

Valentine's Day and the Eventisation of Slovakia's Festive Culture

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The study focuses on Valentine's Day in Slovakia since the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries from the perspective of festive culture. It explores public celebrations, as defined by Lars Deile (2014), associated with Valentine's Day, and analyses them on the basis of event characteristics according to Winfried Gebhardt's concept. The study is based on the assumption that the acceleration of eventisation is a new dynamising element of the festive culture transformation at the late modern stage (Gebhardt, 2000). The aim of the study is (1) to find out which of the Valentine's Day public celebrations in Slovakia have the nature of an event; (2) identify the origin of and motivation for the choice of specific forms of events; (3) outline the specifics of Valentine's Day celebrations as events in the framework of Slovakia's festive culture. At the general level, the author is interested in the cultural dimension of the individualisation and pluralisation processes. Through three Valentine's Day events, he traces the transformations of the trends of deinstitutionalisation, deconstruction, profanisation, multiplication, and commercialisation, which characterise the celebrations of modern society according to Gebhardt. Empirically, the study relies on the findings of the analysis of media sources about the forms of the festive practice accompanying Valentine's Day in Slovakia. The sources come from exploratory research conducted in 2011–2021.

Key words: Valentine's Day, eventisation, festive culture transformation, late modern period

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Introduction

Valentine's Day is a profane holiday related to the expression of partner love and affection, as well as other positive interpersonal relationships. The holiday falls on February 14, when several Christian churches commemorate the memory of St. Valentine. The origins of Valentine's Day are associated with ancient holidays and festivities, with the idea of the beginning of the mating of birds in mid-February, or with legends about the life of at least three saints named Valentine. According to historical data, Valentine's Day originated in the 14th-century court culture of England. In the 19th century, it was transformed into a modern commercial holiday in the USA and returned to Europe in the following century. In the first wave, especially after World War II, Valentine's Day spread in Western European countries. In the second wave during the last decade of the 20th century, after the fall of Communist regimes,¹ it began penetrating Eastern European countries (Staff, 1969; Schmidt, 1993, Oruch, 1981; Kelly, 1986; Van Dyk, 2013).

Valentine's Day began to penetrate Slovakia massively after the fall of the Communist regime in 1989, although it was not completely unknown until then. The inhabitants of Slovakia came into contact with it and celebrated it, for instance, in the USA, where they migrated for work since the 1870s (Brestenská-Gessayová, 1932). According to a representative survey conducted in 2019, it was also a occasionally celebrated holiday in Slovakia before 1990 (Sviatok Valentín, 2019, 2022). At present, people living here have either accepted Valentine's Day and celebrate it, or accept it but do not celebrate it, or do not accept the holiday at all (Zajonc, 2022: 64–69, 79). In a representative survey carried out in 2018, 31% of respondents claimed to celebrate Valentine's Day. For 36% of survey participants,² it is a holiday that they do not celebrate. 31% of respondents did not acknowledge Valentine's Day or did not even consider it a holiday (Sviatok Valentín, 2018, 2022).³

My previous study of Valentine's Day in Slovakia, which focused on its history and forms of festive practice, brought, based on data from the period 1990–2022, findings about a wide range of forms of spending it within the family, community, commercial, media, and even political sphere (Zajonc, 2022: 89–169). Although Valentine's Day has been present in Slovakia for a relatively short period and is still considered a “new holiday”, the data show changes in its celebration at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. At that time, in addition to celebrating it in couples with mainly private settings, its mass public celebrations began to appear, some of which took place only to provide participants with unique experiences and bring profit to the organisers. The study observes the public celebrations of Valentine's Day in

1 Here, Communist regime means a political system based on the power of a single (Communist) party. Post-Communist countries are states in which the political power of the Communist party was replaced by a democratic pluralist political system after the revolutions at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. Ghodsee, Orenstein, 2021: xv–xvii).

2 The term used in this form refers to persons in all variants of gender identity.

3 2% of respondents did not know about Valentine's Day.

Slovakia since the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, i.e., during the late modern period (Giddens, 2003).

The main objective of the paper is to expand knowledge about celebrations in late-modern society based on empirical data about the transformations of Valentine's Day celebration in Slovakia. The first partial objective is to find out which of the Valentine's Day public celebrations have the nature of an event. The second partial objective is to identify the origin of and motivations for the choice of specific forms of events associated with Valentine's Day. The third partial objective is to explore the specificities of Valentine's Day celebrations – events as part of Slovakia's festive culture in the late modern period.

Valentine's Day is a social occasion associated with showing partner love and affection, as well as other positive interpersonal relationships. It is a recurring activity or a recurring period of time, in which something significant or extraordinary takes place or is recalled. Valentine's Day is therefore referred to as a *holiday* in terms of the results of the ethnological analysis of public discourse in Slovakia. During the holiday, specific and, to some extent, normative behaviours are anticipated or evoked, to which symbolic meanings are attributed to a greater or lesser degree (Popelková, 2012: 12). However, in the case of Valentine's Day, the condition that holiday is a day on which a custom or law orders to refrain from, for instance, business activities and thus commemorate or celebrate a certain event, does not apply (Etzioni, 2004: 6). Valentine's Day is not associated with an event the commemoration of which is sanctioned by the State or the Church.

