TRENDS IN URBAN RESEARCH AND THEIR REFLECTION IN SLOVAK ETHNOLOGY/ ANTHROPOLOGY

Alexandra Bitušíková

Abstract: ***The study reflects the development of Slovak urban ethnology and anthropology since its beginning in the 1970s. It explores theoretical and methodological approaches toward the study of the city in the socialist and postsocialist periods and tries to find correlations with the development of urban anthropology in Western Europe and the United States. It mentions weaknesses and strengths of urban research results in Slovakia. The main emphasis of the paper is on the latest urban anthropological trends worldwide and their reflection in contemporary Slovak urban ethnological and anthropological research. Special attention is paid to three areas of current urban research: the problem of urban diversity; the problem of social production and construction of urban public space, and the problem of urban culture and local memory, identity and symbols.***

Keywords: ***history of Slovak urban ethnology; trends in urban research***

Instead of Introduction: A Few Remarks on the History of Urban Anthropology

Anthropological interest in cities does not have a long history. Although anthropologists had already studied urban phenomena in the first half of the 20th century, the intense development of urban anthropology started only in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Since then anthropologists have developed a large variety of ideas, concepts and approaches to the study of cities. As Richard G. Fox already stressed in 1977, "various urban anthropologists define their research goals differently, go to different kind of cities, and study different sorts of dwellers within them"(Fox 1977: 8-9). He pointed out the richness

of urban anthropological research, but also its emphasis on collection of field data rather than theoretical analysis (Fox 1977: 1). Almost thirty years later, the representative of current American urban anthropology Setha M. Low also talks about undertheorizing of the city within anthropology. She says that urban theories remain the domain of other disciplines, mainly sociology, cultural geography, urban planning and history. She asks "why an anthropological voice is not often heard in urban studies discourse even though many anthropologists have contributed actively to theory and research on urban poverty, racism, globalization, amd architecture and planning" (Low 2005: 1).

Older urban-anthropological approaches emphasized either the necessity to study the city in a broader context (city-as-context), e.g., studying various urban units in the context of national and supranational history, and of internal and external development of the city (Press 1975: 28), or the orientation on smaller units within the urban society (Gmelch – Zenner 1996; Eames – Goode 1977), mainly in order to be able to use "traditional" anthropological methods (participant observation and interviews). Studying cities and larger groups within them challenges anthropological methodology and requires using a broader scale of methods and sources. The city as a whole with all its complexities is almost impossible to study and understand through one discipline, one researcher and one methodology; on the other hand the research of exclusively small urban groups and communities is limited if it does not follow relations of these groups with other groups in the city. As Marc Augé puts it, each group is a crossroads of different worlds and different lives (local, family, professional etc.; Augé 1999: 118).

Low identifies three dominant research trends in current urban anthropology:

- poststructural studies of race, class, and gender in the urban context;
- political economic studies of transnational culture;
- studies of the symbolic and social production of urban space and planning (Low 2005: 21).

On the basis of these trends she then defines the ethnic city, the divided city, the gendered city, and the contested city in the first category (social relational processes); the deindustralized city, the global city and the informational city in the second category (economic processes), and the modernist city, the postmodern city and the fortress city in the third category (urban planning and architecture; Low 2005: 5).

Urban anthropology of today closely collaborates with other disciplines, mainly sociology, human geography, urban history, social psychology and others. It expanded its interests from particular urban phenomena to any aspect of urban life, and aims at a more holistic approach.

Slovak Urban Ethnology: Past and Present[1]

The beginning of scientific interest in the city in Slovakia can be seen in the work of historians, geographers, demographers and travelers in the 18th and 19th centuries who collected a large amount of data on topography, history and culture of both cities and villages. In the period of national enlightement (2nd half of the 19th century), the main attention of the Slovak elites was paid to rural people and their culture with the objective to show the "ancient" character of the Slovak nation. Romanticizing tendencies about the Slovak rural culture and its uniqueness have survived in the identity of the Slovaks for many decades, and they have even reappeared with the foundation of the independent Slovak Republic in 1993.

