



FIFTH CONGRESS OF SLAVIC GEOGRAPHERS AND ETHNOGRAPHERS—AN OVERVIEW AND KEY OUTCOMES

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1. Introduction

The emergence of the Congress of Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers is closely associated with the intellectual legacy and visionary thinking of Jovan Cvijić, one of the most distinguished Serbian scholars and a central figure in European geography at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. As a scientist deeply committed to both academic advancement and international scholarly dialogue, Cvijić recognized the need for a structured platform that would foster cooperation among geographers and ethnographers across the Slavic world. Although the initial concept was proposed as early as in 1914, its realization was delayed due to complex political circumstances, including foreign rule in some Slavic countries, the onset of the First World War, and the subsequent turbulent period. With the profound political and social changes after 1918, opportunities for closer academic interaction expanded, and Cvijić renewed his initiative, formally proposing the organization of a joint congress during discussions with representatives of the Czechoslovak scientific community while undergoing medical treatment in Karlovy Vary.

During the interwar period, four Congresses of Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers were organized. These gatherings brought together a large number of scholars and constituted one of the most important forms of institutionalized scientific cooperation within the Slavic academic space, significantly contributing to the exchange of knowledge and the advancement of geographical and ethnographic research. The First Congress of Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers was hosted in Czechoslovakia, from June 4th to 8th, 1924. The continuation of the congress tradition was marked by the Second Congress, held in Poland from June 2nd to 12th, 1927. Notwithstanding persistent political, economic, and social instability, the Third Congress of Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers was convened in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia from May 4th to 17th, 1930 with the support of King Aleksandar I Karađorđević. The Tsar Boris III was patron of, the Fourth Congress of Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers convened in the Kingdom of Bulgaria from August 16th to 29th, 1936,

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representing the last such gathering held during the interwar period. These events had strong support from state and leading scientific institutions, but were also open to prominent scientists from non-Slavic countries, which testifies to their broader scientific importance.

In 2024, the Fifth Congress of Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers was hosted from October 23rd to 25th in Belgrade, Serbia, within a highly symbolic time frame marking 110 years since the formulation of the initial idea and one century since the First Congress in Prague, as well as 88 years after the last interwar meeting. The Congress was organized at the initiative of the Geographical Institute “Jovan Cvijić” of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, in cooperation with the “Vuk Karadžić” Cultural Centre in Loznica, with institutional support from the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia.

The Congress brought together 176 eminent international and domestic experts in geography and related disciplines from 17 countries. The event was further honored by the presence and support of the representatives of the International Geographical Union (IGU), the European Association of Geographers (EUROGEO), and the European Geographical Societies Association (EUGEO), as well as the representatives of institutions with which Jovan Cvijić had maintained intensive cooperation during his scientific career. Over the course of three days, this venue served as an epicenter for the presentation of new scientific knowledge, the exchange of ideas, and the discussion on contemporary challenges in geography and ethnography. In this way, a symbolic and substantive link between historical heritage and contemporary developments in geographical and ethnographic science was established.

2. Thematic sessions: A brief overview

On the first day of the Fifth Congress of Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers, October 23rd, 2024, within “Physical-geographical processes and their effects on the population” session, research results were presented by colleagues from various parts of the world. The session primarily focused on topics related to climate change, natural hazards, and community vulnerability, with particular emphasis on the quantitative aspects of flood risk and environmental protection. Special attention was also devoted to lectures addressing the influence of Jovan Cvijić on the development of physical geography.

“Spatial planning” session was dedicated to the key issues in spatial planning, with an emphasis on contemporary trends and development challenges in urban and rural areas. It covered various methodological approaches and case studies related to sustainable development and spatial organization. Attention was given to the role of heritage, demographic change, and urban growth processes. The session also discussed social and institutional aspects of planning, including community involvement and local initiatives. Through diverse examples, it highlighted the importance of integrated and interdisciplinary perspectives.

Within “Population geography” session, Congress participants addressed topics from social geography, with an emphasis on current demographic phenomena and processes (migration, population structures, households, etc.) and other socio-economic issues. The analyses focused on Slavic countries, with particular attention paid to future trends and dynamics, as well as to the key drivers of irregular migration and their main characteristics.

The first day of the Fifth Congress concluded with a “Forum” which served as a platform for information exchange and academic dialogue. A funding program was presented and important information was provided regarding applications for European Research Council

grants across all scientific fields, including geography. This was followed by a presentation of the international cooperation and publishing activities of the Geographical Institute "Jovan Cvijić" of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Participants were given an overview of the Institute's brief historical development and activities, the Journal of the Geographical institute "Jovan Cvijić" SASA, and other publications. Particular emphasis was placed on the Institute's long-standing cooperation with scientific and academic institutions worldwide, which has intensified over the past several years.

During the second day of the Congress, five sessions were held. In "Ethnology" session, participants explored issues of cultural identity, regional specificity, and the interpretation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Presentations examined traditional culture in post-industrial societies, regional redefinitions, and the role of heritage in nation- and identity-building processes. Particular attention was given to the spatial dimension of ethnological research, including analyses of cultural topographies, rural transformation, and urban interaction spaces. The close relationship between geography and ethnology was emphasized, highlighting space as a key analytical framework for understanding cultural phenomena.

