

Bulgarian Communities Abroad:

Between Inherited and Invented Identities

Main Objective

To study the new Bulgarian communities abroad with an emphasis on the changing identities of the individual and the group. Insofar as the specifics of each place that attracts migrants have an impact on the thinking about oneself and others, on-site research is a priority. The goal is to observe the Bulgarian communities in their daily life in order to highlight the significant elements for them, which dominate the changing and new identities. More broadly, the goal of the project is socially significant. Only the knowledge about the specifics of the Bulgarian communities abroad can there be a real prerequisite for quality policies toward them.

Methods

Field ethnographic research as a classical qualitative method for Ethnology and Cultural anthropology is a leading method in the study of communities in the process of their change. It allows insight beyond the visible and often schematic aspects of the topic under study. Identities are dynamized under the influence of various factors.

Team Leader & Members

Assoc. Prof. Violeta Kotseva, PhD
Prof. Mira Markova, PhD, Assoc. Prof. Milena Petkova, PhD, Assoc. Prof. Mirena Legurska, Assist. Prof. Kremena Iordanova, PhD, Assist. Prof. Petya Grueva, PhD, Kristina Bobeva, PhD

Visited destinations

Kingdom of the Netherlands (The Hague and Amsterdam), Kingdom of Norway (Oslo), Greece (Meliki village), Republic of Turkey (Istanbul), Great Britain (London)

Main Results

The new Bulgarian communities abroad represent dynamic groups with changing identities. The field studies carried out show that identity not only goes beyond the definition of situational identity but is a skillful combination of different levels of self-awareness. Identity selectively inscribes elements that maintain the connection with the homeland. They are usually associated with the sensory and emotional side of everyday life. Sensory anthropology provides an important key to understanding how elements such as taste, hearing, smells make Bulgarians abroad realize themselves as an integral part of the larger community of Bulgarians. This is done through the joint sharing of Bulgarian food (in Bulgarian restaurants or cafes), listening to Bulgarian music, joining Bulgarian folk-dance groups, etc. The other level is the relationship with the host country, which migrants get to know through institutions, jobs, mixed marriages, etc. The difference between Bulgarians in Norway, Bulgarians in Great Britain, Bulgarians in the Netherlands is mainly in the specifics of the host country. Another level of identity is the awareness that they represent other Bulgarians. Bulgarian communities abroad share the identity of the migrant, which unites them on the ground, distinguishes them from other Bulgarians and gives them a sense of supranationality.

Field studies show that Bulgarian communities abroad are not monolithic. Subgroups formed based on the region of origin (often entire villages settle in the new place, reproducing family and neighborly relations), often seeking realization within their traditional livelihoods (construction, gardening, etc.), or based on religious and ethnic origin with Roma, Turks (Muslims) from other countries within the migrant communities. The latter that are the reason for the creation of secondary communities based on ethnic origin with Roma, Turks (Muslims) from other countries. The closer cultural and historical similarity makes the representatives of the peoples of the Balkan Peninsula feel closer than nationalities of other regions. Unlike belonging to Islam, belonging to Eastern Orthodoxy is usually not a strong enough motive for creating supranational communities based on religion between Bulgarians and Greeks, Russians, Ukrainians, etc. The communities themselves are also differentiated according to the period of arrival (old and new), according to the level of education (intellectuals and workers), according to the degree of integration into the host society (well-organized or rather marginal), according to ethnicity (Bulgarians, Roma, Turks).