

**P. Klvač (ed.): BACKYARD LANDSCAPES.** – Drnka, 2012, 71 p., 26 photos, ISBN 978-80-904591-3-7.

**P. Klvač (ed.): RURAL DWELLERS.** – Drnka, 2011, 73 p., 26 photos, ISBN 978-80-904591-2-0.

**P. Klvač (ed.): CLOSENESS NEVER TOO CLOSE.** – Drnka, 2010, 71 p., 26 photos, ISBN 978-80-904591-0-6.

**P. Klvač (ed.): IN OUR BACK YARD.** – Drnka, 2007, 73 p., 27 photos, ISBN 978-80-254-0882-7.

**P. Klvač (ed.): SCENES OF RURAL LIFE.** – Drnka, 2006, 57 p., 26 photos, ISBN 80-239-7956-6.

During a five year photographic journey through rural scenes from the villages in the Dražanská vrchovina micro-region, students from the program in Environmental Humanities at the Faculty of Social Studies at the Masaryk University in Brno have photographed and documented, with short informative texts, contemporary life and scenes from rural life. The five books all focus upon often ignored aspects of life, and what for many might seem to be unimportant details. For outsiders, unfamiliar with the Czech countryside, that is exactly what makes the five books into a unique collection. The books give insights both into the changing culture of the countryside, as well as what a new generation of students wish to illuminate and consider interesting.

The documentation in the five books is local, but still of great interest to outsiders. It illustrates the importance of the often ignored, as well as the diversity of, small rural communities, seldom illuminated through research and documentation. As the editor, Pavel Klvač, points out: "the real state of the landscape is the result of a cross between the current ambitions of society, available technology, historical heritage and natural influence". Accepted cultural templates and contemporary ideology will influence what will be defined as the ideal organisation of the rural landscape, and what will be regarded as acceptable use of the landscape. Coming from a country with another ideological past, different climatic conditions and another type of nature, as well as a different social organisation, we are still faced with many of the same challenges as the five books focus upon.

The transformation of what the editor defines as the cultural landscape, is indeed what is happening throughout the modern world. Large-scale agriculture requires minimal manpower and mechanisation enables man to transform the landscape, in a way that makes backyard landscapes disappear in the Nordic countries as well as in the Czech Republic. This includes hedges, ditches, stone fences, and the breeding of small domestic animals. Local breeds of farm animals are disappearing in Norway as well as in the Dražanská vrchovina micro-region.

Still, the political past has been vastly different. In the Nordic countries economic and technological development has caused the transformation, while political factors during communism and collectivisation have been additional important factors in the Czech Republic. Still, the result is very much the same, and thus what is documented in the five books is also valuable in a comparative perspective with countries with a vastly different political past.

One of the obvious differences with a mountainous country, like Norway, is that the landscape itself (in most of the country) restricts the small scale farming that has disappeared due to development of large scale industrial farms. Still, there are areas like Jæren, close to Stavanger, that allow just that kind of development. What is particularly important about the Czech documentation is the documentation of the impact and changes

on human social culture. What the editor labels as "Disney-like consumerism" is indeed the same challenge that is faced within Norway.

The five books are not to be understood as traditional scientific contributions to knowledge, but rather as books contributing with artistic documentation as well as insightful short commentaries related to the sociological and anthropological understanding of the rural landscape. Used in that way they are important both for the lay reader and the scholar. For researchers, the books give a taste for co-operation and comparative research across boundaries of language, culture, as well as scholarly traditions. We gladly acknowledge the importance of the books for an international audience, and sincerely appreciate the creative academic programme that resulted in the published documentation.

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