

**Katarína Popelková**

katarina.popelkova@savba.sk

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8163-4800>Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology  
Slovak Academy of Sciences  
Bratislava, Slovakia**Juraj Zajonc**

juraj.zajonc@savba.sk

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8583-0158>Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology  
Slovak Academy of Sciences  
Bratislava, Slovakia

# *Halloween and Valentine's Day in Slovakia: new holidays or new opportunities for celebration?*

*Halloween i walentynki na Słowacji:  
nowe święta czy nowe okazje do świętowania?*

## **Introduction**

While penetrating the different cultures of the contemporary world, Halloween and Valentine's Day as global secular holiday phenomena with a significant, entertaining, and experiential aspect, instead of a spiritual message, traditions or a strong story, rely on the media, internet communication, and the ability to flexibly commodify their contents.<sup>1</sup> The common specific feature of the scary as well as entertaining Halloween and of Valentine's Day that celebrates partnership love and other forms of interpersonal affection is that only a few persons are aware of their origin, history,

<sup>1</sup> The commodification of public and private holidays is caused by pursuing profits, mainly in its institutionalised form. This is the main factor that affects both the balance between holidays and the values they express (Etzioni 2004: 26).

or functions at the time they were created. However, there are many known stories about them, which give them a fluid content: as many of them as anyone can interpret them voluntarily and celebrate them in the way that suits them best. Or, they can use the celebration of holidays to their own benefit, adapt them to the commercial plan without risking misunderstanding between the celebrating persons. Some forms of their present-day celebration, widespread also in Slovakia – the giving of gifts and participation in informal parties or professionally organised events<sup>2</sup> – are unthinkable without commerce and are dependent on the massive involvement of business, the cultural industry and pop culture, the mass media, or production companies and agencies organising adventure events for large numbers of people.

To theoretically grasp Halloween and Valentine's Day in Slovakia, we have chosen the *eventisation* theory, as elaborated on by German sociologist of Culture, Winfried Gebhardt (2000). This theory reflects on both internal and external changes in the field of holidays<sup>3</sup> in modern societies and seeks to explain the cultural dimension of the individualisation and pluralisation processes in the late-modernity period. The choice of this concept with respect to the study of these two holidays is based not only on the fact that they became popular in Slovakia during the late-modernity period, but also on the fact that these holidays are not embedded in the historical tradition of the country and are not opportunities protected by important social institutions. What is essential is the fact that these holidays have brought to Slovakia a previously unknown, yet, at the global scale, developed holiday practice, primarily embedded in modern society (Popelková, Zajonc 2014: 257; Zajonc 2014; Zajonc 2020).

Information about these holidays has spread – along with international contacts and thanks to travelling – mainly through schools, the internet, electronic media, and pop-culture. The ways of spending them in friendly and generational groups, at thematic parties or public events with an unusual attractive programme signalise the

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- 2 Together with Winfried Gebhardt, this study understands events as specific holidays and festivities of an individualising, pluralising, consumption, experiential society that is constantly changing into a stage. The defining features of events are as follows: 1) planned phenomena, arranged based on commercial or world-view interests, prepared, produced and equipped with meaning and significance; 2) experiences planned so as to offer the breaking of the routine and immersion into an extraordinary world that differs from daily life; 3) activities interlinking various cultural and aesthetical forms of expression and extraordinary locations into a "unique whole"; 4) activities offering people the feeling of importance of their existence and creative impulses for their daily routine; 5) social places and periods of time bringing a temporary sense of an exclusive community and belonging; 6) mono-thematically focused activities with contents suitable for identifying with them (Gebhardt 2000: 18–22, 29). Following up on W. Gebhardt, Ronald Hitzler (2011: 14) characterised events as pre-arranged occasions for social or at least common self-staging of individuals while seeking an extraordinary (and extremely interesting) "own life". They can be characterised by a specific, entertainment-oriented promise of an experience – group action, fun and ecstasis.
- 3 The term holiday is understood here as an occasion or cyclically recurrent period of various duration, in which something important or extraordinary takes place or is remembered. During holidays, specific and, to some extent, normative ways of behaving are anticipated or evoked, to which symbolic meanings are attributed to varying degrees (Popelková 2012).

tendency of a present-day individual to be more open towards holiday forms, the effect of which is relaxation through an extraordinary experience. The celebration of both holidays is oriented on a heterogenous group of participants from various environments, groups, and communities. These forms of celebration break the previously clear boundaries between the holidays of social classes and layers, i.e. also between holidays of high and popular culture. The ways of spending these two occasions reflect the subjective freedom in the decision to join them, as well as the possibility to act without engagement. These are empirically detectable phenomena that represent elements of the individual trends of the process of "accelerating eventisation in the field of holidays" in modern society, as defined by W. Gebhardt (2000: 25–26). It is therefore possible to use its sociological concept in the ethnological interpretation of the findings on the Halloween and Valentine's Day holidays.

