



“There is only one history – that means not only that it comprises all essentials, all aspects of the past – ‘including the Christ and Pilate’ – but also that history cannot be separated from the present by a barrier of distance, which is comfortable to the writer, but curtails the past at the point where it begins to blend with what interests people most – the present.”

Lubomír Lipták 2000: 290

Zuzana Beňušková

CIVIL CEREMONIES
IN SOCIALIST CZECHOSLOVAKIA
AND POST-SOCIALIST SLOVAKIA



Institute of Ethnology
and Social Anthropology
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The Process of Eventisation in the Festive Culture of Slovakia in the 21st Century



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FOREWORD

Ceremonial culture and civil ceremonies have been in the centre of my interest since the time of writing my master's thesis (1983) and later became the subject of my doctoral thesis (1996). On the one hand, the 1990s allowed to freely choose the approach to the research topic and to the interpretation of the results, while on the other hand, civil ceremonies were definitely not a preferred topic of that period, and some even buried them together with the Communist regime. Nevertheless, civil ceremonies have adapted to the new situation and have become stabilised. I have continued to follow this issue peripherally, and this publication is the result of almost forty years of observation of civil ceremonies both from the point of view of the researcher and citizens. I confront the findings from Slovakia (or Czechoslovakia) with similar results by the German ethnologist Klaus Roth, who focuses on the research of South-Eastern Europe and, in this framework, the development of civil ceremonies in Bulgaria during the socialist period. Even though I argue with him from time to time, a well-founded view "from the outside" has helped me to look at the topic more critically "from the inside".

I conducted the first part of my research during the normalisation period, which is also regarded as an autonomous era of the historical epoch of socialism in Czechoslovakia. During that period, the research on civil ceremonies was considered an engaged topic and was expected to contribute to their development and improvement. Before contributing to anything, socialism was over, and the subject could be explored without forced ideological boundaries.

The book offers a picture of the daily civil life during the totalitarian regime, of the state's political interests, as well as of the practices and strategies used by people to transform the state's official ideology and adapt it to their continuous value system and traditions. I am confident that a critical reflection on this historical experience will contribute to the understanding of how the Communist regime was received as well as co-created and maintained by people for four decades. The publication also shows what traces this era has left in civil ceremonies in Slovakia thirty years after its fall.

INTRODUCTION

Social scientists from Central and Eastern European countries that formed part of the socialist bloc were involved in a great social experiment. The older generation dealt with the research on socialism already during the regime, though they had to respect politically preferred themes as well as the ideological and theoretical boundaries built on Marxist-Leninist historical materialism, adapted to the given period. After the political change in 1989, the newly acquired freedom enabled the re-interpretation of the knowledge and experience of life in socialism in the satellite countries of the Soviet Union. However, the path towards a post-socialist analysis of the socialist daily life was not immediate and easy. This experience was characterised by historian Jan Rychlík as follows: “After all, it is understandable that there was no great interest in this topic shortly after 1989, because every adult was familiar with the daily life of the Communist (and, especially, normalisation¹) regime at that time thanks to their own experience” (Rychlík 2020: 32). The reality lived until then, the changes in retrospective research at the end of 1989, and the newly acquired values negated the previous ones, initially without any selection.

The theoretical background for the study of the socialist period

The authorities representing societies in transition, including scientific ones, tended to present the picture of the socialist past through the phenomenon of a totalitarian political regime which, from the point of view of Slovakia, also comprised the period of the so-called Slovak State.² They focused mainly on “revealing the power mechanisms of the functioning of the Communist Party’s monopoly government and, in particular, on politically motivated persecutions” (Pažout 2015: 7). During the first years after the political upheaval in 1989, the social atmosphere was not prepared for a scientific understanding of the high degree of people’s adaptability or even loyalty towards the authoritarian regime of the Communist government. Methodologically, the research model that clearly named the victims and culprits, designated also as totalitarian historical, prevailed. For a critical and reasonably objective anthropological interpretation of the period of socialism, it was necessary to acquire a certain distance from the studied period.

Nevertheless, the study of daily life during the era of socialism shows “...the complexity of the period, which is neither as simple as suggested by certain rather heated than profound criticism, nor so deep as shown in many occasional brochures, celebratory writings, books or articles” (Lipták 2000: 288). Towards the end of the period of the Communist state, 15 million inhabitants lived under the Czechoslovak Communist regime, and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia counted 1.5 million members. This means that every tenth citizen (if we do not count children and youth, this number decreases³) was a member of an organisation that was dissolved in 1992 and declared criminal in

the Czech Republic after 1989. However, all these people have found a way of co-existence, lived their lives, and the task of both history and ethnology is to explore this form of life. The importance of the functioning of daily life was also confirmed by French researcher Muriel Blaive, who formulated the thesis according to which the system of state socialism was largely based on negotiations. She emphasised the need to “strive for a realistic picture of life in a dictatorship – including, for example, the fact that the Communists indeed fulfilled some of the desires of millions of people, brought them to power, that various autonomous groups and ways of life survived even during the time of harshest Stalinism, or that the protagonists of the Communist powers authentically believed in their own ideological premises and were willing to make considerable sacrifices for them.” And she specifically stressed that the study of daily life in socialism “is not at all a condemnable manifestation or naive relativisation of the crimes and injustice that overwhelmed that period. I am interested in the compromises, in who was able to sacrifice what from the ethical perspective. How people behaved in order to survive” (according to Spurný 2017). Likewise, Czech historians P. Kolář and M. Pullmann note that power and society overlapped in the totalitarian regime. At the same time, a certain bond was created that kept the dictatorship alive. They see the monstrosity of dictatorships – both the Communist and the Nazi – mainly in the fact that they were able to reach out to a large part of society. They formulated the paradox that “the more we study Communist dictatorship, the less we encounter clear features of ‘totalitarian power’ in it” (Kolář – Pullmann 2020). What they consider to be the key task for understanding the functioning of the Communist regime is to capture its internal contradictions

and paradoxes, which may be illuminated by research into collective memory.

The legitimisation of this opinion meant a shift in scientific research. The strong proponents of the totalitarian-historical approach designate this approach as revisionist, or even consider it to be a mitigation of the criminal nature of Communism. In ethnology, the conflict of views of historians and political scientists among the supporters of the totalitarian-historical and the so-called revisionist approach to the study of socialism is perceived rather marginally. Researchers from academic institutions have been aware of the fact that the ethnological interpretation of socialism should be based mainly on the knowledge of how the regime was reflected by people of different social classes and environments and, by exploring collective memory, they seek to reveal the individual, emic form of interpretation of the lived period within a broad social spectrum. The research on socialism has gradually become part of the historically contextualised ethnological research as a partial stage of the development of the studied phenomena. In the framework of scientific research projects, studies and later also publications describing selected areas of life during socialism were created in a targeted manner.⁴ They included the seeking of theoretical and methodological approaches that would be optimal for the collection and interpretation of the gathered information. One of the topics explored as part of the ethnological research on daily life in socialism is ceremonies and festivities. This topic was grasped in an inspiring way by ethnologist O. Polouček (2020), who focused on the continuity and discontinuity of the value system through the example of rural social parties. It turned out that everything could have been done to the general satisfaction of all those involved. Si-

milar results were achieved by Czech historian Petr Roubal in his research on mass exercises connected with the Czechoslovak Spartakiada, which is still positively remembered by thousands of its participants (Roubal 2016). Both publications present the ritualised forms of social life and show how a constant process of collective and individual negotiations between the rulers and the ruled was taking place. The research on civil ceremonies practiced during socialism has brought similar results.

Human communities divide time into ordinary time and festive time. Festive time is perceived as exceptional; festive days are ascribed a specific significance and are associated with practices that symbolically express the claimed values. Rituals are being formed, and institutions to take care of their observance are being established. Institutionally managed holidays have long served also as a political marketing tool. The term marketing is borrowed from the economic sphere to denote strategies aimed to attract and maintain customers, while in the social-political sphere it serves to achieve the desired political effect. According to some authors, political marketing exists only in democratic societies; in totalitarian regimes, propaganda seems to be a more adequate term (Čemez, Klus 2012: 105). However, in a figurative sense, the term marketing can be symbolically perceived as a planned implementation of ideas aimed at “fighting for the customer”, for one’s own benefit. Both environments are close to some politicians and it is no coincidence that they use similar tools in their fight for “clients”. One of the proven tools has been holidays and their contents.

Ceremonies and rituals are an organic part and structural component of holidays. They are created by people to satisfy

their private or group needs, and form an integral part of each human society. Through rituals, they communicate, recall, and protect the values they claim. It is the task of certain – state, public, municipal, or church – institutions to recall and arrange them. In this work, I deal with the institutional forms of rituals. By this term I mean the ceremonies (and their elements) or festive occasions which are initiated and directed by national and local authorities, churches, religious communities, and other social institutions.

I explore civil ceremonies as a sub-group of institutional ceremonies, i.e. that part of institutional ceremonies which are not subject to religious institutions or religious ideology. They are either a non-religious alternative of the festive ritual celebration of important events in the life of individuals or society, or can also be authentically secular, without a religious counterpart. The term civil ceremonies refers to an entire complex and system of secular institutional ceremonies and festivities, their functioning, organisation, and other implementation contexts, i.e. activities and products as well as related organisational and executive components. This complex as a manifestation of the Communist, anti-religious ideology emerged in former Czechoslovakia during the period designated as socialism, after the Communist coup in 1948.⁵ Civil ceremonies form part of the ritual culture, i.e. culture related to ceremonies in general.⁶ In former socialist countries, the term civil ceremonies was used as a synonym for socialist ceremonies. In the countries which have not experienced the formation of socialist civic ceremonies, the terms “civil ceremonies” (or also civic or state ceremonies) and “church ceremonies” are preferred. After 1989, the ideological content of this term lost their *raison d'être*, however, the

activities that are designated as civil ceremonies have survived in Slovakia. At present, civil ceremonies and festivities comprise a complex of rituals and activities of transitional nature, linked to important events in the lives of individuals and with the celebration of holidays recognised by society (see Roth 2008, Leščák – Beňušková 1987).

The historical background of the research on rituals

The functioning of cultural models and their evolution trends in real life are the subject of anthropological research. We know relatively little about the possible alternatives of human behaviour during a certain period and in a certain space, about what people wanted, what they were allowed to do or had to do, what they could do, what was tolerated and was not and why. However, each period had its own atmosphere influenced by the social and political situation, which was reflected in the way of life in society. These social and political influences are particularly manifested, along with civilisational factors, as a dynamising development element contrasting with stabilised traditional culture (Bocock 1974).

In ritual culture, the relationship between citizen – state – society has been shaped since ancient times. Rituals are an imminent part of religion and, for churches and religious societies, they represent an important element of their identity and participation, and have therefore received due attention throughout history. During the Middle Ages, when the secular and church powers overlapped, the festive life in Christian communities was dictated by the Church which overlaid pre-Christian festivities with new contents and brought unified elements in it. This period is characterised by the Church's efforts to impose its interests,

norms, values, and relations. Feudal society was based on regulated behaviour of its members, regular church visits, services, church festivities, processions, pilgrimages, new rituals emerged, and religious life was part of both everyday life and festive life. Social and material preconditions were created for controlling the private festive as well as daily⁷ lives of people with Christian ideology. In the folk environment, this process was slow and uneven, and depended on support from rulers, the social and political situation, as well as the availability or quality of priests. Church elements were incorporated in the traditional life-cycle ceremonies by means of regulations, and people accepted them also because these elements enhanced the impression of the situation being festive and official and because these elements became intertwined. Considering that, in the 15th century, over a third of the days of the year were dedicated to festivities in some Roman-Catholic dioceses (Gurevič 1978: 113), the ritual culture was an important part of Medieval life.

The importance of holidays and ceremonies has not escaped the attention of the representatives of emerging civil states not even in modern times, and the fight for holidays became part of secularisation processes. The penetration of the Christianisation of rituals into the intimate sphere of family ceremonies has been slower than into mass ceremonial occasions that are more frequent in the calendar ritual cycle. For instance, as early as in the 16th century, priests often complained about people desecrating Sundays and holidays, neglecting fasting, seldom receiving sacraments, and living in secret marriages or even dishonouring churches for profane objectives, dances, and markets (Špirko 1943: 105). Officially, it was the Council of Trent in 1545–1563 that represented a historical breakthrough in the Catholic Church.⁸ As a result of

the reformation events at the time of adoption of these decrees, the representatives of the Protestant Church were no longer present at the Council, which was later also reflected in different mandatory forms of rituals in the Catholic Church and in the emerging Protestant religious communities. Unlike the Catholic Church, the Protestant churches and denominations did not formulate a series of ritual ordinances centrally, but preferred to regulate them regionally. The Council of Trent did not even concern the Orthodox Church, which separated from the Roman Church as early as in the 11th century.

In connection with the secularisation processes in modern times, the system of ceremonies also became the subject of interest of the state power. The changes in the state vs. church relationships were also reflected in the ritual culture. The emergence of civil forms of ceremonies was related to the shaping of civil society in the 18th century. In Central Europe, the relationship between the church and the state in the context of ritual culture developed without major turning points, in a relatively tolerant atmosphere (Remberg, A. 1990) until seizure of power by Communists and the creation of states with a socialist regime.

Following the model of the Soviet Union, the term “civil ceremonies” acquired a new meaning, and holidays became the subject of fight for consumers between Communist and religious ideology. The socialist project differed from older cultural managements in its totalitarian nature, broad organisation, and a high speed of its spreading along with the suppression of traditional, mainly religious forms (Roth 2008. 16). A system of state holidays and a system of civil ceremonies oriented on people’s life cycle were created. In the newly formed festive system, the promoted

secular and civil values were ingeniously linked to the ties to the socialist state and its Communist ideology. Under the conditions of the socialist regime, their acceptance by the inhabitants of Czechoslovakia ranged from rejection through various variants of their adaptation to their own needs or circumvention up to unconditional acceptance. Religious ceremonies rituals existed parallel to them.

Church and civil institutional ceremonies together with informal folk rituals created a three-component ritual model. The component, here referred to as folk, is characterised by the transmission of ritual behaviour from generation to generation, whereas the origin of the rituals cannot always be specifically traced, as usually possible with institutional ceremonies. This component can be described as spontaneous, because it is not demanded by any existing institution, but only by its bearer community, based on traditions. The three-component structure of the ritual system was characteristic mainly of the 1970s and 1980s, the period during which the elements of the surviving traditional culture were disappearing, and civil ceremonies were already widespread and largely accepted. However, changes also affected church ceremonies which were controlled by the state that sought to make sure that these ceremonies are publicly visible as little as possible⁹ and, to a certain degree, they adapted to the current needs of their bearers. This resulted in the tabooisation of certain activities and acts, and in their shift and retreat to church premises – churches, where they were protected against the unfavourable situation in society (Jágerová 2008: 253).

The civil ceremonies described in this publication comprise mainly life-cycle rituals. Their origins are based on the ceremonies practiced upon birth, marriage, and death.

Objectives and methods of work

The objective of this publication is to provide readers with an overview of the contexts of the emergence and existence of civil ceremonies in the period 1948–1989 as well as after the fall of the Communist regime – and of the temporary disappearance and subsequent restoration of ceremonies and social events that form part of the civil ceremonies system. The book focuses on the legislation that governed these ceremonies, as well as the constant activities of the Roman Catholic Church that aimed to regain control over life-cycle ceremonies. Since this book provides an ethnological perspective, the focus is not only on the retrospective analysis of the formation of institutional ceremonies, but also their reflection and acceptance by citizens. The research on the institutional component of ceremonies in isolation from their recipients would otherwise not provide a sufficiently convincing picture of its functioning and significance within a local community.

The knowledge base of the publication is built on the research that I conducted in the mid-1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s. During these stages, civil ceremonies in the context of socialist rituals experienced the peak of their development, the search for possibilities for their further functioning in 1989, and their subsequent re-stabilisation. The base material thus comes from the research that I conducted at different Slovak locations and at several time stages. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were applied, focusing on the representatives of the institutions that organise and ensure civil ceremonies, as well as on the recipients of institutional rituals – the citizens.

I carried out the first stage of my research in cooperation with my colleague Milan Leščák in 1984, during the period of socialism.¹⁰ This research focused on the structure and spread of civil

ceremonies over time and was conducted in 150 municipalities of Slovakia. One of the principal research tasks was to determine the mutual relationship between institutionally organised and spontaneously existing parts of contemporary customs and holidays. The information was collected by means of questionnaires distributed to national committees,¹¹ the respondents being organisers of civil ceremonies.¹²

Another source of information from the period of socialism was my research conducted in nine municipalities nearby Trnava in 1986,¹³ which focused on the attitudes of the inhabitants of these municipalities towards civil and church ceremonies. This research was carried out by a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods in 202 households, which represented 5% of the households of each studied municipality.¹⁴ In order to obtain materials to compare the findings, I conducted qualitative research also during my field research in the municipality of Očová (Zvolen district) in 1986, using the same questionnaire. This research field thus covered a predominantly Roman Catholic environment (surroundings of Trnava) as well as a Protestant one (Očová). In all studied locations, I distributed the questionnaires in person, thanks to which I came to direct contact with the respondents, having the opportunity to observe some of them while filling in the questionnaires and listen to their comments and opinions.

I carried out the second stage of my research from the end of 1989 until 1991, i.e. at the time of political changes, in the municipalities around the city of Trnava, with inhabitants of Roman Catholic and Protestant denomination.¹⁵ The qualitative research aimed to explore people's attitudes towards civil and church ceremonies at the time of political change. The core of the research was a case study of one extended family, the members of which

lived at the studied locations. Another part of the research was conducted with people involved in the organisation of civil ceremonies. I also performed a repeated survey by means of the questionnaires that had been used in the municipalities of the district of Trnava in 1986, and I monitored additional information from the press, describing the changes and problems in the society in transition. The research penetrated in the synchronous emic level of the different shades of people's acceptance of civil ceremonies in the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century. The emic approach is based on the categories and ideas of the actors, members of the community, their own perception, and differentiation. It is thus dependent on the context of the given culture.

In terms of time, the third research stage corresponds to the recent past up to the present. In the 1990s, the political changes considerably affected this part of culture at all levels, including the institutional one. The period after 2000 can be characterised as a period of consolidation of the institutional ritual culture. Several works on ethnological research and awareness-raising activities have been published, addressing the contemporary state of institutional ceremonies.¹⁶

The information sources for the study of this topic also include news articles that monitored the importance of and people's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with institutions' relationships to ceremonies. The importance of civil ceremonies is also documented by chronicle records and commemorative books archived by municipal offices and are therefore included in the picture supplement. The visual aspect of the ceremonies is an important source of information about them.

The socialist reality is often described using common stereotypes and ideological meta-narratives: in the case of civil cere-

monies, it is often memories of the existence of secret baptisms of children outside the domicile of their parents or fear from the consequences of church marriage or unsuitability of a church funeral for people with a certain status. Certainly, this was also part of the reality of socialist civil ceremonies; however, despite atheist propaganda, people went to church, church ceremonies were held, and people created their relationship and respect towards civil ceremonies along with the church ones. We no longer have the opportunity to explore to what extent common stereotypes were actually represented in the daily life of the Slovak rural population and to what extent these were only a deviation from the normal, discussed within the local community and remembered by our current informants. It should be borne in mind that the number of direct witnesses of that period decreases and that, with their leaving, the interpretation of the Communist past in the collective memory changes, too.

