsel (PhD) works at the Department of Ethnology in University of Tartu, Estonia as a senior researcher. Ventsel has conducted extensive fieldwork in East Siberia studying property relations, local music business and identity processes. In last years he studied regional policy, language processes and identity building in Russian 'ethnic' regions. His second field site is East Germany where he researched on punk and skinhead subculture. Ventsel has worked last five years on history of Estonian Estrada music as a side project.

Punk Frontier: Estonia in the Global DIY Network

The talk draws on my extensive experience as a DIY concert promoter and freelance music journalist for more than a decade starting from 2007. In that period I have organised dozens of concerts for German, Norwegian, Finnish, Slovenian, Latvian and French ska, punk, garage, and hardcore bands. Most gigs took place in a Tartu rock club, but some also in the Fontaine Place in Latvia. In my presentation I pursue several arguments. First, Baltic states are viewed as the frontier region of European music space where visa regulations, wide spread English skills and local laws make touring relatively easy in contrast to Russia where foreign artists require a special visa and other documents. Therefore the region is on the 'tour map' of European alternative music agencies, band databases and other sources of relevant information. Estonian bands have built up their own international networks that allow them to tour all over the European Union. These DIY-networks are largely informal ignoring many state laws. The participation of Estonia and Estonian bands in these DIY-networks tends to be on an equal basis because they keep on informal agreements. This took, nevertheless, long time until Estonia gained the trust. By analysing these largely informal strategies I also describe certain principles common for most European underground scenes.

I am critical to the to the argument of post-subcultural theory that subculture is a loose impersonal connection of people. Instead of that, face-to-face communication is still important.

Kristina Šliavaitė

[PHOTO]

Associate Professor, Vytautas Magnus University
Senior Research Fellow, Lithuanian Social Research Centre

Kristina Šliavaitė received her PhD in social anthropology at Lund University in 2005. Her PhD dissertation was on ground level responses to the Ignalina nuclear power plant decommissioning in the community dependent on this industry. Currently she is associate professor at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas and senior research fellow at Lithuanian Social Research Centre. Her research interests focus on anthropology of education, minority rights, informal relations.

“We Just Wish to Spread Christmas spirit”: Notions of Help, Respect and Corruption in the Context of Gift Giving to Teachers at Public Schools in Lithuania

The paper interprets ethnographic data on practices of gift giving to teachers at public schools in Lithuania. The empirical data was collected via eleven qualitative interviews with teachers and parents of school pupils in 2016-2017, participant observation and observation at selected school events, as well as investigation of publicly available online discussions on the theme of gift giving at schools. The paper investigates how the notions of *help*, *respect* and *corruption* are employed by different participants in gift giving and receiving practices in legitimizing their position.

Elza Ungure

[PHOTO]

Independent Researcher

Elza Ungure holds a bachelor's and a master's degree in Cultural and Social Anthropology from the University of Latvia. Elza has done research on various subjects relating to practices in different spheres of exchange, labour relations, political representation, and migration and transnationalism. She has also participated in applied social research projects on urban planning with a focus on social aspects of various infrastructures as well as on place-making practices in Riga, the capital of Latvia. Elza's current research interests include governmentality and subjectivity, human geography, social and collective memory, sensory anthropology, spatio-temporal analysis, and Bourdieusian theoretical framework of habitus, capital, and field.

Constructing the Categories and Concepts of 'Formal' and 'Informal' Practices: The Case of Home Winemaking in Latvia

In my studies on home winemaking practices in Latvia, I conceptualize formal/informal as analytical categories denoting practices that lie within or beyond the authority supervision and are guided more either by moral norms or by 'formal rules' such as laws. In the context of home winemaking, the practice is constructed as 'formal' or 'informal', non-confirming with the 'rule', depending on whether an agent is making home wine for their 'private' use and not exchanging it for the money or not. On that depends whether authorities have or have not the symbolic power to subject winemakers to several regulations regarding licences, excise tax, sanitary and hygiene norms etc. I argue that moral and symbolic value and meaning attached to home wine and the practice of its making constructs it as a product of strength, which embodies winemaker's selfhood and fundamental socio-spatial values, making home wine an especially important exchange product within the framework of reciprocity but also being relevant in context of monetary exchange. However, the idea of what 'Latvian home wine' is and how it should be made, exchanged, and consumed is challenged more in cases when a winemaker falls within the category that lies within the authority supervision as winemakers construct, negotiate, agree upon or averse to 'the rule' and categories of distinctions embedded in normative regulations and narrative and discursive practices of other agents.

