Anthropology at Home: Rethinking Methodologies in Slovakia

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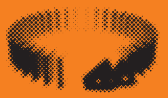

https://doi.org/10.31577/2024.9788069127005.8-28

Abstract

Keywords

home anthropology,
ethnographic field,
polycrisis,
anthropological reflexivity,
methodologies,
Slovakia

In recent years, European anthropology has grappled with the complexities of multiple interwoven crises—pandemics, war, climate change, and social instability—leading to debates on whether we are living in an era of 'polycrisis'. While crisis thinking often isolates events from broader historical contexts, anthropology provides a critical framework for sustained ethnographic inquiry into these pressing issues. This volume, the first in the *Challenges and Directions in Slovak Ethnology and Anthropology* series, engages with these challenges by exploring the evolving landscape of home anthropology and anthropology at/of home, combining institutional self-reflection with methodological innovation.

The introductory chapter shows that the unifying themes of liminality and temporality in the first section of the volume provide crucial interpretative frameworks for understanding contemporary Slovakia. These concepts bridge seemingly disparate case studies by capturing how individuals and communities navigate uncertain, transitory, and often precarious political, social, and religious circumstances.

The study traces evolving methodological debates in at-home research presented in the volume's second section, centering on the interrelated themes of reflexivity, mediation, and knowledge production. These concepts unify the discussions on positionality, sensory ethnography, and AI-driven archival research, highlighting how contemporary ethnographers engage with their own embeddedness in the field, navigate the mediation of experience through digital and material practices, and confront the changing nature of archival work in the age of artificial intelligence.

By critically examining these issues, this volume contributes to the advancement of ethnographic practice 'at home' and ensures that anthropology and ethnology in Slovakia remain responsive to global academic discussions.

Crisis-like narratives

In recent years, discussions at major European anthropological hubs have centered on the perception that the world faces multiple threats.[1] A decade ago, the focus was on migration and free movement, which later shifted to concerns about civil rights, growing nationalism, and xenophobia. Today, the pressing issues encompass pandemics, war, climate change, mass population movements, racial, cultural, and religious conflicts, infrastructural collapse, the risks and dangers of Artificial Intelligence (AI), energy and supply shortages, and financial instability. In addition, several contemporary anthropologists, philosophers, sociologists, and political scientists are increasingly debating whether we are living in a time of 'polycrisis' (Morin, 1999; Masco 2017; Dan-Cohen 2019; Henig & Knight, 2023)—a condition where multiple crises occur simultaneously and are interconnected, amplifying each other's effects (the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, and climate change). These crises are not isolated events but interact in ways that make the overall situation more complex and challenging to resolve. The cumulative impact of these crises is greater than the sum of their individual effects, leading to a heightened sense of instability or risk (Lawrence et al., 2024).

In our view, it is crucial to steer clear of 'crisis-thinking,' as it can often lead to isolating current events from their broader historical and cultural contexts. Instead, anthropology offers a unique perspective for exploring and understanding these events. Rather than preemptively and passively framing social issues into a crisis-like mode, it is vital to keep the epistemological space open to exploration. By delving into sustained ethnographic inquiry, anthropology unveils the intricate web of intimate (as well as impersonal) connections and structures that shape and define our world.

This approach allows for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the complexities at play in our societies. Whether it is an intimate relationship with the state, neighbors, oneself, or even one's own discipline, one must remain truthful to the terms used, respecting the nuances and shades of language(s). As Marilyn Strathern notes: "Especially when resurgent boundaries and exclusions twist truth telling any which way, there is good reason to be thinking about its habits of exposition. The issue weaves in and out of what we might make of engagement and then again of what we might make of its terms" (2021, p. 285). Current anthropology needs to find the appropriate terms to articulate the realities it explores.

In response to this debate, we offer the current collection based on our research on the home and at home; it represents the first volume in the series *Challenges and Directions in Slovak Ethnology and Anthropology* initiated by the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology Slovak Academy of Sciences in 2024. Although the first volume is an 'in-house publication', the series is to create an open forum for practitioners of various disciplines and backgrounds—anthropologists, historians, human geographers, and museum specialists as well as for 'local voices' of our partners in the field, to share personal perspectives, reflect on the current situation, and discuss challenges and strategies that we face.