CIVIL CEREMONIES AND HOLIDAYS IN THE SOCIALIST ERA

In the period of 1948–1989, festive time became the object of radical transformation of the official ritual and festive culture. New political holidays were the first to become a part of the modern festive life.¹⁷ In 1950, a new Act on Family Law was adopted, which was in place in unchanged form until 1964.¹⁸ This act was replaced by the Family Act, which applied with minor amendments in Slovakia until 2005. A complex of secular ceremonies and life-cycle festivities was created, called civil or socialist ceremonies, and a new institution with the task of administering and designing such ceremonies was established – the Assemblies for Civil Affairs (ACAs) (Zbory pre občianske záležitosti, ZPOZ). Changes also affected registries.¹⁹

The formation of civil ceremonies in Czechoslovakia followed the model of the Soviet Union where they had already had some experience with the atheisation of life-cycle ceremonies, implemented artificially and often even violently, and where the ideological purpose of this process was undoubted. “Any ‘Czechoslovak pathway to socialism’ required the working class and the revolutionary party to find a way of involving in the new regime those who

had been, before February²⁰, dispersed on both sides of the barricade, small manufacturers, farmers, the middle class – simply said, non-proletarian part of the nation. These groups formed a majority even in such an industrialised country as former Czechoslovakia, not to mention Slovakia. However, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, just like the entire Communist movement of that period, did not have a consistent policy with regard to these groups, not even with regard to farmers or the urban middle class. In the years before and after the war, there were only some slogans and tactics, they were considered allies in the fight against the reaction and big capital, however, a recipe for their incorporation in the political system after victory other than the one tested in the Soviet Union did not exist (Lipták 2000: 294). Festivities and ritual culture were a worthy space for bringing together different parts of society and, at the same time, for creating, especially in agrarian Slovakia, an alternative to the church festivities model perceived as a tradition among the peasant and urban middle classes.

The idea of creating new socialist ceremonies emerged as a logical consequence of the atheist background of the Communist ideology. The interest of the ruling authorities in life-cycle ceremonies was not straightforward. Initially, all traditional rituals and customs were considered a “door to religion”, and the official part of family rituals was therefore limited to administrative registration acts. These were inspired by the so-called red weddings in the Soviet Union, which took place without a church ceremony and included the laying of flowers to memorials to the victims of World War II. Instead of baptism, an official civil registration of the name was organised, called *Oktyabriny* in Russian, which was derived from the Great October Socialist Revolution. However, it turned out in the Soviet Union that without an emotional

and aesthetic accent, these official acts could hardly compete with church rituals, which was supposed to be their primary objective. One of the first ones to draw attention to this act was the Russian poet Vikenty Vikentyevich Veresaev. As early as in the 1920s, he believed that religious ceremonies were fading out; on the other hand, he expressed his opinion that they should not only be repudiated, but that new, substitute ceremonies should be created to prevent a vacuum that people would fill with old customs. He also drew attention to the fact that the essence of a ceremony does not lie in mysticism and magic, but in the fact that it is a symbolic reflection of emotions. He urged atheists not to pay less attention to ceremonies than believers did. He argued that new ceremonies required an artificial synthesis of traditions, people's artistic creation and the creation of the representatives of the nation. In Soviet expert literature, his initiative was evaluated as an impulse to focus attention on the quality of civil ceremonies, including life-cycle ceremonies and their development into a civil ceremony complex. (Brudny 1968).

Civil ceremonies in the Soviet Union began to fully develop, just like in most other socialist countries, only after the 1950s.²¹ At all administration levels, from government authorities up to local civil councils, the state gradually created a network of methodological and organisational institutions which, in close cooperation with experts in social sciences and artists, formed and arranged an entire complex of ceremonies linked to all important moments of people's civil lives. This activity observed and supported by the state, called *obryadotvorchestvo* (ritual creativity) in Russian, concerned architecture, fine, verbal and musical arts, as well as social sciences. The focus of manipulation with ceremonies was on emphasising the national form and international contents of



Laying a bouquet at the memorial to fallen soldiers in Očová in the 1970s (Zvolen district).

ceremonies and on exploring the ethnic features of civil ceremonies and specificities in the case of ethnically mixed marriages, which corresponded to the multi-ethnic society of the countries of the Soviet Union. The civil forms of ceremonies were expected to contribute to the overcoming of potential problems in the case of marriages of partners of different faiths, since the Christian religion was predominant in one part of the Soviet republics and the Muslim religion in other parts. The ceremonies met with different acceptance in the various republics of the Soviet Union, depending on the religion and local traditions, as well as on the relationship to Russia itself.²²

Along with the form of ceremonies, their spreading and frequency of occurrence were also observed. What was characteristic of this period, including in Czechoslovakia, was reliance on

authorities' statistical reports documenting the wide spectrum of ceremonies and citizens' attendance of exclusively civil ritual forms without further contexts or a polemical approach to these materials. Experts – cultural and educational workers, artists, politicians – evaluated and created the visual aspects of ceremonies, ritual scenarios, ceremonial symbolism, the educational impacts of ceremonies, and sought their new meaning. In an effort to emphasise the natural character of civil ceremonies, they pointed out the incorrectness of the term “introduction” of new ceremonies, thus seeking to give the impression of continuity with the past. This moment was interesting because it concerned not only the relationship between traditions and innovations, which is an imminent element of the research apparatus of ethnology. According to historian Matej Spurný, three aspects are important for the success of an authoritarian regime in terms of destruction of existing orders and a new arrangement of society: the first one is the appearance of continuity (the mainstream society continues to live in the same way), the second one is the actual realisation of certain “bonuses” (promise of a better life and social advancement for broad population groups), and the third one is the conviction of at least a part of the representatives of the new regime about the correctness of the ideas – if ideology is to be a successful tool to transform both thinking and practice, it must be convincing for their bearers (Spurný 2017).

Civil ceremonies and an entire complex of activities, organisational structures and artifacts related to the festive-ceremonial system began to emerge also in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s, following the Soviet Union model. From the legal perspective, ceremonies understood by the Marxist-Leninist ideology as a reflection of social awareness as well as a means for its shaping were in

the hands of the state since 1950. Based on official guidelines, institutions for the arrangement of ceremonies were created, as well as a system of reaching out to potential participants to whom the new form of ceremonies was intended to be addressed. Civil marriage was legislatively conditioned, and the official act gradually became a ritual full of symbolism, including ideological. A whole

Ceremonial room in Lábe (Malacky district) in 1953 with the inscription:
Socialism – the guarantee of a happy marriage.



range of rituals was created, covering human life verbally “from cradle to grave”. The attendance of civil ceremonies was presented as a manifestation of the socialist way of life. This created the conditions for launching a process that aimed to restrict church ceremonies and to gradually replace them with secular alternatives.

The forming of the socialist system of ceremonies was an expression of the systematic, often even violent atheisation of social life in Czechoslovakia. This pressure was felt primarily by public officers, teachers, members of the military and the police, functionaries and important representatives of the cultural and social life who were expected to serve as an example to others and not to attend church ceremonies. This concerned not only baptism, but also confirmation, marriage and even funeral, which was, however, decided by the survivors who no longer took the work position of the deceased person into consideration. Public officers were not allowed to go to church, and so their families arranged their ceremonies in secret, in distant municipalities or towns, or where nobody knew them. It was uneasy for many people to give up their common traditions, and it often happened that even functionaries Communist Party officials had their children baptised in secret or that they had a church funeral arranged by the family. An autobiography of a woman from a Western Slovak municipality, born in 1942, describes the 1950s as follows: “*The teachers who had been religious before the coup, were afraid of losing their job, and so they had to gradually re-orient on a progressive approach to teaching at school or in ordinary matters of their private lives. (...)It was a too fast and hard political change to which pupils as well as parents could hardly get used to*” (according to Profantová 2015: 154).²³ Respondents were aware of the contradiction between the pressure of the reference group and the official ideology also during my research

in the 1980s, which was reflected in their statements such as: *You know, that's the way it is in a village. I would prefer to do so in this way, but not in our village.*

Church ceremonies, which were held in secret outside people's own municipalities, are a frequent representation of the memories of this area of life during socialism. According to my research findings, these cases were not widespread massively, but occurred in almost every village. If a person "did not stick out of the crowd in terms of their status or if they had well-disposed people around, their private activities were not given special attention, and they could only have faced slandering (gossips) within the local community. However, denunciations were common even within the local community. French historian Muriel Blaive points out that "it is a big temptation and a big problem to judge or condemn people's behaviour during the former regime from today's perspective. The moral boundaries have shifted, but if we want to understand why one or the other behaved in this or that way, we have to bear in mind what the norms of that time said: it was sometimes a legal obligation to denounce others (for example, in the border zone), and a part of the inhabitants simply behaved in line with the norms of their own country, either because of fear or because they believed in the system, or used that obligation as alibi. Some people had the tendency to behave patriotically, wishing to 'help their own camp'. Others were blackmailed. And so on. It is always necessary to add the historical context instead of telling us in advance who the bastard was" (according to Šimůnková 2014).

Even though the state tolerated certain expressions of religiousness, there were situations when citizens were confronted with different pressures by the church, the state, and the local community or family. This often concerned family rituals in which individuals

became the subject of pressure of traditions on the one hand and of conflicting ideological systems on the other hand. The problems that arose were usually not manifested in the course of the ceremonies, but were experienced in the intimate life of families. In crucial life situations, such as marriage, birth of a child, and funeral, families placed emphasis on the observance of traditions, including church ceremonies, even when people's relationship to the church and church ceremonies was ambivalent. The younger generation was fulfilling its religious duties also under the pressure from their parents or grandparents, but this did not mean that they would completely depart from faith: *"Those who went to study to the pedagogical school were not allowed to go to church. I was even happy, because on Sundays – sometimes I went voluntarily while other times, when my grandma was still alive, I was forced to go. Now they would say – do what you want. And so I gave it up in a way. Nevertheless, we had both our wedding and baptism in the church, and if my son wishes so, I will enrol him to classes of religion"* (woman, 1968, Suchá nad Parnou).

The objective of the state institutions was to ensure that the whole complex of the civil ceremonial system allows people to be independent from religious ceremonies. By gradually covering all important moments in the life of people, not only birth, marriage, or funeral, civil ceremonies became an important part of the way of life in the 1970s and 1980s. Through them, the totalitarian government liked to demonstrate the care of society for every individual. The importance attributed to the complex of civil ceremonies is documented by an excerpt from the Pravda weekly, central daily of the Communist Party of Slovakia, of 1982: "Much needs to be done to make socialist ceremonies an important factor in the education of the young working class generation in order to

interlink the uniform educational effects of ceremonies with political and educational events that often precede them [...] Only in this way they can learn the socialist morale, respect for the work of their predecessors, respect for family and people with whom they work, love for the factory, the nation, the homeland, the socialist community. The key and most important mission of the new ceremonies and holidays is to turn the young working generation into ideologically mature citizens. We therefore emphasise again that, along with civil ceremonies – ceremonial welcoming of children to life, weddings, civil funerals – we must pay great attention also to the ceremonial hand-over of identity cards, the hand-over of certificates of apprenticeship and joining the ranks of workers, the recruits farewell, as well as festivities related to the completion of the basic military service or life and work anniversaries. The festivities associated with the awarding of the honorary title Socialist Labour Brigade, evenings of labour honour and glory, or farewells to retiring colleagues are also important for the formation of the young generation” (Kopčan 1982: 5).

By focusing on all biographical milestones, socialist rituals gradually expanded in width, also affecting areas which had never been the subject of church interest. Furthermore, it also be noted that civil ceremonies not only reacted to church ceremonies, but also influenced them retroactively, forcing the church to make ceremonies more attractive and involve more people (e.g. the participation of parents and siblings at baptism, the holding of masses along with church weddings and funerals, etc.). These innovations in church ceremonies were not only a response to changes in the ritual systems of socialist countries, but also to the overall secularisation processes in the world.²⁴ The civil forms of ceremonies thus faced a competition which could not go unnoticed.

The integration of civil ceremonies into traditional ritual culture has been a longer process. As was the case of church ceremonies in the past, the legal measures themselves and the prescribed forms were not enough to change the traditionally recognised norms, the durability of which, especially in rural environments, is particularly strong. In Slovak towns, as well as in other socialist countries, unconventional ritual elements were accepted more easily (Brunnbauer 2008; Košťalová 2010). Except for legally conditioned civil marriage, the possibility of choice was used to a greater extent and the pressure of traditions was weaker than in rural local communities. On the other hand, civil ceremonies, such as welcoming to life, celebration of life anniversaries or wedding anniversaries, were perceived by the inhabitants as “more familiar” in small towns and villages where people knew each other. They usually accepted the official invitations to ceremonies.

In connection with civil ceremonies during socialism, German ethnologist K. Roth notes that neither full acceptance nor full rejection was notable, which always depended on the type of holiday or ritual. The diverse complex of holidays was often adapted to the people’s own needs, and the attempt to circumvent the required behaviour standards and influence the development with “spontaneous creativity” was not exceptional either (Roth 2008: 16).

Based on comparative studies on the systems of ceremonies in Eastern and Western Europe, K. Roth found out that people from the former socialist countries celebrated excessively. He notes that the newer studies by ethnologists clearly confirm that holidays, festivities, and rituals have penetrated in all social spheres: private life as well as the world of labour and public life. He points out the great need for an institutional confirmation of the turning points within the life cycle. When it comes to the participants to cere-

monies, family and relatives played a dominant role and, unlike in traditional models, celebrations in work environments played a dominant role. He literally states that “people adapted to their own version of the ‘socialist way of life’, changed and adapted the state patterns, deprived them of their ideological contents [...], and holidays significantly contributed to the fact that daily life became bearable.” (Roth 2008: 19) All these findings, formulated based on his research in socialist Bulgaria, were also confirmed by the research in Slovakia.

Assemblies for Civil Affairs

The state ensured civil ceremonies and a whole complex of related activities through an institution that was established for the that specific purpose by municipal and local national committees, which were contemporary bodies corresponding to present-day municipal offices. The name of this institution was consolidated in the 1960s to Assembly for Civil Affairs (“ACA” or “ZPOZ” in Slovak).

The history of the Assemblies for Civil Affairs dates back to the beginning of the 1950s and relates to the new family law enacted in 1950. Under the new legislation, marriage at the national committee became the only valid form, while church marriage became optional, voluntary. The national committees were also in charge of the administration of registries, which had previously been also under the responsibility of the Church. During that period, the founders of the assemblies and the authors of civil ceremonies faced expressions of refusal by priests and practicing believers, especially at the beginning when the aesthetic value of the civil ceremonies considerably lagged behind church rituals that had evolved for centuries (Mozolík 1989: 30).

The institutions called Boards for Civil Affairs (“BCAs”) became a complementary element of the national committees in 1953, and their main scope of activities included the formation of socialist ceremonies. The establishment of these boards was inspired by the experience with the successful results of a similar institution established at the Educational Centre in the Czech town of Tábor. The Ministry of the Interior ordered the district national committees to establish Boards for Civil Affairs within the educational centres and to define their tasks in ensuring three basic ceremonies. These boards were required to ensure that marriage and the registration of the birth of a child had a dignified and official character, while respecting the traditions of the given locations. They were also expected to ensure a dignified course of funerals of citizens who were not members of any religious society. The BCAs were not in charge of organising ceremonies, but they were responsible for their contents, cultural elements, layout and decoration of ceremonial rooms, promotion, as well as for presenting proposals and suggestions for improving this work. Civil ceremonies were originally created only for atheistically oriented citizens and the framework of ceremonies was differentiated according to the worldview of their participants. However, the importance of civil ceremonies for the formation of the worldview and ideological orientation of individuals was reviewed, and the state’s focus extended from atheists also to believers or citizens with a neutral worldview. In 1957, the BCAs were shifted to fall within the scope of competences of national committees. They were created at the seat of the registry district and had three to seven members. National committees ensured the holding of civil ceremonies materially and managed the cultural, educational, and ideological aspects of these ceremonies. Before 1954, the members of national

committees were not elected, but were appointed “top down”, due to which these institutions were a reliable bureaucratic executive body of the state power in the 1950s.

The first civil ceremonies included the formal recording of a new-born baby in the register, called “welcoming children to life”, civil marriage, and farewell to the deceased or the whole civil funeral. In 1962, another resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia recommended that a BCA become part of each national committee in towns and villages, not only of those entrusted with the administration of registers. The activities of the BCAs were managed by the Ministry of Education. In 1963, the BCAs were renamed to Assemblies for Civil Affairs by a Regulation of the CSSR Government, and the first guidelines on their missions and tasks were approved. (Varjú 1986). The name Board for Civil Affairs was retained by the cells working within state enterprises and cooperatives with more than 500 employees, and later also by workplaces with a small number of employees, which were expected to cooperate with the ACAs mainly in advising people who faced important turning points in their lives and, hence, potential participants to civil ceremonies. They were linked to the trade union organisation which was transformed by Communists from a workers’ political organisation that protected their interests to one of the state’s levers to mobilise labour force (Lipták, 2000: 299). They were involved in the organisation of festivities to celebrate the work and life anniversaries of their employees and cooperated with the ACAs in particular on the occasion of welcoming children to life and funerals.

During the socialist period, from the point of view of the ruling regime, the interlinking of individual holidays and important moments in an individual’s life with celebration at the workplace

was of special political importance. The origins of the celebrations of personal holidays with the work team can be traced back to the pre-industrial traditional community where a work group was usually created by people who were relatives or neighbours or were members of a single rural community. They thus came into contact also outside the work process which often was not even a strictly separated part of the day. People spent their festive work moments more or less together, and the wider community of the municipality had the opportunity to join private festive events, such as weddings or baptisms. There was no need to shift such celebrations to the workplace and, moreover, the workplace premises (farming estates, workshops, factories, etc.) did not even make it possible. Work-related celebrations were only those which were directly related to the termination of the work process – end of harvest, completion of certain stages of the construction of a house, etc.

With the separation of the working environment from the private one as a result of industrialisation and the relocation of people from the countryside to urban areas, the celebrations of major life events were divided into at least two environments and two groups of people with whom one normally comes into contact, but which often do not even know each other.

The celebrations of personal holidays at the workplace and the inviting of colleagues to private festive events during the socialist period became a link that interconnected these two environments. The need for such links strengthened as a consequence of industrialisation and the mass moving of young families from the countryside to urban industrial centres. The work team often substituted the function of relatives and friends who had stayed at the birth place. Celebrations in work teams were supported by

the state also because they corresponded to the idea of socialist collectiveness. A special category of workplace celebrations were those arising directly from the work activities – celebrations of achieving a higher social status, retirement, celebration of work awards, etc.

Celebrations at the workplace were characteristic of the former socialist countries. “It can be said without much exaggeration that people were celebrating all the time, whatever and wherever, most often in socialist enterprises. They celebrated at the workplace not only every anniversary and every birthday (and name day) of the colleagues, every wedding, and every baptism, but also the admission of apprentices and new colleagues, the achievements of the ‘socialist competition’, as well as bonuses for fulfilling the plan and March 8. In addition, almost every professional group had a holiday in the socialist holiday calendar. The colleagues used to sit together at the workplace and celebrate everything and everyone, often even when waiting for materials or anything else.” (Roth 2008: 18) The celebrations at the workplace also fulfilled the task of present-day team-buildings, colleagues got to know each other in situations other than at work, strengthening their relations friendly relations.

