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The Evolution of Valentine's Day in Socialist and Post-Socialist Times

Abstract. The paper outlines the changes in St. Valentine's Day celebrations in Estonia from 1980 to 2014. Valentine's Day, called also Friendship Day, reached Estonia in the late 1980s. At the time, the holiday in Western Europe and America celebrated love, engagement and marriage. However, to Estonia the holiday was introduced as a day to remember your close ones and friends. In the 1980s, the holiday spread among young people, with support from (pre)schools and teachers: cards and small gifts were prepared for friends and family.

The 21st century saw a breakthrough in media influence and commercialisation. Self-made gifts (cards, small objects) saw competition from international commercial gifts. Valentine's Day has also become a definite occasion for entertainment and food catering establishments with special offers, and romantic packages for couples. Today, Valentine's Day stands both as a day celebrating friendship as well as being in love, and accordingly the customs are varied.

Keywords: calendar customs, gifts, invention of tradition, St. Valentine's Day.

This article describes the introduction of a specific calendar celebration—Valentine's Day—in Estonia and the dynamics of its evolution across various political systems. Because Valentine's Day was simultaneously introduced in a number of European countries during the last decades of the 20th century, data on distant cultures available through close neighbours and scientific literature is used for comparison purposes. Celebration of Valentine's Day is new, and we can trace the invention of the traditions (Hobsbawm 1983). Essentially, Valentine's Day can be counted among a series a celebrations instituted in the late 19th century and in the 20th century, conveying a message of honouring family ties, contribution to the upbringing of children, and simple, traditional values. Other celebrations of its kind are Mother's Day, Father's Day, the newly established

Grandparents Day (observed in some countries only), and International Women's Day, aim to develop solidarity or promote a certain profession among the public, such as World Theatre Day, Journalism Day or Fisherman's Day, etc. The occupation holidays gained popularity in the second half of the 20th century. A celebration may be geared toward raising awareness about ecological issues or the need to change one's attitude to the environment (Earth Day, World Water Day, etc.) or calling attention to chronic diseases, diseases difficult to diagnose, people living in extreme poverty, special historical events or pets, such as World Cat Day. This list may go on and on, but at the same time, it provides a context for Valentine's Day.

It is noteworthy that similar celebrations are neither part of agricultural calendars, based on cycles of farming and harvesting, nor various liturgical calendars. Also, such celebrations are institutionalised to varying degrees—while some are observed as national holidays, others are not. Today, the observance of celebrations is upheld by cultural workers, interest groups and NGO movements, the commercial sector, and families. These celebrations are those of a modernised society, highlighting the human dimension and human values, and Valentine's Day should be considered against this backdrop.

The fact that Valentine's Day has two equally widespread translations into Estonian: *sõbrapäev*, 'day of friends', and *valentinipäev* 'Valentine's Day' refers to two different approaches and ways of celebration.

Carola Ekrem (1995) studied the evolution of Valentine's Day in the Finnish cultural space and predicted that the northern self-restraint does not allow the establishment of a day dedicated to the overflowing of emotions. Estonia seemed to fit well within that interpretation. However, Ekrem also noted that in the case of commercialisation, the structure of the holiday will undergo change. On the basis of Ekrem's assumptions, we will examine how the celebration, first introduced in the late socialist period and carried over to the post-socialist era, was adapted for its new surroundings and changed accordingly.

Short history

The Christian Catholic Church recognizes at least three different St. Valentines who died a martyr's death on February 14. Most often,

the holiday is attributed to a Roman Christian priest who secretly performed marriages for soldiers in defiance of the orders of Emperor Claudius II. According to legend, before he was executed on Feb 14, 270 AD, he sent a letter to his beloved signed "Your Valentine". This is the phrase used on contemporary Valentine's Day cards. In 496, pope Gelasius named Feb 14 Valentine's Day and Valentine the patron saint of lovers. However, in 1969 pope Paul VI excluded the holiday from the church calendar.

Other claims state that the holiday originates from a pagan fertility festival, celebrated on February 14 in honour of Juno, goddess of marriage and women. It was customary that women write love letters and then cast them into an urn. Men randomly pulled one out and tried to track down the writer. Some sources indicate that the tradition was one of the more recent celebrations observed in the territory of the Roman Empire in the 4th and 5th century. It came to be a popular celebration that became more widely known by the 8th century (Catholic Encyclopaedia 2012; Oruch 1981: 537).

