

THE 13TH CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY
OF ETHNOLOGY AND FOLKLORE (SOCIÉTÉ INTERNATIONALE
D'ETHNOLOGIE ET DE FOLKLORE – SIEF), *WAYS OF DWELLING:
CRISIS – CRAFT – CREATIVITY*, GÖTTINGEN, GERMANY, 26–30 MARCH, 2017

The 13th congress of the International Society of Ethnology and Folklore (for which we use in this article the abbreviation SIEF, coming from its French denomination: Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore) recently took place in Germany, hosted by the Department of Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology of the University of Göttingen. The location of the congress this year had a special connection with the fields of ethnology and folklore, as nearly two centuries ago the University of Göttingen hosted the famous German scholars Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (1829–1837). In recognition of the accelerating changes and confrontations occurring worldwide, the organizers challenged the participants to address the general topic of *dwelling* (understood as a verb, as well as a noun), and to capture the traits of **home** in what regards its making, the material and the immaterial, the knowledge and practices needed to craft and experience space and place, turning it into a place fit for living, however temporarily.

SIEF is an international organization which aims to facilitate and stimulate cooperation among scholars working in European ethnology, folklore studies, cultural anthropology, and other related fields within the social sciences. In existence under its current name since 1964, SIEF (<https://www.siefhome.org/index.shtml>) originated from the former Commission of Arts and Folk Traditions (La commission des Arts et Traditions Populaires, created in Prague, in 1928, at the Folk Art Congress (Congrès des Arts Populaires), organized under the auspices of the League of Nations. Today, SIEF gathers 830 members from all corners of the world. Romania, although underrepresented this year, has had a long tradition within the organization, the highpoint of which is, without a doubt, the 1971–1982 span of time, when the presidency was held by the Romanian ethnologist Mihai Pop (1907–2000). With interdisciplinary training, a good understanding of traditional communities in Central and Eastern Europe, and, in addition to that, fluency in several different languages, Mihai Pop was an excellent example of what SIEF stands for to this day.

Every two years SIEF organizes a congress on a theme decided in agreement with the host institution. Selections of the papers presented with these occasions have been published in congress proceedings or related publications. In addition, SIEF publishes a biannual electronic newsletter (<http://www.siefhome.org/publications/newsletter.shtml>) and has two official peer-reviewed scholarly journals: *Ethnologia Europea. Journal of European Ethnology* (printed, two issues per year) and *Cultural Analysis. An Interdisciplinary Forum on Folklore and Popular Culture* (online – two issues per year).

SIEF maintains its activity through its various working groups (WG), which generally organize their own conferences in the years between the SIEF congresses. There are currently fourteen WGs within SIEF: Archives; Body, Affects, Senses, and Emotions; Cultural Heritage and Property; digital Ethnology and Folklore; Ethnology of Religion; Food Research; Francophone WG; Historical Approaches in Cultural Analysis; Migration and Mobility; Museums and Material Culture; Place Wisdom; The Ritual Year; Space-lore and Place-lore; and Young Scholars' WG. Besides

„*Revista română de sociologie*”, serie nouă, anul XXVIII, nr. 3–4, p. 319–324, București, 2017



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organizing their own periodical conferences, each WG participates with one or several panels in the SIEF congresses. The papers presented on these occasions are usually published.

The 2017 SIEF congress opened on Sunday evening, the 26th of March. Regina Bendix (Georg-August-Universität), the congress convenor and former SIEF President (2001–2008), was the first one to address the audience, welcoming members to the event. She was followed by Ulrike Beisiegel, the President of Georg-August-Universität and Johannes Moser, the President of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde.

The first keynote speaker was Dirk Jan Visser, a Dutch “visual storyteller”, as he calls himself, who presented the audience with an interactive, multimedia platform called *Refugee Republic* (2014). Showcasing daily life in a refugee camp in Northern Iraq, the platform (<http://refugeerepublic.submarinechannel.com/>) illustrated the emergence of a city in a dramatic context, the fact that dwelling is also possible in temporary settings, thus featuring the ingenuity of people and the complicated relations and interconnections resulted from the situation.

