

# NOTISER

## Who is allowed to belong?

In spring 2013 the XII Finnish-Hungarian-Estonian Symposium was held in Turku. One of the opening speeches was held by professor Anna-Maria Åström from Åbo Akademi University, who has participated in the symposiums over the years:

I remember that when I for the first time joined the Finnish-Hungarian symposium in 1989. I was a little bit hesitant. I wondered if I would be allowed to join when my background is not Finno-Ugric but Finland-Swedish. But there was no problem and we had a most exciting symposium on social networks in Konnevesi near Jyväskylä. One thing that has stayed with me forever was the thankfulness and the eagerness and broadmindedness of the Hungarian scholars, some of which were abroad for the first time. These were the days when the iron curtain was falling apart and countries like Hungary, Czechoslovakia and East Germany got their freedom from the Soviet sphere. There was a very discernible feeling of that something great was happening and that all European nations were now in a turbulent but very exciting state. We celebrated this freedom and the future was one that we would build together. Estonia joined two years after. As Landscape, Place, Locality and Space is the theme of this symposium I would like to ponder about an important space, that of the nation and belonging to a nation.

What now also comes to my mind is the two ways of defining the nation state that our prominent Hungarian ethnologist Tamas Hofer has presented in his famous article about Hungarian nationhood in *Ethnologia Europa* 1991: one consisting in defining belonging to a nation through its territory. All people that happen to have their homes there belong to this state and thus all kinds of ethnic minorities are part of the state. Another way of defining the nation state is through the majority ethnic group. The majority is then thought to carry the essence of the nation. This has to do with the theme of this symposium when Places, Locality and Spaces are in focus. What are the places we belong to and how are spaces made into *our* places? At the same time it should always be kept in mind that by producing our spaces and places, we might prohibit others from using that same space for their purposes. Production of space in some ways and construction of places can also mean that other groups are kept at a distance or even being shut out. But, as has been enforced in many early urban studies, a multicultural or in other ways manifold form of order - in this case urban life - is in no question impossible to bring about. It has been shown that in many cases multicultural localities can find their ways of handling its own social and cultural variety. Positive everyday activity patterns

can be produced and upheld through generations. Language groups and ethnic groups can find ways of coping and special patterns of how to deal with strangeness could in time become one of the pillars of every day life.

In EU rhetoric the term Cultural diversity is of utmost importance. In this rhetoric is embedded that the European nations form a mosaic with each country enriching the others with their own characteristic traits.

An unforeseen but in ethnology already much discussed theme - for instance by the Hungarian ethnologist Peter Niedermüller - is that the historical events of 1989-1992 meant that a national turn and national sentiments filled the vacuum that the ending of the socialist era left. At that same time EU-rhetoric tried to play down the propagations for the nations and foster different regions instead. Regions were the places that should be elevated and presented for larger publics. In this process a large mistake was probably made by not observing that national identification still felt more natural for many European citizens.

In these times of rifts between the north and south of Europe in the 2010s it is not anymore regions that are at stake, because the national institutions and state governance are still what regulates peoples every day lives. Thus I will remind us of Tamas Hofer's statement about the two ways of defining the nation state, the enclosing and the disclosing. And I would also insist on that this is something we as ethnologist, as specialists in studies of ethnicity, must be very careful about. In dealing with our own cultures, we might forget others'. An open-mindedness cannot be and has not always been the leading lines for ethnologists. But it is very sad that ethnologists with a very broad mind, like the Hungarian Agnes Heller and Zoltan Fejös, have met with great difficulties in their academic life. As a representative of a minority - with legs in many cultures - I am also deeply sad that representatives of the Swedish population and persons in leading positions defending the right of Swedes in Finland have been severely threatened on internet in this spring. But equally happy one can be that the leading Finnish newspaper in Finland, Helsingin Sanomat stood up for a defense of the right to use Swedish in Finland. A very important task for ethnologists in Europe is to analyze how opinions arise that will not honor the cultural diversity that has been made one of the corner stones for Europe. This means to respect the nation states as well as the regions, and the differing groups, the inhabitants of each country. Thus places and spaces have a profound meaning, when it comes to who are allowed to belong. Välkomna!