

## Work, Health, Music:

The enduring Rusyn model of a good life amid changing socioeconomic contexts of progress

K. M. Cantin

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## Abstract

Rusyns in Eastern and Central Europe have experience with two predominant models of “progress”: the Soviet-style communist and the neoliberal. Proponents of each system promised to better the lives of all but did not take into account what “better” meant to local populations, including Rusyns. Increasingly, European governmental and nongovernmental organizations are redefining notions of progress and development to accord with values of sustainability and a capability approach (CA) to well-being. Giovanola (2005) and Robeyns (2005) have argued that scholars of the CA need to better develop concepts of “personhood” and “human flourishing”, and to better explain the importance of social group membership and norms to living a valued life. The emerging anthropological focus on well-being, emphasizing culturally specific definitions of what happiness and a good life mean, can provide these conceptualizations. As a case in point, I use freelist and interview data obtained from residents in the Prešov Region of Slovakia and the Zakarpattia Oblast of Ukraine along with Rusyn cultural narratives drawn from poems, folktales, plays, songs, interviews, and speeches to identify prevalent models of “personhood” and “a good life”. I discuss how these narratives intersect and diverge with discourses of happiness and progress along with the implications for Rusyns' ability to flourish.

**Keywords:** *Rusyns; well-being; cultural models; Capability Approach; progress*

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### I. Introduction

Since World War II, Rusyns in eastern and central Europe have lived and worked within two economic systems: the Soviet and the neoliberal. Proponents of each system promised “progress” to better the lives of all, but they did not take into account what “better” meant to local populations. Increasingly, European governmental and nongovernmental organizations are redefining notions of progress and development to accord with values of sustainability and well-being. The capability approach (CA) has recently gained adherents among policy-makers. Initially developed by economists and philosophers concerned with poverty reduction and human rights, the CA analyzes what humans living in diverse types of societies need in order to flourish. It focuses on humans “ability to achieve [...] valuable functionings as a part of living,” (Sen, 1993, p. 30). While economists and philosophers have written extensively about the CA, it has received little attention from anthropologists. Giovanola (2005) and Robeyns (2005) argue that scholars of the CA need to better develop concepts of “personhood” and “human flourishing”, and to better explain the importance of social group membership and norms to living a valued life. The emerging anthropological focus on well-being, emphasizing culturally specific definitions of what a good life means, can help fill this gap. As a case in point, this article will analyze historical and contemporary Rusyn cultural models of “personhood” and “a good life”. I discuss how these narratives intersect and diverge with discourses of happiness and progress along with the implications for Rusyns' ability to flourish.

Rusyns are one of Europe's stateless ethnic groups, and a minority group in every country they inhabit. They live along both sides of the eastern European Union and Schengen borders, from the Poprad River basin along the border of Poland and Slovakia to the Ruscova River in Romania. The Rusyn language is east Slavic. For many centuries, religion was a much more important locus of identity than nationality, and this remained true for many people in the region well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Magocsi, 1978); Rusyns typically belong to a Greek Catholic or Eastern Orthodox church. About 33,500 people identified as Rusyn on the 2011 Slovak census, and about 55,500 listed Rusyn as their mother tongue (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2011). Rusyn activists estimate there are 800,000 Rusyns living in Zakarpattia (Magocsi, 2010), however, Rusyn wasn't an official identity category on the last census in 2001. Only about 10,000 people wrote “Rusyn” in (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, 2001).

Historically, Rusyns' ideal lifestyle involved local control over resources, earning a living through hard work on one's own land, low consumption, raising a family, and religious and secular celebrations filled with song and interpersonal connection. Their traditional value system has little in common with neoliberal visions of economic growth and technological progress championed by central and eastern European economic reformers in the last twenty years. Nor did their lifestyle fit the Soviet ideal, and many Rusyns discuss how Soviet practices undermined traditional Rusyn values.

A growing number of NGOs, Western European governments and the European Union (EU) are beginning to integrate the CA into their definitions of wealth, as evidenced by France's 2009 "*Report of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*." Thus, the CA is becoming important not only to economists and philosophers, but also to policy-makers who seek to balance an individual's quality of life, the wealth and security of the state, and the sustainability of the Earth's resources. Some Rusyn cultural leaders see the EU as the "homeland state" for Rusyns, who are spread across different nation states,<sup>1</sup> and Rusyns generally have favorable attitudes toward the EU. Nevertheless, as the 2009 film, *Osadné* (Skop, Melis, Krahienbiel, & Remunda) underscores, there are discrepancies in cultural capital between officials of small Rusyn villages and the large bureaucracy of EU governing bodies.