Even though these two holidays have their roots in Europe – Valentine's Day in the Medieval English court culture and Halloween in Irish customs (Kelly 1986: 160; Cooper, Sullivan 1994: 37, 293; Zajonc 2014: 109; Zajonc 2020: 42), thanks to people's mass migration from the British Isles, mainly Ireland, they came to the America in the 17<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries. They settled in the US, where their transformation continued: they changed functions and bearers, extended beyond immigrant communities, and underwent transformation into secular nationwide modern holidays with a significant commercial potential (Caplow 2004: 108–110; Schmidt 1993). Their interlinking with the pop culture, including literature and movie, and increased consumption considerably affected the form of their celebration and their emblematic features, and ensured literally limitless possibilities for their penetration (Etzioni 2004: 4, 25).

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Halloween and Valentine's Day spread all over Europe. In their original homeland, they became established in different manners, reflecting and copying the conditions of the event-culture of individualised, late-modern society supported by globalisation (Aventi 2003: 43–44; Augstein, Samida 2008; Korff 2001; Schilling 2001). Their dissemination and domestication were influenced not only by the global business sphere.<sup>4</sup> The structure of the holiday calendar of each country was an important factor of the dynamics of their adoption (e.g. Ekrem 1995; Bačević 2007; Vesik 2016; Kovzele 2021). Last but not least, it was also important on which side of the continent, divided by the Iron Curtain for decades, the country was situated, as the mass media and the internet were also a source of incentives and models of holiday celebrations. Isolation from information and limited mobility of the population of the former socialist Eastern Europe until the turn of the 1980s and 1990s caused that their adoption and integration into the holiday culture was different compared to Western European countries.

4 For instance, for the impacts of Valentine's Day on the turnover of a store chain in the Austrian capital Vienna, see Wolf 2014: 21.

According to German professor of practical theology, Karl-Heinrich Bieritz, holidays in the public as well as private sphere in the late modernity period lose the dimensions of remembering, interpretation, and recalling. The content of holidays has disappeared and what has remained is only their celebration. People need and seek rituals to celebrate their status in real time, while experiencing something transcendent beyond their daily routine. In this context, "what is important is not feast, but celebration", while a late-modernity feast "refers only to itself as an event for participants" (Bieritz 2012: 5).

An exhausting routine also forces people to constantly seek new forms of relaxation, though the importance of holidays begins to weaken. Their function in the creation of individual identity and social order, as well as the function of a non-daily communication form which enhances solidarity and stabilises the community disappear. Nevertheless, celebrations are not on a decline. On the contrary, in a society whose highest value is economic benefit and which, in the era of the internet, enables people to work and trade without a break, regardless of their families, communities and holidays (Etzioni 2004: 3), the need to experience extraordinary events grows. Regeneration is conditional upon liberation from daily, often exhaustive long work shifts. However, breaks at work are not holidays. Everything beyond the daily routine becomes a holiday only when it is prepared and jointly and publicly celebrated in a ritual and festive manner, which also evokes certain social values. Performance brings self-perception – through the representation of collective identity, an individual feels to be part of a community from which others are excluded (Auffarth 2012: 31).

Celebrations in which people constantly seek amusement are becoming daily routine. Even though extraordinary activities – *events* – enable people to feel relaxed, they have no effect on maintaining a community; it is no longer the community that celebrates an event, but the event itself represents the community and brings sociability. The recent forms of the festive – holidays, festivities, festivals, celebrations – fulfilled important social functions and even though they were not called *events* (in Slovak) in the past, they meet several of the above-mentioned characteristics of events. From the historical perspective, an event is only one variant of the festive, and is nothing new. What is actually new, which can be observed in later modernity according to Gebhardt, is the *eventisation* of the social and individual holiday practice. The forms of festivities are largely transformed in them: the offer of planned holiday adventures aimed at satisfying people who long for fun, for something extraordinary, special and unique, is intensified and commercialised. The processes of commercialisation, de-institutionalisation, profanisation, and multiplication of the number of extraordinary events jointly support the almost daily occurrence of the festive. In the present-day world, thoroughly prepared extraordinary events can thus offer the celebrating participants "the state of situational community" (Gebhardt 2000: 22–28). If, at the current stage of our knowledge, in communication with the given concept, we understand the term

