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# *Celebration of the New Year in Ukraine during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods*

*Obchody Nowego Roku w Ukrainie  
w czasach władzy radzieckiej i w okresie postradzieckim*

## **Introduction**

Dynamism is a characteristic feature of the modern world. Rapid changes are taking place in all spheres of social life. The new stage in the development of civilization turned out to be in all respects much more complicated than predicted. Its main feature was the extreme dynamism and indefiniteness of social transformations taking place within the boundaries of the information technology revolution (Chenbai 2019: 95).

These changes have also affected one of the typically conservative spheres, namely, the sphere of holidays and the celebration of socially significant events. The system of public holidays as settled in the territory of the USSR in the second half of the twentieth century in the form of a calendar cycle, at the end of that century was replaced by a new cycle of holidays, both revived religious ones and newly established state ones. Only one holiday has maintained its key position together with a number of its traditions, customs, and rituals: the New Year. After the collapse of the USSR into a number of independent states, the New Year retained its status of the main holiday of the year in public consciousness and practice.

The period of the winter solstice, the end of one calendar year and the beginning of the next, has been perceived since antiquity and is still perceived in the public consciousness and subconsciousness as a certain point of bifurcation, a period in which the system (in this case, society) can either plunge into chaos and move to a new better level (Matyukhina 2020: 154). Thus, the period of the closure of one year and the beginning of the following one has always been considered special in the public mind. The ritualisation of actions and the behaviour during this period has been perceived as a vital necessity. From antiquity to the present day, at all levels – from the family to the state, during the holidays, and especially the transition holidays, various scenarios (both secular and religious) of spending this time came into effect. The modern world is not an exception in this respect. In the twentieth century in the USSR, the violent breakdown of the holiday cycle, its traditions and rituals, which all had been established for centuries went along with the process of both creating a new system of the calendar holiday cycle and preserving the familiar, established traditions and rituals within this new cycle. This duality has especially vividly manifested in the New Year's holiday. Although during the first years of the Soviet regime attempts were made to exclude winter holidays – not only Christmas, but also New Year – from public life and to substitute them with the Day of the October Revolution as the main holiday of the year, they soon turned to be ineffective. Therefore, every effort was made to exclude Christmas from the number of public and family holidays, and make the New Year as Soviet as possible. In fact, in the Soviet period, the main winter holiday was the New Year, which provided a focus for a complex of both social and family traditions and rituals characteristic of the winter holidays of the transition, that is Christmas and New Year.

The French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in his book *Rites of the Passage. The systematic study of rituals* distinguishes a special category of rituals associated with important transitional moments in the life of society (peculiar points of bifurcation), calling them *rites of passage*: “Any change in a person's position entails the interaction of the secular and the sacred. It requires regulation and observance of a ritual so that society as a whole does not feel difficulties and does not suffer losses” (van Gennep 1999: 9). Therefore, the periods of the transition have always been and are an important part of the life of society; they are firmly established and supported. If one of them is banned, as happened in the USSR with Christmas, its functions are assumed by another, similar holiday, along with those rituals that can be preserved under the new conditions. But society nonetheless goes through the periods of transition, in particular from one calendar year to another, in the form of special festivities, saturated with rituals.

In the current article, the author aims to consider nature and dynamics of changes in the traditions and rituals of celebrating the New Year in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century on the example of Ukraine. The reasons for maintaining

the status of the main holiday of transition by the New Year are also analyzed. The author's research is based on materials obtained from research papers, press, video materials (feature and amateur films, photographs), survey materials, and personal observations. The theoretical and methodological basis of the given study is the cultural-historical approach, which enables efficient exploration of the topic, as well as cultural-semantic analysis, descriptive method in characterizing certain elements of ritualism, a logical method in studying the transformation of the ritual culture of the New Year holidays. Particular attention is paid to changes in the traditions of celebrating the New Year during the transition from the Soviet society to a modern democratic society.

### **New Year celebrations in Soviet Ukraine. The process of tradition and ritual formation**

The traditions of celebrating the New Year in the Ukrainian SSR were largely determined by the peculiarities of the Soviet way of life. In 1950s and 1960s, the specific form of New Year's celebration, a complex of customs and rituals inherent in it, took its final form and quickly acquired the character of tradition at the social and individual levels. That, in many ways, has survived till present.