Katre Koppel **[PHOTO]**

PhD student, Junior Researcher, University of Tartu

Katre Koppel, MA, studied Ethnology at the University of Tartu, Estonia, between 2011 and 2015. Currently she is a PhD student and Junior Researcher of Folkloristics at the University of Tartu. In her PhD work, she studies alternative medicine in Estonia, focusing on Chinese medicine in particular. Also, she works as an anthropologist at the Center for Applied Anthropology of Estonia.

“Not Even All Physicians Know Chinese medicine!”: How Chinese Medicine Seeks Acceptance by the Estonian Healthcare System

Eastern European countries with a long tradition of centralized and exclusive medical system are still in the process of medical pluralisation (Cant & Sharma 1999). In Estonia, the opening of health market to international health-related teachings and practices has brought in new forms of medical pluralism. The pluralistic field of health market, however, is highly competitive as diverse and numerous treatments/therapies aim to establish themselves as legitimate and become recognized by public healthcare system. This current situation can be viewed within the framework of formality and informality. Using different legitimation strategies informal medical practices are seeking for acceptance by formal, state financed, healthcare system. One of such therapies is Chinese medicine that has been very successful in legitimizing itself and pushing the public discourse towards the embracement of integrative medicine. Moreover, ethnographic fieldwork has revealed that Chinese medicine indeed is receiving increasing attention by medical community (Koppel 2018).

Andre Thiemann

[PHOTO]

Visiting Professor, Central European University
Research Partner, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

Andre Thiemann is a political and economic anthropologist working on contemporary Europe with a long-standing interest in West Africa. After he defended his dissertation, *State Relations: Local State and Social Security in Central Serbia* with highest honours (summa cum laude), Andre was a research fellow in the ZIF Research Group 'Kinship and Politics: Rethinking a Conceptual Split and its Epistemological Implications in the Social Sciences', at Bielefeld University. Subsequently, he was a Junior Core Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies at CEU Budapest, before joining the CEU Dept. for Sociology and Social Anthropology. Andre has published in *Social Analysis*, *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, the *Bulletin of the Ethnographic Institute SASA*, and in several edited volumes. His post-doctoral research project examines the global value chain of raspberries.

On the Road to Self-government: A Rhythmanalysis of Boundary Work, Infrastructures, and the State in Central Serbia

This article explores relational boundary work at the 'state interface' of a sub-municipal Local Council in central Serbia. Contributing to critical studies of future-making, I argue that infrastructural voluntarism shapes the workings of the local 'state' and temporal reasoning among residents. In my case-study of a road dispute, 'oppositional villagers' stressed their voluntary contributions to road construction while simultaneously demanding swift allocation of funds for road renovation, mobilizing arguments about territorially and socially just redistribution. Residents' desires for material development were confronted with the council budget as the boundary object around which the Local Council aligned. Throughout the protracted dispute, the uneven history of infrastructural transformations (roads, water, electricity, and telephone) was recast to source alternative visions of 'better connected' futures. The process of local self-government thus emerges through complex fluctuations between dis- and re-enchantments with infrastructural longings, and it gains heightened intensity around election time, as political contenders engage in redrawing the boundary between the village community and the sitting Local Council. Anticipating alternative 'village futures', they gloss over multiple axes of internal division (such as age, gender, or class) otherwise salient in local politics. After election, the new Council visions are again constrained by the dwindling means, heightened responsibilities, and changing social utopias of Serbia's neoliberalizing state formation – and the critique of the new opposition. In sum, relational boundary work both erases and rematerializes the line between informal practices and a formal state institution, simultaneously rekindling hope for/against the state and voluntary commitment to infrastructural improvement.

Kārlis Lakševics

[PHOTO]

Lecturer and researcher, University of Latvia

Kārlis Lakševics is lecturer and researcher at University of Latvia. His research interests lie in political ecology, environmental management, social exclusion and rights to the city.

In Search of Home: Tracing Formality at the Margins of Riga

Even though the everyday lives of people living in Riga without a permanent residence might be seen to consist mostly of informal practices, the encounters with formal institutions and urban policing form a significant part of the struggle to create one's space in the city. While some see the use of social services as a resourceful way to get the needed resources, some avoid the use of shelters, soup kitchens and various charities altogether. While some occasionally use shelters during the winter, some use various strategies to occupy a temporary space where to reside during the winter.

In the paper I look at the ways how basic human needs are difficult to fulfil outside of formal structures, while tracing the material and discursive formalities that make it more difficult to fulfil them. In engaging this contradiction, I aim to trace how the neoliberal regime of development, consumption, urban policing and the centrality of private property and ownership arrangements define social relations on the street.