1 See, for instance, the themes of the EASA Biennial Conferences since 2018. Available at: https://easaonline.org/conferences/ [Accessed on August 15, 2024].

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The current volume extends the debate surrounding *home anthropology* (Jackson, 1987) and *anthropology at and of home*. Building on recent contributions that have examined the historical and contemporary challenges of conducting ethnographic research in Slovakia and Czechia (see, for instance, Kiliánová & Popelková, 2010; Kiliánová, 2017; Zachar Podolinská & Popelková, 2023; Zachar Podolinská, 2024; Balaš, 2025), the current volume aims to both preserve and critically reassess the continuity of ethnological inquiry in Slovakia while paving the way for necessary shifts and methodological innovations. The legacy of 'home anthropology' has played a crucial role in shaping the discipline in the local contexts, as evidenced by ongoing debates on ethical challenges, institutional transformations, and the evolving role of ethnology within the social sciences (Zachar Podolinská & Popelková, 2023). This volume does not merely aim to sustain past inquiries but seeks to interrogate their foundations, particularly in light of contemporary discussions on research ethics, knowledge production, and institutional reflexivity (Zachar Podolinská, 2024).

The volume also acknowledges that scientific research is not merely knowledge production but, ideally, a process of knowledge co-creation with our partners in the field embedded within social dynamics. As such, it is always situated within specific contexts, power structures, and varying levels of knowledge permeability—the extent to which an academic environment allows for the exchange, adaptation, and transformation of ideas, theories, and methodologies across disciplines, regions, or intellectual traditions.

In his recent work on socialist Czech ethnography and folklore studies, Nikola Balaš (2025, p. 267) introduces the concept of 'epistemic arrest', describing how a field such as ethnography can become intellectually stagnant when practitioners engage with existing theoretical frameworks but cannot critically develop or extend them. This condition, shaped by historical and structural forces, limits theoretical innovation and restricts a field's ability to evolve. Although Balaš primarily analyzes the internal dependencies of the socialist and early post-socialist periods, his argument invites a broader reflection on whether such residual constraints persist today, subtly relegating critical perspectives and innovations to a marginal, non-transformative role.

Recognizing these risks, it becomes imperative to launch a new scholarly series that embraces critical and perhaps even 'nosy' questions—ones that challenge established academic conventions externally by engaging with broader disciplinary debates and internally by scrutinizing our scholarly assumptions and practices. This volume thus acknowledges the broader context of institutional self-examination, reflecting on how disciplinary constraints, ethical dilemmas, and epistemic shifts influence the ways home ethnology and anthropology in Slovakia define themselves in relation to global trends.

Doing *anthropology at home*, we are compelled to confront the issue of our 'positionality' and 'proximity' (Strathern, 2004; Bilgen & Fábos, 2024). We acknowledge those approaches that seek to deal with increasingly blurred boundaries between the 'field' and 'home', be it a study of a familiar phenomenon in a less familiar context, an exploration of an unfamiliar phenomenon in a familiar setting, or a seemingly familiar site. By incorporating reflections on ethical negotiations and the politics of ethnographic authority, this volume aspires to contribute to both theoretical advancement and practical innovation in the field. Such an initiative would be able to foster intellectual cross-pollination and ensure that emerging research remains dynamic, reflective, and responsive to the shifting landscapes of knowledge production.

The contributors to this volume belong to a generation of scholars navigating the shifting landscapes of home anthropology, balancing between inherited traditions and the fluidity of contemporary academic practice. Neither wholly rooted nor entirely untethered, they engage with anthropology at home, which brings a critical gaze to the familiar, and anthropology of home, which questions what familiarity means in an era of intellectual permeability. Their work is shaped by movement—between institutions, disciplines, and perspectives—yet remains attentive to the need for continuity.

