Local identity under political pressure. The clash of ethnicity, economy, and politics - the case study in contemporary Poland

27. November 2018 | 13.30 h | miestnosť A012 | FSEV UK

The presentation base on the ongoing ethnographic research in small municipality of Dobrzen Wielki near Opole in south-western Poland were the group of anthropologists under Petr Skalnik leadership conducts fieldwork since 2014. The municipality is ethnically diverse and German-minority dominate local government since 90-ies. The diversity and local history were the main factors precluding local community building but there was a slow progress in recent years. In 2015 the regional authorities of Opole voivodeship, supported by Polish government, announced their intention to annex the most economically profitable part of the municipality (with large Power Plant – the investment that has never been neutral to local community). The resentiments toward Germans were involved in the “graging land” process but they caused surprising reaction on the part of Dobrzen municipality people – the rapid consolidation of the local ties and selective rejection of ethnic stereotypes. The boundaries within community were adjourned and the “nation-state” became the Other. “European values”, “western standards” and even “western civilization” are called as a reference points for consolidation against the Other. The conflict activated those frames of reference not because there is a deeply rooted belief in belonging to such a large entities as “Europe”, but because the quasi-grammar structure of we-others relation (that is, the reduction in the complexity of the situation to a narrow set of binary oppositions) is the ready to hand way to handle the dramatic, sudden change. Thus the question of belonging should be carefully settled within the contexts of the use of particular frame of reference (be it local, regional, national or supranational).

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