

Abstract

The thesis analyses the motives of charity and its various forms in the present society. It builds on the critical theory of “studying up”, formulated by Laura Nader in 1970s. It considers the difficulties of ethnographic research in an unequal-power terrain, where the anthropologist finds himself in an unwelcome position. Based on a one-year long research of Rotary clubs, the thesis examines the question of whether the charity is a pure act of altruism, following of self-interest, or a combination of both. Charity has lost its significance from its original Christian form over time. Today, it takes the form of a successful marketing tool. For someone it may mean caring for the disadvantaged, for another a simple tool to ease his conscience; for others a convenient pretext for the setting up of a private club. Charity in some respect replaced the Christian confession and like other commodities in the neoliberal system is consumed without creating a long-term relation between the donor and the donee. Rotary International is a worldwide network of private clubs, among its members are leaders in the financial sector, health care, public administration, journalism and science and research. One can therefore examine the Rotary club from an anthropological point of view of emerging capitalism in the Czech Republic, as the charitable institution.

Keywords: Rotary club; Freemasonry; Philanthropy; Charity; Gift; Conspicuous consumption; Neoliberalism; Constructivism; Studying Up.