The discussion is structured around three aspects of everyday life where the formal and informal intersect: claiming a lesser policed space where to sleep, dealing with the policing and surveillance of informal rules of public space, and the discontent towards the use of public services. I argue that the discursive and violent effects of formal encounters at once aims to solve and contributes to social exclusion, while informal use of other people's property, sharing of consumer goods and extralegal activities have similar contradictions.

Klāvs Sedlenieks

[PHOTO]

Associate Professor, Riga Stradiņš University

Klāvs Sedlenieks (PhD) has worked with questions related to informality since early 2000. He has researched anthropological issues of corruption in Latvia as well as informal aspects of interactions between citizens and state in Montenegro. He is currently finalising an international research project dealing with various aspects of informality across the Balkans.

(Not) Protected by the Law: Informal Care for Historic Monuments in Njeguši, Montenegro

The village of Njeguši in Montenegro is home to about 150 permanent inhabitants. It consists of 7 settlements, in which there are 14 churches. Three of the churches are nicely restored. Three churches have inscription “Protected by the law”. These two groups do not overlap and is a constant source of bitter joking among the villagers. If it’s “protected by the law” it would mean that it is falling apart. The restoration of the churches was carried out by the local people, under the auspices of an informal “committee” (*odbor*). The *odbor* is selected by the meeting of citizens (*zbor gradjana*) and consists only of male representatives of certain local families. The *odbor* then carries out collection of money and managing the works. At the same time the historic monuments that are supposed to be protected by the law are in bad shape specifically due to this protection.

On the one hand the above illustrates a successfully working semi-traditional informal element of self-governance. On the other hand, this story fits to a larger pattern (observed elsewhere in, e.g., Serbia or Bosnia and Herzegovina) whereby the effective and active citizens are seen (by local actors) as efficient and active and by that contrasted to the inefficient and inactive formal state institutions.

Ieva Puzo

[PHOTO]

Researcher, Riga Stradiņš University

Ieva Puzo holds a PhD in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Pittsburgh (2017). She is currently a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer at Riga Stradiņš University, Latvia. Her research interests lie in the anthropological study of the intersection of science, mobility, and labor, focusing on the affective dimension of the transnational mobility of academic workforce.

Seeking the Good Life: Transnational Academic Mobility from Montenegro

Academic mobility from Montenegro highlights a set of paradoxes embedded in the higher education and research system in the country on its course to join the European Union. It also brings to the fore the aspirations and hopes young Montenegrins invest in the idea and ideal of “Europe.”

My paper analyzes how young people in Montenegro make both sense and use of the various international, local and personal level support mechanisms available to them when they make their academic mobility decisions – both leaving the country and, in many cases, returning to it. For the purposes of this paper, I consider transnational academic mobility as an extended and affect-filled process, involving investments in mobility and obstacles to it. In addition, the paper examines the Montenegrin youths’ perceptions of the delineation between what they consider “formal” and “informal” mechanisms in achieving academic mobility.

Through this focus, the paper highlights how Montenegrin students and young researchers navigate a fluid set of resources available to them in the decision-making process about academic mobility (including immobility). It suggests that young Montenegrins consider mobility as a path to ensuring a “good life” in their future and, importantly, that students and young researchers rely on a multitude of institutions and networks to achieve this goal, complicating the “formal” and “informal” divide and, in the process, calling attention to the inclusions and exclusions of the category of “Europe.”

Diana Kiscenko

[PHOTO]

PhD student, Lecturer, Researcher, Riga Stradiņš University

Diana Kiscenko is a PhD student, lecturer and researcher at Riga Stradiņš University. Her doctoral research is on family planning practices in Montenegro. In 2016-2018, she participated in the Horizon 2020 research project “INFORM: Closing the gap between formal and informal institutions in the Balkans.” She holds an M.Sc. degree in Social and Cultural Anthropology from the VU University Amsterdam and an M.A. degree in Latin American studies from CEDLA/University of Amsterdam. Her research interests are gender, family planning, kinship and sexuality.

“Everyone Wants to Have Good Relations with the Doctor”: Women’s Reproductive Goals and Relations with Gynecologists in Montenegro

According to the UNFPA report (2012), Montenegro is one of top ten countries in the world in the most imbalanced sex ratio at birth. International organizations (UNFPA, Council of Europe) and media relate skewed sex ratio to an existing son preference in the society, suggesting that it leads to sex-selective abortion practices in Montenegro. In order to comply with the existing idea of a more desired sex of a child, women in Montenegro need to monitor their health and realize the reproductive aims in collaboration with gynecologists.

