



Call for Papers

**THE AGENCY OF THE DEAD IN THE LIVES OF INDIVIDUALS:
COMMUNICATION WITH THE DEAD**

International Interdisciplinary Conference

July 1 – 3, 2026

Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Aškerčeva 2, Ljubljana,
Slovenia

Organised by

ERC project *The Roles of the Agency of the Dead in the Lives of Individuals in Contemporary Society*
(DEAGENCY, ERC № 101095729)

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Contrary to pre-modern European societies, and many contemporary non-Western societies, where the dead were considered members of the community and continued to be significantly involved in people's everyday lives, the dominant Western ontology nowadays does not integrate communication and exchange between the living and the dead. However, as a bulk of quantitative as well as qualitative research testify, for some people in contemporary Western societies, social interactions do not necessarily cease after death but are merely transformed. The dead continue to be involved in our lives, affecting our thoughts, emotions, values, behaviour, and social relations. While scholars have often treated the accounts of the agency of the dead in people's lives as expressions of "folk belief", and ghosts as symbols and metaphors of larger cultural and social problems and changes, our aim is to take the agency of the dead in the lives of individuals seriously, as people themselves experience it.





The aim of the third DEAGENCY conference is to focus on the different types of interaction between the living and the dead. This will be broadly defined and may include both intentional and unintentional communication with the spirits of the dead, both familiar dead and impersonal ghosts, through both collective and private practices. It can include communication through dreams and other altered states of consciousness, visions, interactions through mediums or with the help of various other practitioners, 'legend trips' and tourism to haunted places, practices of 'summoning the dead', various after-death and memorialisation practices, online communication with spirits, and so on and so forth. Whereas in the past the way of communicating with the dead was largely prescribed by tradition, religion and/or the state, today individuals are free to engage in their practices without having to adhere to prescribed methods; in the fragmented and networked society of privatised death, they may not even have a community to share their practices with.

In this conference we want to explore whether practices of communication between the living and the dead are aimed at maintaining personal relationships with the familiar dead, or whether they are intended as a test of courage or perhaps carried out out of curiosity; do people perform them to honour and commemorate the dead, to ask them for advice, to keep a promise, to obtain or grant forgiveness, to enhance their social status, to improve their social relations, to strengthen their group's identity or a particular ideology, to demonstrate their political stance, or perhaps even as a means in intra-community power struggles and inter-group tensions? Are traditional forms of dealing with the dead (still) used or are they losing their significance for the individual? Have they changed and how, or have they been replaced by new practices? What role do material objects and places play in creating and maintaining interaction with the dead? What consequences does interaction with the dead have for the lives of the living? What role does communication with the dead play?



We invite folklorists, ethnologists and anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, thanatologists, scholars of bereavement and media studies, as well as scholars from other disciplines concerned with the dead in contemporary society, to submit an abstract and participate in the conference. Papers may draw on a variety of sources – ethnographic, archival, digital, media, etc. The conference language is English; the expected length of papers is 20 minutes. There is no conference fee, but you will need to cover your own travel, accommodation and meals. Please use the following link to submit your application:

APPLICATION FORM

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Ms Marja Kovanda, Chair of the Organising Committee: Marja.Kovanda@ff.uni-lj.si.

The deadline for the submission of applications is 15 December 2025. Acceptance of papers will be confirmed by 31 January 2026.

Mirjam Mencej, Prof.

Principal investigator of the ERC project DEAGENCY Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Programme Committee:

Prof. Mirjam Mencej (Chair)

Prof. Tatiana Bužeková

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