
**INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS SEMINARS**

At the end of the 1960s the Department of Ethnology and Folklore Studies of the Faculty of Philosophy of Comenius University began to feel the need of professional cooperation with abroad especially in two areas: in pedagogical work and in scientific – research activities. The international student ethnological seminar *Seminarium Ethnologicum* (SE), which the department had founded and organized for almost ten years, helped considerably to meet these goals.

The Seminar followed especially didactic goals. Within the Seminar the students, who at that time were accepted to the study in greater numbers, did their compulsory professional field practice. The group research under the supervision of teachers made it possible for the students to work on different research projects, provide help in collecting ethnographic material and get supervision in its initial and further processing.

Another goal was to establish and develop scientific contacts and collaboration with ethnological, museum and cultural institutions in Czechoslovakia as well as with university and scientific institutions abroad. The invitations to the Seminar were sent especially to ethnological departments of twin universities, but also to “western” European universities and scientific institutions. Scientists and the teachers from abroad besides their didactic activities established professional cooperation with home participants of the Seminar, informed on theoretical problems of ethnology abroad.

Though the concept of individual years of the Seminar changed some conditions and elements of its organization on the whole it remained the same. The main organizer of the Seminar was always the department in Bratislava. The place of inter-university student field work was selected after the agreement with regional and local cultural and state institutions. These helped with the organization and financing of the research – the counter-value was the collected research material. The participation of the foreign participants was financially covered by the University of Comenius, *Matica slovenská* and other institutions. The home participants received grants from the Slovak Ethnographic Society (*Slovenská národopisná spoločnosť*).

The Institute of Ethnology the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the Slovak National Museum and Slovak Monuments Board also participated in the solution of professional and scientific problems of the Seminar.

The principal mission of the Seminar was the research of folk culture in a particular region. According to its professional goal several thematic research groups were constituted. Each of them was led by a distinguished home or a foreign scholar of appropriate specialization. Slovak students were placed into research groups according to the recommendations of the department, the foreign ones according to their own choice. The task of a professional instructor was to lead the research work, supervise it methodologically, follow and direct the system of the processed material.

The Seminar evening discussions were an inseparable part of inter-university practice. Here the members of research teams presented the results and problems of their work and also the lectures of experts on the themes of research were given. In this way the students got acquainted with a number of areas of folk culture of different locations and gained a more complete picture of life of the people in a particular region.

Special lectures of the guests from abroad focused on more general themes e. g. on functions of history, contemporary situation and perspectives of ethnography in a particular country. Some lectures analyzed general theoretical and methodological problems (structuralism, the issues of ethnographic recording of data, preparation of the atlases of folk culture etc.) The Seminar discussions made it possible to confront theoretical and methodological problems and research methods among the experts from different universities and scientific trends. It is true that the former ethnography students were mostly only listeners, but it was part of the "school" of scholarly life and also for more experienced colleagues it was professional and social experience to listen to the views of the renowned scholars such as V. I. Alexandrov, I. Balassa, B. Bratanić, N. A. Bringeus, J. V. Bromlej, J. Burszta, A. Fenton, H. Fielhauer, Ch. Gandev, M. Gładysz, B. Gunda, B. Kopczyńska-Jaworska, J. Manga, G. Nellemann, V. Novak, B. N. Putilov, H. Rasmussen, G. de Rohan-Csermak, Ch. Vakarelski, I. Vladutiu, R. Wildhaber, M. Zender, Z. Ujváry and many others.

Such „concentration of scholars" from numerous countries at that time provided a good opportunity for scientific-organizational activities (agreements on cooperation, planning of joint scientific projects, editorial activities etc.). In the course of the Seminar there used to be organized the short-term or a few-days scientific events such as conferences, meetings of various ethnological committees, editorial boards, meetings of international research teams.

