

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE *CULTURAL HERITAGE IN MIGRATION* (15–16 June 2017, Sofia, Bulgaria)

Issues concerning cultural heritage, its creation, transfer and preservation in its various forms in the foreign cultural context are receiving increased attention along with issues related to the migration policy, the social and cultural adaptation of migrants and the functioning of their daily networks in the receiving society. One of the pieces of proof of the active interest in these processes within academia and in practice was the international conference *Cultural Heritage in Migration*, organised by the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies together with Ethnographic Museum of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IEFSEM-BAS) in Sofia on 15–16 June 2017.

The conference aimed to outline some specific aspects of cultural heritage in the field of migration and interpret it from the point of view of its importance to the preservation of migrants' cultural identity abroad and its role in the process of integration and institutionalisation of immigrant communities. Even though the call placed emphasis on the experience of Bulgarian migrant communities abroad, thanks to the open approach of the organisers the two-day programme addressed the diverse ethnic, cultural and religious contexts of Central and Eastern Europe.

The research presented by the conference participants was divided into eight thematic areas¹. Due to the complexity of the topic of

cultural heritage in the context of migration, these areas overlapped, complemented each other or were interlinked. The presented papers and subsequent discussions showed parallels in certain research contexts and in migrants' strategies in their new home countries, as well as differences developing under the influence of specific political, cultural, religious, economic and social conditions.

The first day of the conference began with the block *Cultural Heritage Abroad: the Factors of Consolidation and Institutionalisation of Diaspora*. The papers presented in this block highlighted the diversity of this theme and the different approaches to grasping it, from language as a source and tool for the preservation of cultural heritage (Irina Sedakova, Institute of Slavic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences), folklore traditions preserved and handed down to next generations as a means of ethnic identity and differentiation between "us and the other ones" (Veneta Yankova, The Constantine of Preslav University of Shumen), the links between the preservation of cultural heritage and religious beliefs and social class (Magdalena Elchinova, New Bulgarian University) to highlighting the potential processes of redefining cultural heritage into a symbolic and cultural capital legitimising the position of migrants within new social networks (Meglena Zlatkova, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv).

1 The whole conference programme can be found at the website <http://www.migrantheritage.com/international-conference-cultural-heritage-in-migration-programme/>.

In the next conference block, I had the opportunity to present a paper based on my dissertation thesis dealing with the diaspora policy of Slovakia as a home country and its impacts on the preservation of the *national identity* of Slovaks living abroad, including through the support of the mother tongue and cultural traditions.

The institutionalisation of the mutual relationships between the country of origin of migrants or their predecessors, the massive influence of the political context of the sending and receiving country and the support of more or less formal cultural organisations beyond borders were the topics of several papers presented during these two days.

Yordan Yanev, an independent researcher from Sofia, offered an analysis of Bulgaria's diaspora policy the changes in which have affected migrants' daily life.

In the context of institutionalisation of the diaspora communities, emphasis was also placed on ethnic education or the impacts of the host country's integration policy on the possibilities of establishing informal community schools with a minority language of instruction. Ralitsa Savova from the University of West Hungary in Sopron dealt with the impacts of bilingual education of the Bulgarian minority in Budapest on preserving its mother tongue. Boian Koulov and Mariyanka Borisova from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences looked at schools not only as a space for education, but also as a social and cultural centre of the migrant community, affecting its cultural calendar and determining the community activities. The influence of the Spanish integration policy and the practices of a state agency related to the activities and functioning of a Bulgarian cultural organisation were described by Nikolai Vukov and Valentin Voskresenski (IEFSEM-BAS, Sofia). They looked at cultural heritage as a source of strengthening the Bulgarian community and preserving their collective identity, while they observed its shift towards the key instrument for the integration of Bulgarian migrants into the local community. Likewise, Tanya Dimitrova (Friedrich Schiller University in Jena) focused on the Bulgarian community in the Federal State of Thuringia in Germany, having explored the process of

preservation and re-creation of the cultural heritage within an institutional environment and the influence of the emerging cultural organisation on the entry and acceptance of migrants by the local community. Some of the research activities presented at the conference also focused on church institutions, serving not only for the preservation of faith as a link to the ethnic identification of migrants who often find themselves in a different religious environment.

Nina Vlaskina from the Russian Academy of Sciences highlighted churches and parishes as important centres for the creation of social networks and for the maintaining of relationships with the mother country, but also as support institutions in seeking a job and in facilitating the process of integration in the general society.

Parallel with the institutional sphere, cultural heritage in its different forms plays an important role within the family environment which, according to the conference organisers, represents space filled with family stories and daily objects, thus creating a natural environment for informal education in culture, language, traditions or religion. Material culture is accompanied by many cultural meanings and reflects various changing patterns in the ethnic identification process. Akvilé Motuzaité (Turku University, Finland) examined these processes among mixed couples and the role female migrants play in creating a *home* in a different social and cultural environment.