## II. Approaches to Development: Soviet and Neoliberal

The traditional Rusyn lifestyle revolved around subsistence agriculture, forestry, and shepherding. In the 16th century, however, Rusyns became fully ensnared by Hungarian and Polish landowners (Magocsi, 2002). In the mid-19th century, the Hapsburg Empire abolished serfdom. High taxes and duties paid to landowners, however, had become a heavy burden to Rusyns, who tended to live far from economic and political centers, on agriculture-poor land, which was constantly subdivided among a growing population. These conditions, in addition to the political and military chaos of World War I, led many, although far from all, Rusyns to support communist political parties during the interwar years. Following World War II, all areas in which Rusyns resided came under the political control of either the Soviet Union or communist parties heavily influenced by the Soviet model.

Collectivization of rural lands was a key component of communist economic development, that is, shifting control of production from competing entrepreneurs to the proletariat. Marx and Engels (1848/2005) held that individual ownership of property could only result in the exploitation of laborers. They argued that the "State" was a modern political entity which developed so that the capitalist bourgeoisie could politically advance its social position. Once control of the means of production was transferred to the proletariat, the idea of "State" would thus change to "the proletariat organized as the ruling class" (Marx and Engels, 1848/2005, p. 73); precise mechanisms for accomplishing this transformation were not elucidated. Lenin (1917/1992, p. 80) proposed that armed workers were necessary for "suppressing the oppressors" – the "capitalist exploiters" who formed a "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie." While he recognized that socialist or communist societies would need to retain vestiges of the bourgeois state and its laws during the period of transformation, he nevertheless agreed with Marx and Engels that state bureaucracies would wither away as the people took over control of production (Lenin, 1917/1992). In the 1930s, even before the expansion of communist rule to eastern and central Europe, however, Trotsky (1937/2004) pointed out that in the Soviet Union, the "state" was *not* disappearing as communist aims were achieved; in fact, the state bureaucracy was growing, becoming ever more detached from the masses and dominant over them. This pattern was repeated in the Soviet satellite states.

Across the Carpathians, many Rusyns were unwilling to give up the lands of which they had managed to take ownership over the years; they conceptualized "freedom" as freedom from serfdom and autonomy over their

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<sup>1</sup> "C-RS Continues International Work in Washington, DC," *New Rusyn Times*, March/April 2006  
<http://www.carpathorusynsociety.org/Publications/NRT/NRT0603.html>

lives, land, and work. Communist officials often used threats and force to collectivize the land. Communist policies included banning the Greek Catholic Church in several countries as well as forbidding people to identify themselves as “Rusyn”. All Rusyns were considered to be Ukrainians regardless of whether they lived in Czechoslovakia, Poland, or the Soviet Union. Communist leaders also encouraged them to burn their traditional clothing and textiles to break with their old lives and build new ideals (Metil, 2000).

Giovanola (2005, p. 263–264) explains how, for Marx, a “rich human being” is one who uses practical reason and achieves self-realization through meeting social and relational needs. In this vein, Communist parties did promote what they saw as the “free development of each” (Marx and Engels 1848/2005, p. 75) through education, training, and social organizations. In Rusyn villages, communists expanded schooling to encompass the entire population; free education allowed large numbers of Rusyns to obtain university and post-graduate education. The poorest peasants were singled out for good regional administrative positions, and everyone was guaranteed a basic living (Horbal, Macogsi, Pop, & Varga, 2002). Communist parties developed cultural organizations to propagate a Marxist-Leninist Ukrainian identity among Rusyns, but Rusyns also used these organizations to perform their traditional music and disseminate folklore (Metil, 2000). While many Rusyns living in Ukraine and Czechoslovakia began to publicly identify as Ukrainian, a large number of Slovakia's Rusyns also resisted Ukrainianization, often by declaring Slovak nationality on censuses. Many Rusyns resented the region's Communist parties for breaking down the Rusyn identity by forbidding self-identification as “Rusyn”; they also decried collectivization for undermining the traditional agrarian lifestyle and family structure and for outlawing the Greek Catholic Church because they believed it weakened Rusyn spiritual values (Horbal et al., 2002).

After the fall of Communism, most of the central European countries formerly within the Soviet-sphere of influence adopted a low-tax, neoliberal economic model that encourages business-creation and limits social protections. Slovakia's economic reforms, for example, have attracted business, reduced international debt, and decreased unemployment, particularly near the capital, Bratislava. The peripheral Prešov region of northeastern Slovakia, home to the majority of Slovakia's Rusyns, has not experienced the same decrease in unemployment, however, and incomes, remain low. The region is further from the capital of Bratislava – and the Vienna to Budapešt economic corridor – than it is from the Ukrainian cities of Uzhhorod, Muckachevo, and L'viv, home to significant numbers of Ukraine's Rusyns.<sup>2</sup> People living in western Ukrainian cities are essentially cut off economically from central and eastern Europe by Schengen borders,<sup>3</sup> which also divide Slovakia's and Poland's Rusyns from Ukraine's Rusyns. Although Ukraine's Zakarpattia Oblast has benefited economically from its proximity with other EU states (Fawkes, 2007), Ukraine has privatized slowly: most enterprise is quasi-private and remains largely in the hands of “oligarchs”, whom external and internal observers characterize as corrupt. Yet, few of the social protections of the communist era remain in place.