Preparation for the holiday, both at the public and family level, started at least a month, or even more, ahead the New Year. At enterprises, institutions, it was the time of completing the annual plans, of writing annual reports and getting them approved; at universities it was the examination session time, at schools – the period for summing up the results of the second quarter. Amateur groups – dance, drama or choral ensembles and orchestras – started preparing New Year programs. People to perform the roles of *Ded Moroz* (Grandpa Frost) and *Snegurochka* (Snow Maiden) for the New Year celebrations were chosen from among amateur artists, and if those could not be found, those roles were given to the given company's employees. Decorations for New Year trees were renovated or manufactured and purchased, and a week before the New Year the decorated trees were installed in the central squares of cities, in parks of culture, at enterprises, in the lobbies of state agencies or educational institutions. In kindergartens and schools, New Year tree decorations were made from cotton wool, paper, cardboard, and garlands during 'labor', i.e. the design and technology classes. Some of the toy were taken home, and the best ones were used to decorate New Year trees in kindergartens and schools. Snowflakes, New Year trees, snowmen were cut from paper and attached to the windows, which immediately acquired a special, New Year look.

New Year shop windows were decorated with the invariable figures of *Ded Moroz* in a long red fur coat, and *Snegurochka* in a Russian *sarafan* dress, a short fur coat and *kokoshnik*, with hares, foxes, and bear cubs; fir tree, decorated with colourful

balls, toys, garlands of coloured foil, colourful bulbs. And all this was put on fluffed cotton wool, which represented snow. Small scraps of cotton wool, tied on threads, symbolised snowfall.

From the beginning of December, New Year fairs were opened in department stores and covered markets. New Year decorations, garlands, sparklers, tinsel, lametta made from long strips of foil, toys of *Ded Moroz* and *Snegurochka*, carnival masks, and artificial New Year trees have been sold there since 1960s. Saleswomen, especially closer to the New Year, often wore *Snegurochka* costumes. The best fairs in terms of assortment were, of course, in Moscow and Leningrad; in Ukraine, the best fairs were in Kiev. Highly appreciated New Year tree decorations from Germany (the GDR) appeared in shops at that time. The tradition of pre-holiday shopping characteristic of the winter holidays had been preserved in the USSR, only it acquired its own specifics. The eternal shortage of some goods or others in the USSR led to the fact that purchases of gifts and food for the New Year table had to be made long before the holiday itself. Before the New Year, special goods, called "deficit" ones, were "thrown" into stores. Standing in endless queues was an attribute of pre-holiday period. But even this, to a certain extent, created a feeling of prosperity, albeit a temporary one.

It was also obligatory to write and send New Year greetings and, if possible, gifts to relatives, friends and acquaintances. New Year greetings were written on postcards with images of *Ded Moroz*, *Snegurochka*, a little boy sitting on an airplane or a rocket, which symbolized the New Year, winter landscapes with snow-covered fir trees, bullfinches, and fir trees or fir tree branches decorated with toys. Many postcards were printed depicting the Spasskaya Tower in the Kremlin, the chimes of which announced the coming of the New Year. Closer to the New Year, postcards with congratulations were sent to each other by institutions, enterprises, universities, in universities – by departments and faculties. It was believed that wishes must be fulfilled in the New Year; they were therefore taken very seriously. It was also customary in the USSR, before each holiday, including the New Year, to make wall-mounted bulletin boards decorated with New Year symbols in all working collectives, from nurseries to universities and the Academy of Sciences, from small enterprises to huge factories and mines, from offices to ministries. Their content was similar from Brest to Kamchatka – articles on labour successes and achievements of the old year and wishes for the New Year.

It should be noted that if an enterprise reported the early fulfilment of the annual production plan, it received the right to immediately install a decorated New Year tree at the entrance or in front of the enterprise and light garland lights on it in the evening. That was meant to symbolize that the New Year had already come to them, which was an honour and was accompanied by bonuses for workers and employees.

Families traditionally arranged general cleaning, laundry, and, as it was already mentioned, wrote and sent congratulations. Children made new decorations or updated last year's ones, because the factory-made decorations were expensive and many families had them only in small numbers. In addition, making New Year toys – cutting out snowflakes and figures from coloured paper, pasting nuts with coloured paper or foil, making birds and fairy-tale characters from eggshells, dry acorns, chestnuts, cardboard, coloured paper or pieces of fabric – all was a favourite New Year entertainment, not only for kids. 31 December was a working day in the USSR, albeit a shortened one, so everything possible was prepared for the New Year's table in advance.

