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LETTER

SIEF is an international scholarly organization founded in 1964. The major purpose of the SIEF-organization is to facilitate cooperation among scholars working within European Ethnology, Folklore Studies and adjoining fields.

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F C S H  
Universidade Nova de Lisboa

**CALL FOR PANELS!**  
for the 10th SIEF Congress, Lisbon 2011

## EDITORIAL

*DEAR SIEF MEMBERS,*

The year 2010 has nearly arrived and this means that Lisbon 2011 – People Make Places – will than only be a year or so away. Therefore you will find in this newsletter (and on SIEF's website) the call for panels and work-

shops on the central themes of SIEF's jubilee congress. The Program Committee of the board and the organisation in Portugal have been creative in setting up an interesting thematical focus which will be appealing to SIEF members and others and will hopefully incites us all to send in kindling proposals for the organisation of panels.

## Identity studies in Slovakia

As Zygmunt Bauman has pointed out, research on identity was such a productive field in the last decades of the 20th century that 'the traditional issues of social sciences were modified in order to fit into the main discourse turning on the axes of identity.' On the one hand identity studies resulted from the paradigm change in scientific discourse in Slovakia since 1989. On the other hand



the boom in research was a response to empirical studies on political, social and cultural processes in the newly independent state, where the identity question became the central issue in public and academic discussions.

The development led to the project Centre of Excellence of the Slovak Academy of Sciences: Collective Identities in Modern Societies. Central European Region (see [http://www.uet.sav.sk/download/Centre\\_of\\_Excellence\\_report.pdf](http://www.uet.sav.sk/download/Centre_of_Excellence_report.pdf)). In this interdisciplinary project collective identity was defined very broadly at first as the shared awareness of 'we', distinguishing 'us' from the 'others'. The main attention was turned to groups, but individuals were also at the centre of the research as actors of group construction or group termination. The studies focused on nations, ethnic minorities, religious groups or denominations, language groups, and gender groups in Central Europe. Collective identities were understood as 'products' of the processes of identity building and the transformation of historical (economic, social, ideological and cultural) contexts in particular. But at the same time the team also studied representations of identities. The results brought in detailed and complex information

about collective identity constructions in the particular historical context of Slovakia and Central Europe as a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural space from the 16th century till the present time.

## Conclusion

Regarding the changes in ethnological research in Slovakia since 1989 it could be stated that the academic discourse has been divided into two main orientations. On the one hand, researchers have inclined towards the historical study of cultural phenomena. They have concentrated on cultural traditions, cultural heritage in longer periods, for example in the 19th and 20th centuries. In this case they have used methods such as oral history interviews, have conducted archive surveys, made collections of data from print and other media etc. The second tendency has focused on current research into social and cultural changes in the region. Scholars have often followed the mainstream discourse of social and cultural anthropology or the social sciences in general. The research methods are based on more extensive fieldwork, participant observations and interviews. However, the chosen field sites are mostly in Slovakia. Field works in other European or non-European countries are rather rare. In the last two decades the interdisciplinary dialogue among social sciences and humanities in Slovakia has evolved considerably as I illustrated with the example of the research in one of the Centre of Excellence in the Slovak Academy of Sciences. Such initiatives make it possible to approach common concepts from different perspectives and thus challenge methodological frameworks in ethnology.

Gabriela Kiliánová, Bratislava

## 4.5 RESEARCHING CULTURE: CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND POPULAR CULTURE RESEARCH IN SWITZERLAND

As in the entire German-speaking world, the discipline that once went by the name of 'Volkskunde' now goes by many names. In Basel University, the institute is named 'Seminar für Kulturwissenschaft und Europäische Ethnologie' (Department of Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology; [www.unibas.ch/kulturwissenschaft](http://www.unibas.ch/kulturwissenschaft)), and 'Institut für Populäre Kulturen' (Institute

for Popular Cultures; [www.ipk.uzh.ch](http://www.ipk.uzh.ch)) in Zurich. This reflects the long discussions on the naming and orientation of the discipline and on local particularities. There are only two university institutes in Switzerland, primarily due to the fact that in French- and Italian-speaking Switzerland, just like in practically the whole Romance-speaking world, no difference is made between the gen-

eral anthropology, previously known as ‘Völkerkunde’ or ‘ethnology’, and European ethnology. These institutions call themselves ethnological institutes and also do research on Europe. The relationships between the linguistic regions vary in their intensity, and at present they are expanding. The department in Basel, for example, participates in the Swiss Graduate School of Anthropology that has been running for the past few years. At the same time, a larger research project on intangible heritage is under way, in which anthropologists, linguists and people from museums in Neuchâtel and Lausanne participate alongside the Basel institute.