The forms of spending Valentine's Day, which are explored in the study, are public events that have a central and structured organisation, public – though limited – audience, and a clearly defined aim. Since these events are of a festive nature, in which the semantic layer is strongly reflected and emphasised, Lars Deile calls them *celebration*. It is a special term denoting a festive phenomenon of a certain quality, in which the semantic layer is stronger than the community and formal layer. Celebration is not an ideal-typical holiday, neither it is its opposite (Deile, 2004: 14). The suitability of this term is also indicated by a correlation with Karel Šima's reflection on modern celebrations as a set of emotional and rational, affective and conscious, chaotic and organised mixtures and other practices, as well as on the attempt to separate these practices (Šima, 2019: 171). The importance of Valentine's Day mainly as a new occasion for celebrating was also confirmed in his analysis as a new element in the holiday calendar of Slovaks after 1990 (Popelková, Zajonc, 2022).

I analyse public mass celebrations of Valentine's Day using Winfried Gebhardt's sociological concept, the key notion of which is an *event*.⁴ Based on a set of characteristics,⁵ Gebhardt defines it as a “specific variant of the festive”, which is

4 The term *event* is used in the following text exclusively in the sense of W. Gebhardt's definition.

5 W. Gebhardt's events are defined by the following features: 1) they are planned phenomena with a meaning and significance, professionally prepared and produced; 2) they are planned as unique experiences that disrupt the routine of daily life, offering immersion in an extraordinary or even transcendent world;

gaining increased importance in the evolution of festive culture and transformation of holidays, as well as in the ways of spending them. *Eventisation* – in the sense of shaping or transforming holidays and festivities into attractive and unique occasions offering an extraordinary experience and the feeling of belonging – was present in the development of the festive and ceremonial long before the late modern period. What is truly new in this stage according to W. Gebhardt is *accelerating eventisation* (Gebhardt, 2000: 19, 24). As Ronald Hitzler notes, eventisation in the late modern period is a “successful production and offering of experiential worlds for all, always, everywhere and more-or-less under ‘any circumstances’” (Hitzler, 2011: 20).

Background

According to ethnologists, sociologists, as well as psychologists or marketing experts, Valentine’s Day is particularly a couples’ feast day, the main practice of which is gifting. Such a Valentine’s Day model is an object for examining not only the consumption and behaviour of consumers (Ogletree, 1993; Rugimbana et al., 2003; Clarke et al., 2005; Close, Zinkhan, 2006; Zayas et al., 2017), but also the relationship of Valentine’s Day to other holidays of the country or social group (Biswas, 2013; Patel, 2014; Prasiska et al., 2023; Zavoretti, 2013), the influence of the media, virtual reality, or digital communication on the concept of Valentine’s Day celebrations (Masten, Plowman, 2003; Ikems, Udom, 2023), up to following the importance of the holiday in the dynamics of partnerships (Morse, Neuberg, 2004), the birth rate (Levy et al., 2011), or emotions in online interactive contexts (Doods, Danforth, 2010).

In post-Communist countries, the study of Valentine’s Day is framed primarily by the transformation of their festive culture since the 1990s, which occurred as a result of changes in the political regime. In addition to monitoring Valentine’s Day becoming one of the country’s holidays (Kovzele, 2021), the attention of ethnologists has focused on its confrontation with holidays with identical content. The confrontation either strengthens the rejection of the “Western” or “American” Valentine’s Day and the protection of domestic, often by the Communist regime, banned holidays (Teodorescu et al., 2017; Purcaru, 2019); or, as research in Estonia and Serbia has shown, the presence of Valentine’s Day leads to the elimination of International

3) they combine different cultural and aesthetic expressions, mixing elements of different cultural traditions; the result is to be a “total experience” corresponding to all human senses; 4) they offer the experience of the “wholeness of being” as opposed to the particularised reality of daily life; they are to be a “source of strength”, providing vitality and creative impulses to the alienated daily life; 5) they are social places and time segments mediating a sense of exclusive community and belonging; 6) they are usually monothematically focused and interactive; in order to promote identity and create a community of exclusive nature, they need content (forms of action, ideas, and products) that can be communicated or about which it is possible to communicate, which is worth being dealt with and which have the ability to differentiate (Gebhardt, 2000: 19–22).

Women's Day as a representation of the former Communist regime (Bačević, 2007; Vesik, 2016).

I understand the contemporary festive culture of Slovakia as an “event culture that encompasses almost all areas of life and has diverse functions – from entertainment and relaxation to identity formation, support of tourism, and regional development” (Roth, 2008: 21). At the same time, I reflect on the views from the theological environment, according to which, in the late modern stage, holidays in the private and public spheres lose their “semantic relationship” and “commemorative dimension” and are only events for participants referring only to themselves, and “what is important is not the feast, but celebration” (Bieritz, 2012: 5). Nevertheless, extraordinary occasions are increasingly present in the lives of individuals in the late modern era, which they do not experience every day and which reach beyond their daily experience. Gebhardt's concept of *event* or *eventisation* is offered as a suitable theoretical background for research and the transformations of holidays and festivities (Gebhardt, 2000).

Ronald Hitzler, following up on Gebhardt, defines eventisation as “the creation of a specific event of one kind or another, i.e., an enriched traditional cultural event or strategic new creation” (Hitzler, 2011: 19–20). Gebhardt states that “events are usually organised on the basis of either commercial or worldview interests”, while “they have something like a main idea (...) that legitimises an event as such.” (Gebhardt, 2000: 19, 22). This background for shaping events can also be used to identify the origin, motivation of production, and forms of events associated with Valentine's Day in Slovakia.