Leena Samin Naqvi, an independent researcher from Sweden, an architect by profession, talked about food as a universal language and the first step that migrants take on their route towards integration into a new environment. She presented the EAT project implemented in Umeå in the north of Sweden. In the framework of informal mapping of the development of female migrants' social relationships, using the oral history method, she has been examining the changes and impacts on the eating culture.

Lumnije Kadriu from the Albanian Studies Institute in Pristina described the way the role of the traditional meal *flija* changes within the Albanian *diaspora* in Kosovo, including its impacts on the processes of identification and belonging to

a group on the background of integration strategies and social activities.

Besides the institutional and family environment, an important role with regard to the local community is played by the presence of the different elements and forms of cultural heritage in the public space. Shared and emphasised in the framework of different social activities, they are the object of acquiring self-awareness, self-cognition, as well as preservation and promotion. Skaidrė Urbonienė from the Lithuanian Cultural Research Institute dedicated her research to the process of searching for different forms of expression of ethnic affiliation. One of them are wooden crosses, symbolically linking the home country to the current place of stay of post-war emigrants from Lithuanian and being helpful in their adaptation to the new environment.

As the conference papers showed, depending on the time aspects, the circumstances of migration movements, the socio-cultural dynamics of the migrant community in the new environment, cultural heritage appears and is re-created in various contexts.

The final part of the conference was about

migrants' economic activities and the process of revival and preservation of cultural heritage in ethno-business. The different forms of such economic engagement through souvenir shops, catering agencies, hotels or tourist activities were analysed by Vladimir Penchev and Tanya Matanova (IEFSEM-BAS, Sofia).

The conference *Cultural Heritage in Migration* represented a forum of participants not only from different countries, but also with a diverse background and experience. It thus provided a broad perspective of cultural heritage, specifically reconstructed under the particular conditions of a new homeland, and highlighted the importance of its role in the formation and strengthening of migrant communities in their daily life.

These notes are just a small part of what was discussed at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies in Sofia in the course of two days. A report from the conference will be published, with full texts of all the papers presented at the conference.

NATÁLIA BLAHOVÁ,

Institute of Ethnology SAS in Bratislava

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CONFERENCE *ETHNOLOGY WITHOUT BORDERS* (25–26 September 2017, Bratislava)

The 6th international student conference *Ethnology Without Borders* was held for the first time in Bratislava on 25 and 26 September, at the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University. It was organised by the Department of Ethnology and Museology and the Institute of Ethnology SAS. The main topics of this scientific event, which gathered students of ethnology and cultural anthropology from the Visegrad Four countries, were migration, minorities and the theoretical and methodological issues related to their research.

The first conference paper was presented by one of the main speakers, Tomáš Hrustič from the Institute of Ethnology SAS, who talked about the political discourse on minorities. His presentation showed examples

of participatory research on minorities and raised an inspiring question about what position ethnology and cultural anthropology are to take in this discourse.

The first two conference panels thematically focused on minorities and migration. The first one was introduced by Kamil Exner from Jagellonian University in Cracow, whose paper based on his research on Ukrainians living in Poland highlighted the importance of a consistent definition of the term “discrimination” in social sciences. Joanna Maurer from Masaryk University in Brno spoke in her paper entitled “*Transculturality. Cultural Awareness and Its Role in Building (In)Tolerance*” about the concept of transculturality, utilising her knowledge obtained from the research on the Polish

minority living in Brno. The first panel was closed by Marta Kluszczynska from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, who explored the perspective of elementary school teachers in Poznan and Granada, Spain, on the integration of Roma and foreign students.

The second conference panel began with an interesting contribution by Beata Turek about the role of social networks in the migration crisis and about the different models of virtual communication, reflecting the “us vs. them” perspective. Her colleague from Jagiellonian University, Paweł Witanowski, talked in his presentation about the mobility of students and PhD graduates. He also pointed out that the need of young academics to move often leads to the feeling of decreased life stability – not only in the economic sense but also in connection with social relationships and academic freedom. The first half of the conference *Ethnology Without Borders* ended with the presentation by Štěpán Kuchlei from Masaryk University in Brno. He presented in his paper the Misak tribe living in southern Columbia based on the findings from his long-term field research directly among the members of this tribe.

After the lunch break, the floor was given to the second main conference speaker – civic activist Radoslav Sloboda. He talked about growing political extremism in the Banská Bystrica region since the regional elections in 2013 and described the reactions of local activists to this process. Radoslav Sloboda’s contribution highlighted the importance of co-operation between social scientists and civic activists in the research of and coping with political extremism.