### History of the discipline in Switzerland

Let us first have a look at the history of the discipline. It is closely related to the Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Volkskunde (SGV; [www.volkskunde.ch/](http://www.volkskunde.ch/)). Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer founded it in 1897 with the aim of providing a forum for the new field of research. The members of the discipline, which had not yet been installed in the university, were approached for interviews and research work, and the ‘Schweizerische Archiv für Volkskunde’ served as a medium for discussion and publication. Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer is considered as the founding father of the discipline in Switzerland. He graduated in German Language and Literature from Zurich University, was an editor with *Idiotikon*, the Swiss-German dictionary, and in 1900 for the first time taught folklore topics in Basel, where he was the first Swiss to become full professor of German language and literature in 1912. He also established the European department of the Museum für Völkerkunde (today Museum der Kulturen Basel/ Museum of Cultures Basel) from a comparative perspective. With his theoretical works, a collection and research perspective that had an extensive European orientation, and his participation in large projects like, for instance, the *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, he laid the foundation for an approach that reached far beyond Switzerland. In the 1930s and 1940s, the SGV increasingly focused on the *Atlas der schweizerischen Volkskunde*, the publication of which was completed only in the mid-1990s.

Teaching of the discipline at Basel University, still without its own institute, was for a long time primarily occupied with historical topics. Adjunct lecturers were Karl Meuli, who mainly dealt with antiquity and its tradition,

Hans-Georg Wackernagel, with main focus on the Middle Ages and early modern times, Paul Geiger and Hans Trümpy, originally a classical philologist who had qualified in Basel as a folklorist in 1956. The institute was established only in 1961, with Hans Trümpy appointed as a full professor in 1965. His successor was Christine Burckhardt-Seebass, who was conferred emeritus status in 2001.



The Zurich institute was founded in 1951. Its professorship was with Richard Weiss since 1946 and he had acquired renown particularly as a researcher of Alpine culture. After World War II, his functionalist approach, applied in works like *Volkskunde der Schweiz* (1946) or *Häuser und Landschaften der Schweiz* (1959), showed a new way to the German-speaking ethnology that had suffered an existential crisis due to its appropriation by National Socialism. This approach was consistently continued by his successor Arnold Niederer, who on the one hand gave new impulses to Alpine research and on the other, innovatively turned to migration and integration research. He advocated a presence-oriented and Pan-European perspective and actively participated in the

foundation of the *Ethnologia Europaea*. The SIEF Congress that took place in Zurich in 1987 was the culmination of these efforts. His successor Paul Hugger increasingly devoted his time to visual topics and among other things published in 1992 the *Handbuch der schweizerischen Volkskultur*. Rudolf Schenda, who had the professorship for European folk literature and was Max Lüthi's successor, strengthened the study of popular literature, which attracted international attention.

### The university institutes

The Institut für Populäre Kulturen of Zurich University, headed by Ueli Gyr since 1995, is divided into two divisions. The first one is dedicated to the study of popular cultures with various foci, for instance mobility, everyday communication and everyday symbolism, folklorisation, tourism, biography, childhood and youth, urban cultures, food, lifestyles and consumption styles, everyday aesthetics and many others. The researches show a tendency to strongly orient themselves on the present and



THE MARCHLER TRACHTELUT TROUPE FROM SWITZERLAND, AT THE PRAGUE FOLKLORE FESTIVAL, 1 AUGUST 2007

are often bound to an everyday ethnography of the lived-in world. Since the late 1980s, some projects have also been financed by third-party funds. The second division, managed by Ingrid Tomkowiak, includes the field of popular media and literatures and works on topics like medial transfer, multimedia, children and youth literature, adventure literature, science fiction, bestsellers, gender aspects in popular literatures and media, narration in daily life and lived-in world, historical media and reading

materials as well as modern entertainment culture. The Zurich institute edits two book series, *Zürcher Beiträge zur Alltagskultur* (since 1996, 17 volumes so far) and *Populäre Literaturen und Medien* (since 2008, 2 volumes so far), where the research of the two divisions is published. The editorial office of the journal *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde* (2 magazines annually) published by Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Volkskunde is housed in the Zurich institute since 1983.

The institute in Basel sets its main foci in the fields of visual and material culture, questions on integration and exclusion in the society and migration/transculturalism. The department has approximately a dozen PhD students who mostly work in the scope of research projects, financed by the Schweizerischer Nationalfonds (Swiss National Science Foundation) and other foundations. The majority of the projects, but not exclusively, are fieldwork based and focus on contemporary questions and popular issues, but there is also space for major theoretical deliberations.

