
The Conference “Summer in the City. Different Aspects of Culture”.

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Conference Report: Summer in the City. Different Aspects of Culture [Lato v mieście. Różne oblicza kultury]

25th-26th June 2009, Krakow, Poland.

Another of the series of conferences devoted to urban ethnology/anthropology took place in Polish Krakow in June. It was organized by the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Department of Ethnology; the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences; the Polish Academy of Sciences, Committee on Ethnological Sciences, the Committee for Urban Anthropology and the Polish Society of Urban Ethnology. This time, a seemingly light topic was chosen by the organizers: Summer in the City.

Professor Bronisława Kopczyńska-Jaworska opened the conference by summarizing the reasons for the beginnings of the interest in ethnology/anthropology in the city and the development of this branch of studies. The use of ethnographic methods for urban studies was indicated to be a special anthropological characteristic. At the end of her opening speech she highlighted the difference between anthropological urban studies and anthropology in the city. This contrast penetrated the whole conference to some degree. The presented papers varied significantly in themes, theoretical background and methodology - I will try to summarize them in several clusters constructed according to emphasized aspects of the given topic.

Blanka Soukupová presented the city in a holistic perspective using historical ethnology. In her paper Prague and Praguers in Modern Times (from the 1890 s to the mid- 20th Century). A Contribution to the Anthropology of the City [Praha a Pražané v létě v moderní době (od 90. let 19. do poloviny 20. století). Příspěvek k antropologii města], she described a dynamic change in living in Prague in the summer (swimming pools, markets...) as well as in places where Praguers can spend the summer outside the city - all with respect to socio-political changes of the first half of the 20th century. Similarly, Franciszek Ziejka, a historian of literature, followed in his paper Summer in Past Krakow (Turn of the 20th Century) [Lato w dawnym Krakowie (przełom XIX i XX wieku)] a picture of the summer in Krakow mainly as a place for rest connected with different traditional religious and secular festivities. Renata Hołda also dealt with contemporary Krakow in her paper called Summer, or the Time of Getting Away from Routine [Lato, czyli czas zawieszonyj codzienności]. She analyzed the use of the summer in the city by both tourists and inhabitants and adopted the view that the summer (holiday) in the city tends to carnivalization and the summer is in all aspects a period when routine revolts against normality.

The aspect of getting away from routine through festivities formed a significant line reappearing in many papers. On the basis of three case studies, Ryszard Kantor observed the World of Streets and Quarters. Forming of a New Folk Habit [Święta uli i dzielnic. Kształtowanie się nowego zwyczaju ludycznego] in Krakow. He concentrated on life in public spaces using the metaphor of "street carnival." On the other hand, Grzegorz Odoj in his paper Off-Festival in Myslowice. Creating of a New Post-industrial City [Off-Festiwal w Mysłowicach. Kreowanie wizerunku nowego miasta post-przemysłowego] and Magdalena Szalbot in her paper Festival Horizons of Holiday City Těšín [Festiwalowe horyzonty wakacyjnego Cieszyna] (Róża Godula-Węclawowicz read the paper) dealt with the change of the town caused by a summer festival. It was shown that a music or film festival always changes the face of a city, even for its inhabitants. In the summer of Krakow itself, the city where the conference took place, there is a multitude of cultural activities, as was shown in the paper Art Forms in the Offer in Krakow in the Summer in the last five years [Formy artystycznego uwiedzenia w ofercie letniej miasta Krakowa w ostatnim pięcioleciu] by Stanisław Dziedzic, director of the Department of Culture and National Heritage, Municipality of Krakow.

Other speakers chose parts of the city for their analyses. Jolanta Kowalska in her paper Wild fields of Past Żoliborz [Dziki pola starego Żoliborza] followed dynamic changes of this Warsaw quarter from the 17th to the 20th century. On the example of the Summer Salons of Warsaw [Letnie salony Warszawy. Ciągłość i zmiana], Andrzej Stawarz described the stability and change of the genius loci of the city at the turn of the 20th century. While both the above-mentioned authors worked with methods of historical ethnology, Andrzej P. Wejland connected phenomenological tradition with reflexive autobiography in his paper Anthropologist in the Park. My Epiphany of Routine [Latem w parku. Epifanie

codziennosci]. Interconnection of perspectives of anthropologist and flâneur enabled him to see the manifestation of transcendence, to uncover the so-far unlearned as well as to understand oneself or the nature of epiphany. The subject of an anthropologist is crucial in the divulgence of the nature of a given place - Lodz Park - and its interpretation in Alfred Schutz' phenomenology of routine.

The commonplace involves not just the world of things (though, they are of course the easiest to grasp and describe), but also the world of smells, flavors and noises. Aleksandra Krupa in her paper Good Smells and Bad Smells. Olfactory Picture of a City [Aromaty i smrody. Olfaktoryczny pejzaż miasta] chose the perspective of osmo-sociology. On the base of smell perception of Lodz, she created five categories: 1. human smells, 2. bad smells of different provenance (e.g. subway, sewer), 3. market smells, 4. gastronomic smells by Seweryn Wislocki who in his paper Wawel and Skałka. Sacral Space and an Attempt to Desacralize It [Wawel i Skałka. Przestrzeń sacrum i próba jej desakralizacji] dealt with the current commercialization of the riverbank under the Wawel in Krakow. Piotr Jordan Śliwiński devoted himself to a particular phenomenon of the city summer - Beaching in the City (Especially in the Case of Krakow) [Plażowanie w mieście (szczególnie na przykładzie Krakowa)]. Focusing on the theme through Augé's concept of "surmodernité" ("supermodernity" or "hypermodernity"), he described beaching as a way of having a rest through symbolic zooming out from civilization in different city spaces.

Grażyna Ewa Karpińska used the theme of the conference as a metaphor and devoted her paper Ghetto in the Summer. The Hell of Occupation Heterotopy [Getto latem. Piekło okupacyjnej heterotopii] to a description of the Lodz Ghetto between 1941 and 1942, i.e., before deportations (that is why she used the metaphor of summer). Using Foucault's heterotopia as a space of illusion that exposes every real space, she described the routine of the Lodz Ghetto with its institutions and organization structure symbolizing the "normal" city; using the concept of heterochrony the ghetto provisional arrangement is perceived as eternity.

Because of the ongoing floods, Magdalena Parikova did not participate at the conference with her paper Summer in the City. Time and Space for Relax or Culture Change [Leto v meste. Čas a priestor pre relax alebo kulturnu zmenu].

The conference was divided into five blocs which were concluded by interesting discussions. Methods and theories were debated - e.g. defining and delimiting the "present," possibilities and potency of reflexive anthropology, differentiating between the image of the city and its identity, etc. Many papers evoked spontaneous responses usually concentrating on comparisons of given aspects of other Polish towns. In the end, Róża Godula-Węclawowicz, chief conference organizer, summarized the course of both days as follows: "The conference did not answer the question of what anthropology of a city is or how anthropology of a city should be done. It presented various ways of anthropological seeing of the city." After all, a variety of perspectives is typical for anthropology and represents one of the aspects that make anthropology interesting.

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