ABSTRACTS OF RESEARCH PAPERS IN ENGLISH

Habilitation thesis (monograph)

- Kissikova, Maria. *COMMUNITY CULTURAL CENTER AND TIME. Institutional Building and Public Transformation. From the pages of the Chronicle*. Plovdiv: University Press, 2024.

Summary: This research paper is an attempt to seek out the anthropological grounds of a somewhat atypical field such as the document archive of a specific institution. This defines my intention to adhere closely to the "bottom-up" viewpoint with relation to the community, and to less actively attempt to pinpoint the institution's archival logic and its criteria for significance. As a result of this, the document upon which I shall build my interpretation is a Chronicle kept at the community center in the village of Pchelarovo - its first volume is a transcript (a copy), but the second volume (post 1980) records events and notable individuals that the archive has not yet recognized as evidence of the past; those records have not been selected and categorized. They are important first and foremost to those who maintain and carry on the work of dozens of community center workers and village dwellers from 1928 until present day. Investigating the Chronicle should therefore pose questions and seek answers about the heritage and those who inherit it (firstly, within the framework of the institution of the community center). The Chronicle passes on the memory of bygone events and constructs an image of the self, the community, of its values, its heroes, and its nature. My main interest, however, is the issue of narration, which is defined by the fact that my main source is a piece of text which falls within specific genre characteristics. It was created by several authors and varies in content, while maintaining a historical chronology for a relatively long span of time, and working on it assumes an effort to rationalize, edit, select, and chart a narrative that pursues certain goals and intentions, and also has political connotations. With each next page in the Chronicle, one gets an ever-increasing understanding of the fact that writing the entries is not so much a voluntary or arbitrary act, but rather an act of power. In this regard, each piece of information contained within the Chronicle has to be studied keenly; those pieces have earned their inclusion in the Chronicle at the expense of dozens of events, news, activities, etc., that have been left out.

My approach is one of induction, with the Chronicle contents being the guide. I have extracted keywords, themes, recurring motifs. The first stage of the research is an extensive definition of the Chronicle contents, which adheres to the logic of its authors. I have laid out

the issues and themes that are of interest to said authors in a chronological succession. The description of the textual material goes in parallel with my impressions and commentary, which are equivalent to field notes[1] - they foster connections and analogies with specific interpretative ideas or represent assumptions and preliminary conclusions, whose validity may be confirmed or refuted in the following process of theoretical build-up. As the theory is being constructed in the process of an ever deeper presentation and analysis of the empirical data, each next part of the research leans on the last and builds on top of it. In the second part of the research I try to chart a kind of structure that can be found in the book, and this corresponds to the individual portions that the text is divided into, but also within the components themselves. At the next stage of my research, through a study of the contents of the individual sections of the Chronicle, I try to reveal certain implications and meanings, assumptions, and viewpoints, so that I might present a more profound understanding of the Chronicle's messages. As part of these efforts, I adhere to the principles of substantiated theory of content analysis, seeking specific themes and narrative lines in the free-flowing text laid down by the authors (Russel 2006: 492 – 493, 505 – 212). Going deeper into the context defines a specific historical period described in the Chronicle narrative (in its individual sections - the 1930s and 1980s), a specific place (a village in the eastern Rhodope region near the community center, where the population is predominantly mixed and is relatively isolated from the capital city), and how the meeting of the two affects the functioning of institution that is the community center. Filling in the context with meaning is a process that starts from the inside and moves towards an external point of view - information from other archival documents maintained by the center is added to the data in the Chronicle. Said documents are deposited and preserved in the archival files of the National Archive in Kardzhali. Other institutional archives from the village are also brought in as proof of the time, to back up the previously collected data. With the goal of enriching the contents of the community center materials, and what certain activities mean (attracting notable individuals to the community center, organizing evening gatherings and raffles, or celebrating special occasions) in the time period, I have mostly relied on information that can be found in relevant specialized periodicals, In certain cases, to foster a deeper contextualization, yet another type of data is brought in (such as normative documentation like laws, decrees, statues) in accordance with issues and topics introduced in the Chronicle.