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<sup>2</sup> From the perspective of many Ukrainians, “Ukraine's Rusyns” may seem redundant; “Rusyn” is considered the old name for contemporary Ukrainians, and hence, all Rusyns are seen as Ukrainians. Those who identify as Rusyn see Ukraine as a nation and Rusyn as an ethnicity. From their perspective, all Ukrainians were once Rusyns/Ruthenians but not all Rusyns became modern-day ethnic Ukrainians.

<sup>3</sup> The Schengen agreement removed border controls in participating countries but erected new ones between participating and non-participating countries. After the fall of communism, and prior to Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland joining Schengen, Ukrainians could obtain visas free of charge to these countries. Now, the current cost and wait time prohibits many Ukrainians from obtaining visas.

Although levels of self-rated life satisfaction and happiness in Slovakia and Poland have risen since 1990, these ratings are much lower than most western European countries. According to recent Eurobarometer (European Commission, 2009) and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (2011) surveys, since 2006, the percentage of people in Slovakia and Poland rating quality of life and standard of living as satisfactory has declined. The economic recession also contributed to many people in Slovakia and Poland to rating their life in general as worse compared to five years ago (European Commission, 2011). Ukraine's ratings on similar measures have risen since 1990, but they remain among the lowest in the world (European Bank, 2011; Inglehart, Foa, Peterson & Welzel, 2008). Inglehart et al. (2008) attribute stagnant levels of well-being in Eastern Europe to the difficult transition from communism but have not pursued exactly why this should be the case.

Several ethnographies of Central and Eastern European communities, however, have detailed the ways in which radical changes to routines and what is defined as "normal" create profound insecurity. When Metil's (2000) Rusyn informants described their culture and the cultural practices they fear losing, for example, the pleasure and meaningfulness of daily routines and the yearly cycle of events was central to such descriptions. Pine (2007) shows that changing economic conditions in Poland made new production practices necessary and that these new practices clashed with long-held values. Based on long-term fieldwork in Southeastern Poland, Galbraith (2008) acknowledges that in theory, individuals do have more material goods and lifestyles to choose from; their ability to make these choices remains limited, however. Across central and eastern Europe, political and economic changes after 1989 forced adults to become entrepreneurial or to compete for jobs in a market economy after decades of guaranteed employment. Many people believe that those who succeed economically must be corrupt or criminal (Róna-Tas, 1996; Wanner, 2003). Bitušíková (2002) argues that these beliefs were common among central and eastern European peasants but that they were also perpetuated by communist rhetoric. Nevertheless, such beliefs are also based on observations that many of the newly wealthy have ties to organized crime (Róna-Tas, 1996) or to elite networks closed to the common person (Kideckel, 2002). The new "normal" is defined by perceptions of life in the West (Fehérváry, 2002; Róna-Tas, 1996), but Fehérváry's account of Hungarian material aspirations suggests that what is imagined to be normal about Western living is an upper or upper middle class norm not easily achievable to people making average salaries in the United States or Western Europe. In all these cases, people find it distressing to radically readjust to rapid change imposed from the outside, even when they are glad to have lifestyle choices previously unavailable.

### III. Capabilities Approach and an Anthropology of Well-Being

Although contemporary development and well-being visionaries recognize environmental limitations to unlimited economic development, the word "progress" has not disappeared from policy-making. In 2008, concerned about how to better measure economic performance and quality of life, French President Nicholas Sarkozy commissioned a working group, including economists Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen, to develop a report on "The Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress". This report, popularly referred to as "The Stiglitz Report", used the "capability approach" (CA) to well-being and emphasized people's ability to partake in emotionally fulfilling activities and relationships as more important to quality of life than economic self-interest alone (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009). While leaders in some locales such as Bhutan and Nova Scotia have factored quality of life measures into economic development, Sarkozy encouraged broader adoption this approach. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) also discussed these factors at their October, 2009 World Forum meeting, themed "Charting Progress, Building Visions, Improving Life".

In general, the CA synthesizes economic and philosophical analyses of what it means for humans to

“flourish”, drawing on works from Karl Marx to Aristotle to Adam Smith (Nussbaum & Sen 1993). Sen and Nussbaum developed the CA over the last twenty-five years. In conceptualizing well-being, they valorize “human flourishing” over “happiness.” While happiness or satisfaction can be seen as an emotional state, “flourishing” encompasses people’s freedom and ability to actually accomplish what they wish. Income is recognized as an important means to flourishing – living valued lives, but having a high income does not guarantee flourishing (Sen, 2001). With regard to economic systems as a whole, Sen (2001) underscores the need to avoid uncritical celebration of market fundamentalism, the foundation for the “Washington Consensus,” and definitive of the neoliberal approach to economic development, which pushes for heavy deregulation, privatization, and limitation of government’s role in providing material goods and social services. Yet, he also argues against the orthodox Marxist rejection of markets, stating that limiting an individuals’ ability to buy or sell is way of limiting human freedom (Sen, 2001).