In society characterised by processes of individualisation and pluralism, the ways of forming communities are changing. At the same time, they are increasingly exposed to competition of more public and more particular forms of association, these usually being a scene. In this broader context, events can therefore be described as specific holidays and festivities of individualising and pluralising consumer and experiential society that is increasingly becoming a scene. The study observes the *cultural dimension* of the processes of individualisation and pluralisation, and, through examples of celebrating Valentine's Day in Slovakia, it explores the transformation of the trends of deinstitutionalisation, deconstruction, profanisation, multiplication, and commercialisation in the late modern period, which, according to Gebhardt, characterise holidays and festivities of modern society (ibid., 24–26, 28).

Methodology

At the empirical level, the study relies on data from exploratory research conducted in 2011–2022. The research sought to answer the question of how the inhabitants of Slovakia spent and celebrated Valentine's Day since 1990 when this feast began to penetrate Slovakia massively. I was looking for text, text-image and image documents containing the term “Valentine” as a basis of all alternatives to the name of the

Valentine's Day feast day in Slovak.⁶ In this way, I searched 25 selected printed media – from nationwide political periodicals, through magazines for youth or women, to tabloids – and, in addition to company websites and discussion groups, etc., I also studied the digital archives of the Press Agency of the Slovak Republic (TASR)⁷ and the Press Office of the Bishops' Conference of Slovakia (TKKBS).⁸

Subsequently, the thematically relevant sources were divided by means of a content analysis according to whether they contained data on practising Valentine's Day in couples or in mass forms. For the purposes of this study, the sources testifying public mass celebrations were subjected to qualitative analysis. I identified five types of events in the framework of the public celebrations of Valentine's Day in Slovakia, and further analysed three of them: commercial-learning, religious hybrid, and municipal events. The other two types (commercial and charity Valentine's Day events) could not be included in this study given its limited extent.

In line with Gebhardt's concept (Gebhardt, 2000: 19–22), I examined each of them for motivation or the reason for organising them, as well as the main idea and objective behind them. I identified the contents that support identity and create a community of the event. I observed how organisers ensured and possibly also declared a monothematic focus of the event. I tried to find out what was the source of the uniqueness of each of the events and what made this uniqueness stronger. I was also interested in whether and in what ways participants came into contact with the unusual or even “partially transcendent world” and what “creative impulses for daily life” the events offered. I was also interested in the aesthetic and artistic forms that intentionally merged into a “unique whole”. I explored what made events interactive and how they conveyed a sense of exclusivity, belonging, and “big family” to participants. In the light of R. Hitzler's concept of eventisation (2011: 19–20), I reflected on the form of the event and its origin.

Therefore, in order to find out what the specifics of the studied Valentine's Day mass celebrations were, I compared their characteristics to individual trends in the development of holidays and festivities in modern society.

The summary contains findings about Valentine's Day events in Slovakia and their specific features as compared to findings about religious and urban events.

Commercial-Learning Event *Valentine's Weekend at the Castle*

Museums have organised Valentine's Day events since the beginning of the 21st century. These cultural and educational institutions offer and provide visitors with knowledge about history, art, nature, as well as experiences that are thematically

6 For instance, Valentín [Valentine's Day], sviatok sv. Valentína [St. Valentine's feast day], sviatok Valentína [Valentine's feast day], etc. For image documents, I searched for the term in the metadata.

7 Available via: <https://etasr.sk/search>.

8 Available online: <<https://www.tkkbs.sk/>>.

linked to love on Valentine's Day. The following analysis deals with the oldest Valentine's Day event in Slovakia, produced by a museum institution. It is called *Valentínsky víkend na zámku* [Valentine's Weekend at the Castle], which was held for the first time in 1999.

The event is prepared and produced by the Slovak National Museum – Bojnice Museum, seated in the Western-Slovak town of Bojnice, in the castle of the same name. The museum focuses on presenting the history of the castle and the life of its last owner from the Pálffy noble family. The reason for organising Valentine's Day Weekend at the Castle is commercial interest. The aim is to attract both regular and potential visitors, provide them with knowledge and unusual experiences framed by Valentine's Day, and earn a profit for this service. Therefore, this type of event can be more accurately classified as a commercial-learning event.

Its form follows up on *Medzinárodný festival duchov a strašidiel* [International Festival of Ghosts and Spooks], which was held for the first time at Bojnice Castle in 1993.

Castle tours constituted the main element of the festival. The visitor learned about the history of the castle and life of its owner through the theme of the festival in an experiential form. The individual editions of the Valentine's Day Weekend have an identical form, which enriches the traditional form of a cultural event with new, experience-enhancing elements.

The contents of the Valentine's Day Weekend at the Castle consist – also according to its organiser – of “various forms of love”: the romantic love of lovers and fiancés, as well as love between spouses or between parents and children. The main idea of the Valentine's Day Weekend, which legitimises its existence, is based on the current revitalisation of the traditional interpretation pattern of the meaning of festivities that celebrate the values of partner love. The main component and highlight of the festival are the staging of situations with the above-mentioned meaning: engagement and marriage ceremonies, public declaration of partner love with a kiss, and its confirmation by a “certificate of loyalty” given to the couple by the organiser of the event, etc.