In the period of the formation, professionalization and institutionalization of Slovak ethnology in the first half of the 20th century, rural people and their cultures remained the main objective of the research, often as a consequence of the necessity to describe or preserve various phenomena of traditional rural cultures that were rapidly disappearing in the era of modernization (Leščák 1992; Luther 1995: 8). It is only in the second half of the 20th century when scientific interest in the city arises. Several publications have been devoted to the history of urban ethnology in Slovakia (Leščák 1992; Salner 1982, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1994; Popelková – Salner 2002; Luther 1995, 2001; Popelková 1995, 2010; Bitušíková 2003). Two main research lines can be identified in Slovak urban ethnology: big city research and small city research.

Research of the city of Bratislava, the largest Slovak city, has been evolving since the 1970s. It was mainly work by Peter Salner (starting with his dissertation on Bratislava in 1979) that initiated further urban research and attracted other Slovak ethnologists, especially from the Institute of Ethnography (now the Institute of Ethnology) of the Slovak Academy of

[1] I mainly use the term "ethnology" when writing about Slovakia as it is the term mostly used in the country. In addition, the majority of urban studies focus on Slovak cities; they often do not reflect on anthropological theories and do not include comparative perspectives on cities in other countries as most anthropological studies do.

Sciences and the Department of Ethnography and Folklore Studies (now the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology) in Bratislava. Peter Salner described the city as an ethnically and socially multilayer unit in a synchronic analytical perspective, which required the change of research methods (Luther 1995: 10). A new trend of urban research was reflected in two volumes of the journal Slovenský národopis (1985, 1987). While the first volume looked mainly at rural-urban relations by studying nearby villages and neighborhoods from a historic perspective, the second volume brought a broad spectrum of studies on diverse urban phenomena with two main theroretical approaches:

1) research of small urban units (such as family, servants, urban middle class, businessmen, etc.);

2) research of social integration phenomena (social events, balls, restaurants, etc.).

Most of the studies referred to the interwar period of the first democratic Czechoslovak Republic because it was still possible to study it through the eyes of those who experienced the period, and it was also suitable for the understanding of further developments of Bratislava.

Big city research was theoretically and methodologically enhanced by publishing a monograph "Taká bola Bratislava" (That was Bratislava; Salner et al. 1991). The publication brought a plastic picture of the everyday and festive life of the inter-war city through numerous urban phenomena (family; housing; public spaces; leisure time; social events; ethnic, religious, professional and interest groups and communities). The authors used a broad scale of methods including interviews, archival documents, newspapers, memoirs, etc. The book aimed at drawing a holistic picture of the city that is rather a rare approach as it requires a large research team and a long-time schedule.

Urban studies published in the last two decades since the 1990s have been built on the results of a long-term research of Bratislava. They have opened new thematic and methodological dimensions of the study of the city close to sociology, social history, social psychology and political studies (e.g., research of tolerance and intolerance in the city, Salner 1993, Luther 1993; social communication, Popelková 1997; ethnicity, Luther – Salner 2001; transformations of identity, Luther – Salner 2004; social conflict, Luther 2009). A number of recent studies analyze social and cultural transformations of the postsocialist city. The team of Bratislava urban researchers have developed an intense collaboration with urban researchers in neighboring countries, capitals and large

cities, especially Prague, Brno, Warsaw and Vienna that enables them to build comparative analyses of the development of Central European cities.

Small city research has been developing hand in hand with the research of Bratislava. All the cities in Slovakia with the exception of Bratislava and Košice can be classified as small cities. Despite their size, they were important centers of cultural, educational and economic life in the period before World War II. Research of these places in the inter-war era showed broad heterogeneity and differentiation of urban populations that resulted from their historic development in multiethnic societies (first the Hungarian/Austro-Hungarian Empire, after 1918 the Czechoslovak Republic). Small cities often played the role of a cultural pattern by spreading new ideas and innovation to the neighboring countryside through urban-rural relations and collaborations.