The short vignettes presented to the public were the starting point of discussions led by Thomas Hylland Eriksen (University of Oslo, former President of EASA), and Kay Turner (New York University, President American Folklore Society) and Hatice Pinar Senoguz (Fellow at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology / European Ethnology, Göttingen). These discussions were moderated by Valdimar Hafstein (University of Iceland, President of SIEF). The evening continued with a welcome reception in the foyer of the main campus building, with snacks and live music.

The following three days were busy, from early in the morning until late in the evening. The congress program was divided between the 83 different panels (sectioned into one to three sessions and regrouped into 16 thematic streams), lectures (keynotes, a Young Scholar Prize lecture), meetings (working groups’ meetings, the journal editors’ meeting, SIEF General Assembly, the university department representatives’ meeting), poster sessions, exhibitions related to the congress theme and other activities planned by the organizers (film screenings, guided walking tours, sight-jogging tour and even a rather unique, self-guided tour). The events took place in several locations within the university campus, as well as outside, in the old city of Göttingen. The busy program was made available by the Congress administrator, the NomadIT team, which came up with ingenious solutions to make the numerous activities accessible to most of participants.

As a participant in the congress, I joined the activities involving three WGs: The Ritual Year WG, for which I have been the Secretary, since 2015, The Ethnology of Religion WG and the Francophone WG. These activities are presented in the following paragraphs.

The Ritual Year WG (<https://www.siefhome.org/wg/ry/index.shtml>) is one of the oldest and largest SIEF WGs. It was initiated in 2004 by Emily Lyle (University of Edinburgh), its long-time Chair and more recent Honorary Chair (since 2014). The Board of the WG currently consists of Chair Irina Sedakova (Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Slavic Studies), Co-Chair Laurent Sébastien Fournier (Université Aix-Marseille), and Secretary Irina Stahl (Romanian Academy, Institute of Sociology).

During this year’s SIEF congress, The Ritual Year WG organized the panel *Static vs. dynamic, nature vs. culture in the dwelling – connected practices of the ritual year* (Sui06). The panel focused on the symbolism of space and dwelling, in the context of the ritual year, with special interest on static and dynamic, nature and culture in Europe and beyond. Allocated with the maximum of three sessions on Tuesday, 28 March, it filled the entire day. The Convenors of the panel were Nina Vlaskina (Russian Academy of Sciences, Southern Scientific Centre, Institute of Social and Economic Research and Humanities) and Irina Sedakova; the panel Chair was Arūnas Vaicekauskas (Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas), while L.S. Fournier served as the Discussant.



The first paper in the panel was presented by Vito Carrasi (Independent scholar) who spoke about the various religious processions taking place during the ritual year in the Apulia region of Italy, interpreted through the theoretical framework of M. Bakhtin (“liminal chronotope”) and V. Turner (“social drama”).

I presented the second paper entitled *Reclamation of Urban Public Space and Orthodox Symbolism within the Ritual Year. The Case of Post-Communist Bucharest*. The paper focused on the symbolic moment in 2011 when the relics of Apostle Andrew, protector of Romania, were carried out in a procession around the site of the new Cathedral of the Salvation of the Nation. Situated only a few hundred meters from the House of the People, the Cathedral represents the Orthodox Church’s reclamation of the public sphere. Advancing down the boulevard formerly known as The Victory of Socialism, the procession proclaimed the triumph of Christianity over atheistic rule. The third paper was presented by Žilvytis Šaknys (Institute of Lithuanian History), and it referred to the commemoration of the dead in Vilnius, at the cemetery and at home, in a comparative perspective in space and time.

Tatiana Minniyakhmetova (independent scholar) focused on the spatial structure of the house and its relation with the rituals throughout the year, with particular examples taken from the Urdmurt society.

In her paper, Anamaria Iuga (Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Bucharest) explored the dynamics of the wedding ritual in the Maramureș region of Romania. The author underlined the changes that occurred in the wedding rituals once the space allocated to them (the “good room” at an earlier time and today the cultural houses) underwent significant changes. Romania was once more represented after a break, in the second part of the panel, by Attila Mateffy (Hacettepe University / University of Bonn) who spoke about the transformation of the particular winter ritual (known as “The Goat”) in a Moldavian Csango village, under the impact of massive Western European work migration.