The ACA also ensured the system of education of the members and staff of the Assemblies and Boards for Civil Affairs with a focus on methodological, advisory, educational, and organisational activities. During this initial period, a number of trainings, seminars, conferences, meetings, and methodological days were held, and methodological materials and collective volumes were issued. Ceremonies on the occasion of other important moments in the lives of citizens were also prepared – for life anniversaries, the hand-over of identity cards, various other anniversaries, ele-

mentary school leaving, etc. Assistance in the improvement of the ACA activities by means of methodological and organisational work was provided by the national Educational and Awareness-Raising Institute and its advisory board (Ľureková 2004).

During the 1950s and 1960s, the ACA activities faced problems related to the general social and political atmosphere in the second half of the 1960s, which was characterised by efforts to democratise society. A qualitative breakthrough in their activities occurred during the so-called normalisation period in 1972 when new guidelines for the organisation of civil ceremonies were approved in Slovakia. The ACA became the promoter of the state-enforced Communist ideology and its civil function merged with the propaganda function at a new qualitative level. According to these guidelines, the basic mission of the assemblies was to “assist

Commemorative medal handed over to parents as a gift from the town during the welcome to life ceremony, 1987.



the national committees in ensuring that civil ceremonies take place in the socialist spirit; that their ideological and cultural quality constantly increases so that the important moments in the life of a citizen and his/her family, such as birth, marriage, important work and life anniversaries, are the subject of care by our society” (Mozolík 1989: 30-31). The creation of the system of socialist rituals also involved district and regional educational centres by means of methodological-advisory, organisational, and publishing activities. In 1981, a long-term competition presentation of the design of ACA cultural programmes was announced. Methodological days, exchange of experience, and international events were organised, too, and methodological materials, publications, repertoire volumes and special publications were issued. “In 1981, there were 2,458 Assemblies for Civil Affairs with 20,764 members and 4,573 Boards for Civil Affairs with a total number of 19,272 members. Increased attention was paid to the construction and reconstruction of ceremonial rooms. In 1979–1981, national committees put into service 123 new-built or new-established ceremonial rooms” (Varjú 1986: 45). By 1977, 622 ceremonial rooms were set up. At the initiative of the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of the Interior SR, a special artistic and ideological committee of Assemblies was established at the Slovak Fine Arts Fund, to which all proposals for ceremonial room designs were presented since 1975 (Varjú 1986: 45).

The ACA Slovak Council worked in close cooperation with the nationwide structure of educational and awareness-raising institutions in Slovakia that directed the design of artistic programmes for civil ceremonies, ensured presentations and coordination of the ACA activities, and initiated the preparation of methodological and instructional materials for educational institutions,

national committees, and assembly activists. Under its auspices, the methodological cultural-social magazine *Nová cesta* (*New Way*) was published since 1979, focusing on the creation of the system of civil ceremonies and their philosophical problems. Sporadically, methodological and instructional materials were also published: diapositive films, films, publications, volumes of musical compositions on basic ceremonies, or a set of phonographic records (Varjú 1986: 40, 45). In addition, publications dedicated to the Assemblies for Civil Affairs were issued: *Premeny* (Transformations, 1979), *Premeny II* (Transformations II, 1985), and *Premeny III* (Transformations III, 1987) with speeches, poetry, a list and sheet-music of musical compositions, art themes for organising life-cycle ceremonies, and pictures of ceremonial rooms, which also contained recommended scenarios for the different ceremonies. The first part is dedicated to three basic ceremonies – welcoming children to life, wedding, and funeral. The second part focuses on the civil oath to the state upon acquiring the citizenship of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, hand-over of identity documents, welcoming new members of the working class (cooperative farming), the leaving of recruits, return from the basic military service, wedding anniversaries, retirement, and life anniversaries. However, some ceremonies of this series were performed only to a small extent. The third part focuses on children and youth: farewell to the kindergarten, welcoming first-grade pupils of elementary schools, Sparkles' oath ("iskričky" – members of the Communist children's organisation), Young Pioneers' oath, farewell to the elementary school, hand-over of school leaving certificates, or hand-over of membership cards to the new members of the Socialist Youth Union ("zvězáci"). These publications contain art pieces by prominent poets and music composers.

The introduction to the first part of the trilogy presents the main objectives and features of socialist rituals as follows: “By fulfilling various functions, the new socialist traditions, festivities, and ceremonies require even more attention. They are a certain form of people’s artistic creativity. They have a rational effect and provide a strong emotional and aesthetic experience. Civil ceremonies are also a good occasion for minor folk festivities, with the spontaneous presentation of people’s creativity, their sense of beauty, joy, singing and musicality. The connection between folk art and ceremonies or festivities – social, family, or work –, as known from the history of folk culture, is part of progressive traditions.²⁵ We follow up on these traditions and, on their fundamentals, we share new ceremonies and festivities which are national in form and socialist in contents.” (Mravík 1978: 10) The last idea from the cited proclamation also appears in the introduction of the second part. The argumentation with folk culture should be a convincing starting point and an emotional element to disengage people from church ceremonies.²⁶

The questionnaire survey, which was conducted in 150 municipalities in 1984, showed that a core group of activists working in ACAs was formed in the 1970s. This group consisted predominantly of the administrative staff of national committees or other state institutions, and more than a fourth of them were teachers who also engaged their pupils in the artistic elements of ceremonies. The core part of the activities was ensured by the middle generation. In the second half of the 20th century, women’s economic status and employment, as well as the level of their education and position in family, changed, as a result of which they also became active in organising social and cultural life in the countryside. Women were more represented in the ACA activities, and were

more often the main organisers of cultural events. Thousands of volunteers – speakers, reciters, singers, and musicians – were also involved in the ACA activities. For many of them, the organisational and artistic arrangement of ceremonies represented a special form of self-realisation in their leisure time, a hobby associated with certain social recognition and a symbolic fee that served mainly as a compensation for the costs of the clothes.²⁷ In the case of active citizens, their function in the ACA often overlapped with their work as announcers in the local public address system, announcing important events taking place in the municipality. After all, the acceptance and respect for ACA activists by citizens is documented by the traditional habit of giving gifts to them after the ceremony – a bottle of alcohol and pastry. In villages, activists were often invited to weddings; during mass welcoming to life, a small reception was usually organised for the ACA representatives at the national committee. Priests have been similarly given gifts after family ceremonies. The attendance to civil ceremonies was perceived as part of the worldview education. In the introductory chapter to the publication *Premeny (Transformations)*, J. Mravík states the following, in line with the contemporary rhetoric: “Citizens’ attendance to new civil ceremonies is a practical manifestation of their worldview attitudes. It shows to what extent it has been possible to bring people to look at the world and the existence of humans through scientific lens. It also shows whether and to what extent we have managed to satisfy their ethical and aesthetical needs, create a cultivated environment for human life.” (Mravík 1978: 10)²⁸

The development of civil ceremonies in Slovakia culminated in the second half of the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, which was around ten years later than in Czechia (Beneš 1983).

In the 1980s, the ACA's activities already covered all important milestones of human life from birth to death, and it also expanded to the organisation of celebrations of important events in the life of an individual. The most frequent civil ceremonies in the 1980s included: marriage (since it was a legislatively mandatory act, the ceremony related to every wedding), welcoming children to life (there was an individual form for those who did not have their child baptised, or a group for those who also had attended church baptism), funeral or civil farewell to the deceased (in the case of a church funeral), wedding anniversaries – silver (25th anniversary), golden (50th anniversary) and diamond (60th anniversary), celebrations of life anniversaries (after turning 50 years and, in particular, anniversaries of citizens in their retirement age), farewell to recruits and their return from the basic military service (following up on the traditional recruitment customs), get-togethers with pensioners, welcoming first-great pupils, and the hand-over of identity documents. In some areas, the ACAs also organised the ceremonial admission of apprentices to schools, the hand-over of apprenticeship certificates, graduation certificates, the hand-over of keys to new flats, as well as harvest festivals or celebrations of the Slovak National Uprising (Beňušková – Leščák 1987). One of the important rites of passage was the joining of the Communist children's and youth organisation in which the ACA also participated.

In connection with ceremonies, the state and the national committees also paid attention to the maintenance of cemeteries, the building of funeral homes (Jágerová 2009), improvement of funeral services, and the construction of ceremonial halls. Civil infrastructure was thus created, satisfying contemporary needs and being able to compete with dignity with church ceremonies,

which was supported by the state that allocated considerable amounts of money for this purpose. The effectiveness of these investments was continuously controlled not only by monitoring the statistical data on ACA's activities. The relationship of Slovak citizens to the new types of institutional ceremonies was also examined by applying sociological methods, like the public opinion survey in 1973.²⁹ This survey was carried out in the period of significant quantitative growth in the organisation of civil ceremonies and festivities. The results showed that the majority of the population already had a positive relationship to civil ceremonies at that time, which was also confirmed by qualitative ethnological research data in the following years.

Child birth ceremonies

The birth of a child has always represented an extraordinary event in the life of family and society. Like on other important occasions, the need arose upon child birth to behave according to certain generally applicable norms in order to ensure a successful child birth and admission of a new member in the life of society. At a time when written documents were non-existent, the rituals were created and kept in collective memory. Traditional birth-related folk customs can be divided into customs before, during, and after the birth of a child. In the past, their purpose was mainly to protect, bring prosperity, and ensure social integration. Thanks to medical care for mothers and children or increased level of knowledge of the population, the irrational practices related to child birth, so widespread in the past, disappeared almost completely.

The complex of customs related to the birth of a child was reduced to rituals with a social and family function, held after the

return of the mother and the baby from the maternity hospital. They have an initiation-reception function – admission to the community and society. From the point of view of the history of rituals, baptism became the prerequisite for gaining control over pagan culture by the Christian Church. The baptism ritual had not only a religious meaning. From a natural being, an individual turned into a member of the Christian community and received a name. In this sense, baptism was also a legal act. In the early Middle Ages, baptisms were held en masse, for adults. Baptisms took place on the set days, two or three times a year. One of the most popular days was the Easter White Saturday, which was named after the white clothes worn during baptism. The preferred days for baptism also included the Easter and Pentecostal vigil,³⁰ or the night before the Epiphany (January 6) (Jakubíková 1995a: 281). The reason was an attempt to ensure a close symbolic connection between baptism and Christ's acts of salvation, as recorded in the church calendar. Some Protestant denominations restored the massive forms of baptism, such as Anabaptists in the 16th and 17th centuries, or the Baptist Church which began founding its congregations in Europe in the 19th century. Though the baptism of children in Christian churches was common already in the 5th century, it was not until the Council of Mainz, Germany, that godparenthood was officially introduced in 813, with the child having one godparent (Weber-Kellermann 1985: 58). In Slovakia, church baptism spread along with the observance of traditional magical acts and, within the 16th century Protestant environment, the fathers of new-borns were advised about their duty to request baptism (Varsik 1929). The Protestant Church opposed both ostentatious Catholic ceremonies and pagan customs. The process of acceptance of these official regulations by the popular classes

in some regions took more than two centuries. As noted by Z. Winter, the priests themselves had problems with the adoption of church regulations in Bohemia. There were complaints from the 17th century that, during baptisms of Catholics from wealthy families, the priest served masses even in their homes, despite the fact that the Catholic synod prohibited it in 1605, and that some priests used grease, marrow, or bacon instead of oil (Winter 1896: 907, 908).

Baptism represented a turning point in the child's life, which had to be emphasised by the child's clothing. Decorated shirts, sets, or swaddling clothes prepared specifically for baptism were inherited from generation to generation or were borrowed within the family, thus expressing its coherence (Navrátilová 2004: 84). The baby was taken to the baptism ritual by its godmother, while the parents were allowed to attend the baptism only since the mid-20th century or even later.

Due to the high infant mortality rate and the widespread opinion that the souls of unbaptised children are lost, the regulations were later modified so that the child is baptised right during the first days after birth, as a result of which baptisms were held on an individual basis. (Instruction 1979) In the event of death, unbaptised children could not be buried by a priest. Non-church institutions also entered the life-cycle ceremonies, however, their activities overlapped with religious acts in some respects. Such institutions included midwives who became a "tool of religious control and social discipline" (Schilling 1980: 220). Upon the birth of a child, midwives were an extended hand of the priest or the state, interconnecting biological and social activities (Pachner – Bébr 1932: 575) During baptism, they made sure that the child was recorded in the parish register and, if necessary, they even borrowed child

clothes for the baptism ceremony. It was no coincidence that, during the reformation period, their independence from the church was accentuated in some Western-European Protestant countries, just like in the case of marriage.

Welcoming to life

Within the complex of socialist ceremonies, most socialist countries concentrated on the moment of admission of a child to society, making use of the joyful atmosphere in the family, the gathering of the relatives around the new arrival, and focus on the child's happy future. All these positive emotions were to be promoted by the solemn ceremonial act, which accentuated the state's care for citizens and the prospect of a happy future for the child in the socialist society. Parents liked to enhance these extraordinary moments of a positive event with several rituals. The traditional scheme of the ceremonies of admitting a child in society, which only involved church baptism, was gradually extended to arrange its civil version. Two ceremonial components came to the fore – the solemn welcoming of the baby to life and church baptism, followed by the non-institutional celebration of this event – “baptism” (“krstiny” – this term was often used also for celebrations without church baptism, since there was no other traditional name for this type of celebration was common). The forms, the ideological content, as well as some of the functions of baptism changed.

Welcoming a child to life is a ritual that was not associated with legal consequences (according to the legislation, only the recording of a new-born child in the register existed, which is an official act), but given its social significance, it was included among the three basic civil ceremonies. This ritual constituted the public,

official, and solemn confirmation of the oath by parents and by society, represented by the national committee, and was to bind both parties to fulfil the set duties regarding the child. At the same time, its function was to welcome the child and introduce them to the local community in which their parents lived. However, this oath also contained ideological manipulation by obliging the parents to raise a devoted citizen of our socialist homeland.³¹

The child welcoming ceremony took two forms: it was either performed individually for one child, or it was a mass event for a maximum of six children at a time in line with the guidelines. The individual welcoming ceremony was initially intended for baptised children, later it was usually prepared by the national committee at the request of parents, regardless of previous church baptism. Parents with a neutral worldview as well as other attendees thus had the opportunity to replace religious traditions, which for some citizens did not have deeper ideological or emotional roots, but were maintained only as a consequence of a lasting tradition.

In the 1970s, there was already a relatively uniform scenario of this ceremony: the introduction of the parents and the child (children), parents' oath (presented by either the parent or a representative of the ACA and confirmed by the parents), recording of the child in the commemorative book with the parents' signatures, cultural programme, and congratulations to the parents by the participants to the ceremony. J. Mravík introduces this scenario with the following words: "According to the tradition, it contains the following elements: ..." (Mravík 1978: 21)³² The word 'tradition' does not seem to have been used accidentally; the author wanted to emphasise the commonality, continuity, and conventionalisation of this ceremony despite the fact that it had only existed for

twenty years at that time and that people still perceived it as received innovation. The ethnological research in Slovakia as well as the observations of the studied period confirm that many families in Slovakia did not automatically regard the civil child welcoming ceremony only as a replacement of baptism, but the significance they attributed to it arose from the overall need to bring a child to society using appropriate and recognised social form. This is also confirmed by the fact that, in the 1980s, up to 90% of children attended both ceremonies (Feglová 1995: 108).

Since the record in the commemorative book was a document that remained in the archives of the municipality after the ceremony, the whole ceremony was also known as the official registration of new-born children. While the document was signed by the parents, it was recommended that the nurse take the child in

Collective welcome to life ceremony in the 1970s,
Párnica (Dolný Kubín district).



the hands and place him/her symbolically in the cradle, which was a popular prop and symbol of the whole ceremony. The ceremony was usually accompanied by cultural intermezzos in the form of children's performances or the singing of lullabies.

Elements traditionally accompanying baptism were also incorporated in the child welcoming ceremony, such as the giving of gifts to the child's parents – also (or only) by the ACA, and folk songs. The recording of the child in the Commemorative Book became an important element as well. A whole page of this book was dedicated to a single ceremonial act of an individual welcome, and was signed by the parents after taking oath. The guidelines emphasised the need for the father's presence, since in some regions the ceremony had only been attended by women (Mravík 1987: 21). This was due to the fact that, in traditional culture, baptism was usually considered to be mainly a woman's matter.³³

The importance of the child welcoming ceremony was also manifested by festive clothing. Women wore dresses and men were dressed in white shirts and ties, which corresponded to the festive clothing of the ceremonialists. Children were dressed as nice as they could, since no special clothing was prescribed for them. The ceremony included photo-shooting. According to the tradition of wearing baptism shirts or caps, these items could be incorporated in the child's clothing only in secret.

The results of the questionnaire survey of 1984, conducted on a sample of 150 municipalities, give an idea about how this ceremony spread over time. These two forms of the ceremony of welcoming children to life – individual and collective – were examined separately. According to the research results, this ceremony was prepared by ACAs in 97.2% of municipalities. The holding of this ceremony was intensive mainly in the 1960s and 1970s:

Time of introduction of the child welcoming ceremony	Collective child welcoming ceremonies in the studied municipalities (%)	Individual child welcoming ceremonies in the studied municipalities (%)
1950s	4.1	1.3
1960s	30.1	20.5
1970s	39.7	36.3
1980s	4.1	6.8

Some municipalities did not indicate the year of introduction of the ceremony during the survey, others did not hold this ceremony because they did not have a registry office, and some other municipalities only organised collective child welcoming ceremonies. In organising these events, the ACAs were assisted by social organisations, especially the Red Cross, trade unions, the Slovak Women's Union. The cultural parts of the ceremonies were co-created by schools and artistically oriented individuals or groups. As confirmed by the research carried out by other Slovak and Moravian ethnologists³⁴ (Beneš 1983), welcoming children to life was one of the most popular rituals organised by the ACAs.

A questionnaire survey of 1984 also showed that the atmosphere of this ceremony influenced the private life of its participants. This was manifested in the form of a festive gathering at home, the holding of which after the ceremony was claimed by 42.4% of respondents. Another form of celebration were get-togethers of parents or the child's family with the ACA members after the ritual, which was common in 54.7% of municipalities. These data confirm that this ceremony was perceived by many families not

only as a formal institutional matter, but that it acquired family importance along with its social significance. The form of the social gathering depended also on the participation at the ceremony by relatives and friends from other municipalities who had to be appropriately attended after the ritual. In addition, a representative of the trade union from the parents' workplace was usually sent to the ceremony. They were invited by the ACA and were mostly parents' friends from the workplace. As a result, another common form of get-togethers after the ceremony was the invitation of the trade union representatives from the workplace of the child's parents to their home. In 1986, the holding of such meetings was indicated by 46.5% of respondents. During the Communist regime, the intertwining of family and working life was a symbol of caring for working citizens.

A survey of the attitudes of the population to childbirth-related civil ceremonies, carried out in nine municipalities of the Trnava district in 1986, brought the following results: 52% of respondents attributed the same importance to the civil ceremony and the religious ceremony; 27% considered baptism more important; 19% considered the child welcoming ceremony more important; and 2% could not decide. The most common argument of those who preferred baptism was that it was important for the child's future life, was more recognised in the village, and was nicer. Those who considered the welcoming ceremony more important appreciated mainly the realistic content of the speech and the overall good aesthetic impression of that event.

