

## RESPONSE

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With our contribution to this issue of *Ethnologia Europaea*, we aim to highlight one of the more burning issues in contemporary European policy, namely the workings of the welfare system in relation to health. This does not only concern the national economy. It also includes the well-being of people. Our intention is to focus on the cultural dimension of this issue and advocate its further development. The project we have been involved in and report on is only one of many possible ways of addressing a social area that is worth much more ethnological and cross-disciplinary attention – preferably at a transnational level, as Gisela Welz suggests in her commentary. In addition to a more “hands-on” use of ethnology, we wanted to show the rewards of studying the workings of the state at the local level. This is, after all, where most people *experience* the state. The commentators’ responses have been stimulating at a number of different levels. What I find particularly fruitful for further analysis are the many different entries to a deeper understanding of the interface between the state, local culture and individual lives. The comments show a broad spectrum of issues, from central administrative practices to people’s hope and despair when facing the future. It becomes clear that every understanding of life and culture in contemporary Europe will benefit enormously from being held up against the backdrop of the much wider context constituted by the state and its administration.

Both Tian Sørhaug and Pertti Alasuutari focus on the administrative level. An “audit society” delegates the control of practice to more formal systems of accounting. This could indeed be seen as a stream-

lining of the surveillance of governance. Sørhaug’s gloomy portrayal of a contemporary society in which “personal judgement and trust will retreat from the production of universal values” makes this even more pertinent. The image of administrators without a purpose beyond the realm of what can be evaluated appears nightmarish. It makes one wonder about the morally spineless automatons working within such a society. What our results point towards, though, is that an “audit society” can also be studied as it is practiced. In Småland, where a more formal and closely evaluated system was in place, the fewest number of people were reported as being ill. The opposite was the case in Jämtland. Here there was much more scope for individual judgement and, at the same time, twice the number of people on the sick-list. This leads us to suggest that our understanding of governance and implementation can best be furthered by close ethnography, including among administrators. If our results indicate any signs of an “audit society”, then it is in the realm of administration, one that encourages administrators to do their jobs properly and thus facilitates the influence of local communities. Here is, indeed, a rewarding area for the meeting of top-down and bottom-up perspectives.

The extent of local influence and its international reach are clearly illustrated in Alasuutari’s discussion of “domestication”. He shows that foreign patterns and foreign people have to bend to “domestic” rules wherever they appear. At the same time, both patterns and people are rendered more globalised. Still, the saying “no matter how much you domesticate a

horse, there is always some horseness left” reminds us of the power of the local, as in Bourdieu’s *habitus*. It may help us to explain how in communities like Gislaved, with its large number of immigrants, newcomers are easily slotted into a local pattern permeated by a Weberian ethos. The concept also explains how different parts of community life become more and more translocal and transnational. Gislaved was the community where the National Holiday was celebrated most vigorously, which makes perfect sense in relation to Stef Jansen’s analysis of the state as a “hope-generating machine”. Here it would be interesting to study *levels* of “domestication” in order to find out what is easily integrated into a local system and what is more likely to undergo change. My guess is that many of the policy models that Alasuutari writes about are more adjustable, while strong value patterns and life modes are much more resistant to change.

Gisela Welz underlines the importance of revitalising the tradition of comparative ethnography in which regions or nations are contrasted with each other, albeit in a more elaborate way than trying to find some form of “character” or “identity”, as in the intellectual traditions of culture and personality. The new challenge is to look both at the organisation of civil society and the workings of the state and identify the similarities and differences. The comparative perspective should help answering questions of *why*, instead of making statements about *what*. In the project two regions were counterpoised in an attempt to acquire a deeper understanding of how everyday life was culturally structured and how the potential for trust and hope could be conceived as part of that life. Interestingly, the project texts published in Swedish have often been read differently, namely as a further confirmation of the stereotyping of the inhabitants of Jämtland and Småland. The picture we present seems to fortify already existing prejudices. This might discourage the ethnological community from undertaking more cross-cultural comparisons; the legacy of “culture and personality” is part of today’s folklore. But Gisela Welz shows the promise of connecting to previous research on communities in Germany after World War II. Simi-

lar studies exist in Sweden too; one of them is a replica of “Middletown”, carried out in the 1940s in the community of Mallsjö – one of our study areas.

The concept of hope lies at the very heart of Stef Jansen’s illuminating comment in conjunction with his studies of Bosnian refugees. Is it the trick played by the word “belonging” that urges us to focus more on the “umbilical cord” that ties people to places than on what prospects it presents for the future? People must – in Jansen’s words – “feel that the place is going somewhere”. In the different districts we studied, hope was organised in different ways. In Jämtland it was a matter of survival and of trust in one another – but remaining, at the same time, hesitant or in opposition to the workings of the state (or to “Stockholm”, as it was often called). Local culture in the expressive or symbolic form was not such a pertinent issue in Småland, where the future had the ability to influence everyday activities. Here the concept of “society” was much more prominent than “culture”. The celebration of the nation was also much more prominent than the focus on local culture.

In his study, Jansen underlines the potentials of the state as the wellspring of hope (as well, sometimes, of gloom). This appears to be neglected in the rather critical attitude towards nationalism that has become part of an ethnological habitus. The nation-state can serve as “a hope-generating machine” by the use of magic, writes Ghassan Hage. It “magically enables the ‘I’ of the national to do things it can never hope to be doing as an individual ‘I’. [...] Through this magical quality all collective national identities work as a mechanism for the distribution of hope” (Hage 2003: 13, for reference see main article). In other words, people gain possession of this power by constituting themselves as a state subject. While inhabitants of one of the regions had a tendency to constitute themselves as stepchildren of the national community, locals in the other region, saw themselves as exemplary first-born of the nation.

Comparative European research again would seem to be important here. Different nation-states distribute different kinds and amounts of hope to their citizens, and different groups feel more or less

filled by fear and awe rather than hope. This observation naturally goes beyond the analysis of the welfare state, health and the social distribution of hope and trust in the two counties we studied here. Doing ethnography at the interface of everyday strategies of engagement with the state is a path worth treading. It might lead ethnologists to the heart of socially relevant issues of the present – and past. What is more, it will allow us to engage professionally in the design of a new kind of comparative European ethnology – another dream within our discipline that we hope will come true.

# INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

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Falk, P. & C. Campbell 1997: Introduction. In: P. Falk & C. Campbell (eds.), *The Shopping Experience*. London: Sage.

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*For books:*

Bauman, Z. 2000: *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Riggins, S. H. (ed.) 1997: *The Language and Politics of Exclusion: Others in Discourse*. London: Sage Publications.

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