Thus, the month before the New Year retained its character of waiting for the holiday and preparing for it. Urban spaces, working premises and dwellings were given a different, festive look. The festively decorated space created the image of what was desired in the upcoming year – abundance, order, purity, peace. Moreover, an aspect should be especially noted, it was done in the form that fully corresponded to the conditions of life in the city. But the main rituals fell, of course, on the New Year Eve itself.

Until the beginning of the 1960s, the collective celebration of the New Year was widespread within working collectives, or, for students and cadets, in their place of study. Often it was a New Year's costume ball held in the House of Culture or in an assembly hall, in front of which the head of the enterprise gave a congratulatory speech, amateur performances were shown, with dancing in breaks between parts of the performance or after the concert. The celebration was accompanied by a buffet or, later, tables with refreshments for guests were placed along the edges of the hall. The invitation cards indicated the table number. This holiday is very well depicted in the film *The Carnival Night* (1956, dir. Eldar Ryazanov). Later, however, the centre of New Year's celebrations gradually moved to families. At the places of work or study, the holiday began to be celebrated in the last week before the New Year. Also, New Year's balls in the Houses of Culture were gradually replaced by "Little New Year Light" concerts, which were held at the Houses of Culture, in the canteens of large institutions and research institutes, in the assembly halls of universities, museums, etc. following the example of the musical variety show "Little Blue Light" in Moscow. In universities or technical schools, masquerades were arranged for high school students; since the beginning of the 1970s, this type of celebration has gone out of fashion almost everywhere, replaced by dance evenings in halls decorated with garlands, snowflakes and New Year trees, with music by their own bands or invited vocal and instrumental ensembles and with obligatory congratulations by *Ded Moroz*. In kindergartens and primary schools, fancy-dress parties were organized in the first half of the day and were called "New Year's morning party".

Since the late 1960s, before the New Year – as, indeed, before other holidays as well – a pre-holiday mini-banquet was organized by employees at workplaces:

in the offices of institutions, banks, in the departments of research institutes; this celebration was colloquially called “sabantuy”, or, in Lviv and other cities of the Western Ukraine, “impreza”.<sup>1</sup> This celebration was semi-legal – it was forbidden to drink alcohol at work – but the ban was successfully circumvented. People collectively bought alcohol and food: sandwiches, cakes, sweets. Often they brought pies and cake from home to please their colleagues with their culinary talents. At lunchtime or after work, they congratulated each other, drank wine or vodka, depending on the preferences of members of each collective, with funny or serious toasts, and treated themselves to the food. Youth groups arranged dances with music from a tape recorder.

The process of transition from public to family celebrations intensified in the mid-60s, when, as a result of the housing construction development, families massively began to move into separate apartments. From then on, the custom of celebrating the New Year, preferably in the family circle, with relatives and friends, was established. The New Year turned into the most family-oriented holiday of the year, just like Christmas used to be. Some people even tried to interrupt their rest period in a “sanatorium”, a rest house, in order to come home for this holiday. If there was no such opportunity, friends gathered in someone’s room. Celebrating the New Year in restaurants was almost never practiced. The opinion has taken hold in the mass consciousness that if a family is together at the New Year, then everyone will be together again, safe and sound, at the next New Year. This was the manifestation of the belief, characteristic of the rites of passage, that all actions undertaken during the holiday, as well as its setting, simulate or shape the following period. The ritual of the New Year holiday included those from the earlier period or newly formed rituals that symbolized prosperity, safety, peace in the family, thus creating an image of happy future in the New Year. They can be attributed, with certain reservations, to magical rites. At the level of both family and society, there is a need to ritualize the moments of transition. Therefore, the previous rituals associated with Christmas have survived, and the new ones, similar in meaning, have emerged.