In a survey conducted in the predominantly Protestant municipality of Očová (Zvolen district) in 1986, the ties to the church ceremony showed to be less pronounced compared to the Roman-Catholic villages in the Trnava district – 13% of respondents

considered baptism more important, half of the other respondents preferred the child welcoming ceremony, and the other half considered both ceremonies equal. Whether citizens perceived the child welcoming ceremony as a necessity, or they just passively accepted the offer to attend this ceremony, was explored through a supplementary question of whether they would have contacted the national committee on their own initiative if the national committee had forgotten to call them to do so. In Cífer and Čataj, where this survey was carried out in 1989–1991, such contact would have been made by one third of respondents; the others did not feel this ceremony as necessary as to apply for it actively.

The function of godparents was associated with church baptism, and its modified form also exists in connection with civil ceremonies. When welcoming children to life, the organisers created ceremonial functions of recording, introducing, and welcoming parents. Katarína Apáthyová-Rusnáková notes that “at the end of the 1960s, the rural environment required the presence of so-called recording godfathers or welcoming parents on the occasion of the official recording of children in registers” (Apáthyová-Rusnáková 1995: 281). It can thus be assumed that this role had not existed at the time when child welcoming ceremonies began to be organised. It is likely that the role of the welcoming parents was requested, following the tradition of godparents, by the citizens themselves; the state institutions did not have the need to imitate the church in this regard. This is manifested also in the common designation or even calling of the respective persons “godfather” or “godmother” (krstná, krstný) both by the child’s parents and relatives and by the ceremonialists in informal communication. The selection of persons for this role and their duties during the ceremony and in the future life of the child correspond, in fact,

to the role of godfathers, except for ensuring Christian education of the child. However, in general, people did not consider these duties too binding. *“We have always asked whether the introducing parents would also come to the ceremony. They also used to sign the commemorative book, playing the role of a godparent”* (woman from ACA, 1930, Svit). The function of recording parents was not exercised equally in all Slovak municipalities and towns where individual child welcoming ceremonies took place.³⁵ In the 1980s, this role was common in Bratislava and in the surroundings of Trnava where I conducted my research. The research of 1986 confirmed that the necessity to have godparents ceased to be tied exclusively to church baptism. 76% of respondents were of the opinion that a child should have godparents even if the child was not baptised in church. Only 7% of them thought that a child did not need to have godparents. The need to have a godfather was also confirmed by the opinion that the godfather should assume the role of the witness at the wedding of his godchild, which was supported by 71% of respondents. Similar to the selection of godparents in the case of church baptism, it was possible to observe a strong orientation towards relatives in the case of a civil ceremony.

The importance of the ceremony for the family is also documented through the number of participants. The survey conducted in nine municipalities of the Trnava district in 1986 thus also addressed this issue. As for respondents' opinions on the participants to the ceremonial act of welcoming a child to life, the father of the child should also attend the ceremony according to most of them – 79%; half of the respondents were of the opinion that the child's siblings and grandparents should not be missing from the ceremony either. Interest in having other relatives at the welcome to life ceremony was minimal, however, 18% of respondents



Official registration in the commemorative book. While the book is signed by the mother, her child is held by the “recording mother”. Bratislava 1987.

were of the opinion that the ceremony should also be attended by a representative from the parents' workplace. This need was manifested to a greater extent among those respondents who attributed higher importance to the civil form of the ceremony.

I examined the reasons for the ambivalent attitudes and people's motivations through an example of the child welcoming ceremony, using a qualitative method, in the municipality of Cífer in November 1989. I visited seven households in which a child had been born during that year, with the aim to explore the reasons for the respondents' decisions when choosing the initiation ceremony connected with that event. I deliberately included among the respondents families in which the child had not been baptised, since from the perspective of traditional norms these cases re-

presented discontinuity and a new cultural behaviour pattern, the background of which I attempted to explain. I asked questions aiming at revealing the respondents' motivation to attend a church ceremony or civil ceremony and enabling them to provide an evaluation of the ceremony. In some households, the interview was also attended by the grandparents and great-grandparents of the new-born baby. For illustration, I present some of the answers to the individual questions; for comparison purposes, the households are numbered, and the respondent's relationship to the child is also indicated.

A) Why did you attend only the child welcoming ceremony?

No. 1, mother: *"I think that when my children get adult, they will have to decide on their own; and so I don't want to force my son to be baptised and to take him to church as, myself, I'm not a church-goer or believer, so to say. And when my children grow adult and wish to go to church, let them decide on their own. What many people do is that even if they don't go to church, they have their children baptised, but I think it's wrong, if the person is not fully convinced."... "My mother works at the national committee, and so she has not gone to church for quite a long time. My dad does go, and he was against (of not baptising his grandson, note by the author), but he made nothing against it. Only my grandma was very sad about it. And then she had an accident and was bad off. Before she died, she wanted us so badly to have our boy baptised. It would eventually happen, but then she died. My husband has a grandma who also goes to church, but they don't mix up with our things."*

No. 2, mother: *"My husband is a professional soldier. We didn't marry in church and therefore couldn't have baptism. [...] No one in the family had problems with not having our children baptised."*

No. 3, mother: *“My mom doesn’t prevent me from doing what I want to do. She didn’t even force me to go to church.”*

No. 3, great-grandmother: *“These young ones don’t teach their child how to pray. I disapprove it. If they wanted a funeral for that child, they would need a baptismal certificate.”*

No. 6, mother: *“My husband didn’t even have the communion, he would have to complete it. His father works at the national committee, and so he doesn’t want it because of his father. We’ll leave it up to her to decide. If we wanted to have her baptised, we’d have to go outside Cifer, since my husband doesn’t have all the necessary sacraments; however, my husband doesn’t agree because this would cause troubles to his father. Even if we didn’t have our daughter baptised, if she happened to choose someone who would insist on getting married in church, she could arrange it on her own. If she insisted on it... When my husband was in the military, I was considering having my daughter baptised, but he told me – if you want it yourself, do so, but...”* As this informant noted, her parents were unhappy about their children not being baptised. They didn’t even marry in church (*“because my husband’s father works at the national committee”*).

No. 6, great-grandfather: *“I hate that those who attended classes of religion were persecuted. If it was up to me, I would have my granddaughter baptised. Young people should not be prevented from baptising their children. If they invited me to attend the welcoming ceremony, I’d go: It’s a village, people would gossip if I didn’t go.”*

No. 7, mother (originally from Bulgaria, Orthodox): *“My husband is a member of the Communist Party, he doesn’t go to church and would have to complete the sacraments. The family of my husband is not religious, they didn’t mind if we didn’t have our child baptised.”*

B) Why did you take part in baptism?

No. 2, grandmother about the baptism of her daughter: *“My grandmother wanted it, you know, it’s so difficult to convince old people. I’m a party member, but if there were other party members before me, at a higher level, who attended baptism as well as communion, and even had a church marriage, why should I, an ordinary worker, just let it go? And so I had my daughter baptised and even have the communion.”*

No. 4, mother: *“I want my child to be a member of the church, and I’ll even try to bring up my child in this spirit. If the two of us didn’t want to have him baptised, I think he would force us to do so anyway.”*

No. 5, mother: *“Because the other members of our family who had already had their children baptised would otherwise stare at us. The priest here in this church is a decent person, he even gives quite good sermons.”*

C) What do you think about the quality of the ceremony?

No. 1, mother, about the child welcoming ceremony: *“It is nice, there was a nice speech. I liked that there were children from the kindergarten, it was dignified and even emotional.”*

No. 2, mother: *“It was very nice at the national committee. It is like welcoming to the whole life. It didn’t happen, maybe I wouldn’t even miss it.”*

No. 3, mother: *“Well, they recited poems at the national committee. We had no celebration at home. We were given some small gifts, there were speeches, we signed the book, and that was all. It was more impressive in the church. It was so hasty at the national committee, there was some wedding after us. The babies were crying.”*

No. 5, mother: *“What is also important in welcoming children to life is that all those mommies who have children of more-or-less the same age come together. For example, I didn’t know any of them before, but now I know who pertains to whom. In fact, I liked the ceremony at the national committee; it was so official in the church, the priest handled it very quickly. Baptism done in five minutes. And here, they even said who the parents of the babies were, I liked it. It was high quality. They seated everyone there and gave us souvenirs. Even though it was not organised in an appropriate time, I was surprised that everybody came. Well, I think one family was absent, but otherwise, all of us who had received an invitation were there. Without baptising or welcoming my child to life it would seem to be so wild, undignified.”*

No. 6, mother: *“There were children from the kindergarten, one lady was reciting a poem. I liked it.”*

No. 7, mother: *“It was good, we don’t have so beautiful ceremonial halls in our country (Bulgaria). There was even a cradle. However, I also like the ceremony in the church.”*

Knowing the background of the institutional ceremonies, the analysis of the above statements enables us to summarise the findings about the attitudes and motivations when choosing the institutional ceremony after the birth of a child in several points:

- The reason for the parents attending only the child welcoming ceremony could have been their atheistic worldview, membership of a family member in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, the holding of public offices or civil service employment, failure to fulfil the conditions set by the Church for baptising a child (which could also have been the consequence of the previous reasons), as

well as the different confessions of the parents in case they did not care about the religious education of their child;

- The reasons for baptism included religious belief, an effort to satisfy relatives, especially the older generation, customs, traditions (without the intention to systematically raise the child in a religious way), ensuring the possibility of a church funeral, better aesthetic experience compared to the civil ceremony, baptism serving as an impulse for its celebration, and it could also be a form of political protest;

- The reason for attending both ceremonies, baptism and the child welcoming ceremony, was the need to distinguish between the ritual admission in the civil and church community, the effort to satisfy the older generation, positive personal relationships with the organisers of the ceremonies – acceptance of invitation, the liking for social and ceremonial events, expectation of a gift from the ACA or from the trade union.

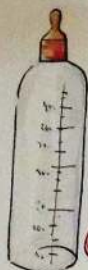
In the countryside, a purely private form of celebrating the birth of a child without attending an institutional ceremony is still rare. This qualitative part of the research revealed the political background of the functioning of civil ceremonies, which, however, was also significantly affected by the period 1989–1991, when the research was carried out. It was a period of important socio-political changes that affected the value system of society and individuals, and my informants were sensitive about the contemporary events associated with the political upheaval.

The undersigned parents are aware of their responsibility for the proper education of their child, and will make every effort to bring up their child to be an exemplary citizen of our socialist homeland.

With their honest work, they will fight for the beautiful and twittering life of all children all over the world.

The Local National Committee and the Assembly for Civil Affairs welcomes with sincere joy our new dear fellow citizen and wishes the parents that the child grows up in health and peace for their joy and a happy future.

Record in the Commemorative Book, 1963, Párnica (Dolný Kubín district):



Zápis

zo slávnostného uvítania do života detí napísaný v obradnej sieni MNV v Párnici dňa 24. VIII. 1963.

Podpisani rodičia sú si vedomi zodpovednosti, za riadnu výchovu urobia všetko, aby zo svojho dieťaťa vychovali vzorného občana našej socialistickej vlasti.

Svojou poctivou prácou budú bojovať za krásny a štebetaný život všetkých detí na celom svete.

, nar. 13. augusta 1963.

podpisy manželov:

MNV a Sbor pre občianske záležitosti s úprimnou radosťou vítajú nového milého spolobčana a rodičom praje, aby vyrástlo v zdraví a miere pre ich radosť a pre šťastnú budúcnosť.



[Handwritten signature]
predseda MNV:

Marriage

Since the latter half of the 12th century, the doctrine of the sacral nature of marriage, promoted during the Middle Ages, helped the Church gain influence over the institution of marriage, which had been a matter of the family community until the late Middle Ages. Marriage was recognised as a sacrament at the Council of Florence in 1439, and the sacramental nature of marriage and of the jurisdiction was confirmed by the Council of Trent. It became practice that the entering into a marriage was conditional upon church attendance and that the church acquired the right to co-decide in marital and family matters. The institutional influences of the secular and church authorities sought to regulate other aspects of wedding as well. For instance, marriage bans were introduced already in the 13th century, but it took long before they became common; in 1611, the Hungarian church assembly prohibited the holding of weddings during the advent and fasting periods; church institutions repeatedly issued prohibitions concerning the duration of weddings and sought to restrict the amount of food, guests, gifts, and the ways of entertainment. Since these prohibitions were recurrent, it is obvious that they were not complied with in most cases and that the power of the tradition was greater. The Church also set the minimum age for marriage – 16 years for men and 14 years for women; in 1858, the Hungarian State shifted this limit to 21 years for men (Jakubíková 1996: 10 and Apáthyová-Rusnáková 1989: 74).

The secularisation process initiated by the French Revolution in 1789–1799 brought a breakthrough. The Enlightenment thus laid the fundamentals both for a new civil society and for a modern Christian society. With the birth of the bourgeoisie society³⁶, the period of managing culture by the political elite began³⁷

(Roth, J. – Roth, K. 1990). During the Enlightenment period, the nuclei of the future states were born, which began demanding participation in the ritual occasions of their citizens. In the second half of the 19th century, obligatory civil marriage in France as well as in several Western European Protestant Countries (e.g. Switzerland, The Netherlands) was introduced. In Protestant countries, the confirmation of marriage in church was also accepted as part of the civil marriage, since the authorities were not prepared for such acts. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church rejected the combination of secular and religious elements in ceremonies as a principle (Weber-Kellermann 1985: 119).

The Enlightenment rulers Maria Theresa and her son Joseph II did not bring major changes to the legislation on rituals, however, they contributed to a more systematic keeping of registers.³⁸ In 1781, Joseph II declared the Roman Catholic registers to be valid public books.³⁹ Enlightenment scholars, many of whom were priests, sought to improve the education of the population, protect it against irrational behaviour, attitudes, faith, as well as excessive celebrations. Some works from the Enlightenment period pursued regulatory objectives, which is interesting in the context of the research on the institutional formation of customs.

The forms of life-cycle ceremonies, which we perceive today as traditional, emerged mainly in the period from the 17th to the 19th centuries. Back in the 17th century, a verbal agreement was almost always enough with regard to weddings in Moravia, relying – to a greater extent than in towns – on the memory of the witnesses who were responsible for the orderly life of the family (Fojtík 1965: 333). The confirmation of marriage by Church was not considered necessary. The development in Slovakia was probably similar to the one in Moravia. There were complaints dating back to the 17th

century about non-observance of burial ceremonies, late baptism of children, or marriages taking place at night (Horváthová 1974: 252). On the northern side of the Tatra mountains, in the Goral regions of Poland, in which there were no churches, couples got married without the assistance of priests even during the first half of the 19th century (Bystroň 1947: 161). Similar attitudes to official ceremonies were recorded among the Roma in the second half of the 20th century. Marriages were often entered after several years of cohabitation, mainly because the couples wanted to have their children baptised (Mann 1989: 115). Unfortunately, no works were written in the past nor preserved until the present in Slovakia, revealing the functioning of the different institutional regulations; we can only assume certain development analogies with surrounding Central European countries.

Before the 20th century, the separation of church and state power as a result of secularisation only affected marriages. In 1894, the modern Hungarian bourgeoisie legislation introduced obligatory civil marriages. “Under this legislative article, a marriage was not considered concluded, if the declaration of marital consent was not made before a secular official who was a state registrar in the case of marriages” (Mozolík 1989: 26). Only after civil marriage the priest was allowed to perform the religious marriage ceremony, which did not have a legal form.

After the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, both church and civil marriage ceremonies became valid forms of entering into a marriage. In Hungary, the civil form of marriage has been the only valid form from 1894 until the present. This law was in place also in the territories of present-day Slovakia, which were annexed to Hungary during World War II.

During the totalitarian regime of the wartime Slovak State

(1939–1945), the legislative equality of state and church ceremonies was officially preserved, however, there were indirect as well as direct pressures on preferring church ceremonies of state-permitted religions. Indirect pressures involved the ideological clerical propaganda, while direct pressures, for instance, required every citizen to have a religious affiliation. The ideological pressures targeted marginal groups that deviated from the Catholic-nationalist orientation.

Developmental deviations in matrimonial law can also be observed among various churches and religious communities in Slovakia. However, before all issues were clarified, a new family law came into force in Czechoslovakia and, in the same year of 1950, the Greek Catholic Church was banned. In socialist Czechoslovakia, church marriages ceased to be legally valid, and everyone had to attend a civil act at the registry office, which later became a civil marriage with the entire ceremonial complex.

In the first half of the 20th century, civil forms of life-cycle ceremonies were held from time to time under the influence of atheist associations among social democratic and left-wing parties mainly in urban working environments; however, they were exceptional even there, with church life-cycle ceremonies remaining a generally accepted norm until 1950.

Civil marriage

As noted above, civil marriage was the only obligatory civil ceremony during the socialist period; other civil ceremonies could in fact be avoided. During the first years after its enactment, marriage at the national committee was considered only an official act attended by the engaged couple several days before the church ceremony. After their establishment, the ACAs focused primarily

on the marriage ceremony as the dominant element of the civil ceremonial complex. The research showed that since the introduction of the obligatory civil marriage in 1950, the state sought to make it not only an official act, but to also ensure a dignified background under the existing conditions.

In rural areas as well as among religious families in towns, civil marriages initially met with constrained attitudes or rejection by people. The perception of a civil marriage as a foreign element is confirmed by the fact that, at the beginning, it was not accompanied or followed by any customs. However, local communities began creating certain norms that interconnected traditions with innovations in a specific form. They related, for example, to the wedding ring which was worn on the right hand in the time between civil and church marriage, and then on the left hand. In some areas, they related to the public acceptance of spouses slee-

Civil marriage in Bratislava, 1980s.



ping together only after church marriage, the holding of wedding parties only after church marriage, the wearing of more ordinary clothes (often only a dark suit) for the civil ceremony, etc. (Profantová 2015: 187). The civil marriage was initially attended only by the engaged couple and witnesses in official (not wedding) clothes. Since the 1960s, the presence of the parents of the young couple became common as well, and they were later also accompanied by the couple's relatives and friends.

What worked in some areas was the principle characteristic of ritual culture, according to which adaptation to a new phenomenon is easier when it is attributed to traditional ceremonial elements. In some parts of the Upper Orava region, the civil ceremony was linked to engagement and took place at least three weeks before the church marriage, on a weekday (this practice is known to have taken place also in other environments and in some urban families) (Kropiláková-Jakubíková 1978: 99). In other areas, it took place on working days in the week before the church ceremony.⁴⁰ The official confirmation of marriage was the precondition for attending the marriage banns. Since, from 1950, a church marriage had to be preceded by a civil ceremony, the marriage banns in the time between the two marriages were not effective, as the couple was already married in the legal sense. Nevertheless, the banns continued to take place in some parishes (Apáthyová-Rusnáková 1989: 72).

Unlike the previous purely official act at the national committee, marriages became more ceremonial after the establishment of ACAs. The official act was enriched with speeches by ACA representatives, emphasising the interest of society in the newly entered marriage, as well as cultural and artistic performances that touched the emotions of the present. With some variations,

the scenario was as follows: official arrival of the engaged couple, a poem, introduction of the engaged couple to the ceremonialist by the registrar, speech, the act itself – legal formulations of the marriage, exchange of rings, recording of the newlyweds and witnesses in the commemorative book, and a cultural performance and music at the end; a toast by the ceremonialist with the newlyweds was also common practice (Mravík 1978).

