

RITUALS AND CUSTOMS AS CULTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH THE EYES OF RESEARCHERS AND PERFORMERS¹

On November 11–13, 2011, the Seventh Annual Conference of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore Working Group (SIEF WG) “The Ritual Year”² under the general title *Researchers and Performers Co-Designing Heritage* took place in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The conference was organised by the Slovene ethnologist **Jurij Fikfak** (the head of the Organising Committee) and **Laurent Sébastien Fournier** (France), and hosted by the Institute of Ethnology of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The SIEF conference was preceded by another conference dedicated to the 60th anniversary of the Institute of Ethnology, which was established on October 3, 1951. In this institute several outstanding scholars such as M. Matichetov and N. Kuret worked, and their ideas and publications serve as classical examples in the field of Slovenian ethnological studies. The institute is famous for its periodicals *Traditiones*, *Studia mythologica Slavica*, *Slovstvena folkloristika*, and series *Gradivo za narodopisje Slovencev*, *Opera ethnologica Slavica*, *Ethnologica dissertationes*, and *Glasovi*³.

As the annotation announces, the Seventh Conference of the SIEF WG “The Ritual Year” should have been focused on the triad of performances, performers and researchers, and aimed at shedding light on their interrelations and mutual influences. Nowadays the researchers of the tradition are not the only ones who collect and explore folk culture. Ethnological studies develop the form of mutual assistance. Thus the performers (musicians, folk “actors”, craftsmen, etc.) also study rituals and customs, the verbal, gesture and musical parts of the ritual year; even more – they read academic folklore and ethnological publications, and seek contacts with researchers and archival and museum workers. Collaboration helps considerably in exploring, performing and preserving the authentic traditional non-material and material (in terms of traditional crafts and ritual objects) heritage.

During the five sessions 30 papers were presented by scholars coming from Austria, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Scotland, Hungary, Estonia, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Greece, Russia, Sweden, Ukraine, Holland, Norway, Iceland, Czech Republic and the USA. Apart from the major topic, some other folklore and ethnology subjects were discussed, the range and the methodology of which varies. Theoretical presentations or those with dominating empirical data were mostly focused on the triad and certainly dealt with the national heritage. The scholars exchanged their routine in the field research and the ideas on how this experience can be used in the process of revival, re-thinking and re-inventing of the folk national traditional life.

The participants characterised the contemporary situation in this field in their countries with the overview of their previous experience and contacts with the informants in the field and on the stage as well. In the three lectures opening the conference **J. Fikfak** “Towards Researching Triad *Performer, Performance, Researcher*”, **L. S. Fournier** “Festive Revivals and Playful Performances as Cultural Heritage in Europe” and the president of the group “The Ritual Year” **Emily Lyle** (Scotland) “Seasonal Festivals as Props in an “as if” Ritual World” put the major questions, which were then alluded to in other papers. They discussed the language which the performers and the scholars speak when communicating, the quantity and the quality of the folk knowledge that

both “groups” possess, the interrelation between “as if” and “as is” world, etc. J. Fikfak raised the question as to what extent the scholars and the performers understand each other while discussing different versions of a ritual and its parts and afterwards while performing it. Working with the bearer of authentic knowledge, as Fikfak puts it, is the most significant experience for an ethnologist, a special type of participating in the folk life, which urges the scholar to be flexible and to be able to transform from the role of a bystander to that of a participant.

L. S. Fournier discussed the mechanisms that have been used in the reconstruction of folk cultural heritage in the sphere of the calendar ritual year since mid-1950s. Comparing the field data from a festival in Provence and in Scotland, the scholar showed the universal features that are evident in spite of the differences in the two traditions. The innovations are due to the commercialisation policy in tourism and marketing in the loci. The very notion of the cultural heritage causes problems for the performers who are trying to find the archaic authentic forms of the rituals that are very difficult to understand nowadays. Such rituals are more interesting and valuable for the professionals who are in charge of collecting and popularising them.

E. Lyle drew a parallel between the ritual world seen by the scholars as imagined in the world of children’s games, where everything seems to be “as if”, and also with the ritual world in the mind of their performers, who accept it “as it is”. Kendall Lewis Walton, an American philosopher and the author of the theory of imaginary and make-believe for art studies⁴ inspired E. Lyle to see the categories of time and space as the “props” for rituals.

