

Nade Genevska-Bracic (Macedonia)

## VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE CITY

*Abstract:* The visual documentation of the city was a lengthy process of research, which was the result of ethnological survey carried out in the city for many years. The process of exploring the various segments of the cultural and historical development of the city evolves and upgrades every year by observing the changes in its social-economic development. This is my personal insight (experiment) into visual anthropology, which is important from the present perspective.

*Keywords:* Visual Anthropology, city, space, street, “Shirok Sokak”, bazaar.

The focus of interest in the visual anthropology of the city originates from the opportunity to observe people’s routine activities in a certain area. Depending on the everyday activities performed, a suitable method of visual documentation was chosen. Significant segments of city life were conceived in a way that can best be reflected and most authentically shown. The best method for this review is to observe the daily habits, which denote basic everyday functions such as movements, conversations and sounds that occur during filming. “The purpose of ethnological film is to capture the feelings, sounds, speech culture” (McCarty 2003: 74).

The concept of observing the everyday activities of people in a certain area – in the city – is determined in accordance with what is authentic and what can make an analogy between the past and the present. Cultural and historical reflections from the past are the focus of (my) visual comprehension of ethno-anthropological observations in the city as a long-term study.

When building the concept, the ethnologist-researcher determines the space, place and angle of filming. S/he is in charge of the complete realization, creates the script, the filming with the camera and editing. The full engagement of the ethnologist in the creation of an ethnological documentary is important for the complete visualization of the main focus. This realization of the visual documentation is a process that complements the previously surveyed units in ethnology, which are manifested as the final product of recording the changes in the social life of the city.

In the visual documentation of the city, specifically in Bitola, the most important aspect of the approach involved two areas that had the greatest impulse in everyday life.

The first starting visual concept was space, i.e. the organization of the city in the past and today, contemplated in a century-old framework; a parallel between the past and present day. Primarily, the most important component in the present context is the city’s main street “Shirok Sokak”. It can be viewed as a phenomenon of everyday life in the city, which changes the cultural systems of living. From a main street of cultural and historical significance, it changes and transforms into a space that meets the needs of modern

times. While registering a single ordinary day, from early morning until late at night, the pace of development in dynamics can be followed, from the preparation for the opening of cafes, which dominate the street, and drinking coffee as a major distinguishable habit of the city, to the tranquility of the night.

The second segment selected for in the observation of the city, where the impulse of life can be perceived and is associated with the cultural and historical context of city life, was the “bazaar”. People’s daily routine, from the opening of the shops and the buying of groceries to the movements, communication, and behavior of people, is what portrays life in the bazaar. A particular factor was the large number of closed stores or stores for rent. With the visualization of these movements they become part of our consciousness. We observed the day from the early morning hours, when the shops open, until the afternoon when the dynamics changes. The most dynamic and most frequent time in the bazaar that reflects the impulse of life in the city is the midday traffic. In comparison, the frequency of the movement is reduced in the afternoon. The dynamics in the bazaar, with reference to the number of people buying usual groceries in the city, the closed shops and dying craft shops, was the main aim of this visual observation. The social and economic reality of Macedonia directly impacts people’s standard of living, and thus the bazaar. The changes and the functions of the bazaar always depend on the social, economic and historical events of certain periods of time. Therefore, it is of vital importance to record the changing conditions with visual documentation in order to capture the moments when they happen.

Bearing in mind that this review refers to two frequently used areas where everyday life revolves in the city, when trying to capture the atmosphere, the question how to conquer the space was raised; what is the best location to place the camera. Setting up the camera in an inconspicuous place, just to follow the movement. If the camera is in a central position, people would try to avoid it, thereby losing the spontaneity in their movement.

On “Shirok Sokak”, the question was whether to set up the cameras in three different locations: at the beginning of the street, in the middle and the end; whether it should be filmed from above or from the side. In the actual implementation, the filming commenced in the beginning of the street, going back from the end of the street to the beginning at different periods of the day, in the morning when the main street - the city centre prepares for the beginning of the day, the greatest frequency at noon, the afternoon and evening.

In the bazaar, which has four main entrances, the same question of where to start filming was raised. Additionally, we asked what surroundings would be the most striking to convey the message and how we should proceed. In the actual implementation, it was intervened at all traveled places in different time intervals.

Should we have decided this filming to be organized, with predetermined marked locations, setting a scene, including people, we would not have captured the spontaneity; the events would have been disrupted and thus it would not have conveyed the message that was set as a goal by the ethnologist. In this case, the activity would not have been a natural one and a difference in behavior could have been observed.

The appropriate approach with the camera for the implementation of the visual process, I believe, is one of authentic perspective, where complete control of the frame and establishing communication between the subject, ethnologist and recipient is re-

quired. In the process of filming, I held the camera with two hands and stretched forward. I sometimes bent the elbows, within reach of the horizon. The genuine transfer of images which are documented and shown to the public will certainly be recognized. If the same images were viewed in some other time they would reflect the true meaning of visual documentation. In this case, long shots were utilized, the camera recorded the action that took place at that moment. At times, it was interrupted when one of the passerbys avoided the camera and changed direction. Certainly this filming did not take place in one day. Different moments were filmed and a large amount of visual documentation was collected. The selection of images and editing of this material is the ethnologist's expression of the message s/he wants to confer.

With these visual observations in the city, a special emphasis is given to the space as a cultural – an anthropological category in which people move and communicate. With the observation method, people are followed without disrupting the environment.

The filmed material remains as historical documents, a witness of a certain period of time. Perhaps it is the basic aim of this method to show events in certain time and space. The activities that occur are a response to social reflections and cultural systems, which create the value of life.

The anthropological documentary primarily has the aim to give an answer to the time and space in which we create. Only essentially conscious research, which visually documents the period, will have the power to create a collective memory.