

## Contemporary Holidays and Their Transformations Editorial

KATARÍNA POPELKOVÁ



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*Katarína Popelková, Institute of Ethnology and the Social Anthropology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Klemensova 19, 811 09 Bratislava, Slovakia; e-mail: katarina.popelkova@savba.sk*

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Until recently, ethnology and anthropology studied holidays and celebrations as a tool for maintaining stability and continuity of social groups and institutions. Festivities and celebrations acted as non-everyday forms of communication, renewing and celebrating common idiosyncrasies and promoting togetherness and solidarity. They were an expression and a prerequisite for the creation of individual identity and social order.

In modern society, which itself is subject to further internal changes (Giddens, 2000; Bauman, 2002; Beck, 2004), festive culture is influenced by a dynamic process of transformation.

The explored area of research on modern festivities has been characterised by a developing terminological and methodological discussion (see, for instance, Šima, 2017). The empirical reflection on the manifestations of modern transformations, such as the privatisation of holidays or the decline of their overall social integration function – the importance of which, on the contrary, is increasing from the point of view of groups and communities in the context of complex society – encourages scientists to review/rethink the traditional Durkheimian theses of the integration effects of holidays and rituals and develop their own theory (see, for instance, Etzioni, 2010: 6, 16, 25, 28). Anthropologist Gábor Barna (2014, 2017) showed that holidays in both the public and private spheres are losing their meaningful relationship and commemorative dimension in the process of secularisation and religious

individualisation. New rituals are being added to the ways of practising them, and rituals are being replaced by new activities (such as trips, relaxation, shopping). According to Austrian ethnologist Ewa Kubalek (2010), the old forms of pre-industrial ritual acts and customs shifted to the area of popular entertainment and organised experiences as a consequence of a radical change of society and economy; many of them have survived until today, acquiring new contents for promotion purposes. The more open forms of public festivities that evolved in the context of modern society have lost their function of rituals that promote fellowship, solidarity, and identity. According to Klaus Roth (2008), changes in European culture at the turn of the millennium were significantly influenced by festivalisation. From the perspective of social sciences, thematic public celebrations are closely linked to the structure and mechanism of functioning of societies and the environment in which they take place (Cudny, 2016); relationships between festivals and tourism, festivals and strategic planning, branding, and economic development have become the subject of developing interdisciplinary research on festival studies (Getz, 2000).

In the late modern period, the changes in the world of holidays acquired dynamics associated with growing individualisation and pluralism. The offer of cultural experiences is increasingly penetrating the areas of our social contacts, and the common forms of holidays, celebrations, and cultural events are being enriched with new elements of entertainment and consumption. At the same time, the growing number of events (Hitzler, 2011) aim at providing an extraordinary experience. According to Winfried Gebhardt (2000), these changes of a global nature can be described as a process of eventisation. He describes eventisation as the action of five trends: weakening the binding nature and institutional legitimacy of holidays and festivals; disrupting the social homogeneity of their participants; rejecting prescribed and binding elements in their content and seeking individual entertainment; growing offer of events; creating or adapting these events to commercial purposes to maximise profit.

The open monothematic call for the 4/2023 issue of the *Slovenský národopis* / Slovak Ethnology journal drew attention to the described processes that affect present-day holidays and offered space for researchers who work on their empirical reflections and analyses. The issue brings five thematic studies by European authors. In the study of the selected cases, they have worked with data from the latest empirical research, applied a broad range of internationally accepted theoretical concepts, and discussed key terminology issues.

The article by two Latvian ethnologists Oksana Kovzele and Ilze Kačāne entitled *Transformations in Midsummer's Eve Celebrations in Soviet and Post-Soviet Latvia* explores the transformations in the celebration of the summer solstice festival – the Midsummer's Eve (Jāņi) as a public holiday, which is perceived in modern times as part of pagan heritage. Historically, it was instrumentalised as a key concept for building and preserving the ethnic identity of Latvians. This was the reason why it was suppressed in the era of Soviet domination and Russification and was subsequently repeatedly restored. Over the past century, its perception and celebration underwent profound changes, including social and economic transformations accompanying

life in late modernity. The authors undertook to reflect on the changes through the study of the practices of its celebration, its emblematic features, and the ways in which the holiday is viewed and what importance is attributed to it by the ethnically mixed population of this Baltic country. The empirical material consists of data from more than a hundred qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted in the Latgale region in south-eastern Latvia. The authors present several models of practising the Midsummer's Eve today as the result of their analysis. The ways it is experienced ranges from celebrations based on modern theatricalisation through celebrations following Latvian folk traditions to celebrations in the form of organised consistent reconstructions that revitalise old traditions in the form of stage performances. The reluctance of a part of the Latvian population to participate in any celebrations of the Midsummer's Eve is thematised by the authors as a signal of the burnout of society, a consequence of work-life imbalance, as well as alienation from old customs, which causes the symbolic meaning of this holiday to be neglected.