The CA is a paradigm for conceptualizing and measuring well-being grounded in economics and philosophy, and it informs economic development and poverty reduction research across disciplines. While the interdisciplinary nature of the CA is strength, it also means that some concepts and applications are less well-defined and theorized. Giovanola (2005) indicates that CA scholars have not fully conceptualized anthropological notions of personhood and human flourishing, which are necessary to understand its social and relational components. She argues that Sen’s focus on individual agency and Nussbaum’s focus on human dignity are important for seeing persons as more than “economic individuals,” in the classical economic sense, and they serve as a useful universal foundation for well-being (Giovanola, 2005). But according to Giovanola’s (2005) argument, flourishing encompasses more than just being capable of having agency and dignity; implicit to flourishing is what she refers to as the *anthropological richness* of personhood, that is, *realizing* needs which are differently valued among individuals and groups, including social and interpersonal needs. Robeyns (2005) argues that while a few scholars have begun to look at how social norms and group dynamics impact individual choices and well-being, the CA would benefit from more social science and cultural studies research.

In the last few years, anthropologists have begun developing an anthropology of well-being that better explains what variables such as “a good life,” “life satisfaction,” “happiness,” or “health” actually mean in different cultural contexts.<sup>4</sup> Thin (2008, p. 41) argues that to fully understand well-being in a society, anthropologists must identify “what it means for a human life to go well”, something scholars cannot properly analyze without understanding a society's view of how good is defined. From Thin's perspective, an anthropology of well-being must engage with topics such as religion and moral philosophy. Calestani (2009), for example, argued that the basis for well-being among urban residents of El Alto, Bolivia is harmonious relations. Self-fulfillment happens through fulfilling the moral obligations surrounding one's social ties, that is, by being an ethical person (Calestani, 2009). Through interaction, the social group (the household or the community) defines what valuable functioning is.

### **Rusyn cultural narratives: models of Personhood and the good life identifying cultural models**

Cognitive and psychological anthropologists use the term “cultural models” to describe the structured assumptions that guide expectations and actions in a particular domain of experience shared among people who are

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<sup>4</sup> The contributors to Jiménez, *Culture and Well-Being*, and Mathews and Izquierdo, *Pursuits of Happiness* provide critiques of Western philosophical bias in well-being research, discussions of more meaningful methods of comparing societies, and ethnographic examples of what well-being means in local contexts. The March 2012 issue of *Anthropology News* highlighted anthropological approaches to "Health, Well-Being, and Happiness."

historically, socially, and/or geographically linked with one another (Quinn and Holland, 1987; Ross, 2004; Hruschka, Sibley, Kalim & Edmonds, 2008). Cultural models draw simultaneously on more than one "cultural schema," "an organized framework of objects and relations which has yet to be filled in with concrete detail" (D'Andrade, 1995, p. 124) to make sense of an experiential domain. More than just a "'picture' in the mind," schemas both interpret situations as well as guide experience (D'Andrade, 1995, p. 136, 231). Strauss and Quinn (1997) describe, for example that schema for "success," "lastingness," and "benefit" contribute to an American cultural model of marriage. However the same schema for "success" also contributes to a cultural model for the "American Dream" (Strauss 1992).

Depending on the type of questions researchers are interested in analyzing, they use a variety of different methods to identify cultural models. Biocultural and medical anthropologists, especially, utilize freelists to identify salient components of cultural domains. (Gravlee, 2005; Barg, Huss-Ashmore, Wittink, Murray, Bogner & Gallo, 2006; Dressler, Balieiro, Ribeiro & Santos, 2007). A more interpretative way of identifying cultural models involves analyzing cultural narratives for common themes (Shore, 1996; Mageo, 2002). Cultural narratives may include fairy tales and sacred myths, but they also encompass the way people within a society tell the story of everyday events (Shore, 1996). To analyze the latter type of cultural narrative, researchers identify metaphors and scripts prevalent in interview transcripts (Garro, 1994; Strauss and Quinn, 1997; Silvasti, 2003).

Over eight months in 2010 and 2011, I conducted fieldwork in 10 different villages, towns, and cities in the Prešov region of Slovakia and the Zakarpattia oblast of Ukraine. I attended, and was a participant-observer in: a Rusyn language and culture school, social consciousness raising activities, meetings of Rusyn ethnic and cultural organizations, concerts, celebrations, school teacher's meetings, literary readings, and university seminars. To analyze sharing, diversity, and change within and between populations with regards to meanings of "a good life" as well as to compare what people say explicitly with the picture of a good life prevalent in cultural narratives, I collected and analyzed freelists from 73 individuals as well as identified common themes in Rusyn songs, poems, folktales, interviews, speeches, and liturgies.