*event* for the purposes of this work mainly as an opportunity to experience anything, then, *eventisation* can be defined as a trend characterised by an increase of created, unusual, unique occasions for an experience, where nothing has to be celebrated in the traditional sense of the word.

Our study<sup>5</sup> observes the transformations of the forms of Halloween and Valentine's Day through the example of Slovakia.<sup>6</sup> The aim is to summarise the ethnological findings on this transformation and to identify, through its observation through the *eventisation* concept (Gebhardt 2000), any changes in the holiday practice. In the first part of the article, we shall look at the characteristics and transformations of the holiday culture in Slovakia during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and explain the situation in Slovakia. In the empirical part, we shall describe forms of the holiday practice of Halloween and Valentine's Day since the 1990s, captured by ethnological research. The final part offers a reflection on how eventisation is reflected in these forms and whether Halloween and Valentine's Day appear to be, from the ethnological perspective, new (traditional) holidays, or whether they are primarily an opportunity for the current citizens of the country to live an adventure and celebrate without restrictions.

The research data analysed in this article<sup>7</sup> was gathered mainly through the search of printed and electronic periodicals, websites containing information about holidays, as well as radio and television broadcasting at the time of holidays in the period 2011–2014 and, in the case of Valentine's Day, until 2021 (*Halloween – Pamiatka...* 2013; *Valentín...* 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). During these periods, visual expressions related to holidays were sporadically observed and photographically documented in the public spaces of the cities of Bratislava, Trnava, and Prešov. The electronic archives of the Press Agency of the Slovak Republic (TASR) and of the Press Office of the Bishops' Conference of Slovakia were also sources of qualitative data of the holiday practice. In 2021, the authors of the study conducted questionnaire research on the Facebook social network on the holiday practice associated with the Valentine's Day in families, at elementary and secondary schools (*Sviatok Valentín na Slovensku...* 2022). The quantitative data come from representative public opinion surveys. The survey was carried out by a professional agency in 2011 (Halloween) and 2018 (Valentine's Day) based on the questions formulated by the authors of the study (*Halloween – sviatok...* 2013; *Sviatok Valentín 2018...* 2022).

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5 The study is the result of VEGA project No. 2/0064/21 *The Process of Eventisation in the Festive Culture of Slovakia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, carried out by the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava.

6 Slovakia is both the name of a historical territory and the abbreviated form of the existing country, the Slovak Republic, within that territory.

7 All empirical data is concentrated in the research reports referred to herein. They are stored in the archive collections of the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology SAS in Bratislava.

## Transformations of the holiday culture in Slovakia since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the context of Europe

Valentine's Day and Halloween began to penetrate massively into the European countries behind the Iron Curtain at the beginning of the 1990s. At that time, as a result of qualitative changes in modern society (e.g. Bauman 2002: 20; Beck 2004: 15), Europe's holiday culture was undergoing transformation, with several specific features on both sides of the former border between different political systems. Western Europe, from which information about the ways of celebrating both holidays reached former socialist countries, including Slovakia, was experiencing a counter-reaction to the trend of reduction and decline in rituality and celebrations. This trend was provoked by secularisation and the deep social changes in the 1960s and 1970s, which contributed to the perception of holidays and rituals as ridiculous, unnecessary, and empty of content. The renewed growth of the need and popularity of celebrations was accompanied by public events – rituals, festivals, and mass folk festivities that attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors. Towns and villages, ethnic and religious groups, associations, companies, and institutions organised their festivities on any kind of initiative; where communities had no such reason, they found one. Ethnologist Klaus Roth characterises this period of the holiday culture in Western Europe as the “boom of inventions of tradition”, calling *festivalisation* the described trend of the growing range of events of holiday, celebration or festival nature, as well as thoroughly produced gatherings designated by the English word *events*: “It is event-culture that affected almost all spheres of life and has various functions – from entertainment and relaxation through the creation of identity up to the support of tourism and regional development” (Roth 2008: 20–21).