The uniqueness of the Valentine's Day Weekend is the result of detailed preparation and precise production of a staged tour of the castle.⁹ It is enhanced by the distinctive character of the place, which is pointed out also by the organiser by claiming that Bojnice Castle is the most romantic castle in Central Europe (Zajonc, 2022: 141). As another source of uniqueness, the principle of having “more and more [stimuli] and of having them bigger and bigger” (Gebhardt, 2000: 20) is translated into a gradual

⁹ The organiser prepares a scenario for a tour of the castle for each edition of the festival. The script contains texts that lecturers tell visitors during the tour of the castle and a description of the activities carried out by the event organisers. When it comes to interactive activities, visitors to the event are also involved. The tour is repeated several times during each of the three days of the festival for several groups of the castle visitors.



Fig. 1. Poster from the website of the Slovak National Museum – Bojnice Museum with information about the event called *Valentín na zámku* [Valentine's Day at the Castle] in 2023. In 1999, Bojnice Castle (in the Western-Slovakian town of the same name) was the first in Slovakia to offer visitors "romantic tours" as a mass form of Valentine's Day celebrations. Source: <https://www.trencinregion.sk/49064/valentin-na-bojnického-zamku> (accessed February 24, 2023).

marrying his lady, the declaration of love by a troubadour, the engagement and wedding feast of real historical figures, etc. Unmarried couples can experience a "symbolic wedding ceremony" or a "practice wedding" in the role of a bride and groom in the Golden Hall of Bojnice Castle, which officially serves as a wedding hall (IKRE, 2001). During a tour of the castle in 2002, visitors walked through a large heart decorated with greenery. For unmarried partners, it was supposed to be a symbol of "entering the joint path of love" (Zajonc, 2022: 142). It was supposed to be one of the creative impulses for daily life that the Valentine's Day Weekend offered as well. Obtaining the aforementioned "certificate of loyalty" can also be considered such an impulse. Visitors come to the Valentine's Day Weekend repeatedly to reaffirm their fidelity or marriage vows in the above-described manner. Some visitors have several such certificates.

The Valentine's Day Weekend at the Castle combines several cultural and aesthetic expressions into a "unique whole". Theatrical and staged interactive events form its largest component. Competitions make up the second largest group of events. These

increase in the number of events as part of the festival, the expansion of its content, and the specification of the content of the individual editions. The content of some editions of the Valentine's Day Weekend consisted not only of partner love, but also of "pure, lifetime, posthumous love" and "love for art" (SR Valentín bozk, 2004). In addition, the content of each edition of the Valentine's Day Weekend at the Castle is specified by the theme, which is expressed in its subtitle, such as *Bozk* [Kiss] (throughout several years since 1999), *Svet lásky, krásy a nádeje* [World of Love, Beauty, and Hope] (2013), *Romantické noci vo dvojici* [Romantic Nights Spent Together] (2015), *Vyznaj lásku ako kráľ* [Confess Love like a King] (2019).

The Valentine's Day Weekend offers the possibility of contact with an unexpected, partly transcendent world within the staged and interactive parts of the festival. The organisers include in the programme the staging of historical events, stories, and scenes associated with love and partnership: the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, the knight's fight for

competitions are also interactive in nature, having couples compete with each other: spinning Ariadne's thread together, finding the right key to the lock of love or of the most beautiful painting in the castle, etc. Participation in the competition can also bring a prize – for instance, the opportunity to spend a night in a count's apartment at the castle – based on a draw.

The participants to the Valentine's Day Weekend find themselves in an unusual environment during the tour and, as spectators or participants to various activities, they are symbolically transported to the past, to different historical periods during the programme. This type of spatial and temporal experience works together to convey the feeling of exclusive community and belonging among the event participants.

Religious-Hybrid Event Lovers' Pilgrimage

Pilgrimages are the most widespread mass form of Valentine's Day celebrations among Catholic communities in Slovakia since the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Valentine's Day pilgrimages began to take place in the villages of Spišská Kapitula and Krížovany in Eastern Slovakia during the 2000s after the fall of the Communist regime. They followed up on the pilgrimage to St. Valentine as protector against diseases and helper in their treatment. In the Catholic Church in Slovakia, the saint became accepted as the patron of lovers only at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. The date of February 14 and Valentine's Day was then also included in the calendar of pilgrimages that had not been associated with this saint in the past. Since 1999, Valentine's Day pilgrimages have been associated with the grave of Blessed Anna Kolesárová in the Eastern-Slovak village of Vysoká nad Uhom.¹⁰ The subject of the following analysis is *Pút' zalúbených* [Lovers' Pilgrimage], which has been held in the Western-Slovak city of Šaštín-Stráže since 2007. This place is known for the tradition of pilgrimages to the statue of Our Lady of Sorrows which the Church recognised as miraculous in 1732 (ibid., 121–125).

Organising the Lovers' Pilgrimage has a philosophical motivation. It is prepared by the Catholic Church¹¹ and is held with the presence of Church representatives. This ensures following the preset programme and correct interpretation of the meaning of the Pilgrimage.

The Lovers' Pilgrimage is one of the events that arise from enriching the traditional form of a cultural event with new, experience-enhancing elements. Its main idea is based on the current revitalisation of the traditional interpretation

10 In 1944, a soldier of the Soviet army shot a 16-year-old girl who "chose death rather than losing her virginity". Anna Kolesárová was beatified as a martyr of purity in 2018 (Príbeh, 2023).