Two inherent attributes of the New Year holiday were the decorated New Year tree and the richly set table. Both have a rich semantic load. The New Year tree (it could be a fir or a pine, whichever could be bought) had to be a living, not an artificial one. It was decorated on the day before the New Year, 31 December. Decorations mainly followed the unwritten but universally accepted spatial structure – either a five-pointed star or a decorative spike was placed at the top. Below, there were glass balls covered with “silver” or coloured shiny amalgam. The decorations depicting the heroes of fairy tales, birds, fruits, vegetables, etc. were placed next. Themed toys were widespread – an astronaut, a pilot, an airplane, a rocket, a globe with a satellite. Hand-made or purchased flat cardboard toys, pasted over or painted nuts, small apples,

1 For more details see: Matyukhina 2000.

candies in coloured paper were placed at the ends of the branches. Garlands were placed on top of everything, and strips of silver tinsel came down from top to bottom. Under the tree, on a layer of cotton wool depicting snow, large or smaller figures of *Ded Moroz* and *Snegurochka* were placed. Garlands of small coloured bulbs were a very desirable but often inaccessible decoration. The richly decorated Christmas tree made a fabulous impression on the onlookers, immediately creating a special holiday atmosphere, organizing a special, festive space where nothing is sad and only joyful and happy events can happen. Garlands, often homemade, could also be used to decorate walls and furniture in an apartment.

An equally important part was the festive table. Before, a Christmas table with the ritual twelve dishes symbolized the prosperity that was supposed to accompany the family in the following year, so a richly set table with certain dishes became an important New Year's tradition as well, only there was no set number of festive dishes; their traditional set was established, however. The table was covered with a white tablecloth, the best crockery, preferably a porcelain service; glasses and goblets were of glass or, which was very much appreciated, crystal. In the centre of the table, there would be a bottle of the "Soviet Champagne", an integral and obligatory attribute of the New Year. Depending on the tastes of the family, there were other alcoholic beverages around: wine, cognac, vodka, homemade liqueur, as well as lemonade, in various quantities. Of the appetizers, sprats and sardines were considered an important attribute of the New Year table, as well as sliced sausage, bacon, cold meats, cheese and herring. In the cities of Central and Eastern Ukraine, they were usually arranged on plates; in the cities of Western Ukraine, they were used to make sandwiches decorated with herbs, lemon slices and egg circles. Caviar and ham were considered the best table decoration, but were available mainly to members of the party and economic elite. Traditional salads were "Olivier", vinaigrette, and later, since the 1980s, a salad of eggs, cheese, crab sticks, with lashings of mayonnaise, or "Mimosa", pickles, pickled tomatoes, sauerkraut with oil, pickled mushrooms – depending on what kind of preserved food was made in the family. Preserved food made from vegetables grown on the garden plot by the family was especially appreciated. From the late 1970s onwards, fresh cucumbers and tomatoes began to appear on the tables, especially in Kiev, but in small quantities. Snacks that demonstrated the culinary art of the hostess were appreciated; this could be an original salad, figurines of boiled eggs with a filling, etc. Roast suckling pig was the most desirable hot dish, but this was extremely rare. Fried chicken or, less commonly, goose, baked meat and homemade fried sausages were more affordable. No fish was served, except sprats and herring. Interestingly, there were no other dishes typical for Christmas – dumplings, poppy buns, dishes of beans, peas, cereals. Potatoes, often with mushrooms, were served as a side dish. The desert was always a cake, with other sweets, like candies and pastry, tangerines, apples and, if available, oranges. The top adornment of the festive table

was considered to be the Kievsky cake made of meringue with nuts. From the 1970s onward, store-bought cakes were being gradually replaced by homemade cakes, even though store-bought cakes and pastries were still more common. Of hot drinks, there was tea, less often coffee, and cocoa for children. In general, food served at New Year depended on the income and capabilities of the family, but it always had to create an impression of abundance.

All the participants of celebration tried to look smart: women wore their best hairstyles and put on elegant dresses, but not evening dresses, which were not popular in the USSR (also, a skirt with a blouse, even a smart one, was not acceptable); men wore suits and ties, even at home. Children were also dressed in their best clothes. Everyone sat down to the table at about half past eleven in order to have enough time to celebrate the old year. The head of the family opened champagne, poured it, and lemonade for the children, raised the toast "to all the good in the old year". Then the participants listened to the radio, or later, from the early 1970s, watched the festive speech of the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU on TV, stood up when the chimes of the Spasskaya Tower in the Moscow Kremlin began to beat (which was broadcast throughout the USSR) and with the last stroke congratulated each other, saying: "New year, New happiness", clinked glasses and drank champagne to the bottom of the glasses, so that there would be no tears in the New Year. Then they proceeded to eat; the meal was accompanied with toasts, often playful ones, with general conversation, jokes and, especially at the end of the meal, songs. Someone could play the accordion or guitar. All topics of conversation, songs and poems were supposed to be funny. The children of the hosts always recited poems. With the spread of television, the general conversation at the table gradually gave way to a joint viewing of the Little Blue Light program with the participation of famous artists. If the family was young, or there were many young people present, they arranged dances to the radio, and later to the tape recorder. The fun lasted, as a rule, until the morning. Towards the end of the evening, when the dessert was about to be served, everyone was invited to come to the New Year tree, under which there were gifts.