First studies of a small city in Slovakia focused on historical-ethnographical descriptions of diverse urban phenomena in a diachronic perspective (Venkovské město 1986, 1987; Město: Prostor, lidé, slavnosti 1990). A crucial milestone of small city research was the conference "City and its Culture" (Prešov, 1993). A large number and variety of contributions confirmed the importance of urban studies in Slovak ethnology. Research of Skalica, Pezinok, Trenčín, Brezno, Liptovský Mikuláš, and mainly Banská Bystrica demonstrated diversity of approaches to the study of the city. The main urban research center outside Bratislava has become the Research Institute of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. Research conducted at this institution has covered a broad spectrum of topics and it is directed towards a holistic perspective (e.g. Darulová 1998, 1999; Bitušíková 2000; Bitušíková – Darulová 2001).

Methodology of urban research in Slovakia is based on a combination of methods. As the historic approach towards the interpretation of data remains an important feature of most studies, methods include not only participant observation and interviews, but also analysis of written archival documents, memoirs, surveys, newspapers, statistical data, chronicles, personal correspondence, and oral history. Emphasis on historic perspective in the majority of urban studies (city-as-context approach) differentiates ethnology in Slovakia from Western European and American urban anthropology where often a synchronic analysis prevails. Several Slovak ethnologists stressed that historicism in the tradition of Central European ethnology is not a sign of its backwardness, but a precondition for understanding of discontinuous developments in Central Europe (Salner 1994: 100; Popelková 1995: 147, Luther 1995: 17). When compared with the Western European or American production, a number

of Slovak urban studies, especially those from the period of 1970-1990, have a descriptive character, and they lack theoretical richness and a comparative perspective. However, given that Slovak ethnology was developing in total isolation from any Western social science theories and suffered from a shortage of foreign literature and from limited contacts with colleagues "behind the Iron Curtain," the results of Slovak urban ethnological research should not be rejected and waived aside as unimportant. The amount and depth of empirical data is an asset that can be used for any comparative anthropological research in the future.

Slovak urban ethnology/anthropology of the new millennium studies the city as a dynamic diversified social organism with a wide network of relations and often focuses on postsocialist transformations.

An analysis of contemporary thematic and theoretical-methodological trends in the study of a postsocialist Slovak city indicates three main research orientations:

1. the study of diversified urban populations with an emphasis on different groups and their relations;
2. the study of social production and construction of public space;
3. the study of urban culture (understood as a mosaic of diverse material and non-material phenomena, processes, symbols and memories that contribute to forming the image of the city or city identity).

These orientations reflect current tendencies in the development of Slovak cities (such as the growth of demographic diversity due to migrations; transformations of public spaces and their symbolic meanings; and new urban planning and marketing building on historic memory and identity forming), but also correlate with trends in urban anthropology worldwide.

The City and its Inhabitants: the Problem of Diversity

The city is the home of diversity. When talking about diversity, I use the broad definition by Steven Vertovec who understands it as "social organization and different principles by which people, from context to context, situation to situation, mark themselves and each other as different" (Vertovec 2009: 9). People identify and differentiate themselves and others by categories such as ethnicity, nationality, religion, race, age, family, gender, sexual orientation, social origin, education, profession, abilities and disabilities, etc.

Thematic focus on people as social actors and members of various groups and communities that form and influence urban life and production of spaces and symbols starts from a diversified structure of urban population. Interest of urban anthropologists in studying smaller units within the urban society has always been popular. However, it has been criticized in recent years, especially if it ignores plurality of relations and identities of each individual and multiple relations of various groups. According to Brubaker, some social scientists show "the tendency to treat ethnic groups, nations and races as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed" (Brubaker 2002:164). Similarly, Vertovec points out the changing nature of diversity in contemporary cities and at diversification of diversity. He uses the term super-diversity taking into account correlations of all sorts of variables such as country of origin, gender, language, religion, age, education, employment, etc. He calls for qualitative and quantitative research of all variables in relation to each other (Vertovec 2009: 12-13). According to Vertovec, current urban research has to go futher than the study of particular groups based on a certain category, e.g., ethnicity of immigrant classification (Vertovec 2007: 1044).