Sabine Eggmann, for instance, who at present works as a research assistant with SGV, wrote a discourse-analytical dissertation on the concept of culture, as applied by this discipline in the German-speaking world in the 1990s. Indeed, several additional projects deal with questions of how concepts and theories of culture are connected to political and social developments. This applies for instance to the project, 'Culture and Policy. 'Folk culture' between science, cultural practice and (cultural) political promotion', or the planned project on intangible heritage. Topics like the change of daily life in the alpine region are linked to ethnographical film projects. Additional projects deal with questions on the use of space and time, e.g. in suburbs, or by pupils and questions of social change.

### The Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Volkskunde (SGV)

The Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Volkskunde, with around 1000 members today, has its office in the same building as the Basel department. Its library is also the department library. The SGV is in charge of a number of long-term projects. It publishes, for instance, the volumes *Bauernhäuser der Schweiz* (Farmhouses of Switzerland), several book series, oversees the

Schweizerische Volksliedarchiv (head: Karoline Oehme) and a collection of archive materials, e.g. the estate of the photographer Ernst Brunner, or photographs of ex-voto panels in Switzerland. Since 2008, the SGV also releases the new book series *Culture. Schweizer Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft*.

A joint field of work by SGV and the two institutes is the ethnographic film. Since the 1940s, the SGV's film department produces ethnographic films. Its productions, mainly from the 1960s, when young Swiss filmmakers applied innovative concepts, also garnered international acclaim. Video technology enabled a concept adaptation. It's no longer the filmmakers but the researchers themselves who make films now. The relevant courses are offered both in Zurich and Basel and the lecturers are either the filmmaker Hans-Ulrich Schlumpf, head of the SGV's film department for almost 30 years or his students, who in the meantime have themselves become filmmakers and researchers making films. At present, a project financed by the Schweizerischer Nationalfonds takes place at the Basel institute, which studies the history of ethnographic film in Switzerland. One of its goals is to digitalise the older films to make them more easily accessible for research and to the public.

### Networks

The collaboration with various museums and exhibiting institutions is important, from large organisations like the Museum der Kulturen Basel (Museum of Cultures Basel; [www.mkb.ch](http://www.mkb.ch)) through Schweizerisches Freilichtmuseum Ballenberg (Swiss Open-Air Museum Ballenberg; [www.ballenberg.ch](http://www.ballenberg.ch)) up to many smaller cantonal, regional and local museums. Students do practical study in the professional field that is important for them, and conversely lecturers from this field also bring their practical knowledge into teaching and education and can, on their part, get research work done, which they could otherwise hardly finance. In this way, students from the Basel institute have organised an exhibition on the topic of popular forms of faith in the region of Central Switzerland in the framework of the programme 'echos – Volkskultur für morgen' (echos – popular culture for tomorrow) financed by the Swiss cultural foundation Pro Helvetia. They also have collaborated in various exhibitions and museum institutions, e.g. for the Museum der Schweizer Garde in Naters (Papal Swiss

Guards Museum in Naters). The exhibition 'Macht der Bilder' (The Power of Images) that had been conceptualised and implemented in a university course received the Swiss Transdisciplinary Award of the Swiss Academies of Sciences and of Humanities and Social Sciences in 2006.

A whole range of professional experts works in regional and cantonal organisations, and there exist close relations with researchers, museums and cultural institutions in Wallis/Valais, Graubünden/Grisons, Appenzell, and Aargau. A close collaboration with the office of integration of the Basel City canton results in the regular teaching of questions of integration in courses and students are able to do practical trainings in this field that increasingly gains in significance. The Italian-speaking Tessin/Ticino has done an exemplary job by pooling its activities in the field of cultural research and concentrated them in the Centro di dialettologia e di etnografia. Studies on language and dialects, the supervision of museums and other activities are centralised here, and thanks to efficient structures and excellent work, achieve a large public feedback. Especially, the publications in language and dialect research have an outstanding reputation.

### Developments

The situation of the discipline is quite positive. Both university institutions have multiplied the number of students in recent years; around 600 people now study in Zurich, 170 in Basel. For this reason, the second professorship in Zurich that had been vacant for a long time is soon to be filled again, and Basel will get a second professorship for the first time. Both institutes have introduced BA and MA degree courses in recent years. It is still too early to judge the professional consequences of this reform, but it has already become obvious that the additional administrative effort and costs are enormous. At present the universities also work on the establishment of structured post-graduate courses. As both professorships will be newly appointed in Zurich in the coming years, not much can be said about the foci in the future. The current direction in Basel will remain the same, with an increased emphasis on the fields of visual culture, migration and transcultural research.

Walter Leimgruber and Ueli Gyr, Basel and Zurich