New Year gifts deserve a separate discussion. Their assortment was determined by tradition and, at the same time, by the scarcity of the most essential goods on the market and the high prestige of a handmade gift. Therefore, a special culture of gift-giving has developed. First of all, a today's observer would be struck by the packaging, or, more precisely, its absence. The most affordable packaging was rough brown paper or unpainted cardboard boxes, so the boxes could be pasted over with pieces of coloured paper, foil from candy wrappers – this was also a kind of needlework – and paper bags were tied with coloured ribbons. Making boxes for gifts of cardboard pasted over with coloured paper and magazine covers was a kind of art. The name of the person for whom the gift was intended was written on the box

or the gifts were handed round by the host or hostess, less often by a *Ded Moroz* invited from the *Svitanok* company or by one of the guests dressed up as *Ded Moroz*.

There were rules concerning what should and should not be given. This needs a detailed explanation. It must be noted that it was categorically not accepted to give household items – pots, irons, washing machines, food processors, coffee makers, etc., stationery, and clothes, except smart ones. It was customary to give cosmetics, jewellery, crystal vessels, boxes or vases, paintings, fancy handbags, gloves, cigarette cases, watches, candlesticks, when they came into fashion, tape recorders, record-players, phonograph records, books, especially art albums, beautiful calendars, tool sets for those who liked DIY, and embroidery kits. Children were given primarily toys, children's books, sledges, skates, skis. Gifts were chosen corresponding to the interests, tastes, and the age of the recipients.

Surveys conducted at the end of the 1990s in Lviv and 2006–2007 in Kiev, the author's personal observations, and the analysis of the literature all show that until the beginning of the 1980s gifts made personally by the giver were not only allowed, but welcomed. In addition, children, who did not earn money yet, were expected to give gifts made with their own hands. Considering the love of handicrafts and the wide range of hobbies common among the residents of Soviet cities, as well as the existence of numerous art, craft, embroidery, sewing, woodwork, aircraft modelling clubs, young naturalist societies, etc. active at the Houses of Culture, it was easy to make something with one's own hands – and do this well. Moreover, the fees in such clubs and at courses were almost symbolic. Women and girls often gave their relatives and friends knitted hats, or a set of hat, scarf and gloves, also, knitted sweaters, vests, pullovers, socks. Since it was considered in good taste to decorate interiors with embroidered details, people gladly accepted embroidered napkins, narrow tablecloths, pillowcases, framed paintings or macramé panels as gifts. Men, youths and boys would give carved or pyrographed shelves, panels, stands, album covers, dollhouse furniture, model airplanes, cars to those who collected them; an engraving on metal, a receiver assembled with their own hands (this was more likely in 1950s), a set of reels or tapes with the recipient's favourite songs recorded from the radio, etc., would have been appropriate gifts. For potted plant aficionados, beautiful plants would be grown from shoots or rare seeds found and brought. Children, especially the younger ones, drew pictures with congratulations. A handmade gift showed a special attitude, particular attention bestowed on the recipient. In the 1950s and 1960s, not only the holiday itself, but also active participation in its preparation and celebration, the opportunity to feel oneself a participant and one of the creators of the holiday, were greatly appreciated.

The holiday continued after 31 December. On 1 January, as a rule, people visited friends and more distant relatives or invited them to their place. The following weekend it was customary for the family to go for a walk in the city centre to admire the New Year tree. In the days from 27 December to 11 January, that is during school holidays,

children attended New Year parties in the Houses of Culture, circuses, New Year performances in theatres.