In Slovak urban ethnology, the study of urban groups and communities still attracts high attention of researchers.[2] It often concerns research that was undermined or censored before 1989, such as the study of the Jews (e.g., Salner 2000, 2004, 2007; Bitušíková 1996, 1999; Vrzgulová 1998), the Czech minority (Luther 2004, 2008; Popelková 1998), the Bulgarian minority (Beňušková 1998), entrepreneurs and businessmen (Falťanová 1987, 1993, 1999; Darulová 2006; Vrzgulová 1996, 1997), professional groups (Koštialová 2002, 2010), students (Bitušíková 1997; Koštialová 2010), wine-makers (Popelková 1995, 2007), urban middle-class (Popelková – Vrzgulová 2005), Muslims (Letavajová 2009) etc. The analysis of the studies reveals that, although they focus on a particular group, minority or community within a specific urban setting, they follow it in the context of large-scale social processes and recognize variety and patterns of their relations.

[2] Due to the large number of publications in this field, I mention only a few of the most representative ones in each category.

Social Production and Construction of Urban Public Space

Urban public spaces, their meanings and representations have become an interesting research topic for urban anthropology since the 1990s. The discipline has benefited from the dialogue with human geography, urban planning and architecture in this field, but it has developed its own understanding of space through the knowledge and experience of the people who form and use public spaces. As Robert Rotenberg puts it, people force the spaces to take on meaning. Their understandings transform space into place (Rotenberg 1993: xiii). The meanings of urban spaces do not necessarily remain the same: they change over the time as the memories and minds of city dwellers change.

"Good" public spaces can be characterized by their openness and accessibility for all people regardless of their social, ethnic, religious, professional or other affiliation. They provide a shared space for diverse people and diverse activities. They include squares, streets, parks, playgrounds and other places of human interaction and gathering. Unlike older studies, current urban anthropology focuses more on studying the mechanisms and spaces of integration (inclusion) within a city. This trend relates to contemporary urban planning, policies and strategies that are directed at the management of growing diversity within cities and at looking for ways to use the positive potential of diversity for economic growth, prosperity, social cohesion and quality of life for all urban residents.

Public spaces play a significant role in urban society. They contribute to everyday sociability of city inhabitants, visitors and tourists; they reflect the quality of life in the city, and thus, they are an important indicator of sustainable development of the city. As they are or should be open to everyone, they may become places of integration, but also places of potential clashes of ideology or other conflicts. They can help to strengthen citizenship, freedom, memory and identity because it is these places where important public gatherings take place (formal or informal, manifestative or demonstrative). Ken Worpole and Liz Greenhalgh stress that the most effective public spaces have their own rhythm, own patterns of the use, and are occupied by different groups during different times of the day. Their attractivity, flexibility and pluralistic feeling of ownership made them centers of urban life (Worpole – Greenhalgh 1996).

An increased interest of urban anthropologists in public spaces goes closely with a trend visible in many cities all over the world including postsocialist cities of Central Europe: reconstruction and revitalization of historic city centers. In global competition, all cities try to identify themselves and to define

their distinctive features in order to differentiate from other cities. The usual return to localism and historicism is provoked partly by globalization; however, the biggest pressure on the creation of public spaces comes from investors and developers. The question is to what extent are cities and their elected representatives able to cope with the creation of these spaces in a transparent way.

According to Setha M. Low, urban anthropological research of public spaces derives from two complementary perspectives of social production of space and social construction of space. The social production of space includes "social, economic, ideological and technological factors – whose intended goal is the physical creation of the material setting, while the social construction of space is related to phenomenological and symbolic experience of space and means the actual transformation of space through people's memories, images, and daily use of the material setting (Low 2005: 112). Both perspectives are interlinked and help us to understand the role, function and symbolic meaning of public urban space in the societal and historic context.

Results of urban anthropological research of space may be used by urban municipalities as guides for transformations of public spaces into inclusive spaces that are one of the indicators of socially sustainable cities. Openness and accessibility are two key words in contemporary urban sustainability strategies on public space (see Polese – Stren 2000; Landry 2006). These strategies emphasize the necessity of accessibility and sharing of public spaces for all city dwellers, but also the necessity to engage civil society in the production and construction of public spaces through civic participation in urban governance. Studying participation of civic actors in the creation of public spaces and their meanings has become a common topic in urban anthropological research (e.g., Harms 2009; Holston 2009; Sorensen 2009).

