Social, political and economic transformation in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 has raised intensive discussions concerning the transformation of higher education and research in all post-communist countries. The question of modernising and internationalising curricula has become an important issue in all ethnology (cultural / social anthropology) departments. During the socialist era, all departments in Czechoslovakia followed similar methodological approaches to the study of domestic cultural phenomena, which mostly centred on folklore and rural studies in a historical perspective. This approach has often been considered as ‘our own Central and Eastern European ethnographic tradition’, which should not, as such, be abandoned. The term ‘anthropology’ used to be mainly related to physical anthropology, considered as a pure natural science. Following the breakdown of Communism, discussions about wider anthropological perspectives of the discipline, about new theoretical and methodological approaches, new subjects of research, and new curricula have started – often very controversial and even personal (old school vs. new school, old generation vs. young generation, former communists vs. non-communists, English-speaking vs. non-English speaking, professors vs. young researchers, nationalists vs. Europeanists, etc.).

Slovak Ethnology/Anthropology in Brief

The history of teaching and research in ethnology/anthropology in Slovakia dates back to 1921 when ethnography (etnografia or narodopis – two terms used in Slovakia as synonyms) became one of the main subjects taught at the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University in Bratislava. Ethnography was regarded as a historical discipline that also included folklore studies and it was often studied in combination with other disciplines, mostly history and archaeology, in a wider
interdisciplinary perspective. In the first decades of its existence, ethnography at the Comenius University developed along national-revivalist lines research with the aim of collecting and preserving data about Slovak rural culture, in a predominantly idiographic way. Under the influence of scholars such as Karel Chotek, Vilem Prazak, Peter Bogatyriv, Frank Wollman and Bruno Schier, Slovak ethnography soon began to reflect and also to follow the methodological trends of European anthropology, mainly functionalism and structural functionalism. These new methodological orientations had a strong impact on the first generation of Slovak-educated ethnographers, whose earlier studies had been influenced by functionalism and diffusionism (see for example, Kovacevicova 1949, Melichercik 1939, 1947). Following the Second World War, the Communist regime introduced a wide-ranging reform of academic curricula leading to standardisation and unification of courses and a generalisation of methodological approaches inspired by Soviet-Russian ethnographia, based on historicism and historic materialism. All other methodological orientations were considered as ‘bourgeois residue’, and those scholars who followed them were declared anti-Communists or ‘bourgeois nationalists’ (like, for example, Sona Kovacevicova). Ethnography became an autonomous subject of study and a discipline in its own right in 1947 when the Ethnography Seminar (Narodopisny seminar) was renewed and reformed. Two ethnography professors, Andrej Melichercik and Rudolf Bednarik, contributed to the further development of the discipline at the Comenius University. In 1969, the department was transformed and renamed as the Department of Ethnography and Folklore Studies.

Ethnographic research and teaching at the Department of Ethnography and Folklore Studies in Bratislava maintained its main focus on studies ‘at home’. Ethnographic fieldwork was centred on Slovak society and Slovak rural (folk) culture (material culture, kinship and marriage, social organisation, ceremonies and folklore) in the Slavonic and Carpathian cultural area of Central Europe, and studied in a diachronic perspective. Only a small number of lectures at the Comenius University were centred on the study of other European or nonindustrial, extra-European societies. For political and ideological reasons, little opportunity existed to undertake research in non-Communist areas, and therefore wider cross-cultural comparison, so essential to anthropology, was often neglected. Despite ideological control of social and historical sciences during the Communist period, Slovak ethnography generally did not succumb to the ideological
influence of the Communist Party. This was, however, not a result of a professional bravery, but mainly the fruit of a ‘right choice’ research focus on peasant communities dating from older, pre-Communist times. The ethnographic study of ‘socialism’ was not developed because any criticism of the socialist system would not be allowed. Majority of Slovak scholars therefore tried to avoid topics related to socialist everyday life although some researchers were involved in the “working class” research.

In addition to the Department of Ethnography and Folklore Studies at the Comenius University, the Institute of Ethnography (Narodopisny kabinet, since 1955 Narodopisny ustav) of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (Slovenska akademia vied - SAV) had been founded in 1946 and has since become the central and leading institution for ethnological research, as well as the sole postgraduate training centre. The research carried out at the Institute did not exceed the boundaries of an ethnography focusing on Slovak society and culture, but, in spite of this, it brought new thematic specialisations to bear, new trends and approaches to the study of Slovak culture, such as the study of urban societies and urbanisation, migration and adaptation, ethnicity, everyday culture (which belonged more to social history domain in Western Europe) etc. Since 1953 the Institute has been publishing the journal Slovensky narodopis. It has also been the seat of the Slovak Ethnological Society (Narodopisna spolocnost Slovenska - NSS), which is a national association of academic and professional ethnologists and anthropologists grouping together about 300 members. The Society and the Institute also edit the journal Etnologicke rozpravy (Ethnological Transactions).