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Communist countries in Eastern Europe, applying the holidays engineering variant designed after the Bolshevik revolution in the Soviet Union (Etzioni 2004: 32), introduced the “system of socialist holidays and ceremonies” (Roth 2004: 13). For their purposes, they created new political holidays, consistently secularised the religious forms of older traditional rituals. In addition, the totalitarian cultural management introduced completely new festivities, in Slovakia collectively referred to as life-cycle civic ceremonies: welcoming children to life, civilian marriages, farewells to the deceased, celebrations of life anniversaries, and round anniversaries of marriages (Beňušková 2017: 28). Under the conditions of constant political control and economic scarcity, the population resorted to an alternative to the ritual activity required by the regime. They mandatorily attended public, state-controlled rituals on the dates set by the law. Simultaneously, people voluntarily dedicated their time and means to the costly and pompous celebration of family holidays, work anniversaries, birthdays, name-days, student and academic rituals “on their own” (Roth 2008: 15). The holiday practice in Slovakia associated with the International

Women's Day is an example of the overlapping of official and unofficial forms of celebrations of state-controlled holidays (Paríková 2008).

The fertile soil for the socialist holiday culture disappeared with the fall of the Communist regimes at the end of the 1980s. Nevertheless, as ethnologists' research show, what continued in Slovakia is rituals within working teams (Herzánová 2008), costly celebrations of important life anniversaries at home and, finally, civic rituals to the satisfaction of the secular part of the population as a proven alternative to church rituals. The non-religious festive occasions in Slovakia after 1990 include not only life-cycle ceremonies, but also a wide range of festivities of municipal nature (Beňušková 2017: 67). It is a waning perception of holidays as part of people's own culture and identity, partly also as a nostalgia after the period of socialism. At the same time, under the liberal market economy conditions, interpersonal relationships were penetrated by competition, and with the change of the organisation of work citizens lost the time necessary for celebrations. However, the need to maintain social networks and social communication under the new conditions by joint celebrations did not disappear. Holidays and festivities in the public space as an expression of finally freely expressed social and religious affiliations and of the local and professional awareness also emerged. As early as at the beginning of the 1990s, the parliaments of post-socialist countries enacted the cancellation of old and the establishment of new public holidays or the re-coding of the meaning of existing public holidays according to the needs and interests of the new political elites (Roth 2008: 22; Vesik 2016: 286).

In the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the system of modern holiday structure in Slovakia has been formed by Christian and secular holidays based on the country's history. The state thus declares the values it shares and its relationship to the country's historical events, while claiming the Christian religious tradition. At present, the Slovak Republic has a total of 15 holidays recognised by law, which are non-working days. The content of certain, originally church holidays (Christmas, Easter, All Saints' Day) has become secularised, and some of them (Our Lady of Seven Sorrows, Holiday of Ss Cyril and Methodius) have been ascribed political importance (Popelková 2014: 17, 32). Religious holidays have extended to the secular holiday practice with elements of pop-culture and folklorism<sup>8</sup> as the consequence of the state ideology during the socialist period, which suppressed religious expression in the public, as well as growing consumption and individualism. They have thus also become opportunities for social interactions between families, friends, and communities, as well

8 Together with Guntis Šmidchens, we understand folklorism as a term that is "defined functionally, denoting the conscious use of folklore as a symbol of ethnic, regional, or national culture" (Šmidchens 1999: 64). At the same time, our study reflects on the fact that, in the historical-social context of contemporary Czechoslovakia, the Communist ideology and political power played a key role in the mediation and presentation of folk culture phenomena as part of the forms of celebrating state-recognised Christian holidays (see also: Pavlicová, Uhlíková 1997: 6; Doušek 2016: 200–201).

as for individual relaxation (Beňušková 2014; Popelková 2019).<sup>9</sup> The attractiveness of state holidays, influenced by the national idea, declined in the context of individualisation and globalisation. In Czecho-Slovakia, this process began as early as at the beginning of the 1990s. The decline in civic participation in enacted holidays, which do not bring together anyone – Czech sociologist Jan Keller called it collective ignorance of holidays – enables citizens to use their spare time to satisfy their needs and ideas (Keller 2003: 86–87). On the one hand, the celebrating persons began seeking relaxing and entertaining activities and extraordinary adventures. On the other hand, this need as a subject of commodification began to be used by different institutions and actors oriented on marketing and business, creating space for an uncommon spending of spare time in a way other than traditional.