Nina Vlaskina presented the audience a typology of inhabited and non-inhabited places relevant for the winter ritual processions of the two main social groups predominant in Southern Russia: Cossack (predominantly warriors) and peasant (predominantly farmers and artisans) and the transformation the rituals experienced over time.

Irina Sedakova brought a comparative approach of the various rituals in relation with the Orthodox Christian celebration of the Exaltation of the Life-Giving Cross (14/27 September) in Russia and Bulgaria, also giving historical, cultural and natural reasons for the differences.

An untraditional topic was dealt with by Flore Muguet (École Pratique des Hautes Études / University of Fribourg), who spoke about the distinct approach to dwelling encountered at the annual Burning Man gathering in the Nevada desert (USA). The speaker underlined the different views of the two main groups present at the event: the people working for the Department of Public Works, institution meant to build the city infrastructure and to clean the land once the event was over, and the “burners”, participants who come to live in the temporary city for a week.

Rasa Paukstyte-Sakniene (Lithuanian Institute of History) analysed in her paper the calendar festivals celebrated in public and private areas in Soviet Lithuania, concluding that while public Soviet festivals did not become popular, family rituals, as Christmas and Easter, were cherished, thus surviving Communism.

In the last afternoon section, Ingrid Slavec Gradišnic (Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts) dealt with the symbolic appropriation that transformed the Prešeren Square in Ljubljana from a secular space to a sacred one.

The last speaker of the panel, Skaidre Urboniene (Lithuanian Culture Research Institute) talked about the symbols which organized the ritual of the Lithuanian Independence Day performance space outside and inside the dwelling, over time, from the first Independence anniversary held in 1919, when the ritual was performed in the outdoor space, to the Soviet era, when the festival was forced to move to a rather private space as all Lithuanian holidays were banned under Soviet occupation. Today once more the ritual and symbols are concentrated outside of the dwelling.

The Ritual Year WG’s meeting took place on Wednesday, 29 March. One of the first points on the agenda was the discussion about WG’s recent publications. Since the last SIEF congress, held in 2015, the papers from two Ritual Year panels were published simultaneously in two separate volumes: 1. *Electronic Journal of Folklore*, volume 66, dedicated to Folk costumes, Guest Editors Irina Sedakova and Nina Vlaskina (<https://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol66/>), and 2. *Revista română de sociologie* 1–2 issues/2016, dedicated to the Transformation of Traditional Rituals, Guest Editor Irina Stahl (<http://www.revistadesociologie.ro/content/nr-1-2-2016>). The last publication discussed reunites the papers presented at the Ritual Year conference in Kazan (Russia), in 2015. Edited by Guzel Solyarova, Irina Sedakova and Nina Vlaskina, the 11th volume in “The Ritual Year” book series is dedicated to *Traditions and Transformation* (T8: Kazan, Moscow, 2016, ISSN 2228-1347, ISBN 978-5-519-50417-1).



Second on the agenda was the election of Board members. The current Chair, Irina Sedakova and the current Secretary, Irina Stahl, were re-elected for an additional two years mandate. The Co-Chair position, previously held by Terry Gunnell (University of Iceland), who stepped down, was taken by L.S. Fournier.

Next on the agenda there was the announcement regarding the 2018 Ritual Year Conference. A Power Point presentation introduced the members to the conference which will take place 6–9 November 2018, in Bucharest, hosted by the Romanian Academy, through the Institute of Sociology and the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore “Constantin Brăiloiu”, and coordinated by I. Stahl. The Museum of the Romanian Peasant has also expressed its interest in being involved in the organization of the event. The announced title of the conference is *City Rituals*. This theme addresses rituals in the urban environment. At the conclusion of the meeting, the WG Secretary, I. Stahl, informed the membership about various other matters regarding the WG, such as: the WG’s new webpage, and the WG’s newsletter *Ritual Year Newsletter* (<http://www.siefhome.org/wg/ry/newsletter.shtml>) which is edited by the Secretary.