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[1] For more on keeping notes in content coding in established theory, see Russel 2006: 499, Glaser & Strauss 2006: 107 – 108.

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This text offers a viewport into the life of a community center, traced over a relatively long time span in view of the history created for our sake by the authors of the institution's Chronicle. My approach toward the textual materials assumes the principles of established theory in the field of the social sciences, stemming from the empirical data, and building analytical models and defining schemas on this very basis. The selected research approach has met the criteria of two crucial principles of anthropological studies - specific cultural phenomena must be studied according to their inherent properties, and random comparisons (in both time and space) must be reduced to a minimum. In its final stages, the proposed research clearly reveals its insufficiency, but the latter can be compensated for by future readers and researchers who can offer different viewpoints, interpretative models, and theoretical understandings, thus adding relevancy to what has been presented here.

Studies

- Kissikova M., Krastanova Kr., Stoilova E. *Creative traditions and cultural projects: re-thinking heritage through experience*. In: Martor 2022/27, 154-179.

Summary: The article investigates the potential of project activities and project culture in creating novel conditions for introducing and re-thinking the complex nature of heritage, its transmission, practice, and new applications. Today, preindustrial knowledge, skill, and practice are interpreted rather as heritage that carries the potential of "creative traditions." In modern societies, they can be incorporated in different fields—from educational programs for kids and adolescents to the tendency to integrate them into creative projects and cultural and creative industries. A key role in this process is played by ethnologists and anthropologists as researchers and interpreters of cultural heritage, but also as "cultural workers." The paper is based on the case study of a project in the textile field, where elements of intangible cultural heritage were used and re-thought in the context of new forms of culture (ArtLabs for experimenting and innovation in textile art, a storytelling event, a festival, creative interpretations, and sensory and emotional experiences). Here we present and analyze a project that used an integrated approach to cultural heritage, carried out in 2019 in the city of Plovdiv, with the participation of ethnologists, anthropologists, artists, and students.

- Kissikova, Maria. *About the Memory and the Inheritance – perspectives toward Identity. On examples from Pchelarovo Village.* In: (M. Zlatkova, St. Penkova, St. Antonov and T. Mitev, eds.). Transforming Village. Plovdiv, 2019, 112-137.

Summary: The paper is engaged with the problems of memory transfer, inheritance and identity construction using field research material from a small village in eastern part of Rodopi Mountain (Pchelarovo, Municipality of Chernoochene, Kardzhali Region). The local context show me that there are some difficulties in process of cultural memory transmission and sustainability of local community (it became visible through the Museum in the village, which building is in ruin). I argue that one can find working mechanisms for cultural memory transference, continuing inheritance processes and re-actualization of local identity in new terms. This mechanism became visible through some social activities undertaken from different social actors: one example is the annual **feast of the village** that is the official public display of the local policies concerning cultural heritage and identity confirmation/reformation (viewpoint from "up"); the other example shows the personal decisions and actions of a local man who is making **reconstructions of sacred places** in the village (viewpoint from "down"). His proactive position and the reactions of the local community is analyzed as a display of the negotiating process around the identity and its old/new aspects.

- Kissikova, Maria. "*Rethinking and Renegotiating Communal Identity. The Case of Pchelarovo*". In: Life Transitions in the Transforming Village: Memory, Identity, Inheritance. (Tasheva, M., Zlatkova, M., Penkova, St., eds.). Plovdiv: University Press "Paisii Hilendarski", 2024, 111-136.