This movement is not without friction. Small academic communities can sometimes fold inward, drawing strength from close networks yet risking insularity when internal bridges falter. Paradoxically, external connections across disciplines[2] and subfields[3]—often more intensive than knowledge shared among close colleagues—become the primary lifelines of exchange. This raises a delicate question: How can anthropology in Slovakia sustain meaningful dialogues within itself, bridging folklore studies, ethnography, ethnology, and

anthropology while remaining attuned to broader European and global debates? There is no clear answer, only the recognition that bridging is both an aspiration and an ongoing practice that requires patience, adaptability, and an openness to reconfiguring familiar frameworks.

Unlike previous generations, contemporary anthropologists in Slovakia are not preoccupied with securing the discipline's legitimacy or defining a singular ethnographic canon. The field no longer revolves around recovering disappearing traditions, so-called 'survival science', or justifying its existence through the selective collection of cultural artifacts and constructing 'folk culture' (Podoba, 2006, p. 273) to give the scholarly conduct a thematic purpose and, especially, an argument for its existence. Nor is there a need to force an abrupt 'anthropologization' of the discipline, as was the case in the post-1989 transition (Beňušková & Ratica, 2002; Bitušíková, 2002; Podoba, 2007). There are no longer so-called 'national ethnographers' (Hann, 2007, p. 10) or scholars who "must live up to standards set by both the international academic community and its national variants" (Kürti, 2008, p. 25). The challenge is now more diffuse and elusive—less about constructing a fixed identity than sustaining a space where multiple perspectives, methods, and intellectual lineages can coexist and evolve.

It is in this space of uncertainty that bridges become essential. Though shaped by diverse disciplinary backgrounds—anthropology, history, sociology, religious studies, and computer science—the scholars contributing to this volume find a shared intellectual ground in anthropology's capacity to accommodate multiple (sub)fields. Rather than drawing rigid lines between ethnography, ethnology, folklore studies, and cultural heritage, they see anthropology as an expansive, generative framework that invites exchange rather than exclusion. What emerges is not a definitive resolution but a careful navigation—between past and future, inside and outside, home and away.

The scope of this volume unfolds within a carefully defined space—one that prioritizes conceptual and methodological frameworks while only partially engaging with ethnographic material. Rather than striving for exhaustive coverage, it seeks to map out the contours of ongoing debates, offering grounded and open-ended reflections that are attentive to continuity yet responsive to change.

The current collection is divided into two sections. The first one explores several cases from the field, showing various facets of the current challenges in Slovak society. The cases of the critical junctions that Slovak society is facing are explored in more depth in the three studies of Section One (by Pavol Kosnáč and Justin Lane; Martina Wilsch and Miroslava Hlinčíková; and Vladimír Bahna).

2 In the project MEADOW (*Species-rich Carpathian grasslands: mapping, history, drivers of change and conservation*, led by Monika Janišová and funded by the Slovak Research and Development Agency APVV-21-0226), anthropologists Andrej Belák and Jaroslava Panáková collaborate with botanists and geographers.

3 For instance, Ľubica Voľanská and Soňa G. Lutherová regularly work across ethnology, anthropology, oral history, and visual anthropology.

The recurring motif across all these cases is liminality and temporality, though applied in different contexts.

The first chapter by **Kosnáč and Lane** discusses the assassination attempt on Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico in the context of increasing societal polarization in Slovakia. The focus is on political crises' temporal, fleeting nature and the shifting tides of public sentiment as society reacts to dramatic events. The assassination attempt on the Slovak Prime Minister is thus explored as a moment of transition, revealing how emotional responses shape and intensify societal divisions in times of uncertainty. The analysis underlines how public emotions fluctuate between anger and anxiety, indicating a liminal state of uncertainty and social fragmentation.

The novelty of this study lies in its application of a big data analysis approach to the study of public reactions to a critical historical event. The study highlights that similar big data analyses have been conducted in various countries where assassination attempts on politicians have occurred. However, Slovakia's response stands out as uniquely different. This distinction offers a valuable contribution to domestic anthropology, providing deeper insights into the country's societal and political dynamics. The authors suggest that the high degree of societal polarization in Slovakia serves as an initial premise and emerges as a key outcome of the analysis.