Current urban studies also point at a new phenomenon in cities. Despite attempts to design spaces of integration and inclusion, growing urban diversity leads to increasing spatial polarization and segregation. It is not only a problem of "traditional" ghettos inhabited by immigrants, but also a problem of new "ghettos of homogeneity" created by members of middle and upper classes who increasingly seek to avoid contact with difference, to elaborate strategies to control their environments and to avoid unexpected encounters with the "other," where they can keep social control in their "own" territory (Stevenson 2003: 44). This polarization emerges not only in residential neighborhoods (gated communities), but also in city centers and spaces which have until recently served a range of different people including members of lower

and marginalized classes. Both phenomena – gated communities in wealthy neighborhoods, and exclusion of marginalized groups from city centers – can also be observed in Slovak cities.

Slovak urban ethnology reflects transformations of urban public space in research conducted by only a few ethnologists (Bitušíková 1995, 1998, 2009; Darulová 2002, 2010; Luther 1990, 2003, 2009). Almost all of the studies of this group refer to postsocialist changes of central parts of cities (Bratislava and Banská Bystrica), from both the perspective of social production (physical reconstruction of public spaces and changes of their functions) and the perspective of social construction, creation of symbolic meanings and representations of public spaces (renaming of streets and squares, creation of new symbolic spaces and places, etc.).

Urban Culture: Local Memory, Identity and Symbols

Urban culture has a broad, holistic and rather elastic meaning in many disciplines. I understand it as a system of material objects and non-material phenomena, processes and practices of meanings that form a specific image and identity of a city. Physical image of the city, of its objects and spaces and their symbolic meanings are reflected in the identity of the city itself (place identity) and in the identity of the inhabitants living there. The city which is "loved" by its inhabitants is probably a place that offers "something" more than just a perfect infrastructure or a nicely designed square. Each individual with his/her multiple identities forms a relation to the city through different experiences, memories, images and symbols. Many of them have roots in collective memory formed by experiences and memories of urban inhabitants in space and time. It is these individuals as members of various groups that create, share and forward the collective memory through their personal experience and individual memory.

Memory of each urban dweller includes images of urban spaces and important events from different time periods. Throughout history, a Central Eastern European city has experienced radical changes of spaces and their functions, or exchanges of populations through forced or voluntary migrations. Any radical change of this kind leads to discontinuity or loss of collective memory (see Coser 1992, according to Halbwachs 1941 and 1952; Boyer 1994). Memoirs are kept and nurtured by both the individuals and their own communities, and in turn, they shape political and cultural attitude (Elkadi – Forsyth 2009: 10).

It is important to realize that the same way the city is home to diverse groups, it is also home to diverse cultures and numerous collective memories. Diversity of cultures and memories challenges local governments and cultural institutions to adapt their policies and strategies to the broadest population. Inclusive cultural policies are becoming increasingly part of urban strategies. Their objective is on the one hand to address local residents and to revitalize and strengthen their local identity, pride and "local patriotism" (and thus, eliminate potential conflicts), on the other hand to attract tourists, travelers, businessmen or investors. Culture is becoming an important industry, "a powerful means of controlling cities," as Zukin puts it (Zukin 2005:1). It is a source of economic income and a tool that can attract new labor, especially knowledge workers and creative professionals who create a significant part of the workforce in global cities. It is these mobile professionals who look for cities that are open, and socially, culturally, ethnically, etc. diversified (Florida 2002, Florida – Tinagli 2004). Current cities must offer not only stimulating work, but also numerous opportunities for a rich social and cultural life: restaurants, bars, cafés, concert halls, theaters, art galleries, social events for adults and children. The growth of cultural consumption ("hunger" for arts, fashion, food, restaurants, festivals, tourism, etc.) fuels the city's symbolic economy and its ability to produce new symbols and space (Zukin 2005: 2).