Special ceremonial halls began to be built for marriage ceremonies, whose interior created a dignified background for these events. It was also an important momentum that the potential participation of the family, relatives and friends at ceremonies was taken into account when building the halls. The increasing of the number of participants to the civil ceremony related not only with the integration of the civil marriage into the ceremonial complex, but also to the creation of space for the audience and reduction of the number of guests at the wedding party. Civil marriage, just like church marriage, became a space for expressing acceptance of the change in the social status by friends, neighbours, and acquaintances who were not invited to the wedding feast, but were bound to attend the ceremony by receiving personal information about the marriage (e.g. by means of a wedding card). After the civil ceremony, it became a custom to offer wedding cakes and alcoholic drinks to the organisers. Civil marriages thus gradually penetrated into collective consciousness.

As a result, believers, too, began accepting a civil marriage as one of the components of wedding customs, which did not prevent them from getting married also in church. The fact that a civil marriage without an additional church marriage was in many areas or families to be insufficient is proven by calling it derogatorily as “marriage under the willow”. Despite the official date of getting



Newlyweds after civil marriage, symbolically harnessed in a yoke.
Bratislava 1978.

married on the day of the civil ceremony, some spouses considered the date of the church ceremony as the day of the marriage anniversary. Since the 1960s, both ceremonies took place on the same day more and more often.

A series of questions in the questionnaire survey conducted in the municipalities of the Trnava district, Western Slovakia, in 1986 concerned weddings. 59% of respondents stated that both civil marriage and church marriage left the same impression in them; 20% of respondents had a stronger emotional experience from civil marriage and 19% from church marriage. Both forms of ceremony thus occupied identical positions in the value system of the Trnava district inhabitants. On the other hand, in a survey carried out in the same year in the Protestant environment of the munic-

pality of Očová in the Zvolen district, Central Slovakia, up to 60% of respondents rated the civil ceremony higher. In addition to the dual confessionalism of its inhabitants, this municipality is also known for keeping alive folklore traditions for many years, which was also used by the organisers of civil ceremonies by bringing them closer to the taste of the local population. “*However, everybody says that it’s much nicer in Očová (than a civil marriage in the district town of Zvolen – note by the author). Here it even takes an hour. Every speech is tailor-made for the family, farewell words are told both on behalf of the young bride and the young groom*” (woman, 1953, Očová). In this location, the results of the skills of local women were used for making souvenirs, and the newlyweds were given napkins produced using the traditional embroidery techniques. The incorporation of local traditions in the institutional part of the wedding ceremony appears to have contributed to its increased popularity. The use of the folklore material from the municipality, especially wedding songs and farewell speeches, was a strong emotional experience for all actors of the ceremony.

71% respondents from the surroundings of Trnava expressed their satisfaction with the quality of civil marriages. The rest was dissatisfied, regarding the premises undignified for this event (“*...marriage in an office is not very dignified*”). Logically, these comments occurred most frequently in municipalities that did not have a ceremonial hall. Poor premises were the reason why young couples preferred to get married in a different location, where they even had a wedding party, which disrupted the wedding traditions of the given municipality.

Regardless of the type of marriage, at the end of the 20th century it was a tradition in rural environments that the bride and the groom were accompanied to the marriage act by their godparents.

This practice was confirmed by the respondents' answers in the municipalities of the Trnava district: 71% of the would support this alternative. The church role of a godfather was thus also exercised during civil ceremonies.

Wedding guests waiting before the civil marriage ceremony.
Hrušov (Velký Krtíš district), 1964.



In the 1980s, it was a popular custom to announce changes in the marital status also at the workplace and confirm them by inviting colleagues to a small reception. 73% of respondents stated that they would have prepared a reception for their colleagues in case they got married, and those who had already passed this stage of life, did so at their workplace. The small reception usually consisted of offering wedding cakes and alcoholic drinks.

In the second half of the 20th century, the development of wedding ceremonies was so dynamic that the changes needed to be observed in shorter time intervals than the 40-year period of socialism. More than political impacts, the factors influencing the changes included modernisation, migration of the population, building of municipal infrastructures, in particular the existence of public spaces and restaurant facilities to which weddings moved from residential buildings and yards. From being an official act, civil marriage changed into a dignified element of wedding ceremonies accepted by people, even though, in the countryside, marriage in church was still considered the culmination of the whole wedding (Kasanová 2013: 199). The wedding procession heading to the national committee and subsequently to the church extended the possibility of participation of the local community in this important life event. It constituted an option not only for people without religion, but also for those who failed to meet for various reasons the conditions for a church marriage. The attention paid to civil marriage by organisers, as well as the experience gained during socialism undoubtedly contributed to a higher quality of civil marriages even after the fall of the socialist regime compared to many countries of the developed Western world.

Funeral

The social functions of funeral rituals include the showing of respect for the deceased and farewell of the bereaved to their close person. Christianity contributed to the unification of funeral rituals and enforced a dignified course of this event. During the 6th–9th century, it changed the way of burying from cremation to skeleton burial in excavated graves (Chorváthová 1995a). Dying and funerals thus became a matter of the Christian Church both in terms of organisation and formal arrangement. Many pagan or pre-Christian acts related to death were reinterpreted and modified in the spirit of the Christian ideology. A priest was called to the deceased to perform the last rites and to make it easier for the dying to leave for the “other world”. The Christian funeral was to ensure the salvation of the soul of the deceased and its return to God. The objects that the deceased was to take to prevent his/her soul from returning to the living were a prayer book, the *Tranoscius* songbook in the case of Protestants, a rosary, scapulars, holy pictures and statues, or holy water. The death was announced to the priest and was recorded in church registers. The vigil (watch) by the deceased helped overcome fear from the dead and anxiety from the loss of a loved one until burial, which acquired a religious character under the influence of Christianity (Jágerová 2001: 18) “In Slovakia, the Christian funeral ceremony took place in the yard, in front of the church, or over the grave at the cemetery. A religious Roman-Catholic funeral was denied to those who excluded themselves from the church community through their own fault, suicides, misbelievers, heretics, duelists, etc., if they did not show remorse before their death” (Chorváthová 1995b, 55). Both the church and secular power intervened also against exuberant burial feasts, thus reducing them to a close family gathering

(Jágerová 2001: 19). The churches also influenced the marking of graves and the nature of commemorative ceremonies. Despite the successful grasping of funeral rituals by Christian churches, the Christian-pagan syncretism persisted. Funerals and burials were accompanied by a whole range of beliefs, magic acts and binding ways of behaviour associated with the different stages of funeral. There is evidence of pagan practices even from the period of the 16th to 20th century – the burying of children outside cemetery, signs of vampirism, the carving of wooden statues of the deceased and their placing on graves on Easter Friday, and on excessive mourning of the dead during funeral. In addition to churches or religious communities, traditional professions were also involved in the organisation of funerals, such as death doula (assisted with the preparation of the death body for the funeral), director of the funeral (took care of the funeral procedure), grave digger, bell ringer, carriers, funeral guilds or funeral societies, whose origins are also related to religious communities or certain hazardous professions, especially mining. (Chorváthová 2001: 35, 39). In the last century, their roles have been replaced by funeral services.

The influence of Protestant churches was manifested also in the extension of funeral verses which were originally non-folk creations and were probably intended to crowd out pre-Christian elements – their interpretation over the dead. “Their origins and penetration relate to the creation and publishing of songbook literature with precise dating. Its spreading is associated with the Reformation and Counter-Reformation schools of thought. Farewell songs therefore have an evidential value when it comes to the influence of non-folk classes (churches) on a folk funeral ceremony” (Chorváthová 1992: 12). Even though these verses have a religious origin, their dissemination and transformation into folk culture

were facilitated by secular institutions – guilds and support associations that arranged funeral ceremonies and through which the originally Protestant texts also reached Catholic communities.

Funeral is the most conservative of the life-cycle ceremonies and it is relatively hard to observe dynamic changes in it. However, civil elements penetrated funeral rites as well, mainly in the case of funerals of eminent persons or those held in urban environments. In Slovakia, the first funerals without the participation of a priest probably took place within the community of social democrats at the beginning of the 20th century. Nevertheless, civil ceremonies were exceptional in rural areas even during socialism and this is true until today.

Civil funeral, civil farewell

Funeral ceremonies came to the attention of state institutions right at the beginning of the formation of civil ceremonies in the 1950s. The institutionalisation of the funeral rite has been promoted since the 1960s by the gradual creation of a state material and technical infrastructure (funeral services, funeral homes, or crematories in larger towns), which disrupted the usual course of funeral customs and created the conditions for their innovation. Cremation associations began to be established already at the end of the 19th century,⁴¹ however, the first crematorium in Slovakia was built in 1969 (in Liberec, Czechia, half a century earlier). During that decade, the Roman Catholic Church began accepting cremation, though it still strongly recommended church members that they prefer skeleton burial (Sudor, 2011).

Despite these innovations, qualitative changes in funerals during the socialist period were very slow in rural areas. This was due to the specific character of that ritual, about which people are

probably the most emotional of all ceremonies. Belief in immortality appears to be a “specific human protest against the shock and social losses caused by death, as well as a defensive attitude against the total negation of an individual being and against the misunderstanding of the extinction of a subject” (Nuska 1981: 3).

Under the psychological pressure that accompanies farewells to close persons, even convinced proponents of the atheist worldview proclaimed by Communism made compromises – not only in terms of their worldview, but also practically, despite expecting possible sanctions by the state. During the funeral ceremony, the atmosphere was not fit for presenting someone’s opinions. There was rather the tendency to adapt to local social norms. It was not uncommon to hold a church funeral of a person who would have never admitted religiousness throughout his/her life (either because of his/her worldview or for practical reasons) and was buried by a priest at the request of the relatives and often to the surprise of his/her surroundings (Kiliánová 2007: 38).

How did these facts manifest in the organisation of funerals by the ACAs? There were two forms of assemblies’ participation in funerals: 1. civil farewell, which formed part of a church funeral; 2. civil funeral, i.e. civil ceremony without church involvement. A civil farewell consisted of a speech that contained information about the life of the deceased and a farewell by society and family to the deceased. In terms of dramaturgy, it followed the religious part as a special element. Civil funerals took place completely without church participation and had an autonomous scenario. They began with music and recitation, followed by the biography of the deceased, as well as other possible speeches (others could also have a speech – representatives of the workplace, social organisations); at the end, the ceremonialist gave a farewell speech,

which was followed by music or singing. Before taking the floor, all speakers respectfully bowed to the deceased. Upon agreement with the ceremonialists and the funeral service (state or municipal companies), this basic scenario could be adjusted. The first one to express condolences to the survivors was the ceremonialists, followed by others present. It also depended on the situation whether the funeral took place at a cemetery or in a crematorium, whether there was a funeral home at the cemetery, or whether the farewell took place by the grave.

Since civil funerals spread slowly, the Communist regime sought to make the civil farewell part of each funeral as an expression of civil society saying good-bye to the deceased. In the minds of the people who never had the opportunity to take part in a socialist civil funeral, it was often mistakenly considered a state funeral organised to important representatives of the regime, presidents, or members of the army, with the participation of the state authorities. Civil funerals were more popular in urban environments and were exceptional in some villages throughout the era of socialism. M. Jágerová mentions civil funerals that she studied in the villages of Telgárt and Šumiac (Horehronie region in Central Slovakia) as a “disruption of the majority model” (Jágerová 2008). She provides examples of when the body of a Communist Party official and school director was displayed in the cultural house on the day of the civil ceremony during the 1980s, when the bodies were usually displayed in the house of the deceased. In the neighbouring village, the deceased was taken to the square in the centre of the village, where a part of the funeral ceremony and farewell by the fellow citizens of the deceased took place. Jágerová notes that, during funerals, the majority model was broken even in the

case of important church members. She also states that where the family did not want to present itself as religious, it asked the local priest to perform the church rituals directly at home, in secret, without the participation of the public. People attended traditional evening prayers in the house of the deceased also in the case of civil funerals; there were even more people than usual, since such person “could not” have a church funeral and, according to older people, “*a civil funeral is like burying a dog*” (Jágerová, 2008: 254).

According to the results of the questionnaire survey, which covered 150 municipalities from all over Slovakia in 1984, ACAs were involved in the organisation of funerals only in 87.7% of the

Funeral procession during a civil funeral in Očová, 1983 (Zvolen district).



municipalities; civil farewells were held in around a half of them. The most times they were engaged in civil funerals was in the 1970s when around one third of municipalities declared to have had an experience in organising civil funerals.

The increased difficulty in organising civil funerals and farewells were due to the relatively short time that was available for their preparation and especially the fact that speakers from rural areas were usually not professionals; they were people of various professions, who were not always available at the time of the funeral. In addition to the Assemblies, social organisations, and various interest groups of which the deceased was a member, were also involved in the organisation of funerals.

Funeral processions with their usual arrangement standards represented an opportunity for those less involved in saying good-bye to the deceased. The procession moved from the house of the deceased to the church and then to the cemetery, or directly to the cemetery. Given the fact that the funeral homes were built directly at cemeteries, funeral processions began disappearing, or their route became limited to the short distance from the funeral home to the place of the grave. The development of road transport was another factor that reduced funeral processions along the main streets of the municipality.

The research of 1984 also included the monitoring of the occurrence of selected ceremonial elements during funerals. According to the survey results, a funeral procession took place in 65.7% of municipalities. In 58% of municipalities, the deaths were announced by the local public address system, which also served for an acoustic enhancement of the atmosphere. During civil ceremonies, the church bells did not ring, as bell ringing was subject to permission from the church (Jágerová 2008: 103). At cemeteries

that did not dispose of a sound system, it was not easy to make the funeral ritual attractive with cultural intermezzos, music, or recitation, which were well-proven means used by ACAs. Local brass bands were an exception in this regard. This changed with the new funeral homes which were built in the last third of the 20th century, mainly in the 1970s and 1980s. They were financed from state funds, though the construction was often ensured by the locals themselves. Since this took place during the socialist period, there is a tendency to consider them a counterpart of the religious space of a church. One can agree with M. Jágerová who rejects this view.⁴² She notes that funeral homes were from the very beginning designed as independent, neutral spaces to serve both for civil and church rituals. They replaced morgues that became part of the new funeral homes, and served for preparing the deceased for the funeral, not for conducting ceremonies. During the period of their construction, it was not permitted to erect any church objects; however, in small municipalities, religious symbols were used right from the beginning of the functioning of such spaces. Some buildings in small municipalities were even consecrated by priests, even though their sacredness could have been disrupted by holding a civil ceremony there. Slovak municipalities continued building funeral homes as well-proven functional spaces that satisfied the social needs of people even after 1989, but no longer on their own.

During the socialist period, particularly civil servants in rural areas, such as military personnel, were buried exclusively in civil form. Members and officials of the Communist Party, characterised as “hardcore party-liners” by our informants, as well as some members of the anti-fascist movement, usually had civil ceremonies.⁴³ In the case of prominent representatives of the social and

political life, the funeral was often prepared in crematories where, outside the local community, the pressure of traditional social norms was not so strong. Their cremated remains were subsequently placed in the municipalities from which they originated. The placement of the urn was no longer given as much political attention as funerals. As M. Jágerová notes: “During the times of totalitarianism, places associated with religiousness became forbidden and tabooed for some individuals. This particularly concerned the members of the Communist Party, civil servants, as well as the working class, whereas it was the funeral that gave rise to certain exceptions. If a death occurred in a family and the family decided to respect the wish of the deceased – to be buried in church, going to church in connection with the funeral mass or funeral rituals was in a way tolerated due to the specific, highly sensitive sphere with which it was improper to interfere” (Jágerová 2008: 254).

Civil funeral in a cultural house in Očová, 1983 (Zvolen district).



A specific part of the questionnaire survey of 1986 on the attitudes of people from nine municipalities of the Trnava district on institutional ceremonies sought to explore respondents' opinions on civil funerals and civil farewells compared to the religious parts of funerals. I assumed that civil funerals were not frequent in the studied municipalities. More than a half of the respondents considered both types of funerals – civil and church – to be equally dignified; 30% of respondents considered a church funeral to be more dignified, and for 10% of them a civil funeral was more dignified. 60% of respondents considered a church farewell to be more dignified against 25% favouring civil farewells. According to 82% of respondents, a civil farewell should not be absent from any funeral. 12.5% of respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with the quality of local funerals; however, I was not able to explore the causes using the questionnaire. It was a fact, though, that not even in the mid-1980s could civil farewells be reliably secured at every funeral, especially in the case of elderly and lonely people. In some cases, it was replaced by a farewell by means of the local public address system.

During socialism, civil funerals in Slovakia were not in the focus of ethnologists, partly because they did not fall within the field known as traditional culture, and partly because they were minimal in the countryside and began spreading in towns not before the 1970s. The reason can also be seen in the fact that they related to cremation as a new element existing in large cities, a step towards modernisation and cultural change, which reached beyond the traditional focus of the discipline when it comes to funeral ceremonies as a subject of research.

Other civil ceremonies

The ideological plans of the Communist regime aimed to constantly develop an entire complex of socialist ceremonies. The attention of the Assemblies for Civil Affairs therefore reached beyond the three basic ceremonies. Other ceremonies that were introduced later have survived or disappeared depending on their success and popularity with the population. From those that became established throughout Slovakia, I have chosen some which are at least in the marginal focus of ethnological research, and which were also included in the questionnaire surveys of 1984 and 1986.

Silver and golden weddings

Other important events organised by the ACAs were round anniversaries of marital cohabitations. The celebrations of silver (25th anniversary), golden (50th anniversary), and diamond (60th anniversary) weddings in Slovakia became widespread in the 20th century. During the pre-war period, they were sporadically organised in the urban environment as a family event and celebration. In traditional rural environments, these anniversaries were not celebrated as a social event, due to which they came to the attention of ethnologists only marginally. During her field research in the Orava region, K. Jakubíková recorded their occurrence in the 1970s.⁴⁴ The initiative came from the local national committee, but it were also adult children who registered their parents – long-year spouses – for the ceremony. The local national committee sent out invitations to the event, but not all celebrants accepted the invitation. The celebration was accompanied by a cultural programme – in particular singing of a folklore group which preferred to perform songs designated as “ancient”. The celebrants

received gifts from the municipality and were expected to bring refreshments to the organisers. A stemmed glass with an engraved number of the celebrant or a cake were a popular gift for the celebrating couple. Children used to give them a cake with the number of the anniversary, flowers, or valuable utility objects. Instead of a wedding feather or a bouquet, silver-plated ears of grain pinned on clothes were popular as a symbol of maturity. The celebrations of round marriage anniversaries spread not only in the form of a civil ceremony, but also church ceremony.

In a questionnaire survey, which was carried out in the municipalities of the Trnava district in 1986, up to 79% of respondents stated that they would celebrate their wedding anniversary (es-

Ceremonialist's speech on the occasion of the golden wedding, with children performing in pioneer uniforms. The table is covered by a tablecloth with local traditional embroidery. Očová (Zvolen district), 1976.



pecially the golden one) also in the institutional form – civil or religious), and 27% of respondents would celebrate their golden wedding both by in the civil form and in church. Unlike the results from the Catholic municipalities of the surroundings of Trnava, in the confessionally mixed municipality of Očová there was higher interest in holding the golden wedding in the form of a civil ceremony, and lower interest in having it in church. This confirms certain differences between the traditional Catholic environment and the more tolerant mixed Protestant-Catholic environment where civil ceremonies were better accepted; this result was also due to the quality of civil ceremonies in Očová, where the elements of the local folklore, clothing, and art traditions were used.

