

Capitalism from Outside? Economic Cultures in Eastern Europe after 1989

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The volume *Capitalism from Outside? Economic Cultures in Eastern Europe after 1989*, edited by Janos Matyas Kovacs and Violetta Zentai, offers a set of coordinated case studies from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and South Eastern Europe (SEE), treated as two sub-regions (the Visegrad group and the Balkans). The publication is a result of the long-lasting co-operation of the contributing authors, predominantly in the form of research projects such as DIOSCURI (Eastern Enlargement – Western Enlargement: Cultural Encounters in the European Economy) or earlier ACCESS (After the Accession. The Socio-Economic Cultures of Eastern Europe in the Enlarged Union: An Asset or a Liability?). The authors provide empirical insights into the cultural history of CEE and SEE economies and societies from the past two decades. The applied methodological pluralism, including large value surveys, in-depth interviews, and others, was possible and necessary at the crossroads of anthropology and economics, enriching the scientific discourse with valuable perspectives.

The overall assumptions put forward in the volume include: (1) scepticism towards the Western-led colonisation (or, as it is formulated in the book: "Eastern self-colonisation") as a typical outcome of cultural encounters; (2) questioning the civilizational divide between East-Central and South-Eastern Europe; and (3) acknowledging the importance of the composite nature of the protagonists of post-communist capitalism and the proto-capitalist potential of the so-called *homo sovieticus*. At the same time, the authors resisted the temptation of building a stunning typology of differences between the East and the West's economic cultures, based on the conviction that they coexist in today's Eastern Europe.

The book is divided into three parts: (1) "Entrepreneurship: Smooth Hybridisation?", (2) "State Governance: Unilateral Adjustment", and (3) "Economic Knowledge: Does Anything Go?" preceded by a prologue co-authored by the two editors. The first part delivers a series of case studies focusing predominantly on the banking sector (e.g. Drago Cengic, Violetta Zentai, Irena Kasparova). The remaining three sub-chapters concentrate on business culture (e.g. Vesna Vucinic-Neskovic) or exemplifications from the wine industry (Eva Kovacs) and the brewery business (Ildiko Erdei and Kamil Mares).

The second part is dedicated to an analysis of state governance, specifically development programs and funds. Katalin Kovacs and Petya Kabakchieva focus on Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and the Czech

Republic. Florian Nitu refers to the concept of Europeanisation (understood as process and outcome) and provides some insights on Romania. Haralan Alexandrov and Rafael Chichek deliver their analysis under the intriguing title *Caring Mother and Demanding Father: Cultural Encounters in the Rural Development Program in Bulgaria*. They explore several interfaces of cultural encounters (between EU and Bulgarian policies and practices, global organisation and local bureaucracy, as well as between each of them and the local rural communities). Mladen Lazic concludes the second part of the book. In his analysis, he combines quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interviews) approaches in order to answer the question how people from various cultural backgrounds adjust to each other.

The third part is opened by Jacek Kochanowicz's text: *Have Polish Economists Noticed New Institutionalism?* The question expressed in the title is negated; at least the author claims that institutional economics has not been institutionalised in the form of journals, research projects or teaching programmes. This chapter does not only offer an overview of the evolution of a new institutionalism in Poland, but it also shows how ideas produced in the West have been assimilated during and after the period of state socialism. Similarly, the remaining chapters of the third part deal with institutionalism and its application in economics in different countries (Roumen Avramov, Vojmir Franicevic, Paul Drago Aligica, Horia Terpe, Janos Matyas Kovacs). The stories about the perception (and misperception) of new institutionalism in economics within various states and contexts illustrate how a paradigm can be transferred, accommodated, and interpreted.

Finally, in the epilogue, the editors return to the assumptions formulated in the prologue. The most frequently used keyword in this conclusion is *hybridization*. The concept of hybrid reflects the great diversity of cultural blends present in the two analysed sub-regions. The fusion of imported and domestic ingredients creates new sets of cultural patchworks. According to Kovacs and Zentai, hybridization also means a lack of hegemony or colonisation, as presented in multiple case studies in this book.

The authors contributing to this volume do not only discuss how the Eastern versions and (re)incarnations of capitalism are shaped from outside, but they also observe, describe, and try to explain the patterns through which incoming economic cultures are appropriated by local societies. This book contributes to the on-going debates about globalisation and its diversified influences in various circumstances and contexts, about varieties of capitalism as well as the cultural factors determining economic processes.

Capitalism from Outside is an important book, providing valuable material about capitalist transitions and legacies in post-communist societies and economies. It presents the "cultural biography" of the issues in question in diversified backgrounds, circumstances, perspectives, and contexts. Post-communist capitalism is a notoriously understudied field in comparison to other streams of similar scientific inquiries. The anthropological perspective applied in this volume informs a better understanding of cultural factors determining the evolution of economic relations in the region.



Sposób cytowania:

dr hab. Rafał Riedel: Recenzja: Violetta Zentai, János Mátyás Kovács (ed.): *Capitalism from Outside? Economic Cultures in Eastern Europe after 1989*, 2012, w: <https://www.pol-int.org/pl/node/836#r6125>.

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