The Ethnology of Religion WG organized two panels at this year’s SIEF congress. The first one entitled *Building personal religiosity as ways of dwelling religion. From spiritual seekers to faithful believers* (Reli01), took place on Monday, 27 March. Convened by István Povedák (Hungarian Academy of Sciences / University of Szeged), it was allocated two sessions slots and lasted until lunchtime. The presenters were: László Koppány Csáji (University of Pécs), Yael Dansac (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales), I. Povedák, Claire Wanless (Open University), Anders Gustavsson (University of Oslo), Athanasios Barmplexis (University of Aberdeen), and Maria Santa Montez (University Lusófona).

After summarizing the terminology used by different authors to identify various approaches people have to religion, I. Povedák presented an interesting typology of believers based on the Hungarian reality he has studied for a long-time. A. Gustavsson, one of the founding members of the WG, compared traditional beliefs in the afterlife with new beliefs expressed on the Internet, in Norway and Sweden; while M.S. Montez, also a founding member of the WG, spoke about the way in which the Mary apparitions in Fatima continue to be expressed in the arts, especially by local artisans.

The second panel organized by the Ethnology of Religion WG took place on Wednesday, 29 March. Entitled *Dwelling and creating within and across religious traditions* (Reli02), it was convened by Clara Saraiva (Centro em Rede de Investigação em Antropologia) and Anna Niedźwiedz (Jagiellonian University).

The Ethnology of Religion WG had its meeting on the day between the two panels during the lunch break on Tuesday, 28 March. The discussions involved the situation of the WG’s publication, the possible location of the future WG conference as well as the election of the Board. It was decided that the next conference will take place in Sienna (Italy). The newly elected Board included: I. Povedák as Chair, A. Niedźwiedz as Co-Chair, Thorsten Wettich (University of Göttingen) as Secretary, and C. Saraiva and Peter Jan Margry (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, Meertens Institute) as members.

Recently created (September 2016), the French speaking WG proposes to reinforce another of the three official communication languages of SIEF, besides English and German, by encouraging French-speaking scholars to join SIEF, discussing the specific inputs of French-language research in the fields of ethnology and folklore and by encouraging translations and comparisons between languages. The WG functions in connection with the Eurethno network (Council of Europe). The Chair of the WG is L.S. Fournier, while Alfonsina Bellio (Institut d’Études Avancées, Nantes) is the Secretary, and Inga Kuźma (University of Lodz) is a board member.

The Francophone WG initiated two French speaking panels at the congress: *Les rituels de l’habiter hier et aujourd’hui, entre rapport aux lieux et patrimoine* (Env04), convenor: Alfonsina Bellio (Institut d’Études Avancées, Nantes), and *La ville en fête: appropriation et intégration de la jeunesse dans les pratiques festives* (Urba02), convenors: Mathilde Lamothe (Université de Pau) et Chloé Rosati-Marzetti (Université Côte d’Azur), discussant: A. Bellio. Both panels took place on Monday, 27 March, the same as the WG’s first meeting which took place during the lunch break. During the meeting, the reasons of creation of this WG were restated. There also were questions of

future cooperation and projects. Considering the close cooperation between the different SIEF WGs, I, as coordinator of the 2018 Ritual Year conference in Bucharest, proposed that the Francophone group should have an active role by including French language presentations in addition to the primary English language presentations.



Mid-way through the congress, on Tuesday 28 March, the SIEF General Assembly held its meeting in the presence of several hundreds of members. Among other issues, the discussions regarded the organization's budget, the activity of the fourteen WGs and the future congresses (2019

Haftein stepped down, handing over his duties to Nevena Škrbić Alempijević (Croatia).

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The SIEF congress ended on Wednesday, the 29 March, with a closing event held at the Assembly Hall on Wilhelmsplatz, in the old town of Göttingen, followed by the conference banquet and the party back at the University campus.

The programme of the 13th SIEF congress can be accessed online at <https://www.siefhome.org/congresses/sief2017/index.shtml>. The printed version of the programme has 215 pages.

Irina Stahl