Summary: Pchelarovo, a 'purely' Bulgarian village in the Rhodopes, near Kardjali, seems a 'typical' case of a fading village where places and institutions are devoid of meaning and the cultural riches (in the deteriorating museum) have lost their value. The transformations taking place in villages during the so-called Transition, proceed in Pchelarovo through the need for the past to be rethought and for the community to be reconfigured. Starting from such assumptions, I seek, in different manifestations of the social, signs of renegotiation of meanings, rethinking of the past, discovering heirs and reaffirmation of the community. In the processes so presented, certain elements of memory and the past can stay under the veil of forgettance (in the crumbling museum) while certain people and institutions carry the

momentum of transformation, undertaking initiatives of rethinking, renegotiation and entering into inheritance.

Articles

- Kisikova, Maria. "*Let's talk about the university…*" - *on the ethnological approach in researching an institution*". In: The University, documents, people. From the physical, digital, and unwritten history of the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. (Compiled by Maria Shniter). Plovdiv, 2016, 139-152

Summary: The article is an attempt to demonstrate the potential of the ethnological approach in researching an institution. The institutions have been subject to research in social and humanitarian studies, and are typically represented as machines of bureaucracy which classify and organize people based on competency and functions in the system. The anthropological approach highlights the individual's point of view and is interested in the minute problems and scales so that we can see how people inhabit a space, how they see, how they arrange, how they evaluate social interactions, work relations, and the institution as a whole. The article is based conversations and interviews with teachers and staff in an institution of education (the case study being the Paisii Hilendarski University in Plovdiv) and the exposition is organized according to the themes that are commented on - professional career, choosing Plovdiv as the location for said career, interactions within the work team. The narratives of the interlocutors make up the major body of the text, and the authorial interpretations are intentionally limited. This allows for a rich expression of a story filled with memories and emotions, and for the deployment of a broad canvas upon which a variety of ethnological interpretations can be built.

- Kissikova Maria**. „***Challenges of Teaching Ethnology. Theoretical and Practical Approaches (With examples from courses Intercultural Communication and Stereotypes and Prejudices)*. In: Guidelines in academic Research and Teaching of Ethnology and Anthropology (Kotseva ed.). Sofia: University Press Kliment Ohridski, 2018, 97-112.

Summary: The paper focuses on two relatively new courses in the curriculum of Ethnology and Social Anthropology BA (Department of Ethnology, University of Plovdiv) – Intercultural Communication and Stereotypes and Prejudices. The teaching practice in the seminars is emphasized – different trainings and activities used as a tool for learning, in depth understanding of anthropological principles and proactive participation of students. Advantages and disadvantages of trainings are explored in the context of academic education. The

discussion on trainings is a way to describe and analyze the content and concept of both courses – Intercultural Communication and Stereotypes and Prejudices, and to emphasize on different kind of theoretical problems and challenges they raises. The aim is to provoke a discussion about different approaches in teaching anthropology – not only in presenting and explaining the theories and ideas but in developing practical skills and attitudes as well.

- Kissikova, Maria. *"The Song of the Road"*. In: ON THE ROAD Stories, Images and Sounds. Kissikova, M., Kr. Krastanova, M. Zlatkova, El. Stoilova (eds.). Plovdiv, 2019, 49-59.

Summary: The text presents an insight to the life story of a person who has lived in different times and spaces. Although it is a result of a continuous empirical study of the *Karakachan* community and an in-depth consideration on the identity, memory and inheritance issues, the theoretical upgrades are tendentiously marginalized in this text. The story of my interlocutor, whom I call the Singer, builds the main fabric of the text. He constructs the remembrance, incorporating moments from his youth, from the time when he has lived as a travelling cattleman (a usual occupation of the *Karakachan* community until the mid-twentieth century), from the period of settling down, from the socialism to the present time. The individual topics are not ordered chronologically or typologically but are rather tied together into a cohesive whole by the songs he performs between the various stories. The song and the singing convey invisible strings between different times and spaces in my interlocutor's story. The interpretation of his story-song is based on the theory of folklore as a culture type (Zhivkov, 1977; Zhivkov 1987) and the place of singing and the song cycle in that culture. In the past, the songs were part of a mobile lifestyle and gave a rhythm and resonance to every action and every thought of the traveling shepherds. After the cessation of the traditional way of life, the song no longer functions on a daily basis and loses its social interweaving. However, in the life story of my interlocutor, the song creates the rhythm, makes connections between different people, events, places and times. It is the solder in the mental bricolage of the Singer that adds harmony, meaning and value to the story of his life before. The text gives a perspective on the inner world of our interlocutor - a person who has lived in different times and spaces.

