Introduction

This volume has evolved as a follow-up to the panel under the same title, which we organized at the 10th Congress of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF), in April 2011 in Lisbon. During the General Assembly congress participants were informed that the journal *Cultural Analysis* and SIEF had decided to be associated. Therefore we are particularly pleased that this special issue is the first volume of *Cultural Analysis* after the important decision was made and that most of the contributors are SIEF members.

The theme of this volume reflects an ever growing scholarly interest in various aspects of city life. The number of urban dwellers is constantly growing, and according to UN forecasts, by the middle of this century 70% of the world population will live in cities. The continuing processes of urbanization bring about new challenges and trigger scholarly and public debate (Bandarin 2011, 121). The very emergence of the subfield of urban anthropology is intertwined with the study of complex societies. As Eames and Goode aptly observe, even if a city emerged or was created for one dominant function it quickly draws to itself ancillary functions. Moreover, cities are not isolated geographic units but are linked in dynamic interaction with a hierarchy of contexts, from the local hinterland to regional, national and even international contexts (Eames and Goode 1977, 79). Among the many roles of the city, its cultural role, including continuity and changes in cultures, remain the primary concern of urban anthropology. Due to globalization and mass migration most of the cities have become multiethnic and multicultural, but constituent cultures do not always act in unison. Urban spaces act as an arena within which different lifestyles interact and compete. As Simmel argues in his seminal work, it is the diversity, the constant tension created by the presence of numerous others and the multiplicity of economic, occupational, and social life that create the sensory foundations of mental life of city dwellers (Simmel 2002, 11-12). Unlike Simmel’s work, none of the articles in this volume are concerned with a metropolis, yet middle-size and small towns on which the authors focus also reveal complexities and challenges of multiethnic and multicultural interaction in urban life.

Among the central and interrelated notions in the discourse on space in general, and on city space in particular, are place identity, reading space and constructing its meaning (See, e.g., Cuba and Hummon 1993; Lefebvre 1991, 1-67; Lewicka 2008; Relph 1976, 8-26). People’s self-conceptions are related to spaces that they experience as their own, perceive as belonging to the other but attractive in their very otherness, or just the opposite, regard as alien and insecure and so try to avoid them. Essays presented in this volume show that these perceptions may be rooted in history (Amosova, Protassova and Reponen, and Vitti) and socio-political changes (Jaago, Janev, and Nosenko-Stein). Memories of the past are inscribed onto places significant for an ethno-cultural group and play a variety of functions: from domesticating the city and making it one’s own to reviving community that virtually ceased to exist. Much thought is
given by the authors to symbolic borders between urban and rural (Blumen and Tsafrir, and Kaurinkoski), and borders that are imposed by ethnic politics and power struggle (Janev, Yelenevskaya and Fialkova). The latter can be either reinforced by residents’ behavior or weakened when members of different ethno-cultural groups find it beneficial to cross them. Another theme that comes up in the volume is places of consumption and their role in the city image, as well as in interethnic and intercultural relations.

Urban studies is an interdisciplinary endeavour, and the background of the authors in this issue testifies to this, as they specialize in cultural anthropology and human-resource management, linguistics and immigration studies, folkloristics and gender studies, homework relations and Jewish studies. The geography of the studies presented in the volume is also diverse and will take the reader from the Baltic (Finland and Estonia) to various regions of Russia and Western Ukraine, to East European Slovakia and Macedonia and then further South to the Mediterranean (Greece and Israel). But although the authors look at urban life and urbanites from the perspective of their various disciplines, and although the towns where fieldwork was conducted vary in dimensions, socio-political structure, and ethno-cultural composition, observations and analyses made by the authors “talk to each other,” pointing to similar trends and problems in multiethnic cities.

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Works Cited