Terry Gunnell (Iceland) in his paper “Types of Performance in Shetland Tradition” reviewed briefly several types of guising traditions at Halloween and New Year. The scholar illustrated and interpreted the shift from the local ritual values of the open door and hospitality towards the outside world (tourists, visitors and researchers), which urges implications of the international context.

Accent on the spectacularity of the rituals and the moment potentially interesting for the tourists is supported by the organizations that financially support the performers. This fact was discussed in several papers. **John Helsloot** (Holland) in his talk “Framing Heritage in the Context of Municipal Subvention. The Case of the Annual St. Nicholas Parade in the Netherlands” added another problem to be taken into account when speaking about the preservation of the authentic tradition – the political correctness. He discussed also the dichotomy of culture and economy and how it works on the level of municipal authorities.

The problems of the carnivals, guising and masking were the main topic of **Arunas Vaicekauskas**, who in his paper “The Carnival Structure, History and their Symbolic Interpretation: Ivrea Case (Italy)” followed the history of revitalization of the old Italian processions, which have been extremely popular among tourists after the 1970s. The classical structure of the carnival was adjusted to the needs of the modern consumerist society; this way the visitors turned into participants and performers, and the visual appeal became one of the major goals of the celebration. The invention of traditions, often with examples from the local history, is one of the important mechanisms for organising and structuring the procession.

The interaction between the local history and collective memory, folk religiosity and calendar were also investigated in other papers. **Evy Johanne Håland** (Norway-Greece)

in her presentation “A Festival Dedicated to the Anniversary of Vision of Agia (Saint) Pelagia” described a unique Greek practice of the veneration of St Pelagia known on the island of Tinos. St Pelagia was a nun who in her dream saw the place of the divine icon of the Mother of God. This find dated 1821–1823 is connected with the fight of the Greeks for independence. Thus the icon turned into the symbol of New Greece after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The celebration date of this icon is an important holiday in the ritual calendar of the Greeks on Tinos. Greek traditional performances were discussed in the talk “Transformation of the Modern Greek Calendar Customs Associated with Fire: Tradition and Contemporaneity” given by **Svetlana Sidneva** (Russia). She concentrated on the rituals with fire, such as walking on fire known in Northern Greece on the Sts Elena and Constantine Day, the burning of Judas and carnival fires *dzamala* (aimed at driving away evil spirits) in Ioannina. These archaic rituals generate new ones, demonstrating a mixture of different cultural traditions with antique and Christian roots. A scholar of the rituals can discover a reflection of new political events: instead of burning the figure of Judas in 2011, the figure of Angela Merkel was destroyed.

Tom McKean (Scotland) delivered a lecture “Stewardship and Evolving Fidelity in a Scottish Fire Festival”, which shed light on the maintenance and change in the ritual of “burning the Clavie”⁵, emphasising the special role of the main practitioner of the crew. The King of the Clavie is in charge of innovations or preserving the traditional scheme. The pressure of the local authorities to change the date from the “Old New Year” (January 11) to December 31 to meet the touristy needs did not work because of the will of “the King” to keep the ritual authentic.

Several speakers maintained in their papers that the direction of the interaction between the scholar and the performer in the sphere of arts could be changed: the investigator plays the role of the bearer of the traditional knowledge. **Nancy McEntire** (USA) “Participant-Observation in Ireland’s Pubs” and **David Stanley** (USA) “Structure and Etiquette in the Irish Traditional Music Session” analysed their fieldwork in Irish pubs with local musicians performing folk. The American scholars argued that the tradition is alive and is being passed on from one generation of musicians to another, mostly from the mother to the daughter and from the father to the son. The researchers-musicologists help a lot in these processes, since they possess archives, publish them on sites and keep collecting tunes from various Irish regions. There are some modern modifications in performance, such as a solo turning into a group singing, some new instruments being introduced, etc. The role of the head of the group is also very important – he is in charge of the repertoire, preserving the authentic tunes and communicating with professional musicologists.

Skaidre Urboniene (Lithuania) in her talk “Researcher – Performer Relations in Cross Crafting Rituals in Lithuania” explored two scenarios, within which a craftsman carves an individual (author’s) cross or makes a copy of an old sample. In both cases he would seek assistance from a professional ethnologist. If he cannot find any help, the craftsman turns into a researcher himself, going into the field and looking for traditional samples.