Celebrations of life anniversaries

Celebrations of life anniversaries and birthdays have become widespread during the 20th century. As a previously existing privilege of eminent persons and higher social classes, they gradually penetrated into towns and only later to the countryside, mostly to the Protestant environment. Birthdays were recalled by sending decorative postcards, personal congratulations, and celebrations (Jakubíková 1995b: 394). Within family circles, celebrations of life anniversaries became an occasion for meetings of family members and relatives, which in many cases was not very frequent given their spatial dispersion.

During the socialist period, the Boards for Civil Affairs as well as organisations of the trade union movement specifically focused on the celebration of life anniversaries at the workplace. Since the 1950s, celebrations of the 50th birthday were particularly widespread and popular. From the point of view of the celebrating person, a life anniversary became an occasion for recapitulating his/her

creative life, for acknowledging the social recognition of his/her own work and for realising future prospects depending on the reached age. On the part of the colleagues, these celebrations were an occasion to establish informal contacts, enhance interpersonal relationship at the workplace, and make daily life more special. On the part of society, these events represented an occasion for rewarding the achievements of the celebrating person in the form of handing over letters of congratulations, remunerations, and gifts from the social organisations of which he or she was a member.

The most celebrated anniversary was the 50th birthday, which was usually celebrated in several stages – in family, at the workplace, or within social and professional associations. A specific form of the celebration of life anniversaries organised by the ACAs and widespread in the 1980s, were meetings of people who celebrated their 50th anniversary and lived or were born in a particular municipality. Along with the “obligatory” nature of the celebrations, these events often tended to be pompous, which was associated with excessive financial costs that became a norm within some environments as well as a burden for some individuals. This also depended on the social status of the celebrating person which, on the other hand, also related to the person’s political engagement.

While economically active citizens celebrated their life anniversaries at the workplace, national committees organised anniversary celebrations of citizens in their retirement age, as well as extraordinarily socially and politically engaged citizens, local deputies, etc. Official receptions of elderly people were specific in that they represented an opportunity to express respect and thanks by society. In 1984, celebrations of life anniversaries at national committees were organised in 86.4% of the 150 Slovak municipalities included in the research sample, with ACAs as the

main organisers, cooperating with social organisations and citizens active in the field of art. The celebration was usually prepared for several birthday celebrants at the same time; they, however, did not associate it with celebration in a family circle. It is also worth mentioning that the celebrations of birthdays and name days at workplaces did not end only with congratulations, but were also accompanied by refreshments or at least a toast, and were usually held during working time. The celebrations of some common names (Anna, Katarína, Štefan, Ján), which relate to the tradition of organising dance parties both in the rural and urban environment, became also widespread.

A part of the questions from the questionnaire survey conducted in the municipalities of the Trnava district in 1986 focused on the respondents' need to celebrate name days and birthdays with their families and at their workplaces. The vast majority of them considered it necessary to celebrate both events in a family environment, with 83.5% of them placing more emphasis on birthdays and 77.5% on name days. On the other hand, 48% of respondents (up to 60% in Očová), considered celebrations of name days and especially birthdays at the workplace to be inappropriate.

There was a greater tolerance for life anniversaries: 56% of respondents were of the opinion that the celebrant should prepare a reception for the closest group of colleagues, and 34% thought that the life anniversary was exclusively their private matter and should not be celebrated at the workplace. 50% of respondents would not invite more than 30 people to their celebration. Many also commented on what they liked and did not like about workplace celebrations: what they considered positive was that the celebrant's achievements were acknowledged and that social organisations showed respect to them; on the other hand, excessive

alcohol consumption, the disproportionate length of celebrations, high costs, insincere relationships, the differentiated approach of the company's management to individual celebrants, and the competition in who would organise a more ostentatious celebration were considered to be negative.

From the point of view of workers, informal social gatherings contributed to the strengthening of friendly relationships at the workplace, while from the perspective of the Communist ideology, socialist work teams were formed thanks to them

Recruits farewell

Before 2005⁴⁵, many Slovak municipalities preserved the custom of seeing off the recruits with singing before they left for the military service. The traditional farewells, which took place in every major municipality in Slovakia each autumn until the mid-20th century, were followed by official recruits farewells, organised by the ACAs in cooperation with organisations associated with the state's security forces.

The research conducted in 150 Slovak municipalities in 1984 showed that farewells had a new institutionalised form since the 1960s, consisting of an official reception by the representatives of the municipality with speeches and a cultural programme. Farewell preparations intensified in the 1970s (only 6.8% of municipalities organised this event in the 1960; there were additional 65.7% of municipalities in the 1970s, and 12.3% in the 1980s). In most cases, the official reception was followed by a recruits' dance party. Along with the institutional component, some municipalities preserved the marking of recruits on the day of their departure with a tricolour ribbon, a farewell to the village by singing in the street, and the traditional seeing-off of the recruits.

Dňa 15. marca 1983

uskutočnila sa v obradnej sieni MNV v Kokave nad Rim.

SLÁVNOSTNÁ ROZLŮČKA S BRANCIAMI,

KTORÍ MAJÚ NASTÚPIŤ ZÁKLADNÚ VOJENSKÚ SLUŽBU.

Rozlúčkový prejav k brancom mal predseda MNV
č. E. Peter a ponúenie, ako aj odporúčanie povolávacích rozkazov
brancom vykonal zástupca OVŠ z Lucenca.

Kokava * / Rim 15.3.1983.

Za MNV:

Za OVŠ:

Za MO-ZÁZEM-u:

Hostia:

Za ZPOT:

BRANCI:

Vilček Jarošlav	Kabráň Peter
Pápa Štefan	Pápa Jozef
Majur Milan	Košť
Čavoš Daniel	Jakub
Štefán Jarošlav	Štefán
Kvanka Pavol	Štefán
Kováč Karol	Štefán
Počí Peter	Štefán
Štefán Jarošlav	Štefán
Kováč Karol	Štefán
Štefán Jarošlav	Štefán
Štefán J.	Štefán
Štefán P.	Štefán
Štefán	Štefán
Štefán	Štefán

Record in the commemorative book from the official farewell to the recruits.
Kokava nad Rimavicou (Poltár district) 1983.

Some ACAs also organised the official welcoming of soldiers upon their return from the military service. This official act began to spread in the second half of the 1970s, and since it did not have a counterpart in traditional ceremonial culture, it did not meet with desired response by the population. This suggests that, in connection with the military service, what was considered substantial was the separation from home and from family and friends instead of showing respect for the civic duty – the basic military service, the termination of which might logically have a greater social value than leaving for the military.

Other festive events

The most widespread and, at the same time, most popular events organised by the ACAs together with social organisations (most often the Red Cross, schools, and the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters) were meetings of the representatives of the municipality (or towns, represented by the ACA staff) with pensioners in the local cultural house, ceremonial hall, or in any other social space. These meetings usually took place in autumn or before Christmas. They can be considered an innovative element that has no counterpart in traditional culture. These events provided an opportunity for a ceremonial expression of respect for the oldest generation by inviting pensioners from a certain age to municipal offices or cultural houses. The gathering was usually opened by speeches by the representatives of the municipality and was enriched by a cultural programme and a small snack. The guests were also given flowers or symbolic gifts. A questionnaire survey conducted in 150 municipalities of Slovakia shows that, in the 1980s, 86.4% of the municipalities involved in the survey were accustomed to organising meetings with pensioners.

The increase in this number was similar to the development of most of the events organised by ACAs (only 6.5% in the 1960s, 52% in the 1970s, and an additional 13.6% of municipalities in the 1980s). The popularity of the meetings with pensioners stemmed from the fact that it was not only an exceptional expression of interest in citizens by both the municipality and society, but also a follow-up on the regular contacts of social workers with lonely elderly people who were dependent on this kind of communication. Some ACAs also organised Christmas dinners for lonely pensioners, celebrations of the International Women's Day for female pensioners, visits to the homes of disabled citizens, etc. To a certain extent, the care by ACAs substituted the limited social contacts of people past their economically active age, as well as the absence of charity and religious associations oriented on assisting elderly citizens.

The entire range of events in which the ACAs were involved related to schools and, in particular, festivities for the school youth, such as the official welcoming of first-grade pupils, the Sarkles' and Young Pioneers' oaths (degrees in the hierarchy of pupils' socialist organisations), farewells to school, the hand-over of identity documents, official reception of secondary school graduates, i.e. events with the nature of initiation ceremonies. The engagement of local ACAs in these events reflected the involvement of the wider society in the life of schools and pupils, and was also expected to contribute to breaking the ties of children and their parents to church ceremonies – communion or confirmation. I experienced this type of a model event in Očová in 1986, which developed in an unusual form, interlinking a school festivity with a celebration and, at the same time, a state holiday. It was the pledge of allegiance to the socialist homeland, which

was attended by 7th grade elementary school pupils, emerging as counterpart to confirmation. The organisers decided to abandon the original differentiation between believers and atheists, making this solemn oath be taken by all children, with the participation of their parents, teachers, and representatives of the municipality. This festivity took place on May 9, which was a state holiday, and involved the laying of wreaths to the monument to fallen soldiers. This event gained a very strong position in people's mind, and did not end with the official part, but continued with a formal lunch and with the giving of gifts to children in the families of seventh-grade pupils. Children attended the event in pioneer uniforms, while their parents wore formal clothes. The representatives of the municipality were convinced that this event contributed largely to the reduction of the number of children attending church ceremonies. Variation of these ceremonies can also be observed in other socialist countries, such as the Eastern German youth festivity *Jugendweihe* (Mohrmann 1987). A secular alternative of the confirmation is also popular in Northern European countries (Skjelbud, A. H. 1988).

The ACAs, together with other social organisations of the municipality, participated in organising events on the occasion of political holidays and anniversaries. To complete the picture, let us shortly describe this activity. It was, for instance, the May Day celebration, which had a different form in rural and urban environments. Workers' parades were typical of urban environments. In 1986, a lantern parade was organised in almost one fifth of the 150 municipalities involved in the survey, and the festive atmosphere was enhanced by the decoration of the municipality and broadcast by the local public address system. The Assemblies also assisted in erecting Maypoles and in arranging May Day parties

that took place in 39% of the studied municipalities, along with cultural and sports events.

The engagement of the national committees and, hence, of the ACAs was much higher in organising celebrations of the liberation of their respective municipalities at the end of World War II (67.1%). These events included a cultural programme and the laying of wreaths to monuments. The celebrations of the Slovak National Uprising anniversaries also had a massive outreach, especially in the municipalities whose inhabitants took active part in the uprising. The structure of the celebrations now included, in addition to cultural events, debates with the members of the anti-fascist resistance or direct participants to the Slovak National Uprising. The burning of partisan fires was also popular. In villages and towns, people met to remember this important historic event through a cultural or sports programme, with the fire becoming the centre of the event during night hours.

The national committees represented by the ACAs were also involved in organising the celebrations of the International Women's Day (IWD). They distributed invitations, arranged refreshments, and took care of the cultural programme with the performances of artists and folklore or singing groups. Children from kindergartens, young pioneers from elementary schools, and local members of the Socialist Youth Union also performed from time to time. During celebrations, women who had several children were paid respect and were given gifts. This holiday was also celebrated at workplaces where the celebration was usually organised by the trade unions. The IWD was a popular holiday, with flower bouquets being given as an expression of respect for women not only at national committees and at workplaces, but in families as well.

The events organised by the ACAs were recorded in commemorative books, illustrated by drawings and photographs and completed with the participants' signatures. The preserved commemorative books from the period of socialism provide testimony of the varied civil ritual culture and of the importance that society attributed to it.

The presented range of civil ceremonies shows the specific paths and manners of how the values of the totalitarian ruling regime as well as certain elements related to social and technical modernisation in general penetrated the life of Slovak citizens.

The description of the origins of civil ceremonies and of their acceptance by Slovakia's inhabitants shows that the state offered alternative ways of celebrating exceptional situations in the life of many, replacing religious ideology with the Communist one. Civil ceremonies were step-by-step cultivated to such an extent that they were accepted by many people either as a full-fledged replacement of their church forms, or as additional ritual elements along with church ceremonies. Civil ceremonies thus satisfied the demand of the Communist Party to create new traditions – serving also for the internalisation of socialist values and norms and as an emotional outlet.

Civil ceremonies developed in several stages, which were closely linked to the political development of society. From the point of view of the variety and frequency of occurrence, they achieved their evolution peak during the normalisation period in the 1970s when the state escalated its control over the daily life of its citizens. Civil ceremonies were also misused as an indicator of people's worldviews and loyalty towards the socialist state, due to which non-observance of these ceremonies was marked by fear in some situations.

The formation of civil ceremonies in Czechoslovakia corresponded to a similar development of civil rituals in other European socialist countries. Despite the conflicting nature and discontinuity of the political development, the ritual culture, including its institutional component, cannot be deprived of its phenomenal autonomy and independence, which was manifested in its persistence despite the fundamental political changes that occurred with the elimination of Communism. The causes of such independence relate to the integration of the institutional elements of ceremonies and festivities into the existing culture that is able to transform ideology and politics into an acceptable form, satisfying the needs of its bearers.

DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL AND SELECTED CHURCH CEREMONIES AFTER 1989

The year 1989 represents an important milestone in the given field, since the restoration of democratic principles in civil life was accompanied by the need to change the functioning of the system of institutionalised ceremonies. After the political upheaval in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in 1989, it was obvious that civil ceremonies as a means of atheisation of the population and an element serving for the formation of the socialist way of life lost meaning. It was less clear what would happen with them in the new social and political situation. In this case, it was problematic to pursue well-functioning patterns from democratic European countries, because the different cultural and historical developments in socialist countries in the latter part of the 20th century influenced their special character. The changes that the political upheaval caused to the complex of civil ceremonies in 1989 can be briefly characterised by three tendencies: elimination of political contents, and reduction of their artificially created diversity and of the number of individuals that attend them. “The overlapping of the secular and church influences on ritual culture and the form of spending holidays acquired a new dimension, which modified

the social and cultural development of the rural as well as urban culture. The new political regime also brought new understanding of civil rights and obligation and represented a qualitatively new approach to the organisation of social life. Changes that affected culture occurred in almost every area of the administration. ... In preserving the customs tradition, we can observe forms of their innovations in the sense of penetration of new elements, or renovations meaning the restoration of old traditions. On the one hand, the influence of institutionalised (commercial – note by the author) forms increases, while on the other hand, the process of individualisation of the customs traditions deepens. During that period, there was a levelling of customs in rural and urban environments. The share of churches and schools in initiating the restoration of some customs and ceremonies increased” (Leščák, 2005: 16 a 41).

The democratic changes in society after 1989 were accompanied not only by the rehabilitation of churches and religious ceremonies in all spheres of their life. This created a strong pressure against organising civil ceremonies and festivities. After 1989, church ceremonies began acquiring greater prestige mainly in rural environments. In general, the Assemblies for Civil Affairs were associated in people’s minds with Communist atheist activities. While everything originating in socialism was critically reviewed, with civil ceremonies considered at the beginning to be a relic of the previous era, most inhabitants of villages regarded church life-cycle ceremonies to be more prestigious and respectful. After the political upheaval in 1989, the religious values in Slovakia deepened. It was provocative or even bold to claim atheism or disbelief in God. This can also be seen in the results of the 1991 statistical census when the number of people who declared themselves re-

ligious was the highest since the political change. However, this number gradually decreased because, according to the statistics, 9.8 % of the population declared to be non-religious in 1991, while in 2011 no church affiliation was claimed by 13.4% of Slovakia's population. The changes in the values recognised by society also influenced the existing system of civil ceremonies.

Changes in the system of civil ceremonies

After the change of social organisation in 1989, the activities of the Assemblies for Civil Affairs remained out of the interest of the state authorities and were considered unnecessary under the new social conditions. Many considered it a relic of socialism that had no place in the newly created democratic society. The Assemblies became a means of political manipulation and the target of attacks, because they had been created in the previous regime and served for its ideological purposes.⁴⁶

Some rural municipalities and towns incorporated their respective ACA in the local council committees; others were cancelled just like the previously built ceremonial halls. However, the ACAs have retained their place in the civil ceremonies system. Life has shown that a part of citizens demanded a civil form of institutional ceremony on the occasion of important life occasions, and new forms of ACA activities emerged as well. Nevertheless, many ACA members, educational and awareness-raising staff and other supporters still perceived this work as their mission and considered it to be an important part of the life of an individual and of society. Where ACAs were preserved in the transforming society, civil ceremonies and festivities began focusing on all citizens regardless of whether they were believers, atheists, or religiously indifferent.



Individual welcome to life ceremony in Bratislava, 2018.

The openness of the current members of ACAs in terms of worldviews was confirmed also during my field research in 2016–2017. One of the long-year employees of the municipal office, who organised ceremonies, said the following during my research: *“I love this work... I am a believer myself.”* Similarly, there are believers also among the performers who carry out these activities as their hobbies, without having in mind that the original task of the ACA was atheisation as a precondition for the formation of the socialist way of life.⁴⁷

On the initiative of several towns and municipalities, the Association of the Assemblies for Civil Affairs was founded in 1991,

called *Človek človeku v Slovenskej republike (Human to Human in the Slovak Republic)*.⁴⁸ This association works as a voluntary organisation with legal personality. The members of the top bodies are elected for a two-year term during all-Slovak conferences. The structure of the association further consists of regional councils. The objective of this organisation is to deal with ACA issues and to support and, in particular, provide methodological assistance to the development of communication with citizens on the occasion of important events of the municipality and of individuals' life-cycles. At present, this institution brings together as collective members almost one-third of Slovak towns and municipalities (over 800 out of almost 3,000), which have ACA teams at their respective municipal councils⁴⁹ and whose functioning is financed by municipalities from their own resources.

In line with its statutes, the association seeks to expand civil ceremonies and festivities, while paying great attention to important life events of citizens. Its aim is to promote social and charity work with a focus on elderly and lonely people, develop cultural and social life in municipalities and towns, as well as other activities to show care and respect for humans and their surroundings, and ultimately, to help strengthen friendly relationships between people and their mutual understanding. It is up to the respective municipal self-government to decide what kind of ceremonies and festivities will take place. Through organised ceremonies and festivities, they document the mutual relationship between citizens, the state, and the self-government or the municipality. Ceremonies provide opportunities in the field of directing, scenography, dramaturgy, spoken word, music, and singing. Shows of the artistic presentation of ceremonies continue to be organised as well, serving as a basis for the creation of methodological aids.

During my field research on this topic in Slovakia, I discovered several types of initiatives dealing more or less intensively with such ceremonies and festivities; however, there are also areas where this practice is limited to organising civil weddings and meetings with the elderly. Many of these activities are not organised by the ACAs, but by cultural committees of towns or municipalities. The ACAs focus specifically on the three main life-cycle ceremonies –welcoming of children to life, marriage, and farewell to the deceased. Another event that municipalities organise on a continuous basis are meetings with pensioners, held usually in the month of October, designated as the “Month of Respect for the Elderly”.⁵⁰ This event is popular both at small locations and in the capital city of Slovakia, Bratislava.