### Domestication and the forms of celebrating new holidays in Slovakia

In this part, in the light of the eventisation concept, we interpret the ethnological findings on the entry of Halloween and Valentine's Day in Slovakia at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and on the ways of celebrating them, which are proofs of the domestication of holidays. The forms acquired by holidays in Slovakia represent a broad and complicated field. We consider its exploration to be a prerequisite for a further study of eventisation processes in Slovakia. In the 1990s, the two holidays were already widespread in Western Europe, where their celebration was closely related to business and the mass media. Thus, we assume that the transition over the former Iron Curtain became for a wide range of actors a means of contact with post-modern holiday culture, largely marked by eventisation.

Today, Halloween is a domesticated, celebrated, and updated scary-entertaining holiday in Slovakia.<sup>10</sup> According to the representations identified in the holiday practice – produced by the media and business or the Church – it can be stated that it is a secular holiday at present (the source of entertainment is staged fear) as well as a religious anti-holiday (the celebration of Satan, Devil, and death).

<sup>9</sup> This trend, as noted by Hungarian ethnologist Gábor Barna, is common also to other Central European countries. According to him, even though the layer of festivities based on Christian spirituality has remained important, the Christian tradition is no longer perceived as determining for the present-day European identity (Barna 2014: 133). It lost its central organising power with the disintegration of communities, and the attractiveness of state and national festivities of European countries significantly declined in the context of individualisation and globalisation (Barna 2017: 161–163).

<sup>10</sup> The data on Halloween used herein comes from the research on the social context of holidays in Slovakia in 2011–2013 (published in Zajonc 2014). In 2011, we conducted a representative questionnaire survey, in collaboration with the professional agency FOCUS, on the interrelated holidays of Halloween (31 October), All Saints' Day (1 November), and All Souls' Day (2 November) (*Halloween – sviatok...* 2013). The research on the domestication of Halloween was based on our observation of the representation of the holiday in line with the theory of the dissemination of representations (Sperber 1996).

Halloween appeared in Slovakia at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s (Juhász 2002: 150) as a holiday that completely differed from domestic holidays in terms of its contents and the way of celebrating it. Nevertheless, the representative questionnaire survey showed that up to 82% of the population was familiar with it in 2011. Its celebration, the essence of which was unusual social entertainment accessible to all, with a hint of scariness, had the form of events in masks and scary costumes, organised by pre-school and school facilities and leisure centres. Private Halloween parties of young adults as well as public parties for disco bar guests also became widespread.

According to an ethnological reconstruction, the previously unknown holiday supported by commerce and the media, penetrated in society by means of a constant confrontation with domestic traditions, holidays, rituals, and forms of ritualised behaviour. It acquired the public representations of being scary, funny, new, foreign (American, Western), forced, commercial, pagan, autumnal. There have been mutual influences, overlapping and merging with local holidays. The incorporation of domestic elements in Halloween celebrations is proven by the findings, according to which masks based on traditional concepts of the respective culture (nymphs, dryads, etc.) are used; some schools and kindergartens also organise lantern processions,<sup>11</sup> and, in one grammar school, the matriculation of new students took place as part of the Halloween party, etc. The result of the reverse process, i.e. Halloween's entry into domestic customs, is – though sporadically – the placing of a pumpkin lantern illuminated by a lit candle on graves as part of the decoration on the days of remembrance of the deceased at the turn of October and November.

Halloween can also be observed as a factor of extended range of opportunities for domestic forms of celebrating this holiday. For instance, by following up on the traditional domestic idea of cleansing fire, it brought the renewal of *svetlonos* (jack-o'-lantern) production or the organisation of autumn lantern processions at kindergartens and schools in some Slovak regions. Another manifestation of the domestication of Halloween is the common explanation that it is a continuation of the domestic Celtic or pre-Christian Slavic tradition. What also contributes to its acceptance is the fact that pumpkin – one of the main representations of Halloween – is a domestic element of Slovakia's agrarian, culinary, as well as holiday culture. The combination of the Halloween lantern and the domestic *svetlonos*<sup>12</sup> has led to the creation of a *Halloween svetlonos* as a representation of the autumn season that has recently become part of most Halloween customs.

11 During the Communist regime, it was a common form of celebrating a political holiday – the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia in 1917.

