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# Report of the conference **Miasto po obu brzegach rzeki – różne oblicza kultury** [A city on both banks of a river – various aspects of culture].

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## **Hedvika Novotná**

Report of the conference **Miasto po obu brzegach rzeki - różne oblicza kultury** [A city on both banks of a river - various aspects of culture]. October 18-20, 2007, Warsaw, Poland.

Organizers: Polskie Towarzystwo Etnologii Miasta, Muzeum Historyczne m. st. Warszawy, Muzeum Niepodległości, Archiwum Państwowe m. st. Warszawy, Czeskie Centrum, Instytut Słowacki

Polish ethnology, in particular cultural and social anthropology, has been dedicated for a long time to urban topics. This interest is expressed in the anchoring of urban studies in the Polish Society of Urban Ethnology (Polskie Towarzystwo Etnologii Miasta) which came into being in the year 2000. The subject of interest of this society is the problematics of the social-cultural identity of cities with a view to changes which, at least since the 19th century, accompany the growth of cities and with them the adjoining regions. One of the most important activities of the Polish Society of Urban Ethnology is the organization of international thematically oriented conferences - e.g., *Sfera sacrum i profanum w kulturze współczesnych miast europy środkowej* (The sacred and profane sphere in the culture of contemporary Central European cities (Warsaw - Pultusk, Sept. 16-18, 2004), ); *Miejsca biesiadne. Co o nich opowiada antropolog?* (Places for parties; what does an anthropologist have to say about them?) (Lodz, June 1-2, 2006)

The most recent of a series of conferences - *Miasto po obu brzegach rzeki - różne oblicza kultury* (A city on both banks of a river - various aspects of culture) was held October 18-20, 2007, in the spaces of Warsaw museums. The topic of the papers was the city and the river from various perspectives. The fact that the topic is broad was already apparent from the introductory block of contributors: Danuta Kłosek-Kozłowska (Politechnika Warszawska) in a comparison of Rome, Florence, Paris and Prague from an urbanistic viewpoint followed the role of the river in the development of the city. Blanka Soukupová (Univerzita Karlova in Prague, Czech Republic) talked about the Vltava as a symbol of Czechness and Czechoslovakness and, in from this point of view about the changes in the relationship between Vltava and Prague, oscillating in various historical periods and contexts between partnership and rivalry. Zuzana Beňušková (Univerzita Konstantina Filozofa in Nitra, Slovakia), taking the example of Bratislava and the Danube, demonstrated the function of the space on the banks of the river and changes of its values in the present.

The afternoon block of papers on the first day of the conference dealt with the theme "The river - connecting or dividing?" The introductory paper was to have been the contribution of Grażyna Ewa Karpińska (Uniwersytet Łódzki) with the explicitly current topic "Mostar - the city with a bridge". Although scheduled for that time, it was presented the following day. The theme of the conference was metaphorically captured by Halina Godecka (Fundacja Akademia Mediów) in her lecture "Cross-border TV - a bridge over the river: the example of Těšín". Hedvika Novotná (Univerzita Karlova in Prague, Czech Republic) discussed the question of continuity and discontinuity in an urban space in connection with some aspects of the flood in Prague in 2002. L'ubica Falt'anova (Ustav etnológie SAV, Bratislava, Slovakia) chose the parable of business as a bridge over the river and discussed traditional and new elements in contemporary urban trade.

The second day of the conference was, with one exception (the above-mentioned Mostar), dedicated to Polish cities through the eyes of Polish researchers. The morning block bore the title "Cities on the Vistula (From Krakow to Toruń)". Krakow was introduced in four papers. Piotr Jordan Śliwiński (Katedra Lingwistyki Komputerowej UJ) presented a brilliant semiotic analysis of Krakow's river boulevard. Seweryn A. Wisłocki (Kraków) lectured on Krakow as a city on the left bank of the Vistula. Róża Godula-Węclawowicz (Instytut Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej UJ), using the example of religious festivals, discussed the Podgórze quarter of Krakow. An interesting contrast was an analysis of the right bank of Krakow as a segregated, "worse" city quarter both in a historical and a contemporary perspective by Anna Niedźwiedz (Instytut Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej UJ).

In the second section of this block, the first lecturer, Justyna Słomska (Instytut Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej UAM w Poznaniu), discussed the role of the river in the development of the city and region of Włocławek. The importance of the river from the perspective of cultural ecology was discussed by Artur Trapszyc (Muzeum Etnograficzne w Toruniu), who used the example of the city of Toruń. In the next contribution, Justyna Słomska concentrated on motifs of the river in folklore.

The afternoon block entitled "Warsaw - a metropolis facing away from the river" began with a multimedial presentation by Przemysław Pasek (Fundacja „Ja Wisła”). The panel discussion about Warsaw with Kwiryna Handke (Instytut Sławistyki PAN), Karol Móravski (Muzeum Woli), Paweł Michał Smoktunowicz (freelance architect, Warsaw), Joanna Angiel (Wydział Geografii i Studiów Regionalnych UW), Andrzej Stawarz (Muzeum Niepodległości) a Tomasz Sulewski (Warsaw) ranged from a historic-anthropological description of bathing in the Vistula in the second half of the 19th century (Sulewski) to characteristic differences between left-bank and right-bank Warsaw (Handke) to a historical and ethnological analysis of the relation of Warsaw to the Vistula river (Stawarz, Móravski, Smoktunowicz) and to a sociological probe of contemporary Warsaw secondary-school youths and their view of the importance of the Vistula (Angel).

On the third and final day of the conference, the "leftover" cities and topics were on the agenda. Tadeusz Sierny (Wydawnictwo Naukowe „Śląsk”, Katowice) introduced the journal "Rzeki kultura, cywilizacja, historia" ( Rivers: culture, civilization, history). Jarosław Durka (Myszków) discussed the values of social-cultural development of the city of Opole, a city on the Odra River. The last two papers diverged from the motif of the river - the city of Łódź has no river. On the other hand, these were lovely examples of discursive analysis (Aleksandra Krupa (IEiAK UŁ)) and historical anthropology (Katarzyna Najmrocka (Zakład Teorii i Badań Kultury Współczesnej UŁ)).

It is apparent that the problematics of the city is an important topic of contemporary social-science research. The opening up of this narrowly formulated theme clearly requires a multidisciplinary approach. Only thus can the approach of individual scientific disciplines to the various facets of this topic rise to the surface. What is important is, primarily, an emphasis on the connection between theory and empirical data and the consequent accent on the structure of the resulting texts. These should concentrate on research problems that are narrowly formulated, but elaborated in detail, problems which would characterize the trends of contemporary society. A further step which the Polish Society of Urban Ethnology is already preparing is a basic comparison of research from the field of urban anthropology based on mutually formulated and long-lasting research projects.

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