In the early 1960s, New Year parties, repeating the New Year Tree party in the Kremlin (it was an almost unattainable dream for children from the provinces to get there), gradually moved to the Palaces and Houses of Culture, theatres and clubs. Invitations to these events were distributed to parents at their work places (only to trade union members). A separate "ticket" with a seal was attached to such invitation, meaning that during the party the child would receive a gift. The gifts themselves – usually confectionery sets with one or two tangerines packed in beautiful coloured boxes or bags – were the main attraction of the holiday. Such gifts from trade unions at their fathers' workplaces were also received by children who did not go to the event at the House of Culture or a club (Kalko 2021). Most children attended such entertainments two to three times during the winter holidays and every time they received a gift from *Ded Moroz*; those gifts differed from one another and were a truly pleasant surprise. In the week after the New Year adults went, depending on their tastes, to the cinema, theatre, variety concerts or the circus more often than usual. In general, by the beginning of the 1960s, an integral form of New Year's celebration had developed in the USSR, especially in the cities of such republics as Belarus, Ukraine and Russia.

### **New Year celebrations in independent Ukraine. Changing lifestyles – changing traditions of celebration**

With the proclamation of Ukraine's independence in 1991, fundamental changes took place in the system of public holidays. Gradually, some Soviet holidays, the Day of the Soviet Constitution and the Day of the October Revolution in particular, were cancelled, new public holidays were adopted – the Day of Independence of Ukraine, Ukraine's Defenders Day, etc. The religious holidays of Christmas, Easter and Trinity Sunday became public holidays.

Since the end of the 1980s, much work has been done by cultural and educational public organizations, church organizations and structures, and since 1991 by the state as well, to revive Christmas as the main winter holiday. It should be noted, however, that although much has been done to turn Christmas into the main holiday of the transition from one annual cycle to another at the social and family level, the goal was only partially achieved. Instead of one holiday, people eagerly began to celebrate both – Christmas *and* New Year, as a single holiday of transition, often combining their traditions. Moreover, St. Nicholas Day on 19 December and the Old-Style New Year, which is celebrated on the night of 13 to 14 January, have been added to the cycle and thus the winter holiday time in Ukraine now covers the period from 19 December to 14 January. Still, the New Year in cities has retained its status of the main winter

holiday. Although there have been certain changes in its celebration, much has survived from previous customs, which already acquired the character of traditions.

A typical scenario for a modern New Year celebration includes elements of the Christmas holiday (decorating a Christmas tree, exchanging gifts), Soviet life (listening to the speeches of state leaders and to chimes), Oriental traditions (choosing a certain clothing according to the colour of the animal which is the patron of the year), as well as magical rites (burning a note with good wishes and drinking those ashes in champagne) (Bondarenko 2021). In general, the family character of the New Year celebration has been preserved. In a period of upheavals, the collapse of the familiar world, dramatic changes in the whole way of life, the New Year in the family became an oasis, albeit a short-lived one, of calmness, warmth, and hope. As before, people set up and decorated a New Year tree, but now more and more often an artificial one; they tried, if possible, to set the festive table, congratulate friends, make gifts, small perhaps, but gifts. With rising living standards, the New Year gradually returned to its former course, but with changes wrought by the times. Delicacies that were inaccessible because of the shortages in the Soviet period began to appear on the tables: ham, caviar, shrimps, fresh cucumbers, tomatoes, original salads, whiskey, French or Italian wines, various fruits, especially grapes (traditional tangerines, of course, are still there). Among the wealthy strata of the population, it became fashionable to put a suckling pig or turkey and French champagne on the New Year's table. Some of the dishes would be ordered or bought ready-made at supermarkets. Interestingly, store-bought cakes almost disappeared from the New Year tables; thanks to the availability of various ingredients, housewives became adept at making fantastic cakes and pastries.

If a family did not celebrate Christmas, *kutia*,<sup>2</sup> *uzvar*,<sup>3</sup> carp, poppy rolls, poppy cake with meringue – traditional Christmas dishes – could appear on the New Year table. It was no longer accepted to give homemade gifts, and previously inaccessible foreign goods began to be appreciated. One of the most coveted gifts was a cell phone, and later – a smartphone, fashionable gadgets, Lego or Barbie dolls for children. The tradition of watching TV on New Year's Eve has remained; fortunately, the program began to include musicals or concerts from various countries of the world. Natural spruce or pine is still highly valued as a Christmas tree; however, it became acceptable to replace it with an interesting composition of spruce or pine branches. Houses began to be decorated with New Year wreaths, lush colourful foil garlands, and an abundance of light garlands. From the New Year until mid-January,

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2 *Kutia* is a dish of boiled grains of wheat or barley with honey, crushed poppy seeds, nuts and raisins. It is a traditional ritual dish of the Christmas holidays in Ukraine.

