

EDITORIAL

Active citizenship is one of the key indicators of sustainability according to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development and, in the national context, to the National Strategy for Sustainable Development in the Slovak Republic (2001). The reason is obvious: civic activities that aim at improving biological, environmental, material, cultural, spiritual and social needs and interests of local citizens contribute significantly to strengthening civil society at local or regional levels. The range of these activities is broad and it includes environmentally-oriented actions; human rights support and advocacy (ethnic, religious, gender, social and other); preservation, revitalisation and promotion of urban heritage and identity; civic participation in urban decision-making and governance, local solidarity and assistance, community life, etc. The engagement and active participation of citizens in urban life has been an object of social sciences and humanities research for a long time. Many authors (quoted in the studies presented in this issue) confirm that sustainable development of local (urban) communities depends significantly on the way how they develop and support their own social and cultural potential and capital.

The Institute of Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences has been the coordinator of the project “Civic Activities as a Determinant of Sustainable City Development (An Ethnological View)”. The key field research destination has been Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia (combined with some comparative research in other Slovak cities). It is understandable that a small project cannot cover all forms of formal activism (non-governmental organisations) and non-formal activism (civic initiatives) that have been observed and studied in recent years. The main objective of the project has been mapping and analysing selected individual and group activities in the field of preservation and reconstruction of historical and cultural values; implementation of ecological concepts into urban strategies; advocacy of minority groups’ interests and rights; and community life revitalisation. We presume that civic activism in Bratislava focuses primarily on problems related to local government and governance, social issues, urban heritage, social communication, and environment. The ethnological analysis of these activities can contribute to better understanding of social processes in the post-socialist city.

The papers in this issue of *Slovak Ethnology* offer and demonstrate diverse approaches towards the study of urban activism. Alexandra Bitušíková in her introductory study presents a general overview of theoretical approaches to the study of urban

movements and activism. She studies activism within the framework of civil society and social movements in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. She challenges older academic writings that describe civil society in Central and Eastern Europe as underdeveloped and weak, and presents research findings of a number of social scientists (including social anthropologists) that emphasize a specific nature of activism in the countries of the region. She demonstrates that even after more than two decades since the fall of communism it is still important to take different historic, political, economic, social and cultural contexts into account when comparing urban movements and activism within Europe.

Natália Blahová focuses on corporate volunteering as one of the forms of collaboration between the non-profit and the private sectors seeking solutions to social problems and community development in the city. Volunteering is part of the philanthropic strategy of companies which want to present themselves as entities responsible towards the environment in which they run their business, and towards their employees, partners and customers. The author presents engaged anthropology and its methodological tools (such as a community-based participatory research) as a new approach to study corporate volunteering. This kind of engaged research includes all partners on an equal basis and identifies their unique contribution to problem solution and community development.

Daniel Luther presents a specific case related to the transformation of urban space in Bratislava considered as historically important by urban inhabitants. He discusses civic activism in the context of preservation of the historical identity of the city. The author seeks to grasp the issues of active citizenship through motivations and reasons, particular areas of interest, actual results, and effectiveness of civil activism. He concludes that interventions to preserve the historical identity of urban spaces have strongly mobilised part of the public and have become one of the incentives of growing civil engagement in the post-socialist period.

Peter Salner focuses on civic activities aimed at preserving the Jewish minority culture in Bratislava. He follows a complicated process of the establishment of the Jewish Community Museum that started before the WWII, but could not be realised and implemented until the end of the communist rule. The author presents long-term efforts of individuals and the Bratislava Jewish Community leadership in establishing their own museum. The role of this new institution is to present the history and the current status of the largest Jewish community in Slovakia. The creation of the Jewish Community Museum is a manifestation of activism of several individuals and of their vision being accepted by the leadership of the religious institution. The result is a new impetus for the development of the community, but also for improving the Jewish - Gentile relations and thus for a step forward to sustainable development in Bratislava.

The papers in this issue show different perspectives on urban activism in Slovakia that contribute to deeper understanding of specific problems of post-socialist cities in Central and Eastern Europe.

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