By integrating large-scale data analysis with localized ethnographic insights, home anthropologists can leverage big data as a complementary tool to enhance qualitative research and achieve a more nuanced understanding of social and political dynamics across different contexts. This approach could reinforce or challenge interpretations derived from traditional ethnographic methods, helping validate or refine locally and regionally embedded narratives. To make big data meaningful, it is crucial to bridge the relationship between underlying structural dynamics and its cultural expressions. While long-term trends, such as voting mobilization, may be suitable for large-scale data analysis, they often encompass too vast a range of phenomena for anthropology to produce precise insights. Instead, the focus of home anthropologists shall be on singular events—moments of disruption that reveal the qualitative aspects of cultural change. These liminal moments offer personal reflections on processes of profound social and political instability, raising questions about the nature of change itself. How do people experience and interpret these transformations? What aspects of political sovereignty and communication do Slovaks sometimes find compelling and revolting at others? Returning to Marshall Sahlins (1987), we can better grasp the relationship between structure and event within a symbolic ecosystem, where existing interpretative frameworks shape how societies navigate and make sense of upheaval.

In the chapter by **Wilsch and Hlinčíková**, the central theme revolves around 'temporality,' 'temporariness,' and 'liminality' as perceived and lived by Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia. The authors highlight housing in the context of feminized

forced migration as a site of precariousness, uncertainty, entangled inequalities, and emerging challenges. Such a state of liminality is often caused by legal status, exclusion from public housing, and changing government support schemes. The authors argue that housing is not just a physical necessity but a key element in navigating social, economic, and political landscapes, particularly in conditions of forced displacement and liminality. It explores how the Slovak state categorizes vulnerability within strict bureaucratic frameworks, leading to precarious living conditions and reinforcing the temporary, liminal existence of refugees. Equally, the authors recognize that time is not neutral—it is deeply political, shaping migrants' agency, vulnerability, and resistance. Scholars such as Bridget Anderson (2010), Shahram Khosravi (2018), and Tuen Yi Chiu and Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho (2023) highlight how states actively produce 'temporariness' as a strategy to manage and control migrants, keeping them in a state of 'permanent temporariness' (Moutz et al., 2002). This issue resonates also in Wilsch and Hlinčíková's chapter, as Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia navigate the challenges of securing stable housing while being caught in a legal and social limbo. The authors' position demonstrates the reflexive turn in home-based migration studies.

Vladimír Bahna's research on Marian apparitions and pilgrimages offers a nuanced and compelling theoretical analysis, thoughtfully positioning them within broader academic debates. Expected to be further developed by the empirical component, his current research involves theoretical exploration that effectively synthesizes concepts such as 'communitas,' contestation, and modes of religiosity. Drawing on Agnieszka Halemba's (2015, 2017) and Tatiana Zachar Podolinská's (2019, 2020) extensive research in Slovakia and post-socialist Europe on this diverse, global, and dynamic cultural phenomenon of modern Catholicism, his text effectively bridges traditional anthropological theories with cognitive and evolutionary perspectives, providing an interdisciplinary depth that enhances the overall argument. The discussion on the role of Marian apparitions as social and political arenas, where religious, ecclesiastical, and lay discourses intersect, is particularly insightful. The author explores Marian's apparitions and religious pilgrimages, framing them as liminal experiences that create temporary communitas (solidarity) among believers while becoming sites of contestation (social and ideological conflict). The analysis shows how pilgrimage sites act as liminal spaces. On the one hand, they represent a ground for transformation, reinforcing the idea that liminality is crucial in religious devotion and social structures. On the other hand, they are spaces where competing religious and social discourses clash.

The studies in the first section examine various forms of transition—emotional and ideological shifts affecting national stability, housing instability as a temporary state, and sacred journeys as transformative experiences—each highlighting the fluid, uncertain, and socially constructed nature of liminality. This section explores unstable social conditions, transitional phases, and contested spaces, emphasizing how such moments shape both individual and collective identities.

The second section addresses methodological issues authors face in the field and engages with methodological innovation. Three chapters in Section Two (by (Soňa G. Lutherová and Ľubica Voľanská, Jaroslava Panáková, and Andrej Gogora) offer analysis of some approaches explored in the global debate and here adopted in reference to the local ethnographic field. The authors' perspectives are framed by their time spent in the field at home and the warm relations they forged with their partners. Each work challenges traditional research paradigms by advocating for more engaged, adaptive, and interdisciplinary approaches—whether through participatory methods, sensory ethnography, or digital enhancements. These concepts reveal how the anthropology of home goes well beyond scientific data, project funding, or planned scholarly publications.