Teaching Ethnology/ Anthropology

The fall of Communism in 1989 and the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic in 1993 have led to a certain number of changes in teaching and learning anthropology in the country. The first change was a ‘cosmetic’ one: all academic and research centres have been renamed from “ethnographic” to “ethnological” (and only recently also anthropological) institutions. The new era has tended to liberate teaching from uniformity and homogeneity and has revealed theoretical and methodological pluralism as well as diversity in research topics and teaching approaches.
1. The oldest department, the Department of Ethnography and Folklore Studies at the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University in Bratislava, has become the **Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology**. The orientation of the department has been broadened and now includes three branches:

- ethnology and cultural anthropology, which includes folklore studies
- religious studies;
- cultural heritage preservation and museology studies.

The main section of the department remains the ethnology branch, which offers undergraduate (BA), graduate (MA) and postgraduate programmes (PhD). The curriculum reflects the Department’s transformation process and combines ethnology, social and cultural anthropology, and folklore studies.

2. New departments: In 1991 the Department of Folkloristics and Regional Studies, later renamed **Department of Ethnology and Ethnomusicology** was established at the Constantin Philosopher University in Nitra by several lecturers and researchers from the Slovak Academy of Science in Bratislava. The syllabus offers courses on European and Slovak ethnology and folklore studies. In addition to theoretical knowledge, it includes ethnomusicology (*etnomuzikologia*, the analysis of music, musical instruments and performance), ethnochoreology (*etnochoreologia*, the theory of dance) and practical training in folk music (singing and playing musical instruments and folk-dancing). The Department is unique among Central European academic institutions because it combines theory with artistic practice and performance. The students applying for this programme have to pass a special entry examination that includes singing, playing a musical instrument or dancing. The Department has developed and offers all three cycles. Although the Department combines theory with practice, which is a very specific approach, the lecturers are open to all kinds of new approaches and topics concerning post-Communist transformations in society, and helps students to venture beyond the boundaries of ‘traditional’ ethnography.

3. The **Department of Ethnology** in Slovakia (*Katedra etnologie*) was founded in 1997 at **SS. Cyril and Method University in Trnava** by Jan Podolak and lecturers from the ethnological institutions from Bratislava. Its long-term strategy is to focus not only on Slovak and European
cultures and societies, but also on extra-European cultures. The Department has several younger scholars who introduced fresh topics in teaching and research such as globalisation, ethnology vs. anthropology etc. The department edits the journal Ethnologia Actualis Slovaca.

4. The youngest department, the Institute of Cultural Studies at the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences of the Comenius University, was established in 2002. It offers undergraduate (Bachelor) and postgraduate (PhD) courses in social anthropology. Active young scholars at the institute founded also a professional association Slovak Association of Social Anthropology.

5. In addition to the four departments, ethnology/social and cultural anthropology is also taught at other Slovak universities, mainly at Matej Bel University in Banska Bystrica which has a Research Institute with its main area of specialisation in urban anthropology and diversity/identity studies.

Ethnology/Anthropology Research

Before 1989, like in other countries of the Eastern Block, basic research was mainly carried out at academies of sciences, while universities’ main mission was teaching. This has changed, and universities are becoming crucial centres of research. At the same time, academies of sciences remain strong in most countries of the region.

In Slovakia, the former Institute of Ethnography (Narodopisny ustav SAV) was in 1994 transformed into Institute of Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. The staff of forty members before 1989 was reduced to twenty members in the 1990s. The Institute closely cooperates with ethnology departments at universities in research, teaching and in organising conferences. The postgraduate doctoral programme, which includes a European PhD programme with foreign partners, run by the Institute has been split into full-time and part-time programmes. Full-time doctoral programmes are open to young scholars on the basis of a competitive examination (two or three internal students per year). The average annual number of part-time scholars at the Institute ranges from five to twelve students.
We can say that traditionally oriented research of the Slovak folk culture culminated in the 1970s – 1980s and was finalised at the beginning of the 1990s by publishing large analytical monographs (Ethnographic Atlas of Slovakia 1990, Encyclopaedia of Slovak culture 1995, Folk Culture Atlases of the Slovaks in Hungary and in Romania, Slovakia - The European Contexts of Folk Culture, 1997) and a number of regional monographs and monographs focusing on selected cultural phenomena. This has been a good starting point for a broader comparative research in a European context. In addition, ethnologists provided the contemporary Slovak society with detailed information on its cultural heritage, which in times of globalisation may be more important than we sometimes realise and admit.

