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20 YEARS OF THE INSTITUTE OF ETHNOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY (2005–2025): TEACHING, RESEARCH, AND PUBLISHING ACTIVITIES

Abstract: This text offers a critical retrospective and strategic reflection on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology as an independent academic unit at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. It traces the historical conditions for the (non-)development of ethnological studies in Macedonia—from their early establishment and discontinuation in the 1950s, through museum practice, to institutional consolidation in 2005. It examines the challenges facing the discipline, including the lack of a stable research policy and staffing support, and points to the importance of reviving the system of engaging young researchers. Through the lens of the jubilee conference “Macedonia in Ethnological and Anthropological Science – From Within and Beyond”, it presents the ongoing transformation of the field: from classical topics towards contemporary, problem-oriented research with public relevance. The text affirms the role of the Institute as a key actor of academic and social reflection in both national and regional contexts.

Keywords: Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, ethnological studies in Macedonia, academic jubilee, cultural heritage, research policy, anthropology, interdisciplinarity,

young researchers, research institutionalization, ethnography.

The Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, is this year marking significant jubilees which represent not only a milestone in the historical development of the institution, but also an opportunity to reaffirm its scholarly, educational, and socially relevant role. Marking these jubilees is not merely a retrospective glance at the past; it is also a chance for critical reflection and strategic planning for the future of ethnology and anthropology in Macedonia.

We are marking twenty years since the establishment of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology as an independent unit of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics within Ss. Cyril and Methodius University – a notable jubilee that offers space for academic reflection, historical assessment, and future orientation of the discipline in the Macedonian context. This jubilee is understood as an incentive for scholarly mobilization, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the expansion of dialogue between academia and the wider public.

Over the past two decades, the Institute has affirmed itself as the central institution for the development of ethnology and anthropology in Macedonia. Its constitution as an autonomous organizational unit in 2005 signalled not only institutional autonomy, but also the substantial consolidation of its research, teaching, and applied activities. The Institute has created and continuously upgraded its study programme in ethnology and anthropology and, more recently, the study programme in protection and management of cultural heritage, in line with contemporary European and global academic trends. It has educated generations of students, Master's candidates and doctoral students and has contributed to the development of research in areas such as cultural heritage, identity politics, migration, religion, everyday life, and embodiment.

Beginnings, Development, Decline, and Renewal of Ethnology Studies

In the socialist period, especially after the Second World War, ethnology in Yugoslavia developed mainly within museum institutions, while disciplines such as history, archaeology, and philology dominated the academic sphere. In Macedonia, the priority was the establishment of state-national institutions, rather than opening questions about identity or cultural heterogeneity. As a discipline that often raises uncomfortable questions—about ethnic boundaries, nationalism, power, cultural representations, and stereotyping—ethnology was seen as potentially “subversive” or, at best, as a second-rate discipline.

Only a few years after the opening of the programme in ethnography and ethnology in 1946 at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, and after a few cohorts of ethnology students, the study group was closed in the 1952/53 academic year.

Until the 1990s, ethnology in Macedonia existed primarily as part of museum practice, mostly through the work of the first post-war generations of ethnologists. The absence of a dedicated university programme in ethnology delayed the development of

a more robust research and methodological tradition. Most ethnologists were oriented towards factual description of “folk culture” rather than critical analysis of social processes and contemporary lived realities.

The formation and development of academic disciplines requires a critical mass of professionals, which in the Macedonian case was a limiting factor. For many years, the few individuals who worked in ethnology were trained in Belgrade, Ljubljana, or Zagreb. Only after independence and the opening of the Macedonian academic system to new methodologies and discourses were conditions created for the emancipation of this field.

The establishment of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology as an independent academic unit in 2005 can be understood as an institutional confirmation that Macedonian society had matured enough to critically reassess its cultural narratives, social hierarchies, and historiographical frameworks. This step marked the beginning of a deeper embedding of anthropological knowledge in the educational and research system.