I approached potential respondents in a variety of different public venues including cultural events, pubs and restaurants, shops, and on the street. To choose whom to approach, I utilized a quota sampling strategy, aiming for balanced response sets based on age, gender, level of education, and living in a city versus living in a small town. I collected most freelists orally, however nineteen freelists were gathered as part of a written questionnaire. The majority of questionnaires were collected with the assistance of contacts through a university function and through a village municipal office. The question prompt for both was "Think of someone who has a good life. Describe/list why it is a good life." The listing exercise often was a prelude into a longer, unstructured interview exploring the themes discussed in the basic list. No names were collected and respondents were assured that their responses would be kept anonymous.

#### IV. Models of a Good Life

From the freelist data, the basic picture of a "good life" shared among residents of Carpathian Rus' ( $n = 73$ ) is health (32.9%), work (31.5%), money (19.2%), and family (19.2%). I did not have to ask my respondents to compare their lives now to their lives during the communist era; most made these comparisons spontaneously. And almost everyone old enough to remember the era thought it was better; not good, necessarily, but better than now. Several informants commented on the fact that everyone was guaranteed a job and a house or apartment. Families did not have to go all over the world to find work, so they could be together. There were monetary incentives for

having children. People received vacation time and the spas, a regional staple of both medicine and recreation for everyone, were affordable. A retired artist remarked, "It's nice that we're free to go on vacation to Paris now. But nobody can afford to go." Some people's frustration was thick. An intellectual living in northeastern Slovakia, spoke at length:

There was propaganda, yes, but the anti-socialist propaganda lied. We *had* fruit: bananas, oranges – and everybody could afford it. Now, elderly people don't eat fruit because it is too expensive for them. We had meat! [The other women present chimed in and nodded.] We had money. And our stuff was good quality! We made it here; we had our own factories. Our shoes were so good! They lasted several years. Like Italian shoes. Now all we have are Chinese goods. Clothes are more expensive than they were then, but they don't even last a year.

She also described the earliest realities of the effect of privatization on employment. People expected privatization would mean simply transferring ownership of factories and co-ops from the state into private hands. What happened throughout Eastern Slovakia<sup>5</sup> was that foreigners bought up factories, agricultural co-ops, and land for low prices. Instead of running them, however, the new owners liquidated them. People in the region not only lost their source of guaranteed employment, they lost most manufacturing and agricultural jobs altogether.

I met no shortage of entrepreneurs in central and Eastern Europe, but the smaller entrepreneurs lacked resources to expand their businesses. One young man working for his family's travel business said that they knew there was a market for a better hotel in his town and that they had the land on which to build, but they lacked the money to build. He noted that a lot of people he knew had good ideas for businesses but lacked the money. A middle-aged man involved in several business ventures worried about how his main Prešov Region business was suffering during the recession because people couldn't pay outstanding bills from previous contracts nor were new clients signing contracts.

A consultant who had his own business in the Zakarpattia Oblast compared the costs of the Soviet and neoliberal systems. He often decried the heavy-handed tactics used by the Soviets to coerce his family into collectivizing the land they worked hard to obtain over several decades. On the other hand, he described the ways in which the city of Uzhhorod was worse now, compared to a couple of decades ago:

During communism things worked – not well – but they worked. There was water 24 hours a day. Uzhhorod was one of the nicest parts of the USSR; it was very clean. That's the price of democracy: we must pay for water and don't have it all the time, the streets are awful, and the city is very dirty. During communism, street cleaners would say to you if you littered, "hey, pick it up." But now cities can't afford trash cans, and everyone has to take care of their own garbage. We have a new generation that thinks littering is normal, especially when there aren't trash cans around. We need radio and tv ads to discourage littering, but they cost money.

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<sup>5</sup> In the Ukraine, foreigners are prohibited from buying agricultural land, although they are allowed to enter into long-term lease agreements.

The liquidation of factories and co-ops, crumbling infrastructure, fears of corruption which discourage foreign investment, and the large investments required to scale-up to be competitive in global markets all contribute to the lack of work which pays a livable wage in the region. But while "work" is the second most salient component of a good life for most Carpathian Rus' subgroups analyzed, it is important to emphasize that most people value work as a means to make an honest living; they do not wish to live for the sake of working. They make this distinction because they have begun to experience the United States model of work, either through living in the U.S., working for U.S. companies in Slovakia, or working for companies that have imported U.S. corporate values. Many individuals perceive this model as demanding work to dominate one's life. The U.S. Steel plant in Košice is touted by the Slovak government as one of the most successful foreign, job-producing investments. People in eastern Slovakia are grateful for the jobs, but they also refer to it as "U.S. Stress".

Another variation on the "work" response, mentioned especially by several women in the Prešov Region, was the caveat that a good life involved jobs being available close to home, so that family would not have to go so far away to work. Like Kaneff and Pine (2001) describe for much of eastern Europe, residents of Carpathian Rus' are required to become part of the flexible/insecure global labor force in order to earn enough money to meet their basic needs. It is not uncommon for a family in Carpathian Rus' to have a member working in the U.S. or Western Europe and sending money to their families; for young people to work abroad for a summer; or for people to work abroad long enough to make enough money to move back and buy a house or some land in Carpathian Rus'.