11 The pilgrimage is organised by members of the Religious Society of St. Francis de Sales and the Order of St. Paul the First Hermit with the help of young volunteers from the community of believers. The pilgrimage takes place on February 14 or as close as possible to this date, from Friday to Sunday.

pattern of a non-liturgical religious activity – pilgrimage.¹² The aim is to attract primarily young people, strengthen their faith, present the Church as a modern institution, and possibly gain new believers.

The organisers call the Lovers' Pilgrimage a thematic pilgrimage – for instance, as compared to the National Pilgrimage to the patron saint of Slovakia, Our Lady of Sorrows, on the day of her feast day on September 15. By doing so, they directly declare its monothematic focus.

The content of the Lovers' Pilgrimage features love between God and man which man expresses by respecting the Christian principles of life in partnership. This idea is contained in concentrated form in *Hymna Púte zalúbených* [Anthem of the Lovers' Pilgrimage], which interlinks the individual editions and legitimises the Pilgrimage as an event:

„My prosíme Ťa, Pane,
ďaj nám požehnanie,
zachráň nás od prázdnych ciest.
Nech tvoja láska, Pane,
sa našou láskou stane
nech necháme sa s tebou viesť.
Ty dávaš lásku nám,
čo neberie lež dáva,
[: a z dvoch vzdialených srdc, môj Pane,
v Tebe jedno sa stáva :]“

“We ask you, Lord
Give us a blessing,
Save us from empty paths.
May your love, Lord,
Become our love,
Let us be guided by you.
You give us love
that does not take away, but gives,
[: and from two distant hearts, my Lord,
one is realised in You:]”

(© Púť zalúbených, www.zalubeni.sk text, text: Mária Oravcová, music: Braňo Letko.)

Each edition of the Pilgrimage updates this universal ideological framework with a new approach to partnerships, as expressed by the “motto of the Pilgrimage” since 2008: for instance, *Pod krídlom* [Under the Wing] (2008); *Slobodní v láske* [Free in Love] (2009); *I like manželstvo* [I like marriage] (2012); *Slúžiť v láske* [Serving in Love] (2015); *Hľadiť novými očami* [Looking with New Eyes] (2022). The motto of each edition manifests its uniqueness. The programme consists of religious and profane activities, the number of which is relatively stable. Therefore, in the case of the Pilgrimage, it cannot be stated that the exceptionality of the event is expressed by bringing more and more impulses. It is enhanced, for example, by the fact that the Pilgrimage takes place once a year, as well as by the place where it takes place. Church representatives and believers refer to the Basilica of Our Lady of Sorrows in Šaštín-Stráže as the National Basilica or the National Shrine (Národná bazilika, 2013; Národná Svätýňa, 2014), which indicates its important position among Catholic churches in Slovakia.

¹² In the sense of the catechism of the Catholic Church, the pilgrimage is an expression of piety, religious sentiment, and an opportunity for promises to God, the fulfilment of which is understood as an expression of obligatory respect and love for Him (Katechizmus, 2007: 423, 517).

In general, events offer participants immersion into an unexpected, totally new transcendent world. However, the findings about the Lovers' Pilgrimage show that the participants, as believers, already know the (faith-related) supernatural and have experience with it. The Lovers' Pilgrimage as a religious event thus represents a new and another way of entering the supernatural.

The language of cultural and aesthetic syncretism is enriched in the Lovers' Pilgrimage with the religious dimension of individual aesthetic expressions such as music, singing, visual arts, etc. Its key component consists of religious rituals performed during daily masses, as well as prayers and adoration outside of them. The programme also includes concerts of gospel and classical music, competitions, workshops, and tours of the basilica, which serve especially for fun and relaxing. The participants to the pilgrimage meet with priests and experts in the topic to which the particular edition is devoted, at lectures, discussions, and debates. Married couples give "testimonies" in interviews about their experiences of partner life in the spirit of the Catholic faith. Film and theatre performances are often the starting point for discussions (V Šaštíne oslávilo, 2008; Šaštín počas Valentína, 2010; KRONIKA, 2016; ŠAŠTÍN-STRÁŽE, 2017). Thus, the Lovers' Pilgrimage combines and intertwines traditionalist forms of celebration with elements typical of contemporary youth culture, which results in a religious-hybrid event (Pfadenhauer, 2010: 392; Hitzler, 2011:29).

The Church considers it important that the Lovers' Pilgrimage disrupts the particularised reality of daily life and routine and that the participants experience the metaphysical feeling of the "wholeness of being". It signals this, in the role of organiser and co-producer, by reflecting the importance of the pilgrimage not only during its preparation and duration, but also after it is over, for instance, through reports in church and other media.

The exclusivity of the Pilgrimage is guaranteed by participation exclusively on the basis of registration, which is additionally limited by the number of participants, also



Fig. 2. Poster informing about *Pút zalúbených* [Lovers' Pilgrimage] in 2013. The pilgrimage takes place in the Basilica of Our Lady of Sorrows in the Western-Slovak town of Šaštín-Stráže, called the National Shrine. The programme of the meeting, in which only 150 couples could participate, also included non-religious activities: theatre and film performances, a workshop, a tour of the basilica, etc. The pilgrimage can therefore be described as a hybrid-religious event of an exclusive nature.