Since the 1990s, the child welcoming ceremony, organised by municipal authorities, has undergone major revitalisation. In some municipalities, this ceremony ceased to exist after 1989, however, it has recently been restored as a collective ceremony for several new-born babies. Individual child welcoming is more frequently held in urban environments. According to the staff of municipal offices, it is the most attractive ceremony among optional ceremonies organised by the ACA. It is attended by both the parents and siblings of the child, and in families where the child is not baptised, this institutional ceremony is sometimes accompanied by a home reception for the relatives. At present, the social role of the “welcoming” or “recording” parent occurs rarely, however, there are municipalities where the babies are officially recorded in the commemorative book even in the case of an individual child welcoming ceremony. This only happens in case the child is not baptised in church. The role of the “godparents” (this title is used both by the relatives and during the civil ceremony) is ensured by

the parents of non-baptised children by oral agreement with the relatives who assume it in certain situations in line with the tradition. For the authorities, the organisation of an individual child welcoming ceremony is financially costly, since the family does not contribute to it with finance, but the number of all people involved in the ceremony – organisers and performers – is the same as in the case of collective ceremonies.

In many villages and towns, collective child welcoming ceremonies, organised in certain intervals, are popular. According to the number of new-born children, the municipal offices invite the parents of the babies born during a certain period once or even four times a year. The children are solemnly introduced to the local community and the citizens of the state. This popular festive occasion can be found in almost every website with a list of municipal events, in almost all municipalities, including where no ACA is active. In suburbs with a number of new immigrants, the collective welcoming of children to life serves to young families to get to know each other. The participants come to the collective event dressed in ordinary clothes; however, where this ceremony has had a continuous long-year tradition or in the case of an individual welcoming ceremony, the participants are dressed more formally.

The different variants of the municipal authorities' approach to the child welcoming ceremony showed that this ceremony, which was originally artificially created by the socialist state, has survived the year 1989 and is part of the social life of many municipalities and towns in Slovakia even in the 21st century. It is now hard to find out whether its durability is due to the accepted offer of municipal offices, or demand by citizens who requested this offer. There are certainly many cases where the child is neither baptised nor has attended a civil child welcoming ceremony; however,



Ceremonial room in Kokava nad Rimavicou (Poltár district), decorated by folk motifs, prepared for the welcoming to life ceremony, 2015.

these cases are hard to identify using standard research methods, since they cannot be explored through the research of institutions, but only through a set of individuals.

Innovations in religious life-cycle ceremonies

Not only civil ceremonies, but also church ceremonies found themselves in a new situation after 1989. During the first post-revolution months, the Roman Catholic Church began to focus on regaining its lost exclusive positions in life-cycle ceremonies

and festivities. The previous dual attendance of institutional ceremonies under the influence of church warnings and regulations began to change towards attending either a civil ceremony or a church ceremony – in the case of baptism, it was not recommended to also attend the child welcoming ceremony, and the civil part at Catholic funerals was also blocked for a certain period. Given the fact that, under the influence of the long-year existence of socialist civil ceremonies, the inhabitants of Slovakia perceived participation at both a secular and church ceremony as a natural and integral part of ceremonial culture, it was obvious that the re-orientation on a single ceremony would be a longer process that had to be directed by recommendations, regulations, and prohibitions.

During this breakthrough period, it was mainly the Bishops' Conference of Slovakia, the supreme body of the Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia, that took a strict and negative position against the Assemblies.

The second most numerous church in Slovakia – the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession – was much more tolerant of civil ceremonies, considering baptism and holy communion as the only sacraments. Attending a farewell ceremony during a funeral was not prohibited by this church.⁵¹

Many people, who were previously involved in the organisation of civil ceremonies, faced a chaos in their values. As an example, we can mention one of my female informants whom I met during my research conducted in the 1990s. She was moved to tears when remembering her recent visit to the Lourdes pilgrimage site. As she was taking out from her case the religious pictures that she had brought from Lourdes, I noticed that she kept in that case ceremonial speeches for a civil farewell ceremony that she had

conducted on behalf of the ACA in the past. Seeing my interest in reading these texts, she hesitantly commented on this combination with the words: “*There was nothing wrong with that, was there?*”

After November 1989, numerous adults or teenagers in Slovakia began requesting baptism as a precondition for their return to Christian life.⁵² In connection with completing their sacraments, requests for confirmation or church marriage ceremonies were also frequent. These new necessities resulted in conflicts in a number of families, and the attitudes of spouses on religious du-

Ceremonial room in Vrútky (Martin district), 2017.



ties and church sacraments were so different that these problems were dealt with by higher church bodies. Religious institutions also reacted to people's increased interest in religious ceremonies. For instance, holy communions and confirmations became a festive event not only of the parish, but of the entire municipality in which they were held. Baptisms in Protestant communities began to be held in front of the congregation after the Sunday mass in order to emphasise their social importance. Ceremonies were now enriched by musical bands that have been active within many parishes and, just like ACAs, represent a form of cultural and artistic activities.

Since marriage is the only life-cycle ceremony enacted by law, the changes in this ceremony must have been initiated by the legislative bodies. In 1991, a group of Christian-oriented deputies of the Slovak National Council submitted a proposal to put civil marriage and church marriage on equal footing. The amendment to the Family Act, under which marriage can be entered either in the form of a civil ceremony or church ceremony, i.e. equal status of both forms of marriage, entered into force on July 01, 1992..⁵³

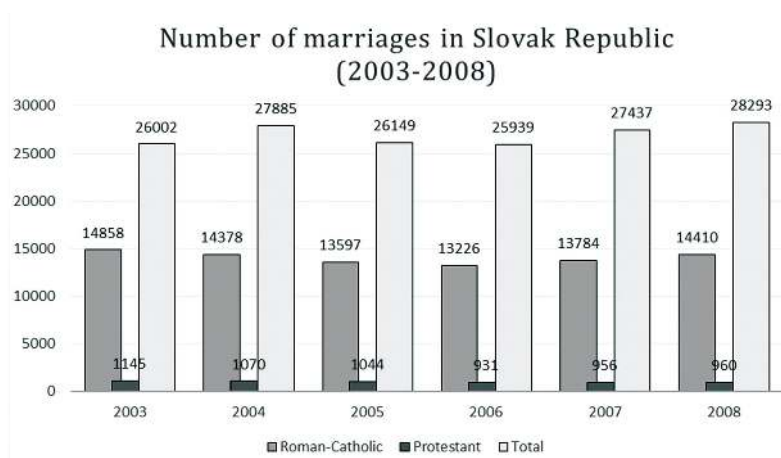
A new element that citizens demanded during the first years after the changes was the official reception of the newlyweds at the municipal office. This event was attended by the newlyweds who had got married in the church and, as was usual, they also wished to have a civil ceremony, which was another form of the common dual ceremonial model before 1991. However, only one of these forms was valid – in this case, the church ceremony. After some time, these ceremonies were no longer demanded. Even today, there may be a dual marriage model – obligatory and optional. This is, however, not due to the persistence of patterns or causes from the socialist period. It is rather the result of certain legal and

practical contexts of marriage; for instance, when the relatives and wedding guests were not able to attend the official marriage act.⁵⁴ The reasons that made some newlyweds get married in the form of a civil ceremony were differentiated from the beginning, e.g. different denomination of the spouses, missing sacraments that entitled the persons to get married in the church, marriage of divorced partners, as well as disbelief.⁵⁵ Given the fact that a Roman-Catholic marriage may only take place once, divorced believers may get married for the second and every next time only through a civil ceremony. On the other hand, a multiple times divorced person who got married only in the form of a civil ceremony may have a church marriage in the case of the last marriage.

The Roman Catholic Church responded positively also to the current trends of organising marriage ceremonies at non-traditional places outside churches – in nature or at restaurant and accommodation facilities; however, the Bishops' Conference recommended that the believers hold these ceremonies in holy spaces.⁵⁶

Lawyer and journalist Karol Sudor published an article “Half of marriages take place in church. Their number has not increased for years” (Sudor 2010), which contains statements corresponding to the evolution trends that I have recorded in the framework of my field research: after 1989, the number of church marriages grew, later it declined until it became stabilised. The initial growth was logical and concerned not only marriages, but also baptism and other sacraments. These ceremonies were attended by many of those who had already been married through a civil ceremony or who did not want or could not do so during socialism.⁵⁷ Since, in Slovakia, the number of church and civil marriages is not registered centrally, K. Sudor obtained data from the largest churches

(Roman-Catholic, Greek-Catholic, and Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession) in 2003–2008 and compared them to the total number of marriages recorded by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.⁵⁸ He notes that, according to the estimates of the Bishops' Conference of Slovakia, the sum of Roman-Catholic and Greek-Catholic marriages in Slovakia in 2003–2008 was around 14,000 per year, which was just over 50 per cent of the total number of ceremonies. Marriages concluded within the Evangelical Church recorded a greater decline compared to the Roman-Catholic Church (Sudor 2010).



In this matter, the situation in Slovak villages and towns is different, and the individual regions of the country also have their specificities. In particular areas, even geographically close ones, the situation may be quite distinct, as the denominational composition of the location is an important factor to be considered. In relatively homogeneous Catholic environments, the proportion of church marriages is significantly higher than in confessionally

mixed social environments, where there is greater tolerance for other forms of marriage than for “own” ones.

Research has shown that, after 1992, when church marriage and civil marriage were put on equal footing, people who wished to get married in church gradually switched from the double institutional marriage to a single one – in their case, church marriage. Two wedding ceremonies occur even today, but only in exceptional situations and usually not in one day. Although nationwide records do not exist, partial findings suggest that, after a transitional period, when church marriages prevailed in the country, the situation has become stabilised, and both institutionalised forms are now almost in balance throughout the country.

Even though funeral ceremonies were least succumbed to innovation processes, they became the most discussed in public after 1989. Within the Catholic Church, this was initiated by the archbishop’s decree, according to which Catholics were not allowed to have a civil farewell at the funeral. The regulation came into force in July 1990. People usually became familiar with it only when it was put into practice. A series of reactions in the media showed that it was an unpleasant surprise for many. Later, as a result of public pressure, representatives of the Catholic Church denied the strict binding nature of this regulation, and at the request of the survivors, a civil farewell became admissible at the end of the ceremony.

The attempts of the Roman Catholic Church to direct funeral ceremonies continue even today. On this occasion, the Vatican emphasised that it still preferred burial to cremation. Cremation was for the first time permitted in 1963.

In less conservative church circles, there is also a critical view of the strict definition of boundaries between church and civil fune-

rals. According to Roman Catholic theologian Albín Masarik, who specialises in church funerals, the difference between civil and church funerals is that a civil funeral seeks to honour the deceased, while the background of a church ritual is based on declaring God's word. From this perspective, some churches inadequately understand a church funeral as an exclusively missionary occasion. On the other hand, if a civil funeral aims to honour the deceased, it relatively weakly addresses the emotional state of the survivors.⁵⁹ Although this opinion can be argued, it indicates the will to seek and use the positive sides of both types of the funeral farewell.

The research showed that the funeral, which appeared to be the most conservative among ceremonies during socialism in terms of the dynamics of its development, came under the strict control of the Catholic Church that seeks to instruct its members about how to bury the deceased and how to dispose of the cremated remains. Civil farewells, unless requested by the survivors, ceased to take place. In some municipalities of the countryside, they are replaced by farewells via public address systems.

The development of civil ceremony in Czechoslovakia from 1950 to 1992 was based on common legislation and, except for minor differences, it was uniform in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. After the split of the republic in 1993, the development in the new countries took its own direction. Even though Slovakia is under considerable influence of the Roman Catholic Church and the Czech Republic is one of the least religious countries of Europe⁶⁰, the two countries continue paying attention to civil ceremonies and festivities mainly through local self-governments. In the Czech Republic, there is no counterpart to the civil association *Člověk člověku* (Human to Human) to continue the system of

care for the Assemblies for Civil Affairs, which still do exist in the Czech Republic. Jiří Pondělíček, an expert in interpersonal communication, prepared a unique methodological material based on his long-term experience in the work of the Assemblies in coordination with the Institute for Local Administration. The author calls civil ceremonies and festivities as civil and social acts and lists the following reasons for why it is necessary to organise them also today: they are an extremely powerful tool influencing the feeling of coherence within the community; serve for the creation of a positive image of a local politician as well as of the authority as a whole; contribute to the identification of citizens with the objectives and interests of the community; interconnect the activities of the self-government and of the executive bodies; increase the authority of the public administration as well as individuals (Pondělíček 2005: 5–7).

During the last decade of the 20th century, several sociological surveys on religiousness were carried out in Czechia and Slovakia under the *European Value System* (EVS)⁶¹ and the *International Social Survey Programme* project. One of the research questions focused on the form of participation of the religious community in occasional religious ceremonies accompanying birth, marriage, and death.

Importance of religious ceremonies in connection with different events (%)

Country	Birth	Marriage	Death
Poland	94	95	93
Slovakia 1991	77	74	79
Slovakia 1999	77	75	78
Western Europe	72	75	81
France	65	68	73
Czechia	44	43	52

Source: Marody, 1996 and EVS 1999 according to Bunčák 2001: 14.

The research showed that the attitudes of the inhabitants of Slovakia on these issues largely differ from those of the inhabitants of the Czech Republic. As in the whole of Western Europe, the highest importance in Slovakia is attributed to the religious ceremony on the occasion of death. The fact that it exceeds the proportion of people who claim to be religious corresponds to the results of the previous ethnological research. Even though the research focused on church ceremonies, we can find out what the preferences for civic ceremonies were in 1999.

Preferred ceremony	Czechia	Slovakia
Civil marriage	57%	25%
Civil funeral	48%	22%
Civil ceremony upon child birth	56%	23%

The result related to birth cannot be interpreted unambiguously because, in this case, the percentages can be divided between those who prefer a civil ceremony, and those who would not attend any ceremony at all. We can also assume that a part of the inhabitants does not have any need to attend any institutional ceremony upon the birth of a child, which is similar also in the case of funerals. In the past two decades, what has been increasingly common in the Czech Republic is that a farewell funeral ceremony has been almost completely absent. For instance, in the Pardubice Region, no ceremony has been conducted in over 80% of death cases (Nešporová 2014), with people keeping the urn with the remains of the deceased at home. Such trend has not yet been reported in Slovakia.

Ethnologist Jozef Porsch conducted research on civil ceremonies as part of his dissertation, noting that “today, we are witnessing grouping when it comes to the forms and contents of ceremonies ... After the attendance of religious ceremonies was punished and the attendance of socialist ceremonies ordered, the people who internally did not pursue either system have lost both of them. Thus, the Czech society has found itself facing the question alone; individuals must find the answers to the fundamental human questions by themselves” (Porsch 2006: 152)

In the Czech Republic, there seems to be stronger tendency to spend the life-cycle milestones privately, in the circle of relatives and friends, unlike in Slovakia, where we have witnessed, in addition to increased participation at church ceremonies, a slight revival of interest in civil ceremonies and festivities.

The research showed that there are many similarities as well as differences in attitudes towards institutional ceremonies even within a single country. The denomination and the influence of

churches on the system of ceremonies also plays a differentiation role even within a small territory such as that of Slovakia. On the other hand, the identical political development in Slovakia and Czechia does not automatically mean the continuation of development processes related to institutional ceremonies in both countries.

Further to his comparative study of ceremonies and festivities in former socialist countries, German ethnologist K. Roth affirms that, after the fall of socialism, one could expect the rejection of socialist holiday culture in post-socialist countries. However, he finds out that the reality was different and that after several years of turbulences and difficulties the culture of ceremonies was restored and even slightly increased. He seeks the explanation in people's identification with the holiday culture created during socialism or nostalgia for socialism as a result of problems during transition (Roth 2008: 22). Nevertheless, I believe that the ability to revitalise civil ceremonies should be primarily sought in the current needs of people and respected values to which civil ceremonies were able to adapt.

CONCLUSION

The roots of exerting influence on ritual culture by power institutions are as old as the institutions themselves. On the one hand, ceremonies serve as a tool to control society and a means to demonstrate the authority of power structures; on the other hand, important events in human life, confirmed by rituals, gain a stamp of importance and social significance from institutions. In Europe, this context can be clearly observed in both ancient and medieval countries, where secular power tightly overlapped with the power of the Church. In the 20th century, two types of institutions entered the life-cycle ceremonies to different extents and in different ways – the State and the Church. The State undermined the exclusive position of Church in family ceremonies through legislation, thus creating an alternative to the previous forms of church ceremonies. In Slovakia, this process became more dynamic in the second half of the 20th century under the influence of secularisation, Communist ideology, as well as individualisation of the way of life. Since the rise of the Communist regime, civil ceremonies were deliberately created and formed as an atheist alternative to church ceremonies. Along with spontaneous, popular elements of ceremonies, which play an important role even today, new cultural

patterns have emerged also in the institutionalised part of ceremonies that people began to perceive as traditional. It is obvious that the Assemblies for Civil Affairs became an important part of life of the people living in the socialist regime. The ACA's activities were politically managed and directed through regulations set by the State, which financially supported the publication of methodological and other instructional materials. The ACAs worked as an important component of the cultural and social life in Slovak municipalities and towns. Their entering into the life-cycle rituals of man and cultural events in municipalities did not escape the attention of Slovak ethnologists, who began focusing on the ACAs in the 1980s. In addition to the above listed research, some minor mentions can also be found in the publications by regional researchers.

Civil ceremonies were expected to declare a positive relationship between an individual – citizen and the socialist society. Despite pressures and threats faced by some citizens when disregarding the required behaviour, several activities, which were referred to as civil ceremonies, gained popularity among the population and were accepted as a social standard. Some survived the end of the Communist regime and formed the basis of civil ceremonies of the present-day civil society.

The research on civil ceremonies during socialism reveals a wide range of attitudes from opposition through passive adaptation up to open support for the Communist project. Social gatherings on the occasion of the rites of passage represented situations where members of different generations from several families and with various experience and opinions met – party members and non-members, believers and non-believers –, and got to know each other in a friendly atmosphere. It should be menti-

oned that dissenting political views and worldviews could often be found even within a single family. The participants to family celebrations and get-togethers often discussed politics, and the debates sometimes led to disputes between relatives. The ways of approaching the offered alternatives to institutional ceremonies required compromises even within one family. The same was true about celebrations at the workplace. The celebrating person received gifts from his/her colleagues, which was followed by eating, drinking, and singing together, or by sharing experiences in the situational atmosphere of trust. They often politicised in small circles in a friendly manner, attempting to understand each other. When people met again in the working process, in public life, or in their everyday activities, the different political and religious edges were often brushed, overshadowed by familiar and clientelist relationships (Možný 1991). On the other hand, thanks to the experience they had shared, they became aware of potential threats and knew how to behave safely when in contact with the authorities that represented the ruling power. The opposition between perpetrators and victims was blurred. This was also confirmed by the results of the above-mentioned research, which pointed out a low degree of strong conviction as well as considerable ambivalence of people's attitudes towards civil and religious ceremonies, which was subsequently reflected in attending both institutional ceremonies.

The analysis of the acceptance of civil ceremonies by Czechoslovak citizens during socialism, i.e. of the emic level, is not balanced in this publication when it comes to individual ceremonies, which is due to the limited research in the given period. After 30 years, what can only be explored is the reflection of these activities in collective consciousness. Their interpretation is influenced

by the stereotypes of memories of what was allowed and what was forbidden during socialism, memory optimism and nostalgia when remembering youth, as well as subsequent life experience and political opinions. Contemporary situational nuances can no longer be captured in their entirety without the risk of distorting reality.

