

## INTRODUCTION

Nature and culture have hundreds of aspects and manifestations in modern societies. Volume 7 of the Yearbook of the Balkan and Baltic Studies aims to highlight some of the trends emerging and results achieved in the field of cultural studies, demonstrating how culture and nature interrelate and complement each other. The volume contains a series of articles on religion, human-nature relations, linguistic phenomena, crises, specific spheres of folklore, activities of the Tartu-Moscow School, and the mindscape of a notable individual.

Most of the articles take an interpretivist approach, that is, an action or event is analysed in the light of the beliefs, narratives, norms, values, or fabricated details of the culture of the society in which it takes place. In most cases, recent events and phenomena are examined alongside past ones, as well as examples of folk narratives and linguistics from historical sources of the region. History is described as a socially situated process with interrelated cultural contexts.

There are also two longer articles in the volume, the first of which traces an important period in the early days of the Estonian Earth Believers' movement. The marking of a well-known place with wooden statues and incantations and its consecration as a holy site in the city centre, on a hill, was an important sign in the early days of the movement. The article is an important milestone for current and future research. Several neo-religions emphasise their links with traditional knowledge related to the identity of local people, local communities or particular groups, who either reinvent traditions, or invent their own traditions and rituals. Traditionalism is an intrinsic element, a signifier of intellectual property and cultural expressions. There are many ways in which sacred sites are negotiated by visitors, believers, or religious groups.

The second longer article deals with ethnobotany. Professionalisation of science has led to a division into narrow disciplines; within one's specialty, the scientist/physician is competent, but their competence ends outside the borders or their discipline. In this sense, popular and folk knowledge, synthetic in nature, cannot be fully represented within one specialty, and for a representative of this specialty the other data are not of interest or are displaced/invisible. One example of interdisciplinary research is ethnobotany, which sometimes takes the opportunity to consider the data from linguistic, folkloric or both disciplines. In many countries data collection in ethnobotany, ethnoveterinary medicine and ethnomedicine has been predominantly in the hands of representatives of these main disciplines, or data are collected by folklorists, ethnologists, or linguists within their own fields. Although researchers' enthusiasm for collecting has been high, several bottlenecks were apparent from the outset. This article in the volume, a collaboration between researchers in the field of botany, ethnobotany and linguistics, offers an example of joint research and its possible results on the basis of historical sources.

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