

Interdisciplinarity: challenges and possible contributions of medical anthropology on the example of vaccine hesitancy in Serbia

First part:

- Challenges that medical anthropology faces in collaboration with biomedicine and public health

Second part:

- Lack of anthropological perspective  unsuccessful official response to anti-vaccination campaigns in Serbia

- **Medical anthropology** – a discipline which describes, interprets and critically appraises the relationships between culture, behaviour, health and disease, and places health and illness in the broader context of cultural, social, political, economic and historical processes.

# Unequal position of doctors and anthropologists in medical research settings

- Doctors define the problems and research priorities; anthropologists play an ancillary role
- Methodological differences between social and natural sciences

# Vaccination issue in Serbia

- **Context:**

Complex process of post-socialist transformation



Significantly changed cultural and socio-political  
circumstances

# Vaccination issue in Serbia

## Public health experts' strategies:

- Disseminating accurate information about vaccines, vaccination practices and their benefits
- Demonstrating the need for vaccines in the contemporary moment, the safety and utility of vaccines
- Relying on statistics, historical facts and medical references

# Vaccination issue in Serbia

**Public health experts' reasoning about why people challenge vaccination and vaccines:**

- People are ignorant, passive, irrational, emotional, superstitious, gullible, susceptible to rumors and conspiracy theories, insufficiently civilized.

# Vaccination issue in Serbia

## **The sources of public views and concerns:**

- Far-reaching social problems and people's experience of living in post-socialist circumstances
- Experts' argument about the importance of herd immunity not in line with new social values promoted in post-socialist context
- Questions about the state's role and responsibilities – the issue of accountability in case of adverse side-effects



# Vaccination issue in Serbia

## **Oversights in addressing vaccine scepticism in Serbia:**

- Not taking into account the complex reasons why people would resist vaccination
- Misconception that people were making decisions about vaccination exclusively under the influence of anti-vaccine groups
- Not taking into account wider social, cultural and political influences

**Thank you for your attention!**