These social contexts of work have a direct bearing on the health of people in the region. From stories told to me by consultants and by my observations, stress and loneliness are major contributors to the types of illness most prevalent in the region. Women speak openly about hospitalizations and recuperation from stress-related breakdowns; men and women who describe being overworked and/or lonely simultaneously show physical manifestations of pain in the form of chronic joint or muscle pain and long-lasting chronic fatigue or mono-like illnesses; heart disease kills many men by their fifties. And while alcohol can be a healthy key ingredient of socializing and celebrations, drinking to excess was pointed out to me by my consultant as a health problem in and of itself and as a contributing factor to other illnesses.

The generally desired life then was one in which people work toward what they have and value a work/time balance that gives them the security of a house, enough to eat, access to health care, and enough of what they need but that leaves sufficient time to spend with family. They would rather have leisure time than luxuries but would rather work than feel insecure and not have enough. Many respondents in general mentioned some form of having "enough" in their responses to what a good life was. One university student qualified, "Enough of everything I need — but not necessarily what I just desire and can live without." Only three respondents mentioned any components of a good life that could be considered luxuries: one man said "gold", another young man said "a big house", and a woman, describing why she didn't think they had a good life in the region, mentioned that they didn't have "nice stuff", like the U.S. did. In many ways, most people's model of a good life *is* consistent with the communist era of a good life, when workers were celebrated and everybody was provided with a job and the basic necessities of life but very few owned luxury items. But as Berend (2007) points out, collectivism and egalitarian were also the norms for pre-communist village life in central and Eastern Europe up until the middle of the 20th century.

It is such a village life which is celebrated in Rusyn literature, past and present. Aleksander Dukhnovych was one of the first Rusyns to write major works of literature using everyday language that could be easily understood by all people. Rusinko (1994) describes his mid-19th century story, "Milen and Liubysia: An Idyllic Story from the Times of Ancient Ruysns," as a sentimental tale of an imagined past. This tale illuminates a Rusyn view of the utopian life. In Dukhnovych's story, the ideal life for Rusyns consisted of political autonomy; serving God; making a living through a subsistence-level lifestyle (especially herding and fishing); singing; praying;

remaining innocent; and succeeding in romantic love. The protagonists of the story celebrate nature while viewing city life as corrupt.

Dukhnovych nevertheless disabuses readers of an overly romantic view of the rural village. In his play, *Virtue Is More Important Than Riches*, Dukhnovych preaches against the greed, envy, superstition, and drunkenness that were typically found in rural villages (Rusinko, 1994, pp. xxii-xxvii). Prefiguring Kearney's analysis of peasant communities (1996), Dukhnovych situated village life within a larger geographical network that was more complex than simple urban/rural or modern/non-modern dichotomies. He believed that leaving the village, becoming educated, and bringing new ideas back to the village was necessary to maintain the positive aspects of Rusyn culture while overcoming potential drawbacks of rural isolation. The title of the play is the aphorism meant to provide guidance in preventing oneself from succumbing to the potential for corruption found in both the city and the village. During my own research, consultants continued to valorize village life and maintained personal connections or property there, even while living and working elsewhere.

Living well for Rusyns also means being soulfully connected to the natural environment, particularly the Carpathian Mountains. In the literary newspaper he established, Ievhenii Fentsyk, a 19th century poet, says of these mountains, "Our hearts are riveted to them. There is not a single Rusyn soul that would prefer the fruitful plains flowing with milk and honey" (cited in Rusinko, 2003, p. 261). Contemporary poet, Volodymyr Fedynshynets', too, connects the essence of being Rusyn to nature. The poem, "We are a Teardrop on the Earth" (translated by Pop, n.d.) evokes an afterlife in which he imagines his soul passing into a rose, an aspen, a hutsul-pony, and an eagle. In so-doing, these plants and animals become Rusyn. Rusyn soulfulness is not, then, an experience limited to the person, or even the interaction between persons; being soulful also encompasses attachment to the Carpathians.

These cultural ideals are woven into contemporary events. The yearly Mt. Kremenech hike and camp-out is both a graduation ceremony for students of a Rusyn language program and a celebratory way of demonstrating that the Carpatho-Rusyns are one people currently divided by state and Schengen borders; the peak of Mt Kremenech is where the borders of Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine meet, and participants hike up from each country to attend. In addition, open-air festival stages have the mountains as their backdrop. Even when events such as folk festivals or concerts take place in a city or town, the promotional materials for the events usually feature photos of the performers in a mountain or forested setting. Televised programs featuring folk singers typically show them outdoors, in a natural setting. Zakarpattia's weekly Rusyn television program often features segments about villages and whole segments have been devoted just to flowers.

