

EXHIBITION “THE SLOVAK-SLOVENIAN DIMENSION” - A SPACE FOR FINDING CONNECTIONS

For the third successive year, this exhibition is taking place, the idea behind it being to give space to inter-ethnic relations in the most varying dimensions of history, culture and way of life. It first opened in June 2016 in the Hall of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic in Bratislava. It began its journey at a time when Slovenia was celebrating the 25th anniversary of the foundation of an independent state, and when Slovakia was presiding the Council of Europe for the first time. Since then, the exhibition has travelled through many Slovenian, international and Slovak destinations, carrying its unique message. The idea behind the creation of this exhibition was born a while ago. It is linked to the work of the lectorship in Slovenian language at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava and to the support given by the diplomatic mission of the Republic of Slovenia in Slovakia.

The lectureship in Slovenian language and culture, which is one of the traditionally excellent lectorships in the Department of Slavonic Philology of Faculty of Arts of Comenius University, has been held for over ten years by Saša Vojtechová Poklač, who brims with ideas – and the energy to implement them. New courses, such as the Facts about of Slovenia, work with literary texts and artistic translation, excursions as well as the wider realm of Central European studies, all this – as part of language learning – is very inspiring for students both in terms of form and content. Over the past semesters, a new experience has been added: the preparation of an exhibition. Additional teachers have been intensely involved in the latter: Miha Kragelj, Svetlana Kmecová, Marta Botiková, as well as students from the Department of Ethnology and Museology – Linda Moróczová, Michal Uhrín, Tomáš Winkler – and from the programme of Central European Studies – Katarína Lalíková and Anna Csordás. The artists and architects Pavel Figlas and Slavomír Lalík also contributed with their artworks. Last but not least,

the museologists Zuzana Vášáryová, Pavel Habáň and the radio journalist Rozália Vlášková have also cooperated on the preparation and realisation of the exhibition, as well as colleagues from museums and exhibition sites where the exhibition was presented.

The exhibition's topics are based on interest in state, geographic and historic connections, on the ethnological discovery of the way of life, the literary and wider cultural tradition and important figures from these spheres, on the architectural image of towns and the dreamlike image of folk tales. Further dimensions of the exhibition occupy the virtual space of the internet, in lessons for primary schools and in the itinerant nature of the exhibition, which is one of the objectives of this complex project. The exhibition was presented in Slovenian towns (Koper, Ljubljana 2016), in the embassies of our countries in Berlin and London (2017), later once more in Slovakia, in the museums in Martin (2018) Ružomberok and in Liptovský Mikuláš (2019).

For this travelling project, the three-dimensional items in the exhibition are more of a symbolic nature than a museum one: they come mainly from private collections, they are models and objects of contemporary folk art production and only some are from museum deposits and collections, usually from the museums, which are hosting the exhibition.

Preparing the exhibition involved for its creators many other dimensions: work with texts, collection items, a spatial presentation. The people "straight out of school" learnt all this *on the go* from their experienced colleagues, museologists and specialists in such presentations. Meetings, experiences, enjoyment of what has gone well, embarrassment at short delays – all this was a valuable experience for the group of creators. The educational dimension for viewers was also important: they searched for ethnological and historical, geographical and literary topics in secondary sources, as well as discovering culture and civilisation, facts and language; for example, how to describe briefly and accurately the differences between Carpathian sheep-breeding and Alpine animal breeding, how to standardise the meanings of beekeeping and gingerbread-making, or viticulture, which developed in the more southern, or more northern, areas of the wider Central European area.

Even while the exhibition was being held, artefacts were added. An excellent example of the proximity of the ethnonyms, as well as the fatefulness of their differences, is the story of an American pilot whose remains were discovered by enthusiasts from the Club of Aviation History in the site of Svätý Jur near Bratislava. Lieutenant Raymond W. Allen, the pilot of a light fighter plane from the American air base in Italy, was shot down on June 26th 1944. He told his base that he had been shot down over Slovakia, but the radio officers understood that he had fallen over Slovenia, probably into the waters of the Adriatic. As a result, no one looked for him, and this mistake was only explained by the above-mentioned discovery,

many decades later. A commemoration of this mistake shows one of the dimensions of the relations presented at the exhibition.

The exhibition **Slovak - Slovenian Dimension** took place thanks to the knowledge, vision and work of its creators, and was given financial support by the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic and the Slovenian Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The presentation of cultural-historical and contemporary parallels and differences between the two countries speaks to visitors in our home countries and abroad...But who knows whether people will begin to confuse us less around the world, when this exhibition has shown us how different we are, but also how very close in many ways?

Marta Botiková