The origins of the day are also attributed to the start of the mating period of birds and bees, which, according to medieval beliefs, fell on February 14. According to research by Jack B. Oruch, establishment of the tradition of Valentine's Day was affected in the late 14th century by the poet Chaucer, who wrote a poem with three friends in which the celebration is associated with the mating period of birds and bees. From there stems a more recent tradition that did not gain wider popularity. It is known that King Charles VI used to celebrate the day with wine, music and poetry recitals in the company of 400 men from his court (Oruch 1981). A historical review indicates that the popularity of Valentine's Day has had its ups and downs, it has been observed sporadically, and it came to be among the most loved celebrations—primarily in the US, and promoted by the social climate of the time and the media—only in the 20th century.

Invention of the tradition

Valentine's Day arrived in Estonia in the late 1980s from Finland. Valentine's Day was celebrated in educational institutions through the initiative of teachers, who relied on information gleaned from

the media: the articles spoke about the background of the holiday and the importance of celebrating it (see, e.g. Hiimäe 1999, Dogatko 2004). Personal touches were added as and where possible; hand-made effort was an important aspect of cards and gifts. Children in preschool and primary school made cards mostly for their mothers, while it was only in lower secondary school that they started to make and give them to friends, too. Also, children were encouraged to give homemade gifts (as opposed to purchased ones). In general, they prepared such gifts in preschool or school classes, sometimes at home, using materials at hand. These presents were age-appropriate keepsakes with a sweet emotional charge. The words of the young singer Jana Kask uttered in 2011 appropriately illustrate the prevalence of homemade gifts:

"To celebrate Valentine's Day on the 14th of February, I always prepare homemade gifts for my friends. Sometimes it is not easy, because my friends are so different from each other. Some like the colour pink and Chihuahuas, while others dig Black Sabbath and black leather pants, but I think I'll manage. I will certainly make something with my own hands, for example, drawings" (Kask 2011).

The holiday was introduced as a day to remember friends and loved ones. This was quite different from the Western European and American tradition, which regarded the day as one dedicated to romantic involvement.

The post-socialist period: people we do not consider quite adult

In the early 21st century, high-schoolers started to take over the organisation of Valentine's Day activities (Dogatko 2004; Kõiva, Vesik, Särg 2004). Schools used stereotypical elements: post boxes for friendship letters and cards, hearts drawn or painted on the face, romantic decoration of classrooms and, in some cases, wearing dress clothes to school. Aspects of the celebration such as its improvisational nature and being targeted to cementing friendships are clearly emphasised.

In 2001, students of Audentes Private Gymnasium wore red outfits or traditional symbols of Valentine's Day, for example. All students

wore heart-shaped numbers on their chest. Everyone could use a big red mailbox to forward greetings to their friends. At the end of each school day, the mailbox was opened and notes were delivered to their receivers. Valentine's Day traditions and customs were discussed in English classes, and card-making competitions were held between classes, etc. In 2002, a pancake race was held at the same school, and participants as well as those in the audience had a great opportunity to experience the joy of participation and cheer for their favourites (Kõiva, Vesik, Särg 2004).

A local newspaper described the atmosphere in Jõgeva Gymnasium.

"Valentine's Day on the 14th of February in our school was the same as every year: happy students clad in red, lively hustle and bustle around mailboxes, and the sending of cards. Students from 8th to 12th grade participated in a FRIEND GAME: participants draw the name of a person whom they had to surprise with a gift and hugs within three days" (Kõiva, Vesik, Särg 2004).

The adults in their personal sphere

Through the 1990s, the celebration of Valentine's Day spread among middle-aged and older people. It was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate close relationships and lacked any political (or even religious) connotations with gifts: flowers, small handmade gifts, well-wishes, dedicated greeting cards, and later e-cards as well. A contributing factor to this success may have been the fact that in 1992 Estonia officially excluded March 8 from the list of national holidays, and this day no longer being work holiday led to a decline in the festive celebration of Women's Day at home. Also, in the 1980s March 8 acquired the aura of a "red" holiday. Valentine's Day was conveniently available to fulfil an empty niche. Today, about 20 % of adults in Estonia have accepted Valentine's Day as a regular holiday (Postimees 2011).

The post-socialist period: transformation into a commercially institutionalised holiday

Commercial retail enterprises quickly seized onto the idea of having another holiday with dedicated memorabilia—cards, heart-shaped pillows, roses, candy, etc. Commercial products became competi-

tion for handmade products. Entertainment and catering companies also saw an opportunity, developing dedicated evening programmes. As a conclusion, today it is almost compulsory for romantically involved couples to enjoy an evening out that night.