The third conference panel tackled nationalism and identity issues. The first one to speak was Katalin Pajor from Loránd Eötvös University in Budapest. She focused on the process of changes in the ethnic identity of the members of the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia. In the next presentation entitled “*Fans, Skinheads, New Elites. Internal Stratification within Polish National*

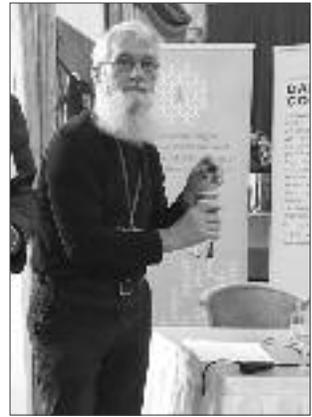
Organisations” Weronika Kuta from Jagiellonian University in Cracow introduced the results of her research on the members of nationalist movements in Poland. The third thematic panel was closed by Katerina Ivanova from Comenius University in Bratislava with a paper on the ethnic identification of people living in a multi-ethnic environment. Her research conducted among Bulgarian Turks showed, for example, that the self-identification of minorities can be affected, among other things, by categorisation “from the outside” – in this case, by the Bulgarian majority.

The final fourth panel was dedicated to the theoretical and methodological aspects of research on the topics mentioned above. Another representative of Jagiellonian University, Adrianna Beczek, pointed out in her contribution on “*Cultural Anthropology as an Exercise in Introspection*” the importance of cultural anthropology that can be helpful in facing social problems and expressions of extremism or nationalism by gathering knowledge about “others”. The rich conference programme was closed by Kinga Wygnaniec from Jagiellonian University who offered the public an anthropological perspective of the different expressions of crises in society through the example of the student protest in Cracow, which took place on 25 January 2017.

The conference was followed by an informal evening gathering of the participants and organisers in a Bratislava bar. On Tuesday morning, 26 September, the guests visited Devín Castle, thus ending the programme of the successful event. The conference *Ethnology Without Borders* confirmed again that its importance lies not only in the presentation of research and works of ethnology and cultural anthropology students, but also in establishing contacts and in meeting other young people from the Visegrad Four countries.

TOMÁŠ WINKLER,
Institute of Ethnology SAS in Bratislava

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE INFORMATION MATTERS: TOWARDS POSITIVE PATHWAYS OF MIGRANTS' INTEGRATION (26 October 2017, Bratislava)



From left: Tatiana Podolinská, director of the Institute of Ethnology SAS, opens the conference. The main conference speakers – Antoine Savary and Rinus Penninx. (Photo by Katarína Paduchová)

The Institute of Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences was the main organiser of the international conference “Information Matters: Towards Positive Pathways of Migrants’ Integration”, held at Palfy Palace in Bratislava on 26 October 2017.

The conference, organised by the Institute of Ethnology SAS in co-operation with the Slovenian Migration Institute of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts and the Institute for Labour and Family Research, was one of the important outputs of Part 1 of the Danube Region Information Platform for Economic Integration of Migrants (DRIM) project, implemented under the European Union project scheme Interreg Danube Transnational Programme 2014 – 2020. The DRIM project is implemented by an international scientific consortium composed of nine countries (Slovenia, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Germany, Croatia, Serbia, Czech Republic, and Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The project aims to create the “Danube Compass”, an information web portal for migrants and state authorities in the countries which have become part of the European migration wave in recent years. It targets mainly state authorities and migrants who need

comprehensive, structured, transparent, easily available and comparable information at a single place. At the end of October, international experts and researchers from the Institute of Ethnology SAS presented in Bratislava their experience in creating such a large international portal and their findings on the integration of migrants in Europe.

“We want to present to the public our experience with creating the portal for nine countries of the Danube region which share their legislation and practical experience in co-operating with the governmental sector or non-governmental organisations. The Danube Compass will be a big help in navigating people who left their home country and seek to find a good job or sufficient social security at a new place,” said Tatiana Podolinská, Director of the Institute of Ethnology SAS about the project. She, together with Martina Bofulin from the Slovenian Migration Institute, the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts and DRIM Project Lead Partner, opened the event.

The main conference speakers were Antoine Savary, Deputy Head of Unit Legal Migration and Integration, DG Migration and Home Affairs of the European Commission,



Participants of the international conference Information Matters: Towards Positive Pathways of Migrants' Integration (Photo by Katarína Paduchová)



Boris Divinský, Tatiana Podolinská, Martina Bofulin and Tomáš Hrustič (from left to right) are giving an interview for television and media reporters (Photo by Katarína Paduchová)

and Professor Rinus Penninx, prominent European expert in migrants' integration from Universiteit van Amsterdam. They were joined by the speakers of the working panels from Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Germany and Hungary.

The key topics of the Bratislava conference included the role of information in the effective migrants' integration in society; availability, correctness and timeliness of information provided to migrants; and migrants' integration into the labour market of the receiving country. During the conference, the experts also tackled the current

issues of modern integration of migrants and migration management within the EU or the background of and interaction between information, integration, economic, migration and population policies. The international conference was accompanied by a domestic press conference and met with active interest from the mass media.

BORIS DIVINSKÝ, TATIANA PODOLINSKÁ,
Institute of Ethnology SAS in Bratislava
MONIKA HUCÁKOVÁ
(Office of the SAS Presidium)