The role of the scholars in preserving the authentic guising traditions and making the masks was shown in the paper read by **Aida Rancane** (Latvia) “Revival of Some Local Masking Traditions in Latvia as the Result of Cooperation between Maskers and Researchers”. Ethnologists had to work hard to retrieve into folk processions the tra-

ditional masks, which at the beginning of the revival of the interest towards masking were mostly ignored.

Aado Lintrop (Estonia) in his intervention “The Great White Leader Visits the Northern Shaman” compared his first experience as part of the “Winds of the Milky Way” film team, which in 1977 conducted several expeditions into Northern Europe and Siberia, with another fieldwork 34 years after. The scholar argued that the filming of a ritual person, especially a shaman, requires from an explorer as an outer person good knowledge of the traditional worldview, customs, etiquette and folklore. An opposite direction of the categories “inner – outer” was depicted in her talk “The “Moral Codex” of the Researcher – Bearer of the Tradition” by **Tatiana Minniyakhmetova** (Russia–Austria). Being an Udmurt herself and investigating the Udmurtian folk culture made her confront several restrictions. The researcher listed a number of rules that a bearer of tradition as a scholar has to follow when communicating with performers.

Leon van Gulik (Holland) read a paper “Stage-Setting, Performing, and Pretending in the Cosmic Imaginarium. Ritual Space as a Playground for Researchers, Worshipers and their Aspirations”, in which he interpreted the performance of rituals and the correlation between real and imaginary worlds, partly using the theory of the psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott⁶. This paper alluded to the ideas of Emily Lyle, but was based on somewhat different data. The scholar argued that a neo-pagan ritual should be seen as an act of creativity, which, supported by faith and religious views make the real and the imaginary worlds cohere. The neo-pagan rituals as seen by performers and scholars formed the core of **Kamila Velkoborska**’s (Czech Republic) paper “Performers and Researchers in Neo-Pagan Settings”. She shared her field material collected during the sessions and rituals of the Czech neo-pagans. The attitudes towards the rituals are different for a practitioner and a scholar. Only trust and faith make the investigator to completely understand the essence of the magic performed by the believers.

A very different topic was investigated and shared by **Marlene Hugoson** (Sweden) in her talk “You are Cordially Invited to... The Distanced Participation of the 21st Century”. The author analysed a totally new type of celebration, made possible due to new technologies. On June 19, 2010, Swedish Crown Princess married Mr Daniel Westling and the wedding ceremony took place not only in Stockholm, but also in the groom’s home village Okelbo, where some 7 000 people assembled to celebrate together. Thus this event introduced a new way of attracting tourists and creating local history.

Brand new and already very popular Hungarian cultural festivals (National Assembly and *Kurultaj*) were investigated by **Istvan Povedak** (Hungary) in the paper “Reinvented-Invented-Copied-Transnational-Cultural” Festivals in Contemporary Hungary”. The title of the talk lists many of the mechanisms used to create and organise these national-patriotic festivals, and the author analysed them in detail, while adding such internal characteristics as anti-globalist, anti-communist and close-to-nature ideology. An unexpected turn in the discussed topics was suggested by **Irina Sedakova** (Russia). In her presentation “The Russian Ritual Year and Folklore through Tourist Advertising” she used the database of several hundreds of touristy spam letters and thus followed the main developments of the calendar celebrations on the changing tourism map of modern Russia.

Reforms in the pre-Christian Icelandic winter traditions, turning them into Christian calendar rites and combining with the St Michael ritual complex were the subject

of **Karen Bek-Pedersen's** (Scotland) talk "St Michael and the Winter Nights". **Arne Bugge Amundsen** (Norway) read a paper "Ritual Reform and Ritual Behaviour", in which the influence of the Lutheran reforms on funeral rites was scrutinized.

Two lectures were given on the ritual year in the educational system. **Mare Kõiva** and **Andres Kuperjanov** (Estonia) in their lecture "Back in the First Class! Rituals Connected with Finishing High School" showed some archaic models in modern school celebrations, such as games with water, masking, etc. **Jonathan Roper** (Estonia–Great Britain) in his talk "The Ritual Year of the University of Tartu" interpreted a very complicated scheme of the customs at the university, which reflects some cults and superstitions, professional interests and academic history.

In the papers of Slovenian ethnologists **Mateja Habinc** ("Folklorisation of the Carnival vs. Diminishing of St Roch's Day – a Case Study of Socialist Cultural Management") and **Marija Klobčar** ("Ritualism as a Reflection of Social Transformation and the Researcher's (Lack of) Power") the influence of the socio-cultural, political and ideological issues onto the local ritual year, processions, masks and folk costumes in the Slovenian villages and small cities was investigated.