The study by Czech ethnologist and ethnochoreologist Daniela Stavělová *Why Do We Have So Many Carnivals in Town Today? An Event Between Ritual, Politics, and Festival* analyses the processes of carnivalisation and communitisation in the late modern era. She reflects on the role of collective memory in constructing the forms of today's carnival festivals in urban environments. Although they assume the proven cultural patterns of the traditional Mardi Gras, they manipulate them according to the needs of contemporary urban society. This process is illustrated by the author through the example of a carnival organised in the outskirts of the Czech metropolis of Prague, where people create their own space for stable housing using also various cultural techniques. During its relatively short existence, the carnival has gained great popularity and has been intensively attended by visitors. The author describes the strategies of its organisers and the range of its functions, including the commercial one. The paper points to the innovative approaches of the actors of the current urban environment in constituting "new" traditions. By examining the adaptation of traditional rural rituals to the complex urban environment, the study contributes to the discussion on festive post-traditional phenomena. The author directly talks about fictional carnivals that play an important role in building social ties within hierarchical local communities, which she interprets using Weber's concept of community.

When reflecting on the conceptual distinction of individual festive occasions and the typology of the examined cases, she relies on the views of W. Gebhardt and R. Hitzler and develops a terminological discussion by analysing the definition frameworks of the terms feast, celebration, festival, and carnival. She comes to the conclusion that the explored examples of contemporary carnival are so complex and ambiguous that it is not possible to clearly determine what kind of event it is. She herself understands it as part of the constant negotiation process of the actors. Taking into account the trends of late modernity, it is characterised by a considerable degree of eclecticism – it features elements of a holiday with a focus on an intimate experience and the sharing of the sacred, festival elements with a commercial

purpose, and also includes manifestations of the eventisation process: emphasis on interactivity and creativity with the aim of attracting people to participate in the experience of a unique event.

The study *#CovidEaster – Humour in the Digital Sharing of Easter Festive Material During the COVID-19 Pandemic* by Croatian researcher Željko Predojević reflects on the influence of social media on the way holidays are celebrated. The secularisation of festive practice and the growing importance of non-religious practices is of a global nature. Their impact and manifestations can also be documented through “traditional” holidays, including Easter, and even under as exceptional conditions as those created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Predojević worked with data gathered from the internet (from the social media platform Instagram, using Easter-related hashtags) and specifically with visual-verbal humorous internet genres, which were published in spring 2020. Internet memes and their subgenres – image macro memes and viral photo – wittily depict the problems caused by the coronavirus pandemic. He examined them as digital folklore in relation to common jokes in the context of present-day (pandemic) humour, as well as in the context of newslure, political humour, and catastrophic humour. The factual findings that emerged from the analysis of the topics and motifs contained in the material outstandingly reveal the depth to which the unknown and formidably spreading pandemic affected daily life at the beginning of 2020. Original knowledge contributes to the understanding of the mechanism of how internet users coped with reality through humour, while freely, critically and creatively dealing with the seemingly untouchable, globally widespread symbols and emblems or traditional representations of a centuries-old holiday (Easter egg, rabbit, Biblical scenes of the Last Supper, resurrection of Jesus Christ, etc.).

The theoretical contribution of Predojević’s study is that it applies the view of visual-verbal humorous internet genres as digital folklore expressions. It deals with the thesis developed by several other researchers, according to which the creation of online genres depends on the community, similar to traditional folklore expressions. Members of internet communities interact with each other, while creating, editing, and sharing internet genres, including the memes explored here, for other community users. Among people with common interests, these genres thus play a role in shaping their identity.

The text by Slovak ethnologist Alexandra Bitušíková *Food as a Unifier? Rural and Urban Food Festivals in Central Slovakia* is based on a comparative analysis of data from ethnographic observations of rural and urban food festivals. Bitušíková conducted her research in the city of Banská Bystrica in Central Slovakia and in several rural locations in this region in 2021 and 2022. Since the mid-1990s, when culinary festivals began to emerge in Slovakia as exceptional occasions for social interaction, communication and learning, their popularity has grown. The author describes the specific features of these organised public events, examines their social, integration, and economic functions, as well as the forms of links to the local and regional context. According to her findings, rural food festivals mostly focus on the concept of competitive cooking and consuming traditional dishes. Participants are

involved in the preparation and tasting of food prepared according to either old recipes or specific foodstuffs. Their main goal is to promote unity within communities and raise the awareness of local belonging and solidarity. They present a rich tapestry of traditions also through folklore performances and tours. These events are mainly attended by locals and their relatives from the surrounding area. They play a key role in strengthening ties within communities; however, in addition to the processes of communitisation, the author also reflects on their politicisation. This is manifested by the participation of political representatives or propaganda of political (especially neo-fascist) groups. The city festivals in Banská Bystrica have developed as a mixture of culinary experiences that include diverse cuisines and new food trends. Unlike their rural counterparts, these festivals avoided the competitive aspect, placed less emphasis on heritage and, instead, offered a number of cultural performances that reach beyond folklore traditions. They have attracted both locals and visitors from the wider geographic region, becoming important places to interact and communicate. Celebrating different culinary cultures and artistic expressions, urban food festivals have become reflective displays of the diversity that is inherently rooted in most urban centres. Unlike rural festivals, urban festivals have demonstrated a commitment to environmental awareness and sustainability – applying a waste management strategy. Their importance goes beyond cultural enrichment and also includes robust economic dimensions by providing local and regional entrepreneurs with space to present and sell their products.