In this sense, although the “delay” is evident, the reasons are complex and largely connected to the historical, political, and institutional dynamics of the region. In the past 20 years, we can indeed see a continuous growth and consolidation of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, both in terms of research production and field activity, and in the interest among students and the public in the issues with which our discipline engages. Nevertheless, when it comes to staffing, satisfaction must be carefully nuanced. Although there is a stable core of academic staff, their number is not proportional to the tasks and responsibilities assumed by the Institute—both in teaching and in research and applied work.

Contemporary anthropological and ethnological questions are increasingly complex and demand engagement in diverse thematic areas—cultural heritage, gender studies, migrations, urban transformations, religion, digital cultures—which presupposes teamwork, diverse research profiles, and opportunities for generational and methodological exchange. It is therefore crucial to restore the system of engaging teaching assistants, which in the past enabled continuity, timely training of new staff, and knowledge transfer within institutional frameworks.

Engaging young researchers as assistants means their early involvement in teaching, field research, and academic and project-based work. They are not merely technical support; they are the future carriers of teaching and research activities. Without a structured possibility for their academic advancement—through systemically envisioned positions, mentoring support, and clear criteria for promotion—the institution risks being left without successors, breaking institutional memory and undermining disciplinary consistency.

Restoring this model does not mean automatic “inheritance” of positions, but rather the creation of space for scholarly maturation and a competitive yet stable academic development. For a small but research-active and internationally connected institute such as ours, this is a question not only of academic logic but of survival.

It should also be stressed that one of the most serious obstacles to the continuous development of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology is the lack of consistent

policy for funding research by the relevant Ministry of Education and Science. For more than fifteen years, this Ministry has not issued annual calls for national research projects, producing an institutional vacuum and undermining academic stability and productivity.

Under such conditions, the Institute is forced to rely primarily on modest support through projects funded by the Ministry of Culture, which, by their nature, are limited to applied anthropology or publishing activities. While these activities are valuable and have a public impact, they cannot replace systematic research work nor provide space for in-depth, long-term investigations that build the discipline.

This prolonged interruption of institutional support places research activity in a kind of “waiting mode”, creates uncertainty among researchers, and prevents the mentoring of young staff within a sustained research practice. In a society where culture and knowledge are key to survival and progress, such a stance towards science is not only a budgetary, but also a value-based issue.

Among the central events in the jubilee celebrations was the organization of the international scientific conference “Macedonia in Ethnological and Anthropological Science – From Within and Beyond”, held from 12 to 14 September 2025 at the UKIM University Congress Centre in the village of Konjsko, Ohrid. This event represented a platform for open and critical dialogue among researchers dealing with various aspects of Macedonian society and culture, as well as for comparative approaches and regional networking.

The event brought together Macedonian and international researchers in an open dialogue between “internal” and “external” perspectives on the cultural, social, and historical processes related to Macedonia and the region.

The programme was organized into sessions with participation of distinguished scholars from several European countries (Slovenia, Croatia, Greece, Czech Republic, Poland, Serbia, Hungary, the Netherlands, and others), moderated by researchers from prominent academic centres. The working languages were Macedonian and English, and alongside the scholarly discussions, a “Heritage Music Evening” was held, dedicated to the collectors Peter Endedijk and Annemiek den Uijl, in recognition of their lifelong dedication to preserving the musical cultural heritage of Macedonia gathered in their music collection.

The conference clearly signalled that Macedonian ethnology and anthropology today are moving from “canonical” topics towards problem-oriented research with high public relevance—bringing together field ethnography, archival work, visual and digital methods, and critical theory. The expected outcomes are twofold: strengthening regional and European research connections and preparing selected papers for a bilingual, peer-reviewed publication in *EthnoAnthropoZoom*. In this spirit, the event confirmed the role of the Institute as a mediator between local experiences and global scholarly debates, and as a platform that connects academic communities, cultural institutions, and civil society around issues crucial for the present and future of Macedonian society.