"Economic development perspectives and their impact on the population" session featured eight presentations covering a broad thematic spectrum. Topics ranged from contemporary financial models and fintech trends to urban issues such as poverty, social exclusion, and segregation. Particular attention was given to challenges in rural areas, including planning, post-socialist transformation, and modernization processes. The session also addressed the impacts of tourism on both the built and natural environment. Overall, the presentations provided a comprehensive insight into current socio-economic dynamics and their spatial implications.

Within "Contemporary Theoretical and Methodological Approaches in Geography" session, nine lectures presented current directions in geographical research. The papers addressed a variety of theoretical perspectives and methodological innovations. Particular emphasis was placed on the application of new technologies and interdisciplinary approaches (machine learning, UAV, etc.). Several presentations focused on environmental and climatic studies, as well as spatial analysis. The session also examined different case studies from diverse geographical contexts. Attention was given to practical applications of research results.

"Historical geography" session included six presenters. The histories, activities, organizational structures, and key initiatives of geographical societies in several European countries (Italy, Slovakia, and Serbia) were presented. Attention was drawn not only to the importance of connecting these societies through events such as the Fifth Congress of Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers and to the advancement and synchronization of geographical research at the pan-European level, but also to the common challenges they face in the contemporary context, including operating within the spaces of other institutions, declining membership, and a lack of enthusiasm among younger members.

In "Political Geography" session, six participants from five countries presented their research. The papers addressed a wide range of topics, reflecting both thematic and geographical diversity. Discussions encompassed political and administrative borders, critical geopolitics, and the global order of knowledge. Historical, cultural, and regional perspectives were explored, particularly in relation to Slavic space and its heritage. Contemporary political processes, including European integration, were also examined. Overall, the session offered a multifaceted insight into current issues and debates in political geography.

At “Poster Session”, nine participants presented their research results. Questions and discussions related to physical-geographical topics focused on the possibilities of comparing the obtained results with those from the wider region. Topics from social geography and spatial planning prompted positive comments regarding the applicability of the results.

The third day of the Fifth Congress was dedicated to a professional field trip. Participants had the opportunity to get to know the natural and cultural-historical features of eastern Serbia, including the archaeological site of Viminacium, Đerdap National Park, and Golubac Fortress.

3. The Congress resolutions

Through a series of presentations, the strong interconnection between geography and ethnography was highlighted, emphasizing how spatial knowledge contributes to a better understanding of key ethnographic issues. This once again confirmed the necessity of involving the scientific community in addressing complex challenges, as well as the continued organization of cooperation and the exchange of knowledge among scholars from Slavic and other countries. High-quality presentations, diverse thematic content, and an interactive approach encouraged constructive discussions among Congress participants.

The particular significance of the Fifth Congress is reflected in the adopted resolutions (conclusions), which, in the spirit of previous Congresses, aimed to stimulate further cooperation, joint research, and institutional networking. Some of these include:

- Defining measures aimed at mitigating the rising temperature trend;
- Encouraging the involvement of state institutions in implementing measures for population adaptation to climate change;
- Defining and developing policies for nature and environmental protection;
- Establishing frameworks for communication with authorities and other decision-makers in the field of spatial planning, and highlighting possibilities for applying scientific results in decision-making processes;
- Paying special attention to areas experiencing depopulation, with particular emphasis on border regions;
- Applying the experiences of European Union member states in the region with regard to current migration processes;
- Promoting collaboration and joint applications for numerous projects and programs in geography and related scientific disciplines, with an interdisciplinary approach;
- Involving the academic community in research and the protection of cultural heritage;
- Observing and studying urban development phenomena not only at the local level but also at a broader, regional scale;
- Including researchers from other related disciplines (in addition to geographers and ethnographers) in future conferences;
- Intensifying the study and application of contemporary theoretical and methodological approaches in geography; and
- Continuing research in the field of political geography, both within Slavic countries and in relation to their shared interactions with neighboring and more distant countries.

4. Conclusion

With this Congress, Jovan Cvijić’s vision has been reaffirmed and further realized, emphasizing the importance of continuity in organizing scholarly gatherings that foster

dialogue, cooperation, and mutual understanding among geographers and ethnographers. The Fifth Congress, both symbolically and scientifically, successfully bridged historical legacy and contemporary geographical and ethnographical research, through eight thematic sections and the publication of the Book of abstracts and contributed papers, comprising 101 contributions (81 abstracts and 20 full papers). At the same time, the Fifth Congress served as an important platform for revitalizing scholarly dialogue, articulating shared research priorities, and adopting resolutions as concrete guidelines for future scientific work and collaboration.

Geographical Institute "Jovan Cvijić" of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts expresses its sincere gratitude to all the Congress participants, as well as to the institutions and individuals whose support contributed to its successful organization and implementation. Their participation and engagement represent a vital contribution to the preservation and further development of the tradition of scientific cooperation founded on the ideas and values of the Slavic congresses. Finally, the organizers express their hope and intention to initiate the organization of the next scholarly gathering, the Sixth Congress of Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers, in the near future.