

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CZECH
ETHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY
AND THE CONFERENCE ENTITLED
ETHNOLOGY BETWEEN SCIENCE AND POLITICS:
AB/USE OF ETHNOLOGICAL SCIENCES
FROM THE 19TH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT**

The year 2020 was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and a significant number of events had to be cancelled for health and epidemiological reasons. The pandemic also affected the general assembly of the Czech Ethnological Society (CES) and the conference organised every three years by the organisation of Czech ethnologists. The general assembly and the conference were held from 15 to 17 September 2020 at the Mining Museum Příbram under strict sanitary measures.

General assemblies of The Czech Ethnological Society are held every three years to evaluate the society's activities, elect the incoming main committee, and present a vision for the upcoming three-year period. This was also the case in Příbram, where the CES chairperson Jana Nosková gave a report on the society's activities from 2017 to 2020. The society has approximately 200 members and publishes its own ethnographic journal called *Národopisný věstník* [Ethnographic Bulletin]. It is published twice a year and in 2018 it achieved major success, as it was included in the prestigious world bibliographic database SCOPUS. In addition to the journal, the society maintains a bibliographic database of ethnological articles published in regional journals, which currently has over 15,000 entries. The society also continued to popularise and reward professional activities in the field of ethnology, for instance, by regularly organising a poll about the most significant achievement in the field for the previous calendar year in the following categories: publication; exhibition, exposition; project, event, conference. Moreover, it supported the work of young researchers in the field of ethnology by organising the Student Award of the Czech

Ethnological Society in the bachelor and master thesis categories. Since 2017, university students in the field of ethnology have also received financial support from Dr Alena Plessingerová's and Dr Josef Vařeka's foundation to carry out field research in the Czech Republic. The CES also helped develop cooperation with its regional correspondents and conducted interview surveys on national consciousness and contemporary festivals and photographs capturing the period of socialism. In 2017 – 2020, the international cooperation of the CES consisted mainly in its cooperation with UNESCO. In 2016, the CES was elected a member of the Evaluation Body of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of UNESCO for a term of four years. In these roles, the members of the CES evaluated applications for the Intangible Cultural Heritage List and their work was highly appreciated by UNESCO. Cooperation with the Ethnographic Society of Slovakia has also developed further, and since 2018 members of both societies meet regularly once a year in autumn at the top of the Velká Javorina mountain. As part of its professional activities, the CES has organised or helped organise various conferences and workshops. It is important to highlight the activities of two commissions that are particularly active at the CES, namely the Commission for Vernacular Architecture, Settlements, and Habitation and the Commission for Folk Customs. A total of seven conferences and workshops were organised in the three-year period, including in cooperation with major museums.

The aforementioned activities could not have been carried out without the financial support from grant projects for which the CES actively applies each year to the Ministry of Culture and the Council of Scientific Societies, or without the funding granted for work that had been carried out for UNESCO. At the same time, the active work done by the members of the main committee, which is voluntary and often time-consuming, contributes to the successful implementation of activities. At the 2020 general assembly, new tasks have been assigned for the period of the following three years, such as the continuation of the digitisation process and ensuring the data collected and created as part of the digitisation process and the bibliographic database of ethnographic articles is accessible, as well as the maintenance of the ethnographic journal *Národopisný věstník* in the SCOPUS database, and the improvement of the engagement of the CES members (for instance, by voting in the poll). In the financial agenda, the tasks include securing the funding for the activities of the CES in the following three years, during which the CES will not take part in UNESCO's Evaluation Body, thus losing one significant source of income. These tasks will be handled by the incoming main committee and the incoming Chairperson elected at the general assembly in Příbram. Jiří Woitsch from the Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences (CAS), a public research institution in the Czech Republic, was appointed the new Chairperson of the CES for the period from 2020 to 2023.

