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Part IV. Anthropology and the Study of Socialist Societies: Introduction

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PART IV. ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF SOCIALIST SOCIETIES

Introduction

Much has been written in modern anthropology about the obligation of anthropologists to make the results of their research available to the people where the study took place. This ideal is one of the inspirations for this volume, and the conference on which it is based. We agree that our understanding of Romanian society and culture should be available to Romanians. We hope that this volume will be of use to Romanian scholars, planners and private citizens interested in a critical approach to their own society and culture.

A second use of the research, however, is as a contribution to the American understanding of Romania in particular and the socialist societies of Eastern Europe in general. This is a second ideal which inspired both conference and volume. Including chapters by both American anthropologists and Romanian social scientists, the volume can contribute to a critique of existing American literature on socialist countries. Such a critique should be informed by a critical approach, as discussed in the introduction, and by an appreciation for the insights that have developed within the socialist countries themselves. Drawing on this volume and other literature, this final chapter raises some questions about conventional American academic approaches to Eastern Europe.