Gyarfáš Lutherová and Voľanská's exploration of 'reflexivity' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Clifford & Marcus, 1986) and 'positionality' (Said, 1978) in ethnographic research offers a thought-provoking critique of the methodological and ethical complexities inherent in home anthropology. Knowledge (knowledges) is always plural—multiple, diverse, differentiated, and layered—and inherently 'situated' (Haraway, 1988), shaped by specific contexts, perspectives, and experiences of those producing it. In the context of 'at-home' research, this notion highlights the challenge of balancing researcher subjectivity with academic rigor. Unlike conventional ethnographic work, where the anthropologist arrives as an external observer, home anthropology complicates the familiar distance between self and other. This dual positioning brings both privilege—immediate access to nuanced meanings, and constraint—the risk of intellectual complacency and over-identification.

In addition, internalized academic hierarchies can shape what is studied and how it is interpreted and legitimized within national academic frameworks. This brings us back to the historical analysis of the discipline in Slovakia mentioned above (see Zachar Podolinská & Popelková, 2023; Zachar Podolinská, 2024; Balaš, 2025) and the risk of 'epistemic arrest'. In this context, 'positionality' also entails an awareness of how internal forces and power structures within national scholarly traditions shape legitimate modes of knowledge production and determine which perspectives remain marginalized. Thus, conducting anthropology at home' necessitates heightened sensitivity to institutional and epistemic dynamics, especially in smaller academic communities where professional and personal relationships are closely intertwined.

Rather than treating 'positionality' as a static concept, the authors frame it as inherently fluid, shaped by shifting power dynamics, personal relationships, and emotional investments. This perspective challenges the long-standing notion of the ethnographer as a neutral observer, pushing instead for a more transparent and self-reflective engagement with the field. Bridging insider knowledge with

broader anthropological debates becomes crucial as a methodological stance and an ethical commitment to keeping intellectual horizons open and fluid. The authors' approach is compelling precisely because it acknowledges the discomforts and dilemmas of ethnographic work in familiar social environments.

One of the most striking aspects of their argument is the advocacy for participatory and multimodal methodologies as a means of decentralizing knowledge production. By integrating visual media and collaborative approaches, they not only challenge traditional textual authority but also open up new possibilities for representing ethnographic insights in more inclusive and engaging ways. Their critique of the pressures of academic productivity is equally timely, as they call for a 'slow' anthropology that prioritizes depth, ethical engagement, and sustained reflection over the rapid production of research outputs. This argument resonates with broader critiques of the neoliberal academy, where scholars are often incentivized to prioritize quantity over thoughtful inquiry. While their call for more reflexive and deliberate anthropology is compelling, it would be interesting to see how such approaches can be institutionalized within existing academic structures in Slovakia that still largely privilege conventional research outputs. Nonetheless, their work contributes significantly to ongoing debates about methodological innovation and the ethical imperatives of contemporary ethnographic practice at home.

At the core of **Panáková**'s argument is the idea that sensory methodologies generate qualitatively different knowledge about environmental interactions. This can be particularly relevant in home anthropology, where researchers often study familiar landscapes and communities, making reflexivity and sensory immersion essential tools for understanding local ecological practices. In his book, Balaš (2025, p. 288) suggests the reconciliation of home ethnology and anthropology through the exploration of a 'vast repository of archival documents, systematic work with eyewitness accounts and a sound theoretical framework' (Balaš, 2025, p. 288). In her piece on sensory ethnography in environmental research, Panáková shows how the work of *Volkskunde* (*Národopis* in Slovak), exemplified in the repositories of archival documents and firsthand accounts, can be effectively utilized and even enhanced in current anthropological research. She claims that using archival documents, together with ongoing lengthy observations and narratives of the current farmers in Slovak Carpathians, may bring new light on the human-animal relationships.