12 Svetlonos means a carved ripe pumpkin in the shape of a face with a lit candle inside. Before Halloween became common in Slovakia, it was made and used in the autumn period as a fun prop to produce fear. Svetlonos has retained this function even afterwards, becoming an exterior or interior decoration.

In the range of the ways of celebrating Halloween, as recorded in Slovakia, the trick-or-treat walking tour by masked children on 30 November is completely absent or very rare, being oriented on the neighbourhood and the community, known from the history of the family stage of the holiday. It has been replaced by corporate and school parties organised with the aim to strengthen relationships on the dates preceding All Saints' Day. The participants to these parties gather in burlesque masks and costumes, experiencing social interaction and fun in an unusual atmosphere, resulting from displayed and imitated horror. Where such parties are held in private, they are also combined with the preparation of Halloween-themed food and drinks accompanied by pumpkin monsters (*svetlonos*). Pre-school facilities as well as elementary and secondary schools organise Halloween events combined with the carving of pumpkin lanterns, the production of masks, and the wearing of costumes with the attributes of the holiday. The night sleeping at schools (though not widespread), evening parades of masked children across urban neighbourhoods or villages, as well as lantern processions serve for experiencing a funny atmosphere of horror. Where such events are attended by parents, they become their passive consumers. Adults usually participate at Halloween parties organised in towns for clients by bars and disco clubs – the participants have fun in masks and have drinks with scary names (Zajonc 2014: 193–194, 210). At the turn of the millennia, the arrival of Halloween in Slovakia became an opportunity for increasing the number of commercial public events, whose forms and perception refer to domestic traditions. Some examples include the night visits to the Bojnice Castle organised around 31 November, called *The Svetlonos of Bojnice at the Castle*. The commercial activity *International Festival of Spirits and Ghosts* has been extended on the principle of multiplication, organised as a traditional part of the season at the turn of April and May in the 1994–2018 period (TASR 2018).

Specific expressions of the domestication of Halloween as a holiday rejected by the Church include the spreading of entertainment with music and dance in thematic masks. Under the title "Saints' Ball" or "All Saints' Ball", they have been organised by parishes or leisure centres since 2015. They are attended by children in masks of saints, church officials, etc. The parties are usually held in the period from 31 October to 2 November as a counterpart to children's school parties in Halloween masks.

The fact that Halloween became another entertainment opportunity for inhabitants of cities is proven by the *Svetlonos Festival*, which has been organised by the municipal council of the City of Košice since 2017 (Adamčeková 2018). This event consists of activities known also from other festivals (e.g. competitions in manual and movement skills, decorative painting of children's faces) and is linked to holidays only through specific Halloween props, organisers' clothing, or the theme of painted motifs.

The close links of the holiday to showbusiness, commerce, and its use in advertising are another proof of its domestication, which naturally assumes general familiarity with it. Halloween celebration is also a platform for the production, sale, and buying

of services – accommodation and recreation facilities or aquatic parks organise seasonal Halloween stays and weekends offering adventures, including scary parades, parties, and discos with Halloween menus.

Valentine's Day in Slovakia<sup>13</sup> is also a domesticated, celebrated, and updated holiday. Its content consists of the celebration of love, partnership, friendly, and other close interpersonal relationships (Zajonc 2020: 113). The central figure of the Valentine's Day is a saint, and even though the interpretation of the origins of this holiday in Slovakia is most frequently related to his life and martyrdom, it is a secular holiday. Almost all practices related to Valentine's Day in Slovakia have these characteristics. Thanks to the personality of the saint, the holiday is also accepted by the Church, which regulates its celebration in line with Christian principles mainly in the field of partnerships. The Church supports the domestication of the holiday by disseminating legends about St. Valentine as the patron of lovers (e.g. Dian, Judák 2006: 52). Even though Valentine's Day was not completely unknown in Slovakia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>14</sup> it began to be spread and celebrated in the first half of the 1990s as a holiday whose content and form of celebration was close to some domestic holidays. According to a representative questionnaire survey, almost 98% of respondents were familiar with it and was celebrated by 31% of the population.

