Intriguing Topics in Physiological Anthropology: 
Introduction to the Theme

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It is well known that we are able rightfully to claim how anthropology, with the subject of its concern, comprises many fields which within the ‘classical division’ of the discipline were not adequately represented (Rudan et al., 1977). That was the case - until the last few decades of 20th century - with ‘physiological anthropology’ as well, which offers today much more than was provided for in the moment of creating its differentia specifica (e.g. Weiner, 1966; Baker, 1988; Sato, 1995; Juergens, 1995; Rudan, 2000). It should be stressed that in the span of the last decade the subject of this narrow anthropological domain should be regarded as much more expanded ranging from: new areas of research, historical analysis of human adaptations (especially in the lights of the possibilities for application of various ergonomic solutions in different parts of the world), studies of different cultural patterns in human physiological reactions and adjustments, judgements of the so called ‘peculiar situations’, etc. to different ‘research/application spectrum’ which could be regarded as the cultural construction of what we call ‘applied physiological anthropology’ (Rudan, 2000). Consequently, the scientific interest in physiology within anthropology has expanded inevitably in the last decade towards all scientific narrow fields of discipline and related areas already described and presented through strategic targets by Paul Baker’s ‘eternal triangle’ of interdependencies (Baker, 1997) resulting on the global scene in an elaboration of different (new) research problems, different (new) methods applied and the specific (new) applicational activities depending, many times, on our own perceptions. It is clear that the way in which current attitude toward physiological anthropology has been elaborated and developed depends directly on the evolution of human knowledge although even today one could still find those who relate physiological anthropology to standard classical methodological patterns of anthropological work (based mainly on metric-morphological properties and analyses of morpho/physiological adjustments) as opposed to those that accept (realistically) the almost immesurable growth of specialised research interests and techniques in this anthropological discipline (e.g. analysing different problems of human evolution, human ecology, medical anthropology, genetical epidemiology, growth and development and aging processes studies, etc.). This is especially visible in the most economically and technologically developed countries of the world. In fact, the number of research interests and techniques applied, as well as the interpretations obtained progressively grow together with the acceptance of new, not only inter- and trans-, and (respectively) multidisciplinary approaches to scientific research and its application, but also with the possible insight of today, and within it the necessity of its, inevitable holistic analytic approach. And here the question of our interests to ask and to try to resolve many confronted problems in physiological anthropology arises.

The intellectual maturation of the ideas to accept physiology within the framework of classical anthropology and its differentia specifica became reality a few decades ago. Accepting the integrity of our discipline it was my privilege to invite a few colleagues from different countries, oriented to the problems of research in different fields of anthropology with a very important goal - to present, to analyse and to give us some ideas about possible applications of new approaches and different scopes to which some problems could be related, presented and reexamined in different intellectual constructions, in order to avoid the ‘classical’ anthropological uncritical acceptance of certain ‘morpho/physiological’ assumptions. So, the papers published in this volume of the journal present not only the variety of encountered problems but also the different
techniques and levels of investigations. All of them show a part of the variety of richness in which different problems of physiological anthropology could be presented today, representing a significant contribution to our efforts toward the development of strategy of our scientific discipline, contributing to the perceptual syntheses and showing that the subject of physiological anthropology should not be limited by any intellectual boundaries.

References


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