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The Grey Zone of Law and Practice:
an Example of Child Benefit

This paper analyzed how institution of child benefit might be perceived as an indicator of different social, political, economic and more broad changes not only on individual but also on general level. In that regard we traced transformations of institution of child benefit during socialism and post socialism, compared how people perceived it and what kind of relations towards property it caused. These two time frames are not taken randomly. On the contrary, they represent two different systems as well as values. While socialist system introduced welfare state, where individual security was transmitted to collective level, in post socialism individual uncertainty has become dominant feature due to the rapid disintegration of the institutions of social state.

In two different settings, Vranje and its nearby villages and in Gaj village, we analyzed how child benefit shaped property relations, how persons perceived security and uncertainty, and how they coped with uncertainty during these two periods. Interestingly, in socialism people who moved from village to city and who were using child benefit were not usually claimed right to parent’s land and were excluded from inheritance. On the other hand – apart from the fact that in post socialism property represents one of the main preconditions for exclusion from any social help and child benefit as well – people who live in village apply different coping strategies in order to secretly keep property and at the same time to claim child benefit even though they are not eligible candidates.

We analyzed different examples of these coping strategies and argue that they represent, in fact, dynamic and creative answer to “routinized state of crises” where economic and political security and stability are missing at a state level.

Key words: child benefit, property relations, uncertainty, coping strategies