At the literary reading to honor the 2010 Dukhnovych prize winner (annual prize for the best work of Rusyn literature), four writers read works emphasizing Rusyns' connection to their natural environment. *Wisdom of Life*, 2010 winner, Jozef Kudzej's (2008), book of fables, features bears, donkeys, and mice representing human concerns. His fables valorize love and helping others while critiquing infidelity and lust. Each of the writers present also highlighted the importance of work and family. Baumeister (1987) has discussed how work and love figured heavily into Romantic era ideals for self-fulfillment in Western Europe, and these themes are especially evident in Rusyn ideas of self-fulfillment. In her analysis of Rusyn literature, Rusinko (2003) has also documented numerous ways in which Romantic era values are reflected in Rusyn poems, songs, plays, and novels. Baumeister (1987) notes that in American, English, and French Romantic era literature and ideals of the self, secular themes replaced religious themes. Rusyn literature, however, did, and continues to, overlay these secular themes on to religious themes. In Kudzej's *Wisdom of Life*, for example, Christ is an icon of hope and a jury decides who will go to heaven or hell based on whether or not they have helped others during their lives.

## V. Rusyn Personhood

Ethics and morality undergird Rusyn ideas of a good life and being a fulfilled person. In the present day, Rusyns and non-Rusyns use the word “humility” to describe Rusyn character. They view humility as positive and tied to Rusyns' rejection of political and military methods to resolve issues (Metil, 2000). Such a characterization goes back at least to the writing of Aleksander Dukhnovych, who described Rusyns as pious, generous, and poor but not envious (Rusinko, 2003, pp. 125–126). Humility and piousness, specifically toward the Christian God, were long practiced through the public religious performance of the Liturgy. The phrase, “Lord, have mercy” is repeated continuously throughout the Divine Liturgy used by both the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches. In explaining the spirituality underlying this practice in Eastern Catholicism, Roccasalvo (1992, pp. 16–7) states that it is an aspect of hesychasm, “interior or contemplative prayer”: “Our hearts are purified by acknowledging our nothingness without the mercy of God . . . It frees us from spiritual arrogance and independence; its fruit is spiritual joy.” Thus, a Rusyn is religiously primed to think of self as eternally a supplicant and to see “independence” as morally questionable. Pesmen (2000, p. 193) also notes that in the Orthodox tradition, faith involves “shifting value to the other” and influences the experience of “soulfulness”, or “feeling other's pain”. The experiences of her Russian informants implies, “[...] this boundary crossing is the most [...] ‘human’, thing a person can do.”

As it does for Russians (Wierzbicka 1989, p. 49–52), the Rusyn concept of “soul” denotes the total personality and especially encompasses morals, values, and emotions. In the song, “The Prayer,” the Rusyn soul is described as both fragile and deep. This song also underscores the centrality of song to Rusyn personhood and group identity.

Let us sing our little songs  
because they have so much feeling and beauty,  
in them alone is feeling and beauty.  
Do not forget our little songs,  
because without them the people will be lost to us,  
in them alone is feeling and beauty.  
(Volčko, cited in Metil, 2000, pp. 416-417.)

Singing is such an important component to happiness partly because it is how Rusyns practice their “soulfulness.” Metil (2000) describes that the goal of a singing event is to achieve *nálada*, a peak experience of exceptional singing, mood and camaraderie. Boundary-crossing is central to this experience and happens through the singing itself as well as through physical proximity of participants and sharing of food, drink, and tobacco. The word *pripojenie*, which literally means “connecting”, describes the Rusyn singers moving into the song, when inspired, by joining the melody, harmony, or adding another harmony. Voices also converge and diverge - singers switch parts, pitches, and octaves throughout a song. I also observed how connecting happens through the circle dances which take place at virtually every party, and across age groups and musical genres. Hands are connected behind backs in such a way that each participant is physically connected to at least four other people in the circle.

### **Rusyn personhood and good life: intersections and divergences with governmental and non-governmental visions of progress**

Taking the myriad Rusyn cultural narratives together reveals one of the prevalent cultural models of the ideal life: Connection to a village, romantic love that leads to marriage and raising a family, sufficient work for an honest living, health, being outdoors—in the fields, mountains, forests and along the streams; singing while working, worshipping, and celebrating; intersubjective connections with family and people in the community through

song and dance; local decision-making; and control over resources. Nowhere in these descriptions of the ideal life are technological progress and economic development – phenomena central to progressivist and neo-liberal constructions of “utopian capitalism” (Bodley, 2003, p. 199) – celebrated.

Of course, Soviet-style communism also prevented Rusyns from living their ideal life by detaching people from the land through collectivization, separating families through work assignments, and outlawing the Greek Catholic Church. Wolf (1966) and Kearney (1996) have argued that Soviet and capitalist models of development were remarkably similar. In rural areas, specifically, both Soviet-style state farms and capitalist agricultural corporations transferred decision-making about production and distribution from the local level to a centralized administrative unit. Certainly, the same modernist assumptions undergirded both communist and capitalist visions of progress. Habermas (1983) and Harvey (1989) describe modernity as a project of Enlightenment philosophers who envisioned that objective science could be used to control nature and that universal laws and morals could free people from “irrationalities” of myth and religion. The “most striking quality” in McLeish’s (1967, p. 164) description of the new Soviet ideal man was “his optimism, the confidence in his own strength, the cheerfulness with which he sets out to conquer nature. The Russians believe...that there are no limits to man’s power of transforming nature and society.” Verdery (1996, p. 228), too, notes, “Teleological thinking has plagued the region for decades...Socialist regimes saw themselves as ushering in the radiant future, the final stage of human happiness...”