3 *Uzvar* is a compote of dried fruits and berries. It is included, like *kutia*, among the 12 traditional ceremonial dishes that in Ukraine are put on the table on Christmas Eve.

compositions of garlands flashing with coloured lights are seen in the windows of many houses. The tradition of sending New Year's greetings was replaced first by e-mails, later – by text messages, New Year's greetings with pictures on social networks, via Viber or other services on smartphones and computers. It has become customary to send congratulations immediately after the New Year.

Additionally, the complex of New Year's traditions and rituals has been enriched with peculiarly reworked Chinese rituals for celebrating the New Year. Since the end of the 1980s, borrowings from the Chinese New Year rituals have started to penetrate into the celebrations in Ukraine: "Bright, exotic, funny, Chinese customs to a certain extent meet both the desire for a variety of festive rituals and the need for magical rites" (Matyukhina 2014: 312). After eight years of research, it is clear that Chinese horoscopes are quite firmly rooted in New Year's rituals, and almost all newspapers print them before the holidays. Calendars with images of the patron beast of the year in various forms are available and popular. People try (more or less seriously) to please the tastes of the patron beast in New Year outfits, in the menu of the festive table, and by depicting it on New Year toys, decorative figures, cups, plates, small panels, preferably Chinese or imitating Chinese, and in carnival costumes for children's New Year parties. Firecrackers became very popular – for a couple of minutes after the arrival of the New Year, cities, and often villages, literally thunder and glow from the mass of firecrackers and fireworks. Somehow no one is worried and does not care that the Chinese New Year comes in February. Elements of Chinese New Year rituals have now become part of both public and family celebrations of the New Year, especially in large cities of Ukraine. It should be noted that acculturation – the borrowing of samples, customs, actions originating from other cultures – in modern New Year rituals occurs most often in the field of magical rites and objects that should ensure a better year.

A completely new form of New Year celebration, which has spread only at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is a trip to a resort, to country hotels, to the mountains, abroad, especially to Egypt, Turkey, tropical countries or islands. In this case, the celebration of the New Year takes on an individual character. A person or a couple celebrates the New Year away from the large family, in a country and environment of their choice. Doing this, people do not move into a festive space-time in real space-time in which they always live, but geographically move to another world of celebration and relaxation; a joyful, carefree, blooming, almost fairytale one.

The custom of New Year festivities around a decorated New Year tree in the central square of the city was augmented with a new form of celebration: meeting the New Year near it. This custom came from Europe in the late 1990s. It runs almost the same throughout Europe, so there is no need to describe it in detail; it should only be noted that this type of celebration acts as a certain modification of folk festivities, largely formed and popularized by modern mass culture, corresponding to the nature of the consumer society.

Another public form of celebrating the New Year of the previous period, the “sabantuy” at work, smoothly transformed into corporate parties. Morning parties are still held in nurseries, kindergartens, and in the lower grades of primary schools. Decorating New Year trees, shop windows and interiors of shops, shopping centres and institutions have acquired a mixed New Year and Christmas character. The decor is widely represented by angels, Bethlehem stars, Santa Claus, deer, elegant wreaths, and... beasts, symbols of the New Year according to the Chinese calendar, Chinese New Year red lanterns, etc. Changes have taken place in timing of events: in the Soviet period, a decorated New Year tree was installed and garlands were lit on it before the New Year, now it is done on 19 December, that is on the Orthodox holiday of St. Nicholas. Instead of the figures of Ded Moroz, figures of St. Nicholas or Santa Claus in a reindeer sled are put. On 6 January, the Orthodox Christmas Eve, a nativity scene with the baby Jesus, the Virgin Mary and Joseph is staged.