Panáková proposes to use Ján Podolák's collections, which provide a rich material foundation for a novel 'multispecies ethnography' (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010) of the region. However, these materials must be confronted theoretically and methodologically with scholarly discourses on the impact of postwar modernization on crafts, e.g., Deema Kaneff's (2004) concept of the 're-contextualization' of peasant traditions into reified folklore by socialist institutions. Today, diachronic analysis of ethnographic documents is considered vital by scholars outside of anthropology, such as botanists and ecologists working on biodiversity enhancement projects, as well as by our partners, like young farmers who seek essential information for their self-education. Where possible, the collected data are placed within the framework of current anthropological theories on local knowledge, multispecies ethnography, and the anthropology of human-animal relationships (Kohn, 2013; Tsing, 2015), engaging with contemporary debates on human-animal relations, environmental stewardship, and cultural heritage in a changing world. This approach revitalizes old and fragmentary data, transforming them into a crucial inter-linguistic 'glue' that bridges gaps in our current understanding of meanings and functionalities—insights that would otherwise remain elusive.

The chapter by **Gogora** explores the application of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) for metadata enrichment in the digitization of Slovak ethnographic research collections, thus representing a significant methodological innovation in home anthropology. The approach is situated at the intersection of digital curation, ethnographic documentation, and artificial intelligence, reflecting a broader shift toward computational methods in the humanities. This study confronts a long-standing challenge in ethnographic research in Slovakia: the organization, accessibility, and usability of archival materials. Leveraging generative AI for metadata enrichment offers a potential solution to the labor-intensive process of cataloging and structuring large volumes of historical data, making ethnographic collections more searchable and research-friendly. It demonstrates that AI can generate metadata efficiently, often improving existing records by expanding keywords, refining document titles, and summarizing content in a structured manner. However, it struggles with contextual sensitivity—while AI-generated metadata may be detailed, it can lack the nuanced understanding of a human curator, leading to semantic inconsistencies, misprioritization of key information, and challenges in maintaining archival integrity. The study underscores the potential of AI as a tool for augmentation rather than automation, highlighting the necessity of human oversight to ensure accuracy, relevance, and ethical considerations in archival documentation.

In Slovakia, where ethnographic research traditionally relies on human expertise in cataloging and interpreting material culture, AI introduces a novel layer of semi-automated processing, streamlining documentation. This shift marks a move toward a more technologically integrated ethnographic practice while still acknowledging the importance of human judgment in classification and interpretation. This nuanced perspective is particularly relevant to Slovak home anthropology, where scholars are both researchers and cultural insiders tasked with preserving and making sense of their heritage.

A key contribution of this work is its bridging of digital methodologies with ethnographic knowledge production. Home anthropology in Slovakia has long been rooted in intensely localized, participatory research, often conducted within one's cultural and linguistic environment. By integrating AI-driven metadata enhancement, Gogora's approach makes these homegrown research collections

more accessible and systematically organized, reducing the risk of valuable materials being overlooked or misclassified. This innovation ensures the longevity of ethnographic records and opens new pathways for interdisciplinary collaboration, allowing ethnographic archives to interface more effectively with global digital humanities and data-driven social science initiatives.

The concept of 'anthropology at home' inherently requires greater reflexivity as the researcher is embedded in the field they study. Gyarfáš Lutherová and Voľanská exemplify this through their autoethnographic reflection on personal entanglements in research. Panáková extends this by incorporating sensory methodologies, which deepen the researcher's immersion in familiar spaces. Gogora, while dealing with AI-driven metadata enrichment, implicitly engages with positionality—how digital tools mediate knowledge production within home archives. The notion of home as a research site necessitates ethical scrutiny. The researcher's intimate involvement in the field creates challenges regarding consent, representation, and the co-production of knowledge. The three studies illustrate how anthropology at home is not just about proximity but about the methodological and epistemological shifts required when studying the familiar.

These methodologies offer pathways for expanding home anthropology into new terrains while maintaining its disciplinary coherence. By synthesizing these innovative approaches, we can redefine the discipline's epistemological identity while engaging with contemporary methodological developments. Amidst external pressures, such as geopolitical influences and internal challenges in asserting research priorities, the discipline must reaffirm the value of long-term ethnographic fieldwork, a cornerstone of anthropological inquiry. Therefore, the next step is to apply the proposed pathways within rigorous ethnographic research, which remains central to our current work and promises to shape future publications.

