

REPORTS AND BOOK REVIEWS

Urban and ethnological seminar "Towns after 1989"

The third meeting of Slovak and Swiss urban ethnologists was held from October 3 to October 10, 1994 in Bratislava as part of the Grant project Dynamics of Social Processes in the Life of the Towns of Central Europe (Historical changes and their Impact on the Everyday Life of Citizens). The title of the meeting Towns after 1989 (Dynamics of social processes in urban environment) indicates that the organizers (Ethnologisches Seminar Basel, Institute of Ethnology, Bratislava, Ethnologisches Seminar Zürich) focused on the present.

Preceding events (Zürich 1991, Bratislava 1992) brought interesting confrontations but some contributions diverged in time and space. Differences in methodology, local orientation and the period investigated had often caused an information noise, which had to be elucidated in discussions. Descriptions of the situation in interwar Bratislava alternated with the present situation in the towns of Switzerland, South America or Papua New Guinea. The course of the last Bratislava meeting was different. Six of the eight presented contributions dealt with the city of Bratislava, the other two with Prague.

The working session of the meeting was opened by M. Stanek (Zürich). The title "A Hot Potato: Attitudes to the communist heritage" covered the known facts about the relationships of the members of Czech society to the recent past, which is still topical even in current social conditions. In her contribution "Phenomenon injustice" in the case of small entrepreneurs expropriated in Slovakia after 1948, L. Faltnová (Bratislava) concentrated on the attitudes of the afflicted to the current steps taken to make amends for injustice. D. Luther from Bratislava (A silent consent to the revolution) compared satirical and critical elements of the village carnival game with the demands later submitted on the November stands. P. Salner (Politics in the streets) paid attention to the influence of the changing social conditions on the political activities in public places of Bratislava during the 20th century.

In his contribution Elections (Bratislava and Slovakia 1989–1994), Bratislava sociologist V. Krivý, analysed relationships between the capital and the rest of the country as well the differences between the individual parts of the city of Bratislava. W. Schwarz (Zürich) analysed the forms of presentations of the problem of the day – the national issue – by political parties before the 1992 elections in his contribution entitled "Political representations and the national issue". The contribution "Racism, antiracism" by L. Sidler from Zürich raised polemic. The author presented the attitudes of the Slovak and Swiss societies to foreigners as well as to the Jewish people and to the Romanies. F. Weiss (Basel) introduced her conception of research into the Prague family and the first results in the contribution "Transformations of specific male and female social roles (1948–1989)". The author emphasized that for better understanding of the contemporary attitudes a synchronous look is not enough: it is necessary to know the family background and the current views of children.

The event ended with an extensive discussion. Its results showed that the different methodological orientations of Slovak and Swiss urban ethnologists on comparable terrain are gradually coming closer. It was confirmed that the knowledge of the present is not sufficient for understanding the complex historical development of Central Europe. It is necessary to direct attention to the past as well. Differences persist in the degree of application of theoretical knowledge in preparation, implementation, and interpretation of research.

The Seminar "Towns after 1989" again confirmed the importance of wide international and interdisciplinary confrontations, but not only in the field of urban ethnology.

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