

FIRST NISE CONFERENCE

27 & 28 May 2010, SKOPJE (Macedonia)
Institut za nacionalna istorija (INI)

Networks and databases, themes of the first NISE Conference

On 27 and 28 May 2010 the first NISE Conference was held in Skopje (Macedonia). Host was the Macedonian Institute for National History (Institut za nacionalna istorija-INI). The meeting was organised as a so-called working conference: its main aim was the further development of two fundamental instruments for the NISE project: the database and the network of heritage and research institutes.

The first conference theme concerned the choice of subject for entering information into the NISE database. This also figured prominently on the agenda of the annual meeting of the Scientific Council, which had also taken place in Skopje on 26 May. During the conference one particular subject was highlighted: the nationalist periodicals of the 19th century. As they played an important part in disseminating national identities, the coordinated input of their data could, through a comparative approach, lead to the detection of parallels, i.e. the transfers of ideas, modes of operation, symbols etc. Two examples were presented: the first one, regarding the national historical journals, by historian Claus Møller Jørgensen from Aarhus University (Institut for Historie og Områdestudier, Denmark), showed their fundamental role in nineteenth century Europe in not only the professionalisation of history-writing, but also, because that activity mainly took place within a national context, in the 'nationalisation' of the population. The Rumanian historian Răzvan Pârâianu (Universitatea Petru Maior, Târgu Mureş) described how at the end of the 19th century in Rumania, writers, journalists and poets in periodicals (most of the time implicitly) replaced the liberal, rational political discourse regarding identity with a much more emotional tale, transforming in the process citizens into members of the collective, national body. At the end of this session, the ODIS database (new edition), the framework for entering the data into NISE, was introduced by Peter Heyrman (KADOC-KULouvain, Belgium), generating considerable interest among academics and archivists alike.

The second part of the conference was devoted to the source materials for the study of national movements, esp. their preservation and management and the research carried out with their help.

The case studies that were presented during this session reflected the very different situation for the heritage and research institutes concerned. Were successively presented: two private institutes from Spain, the Fundació Josep Irla (Catalunya-Bernat Joan) and the Abertzaletasunaren Agiritegia/Archivo del Nacionalismo (Basque Country-Eduardo Jauregi), two state institutes, from Lithuania (Lietuvos istorijos institutas-Darius Staliunas) and Macedonia (Arhiv na Makedonija-Ivan Aleksov), and finally the very different situation for two institutes of peoples without a state, resp. the Sami (Sámi Arkiiva-Øystein Steinlien) and the Kurds (Kurdish Institute Brussels-Derwich Ferho).

Stefan Berger (University of Manchester), Louis Vos (KULouvain) and Todor Čepreganov (Institut za nacionalna istorija) acted as moderators. Additionally, Alan Sandry (Welsh Nationalism Foundation) described the methodology used with a project on the defence and international policies of sub-state nationalist parties across Europe.

During the Round Table, concluding the conference, possibilities were explored for cooperation between heritage and research institutes with national movements as (part of) their field of interest. Hanno Brand (Fryske Akademy, Friesland) coordinated the debate, which was kick-started by his pilot document on the development of a network, linked with a knowledge and documentation centre. This pooling together of expertise could lead to the establishment of best practices and benchmarking and offer the possibility for joint European projects.

The findings of the Round Table will be integrated into the pilot document and, together with the case studies, published as conference proceedings (for the first conference theme, the entry-subjects for the database, a separate document will be drawn up, consisting of a report by the Scientific Council and the studies presented at the conference).

The first NISE Conference has proved a success, not only because of the excellent quality of the papers, but also thanks to the interesting contributions from the public. Moreover INI-director Todor Čepreganov and his assistants, Natasha Kotlar and Liljana Gusevska, demonstrated excellent organisational skills, including an extensive and interesting accompanying program.

The formula of holding every three years a general working NISE Conference, will therefore certainly be continued.