The social content of the Seminar consisted of excursions to the sights of folk culture, historical sights and trips to nature. If possible visits to local festivities and folklore festivals, cultural institutions, the meetings with the representatives of villages and officials of culture were also organized. These activities made it possible for our, but also foreign, participants to get better acquainted with the culture of Slovakia and they contributed to the promotion and increase of interest in comparative studies.

The department in Bratislava had organized seven years of SE: in Spišská Belá (1968), Liptovská Teplička (1969), Oravská priehrada (1970), Stará Lubovňa (1971), Levoča (1972), Mlynyky – Gemer (1973) and Trenčín – Opatová (1974). In the following years the Seminar was organized according to the original plan by the universities in Poznan, Lodž, Belgrade and Warsaw. In the eleventh year the chain of seminars had broken. None of the participating countries was able to overcome difficulties in the contemporary social and political conditions, the obstacles of bureaucracy and political system and organize the eleventh Seminar.

The contribution of the international field work within SE for the department in Bratislava and its students must be judged within the social and political context of the contemporary period. The seminars which now look like university summer schools 40 years ago for students, besides acquiring skills in the documentation of folk culture, also opened ways for contacts with students and renowned authorities from other universities. They offered an opportunity to compare the methods of study at different universities and theoretical and practical problems of the science in our country and abroad. They became a motivation for the study of foreign languages and laid the foundations for mutual understanding and future scientific cooperation.

For teachers and research workers the ethnological seminars meant especially mutual exchange of experience, progress in cooperation and motivation for further

research project. From this point of view the organizational activities of the department hosting team lead by its founder and the SE director Professor J. Podolák were seminal and deserve praise.

The ethnographic seminars of Slovak and Polish students were another significant and specific department activity. They resulted from a need of students to establish mutual contacts and to confront their study and research results.

The first Polish-Slovak seminar was held in Poznan in 1972. The program of the seminar focused on the problems of tradition and the present and the presentations of Slovak and Polish students were given. Professor J. Burzsta, who supported this seminar very much, also gave a lecture. The ethnographic films from Poland and Slovakia were shown. Slovak participants visited a local student club and were shown the sights of Poznan.

The nature of the first seminar served as a model for the following meetings. The students managed the professional and social part of the seminar program. Poznan and Bratislava took turns in organizing the seminar. Gradually the students from Lodž, Warsaw and Krakow joined and in Czechoslovakia the student from Prague and Brno. In the last seminar also the students from Budapest, Debrecen, and Sophia universities participated.

Each seminar had its own thematic orientation, e.g. The Transformations of traditional folk culture under the conditions of socialism (1973), Folk culture and national culture (1974), Woman, family and society (1975). The themes for the next one were announced at the end of the seminar, so that participants had enough time to prepare their lectures. Seminars were known for their rich discussions and there was a plan to have them published, however, besides "samizdat" publications of the lectures from the 4th Seminar the plan failed.

Gradually besides an organizing department and faculty also prominent scientists of the country – specializing in the topics of a particular Seminar – had a patronage over the seminars. The meetings of professionals were accompanied by the festivals of ethnographic films. In the social program of the Seminar were included sightseeing tours of a city and its surroundings.

In total there were nine bilateral student ethnographic seminars. The plans for the tenth, an international one, failed due to stormy social and political situation in Poland at the beginning of the 1980s, which resulted in the strict restrictions imposed upon mutual contacts between our two countries.

The nine years of the Seminar are valuable especially for the fact that they originated from a spontaneous activity of students and also their organization and professional activities rested considerably on the work of students. The effort made found its reflection in new knowledge and scientific information which the students gained and exchanged. It also gave an opportunity to get to know life in a neighbouring country. We regret that only a few people knew about this departmental activity. A weak promotion, only random news in professional journals and almost no records of these events give an evidence of the modesty of students and the department. Better promotion could have helped a wider interest and larger participation of ethnographers from various institutions and have contributed to a greater and deserved significance of the Seminar.

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