As noted above, the activities carried out by the CES in 2020 were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Apart from the general assembly, the only other event that took place was the conference “Ethnology between Science and Politics: Ab/use of Ethnological Sciences from the 19th Century to the Present”, which was organised by the CES in cooperation with the Mining Museum in Příbram’s Březové Hory, the Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, and the National Institute of Folk Culture in Strážnice, in Příbram. The conference was partly held online, with several speakers giving their presentations from their homes.

The conference was based on the assumption that ethnology (sociocultural anthropology, folklore studies) as an academic science has been closely connected to the historical and political development of society and to various ideological currents since its beginnings, whether it was enlightened patriotism, romantic “discovery of the people”, or nationalism. Therefore, the relationship to the political ideologies of the time period – from the idea of Czechoslovakism through the transformations of ethnological theories in the period of national socialism and communism – forms part of the history of the field. In addition, the knowledge acquired during ethnological research has always been used in the applied field. The main topics of the Příbram conference revolved around the use, application, and abuse of the results of ethnological research in a broader historical and social context and vice versa on the transformation of ethnological research as a result of the changes in ideological and authoritarian regimes and discourses from the nineteenth century up to the present.

Two scholars who have long been involved in the research on history of Czech and Slovak ethnology have been asked to open the conference with their presentations. Gabriela Kiliánová (Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology, SAS, Bratislava) raised the issue of research carried out by German researchers in Slovakia during the Second World War. She drew attention to the activities of Hertha Wolf-Beranek, who worked at the *Institut für Heimatforschung* (Institute for Homeland Research) in Kežmarok, the ideological background of her research, the relationship with German and Slovak colleagues, and the issue of gender. The second presentation was given by Jiří Woitsch (Institute of Ethnology of the CAS, Prague), focusing on Czech ethnographers (social anthropologists) who conducted research in the 1960s primarily in Africa and Latin America. Although their research is currently highly praised for the application of “Western” anthropological approaches in Czech ethnology, it turns out that Czech researchers often carried out non-scientific roles in the fields they studied, when they became involved in power struggles in post-colonial countries.

After the introductory presentations, the conference was divided into individual thematic sections that were arranged in chronological order. The first one was devoted to the interwar period in Czechoslovakia and research pro-

moting the idea of Czechoslovakism or Slavism. Filip Herza (Institute of Ethnology of the CAS, Prague) gave a lecture on the research carried out by Czech academic scientists in Carpathian Ruthenia. In his presentation, he used the theory of postcolonialism and showed how the gathering of knowledge by Czech scientists was also an instrument of power. Klára Woitschová (National Museum, Prague) provided an overview of the development of the Ethnographic Department of the National Museum from the foundation of Czechoslovakia to the early 1950s. She used selected figures (for example, the activities of Drahomíra Stránská) and events (for instance, the relocation of the wooden church from the village of Medvedovce in Carpathian Ruthenia to Prague) to illustrate the dependence of the museum's activities on political events, and regime and ideological changes. Lydia Petráňová (Institute of Ethnology of the CAS, Prague) used the example of the awarding of honorary doctorates at Charles University from the second half of the 19th century to the present day to highlight a similar practice. The scientific activity carried out by those awarded was not always the main criterion for the award of this academic rank, as both academic policies and political interests played a role there.

The following thematic section dealt with the relationship between ethnology and the Nazi regime. Petr Lozoviuk (University of West Bohemia, Pilsen) examined the boom in research carried out by German scholars working at three institutions (including Charles University) in Bohemia during the Second World War. These scholars also conducted research on the Slavic/Czech population. Lozoviuk has shown that some of their conclusions claiming that Czechs and Germans were culturally similar did not correspond with Reinhard Heydrich's views and his vision of "solving the Czech issue". Blanka Soukupová (Charles University, Prague) focused on Czech "ethnographic" celebrations and exhibitions during the Second World War and the political situation they were set in, as it promoted National Socialist ideology, particularly through the adoration of farmers and the damnation of cities. Dana Motýčková and Kateřina Sedlická (Institute of Ethnology of the CAS, Prague) used archival sources to show how research on vernacular architecture, which was funded primarily by the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment, was carried out during the Second World War. They also highlighted how this knowledge was applied, for instance, in urban development projects in villages and cities.

