

35th Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference in Reykjavik<sup>1</sup>

The 35th Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference (RE:22) marked the centenary of the conference series. As a long tradition, the first conference in this Nordic series was hosted by Nordiska Museet in Stockholm as early as 1920, and the 35th conference, in 2022, was a celebration of the anniversary. This conference series traditionally brings together Nordic scholars of ethnology and folkloristics, as well as scholars with common interests from other disciplines. The conference was organised by the University of Iceland and took place in a hybrid format, although most of the participants attended in person.

The keyword of the 35th Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference was “re-”, which as a general theme and prefix signified various comprehensions and perspectives of repetition and return in cultural and social contexts, and in ethnological and folkloristic research itself.

The program covered a vast range of topics and included two keynote speeches. The first, by Tine Damsholt (University of Copenhagen), titled “Re-assembling Everyday Temporalities” discussed how time is practiced in everyday life and how the Covid-19 pandemic destabilised it. The keynote by Terry Gunnell (University of Iceland), titled “The Art of the Ripples: The Development of Folk Tale Illustration in Northern Europe (1816–1870)” discussed the emergence and development of illustrations in early folk tale collections and the interaction between collectors and artists.

The various re-verbs and re-nouns proposed for the program indicated diverse topics such as representation, reproduction, restoration, remembering, recovering, recycling, reuse, remake, repair and reduce, to cite just some of them. These topics and approaches are applicable to various subjects in culture – ideas, words, behaviours, objects, music. Most of the abundant number of panels fit into this general theme well as it was intentionally broad. The “re-” prefix evidentially aligned with the name of the city as well, similarly to

the 33th conference in 2015 in Copenhagen, where the theme was the prefix “co-” (Rauhala 2015: 127).

The three-day academic program saw the conference host 81 panels. Some of the most popular subjects were sustainability, temporality and heritage. Some current challenges in our world, namely the climate crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic, were also discussed in multiple panels and presentations. The Covid-19 pandemic was presented as a topic for research in panels discussing the crisis from the perspectives of children, digital social interaction, education, materiality, everyday habits and rituals, as well as in Damsholt’s keynote speech.

The climate crisis and sustainability were present in panels that focused on responsibility, traditional ecological knowledge, materiality, landscape, tourism, the future, education, human–animal relationship, human–microbe relationships, refrigeration, the North Atlantic Ocean and the Nordic journal *Ethnologia Scandinavica*. According to my impression the climate crisis and sustainability were the most discussed subjects in the conference from various perspectives. Posthumanism as an approach was also evident in the program with different panels discussing interspecies relations, more-than-human, and non-human relations and care for materiality.

Estonian academia was (re)presented by a number of researchers from variety of institutions, including the University of Tartu, the Estonian Literary Museum and the Estonian National Museum. In total, 16 presenters and two volunteers attended from Estonia. From the Estonian National Museum, apart from my paper on the new materialist perspective on repair in the panel titled Caring for Materialities, Imaginaries, Relationships and Worlds, Indrek Jääts co-convoked a panel on the history of ethnology and folklore studies, and presented a paper on Estonian ethnologists’ expeditions to Nazi-occupied Ingria

during the Second World War. In the same panel, Marleen Metslaid (Estonian National Museum) presented a paper on Estonian refugee ethnologists in Sweden after the Second World War, and Kristin Kuutma (University of Tartu) on the Cold War implications on ethnographic studies. Anu Kannike (Estonian National Museum) and Ester Bardone (University of Tartu) presented a paper on domestic cold storage practices in 20th-century Estonia. From the University of Tartu, Ene Kõresaar and Kirsti Jõesalu presented a paper on representation of the Russophone minority in Estonian museums, Alina Oprelianska on the sealed grave ritual in contemporary Ukraine, and Alena Shisheliakina on Tatar minority heritage in Estonia. From the Estonian Literary Museum, Risto Järv and Mari Sarv presented a paper on the use of topic modelling for the analysis of Estonian fairy tales and folksongs, Mare Kõiva and Andres Kuperjanov on traditional and new practices in natural places of worship in Estonia, Anastasiya Fiadotava on digital sharing of humour in family communication, and Liina Saarlo and Mari Sarv, with their international colleagues, on the FILTER project, which brings together Estonian and Finnish national folklore collections. The variety of topics covered by Estonian scholars shows the broad scope pursued by the small Estonian community of academics.

The 35th Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference was certainly very positive and refreshing experience in all means. It was a useful experience for international student volunteers, who took part in the conference seminar organised by the University of Iceland. The conference organisers offered a great level of hospitality, and a unique social and cultural program. For the reception, conference delegates were hosted by the president of Iceland, Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, at the presidential residence at Bessastadir. After the reception, delegates got a sense of Icelandic culture by having an open-air pool party in Gardabaer, a small town near Reykjavik. On the third day, to offset their carbon footprint, 170 participants planted 2,000 trees in a forestation site

in Ulfarsfell, just outside Reykjavik, with guidance from the Icelandic Forestry Association, and visited the Arbaer Open Air Museum. The final dinner and dance party was hosted at Reykjavik's Hafnarhus Art Museum. The next Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference will take place in 2025 in Turku.

The 35th Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference hosted more than 430 delegates, nearly 370 of whom participated physically, this being about a twice as many as were expected initially, as they admitted in their welcome speech. In comparison, the 33th conference in Copenhagen in 2015 hosted approximately 230 participants (*ibid.*). For quite many, including myself, this was the first offline conference since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The breadth of international participation was wider than in previous years. In addition to the Nordic and Baltic countries there were scholars from Central Europe, Eastern Europe, the United Kingdom, North America and South America, quite many of whom were attending this conference for the first time. The prevalence of English in the conference series is quite a novel trend, it being chosen as the official language for the first time in 2015 (*ibid.*). Evidently, the 35th conference was the largest Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference, and probably the most international. Perhaps this conference series is becoming more and more visible and international, and moving from being regional to being global.

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## References

- Rauhala, Anna. 2015. 33rd Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference in Copenhagen. – *Ethnologia Fennica* 42: 127–129.
- RE:22. Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference. <https://www.ethnofolk.org/> (accessed October 11, 2022).

## Notes

- 1 The 35th Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference, titled RE:22, was held from June 13th to 16th, 2022 in Reykjavik, Iceland.