The growing importance of culture for the economic prosperity of the city forces local governments, entrepreneurial and professional actors to actively support specific cultural activities. They include organization of ritualized celebrations and festivals, reconstruction of historic city centers and reinvention of their symbolic meanings, return to localism and historicism, revitalization of urban life and strengthening of local identities built on collective memory (e.g., de la Pradelle 1996; Hebbert 2005; Sorensen 2009). The attempt to form new urban traditions and symbols is often a reaction to increasing economic and cultural globalization, and urban cultural strategies often meet the interest of investors, developers and politicians rather than that of residents. Cities compete for their place in the global urban hierarchy and search for a new image and uniqueness. They try to develop meaningful public spaces that can become models for new patterns of economic, social and cultural integration of different people (Elkadi – Forsyth 2009: 13). Present urban marketing is built on local cultural and artistic specificities; it is inspired by history; it transforms physical and symbolic places and gives them new meanings and representations. The way cities, their municipalities and their residents create new images

and symbols of their cities is an interesting process of "social production of symbolism" (Nas 2004: 2) and "city's symbolic economy" (Zukin 2005: 2).

Memory, symbols and identity as part and reflection of a city's culture have become themes of a number of Slovak urban ethnological studies. Early studies of the inter-war city focused on topics such as social events (Bitušíková 1995, 2000), places of social interaction and communication: pubs and bars, markets or the promenade (e. g., Bitušíková 1996; Darulová 1995; Falťanová 1994; Luther 1990) or urban festivals and rituals (Feglová 1987, 1997). Authors collected rich ethnographic material about selected aspects of urban social and cultural processes in the 1st half of the 20th century, but memory, identity and symbolic production was studied only as a side product of these processes and not as a point of departure for the analysis. As Daniel Luther reports, these studies can be characterized as historic analyses of selected (isolated) social and cultural processes. Their orientation on the inter-war period comes from the need to understand the social and cultural background of the era that is crucial for the understanding of further historic periods (Luther 1995: 11).

Recent studies analyzing changes of postsocialist cities reflect new linkages of Slovak ethnology with Western anthropological and sociological theories and show an evident attempt for a new style of interpretation of collected data, confronted with numerous references from other countries and enabling comparative views of the problem. Memory, symbols and identity become the primary source and starting point for an analysis that usually builds on "Western" theories. Various urban events, festivals, places of entertainment, consumption, communication and interaction are studied in order to understand processes of production of memory, symbols, identities and meanings. Publications of this kind analyze identity and memory forming through ritualized festivals, monuments, object of representations, symbols and institutions (Bitušíková 2007, 2009; Ferencová 2005, 2008, 2009; Darulová 2009) or through social activities of diverse urban groups and communities (Koštialová 2009; Vrzgulová 2009).

Conclusions

Slovak urban ethnology/anthropology has been developing since the 1970s. Due to its isolation from Western European and American social and cultural anthropological theories during the socialist period, it mainly focused on the study of inter-war Slovak cities in a diachronic perspective without reflecting on broader anthropological theories and with limited attempts for comparative

views with other countries. Despite these limits, it collected a large amount of empirical data that can be and already are used for further anthropological research of contemporary cities and their transformations. The present urban ethnological and anthropological research in Slovakia follows the trends in current urban anthropology worldwide and demonstrates the richness of theoretical and methodological approaches toward the study of the city. It is as diverse, rich and interesting as the city itself.

Dr. **ALEXANDRA BITUŠÍKOVÁ**, PhD. graduated in ethnology and received a PhD from Comenius University in Bratislava. Since 1991 she has been working at the Research Institute of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica as a senior researcher and in 1993 – 2000 as the Director of the institute. She is the author of *Urban Anthropology: Tendencies and Perspectives* (in Slovak); *Women in Civic and Political Life in Slovakia*, editor of *Cultural and Social Diversity in Slovakia I and II*, author of a number of publications focused on urban anthropology, post-socialist social and cultural change in Central Europe, identities, minorities, diversity and gender. In 2001 – 2007 she worked in Brussels in the European Commission and in the European University Association while continuing working in academia. Her latest research projects at Matej Bel University include the EU funded projects: "Enlargement, Gender, Governance: Civic and Political Participation of Women in the EU Candidate Countries" (FP5), "Sustainable Development in a Diverse World" (FP6 Network of Excellence) and "Gender Debate in the ERA" (FP7).

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