### **Conclusions**

New Year remains a special holiday characterized by a high degree of ritualisation, a kind of magic. The perception of New Year's time as a special moment – a point of transition from one stage to another – is set and fixed in the public and individual consciousness by the entire system of culture. Since ancient times, the purpose of the traditions and rituals of winter holidays, which constitute the process of its celebration, has been to ensure the successful passage of this stressful time in the annual cycle. The rigidity of the ritual program should ensure the preservation and restoration of the harmony of the world, the integrity of its ties: “Society must overcome the crisis of the transition period as united as possible, according to the rules of behavior common to all” (Bayburin 1993: 10). The number of sign systems that are used in the ritual is noticeably increasing. Speech, even every word, clothing, ordinary everyday activities, events, the type of surrounding space – from city streets to the space of an apartment – everything acquires the status of symbolic objects, means of creating the future, real participation in the creation of the New Year.

The need to celebrate the time of transition while respecting established traditions and customs is perceived at the social and individual levels as a vital necessity. This is manifested through the preservation of the specific form of celebrating the New Year with its inherent rituals and customs. The urban culture of Ukraine in the end of 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century clearly displays the intertwining of the processes of preserving the previous ritual system and forming a new one, based on elements of previous systems and elements borrowed in the process of acculturation or emerging due to changed conditions.

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## Summary

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, that is during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, the New Year was – and it still remains – one of the main calendar holidays celebrated by the urban population in Ukraine. It can be said with confidence that it has become a focus of a variety of customs, traditions of its celebration, both borrowed from other holidays and newly formed, inherent only to this one holiday. The current paper deals with the changes in the traditions and rituals of celebrating the New Year in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century in Ukraine, and demonstrates that its status as the main winter calendar holiday pertaining to the transition from the old to the new annual cycle is still maintained. The specific pattern of the New Year celebration, i.e. the integral complex of customs, traditions and rituals characteristic of it, took shape in the 1950s–1960s and it has mostly survived to the present day. First of all, it retains the character of a family holiday and the decorated New Year tree, as well as abundant treats and gifts, are still its inherent attributes. At the same time, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the New Year celebrations were enhanced with new forms, customs, and rituals; peculiarly, the revised and rethought European and Chinese rituals and symbols were included in the celebration system. They have greatly enriched the magical component of the New Year holidays, intended to conjure up a better coming year. The New Year's Day maintains and develops its character as the main holiday of the period of transition from one calendar year to another. Such holidays have always been a part of the real life of society.

**Keywords:** celebration, New Year, Ukraine, transition period, acculturation, gift-giving culture, holiday customs

## Streszczenie

W drugiej połowie XX w. i w początkach XXI w., czyli w czasach władzy radzieckiej i w okresie postradzieckim, Nowy Rok był – i pozostaje do dziś – jednym z najważniejszych świąt kalendarzowych celebrowanych przez ludność miejską Ukrainy. Nie ulega wątpliwości, że liczne

i zróżnicowane obyczaje i tradycje świętowania, które dotyczą tego święta, są zarówno zapożyczone z obchodów innych świąt, jak nowo stworzone; wszystkie jednak są przypisane wyłącznie do niego. W artykule omówione są transformacje tradycji i rytuałów dotyczących świętowania Nowego Roku na Ukrainie w drugiej połowie XX w. i w początkach XXI w., które pokazują, że jego pozycja jako głównego zimowego święta kalendarzowego, związanego z przejściem od starego do nowego cyklu rocznego, pozostaje niezmienną. Wzorce świętowania Nowego Roku, tj. jednolity system specyficznych dla niego obyczajów, tradycji i rytuałów, wykształciły się w latach 50. i 60. XX w., które w większości nie uległy zmianie aż do dziś. Święto nadal zachowuje charakter rodzinny, a bogato udekorowana choinka noworoczna oraz obfitość smakołyków i prezentów pozostają jego atrybutami. Jednocześnie pod koniec XX w. w obchodach Nowego Roku pojawiły się nowe obyczaje i rytuały. Szczególnie interesujące jest wzbogacenie obchodów o symbole i rytuały europejskie i chińskie, choć w zmienionej i przereklamowanej formie, które mocno podkreślają magiczny komponent obchodów związany z życzeniami, aby nadchodzący rok był lepszy niż poprzedni. Nowy Rok utrzymuje swój charakter głównego święta przejścia od jednego roku kalendarzowego do następnego. Takie święta od zawsze są elementem autentycznego życia społeczności.

**Słowa kluczowe:** obchody, Nowy Rok, Ukraina, okres przejściowy, akulturacja, kultura dawania prezentów, obyczaje świąteczne

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