Other theoretical and practical issues of correlations between a performer and a researcher as designated in the titles of the papers were discussed by **Kinga Gaspar** (Hungary) "Self-Reflexivity and "Casting" in Cultural Performances", **Mojca Kovačič** (Slovenia) "They Told Us That It Was the Right Thing! – Folk Music Performers' Views on Cultural Policy", **Oksana Mikitenko** (Ukraine) "On the Problem of Performance: Serbian Mourners", and **Katya Mihaylova** (Bulgaria) "The Wandering Blind Singer-Beggar and the Slavic Ritual Year".

As follows from the review of the papers, the triad in the course of the conference lost its three-part configuration, since it gained several other parameters and components, which have to be taken into account while analysing the folk cultural heritage. The activity of various organizations, first of all UNESCO, governmental and local authorities, commercial and touristy needs, and the problems of transmission of the knowledge and education – were touched upon in many papers. As the presenters showed, for the former socialist countries the specific question of drastic changes in the attitudes towards religion plays a significant role, and for all the countries the problems of globalisation, migration and multiculturalism are important. The scholars shared their experience of communicating with the performers in their own countries and depicted the new possibilities introduced by the new technologies.

During the general meetings of the members of the SIEF WG "The Ritual Year" several questions arose. Volume 4 of the series *The Ritual Year and Gender* (editor Jennifer Butler)⁷ in coordination with the "Cosmos" was presented. The edition contains 23 articles with the Editorial by Jennifer Butler and an article by Emily Lyle "A Farewell and a Welcome", who is taking farewell of being the editor of "Cosmos" and welcoming Mirjam Mencej, its new editor. The articles are follow-ups after the 4th conference of the group in Cork (2007).

Further plans of publications were discussed, and we are happy to announce that the plan has been fulfilled: volume 6 "The Inner and the Outer" has been published in Tartu (editor Mare Kõiva) with 22 academic articles and excellent design with colour illustrations⁸. Volume 7 of the series will be published in Slovenia under the editorship of Jurij Fikfak and Laurent S. Fournier.

The participants of the conference had the opportunity to go on an excursion and visit some places of archaeological, religious and ethnographic interest. The group enjoyed the so-called *martinovanje* – the celebration of St Martin's Day with a dinner in a vineyard cottage, listening to Slovenian folk songs and performing their own national songs in response.

The eighth conference of the SIEF WG "The Ritual Year" will be held in Plovdiv, Sofia, on June 26–29. The ninth conference will take place in Szeged (Hungary) and the tenth one in Innsbruck (Austria).

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Notes

- ¹ The Russian version of the review will be published in the journal "Antropologicheskoy Forum", Saint Petersburg, September, 2012.
- ² On the Sixth Conference of The Ritual Year WG see: Irina Sedakova. The Inner and the Outer in the Ritual Year: Traditions and Today. Folklore, Vol. 46, Tartu.
- ³ Information on this Institute see at: <http://isn.zrc-sazu.si/>.
- ⁴ Walton, Kendall Lewis. *Mimesis as Make-Believe: on the Foundations of Representational Arts*. Harvard University Press, 1990.
- ⁵ More on this see: <http://www.hogmanay.net/events/scotland/burghead>.
- ⁶ Winnicot, Donald Woods. *Playing and Reality*. London: Tavistock, 1971.
- ⁷ Butler, Jennifer (ed.). *Gender. The Ritual Year 4 & Cosmos*. Edinburgh, 2011.
- ⁸ Kõiva, Mare (ed.). *The Inner and the Outer. The Ritual Year 6*. Tartu, 2011.

ESTONIAN FOLKLORISTS' 7TH WINTER CONFERENCE

On February 2–3, 2012, the 7th folklorists' winter conference was held on Rogosi manor, Võru County, South Estonia. The conference was dedicated to the 75th jubilee of our colleague Mall Hiiemäe, who still pursues her research on the topics of traditional place knowledge, perceptions, attitudes and narratives.

Presentations inspired by nature and place folklore continued throughout two long working days. The place lore working group of the Estonian Folklore Archives – the organiser of the 2012 winter conference – involved the audience in the discussion about the meanings of tradition in the dialogue between Man and landscape.

One of the aspects that several papers were focused on was place names and their accompanying narratives. In her paper 'Landscape Elements in Place Name Creation'