It is also interesting to compare the development of institutional ceremonies after the break-up of Czechoslovakia, since the two succession countries, Slovakia and Czechia, can be found on the opposite poles when it comes to the degree of religiousness in Europe. While the population of the Czech Republic is one of the last religious ones, Slovaks still trust the churches, among which the Roman Catholic is the most dominant, even though its conservative and clericalist manifestations are increasingly criticised. A comparison of Roman Catholic municipalities with a municipality with the prevalence of Evangelicals of the Augsburg Confessions, performed in the 1980s, suggested that the members of the Protestant Church are more open to innovations in ritual culture compared to Catholics. This fact was also recognised by other research in confessionally mixed regions. Another manifestation of Slovak traditionalism is attachment to folklore roots. Building on local folklore and traditions in some municipalities thus played an important role in making civil ceremonies more attractive.

At present, the citizens of Slovakia can freely decide about the civil or religious form of ceremonies. Sometimes, the only legally binding ceremony – marriage – takes place in both forms even today, while only one of them is obligatory. The reasons are pragmatic and are not related to ideology. The change of values has led to creating a new festive structure, which respects traditions as well as the dynamic development of society at the turn of the

millennium. The civil ceremony system created during the Communist regime has transformed, in an ideologically neutral form, into a system that ensures holidays, important events and life-cycle rituals at the local level, while respecting local traditions as well as the current needs of local self-governments and citizens.

The analysis of civil ceremonies reveals elements of continuity that existed both during the Communist regime and after its fall in the framework of a seemingly discontinuous development of the daily life of the inhabitants of the former Soviet bloc countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

Footnotes

¹ The socialism era in Czechoslovakia is divided into three periods: 1948–1959 was a period of laying the foundations of the Communist system, with Stalin's strong influence until 1953, characterised by political persecutions, fear, as well as enthusiastic building of the post-war state; 1960s – the repression eased, the living standards were raised, Czechoslovakia began to open up to the world, wanting “socialism with a human face”; Slovaks achieved a federal arrangement of the state; the political relaxation ended with the intervention of the allied troops of five countries of the socialist bloc; 1970s–1980s – normalisation period – meant the consolidation of the Communist power; violent physical persecutions were replaced by social bullying (interviews at workplaces, threat of the loss of job), the living standards grew; as long as “nothing” happened, people did not revolt.

² The issues concerning the Slovak State, i.e. the Slovak Republic of 1939–1945, was topical not only because of analogies with the totalitarian regime, but the events were reconsidered also because some of their protagonists expected to be rehabilitated.

³ In 1970, in the framework of the “cleansing process”, over 300,000 members were excluded from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, which represented around 1/5 of the membership, mainly members of the intelligentsia. Exclusion often meant a ban on practicing one's profession (Bystrický et al. 2008: 42).

⁴For more details, see Beňušková Zuzana: *Ethnological Research of Socialism in Post-Socialist (Czecho)Slovakia*.

⁵ The period of socialism as defined in this publication refers to the period 1948–1989.

⁶ From a logical point of view, their designation with the term “civil” is not consistent, as church ceremonies are also intended for citizens. This relates to the secularisation of ceremonies during the bourgeoisie revolution period at the end of the 18th century.

⁷ On the one hand, the term ‘daily life’ means the opposite of festive life, but in anthropology, daily life also comprises festive days and the ways of spending them by people from the most numerous groups of society.

⁸ The Council of Trent comprised several time-separated stages with 25 sessions in total held in the course of almost 18 years. Pope Pius IV. formally confirmed the

Council's conclusion on 26 January 1564 (Jedin 2010). The number of sacraments stabilised at seven, and the validity of marriage of a baptised couple was made dependent on a marital consent given before a priest and two witnesses. In addition, the decree on the sacrament of marriage emphasised the indissolubility of marriage and defined the obstacles to marriage. The Council did not allow the repetition of baptism and ordered that the sacrament of Confirmation be administered by the bishop. The Council also established the duty of confession of the faithful and the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. (Bagin 1982). The Council of Trent also regulated some other daily activities of individuals.

⁹ The Communist regime paid particular attention to making church ceremonies as little visible as possible to the public. Processions and pilgrimages were therefore restricted. However, they did not disappear from life. For example, the processions on the Feast of the Corpus Christi took place within the church grounds and the pilgrimage was officially held on the pretext of trips by rural social organisations with a different official declared purpose of the trip.

¹⁰ The results of this research were published in the study by M. Leščák and Z. Beňušková *Institutionalised Forms of Ritual Culture in Current Rural Environments* (Leščák – Beňušková 1987).

¹¹ During the socialist period, national committees referred to municipal, local, district, and regional authorities.

¹² It is worth mentioning that when filling in the questionnaires during the period of socialism I did not face any expressions of mistrust as a result of the ideological and political perception of the studied phenomena. The results of my research obtained before November 1989 was also confirmed by the research that I conducted after 1989.

¹³ In the municipalities of Cífer, Smolenice, Boleráz, Ružindol, Dechtice, Dolné Orešany, Buková, Horná Krupá a Horné Dubové. The selection of municipalities took into consideration their size, since in small municipalities ceremonies were often not held directly at the location, as they did not dispose of the necessary infrastructure.

¹⁴ For the published partial results of this research see Beňušková 1987, 1989, 1991a, 1991b.

¹⁵ Cífer (Trnava district), Čataj (Senec district), and Veľký Grob (Galanta district).

¹⁶ The publications are listed in the bibliography: Jágerová 2008, Leščák 2002, 2005, Košťalová 2017, *Občianske obrady a slávnosti v miestnej a regionálnej kultúre* 2004 (Civil Ceremonies and Festivities in Local and Regional Culture), and the thesis by Bobříková 2013.

¹⁷ In the course of the 1950s, a new structure of state holidays was created, responding to the modern historical milestones in the development of society and accentuating new values within the framework of traditional holidays. According to the acts of 1946 and 1951 on public holidays, rest days and on commemorative and days of importance, the following holidays were considered recognised rest days in Czechoslovakia during the 1980s: January 1 – New Year; Easter Monday; May 1 – Labour Day, May 9 – end of World War II – Victory over Fascism Day,[17] October 28 – establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic, nationalisation and federation; December 25 and 26 – Christmas Days.[17] February 25 – Victorious February and, in Slovakia, August 29 – Anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising[17] (May 5 in Czechia – anniversary of the Prague Uprising) were also important holidays.

¹⁸ Under this act, a Czechoslovak citizen could marry a foreigner only with the consent of the Ministry of the Interior. In 1964, this measure was cancelled (Rychlík 2020: 87).

¹⁹ Unlike some other European countries, the Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia within the Czechoslovak Republic maintained its task of keeping registries for a relatively long time.

²⁰ February 25, 1948 was the day of the Communists' victory.

²¹ See, for instance, the studies by R. Ivanova, M. Kašuba, U. Mohrmann, J. Morvay, S. Poljak-Istenič, D. Rithman. Auguštín, Z. Staszczak, and T. Stoychev.

²² For instance, in connection with the promotion of civil ceremonies in Latvia and Lithuania, R. Paukshtytė-Shaknienė emphasises not only Communist pressure, but also the pressure by the Russian Socialist Republic as the centre of the USSR (Paukshtytė-Shaknienė 2007).

²³ In the nearby municipality of Šenkvice, several witnesses remember the case where an elementary school teacher was immediately fired because of her wedding in church despite her active and successful work with pupils also in the field of hobby activities (according to the materials prepared for the monograph on Šenkvice, author Martin Lukáč).

²⁴ The modifications were approved by the Second Vatican Council, which took place in 1962–1965.

²⁵ The author notes that there are also archaic (regressive) traditions: “which were created in the lives of our people in the past under the conditions of social and cultural backwardness. These mainly include religious ceremonies, through which the Church sought to deprive our people from revolutionary awareness, activity, and life optimism.” (Mravík 1978: 10)

²⁶ The tactic of manipulating with citizens through folk culture was also applied in other situations – for instance, the date of the biggest folklore festival in Slovakia, in Východná, which was held in 1953 for the first time as an ethnographic Festivity of Songs and Dances, corresponded to the date of the nationwide Catholic pilgrimage to Levoča.

²⁷ In the 1980s, it was around 30 Czechoslovak crowns per ceremony – for comparison: it was 5 crowns more than a full-day allowance on a business trip and 5 crowns less than the price of a monthly student ticket for public transport in Bratislava.

²⁸ Such perception of civil ceremonies is also illustrated by a record in the chronicle of an elementary school in Bratislava from the turn of the 1950s and 1960s: *“Welcoming new-born citizens from the district of Vinohrady. The children prepared the programme and gave flowers to their parents. By this they were able to acknowledge that new-borns must be received in this way. This manner of welcoming children will certainly leave a sufficient emotion in them.”* (Chronicle of the Elementary School Vazovova, Bratislava, years 1959/60).

²⁹ The respondents answered the question: *What is your opinion about civil festivities organised by the national committees?* The results were as follows: a) I consider them a nice act and a show of recognition – 65.9%, b) the acts are formal, I consider them useless – 5.9%, c) I cannot decide – 12.2%, d) these kinds of celebrations do not take place at our place – 16.0% (Kopčan 1982: 5).

³⁰ Vigil is the eve before an important church holiday and a prayer meeting held on that occasion.

³¹ However, a clever parent was able, while reading the oath, to reformulate or omit these manipulative parts, which did happen from time to time.

³² It was recommended to address those present with the words “Dear Comrades” (Mravík 1978: 43). In reality, less formal expressions were used, such as Dear Parents, Dear Guests, Dear Participants, Dear Friends, or Dear Fellow Citizens.

³³ In the regions of Orava, Kysuce, a part of Liptov and Gemer, this common practice was maintained until the mid-20th century; in the Horehronie region, men only attended the baptism of their first-born children, while in the municipalities of the Upper Nitra region, baptism ceremonies were held separately for women and for men (Beňušková – Krekovičová 1995: 282).

³⁴ The popularity of the welcome to life ceremony is described, for instance, in the book *Čas života* (The Time of Life) and specifically in the chapters by M. Šotolová,

E. Večerková, V. Šepláková, A. Kramolišová, M. Mušinka, and K. Gellenová (Čas života 1985).

³⁵ According to research conducted in Svit, the existence of an alternative godparent was confirmed only in the case of one informant; the other parents and involved staff did not remember the role of introducing parents (Bobříková 2013: 44).

³⁶ The term bourgeoisie society relates to the translation of the German “bürgerliche Gesellschaft”, i.e. urban society from which a class of educated and rich people set aside in the 18th century (Kocka 2008). An alternative translation is civil society.

³⁷ According to these researchers, it was preceded by two evolutionary stages: 1. management of culture by the Church and clerical elite, and 2. management of culture by Enlightenment scholars.

³⁸ In Catholic countries, the introduction of church registers related to the Council of Trent, even though the oldest preserved registers in Europe come from the 14th century. In some regions, the Christian Church registered baptisms, weddings, and deaths already during the Roman era. The Reformation movement contributed to the development of registers in England, Northern Germany, the Baltic, Switzerland, Czechia, and Slovakia. In these countries, baptism was registered instead of the date of birth. In Protestant countries, they began to be registered by the secular power. The Czechoslovak state registries were fully in place from January 01, 1950. Before that date, the state competencies in this area were exercised by church registries, Czechoslovakia being one of the last European countries in this respect (Horská – Kučera – Maur – Stloukal 1990: 250).

³⁹ *Vznik a vývoj matrik*. [cited on December 15, 2016]. [Online]. Available online <<http://www.geni.sk/vznik-a-vyvoj-matrik/>>

⁴⁰ There were also variants of the dates of marriage. For instance, an informant from Svit notes: “*From the human perspective, a civil wedding act has certain benefits, as nobody reproached the bride in the event that she was no longer a virgin and got married; well, sometimes she was even pregnant, but nobody objected against it; it was taken as a human factor, they simply got married and that’s it. It was also less frustrating; when they went to church, they had already been married. There were even times that they went to church several years after their civil marriage*” (Bobříková 2012: 50).

⁴¹ The first crematorium was established in Milan, Italy, in 1876.

⁴² “I admit that by introducing funeral homes the former state power might have had partial influence and, in particular, control over various practices and acts around the deceased which was impossible when the rituals took place at home. ... It can be

assumed that this phenomenon would have reached us sooner or later, regardless of the nature of the state or political party. This is confirmed by the fact that funeral homes are built until the present, are demanded by people, and have become a necessary part of the life of municipalities” (Jágerová 2008: 135).

⁴³ From the field research of M. Jágerová (Jágerová 2008: 146).

⁴⁴ I thank K. Jakubíková for providing this information and for giving her consent to its publishing.

⁴⁵In 2005, the compulsory military service was cancelled in Slovakia.

⁴⁶ The situation is illustrated by the statements of contemporaries: *“All that was old was wrong, nothing was appreciated. It was said that there was no need for ACAs, that there are priests to do it. Revolutionaries demolished all that was old, without offering anything new to replace the ACA. People now wanted civil ceremonies again, they started to miss them”* (male, born in 1933). *“[...] the 40-year-long socialist government brought up a generation of disbelievers who were not close to the church at all. However, after the revolution, the government thought that the ACAs and civil ceremonies were no longer necessary”* (woman, born in 1958) (cited according to Bobříková 2013: 29, 30).

⁴⁷ For instance, in the municipality of Soblahov (Trenčín district), the ceremony of welcoming children to life also involves performances by children from a church kindergarten, as evidenced by an article from the local newspaper: *“Children from the church kindergarten and from the elementary school and kindergarten in Soblahov took care of a nice cultural programme, the parents received small gifts from the mayor of the municipality and enhanced the meeting experience by signing the Commemorative Book of the Municipality of Soblahov.”* (Welcoming to life) In the town of Vrútky, newlyweds and the parents of welcomed children are given books from a publishing house that focuses on religious literature. The instructions on how to be a great parent or how to communicate successfully in a partnership also contain a recommendation to the readers to communicate with God.

⁴⁸ See: Združenie zborov pre občianske záležitosti (Association of Assemblies for Civil Affairs). / *Človek človeku SR (Human to Human)*. [Online] [cited on 24 December 2016]. Available online: <<http://www.zpoz.sk/>>

⁴⁹ There are 2,917 municipalities in Slovakia. (Slovak Republic: List of municipalities of the Slovak Republic / websites of municipalities / selected statistics).

⁵⁰ In 1990, the United Nations General Assembly designated this month the Month of Respect for the Elderly and October 1 the International Day of Older Persons.

⁵¹ When I asked my informants during my research at a confessionally mixed location in Čataj in the 1990s about where they saw a difference between a Catholic and a Protestant funeral, the first thing they mentioned was that it was prohibited to hold a civil farewell ceremony at a Catholic funeral, unlike at Protestant funerals.

⁵² Members of other religious organisations went through a similar process as Roman Catholics. In Bratislava, the Jewish Religious Community performed circumcisions of adult boys who had not gone through this ritual, so necessary for Jewish affiliation, in the period of socialism. The circumcisions were performed by a mohel from Austria (according to the lecturer from the Museum of Jewish Culture in Bratislava).

⁵³ Act No. 234/1992 Coll. amending Act No. 94/1963 Coll. on Family entered into force on July 01, 1992.

⁵⁴ This happens mainly in the case of marriages abroad where the newlyweds subsequently organise the wedding party at home, or if they want to get married outside the ceremonial room at a place where, for some reason, the official ceremonialists do not want to perform the marriage ceremony, or they wish to have a ceremonialist who is not authorised to perform such activity.

⁵⁵ For instance, my research from the years 2008–2013 in the strongly Roman Catholic municipality of Liptovská Teplička showed that civil marriage is most common among the Roma (partners often moved there) who do not have the sacraments required for having a church marriage completed.

⁵⁶ “The bishops recommend all believers that in order to enhance the holy character of the sacrament marriage bond they get married at holy places (in churches) and do not request recklessly (for reasons of trend and fashion) exceptions to get married in the nature, mountain chalet, etc.” 51st plenary session of the Bishops’ Conference of Slovakia in Donovaly on 7–8 June 2005” (Sacrament of marriage).

⁵⁷ The author obtained information about the number of marriages in individual churches directly from the churches and confronted them with the data from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

⁵⁸ In the Slovak Republic, only partial data can be obtained from registry offices. Even though registry offices report these data to the Statistical Office, there the data are aggregated, indicating the total number of marriages.

⁵⁹ On funeral sermons and speeches. Interview by M. Lincényi with doc. ThDr. Albinom Masarikom. *Slovenské pohrebníctvo* 2013, No. 2, pp. 26–27. [online] [cited on 05/10/2017]. Available online: <<http://www.pohrebnictvo.sk/data/files/1220_sp_09_2013.pdf>>

⁶⁰ According to the data of the statistical offices of both countries, there are 13.4% of non-believers in Slovakia (Census...) and 34.53% in Czechia (CSU 2011).

⁶¹ The research was organised by the University of Tillburg and was conducted in 16 Western countries in 1980–1991. In Slovakia, it was for the first time conducted in 1991 and for the second time in 1999. Another international comparative research on religiousness was carried out in 1998. All these three research projects were executed using the random sampling method among adult population aged 18 years and older, whereas the representativeness of the sample was checked by sex, age categories, education, and size of the place of residence of the respondents. (Bunčák 2001)

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ISBN 978-80-569-0673-6, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/2020.9788056906736>

ETHNOLOGICAL STUDIES 49

Popelková, Katarína: *Vinohradnícke mesto v etnologickej perspektíve* [Viticulural town in ethnological perspective]. Bratislava: Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology SAS – VEDA, 2021. 176 pp. ISBN 978-80-224-1916-1,
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/2021.9788022419161>

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Winkler, Tomáš: *Transactional Activism in Bratislava: A Case Study of Nová Cvernovka Cultural and Creative Centre*. Bratislava: Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology SAS - VEDA, 2021. 128 pp. ISBN: 978-80-224-1927-7,
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/2021.9788022419277>

This book was written with the primary purpose of filling in the information gap in the collection of academic knowledge about non-religious rituals, which are also known as civil ceremonies. This area forms that part of the ritual culture, the history of which is closely related to the four decades of the Communist regime in Slovakia. Through civil ceremonies following the life cycle, this regime sought to suppress the influence of the religious worldview and create a “socialist citizen”. Three ceremonial opportunities: birth, marriage and death. represent the main line of the book’s chapters. Since the publication offers an ethnological perspective, the attention focuses, apart from a retrospective analysis of the development of institutional ceremonies, on their reflection and acceptance by people. The knowledge basis of this book comes from ethnographic research conducted at various locations in Slovakia in several time segments – in the mid-1980s, at the beginning of the 1990s and subsequently in 2014–2016. as well.

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local identity in the context of traditional folk culture, festivals and rituals in diachronic and synchronous cross-section, urban ethnology as well as the influence of social and cultural capital on the development of communities.

Zuzana Beňušková
CIVIL CEREMONIES
IN SOCIALIST CZECHOSLOVAKIA
AND POST-SOCIALIST SLOVAKIA

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On the cover: Ceremonial room in Kokava nad Rimavicou (Poltár district).
Author of the artwork Ivan Vychlopen.

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