

Encyclopaedia of Anthropology

First interactive international encyclopaedia of anthropology

In a major undertaking, the Department of Anthropology of the Faculty of Science, Masaryk University, Brno, in collaboration with scholars from other universities and the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, has launched an ambitious research project, the first-ever online interactive *Encyclopaedia of Anthropology*. Conceptually, it is – to some extent – akin to the well-known Wikipedia, the largest and most popular general reference work on the internet, or rather its predecessor, Nupe-dia, in that it is a web-based, collaborative, free content, interactive and frequently updated resource open to anyone. These similarities apart, the projected “anthropedia” distinguishes itself by several unique features. In particular, a devoted cadre of eminent specialists in their respective fields, touching upon anthropology, the science of man or the study of humanity, as well as an editorial board assisted by consultants and peer-reviewers will guarantee the validity of its scholarly content and academic eminence of individual entries, which will be periodically revised and updated to reflect the progress in scientific knowledge. Though the basic edition of the web encyclopaedia *in spe* will be in Czech, other language editions can be visualized, depending on the cadre of potential contributors and/or translators.

The Encyclopaedia of Anthropology is conceived as a follow-up to *The Dictionary of Anthropology (with consideration of the history of literature and art) or What Every Human Should Know about Humans*. This dictionary was published in 2009 (Brno: Akademické nakladatelství CERM, ISBN 978-80-7204-560-0; the on-line version is available for free at <http://is.muni.cz/do/1431/UAntrBiol/el/antropos/index.html>). Like this dictionary, *The Encyclopaedia of Anthropology* respects the fact that modern anthropology is an interdisciplinary, comparative and holistic field of science seeking answers to fundamental questions relating to humankind: “Where do we come from? What are we like? Where are we heading?” This is based on the knowledge that people and human societies, their origins, developments and transformations are determined by the interrelationship of given facts in areas such as biology, medicine, psychology, society and culture. It is therefore essential in this scientific discipline to engage in holistic research. Anthropology studies the biological variability of humans – the similarities and differences in relation to other biological species (especially our closest relatives – primates). At the same time, it investigates the local socio-cultural variants of the universal structures of human thought and behaviour, their disparities and parallels within the whole continuum of development as well as possible future directions.

What is specific to *The Encyclopaedia of Anthropology* is its original concept, going beyond all other similar works which have been published on this topic anywhere in the world so far. Structurally, it has been designed as an integrated database of knowledge acquired in the fields of human, social and cultural sciences in the context of the development of anthropology and its sub-disciplines, research methods, paradigms and

theories. In contrast to standard Anglo-Saxon dictionaries and encyclopaedias, this encyclopaedia broadens the thematic horizon to encompass belles-lettres and the fine arts. It includes a comprehensive list of entries devoted to the area of art culture which has largely been neglected by traditional anthropology. This encyclopaedia could thus be considered a contribution to the development of the anthropology of art that has so far been insufficiently processed on a world-wide basis as well as an enrichment of the epistemological foundations of general anthropology. Some other original aspects of *The Encyclopaedia of Anthropology* are its interactivity and range of international backgrounds of the authors: the work will be continuously updated with the latest scientific knowledge (the authors of the entries are often the discoverers of new findings) and it will be possible to respond to critical remarks as well as user feedback and suggestions.

Another original feature of *The Encyclopaedia of Anthropology* is its web platform “New Discoveries and Findings” (commensurate to scientific journals of international calibre) delivering reviewed studies and reports on the latest research and discoveries in anthropology and related disciplines.

The encyclopaedia is meant for students and researchers in the area of anthropology and related disciplines (area studies, archaeology, astronomy, bioculturology, biology, computer science, economics, ethnology, philosophy, folklore studies, genetics, geology, history, kinanthropology, cultural studies, linguistics, mathematics, media studies, medicine, palaeontology, political science, law, psychology, religious studies, sexology, sociology and theology) as well as for teachers and students of secondary schools and universities and for the general public.

The encyclopaedia will be *ab initio* free of charge and accessible to all users of the internet – this will make it possible to fulfil its purpose as an up-to-date educational and scientific research tool. As a matter of course, encyclopaedias tend to be rightfully considered as regular reference resources *par excellence*. But they can also be speculated upon in another sense. The alphabetical order of individual entries in encyclopaedias and dictionaries offer lauréatmontian “accidental encounters” (“Beautiful ... as the accidental encounter, on a dissecting table, of a sewing machine and an umbrella.”) of unrelated or different objects and ideas. Thus we can easily find, side by side, cannibalism, capitalism, celibacy and Crow-Omaha systems in the neighbourhood of death ..., and there arise other surprising neighbourly relations stimulating fantasy, inspiration, originality and creativity. Hopefully, *The Encyclopaedia of Anthropology* will fulfil not only the role of an information handbook, but also the vision of surrealists or the French philosopher and literary theoretician Roland Barthes, who in his study devoted to Diderot’s *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1751–1772) states that “(...) there is not one plate of the Encyclopédie that does not vibrate well beyond its demonstrative intent. This singular vibration is above all an astonishment”.