While domesticated, the Valentine's Day was also confronted with domestic traditions, holidays, etc. Its content is, in the narrow sense of word, the celebration of a lovers' relationship. It is therefore compatible with some domestic holidays and rituals: for instance, with the tradition of expressing love affection towards a single girl by a decorated tree, erected by a single boy in front of her house on the eve of May 1 (Horváthová 1986: 205). During the process of domestication, Valentine's Day was confronted with a much younger holiday which was politically important during the Communist regime – the International Women's Day. Although the political elites demonstrated through the holiday the state's care for women as workers and mothers, the holiday was also an opportunity in families or among friends or colleagues to express respect and affection towards a woman as a partner or colleague. With the partial disappearance of the holiday – perceived as a relic of the Communist regime – the latter one was shifted from March 8 to February 14, perhaps also thanks to the proximity of these dates. During its domestication, Valentine's Day also entered domestic holidays. One example is its widespread celebration by fun and dance – by having fun

13 The basic data about Valentine's Day was obtained in the period 2011–2021 through exploration research aimed at mapping the width of manifestations of the holiday practice and at studying the spreading and domestication of the holiday in Slovakia (*Valentín...* 2017a). Through the FOCUS professional agency, representative questionnaire research was also conducted in 2018 and 2019, focused on the degree of acceptance of the holiday, its representations and forms of celebration.

14 In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reports on Valentine's Day in England were published in Slovakia.

and dancing at Valentine's balls or school discos for children in masks perceived as an element of the tradition of balls and carnivals during the carnival period.

The range of the forms of celebrating Valentine's Day ranges from the so-called American way of celebration<sup>15</sup> (giving of material gifts, adventures; expression of love or affection through Valentine's greeting cards) through going to restaurants or cultural events in couples (activities organised by theatres, cinemas, restaurants, etc. thematically linked to Valentine's Day) up to celebrations, balls, and discos, the actors of which are various large groups of people. All these forms are directly linked to consumption – this holiday is accompanied by shopping and giving gifts – and are also organised with the aim of gaining profits from the sale of tickets to events.

According to research data, non-commercial Valentine's Day celebrations began to take place in the cities of Bratislava, Lučenec, Nitra, Prešov, Trenčín and Zvolen after 2000, organised by local self-governments with the intention of creating an opportunity for couples to mutually express love in an unusual way (e.g. by kiss in the representative premises of the historical town hall in Bratislava), while fostering love for their town (in Prešov, for instance, by joint consumption of a mega-cake during the municipal celebration). One example of combining Valentine's Day with local traditions is an event with the motto "Drink a glass of good wine on Valentine's Day". Winemakers from one of Bratislava's city districts (previously a village with wine-growing and winemaking traditions) organise it for themselves as well as for other citizens. The nationwide event Valentine's Drop of Blood interconnects love, belonging, and charity. This activity has been organised by the national Red Cross organisation and the national transfusion service since 2012 with the aim of reaching out to young people as blood donors and obtaining blood for the purposes of hospitals. After 2000, Valentine's Day has also become a term for group events as an expression of love for nature and, more widely, for the environment. In addition to stays and recreational activities in nature, it also comprises activities to improve the quality of the environment – waste collection, meeting a minister to urge the prohibition of the growing of genetically modified crops, etc.

Events based on the combination of love for God and partner love that respects Christian principles include "Valentine's pilgrimages" or "lovers' pilgrimages", organised by the Catholic Church. At the national level, they are held in the "national shrine" (Cathedral Basilica of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows) in Šaštín-Stráže, as well as in churches and chapels (with St. Valentine's patronage or only with his statue or picture) at sites with a pilgrimage tradition (Spišská Kapitula, Krížovany, Vysoká nad Uhom).

The commercial sphere comprises important organisers of events that offer the opportunity to celebrate Valentine's Day in an original way. For instance, shopping

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<sup>15</sup> For more details, see Zajonc 2020: 90–92.

centres in towns and cities organise competitions for potential customers (e.g. the most beautiful love photography), Valentine's Day creative workshops for children, presentation of goods with Valentine's Day themes, etc. All this is framed by the spending of this holiday in combination with fun, relaxation, and a unique experience.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the holiday practice associated with Halloween and Valentine's Day, which have become domesticated in Slovakia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, suggests that their emergence has been accompanied with the penetration of eventisation in the culture of holidays and celebrations of Slovakia's citizens, for which both holidays create a suitable environment.

This penetration was, on the one hand, possible because of the domestication of Halloween and Valentine's Day thanks to contacts with domestic holidays. On the other hand, they are still perceived as new holidays. Therefore, their use for the creation of occasions with the characteristics of an *event*, as identified by W. Gebhardt (2000: 18–22), is therefore easier than in the case of holidays considered domestic. The linking of Halloween or Valentine's Day with new forms of celebration is thus not considered as the breaking or shifting of the traditional meaning and content of holidays.

