

ETHNOGRAPHIC ATLASES REGIONS, BORDERS, INTERFERENCES

16th Conference of the SIEF's
International Ethnocartography Network
2010

The International Ethnocartography Network monitored this activity in the form of conferences only up to the year 2000 (1990: Stará Lesná, Slovakia; 1993: Bad Honnef, Germany; 1996: Třešť, Czech Republic; 1998: Cieszyn, Poland; 2000: Komarno, Slovakia). For this reason, the Section entitled "Work on Ethnological Atlases in Europe" of the 16th Conference of the SIEF's International Ethnocartography Network has set the objective to evaluate the results of the period of almost ten years since then and to assess the future potential of ethnocartography. The SIEF's International Ethnocartography Network has existed under this name only since 1990, scientists interested in the preparation of ethnographic atlases have organised thematic conferences regularly since the blueprint Linz conference in 1958 (1966: Zagreb, 1968: Bonn, 1970: Helsinki, 1972: Stockholm, 1974: Budapest–Visegrád, 1976: St. Pölten, 1978: Eniskillen Northern Ireland). The birth of it was in connection with the effort in ethnocartography in Europe. The flourishing period of ethnocartography was the 1960s and 1970s. After former examples in Germany, Austria etc. ethnographical atlases were launched and started in different European countries. The representatives of this undertaking formed out the plan of the European Ethnographic Atlas. The main representative of this atlas was the great generation of the European ethnology: Mathias Zender, Alexander Fenton, Jenő Barabás, Branimir Bratanić, Milovan Gavazzi, Béla Gunda, later Heinrich Cox, Jozef Vařeka and others.

The result is known: neither the national atlases in every country, nor the European atlas were finished. At least the working group which organized many symposia during the decades has been dissolved.

Nevertheless, one result can be mentioned. As a consequence of these efforts arose the working group, the International Ethnocartography network in the frame of the SIEF. I have been member of this network only since the 1990s. So I was participant only in the last events, conferences. In 1997 Josef Vařeka hosted a conference under the title

“European Cultural Area – Unity in Diversity”. In 2000 there was a meeting in Komárom/Komárno, Slovakia, then in 2004 in the frame of the SIEF-Congress in Marseille, then again in 2008 in connection with the SIEF-Congress in Derry Northern-Ireland. The 16th Conference of the SIEF’s International Ethnogeography Network in 2010 was organized by the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Szeged.

To tell the truth it is not the most active working group of the SIEF. If I interpret the process correctly, it is because of the deep changes in theory and viewpoint of the last decades. The ethnographic atlases have lost their former great importance. The focus of interest has been shifted from the traditional peasant culture, or from the spatial partition, features of peasant culture to other problems in connection with the society, culture and space, to use and importance of maps, mental maps, virtual places, or non-places, all in general to all problems in connection with place and space.

I don’t think that the importance of the traditional ethnographic atlases has totally disappeared. We have to use the great amount of knowledge accumulated in the atlas-collections. But we have to find out the appropriate and modern way of analysis. The digitalized world offers new approaches – parallel with the horizontal analysis vertical, structural ones, which help to interpret the cultural phenomena more in their contextual connections. Perhaps the papers of the conference bring some new ideas in this field. On the other hand we see that there are efforts in different countries (e.g. in Czech Republic, Romania) to make or finish their ethnographic atlas.

The second part of papers given at the conference show different approaches. Mental borders, historical regions and regions divided by borders (Silesia, Galicia, the entire Carpathian Basin, etc.), new and old identities. What is the connection between global and local? Are regions representations of the local/regional? What kind of spaces and places does our postmodern age know?

Gábor BARNÁ