

SUMMARY

Anthropologist in Museum – a rescuer, an educator, a researcher?

Panel discussion at the 1st Congress of Polish Anthropology organized by Polish Anthropological Institute (23–25 October 2013)

There were two general aims of the panel: one hand it was to present the dilemmas ethnologists face during their work in museums, and on the other, to attract also the ethnologists involved in academic research and teaching. Therefore, the title was phrased in form of a question: *Anthropologist in Museum – a rescuer, an educator, a researcher?*

The proposal had contained several questions we wanted to use as a frame for reflection:

The panel is dedicated to discuss questions of social involvement of anthropologists-museum workers and the always present relation between their museum activities and the society: the visitors, the officials, the authorities. Anthropologists in museums play different roles: they preserve cultural heritage and memory, they organize cultural activities, they carry out research. Cultural violence towards the researched subjects sometimes permeates the work of ethnologists-museum workers, but it is seldom reflected upon, though. Are we supposed to heritagize and pass on only those elements of culture we value in a positive way (e.g. folk costumes, folk craft), or those that we perceive as harmful (drunkenness, xenophobia) too? Is our looking after folk artists supposed to consist of teaching them traditional, 19c esthetic standards as invulnerable to cultural change? What should the research and documenting of contemporary popular culture (as the football fan subculture) carried out by museums do: change it, preserve, or evoke critical reflection? It would be worthwhile to consider whether ethnologists are good to perform all these roles; especially as they may appear contradictory.

We hoped for reaction of both museum and university anthropologists. Ten papers were submitted, out of which we have chosen five that met the thematic criteria outlined in the proposal.

A numerous and institutionally differentiated audience present during the panel and actively involved in discussion confirmed our feeling that debates on ethnographic museums are needed. On one hand, one of the foci was the question of museum representation, on the other, the problems of collecting and documenting strategies. The reflection on cultural creativity of various types of museum facing changing challenges of our times seemed also of great relevance.