Eventisation in connection with Halloween or Valentine's Day is reflected in the fact that some forms of their celebration have the characteristics of *events*, which was not common in Slovakia before 1990. Such events include urban Halloween festivals for broad population groups, experiential cultural and entertaining events with Halloween or Valentine's Day themes organised with a commercial purpose at historical castles, religious pilgrimages, or ecological events related to Valentine's Day.

Today, Halloween and Valentine's Day are celebrated in Slovakia both in couples or in groups. The holiday practice in couple, which is mainly related to Valentine's Day, is a permanent and common part of its celebration as a holiday of partner love. A part of the group forms of celebrating these two holidays has the form of experiential and entertaining events organised primarily with a commercial or world-view purpose. With respect to these holiday practices, one of the elements of which is a new, unusual experience, holidays fulfil the function of a framework for social interaction, celebration, and relaxation. What is important is either the celebration as such, as the event does not refer primarily to the holiday itself, and, as an *event*, it has a meaning only for the participants (Bieritz 2012: 5); or, the organiser incorporates in the framework of the holiday – which is the case of the Valentine's Day – content that is important to the given organiser (e.g. local patriotism, ecology), thus extending its meaning and making it more attractive for the participants.

From the ethnological perspective, Halloween and Valentine's Day appear as holidays that are currently perceived as new ones, expanding the holiday calendar of Slovakia's inhabitants. At the same time, the group holiday practices combined with commerce and extraordinary experiences and organised at extraordinary places, providing the feeling of belonging, etc., are *event*-type of activities for Slovakia's citizens and, hence, special opportunities to celebrate.

Schools, the mass media and pop-culture influence all population groups, thus creating and maintaining conditions for the application of business strategies of the commercial sphere in the field of holidays: in this way, citizens become "informed" participants, clients, and consumers of global forms of celebrating these two new holidays, including the purchase of thematic goods, costumes, flowers, and gifts. This creates a suitable environment for the effects of eventisation with an expected broadening of the range of the forms of celebration with *event* characteristics.

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## Summary

This study deals with Halloween and Valentine's Day in Slovakia from the perspective of the eventisation theory elaborated on by Winfried Gebhardt (2000), which reflects on internal as well as external changes in the field of holidays in modern societies and seeks to elucidate the cultural dimension of the processes of individualisation and pluralisation during the late-modernity period. The authors explore these two holidays as global phenomena with a focus on their holiday practice, i.e. on the ways of celebrating and spending holidays. At the same time, they analyse the historical and social processes related to the transformations of Europe's and Slovakia's holiday culture since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On this basis, they present research materials that clarify these processes of domestication as well as the ways of celebrating Halloween and Valentine's Day in Slovakia. The empirical data form the basis for formulating findings on the ways of spending these two "new" holidays and their relationship to the process of eventisation of the holiday culture.

**Keywords:** eventisation, Halloween, celebration, holidays, holidays in Slovakia, Valentine's Day

Translated by J. Takáčová

## Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia analizę obchodów Halloween i walentynki na Słowacji z perspektywy teorii ewentyzacji, szczegółowo opracowanej przez Winfried Gebhardt (2000). Teoria ta koncentruje się na wewnętrznych i zewnętrznych transformacjach obchodów świąt w nowoczesnych społeczeństwach i objaśnia wymiar kulturowy procesów indywidualizacji i pluralizacji w okresie późnej nowoczesności. Autorzy analizują oba święta jako zjawiska globalne, skupiając się na praktykach ich celebracji, tj. na tym, w jaki sposób są obchodzone, a także przedstawiają procesy historyczne i społeczne związane z transformacjami sposobów świętowania, jakie zaszły w Europie i na Słowacji od końca XX w. Autorzy prezentują także materiały badawcze, które rzucają światło na procesy domestykacji oraz przybliżają sposoby świętowania Halloween i walentynki na Słowacji. Następnie na podstawie danych empirycznych formułują wnioski dotyczące sposobów spędzania tych dwóch „nowych” świąt oraz ich relacji do procesów ewentyzacji kultury świętowania.

**Słowa kluczowe:** ewentyzacja, Halloween, obchody, święto, święta na Słowacji, walentynki

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