The article by Slovak ethnologist Juraj Zajonc *Valentine's Day and the Eventisation of Slovakia's Festive Culture* brings a new attempt to interpret Valentine's Day celebrations in contemporary society in Slovakia. The contents of Valentine's Day as a modern secular holiday have a diffuse nature and are recreated and communicated during the holiday period on an annual basis. This allows not only for its rapid dissemination, but it provides anyone – from individuals to institutions – with the opportunity to fill Valentine's Day with specifically modified content and use it for their own purposes. The author's innovative approach consists of combining Gebhardt's and Hitzler's concepts of eventisation with an analysis of three public celebrations in Slovak regions. For the purposes of his case study based on an analysis of organised public events related to Valentine's Day instead of individual practices related to practicing this holiday in private, the author chooses the term celebration and by explaining this choice he contributes to a broader terminological discussion.

On the empirical level, the study relies on the findings from the analysis of media sources examined during his exploratory research which he conducted in 2011–2021. J. Zajonc identifies selected Valentine's Day celebrations as public events that have a central and structured organisation, public but limited audience, and a clearly defined aim, and through their content and course, he observes the manifestations of the individual trends in the eventisation process. He shows how the globally commodified Valentine's Day celebrations are transformed into local cultural, social, and religious contexts according to the needs and interests of the organisers.

According to Zajonc, eventisation as the production and provision of experience worlds in the celebration of Valentine's Day in Slovakia manifests itself both through the existence of Valentine's Day events that enrich the traditional cultural occasion (Valentine's Day pilgrimage as a religious hybrid event, Valentine's Day castle tour as a commercial-learning event), and in "strategic new creation" (urban Valentine's Festival as a municipal event). The presence of both forms of eventisation as the projection and production of events reflect the acceleration of this trend in the festive culture of Slovakia.

The corpus of five studies on the current transformations of festive culture has several remarkable common characteristics in its diversity – resulting from different empirical material and methodology used. One of them is the fact that they provide a qualitative ethnological testimony about the state of society in post-socialist European countries (Latvia, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia). With the often interdisciplinary context that the authors applied, they crossed the boundaries of the traditional ethnological approach to festivities. Some of them are pioneers in exploring topics that have not been common in the ethnology of their countries, and also elaborate on the on-going international terminological discussion. The findings and conclusions offered deepen knowledge about the cultural dimensions of complex social processes characteristic of European late-modern society, which – as we hope – can be an interesting contribution to ethnology and other social science and humanities disciplines also internationally.

The issue also contains an off-topic article by up to seven authors from the Czech Republic. The team of authors led by Tomáš Bubík from Palacký University in Olomouc undertook an ambitious survey of the attitudes to death and dying based on an analysis of inscriptions on tombstones, which can provide information about the bereaved's views on death and afterlife called funeral religiosity. Through the perspective of the academic study of religion, the authors focused on two Central-European regions, specifically along the borders of the Czech Republic, with different levels of declared religiosity. These regions were influenced by different national (Czech, German and Polish) and religious groups (especially Catholic and Protestant). In total, they have documented almost 10,000 gravestones in the border towns of Třinec and Litvínov and developed a quantitative method for the data processing. The results of this research are offered in the article entitled *Places of the Dead and the Living: A Study of Cemetery Religious Symbolism as Funerary Expressions of Religiosity*. An important part of this text is also an extensive dataset, which can be viewed at the attached link.

The final part of this issue contains four book reviews of current ethnological and anthropological publications concerning the Central-European region.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KATARÍNA POPELKOVÁ (ORCID: 0000-0002-8163-4800) – ethnologist, senior research fellow at the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava. She studied ethnography at the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University in Bratislava (1987) and defended her scientific dissertation on the topic of urban ethnology in 1997. She deals with issues of the history of ethnology, ethnic stereotypes on the border, regional development, and the post-socialist transformation of viticulture. Since 2011, she has led four research projects on the transformation of holiday culture in Slovakia in the twenty-first century. She is the author of over forty scientific studies, and editor of the publication *Čo je to sviatok v 21. storočí na Slovensku?* [What Is a Holiday in the Twenty-First Century in Slovakia?] (2014) and the author of the book *Vinohradnícke mesto v etnologickej perspektíve* [Wine-Growing Town from an Ethnological Perspective] (2021).