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From Nowhere to Somewhere: The Carpatho-Rusyn Movement. A Personal History

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From Nowhere to Somewhere: The Carpatho-Rusyn Movement. A Personal History

By Paul Robert Magocsi

Ibidem-Verlag, 2024

ISBN 978-3-8382-1973-8 (hardback)

ISBN 978-3-8382-7973-2 (eBook)

With its title alluding to Andy Warhol's famous dictum, Paul Robert Magocsi's magisterial *From Nowhere to Somewhere: The Carpatho-Rusyn Movement* offers unique first-person insights into a life dedicated to promoting a minority who reside on the territories of several countries in East Central Europe (Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine), with varying – and sometimes contested – degrees of recognition and status. Bearing the subtitle *A Personal History*, this 530-page book – originally intended as the thematic component of a mooted six-volume autobiographical memoir (Magocsi, 2024, pp. v-vi) – outlines Professor Magocsi's deep-rooted professional and personal interests in Carpatho-Rusyn language and culture, which go far beyond academic scholarship and teaching to also include political advocacy, artistic projects, and practical publications for the wider public.

Divided into 61 chapters of varying lengths, the book is chronological in structure. To briefly summarise some of its fascinating and wide-ranging contents, the volume opens with Magocsi's curiosity about his family origins whilst growing up in the postwar United States, and how his life goal to learn more about the Carpatho-Rusyns coalesced during his postdoctoral work at Harvard, where he developed his initial contacts with the diaspora community, organised conferences,

**Journal on Ethnopolitics and
Minority Issues in Europe**

Vol.24, No.3, 2025

pp.144–146

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.53779/ANHW1711>

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and made steps towards creating a community of scholars and advocates, culminating in the foundation of the non-profit Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center, whose activities also included publishing relevant books and newsletters (chapters 1-5).

On moving to the University of Toronto at the beginning of the 1980s, Ukrainian studies were Magocsi's primary scholarly focus, with Carpatho-Rusyn remaining as an ancillary activity outside professional hours. During this period, he led study tours to Europe and received research grants to travel to Prešov, in then-Communist Czechoslovakia, as well as making contacts with the Lemko minority in Poland (chapters 6-11). Magocsi also writes of his role *inter alia* in discussions to create a Warhol Family Museum in Slovakia, noting how the Carpatho-Rusyn minorities were dealing with the ideological changes of the early 1990s, and also the pioneering efforts to create the First World Congress of Rusyns in 1991 (chapters 12-18). These initiatives were also realised through the codification of a literary standard for Rusyn in Slovakia, including Magocsi's role in announcing the "existence of this new Slavic language" (Magocsi, 2024, p. 170) to the world, as well as the appearance of linguistic, pedagogical, popular, and scholarly texts accompanied by increased academic interest among Slavists and the creation of a dedicated research library at Magocsi's home university in Toronto (chapters 19-28).

The background of changing minority policies in the countries where Carpatho-Rusyns reside also led to greater political engagement with a number of stakeholders, as well as the need to encourage more young people to participate in the initiative. This too was paralleled by the need for additional financial support; with the generosity of Steve Chepa, a Canadian businessman of Carpatho-Rusyn heritage, several projects were funded, including prizes for literature and publications such as Magocsi's well-known *The People from Nowhere. An Illustrated History of the Carpatho-Rusyns* (Magocsi, 2006), which was translated into ten languages (chapters 29-40).

Magocsi held the influential position of chairman of the World Congress of Rusyns for two consecutive two-year terms (2005-2009) (chapters 41-48), before subsequently continuing with his scholarly activities, resulting in the publication of *Carpathian Rus'. A Historical Atlas* (Magocsi, 2017; see chapter 50). The memoir's final chapters (chapters 50-60) expand on the deepening links with the University of Prešov, where a dedicated Carpatho-Rusyn research centre and summer school (*Studium Carpatho-Ruthenorum*) were established, and the favourable efforts relating to minority policies towards the Carpatho-Rusyn and their language in Slovakia are contrasted with the current situation in some of the other countries. The book closes with Magocsi stating his desires for the future of the Carpatho-Rusyn movement, including the creation of a national library and the development of cultural awards and prizes (chapter 61).

As the above outline details, this book is wide-ranging in its scope, and Magocsi's style is extremely reader-friendly, with the rare ability to present and navigate through complex debates and issues with clarity. In addition, given the many different institutions, organisations, individuals, and even historical figures mentioned, the book helpfully comes

with a list of ‘Dramatis Personae’ comprising almost 300 names. The text is also enlivened by the judicious use of photographs, documents, and maps, many from Magocsi’s own personal archive, which also gives the reader a visual perspective on the book’s events and discussions.

For scholars and advocates interested in minority issues, many of the topics that Magocsi deals with in his memoir will doubtlessly be familiar. These vary from aspects relating to standardising linguistic forms; dealing with bureaucratic institutions; the vicissitudes of committee memberships and accommodating opposing viewpoints and demanding personalities; awareness-raising and dissemination of group activities through events and publishing; encouraging the next generation of advocates; as well as the need for sufficient financial resources. In bringing together academia, activism, and policy, Magocsi’s unique experience therefore represents a treasury of information for other interested parties, and not solely in the domain of Carpatho-Rusyn studies. Accordingly, this incisive and deftly-written memoir will find a wide readership and represents an important contribution to minority studies in the European context and beyond.

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