The third section was devoted to the period of socialism. Nela Štorková (University of West Bohemia, Pilsen) focused on the discourse analysis of the fundamental works published by Czech ethnographers in the 1950s. Štorková maintains that Marxist-Leninist philosophy was used to evaluate works written by the older generation of ethnographers in negative light, it served as a framework for data analysis, and it opened up new research topics. At the same time, there were certain works that were not influenced by Marxism-Leninism. Oto Polouček (Masaryk University, Brno) also focused on the language of ethnographic publications. He applied the ideas of the Russian-American anthropolo-

gist Alexei Yurchak on language (hypernormalisation) and compared the use of ideological rhetoric in the works of the Slovak ethnologist Božena Filová and the Czech ethnologist Antonín Robek, the most significant representatives of ethnography in the 1970s and 1980s. Nikola Balaš (Charles University, Prague) focused on the same period and elaborated on whether the works of ethnographers from this period may be described as atheoretical, whether they are based on Marxism-Leninism, and whether the nationalist vision of the world typical of ethnographic work from the 19th century and later prevails in these works. The analysis of the material showed that national ideology was the most common framework for the interpretation of the data collected. The thematic block was concluded by Petr Janeček (Charles University, Prague), who discussed folklore studies and the connection between this field and several ideologies. Janeček maintains that folklore studies can be apolitical, but the data these studies provide may be used by various ideologies.

The second-to-last thematic section was devoted to applied ethnology/anthropology. In his dive into its history, Daniel Dědovský (Palacký University, Olomouc) went back the furthest, reflecting on proto-ethnographic works from the Baroque, Enlightenment, and Romantic periods and pointing out their connections with economic or national ideologies and theories. Klára Jurková (Masaryk University, Brno) highlighted the cooperation of ethnologists with experts and craftsmen in the preservation and development of handicraft technologies using the example of blueprinting. Stanislav Brouček (Institute of Ethnology of the CAS, Prague) described the cooperation between ethnologists and representatives of the Czech minority abroad in solving problems related to the migration policy of the Czech Republic since the 1990s to the present, where the expert knowledge of ethnologists is directed towards the government authorities.

Migration was also the central topic of Silvia Letavajová (University of Constantine the Philosopher, Nitra), who opened the last thematic section that was dedicated to the social overlaps of ethnological research. Letavajová focused on the use and abuse of migration processes by political actors during the political unrest in Slovakia after 2015. Eva Šipőczová (Institute of Ethnology of the CAS, Brno) focused on the possibilities and limitations of folklore research on political anecdotes and inscriptions on banners carried during protests in the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 2018 and 2019. The conference was concluded by Kristína Jamrichová (Masaryk University, Brno) and her presentation on the topic of ethnological research in a diagnostic centre (educational facility) for youth. She regarded this institution as a product of the doctrine of neoliberalism, tracing its legitimization inwards and outwards while noting her positionality in research.

The conference successfully achieved what it had set out to do. The presentations critically examined the links between ethnology and politics or the

application of different ideologies, both in planning field research and in analysing and publishing empirical data, from a historical perspective and by using Czech-Slovak material. At the same time, the participants' contributions dealt with the applied aspects of ethnology and critically examined the possibilities of ethnologists' community engagement. The lively discussion sparked by some of the contributions proved that coming to terms with the role of ethnology in various regimes and historical periods is not at all devoid of emotion. One can only regret that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not possible to hold a panel discussion to examine ethnological research and the activities of ethnologists during Socialism, which would have been attended by several contemporary witnesses of that time period. In conclusion, it can be stated that coming to terms with the ab/use of ethnology is by no means over. Those interested in the subject matter would be happy to hear that several contributions will be published in the ethnographic journal *Národopisný věstník* in 2021.

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