Based on eight months of ethnographic fieldwork (from June 2017 to March 2018) in the central and northern part of Montenegro, in this paper I explore the complex relationships between women and gynecologists in Montenegro. I suggest that both formal, institutionalized settings and informal and personal relations with gynecologists are employed to realize reproductive aims. While it is important to establish personal relations with a doctor who provides medical opinion, prenatal testing (ultrasound, CVS, amniocentesis, cell-free foetal DNA testing) and abortion can be performed in the formal medical institutions. These relations are seen not only as a way to get access to better maternal care today, but also secure a predictable support mechanism in case of need in the future.

Maria Vivod

[PHOTO]

Researcher, Riga Stradiņš University

Associate Researcher, Dynamiques Européennes, University of Strasbourg

Maria Vivod is an Associate Researcher and Anthropologist and Ethnologist at a research lab UMR 7367 D.E. Dynamiques Européennes (*Dynamics of Europe*) based in Strasbourg, France. Since recently, based in Riga Stradiņš University, she is also a short-term researcher in the Horizon 2020 “INFORM” project. Maria Vivod received her PhD in Ethnology, Demography and Sociology in 2005 from the University Marc Bloch in Strasbourg, France. Her fields of research and interests include political violence, armed groups, paramilitary units, insurgencies, peace and conflict research, politics of the Balkans and Central Europe, societies in Transition (post-socialism), Eastern European Anthropology, Medical Anthropology/Ethnomedicine and Visual Anthropology. Her most recent book is *The Master and its Servants: The Entangled Web Between the Serbian Secret Service, Organized Crime and Paramilitary Units in the Yugoslav Conflict* (2015).

From an Informal to a Formal Practice: The Case of the Serbian *Slava*

The Serbian *slava* entered the UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list in 2014. Originally, it is a patrilineal lineage celebration custom based on orthodox Christian liturgical elements with foundations in the pre-Christian belief-system. It is popularly known as the celebration of the saint-protector of Serbian families.

The paper will start with a brief ethnographic description of the Serbian *slava*. Additionally, it will deal with the phenomenon of transmutation of this usually privately celebrated social practice into a publicly displayed celebration of governmental institutions of the Serbian State. In their effort to transmute the *slava* into a public event, Serbian state institutions often transmogrify the traditional practices related to the celebration of this custom and amplify the rituals, thus obtaining a grotesque public display of ethnic identity. An insight of the role in the process of transmogrification played by the Serbian Orthodox Church will be offered as well.

The goal of the paper is to trace down the path of the transmutation of the Serbian *slava* from an informal social practice into the arena of formal institutions. In that sense, it will explore the criticism of such transformation coming from the sphere of the Serbian civil society and it will analyze the social conditions enabling such a conversion. Moreover, the state of the art on theoretical framework on this topic will be discussed and other interpretational models will be developed as well.

Rasa Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson

Associate Professor, Vilnius University

Rasa Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson is an anthropologist, based at Vilnius University, Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies. Her research interests are contemporary alternative religiosity, Soviet and post-Soviet cultural heritage, youth, religious and other subcultures, and alternative social projects. Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson has experience of fourteen years (2004-2018) in applying qualitative social research methods. She has published on the material collected during her fieldwork on post-Soviet and Soviet religiosity, alternative religious movements and subcultures (Vissarionites and Anastasians in Baltic countries, Ukraine and Russia, Lithuanian communities of Hare Krishna, Buddhists and Pagan Romuva, diverse subcultures in Lithuania).

The Field of Individual Religiosity in the East-Central Europe: Anastasian Nature-based Spirituality and Environmental Communalism

The paper presents a research into contemporary informal East-Central European religious field focusing on the Anastasia “spiritual” movement, classifiable as New Age which emerged in Russia in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and since has spread to East-Central Europe and beyond. It presents the implementation of environmental and spirituality ideas of alternative communitarian movements through the establishment of quickly spreading nature-based spirituality communities and their settlements in the East-Central Europe. The paper studies current socio-religious processes, discussing diverse manifestations and changes of religious phenomena concerning individual religiosities, development and expressions of informal religious practices in (trans)national and (trans)regional levels.

In the paper I will discuss informal Anastasian ideas and activities within cultural underground – a process of sacralization of nature, utopian visions of prospective heaven on Earth serving as a basis for establishment of alternative social, based in natural space, projects – love spaces. One part of the research has been focused on the relative importance of social and ideological contexts in the construction of the alternative religious identities of Anastasians. The paper also explores the meaning of religious identity and how it influences – and is influenced by – local and global cultures ultimately producing a religious subculture. Particular attention is given to the role of these dynamics in the development of post-Soviet cultural heritage in East-Central Europe and in the communication of Western cultural influences on the religiosity in the region.

Findings are based on data obtained from the fieldwork in 2005–2017, including participant observation research and interviews with respondents in the Baltic countries, Russia and Ukraine.