
**SEMINARIUM ETHNOLOGICUM
IS REMEMBERED BY**

Seminarium Ethnologicum – the first (and only) ethnological European “union” in Slovakia, 1968 – 1974

Alongside all the forms, greater and lesser, of summer school and similar available today, and especially the results of the European Higher Education Area known as the Bologna process, we should not neglect the memory of the excellent European Ethnological Summer School, organised very successfully from 1968 to 1974 by the chair of ethnology and folkloristics at the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University in Bratislava. Behind sound institutions usually stand sound people, planning and realising ambitious tasks, and in the case of this summer school, entitled Seminarium Ethnologicum (SE), that person was Prof Dr Jan Podolák, who together with colleagues and students organised this exceptional international exchange during a period of great political and other problems in the then Czechoslovakia.

After over 40 years, the SE meetings still have a historical legacy. The individual details of each memory enable an assessment of the seminar as an exceptional form of integration in a Europe then still divided into east and west. The SE ran for seven years and allowed students and professors from many ethnological schools, with a wide range of methodological approaches, to gather together. It was based on fieldwork that took place each year in a different part of Slovakia, seminar discussion and lectures. The fieldwork took place in smaller groups, which as a rule comprised representatives of different countries. Of particular benefit was the contribution of the many professors, who were able to directly share their knowledge and views on research issues with students. It is understandable, of course, that the fieldwork did not produce profound results, since the research was limited to little more than ten days, with survey or questionnaire work predominating. Language differences never proved a problem, even though English was not yet the global language it is today. The great merit of the field research lay primarily in the direct communication and direct contacts between SE participants and in the ways in which ideas and theoretical knowledge were exchanged. This was the guiding principle of the SE organisers, who were well aware that ethnology students in Europe had not had much opportunity to establish academic contacts and links during their studies unlike older colleagues, professors and others who had completed ethnology studies earlier and had been able to meet and exchange academic and scientific knowledge at congresses and symposiums.

The research groups were thematically defined and generally based on an attested ethnological system. For example, at the second SE in Liptovská Teplička students and professors were divided into groups addressing economic issues (specifically pastures and livestock rearing), food and transport. The third SE in the Orava district focused on issues of social relations and spiritual culture, participants were divided into groups to research into family life, social relations in communities, and for all three basic areas of traditions and customs, i.e. seasonal, family and work. The fourth SE in Spiš was dedicated to questions of material culture; the following year, the fifth seminar was held in Levoča and addressed research into relationships and family, life in communities and traditions

and customs. The special feature of the sixth SE in Rožňava was field research, specifically into seminar discussions on the subject "Material folk culture and its changes after village socialisation," which was the 'logical' consequence and reflection of the general social or political situation in Slovakia at that time. The seventh and last Slovakian SE took place in 1974 in Opatovská dolina in the Trenčín region, where the central seminar theme was "Tradition and the Present". This theme included individual areas of material culture, e.g. architecture, the economy, diet, dress and handicrafts. After seven successful years of organising SE, it was Prof. Ján Podolák's desire that the original model of the summer ethnological school be transferred to other countries. Poland and Hungary were originally enthusiastic about taking on the organisation. The next SE was organised by the Poles, though I did not attend as I was on my military service in the Yugoslav army. The ninth SE was organised in 1976 in Prijepolje, Serbia in the then Yugoslavia. In terms of organisation and content that SE was a disaster, and represented the final demise of the first and only international ethnological summer school.

The SE was a unique and original seminar for the "east and west" of Europe of the day. The participants made great strides in their knowledge of field research. The dynamic talks in the field and the exchange of theoretical and academic views in afternoon and evening seminars expanded the methodological and subject boundaries of our future academic (and pedagogical) efforts. Students, colleagues and professors, we together created personal relations and connections. For all of us who were students and then in the first years after graduating it was exceptional and above all equal and collegiate gathering with the best known ethnological European names of the day.

SE is an excellent example of inter-faculty and inter-university cooperation in the 1960s and 1970s. It is also an example of integration and connections within a discipline that today continues to grow in importance within a union of European regional cultures. All seven years of the Slovakian Seminarium Ethnologicum remain written in the history of European ethnology, not only due to the attempts of the time to open Europe's east and west up and bring people closer together, but also as an exceptional organisational undertaking that no European social and cultural environment can repeat today, despite our current openness and democracy.

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Those memories I recall somewhat from two points of view, my own personal one and that of an institution where I have worked and which I have led for several years. That is why I specify in the title: my (our) contacts.