Source: <https://upc.uniza.sk/put-zalubenych-16-18-2-2018-registracia/> (accessed March 12, 2022).



Fig. 3. Poster (from 2014) informing about the city festival called *Prešov – láska moja* [Prešov – My Love], which took place in this Eastern-Slovak city in 2008–2014. The heart with the figure of a cupid – the largest object of this kind in Slovakia – was one of the sources of unique experiences associated with this event. The heart has appeared on the main square of the city during Valentine's Day even after 2014, and the city's residents still look for it as an original scene for taking pictures. Source: https://pis.sk/clanok/13233/valentin_v_presove.html (accessed Juny 19, 2023).

municipal leadership creates the opportunity for residents to show love and affection to each other in a partnership or in relationships with other close persons jointly in one place and at the same time. The city festival (e.g., Bitušíková, 2021: 259) framed by Valentine's Day is a manifestation of the positive relationship of the representatives of the city to its inhabitants and an opportunity to build the relationship of the inhabitants to the city and its local government. The following text describes the event entitled *Prešov – Láska moja* [Prešov – My Love], which took place in the Eastern-Slovak city of Prešov during the Valentine's Day period from 2008 to 2014.

This event was organised by the municipal leadership. According to the then mayor, the event strengthened the love of the inhabitants for the city and supported the growth of local patriotism (Prešov, 2013). The period of organising the festival

due to the capacity of the building in which the pilgrimage takes place, while considering its theme.¹³ According to the organisers, the Pilgrimage is primarily intended for those who “are dating, or are engaged or married”, and presents it as “the only pilgrimage for young people” (Kotris, 2008; O púti, 2021). Exclusivity is also ensured by the separation of participants from the outside world within the church premises. The basic source of their belonging is faith and jointly performed religious as well as non-religious activities. From the point of view of the participants, the key element of the Pilgrimage are “vows”, which form a kind of prayer during the mass. Unmarried couples undertake to live without premarital sex, while married couples renew their marriage vows in this way (Zajonc, 2022: 123–124).

Municipal Event *Prešov – My Love*

After 2000, the local governments of some cities in Slovakia also began organising mass Valentine's Day celebrations. The

13 Only couples in love, not individuals without a relationship, could participate in the 2018 Lovers' Pilgrimage featuring the theme *Who lives a pure life, can be faithful and enjoy a new life*.

corresponded to the term of office of the mayor (Zoznam, 2022). The mayor's intention to present himself was also explicitly included in the event in 2013 and 2014, when the festival participants could consume the "mayor's drink" for free (Prešov 2013; Na Valentína, 2014). The motivation to organise the event can thus be combined with the political interests of this municipal politician. One of his goals was undoubtedly to build his positive image by organising the festival. Therefore, I categorise this event as a municipal and not an urban event. Various types of events take place in the city, the organisation of which is motivated by various interests. Moreover, a municipal event can also occur in rural environments.

In terms of its form, the festival Prešov – My Love is a newly created event. Its main idea is based on the current revitalisation of the traditional interpretation pattern of feasts, which are designed and produced with the intention of building local identity based on local history and traditions.¹⁴ The contents featured not only love for the city, but also partner love and love between close people.

The uniqueness of this festival was ensured by the fact that it took place once a year. The two main material symbols of the event were also unique. According to information from local media, *Valentínske srdce* [Valentine's Day Heart] or the "lovers' gate" was the largest object of this kind in Slovakia at that time (Valentín omámil, 2011).¹⁵ The red heart glowed at night, with a white cupid sitting on it. The heart was installed on the main square of the city in front of the town hall a few days before Valentine's Day. This made the place exceptional, which also strengthened the uniqueness of this event. The second unique symbol was the "megacake", also called *Valentínsky obor* [Valentine's Day Giant].¹⁶ The cake usually depicted the coat of arms of the city and the inscription "Prešov – My Love". It was the central element of the gathering of the inhabitants of the city during the Valentine's Day mass celebration, which usually took place on February 14 (Zajonc, 2022: 133).

Unusual experiences were mainly associated with the two unique elements of the festival. The cutting of the cake, which he always did first as the mayor of the city, and its joint consumption by the participants to the celebrations were the highlight of the event. Taking photos by the participants with the big heart on the square as a prop was an unusual experience as well. This element remained part of the Valentine's Day celebrations in the city even after 2014 (ibid., 133–134), which points out its uniqueness and the importance of the way of spending the holiday by the inhabitants of the city.

The distinctive character of the event, based on the offer of impulses that are subject to the principle of "having even more of it and making it even larger", was associated with an increased number of co-organisers of the festival Prešov – My

14 These are urban festivals referred to, for example, as *Days of the City of A*, *Days of the Municipality of B*, which take place every year or on the occasion of the anniversary of the location, the granting of city rights, etc. According to the available data (Dni obce, 2023), this kind of urban festival existed already during the Communist regime and their number increased after 2000.

15 The heart was 3.5m high and 3.2m wide.

16 The cake was approximately 2x2m large and weighed 145–150kg.



Fig. 4. The city festival called Prešov – láska moja [Prešov – My Love] took place in this Eastern-Slovak city in 2008–2014. The heart with the figure of a cupid – the largest object of this kind in Slovakia – was one of the sources of unique experiences associated with this event. The heart appeared on the main square of the city during Valentine’s Day even after 2014, and the city’s residents still look for it as an original scene for taking pictures. Author of the image: © Press Agency of the Slovak Republic (TASR)/Milan Kapusta, 2012.

