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UDC: 39:303.442.23

DOI:10.2298/GEI1002088M

Accepted for publication: 29.09.2010.

Václav Michalička

Department of European Ethnology, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University,
Brno, Czech Republic
282253@mail.muni.cz

Field Research as Village Community's Cultural Awareness Identification Tool

The conference paper will deal with possibilities of specific assets and outcomes of field research in a village as an enclosed housing, social and cultural space. It will focus on the role of field research as a tool of identification of cultural awareness of a village. The relationship between research, its outcomes and subsequent reaction of dwellers will be defined as well as question of impact of such research on local identity. The case study will show particular village with developed traditional craft production (already extinct). Apart from realizing (or re-building) local identity, new possibilities of reconstruction of the extinct technology or even particular aspects of historic environment open up here.

Key words: Field Research, village, local identity, Cultural Awareness

The purpose of this report is to outline several options of specific benefits and consequences of the field research in residential, social and cultural space of a village.

An intensive ethnological research, the purpose of which is to obtain knowledge and information data directly within a village community, can become a significant input for the cultural dimension of the local citizens. The research and eventual outputs are obviously responded to by the members of the investigated community, whereas such responses can represent a significant secondary consequence, directly affecting the given society with its impact and action.

The subject of investigation thus comprises the village inhabitants – particular specific locations and places determinate for life. The ethnological research subjects this place and people to new observations, trying to obtain as many pieces of information about the past and present facts as possible. The village, a village-type settlement with an integrated group of people with their past and present peculiar manifestations, contains a huge number of features, which constitute the subject of interest of the ethnological research. An unsubstitutable

method for data collection is the field research carried out directly in the given location.

The task of the ethnological field research of a village community as a scientific gnoseological source of information is to understand certain specific facts on the principle of direct contact with people, who witness these facts, and are the carriers of the required data related to the investigated phenomenon. Substance of such field research type is obtaining of as many details as possible from the community members based on their knowledge, understanding and personal experience. The gathered data is, of course, evaluated, set in wider context and interpretations. Besides the primary mission, the long-term field research can, however, have even a secondary social-cultural impact on the entire village as a consequence of direct contact of the researcher with the citizens.

For the field research to obtain material with as high informative value as possible, it is required to obtain as many documents, information and data about the culture and cultural process in the investigated location and community as possible. The research commencement by the researcher (being interested in certain cultural phenomenon adherent to the municipality) is often perceived by the local citizens as an arrival at the last moment, i.e. at the time when they consider capturing of a certain specific phenomenon very difficult with respect to decease of the contemporaries. The factor of gradual becoming aware of the time and death in relation to the social and cultural transformation of the village is present for the entire period of the research.

The entire field research of a village community is actually a process of cognition on the part of the researcher, as well as on the part of the citizens – respondents. The tool of this cognition process comprises interviews with people. The interviews, which are the targeted waking up of memories and reviving of memory. The work with memory thus leads to awaking of both, past and present facts.

If the researcher manages to gain confidence of the respondents and can listen, he will not only get the answers to questions related to the investigated phenomenon, but he will also receive telling of stories the people have lived. If the informants talk about themselves, they mainly talk about the place where they were born or spent their childhood. They talk about the place where they worked or work, live and bring up their children. The listener receives the required information in a wider context and thanks to telling, the teller activates his memories of past facts, which can lead to certain self-reflection and process of self-cognition.¹ Especially the older people often desire to talk about their lives and need the retrospective view of the life they have lived or the facts they have experienced.

Such interviews with people and targeted wakening of their memories can result in them realizing the exclusivity of their own living environment again

¹ Srov. Hall, S.: *Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation*. Framework 36, 1989, s. 76.

and in a new quality way. The memory revival of individuals can also result in subsequent revival of the entire community's memory. Such memory leads to cognition and subsequent self-cognition. So not only cognition of one's own world, but also of the world of people's community, which can be the investigated village community.

In the process of the field research, a huge number of questions are asked, which the respondent answers not only to the researcher, but also to himself. These answers to questions directed to life experience and personal experience lead to formation of certain identity – identification with the past and present facts, which the research involves. The process of realizing one's own past is a necessary condition for understanding the local identity formation. The local identity is thus formed by human's self-awareness with respect to a certain place. The asked questions and subsequent answers directly help identify and define the village identity. This process of identification with a specific location in tradition and culture seems to be necessary just in the present period of globalization and integration of various social life phenomena.²

Every village community is related to a specific historical phenomenon that goes beyond the time of its formation and direct action, and persists from the past till the present times. As the time passes and owing to social transformations and subjective approaches, the given historical phenomenon gains a form of a certain myth besides the appearance of a historical fact. Such myth based on a specific non-impugnable fact becomes an edifying factor in the community awareness, which puts the entire village in a better light, giving it certain exclusivity. This phenomenon gradually transforming into a myth affecting the cultural image of the village can be, for instance, a historical event, famous person, peculiar occupation of the citizens, social, economic or cultural particularities, and others. The verbally passed information naturally gets modified in the village community based on the community needs. The ethnological research can, however, secondarily change the citizens' vies of the specific phenomenon and give it new culture-forming qualities.