- Kissikova, Maria. "*Self-Identification and collective Identity – personal Hierarchy and social Reflections (examples from biographical interviews with University Professors)*"

In: INVESTIGATING CULTURE – international journal for cultural researches (Dr. Loreta Georgievska - Jakovleva ed.). Skopje, 2020/4, 71-79.

Summary: This paper is an attempt to answer the question how the memory about an institution is constructed, how it is remembered and represented and what is the individual's role in it. The ethnological research of one University outlines the experience of time and space in informer's perspective. It is interesting to see how the informer's memory (individual and collective) builds connections between past and present, how they emphasize on certain facts and miss others. Their narrations not only rearrange the past but rethink and create the identity.

- Kissikova, Maria. *"I didn`t even know there was Pchelarovo! Not mentioning to spend my old Age here, to learn farming, to keep Hens…" The Village as an (un)expected Choice.* In: Bulgarian Ethnology, 2022/1, 54-71.

Summary: The study presents a specific case of a family that moves to the countryside after retirement. Following the development of the narrative of the interlocutors, the author′s interpretations, in the first place, focus on the way in which the selected village (Pchelarovo) is positioned in the local context, in a network of relevant settlements. At the next stage, the specific situation is placed and made meaningful in the context of the life stories of my interlocutors, who build an argumentative line explaining their choice to move to the countryside. The meanings of the village and rural life derived from these contextualizations then unfold against the background of the everyday life of my interlocutors in the village. The aim of the author′s interpretations is to stay close to their sources, as the case unfolds through the narratives of the interlocutors, who are called to construct memories, set meaning and help to establish identity.

- Kissikova, Maria. "*Outlines of community Spaces (karakachan`s community cases/ examples)"*. In: Folklore Studies and Ethnology in Central and Southeastern Europe. (Anastasove, Ek., M. Borisova, T. Matanova, R. Rozhdestvenska, eds.). Sofia: BAS-IEFTEM, 2023, 69-84.

Summary: The research interests in this paper focus on communities in other cultural context theoretical frame. Examples are taken from a field research among karakachan`s community which is perceived as different from insiders` and outsiders` view point. Following Vladimir

Penchev`s topology if ethnic presence (the display of community belonging and identification through special signs) I will present different examples how certain places are inhabited and marked by karakachan`s community and will build my interpretation. The approach of the research is anthropological, and different cases will be analyzed. Main goal is to define and present karakachan`s community places while making some notes and conclusions on community belonging and identification process.

- Kissikova, Maria. „*Official Holidays – Implementation and Transformations. The Archives of a village Community Center*". In: Epohi, 2024/2, 458-474.

Summary: The establishment of a calendar of public holidays within nation-states gives expression to the national ideal, to the "values, merits and achievements" important for the affirmation of national identity. Looking at the normative and institutional order, draws attention to the framework set by the state and its supposed best possible realization. If we turn our attention to places and regions and look for records of the process, we can see how public holidays are celebrated and how national ideas reach people and communities. This study proposes a look at the archival documents of a village community center (focusing on the period from the 1930s to the 1980s) in an attempt to show how a local cultural and educational institution, charged with the duty of establishing and organizing the village holiday calendar, accomplished this task. In this way, local 'resistances' can be seen and our understanding of what actually happened in the official holiday calendar can be deepened.