Love. The municipal leadership communicated with the cultural centre, the local radio station, the municipal youth parliament, the university based in the city, primary and secondary schools, etc., offering them the opportunity to participate in the preparation and production of the event (ibid., 133). The range of activities that took place during it therefore increased and became more diverse each year.

The festival Prešov – My Love conveyed a sense of exclusive community, belonging, and “big family” to the participants, especially during the joint events: cutting the “megacake” and its joint consumption, taking pictures with partners and close people in front of the big red heart, sharing these images, and remembering the event and the people who participated in it through pictures. In addition to these two stable elements, the programme of the individual editions of the festival included, among other things, a concert by pupils of the private conservatory and a disco produced by the local radio station. The competition for the most beautiful cake, which was attended by primary

schools, kindergartens, and senior centres, as well as the distribution of gingerbread hearts made by pupils of Prešov schools, were part of the gastronomic component of the event. It took place in a space that, in addition to the large heart with a cupid, was made special, for instance, in 2013, by heart-shaped pillows hung on the facade of the city hall which were sewn by pupils of the art school. In 2014, the square was interconnected with the holiday by the *Valentine's Day Road* consisting of panels with texts on the origin of Valentine's Day. Some elements of the programme were interactive: participants left on the board "messages to their love or city", as well as their fingerprints or stamps in the form of a heart. In 2011, residents expressed their relationship to the city directly in the local radio broadcast as part of the survey *Prešov Seen through the Eyes and Heart*. At that time, members of the city's youth parliament hugged the participants of the celebrations (Čorňáková, 2011; Prešov, 2011; Gubová, 2014, Zuzka, 2014; Pihuličová, 2014). Various cultural and aesthetic forms (music, dance, visual arts, etc.) were thus combined into a "unique whole".

Summary

Looking at Valentine's Day events in Slovakia through the perspective of the trends that characterise the holidays and festivities of modern society (Gebhardt, 2000: 24–26) makes it possible to highlight the specifics of Valentine's Day events as a special component of festive culture in the late modern era.

Modern holidays and celebrations of state and other political, economic, cultural institutions are being deinstitutionalised. Holidays lose acceptance and legitimacy. They are replaced by more open festive forms in which politically diffuse and non-binding goals are mixed with a free social experience (ibid., 25). Valentine's Day is originally a non-institutional feast day. The contents of Valentine's Day have a diffuse nature and are recreated and communicated during the holiday period on an annual basis. This allows not only its rapid dissemination (Bieritz, 2012: 6), but also provides anyone – from individuals to institutions – with the opportunity to fill the holiday with specifically modified content and use it for their own purposes. In this way, the Church, charitable organisations, museums as memory institutions, municipalities, as well as the commercial sphere in Slovakia "temporarily appropriate" Valentine's Day through events. The analysis indicates that, unlike the holidays of modern society, events in the late modern stage are not subject to deinstitutionalisation, and the social homogeneity of their participants does not determine the origin and identity of the festive community.

The social homogeneity of participants to modern holidays and festivities is increasingly disturbed. Destructuring – as Gebhardt calls this trend – is the result of weakening the importance of boundaries between classes, layers, and environments in creating a festive community (Gebhardt, 2000: 25). This trend is also associated with Valentine's Day events in Slovakia. An exception from this is formed by religious-hybrid events (Lovers' Pilgrimage and others). The communities of participants

are confessionally homogeneous since they come primarily from the communities of Catholic believers. In celebrations during the late modern period, there is no longer a community that celebrates, but the community itself is constituted by the celebration of the holiday (ibid., 28). Therefore, the level of social homogeneity is no longer decisive for the existence and identity of the community of a holiday or festivity. The trend of destructuring becomes irrelevant in connection with the event. This finding confirms that individualisation and pluralism processes do not lead to the disintegration of traditional and modern forms of association, nor to people's loneliness, but rather to changes in the forms and ways of gathering (ibid., 28).

In modern holidays, everything objective, i.e., fixed, ritual, prescribed, normatively binding, is rejected, and what comes to the fore is subjective freedom and the possibility of acting freely during the holiday. As a result of profanation, modern holidays and festivities are events that are increasingly ideologically and philosophically poor (ibid., 25). Valentine's Day events also provide participants with freedom and the opportunity to decide. Individual entertainment and unique experiences are at the core of these events. However, the content of the event must be clear to the extent that it can be communicated and that it is possible to communicate about it. It is exclusively the content that promotes identity and creates a community of the event (ibid., 21–22). Therefore, Valentine's Day events are not ideologically and philosophically poor. This statement applies primarily to religious-hybrid events that take the form of Valentine's Day pilgrimages in Slovakia. The Valentine's Day Pilgrimage has a religious content, and its festive practice also includes normative binding rituals in the form of liturgical and non-liturgical celebrations.

From a qualitative point of view, the offer of holiday events in modern society is constantly growing. Multiplication allows people to choose from an increased number of festivities. Holidays and festivities are more and more detached from biographical and historical opportunities and are purposefully created mainly for commercial reasons (ibid., 26). Valentine's Day events are part of this trend, as are other types of festive practices associated with Valentine's Day. Valentine's Day events are specific in that their projection and production are often related to specific stages of life. Lovers' and marital relationships, relationships between parents and children, etc., existing at certain stages of a person's life, constitute the main idea of Valentine's Day events.