The above-mentioned proves that the field ethnological research can be a significant tool for identification of the village cultural awareness. However, the relations between the research, outputs and feedback of the citizens are important. Based on the field research and arouse interest in the past in the self-cognition process, the community may start to desire a retroactive reconstruction of the extinct world as a secondary consequence, which is, within the local community, certainly fully substantiated. This often results in exhibitions or village museums. After the revival of the memory and stories, the people start to desire to touch the past via authentic witnesses of the past – material artifacts associated with their memories and stories.

² Vašečková, R.: *Tradiční a národní kultura v procesu globalizace*. In: *Péče o tradiční lidovou kulturu v České republice*, Ústav lidové kultury ve Strážnici 2002, page 31.

A specific example of the secondary effect of the ethnological research within the local identity is the research in the community of Metylovice located at the foot of the West Carpathian Mountains in the territory of the present Czech Republic, conducted since 2004.³ The task of the research is to document the social and cultural transformation of the village during the 20th century, with an emphasis on the specific handicraft in the community. The tanning craft was dominant in Metylovice from the 17th century till the middle of the 20th century and it was affecting the appearance of the entire village in many implications. And it was this peculiar tanning production that was distinguishing the Metylovice citizens in a significant way from the neighboring villages. After the production extinction in the 1950's, this phenomenon gradually fell into oblivion and became very hard to define for the present young generations.

The field research in Metylovice evoked revival of memories of a lot of living contemporaries and interest of the younger generations, which resulted in reflection of own past, as well as identification with the past and some cultural specifics of the community. However, it was also followed by certain panic that something substantial is disappearing with demise of the old generation. A fear appeared, not realized till that time, that the significant past of the community would be definitely forgotten. So several activities followed, which were aimed to strengthen the common awareness of the past of the people's families and community. This mainly included an active involvement in the conducted research, organization of gatherings with the contemporaries and the researcher conducting the research, organization of several exhibitions related to the village history, and mainly establishment of the local museum documenting the tanning production in the context of everyday life. This is the community museum, where the people recognize the past of their families and the stories they have lived in the authentic objects.⁴

This museum and other similar activities were definitely not the objective and substance of the ethnological field research, but they arose as a feedback and response thereto. So it is not a process of self-realization of the researcher but of the citizens of the investigated village leading to strengthening of the local cultural awareness. The museum establishment in cooperation with the researcher conducting the research became one of the most important factors of the local identity. Thanks to this museum, the local and collective memory is being strengthened. This animation of cultural elements associated with the people living in the village community means reviving and wakening of what seemed to be lost beyond recovery and covered by the modern environment and lifestyle.

The field research and interviews with the village community citizens resulted in memory revival and gradual intensification of the cultural awareness and local identity in Metylovice. The specific extinct phenomenon of the tan-

³ Research conducted in the community of Metylovice by Václav Michalička in 2004-2009

⁴ The completed field research was also connected with searching and documenting of authentic objects – related to the investigated phenomena.

ning production with production of whips produced by currently not used technology ensuring their prestige, which used to be a symbol in the culture-forming process of collective memory, gained new qualities. In relation to the memories, told stories, authentic witnesses, the contemporaries newly started to desire to present, show and practically explain the handcraft technology of the whip production, which has not been used for a half of the century. Here we have a space for reconstruction of the specific technology, when the people, who are the information carriers, do not confine themselves only to a verbal data transfer, but also do the practical demonstration or rather put some of the local cultural specifics in real life via reconstruction. This reconstruction conducted in Metylovice within the ethnological field research arose an interest of individuals from the young generation in the old technology adherent solely to their village. This effort to master the technology and preserve it in the village is another secondary consequence of the intensive and long-term field research. This secondary effect also leads to strengthening of the cultural identity of the entire village community.

The above-mentioned proves that the long-term and intensive ethnological field research of the village can result in a number of secondary benefits associated with the local identity and supporting the cultural awareness of the entire village community thanks to the village orientation to memory, referring to the past, telling of stories based on personal experience and asking and answering questions.

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Вацлав Михаличка

Улога теренског истраживања у идентификацији културне стварности у руралним заједницама

Кључне речи: истраживање, село, локални идентитет, културна стварност

Ово саопштење са конференције ће разматрати нарочите особине и могуће последице рада на терену у селима, као местима која су релативно просторно, културно и друштвено омеђена. Фокус ће бити на улози теренског истраживања у идентификацији културне стварности у руралној заједници. Разматраће се однос истраживања, сакупљених података и реакције локалног становништва, као и питање утицаја истраживања на локални идентитет. Рад ће представити једно локално село са развијеним занатима, и указаће како је само истраживање утицало на разумевање, поновно стварање идентитета и заната.