About the Series

The series *Challenges and Directions in Slovak Ethnology and Anthropology* is designed to address the evolving landscape of research in/of Slovakia (ethnographic cases of Slovakia and/or research conducted by scholars of Slovak origin). It is shaped by global and local sociopolitical changes, shifting ethical paradigms, and regional academic dynamics. The series aims to critically reflect on historical trajectories, current dilemmas, and future possibilities, offering a comprehensive exploration of the discipline's multifaceted challenges and opportunities.

In the next volumes, we aim to address the following topics:

a) *Ethical and professional challenges* faced by scholars in Slovakia, examining the complexities of working in post-socialist environments and balancing local responsibilities with global academic engagement. One aspect to explore is the emigration of scholars from Slovakia abroad who are now shaping their careers in diverse cultural and intellectual environments. Among these with whom we have collaborated are Martin Fotta from the Institute of Ethnology CAS, Marek Mikuš from the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, and Daniela Vávrová from the The Cairns Institute, James Cook University;

b) *The understudied places and missing fieldwork(s) in/of Slovakia* are other possible areas to tackle. Drawing on research by foreign scholars such as Agnieszka Halemba on Marian apparitions (2008), Tatyjana Szafonova on populism and right radicalism (MCSA 2023–2024), Petr Nuska on Roma musical accords (MCSA 2024–2025), David Scheffel on Roma (2005), Joseph Feinberg on authenticity and (post)folklore (2018), Davide Torsello on trust and property in rural communities (2004), Nicolette Makovicky on moral economy, pastoralism, and crafts (2009), we wish to open a debate to define our terrain(s) and field(s) in/of Slovakia, inviting other scholars to the region;

c) *Building resilience and innovation* will explore strategies to revitalize and sustain ethnology and anthropology at home in a rapidly changing world. This involves leveraging digital tools, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and adapting research practices to emerging challenges. Emphasis will be placed on ethical dilemmas and innovative methodologies that help address pressing social and cultural issues.

The series aims to provide a thoughtful and forward-looking exploration of ethnology and anthropology in Slovakia, celebrating the discipline's resilience and capacity for innovation. By weaving together critical historical analysis with examinations of contemporary challenges and future possibilities, it seeks to inspire fresh approaches and foster a strong scholarly community dedicated to advancing the field. This includes deepening our understanding of complex social and cultural realities in Slovakia and beyond.

For the discipline to thrive, it must critically examine and question the so-called 'islands of habitability' (Morris, 2016)—spaces where the potential for imagining radically different futures can take root. The connections these spaces provide present opportunities that call for thorough exploration. Chris Hann's (2024) call for nuanced anthropology underscores the importance of going beyond surface-level interpretations to engage with the complexities and subtleties of cultural and social entanglements. However, while Hann advocates for a more refined and empathetic approach to anthropology, his analyses of today's Ukraine and Russia can sometimes rely on broad generalizations and fail to fully engage with the voices and perspectives of the communities. This paradox highlights the challenge of practicing what one preaches: urging for nuance requires not only intellectual commitment but also a willingness to confront the limitations and biases in one's own methods and frameworks. It serves as a reminder that anthropology, as a discipline, must continuously strive for self-reflection and improvement to remain relevant and impactful. We need to build bridges—not rigid, unyielding structures, but fluid, dynamic connections. Like divers in the ocean moving alongside other species, we must navigate with sensitivity, observing, seeking to understand, and adapting to the currents of difference. These connections require both closeness and distance, a delicate dance of engagement and retreat. In this ebb and flow, we not only reach toward others but also deepen our understanding of ourselves. And just as every diver must resurface for air, there comes a moment when we, too, must pause—breathe—before diving back in, renewed and ready to continue the journey.

Acknowledgments

This paper was produced with public funding support from VEGA 2/0051/22 *Technological and Sociocultural Contexts of Material Culture Innovations: An Ethnological Perspective* (2022–2025) and VEGA 2/0139/24 *The Meadow that Makes Sense. Sensory-anthropological Perspective on Biodiversity* (2024–2027).

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