Modern holidays and festivities are increasingly subject to commercialisation, i.e., the principle of maximising profit. Existing or newly "invented" holidays are organised to make money directly or indirectly. Thus, the holiday itself becomes meaningful. Profit stems from the universal need of people for an unusual experience (ibid., 26). Valentine's Day penetrated Slovakia as a commercial feast day. The existence of commercial events confirms its strong connection with the commercial sphere even today. The range of commercial Valentine's Day events ranges from events that shopping centres do to attract potential customers to events produced by companies to present specific products by means of the holiday.¹⁷ However, the Valentine's Day event is a marketing tool not only in the commercial sphere. All five

identified types of Valentine's Day events in Slovakia serve as a tool to achieve some form of "profit", though not only in the form of finance.

The production of Valentine's Day pilgrimages in Slovakia is a reaction of the Catholic Church to the need to "Christianise St. Valentine's feast day, which has become too secularised" (Austrálski biskupi, 2012; Deň sv. Valentína, 2005). Pilgrimage as an example of a religious-hybrid event proves that the Catholic Church in Slovakia also reacts innovatively to global pluralism by "eventising faith". The result is a relatively new form of event that combines elements of modernist events typical of today's youth culture and elements of traditional religious, especially liturgical ceremonies (Pfadenhauer, 2010: 392). However, the Lovers' Pilgrimage differs from the World Youth Day in connection with which this "hybrid of a marketing event, megaparty, and religious festival" was explored (Pfadenhauer, 2010; Hitzler, 2011: 28–31; Bik, Stasiak, 2020). The difference lies not only in the national, regional, or local importance, or in the number of participants.

The Lovers' Pilgrimage did not emerge as a new event. The existing profane holiday was integrated into the framework of religious celebrations, where it received an updated and innovated form of pilgrimage as a traditional religious festivity.

The case of the municipal event Prešov – My Love confirms that urban festivities and festivals work as a means of enhancing local identity and belonging and strengthening local pride (for more details, see, for instance, Addo, 2009; Jaeger, Mykletun, 2013). The municipal event did not affect the eventisation of the city in terms of long-term changes in the layout of the space or its use by social groups or scenes as it happens in cities in connection with supra-local or even global mega events (compare, for instance, Spracklen et al., 2013; Hannam, 2018).

The analysis of the commercial-learning event Valentine's Weekend at the Castle showed that the subject of commodification of cultural heritage in Slovakia is not only (or predominantly) elements of folk culture (e.g., Popelková, Zajonc, 2013; Košťalová 2016, 2020; Bitušiková, 2020, 2021), but also elements of high culture, such as historical objects as a space for the event, historical clothing in the form of replicas, or realities about the way of life and events from the life of higher social classes in the form of narratives that thematically correspond to the content of Valentine's Day used during the event.

The findings of the analysis of three Valentine's Day events in Slovakia suggest that globally commodified celebrations can be transformed into different social, religious, and cultural contexts. In doing so, they retain the properties of commodified symbolism and acquire very specific purposes that embody the interests and the offer of identity of key actors. In this context, the transformation process can be understood as a global adaptation of eventisation. This shows that general trends can

17 In 2004, for instance, a company producing electronics organised a *Valentine's Day dinner* in a circus tent on the banks of the Danube River in Bratislava. Several hundred couples in love took part in the event which also featured "public marriage proposals". This step was motivated by mobile phones donated by the company to couples declaring their intention to marry (SR Valentín, 2004).

have significant local impacts on the revival of festivities as community-building events that attempt introducing authentic identification processes. The identified trends seem to go in the opposite direction compared to the theoretical conclusions of Gebhardt and Hitzler.

Eventisation as the production and provision of experiential worlds for everyone, always, everywhere, and more-or-less “under any circumstances” (Hitzler, 2011: 20) manifests itself in the celebration of Valentine’s Day in Slovakia both as the existence of Valentine’s Day events that enrich traditional cultural occasions (Valentine’s Day pilgrimage as a religious-hybrid event, Valentine’s Day castle tour as a commercial-learning event), and in “strategic new creation” (municipal Valentine’s Day Festival as a municipal event). The presence of both paths of eventisation as a projection and production of events (ibid., 20) demonstrates the acceleration of eventisation in the festive culture of Slovakia in the late modern period.

Findings about the origin, intentions of production, and the impact of Valentine’s Day events on participants also correspond to the knowledge of Katarína Popelková about the accelerating process of eventisation of the festive culture in Slovakia (Popelková, 2023: 128). However, we can talk about the acceleration of eventisation from the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, when events emerged as specific forms of mass celebrations of Valentine’s Day, and not only from 2021, when K. Popelková conducted her research on the forms of spending Easter during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A look at Valentine’s Day from the point of view of eventisation shows that its inclusion in the holiday calendar of the inhabitants of Slovakia did not only enrich the transforming festive culture with a “new feast day”. The presence of Valentine’s Day also enabled the spread of a new way of designing, producing, and experiencing holidays as a product of accelerating eventisation. As the above three examples show, Valentine’s Day events often follow up on domestic festivities, festivals, traditions, and all identified types of events represent a widespread and popular form of Valentine’s Day celebration in Slovakia. This confirms that it has become an established feast day in the 21st century.

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