In the 1990s ethnological research opened towards more interdisciplinary and international cooperation. Post-socialist transformation has become a perfect laboratory for research although it took some time to switch the attention to the study of contemporary society. New and hot topics related to transformation of the society, establishment of the new independent state and joining the EU started to be studied such as identity, ethnicity and ethnic relations, nationalism and national myths, historic memory, minorities, migration, gender, changes in social structure, social groups, urban and rural transformations, value orientations, etc. Topics that were neglected in the past for ideological reasons (the Roma, the Jews, marginal groups, religious groups) also opened new opportunities for research. Folklore phenomena continued to be studied in a changed context as a special kind of social communication. New research themes include impact of globalisation, tensions between the global and the local, diversity in its broad sense, migration (not only emigration of the Slovaks, but also immigration to Slovakia and attitudes of the society), etc. All these topics and approaches, however, are related to new phenomena that appear in the society as a result of post-socialist transformation, European integration and globalisation, and by studying them traditional ethnology came closer to social anthropology and also – in a way - joined the same research field as sociology (although using different methodology). It seems that contemporary ethnology research in Slovakia neglects the topics which were popular before 1989 such as study of the development of regional and local cultures and their changes. In rural Slovakia (still almost half of the country) one can still find a large number of living and
developing phenomena of cultural heritage (handicrafts, family rituals, annual rituals, folklore). In addition, due to impacts of globalisation and also growing international pressure (UNESCO Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions, 2005) there is an increasing interest of the society in cultural heritage.

Following G. Kilianova (2005), research trends in contemporary Slovak ethnology in the new millennium include:

1. Ethnological reflections of transformation processes in the Slovak society after 1989
2. Ethno-historical development of Central-European space
3. The role and contribution of the cultural heritage of Slovakia in the European context

Conclusion

The debate about the direction of Slovak ethnology/anthropology is an ongoing process. Following my own reflection on the past 18 years since 1989, I can say that it was too early to expect critical evaluations and reflections on the development of Slovak ethnology in the first years after 1989. Slovak scholars needed time to get acquainted with the discourse in anthropology in other countries; some distance or detachment from pre-1989 research and from emotional debates that followed 1989. When looking at Slovak ethnological production of recent years, I can say that ethnology/anthropology in Slovakia managed to move forward and to join the European mainstream. Critical debates on the future of ethnology and social and cultural anthropology have appeared in several professional journals and a conference on the topic was organised at the ethnology department in Trnava in 2005. Both ethnology and social anthropology are now included in the official list of accredited subjects of study at the Ministry of Education as part of social sciences (before they were part of historic sciences). Several years ago I wrote in one of my papers that ethnology in Slovakia reminded me of the Sleeping Beauty waiting for a prince who would wake her up. I think that the prince arrived and the Sleeping Beauty is alive and quite dynamic again.
Notes

1. In Slovakia, ethnology is the term used either for a separate discipline or as an equivalent for social and cultural anthropology. The discipline has gone through a transformation process from ethnography (*etnografia, narodopis*), which was taught prior to 1989, towards ethnology and social and cultural anthropology (*socialna a kulturna antropologia*).

2. The Slovak Republic was established on 1 January 1993 as a result of agreements negotiated by the governments and parliaments of the Czech and the Slovak Republics. From 1918 to 1992 it was a part of the Republic of Czechoslovakia, where there existed three Departments of ‘Ethnography’: in Bratislava (the oldest one, founded in 1921), in Prague and Brno.

3. Peter Grigorievic Bogatyriov was the first scholar in Slovakia to introduce functional structuralism in his article, ‘Funkcno-strukturalna metoda a ine metody etnografie a folkloristiky’ (The functional–structural method and other methods in ethnography and folkloristics), *Slovenske pohlady*, 1935. He applied functional structuralism in his later works *Funkcie kroja na Moravskom Slovacku* (The folk costume function in Moravske Slovacko), Bratislava, 1937; *Lidove divadlo ceske a slovenske* (Folk theatre – Czech and Slovak), Bratislava, 1949.

4. This specialisation was a result of an agreement between the three ethnography departments in Czechoslovakia: the Bratislava department was supposed to focus on Slavonic and Carpathian cultures, the Prague department on non-European societies, and the Brno department on European societies.

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