Teleological thinking also manifested itself in Rostow’s (1990, pp. 17-19) “non-communist manifesto” for “economic growth,” evident in how he spoke of “stages” in economic transitions and take-offs. With regard to encouraging the transition from a primarily agricultural economy to one based on industry, trade, and service, he argues:

And, above all, the concept must be spread that man need not regard his physical environment as virtually a factor given by nature and providence, but as *an ordered world* which, if *rationally* understood, *can be manipulated* in ways which yield productive change, and, in one dimension at least, *progress* (Rostow, 1990, p. 19, emphasis added).

This passage – read from the standpoint of a Rusyn soulfulness, interconnected with God and the land – sounds more like destruction than progress.

Yet, while Rusyn’s cultural model of flourishing or human richness overlaps to a great extent with Marx’s in terms of its valorization of social and relational needs, the Marxist economic program as enacted by the region’s communist parties was not embraced by many Rusyns. Rusyns fulfill their social and emotional needs through celebrations centering around family and friends. Religious institutions and ethics were the foundation of a cultural model of the person as soulful, a model that does not separate the psychological from the moral (Wierzbicka, 1989). The Communist model of progress, with its intentions of breaking apart the family and replacing religion with rational science, sought to destroy Rusyns’ most valued institutions along with their style of personhood. Certainly, Rusyns experienced *nálada* and camaraderie at events organized by Marxist-Leninist cultural organizations. But it was at the end of the night, after the Party officials had left, that Rusyns sang in their own way (Metil, 2000, p. 288).

Is the neoliberal model of progress any better for Rusyn personhood? Neoliberalism privileges a personhood constructed on ideals of individual autonomy and entrepreneurship rather than social and relational ideals (Gökariksel and Mitchell, 2005). This ideal of personhood in and of itself contradicts Rusyn ideals. Yet, Neoliberalism is problematic in additional ways. In theory, a Rusyn individual should be able to become an entrepreneur, attract business, and expand markets in the Carpathian region. In countries such as Slovakia and Poland that adopted the “Washington Consensus” model of development, governments kept taxes low in order to

attract businesses. These same low taxes, however, deprive states of funds that could be directed to locally-grown economic development. This is, of course, the privatization ideal: to keep the government's role limited. But foreign and domestic businesses alike locate to already established economic zones with favorable infrastructure. Rusyns remain forced to migrate to other areas in order to find work, thereby disconnecting them from their beloved land, families, and communities.

## VI. Final Considerations

Neither Soviet-style collective agriculture, nor neoliberal pro-big business incentives have provided Rusyns with structures or capital to develop local, sustainable modes of production that allow economic survival without tearing down the structures that meet their emotional and relationship needs. Because of the top-down control of both Soviet and neoliberal models of development, they were limited in their ability to attend holistically to individuals' well-being, despite the idealism underlying both systems. Neither the soulless Marxist ideal of personhood nor the fiercely individualistic neoliberal ideal of personhood have much resonance for Rusyns, even for people who were able to succeed professionally under one or both of the economic systems.

Although revolutionaries and reformers may create new economic structures and persuade people to embrace some new values or practices, ideals of personhood, in general, may not change dramatically after a couple of decades. Despite years of exposure to both communist propaganda and capitalist advertising, contemporary models of Rusyn personhood and ideals of a good life retain vestiges of worldviews in place prior to the influence of these modernizing programs.

What Rusyns need to flourish is access to the types of resources necessary to create locally sustainable ways of life and allow people to remain on the land they love, in emotionally-fulfilling communities, instead of having little choice but to relocate to a distant EU or North American city for work. But activists, scholars, and local spokespeople will need to spread the word about new opportunities for organization and development among older Rusyns, especially, who may be hesitant to expend any energy in yet another system that may come and go.

Anthropological findings are a useful means to document local meanings of a good life, especially for Rusyns and other stateless populations or minority groups, whose needs and values may get overlooked in national and international analyses of well-being. These findings contribute to a body of data which allows researchers to understand what is both universal and culturally specific about what living a good life entails. The analysis of Rusyn good life and personhood models show one way in which a socially-oriented ideal of personhood emotionally motivate individuals. Anthropologists of well-being can integrate descriptions of locally valued models of personhood and good lives with economic and philosophical analyses of the good life encompassed by the CA. This will provide development workers, local leaders, politicians, and activists with better evidence to argue for policies that will assist communities and IGO/NGO programs with common values to find one another, go beyond measuring, and actually improve quality of life.

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