The local commercial sector immediately seized the opportunity to make money off the 14th of February celebrations. Special Valentine's Day articles were put into production: supermarket shelves became quickly filled with locally made confectionary specially customised for the celebration, as well as chocolates and smaller thematic gifts, heart-shaped and fittingly decorated cakes and pies. In 2003, the media announced that a whopping 20.6 tons of special confectionary was put on the market for Valentine's Day (Postimees 2003).

In the 21st century, commercialisation brought about powerful changes when domestic products were forced to compete with the selection of goods provided by international chains. First came globally mass-produced red-and-pink thematic greeting cards. This new wave of cards did not represent a message of celebrating friendship but one of American love culture. The assortment of internationally marketed gifts expanded. Although homemade presents are still popular, commercially marketed items have begun to gain ground over handcrafted ones, especially among adults.

Commerce has also tried to make the most of the "friend" aspect of the holiday, offering "prices for friends", announcing that this month is "friendship month, come see!" etc. These offers last throughout February and are not limited to Feb 14th. There are a great number of examples for campaigns which share only an arbitrary connection with Valentine's Day as a day of celebrating friendship, relying on a logical shift in product offering. For example, Tartu University Press advertised friendship month—buy 2 books, get a free bag; special offers for underwear or cosmetics have appeared: women's underwear—20 % off, 14 % off cosmetic products; and dry-cleaning promotional offers have been advertised (bring three items in for dry-cleaning, get one cleaned for free). The semantic scope of the word 'friend' has been broadened, because it is first and foremost friendly prices that are advertised, for example, a friendship month offer: cheap laptops and computers, or in another example, take

a friend with you for a free body content analysis. Some campaigns include the entire months of February and March in their promotional period, adding to the above list birthday parties at affordable prices—25% off in February and March.

Valentine's Day is important for entertainment venues: pubs and restaurant throw style parties, the dress code for thematic events is red, or a special programme is offered. For example, attending a retro party at the Lühikesed Mehed inn in Kadrina village, Pala rural municipality, in 2011. It was advertised that the best dance music from the last century would be played, and guests were expected to follow a certain dress code (red). In the 21st century, the celebration culture that started off with a couple of thematic evenings in the capital and larger towns spread all over Estonia.

As for a more personalised approach, there were Valentine's Day balls held sporadically on the initiative of students in some gymnasiums, featuring general elements such as mailboxes, friendship notes and romantic messages, ballroom dances, formal clothing, a vote for the hottest couple, and everything else associated with the celebration. Such balls are popular only among a certain group of students because these events are seen as competing with proms typically held at the end of the school year. Also, it is considered highly impractical to go to great expenses for clothing that is rarely worn and is not included in the generally accepted trend (Valentinipäeva ball 2011).

Gender differences

All age groups and both genders are potential targets for celebrating the romantic-cum-friendship holiday. Although women often initiate the holiday's observance and men accept it as something they need to do, there is no uniformity in that attitude.

In 2009, the popular web portal Tarbija24 conducted a survey to find out how its readers celebrate Valentine's Day (Tarbija 2009). A third of the respondents were male and survey results indicated that approximately half of the respondents celebrate Valentine's Day and the rest do not. Even if it is perceived as a nice tradition involving surprise gifts and as a holiday worth celebrating, a significant share of respondents chooses not to observe it personally.

The comparison of social media comments by men and women reveals that in many families making gifts and surprises is a question of agreement, and both sides do it. Next follow some examples from the web portal Buduuar (2011):

"I'm so glad that Valentine's Day trinkets are on display at shopping centres—that way it is quite impossible to let it slip your mind. Otherwise, it would be quite embarrassing. I do not think much of the celebration, but it is always nice to do something with my girlfriend." Martin (28)

"I'm waiting for it! Not one Valentine's Day has gone uncelebrated by me and my partner. We outdo each other with surprises and that's incredibly sweet!" Rain (32)

"The celebration itself is nice, but I cannot stand the idea of making bookings, running around shopping centres and, to top it all off, wearing a suit in the evening simply because it's some holiday. That's why I always try to surprise my wife with something nice at home!" Lauri (36)

"This day is marked with red in the calendar — my girlfriend did it as early as the beginning of January! I'm very excited to see how I will be surprised that evening! Granted, there will be gift for her as well!" Margo (25)

The fact that women are more active in celebrating Valentine's Day can be explained with their desire to show off their relationship and draw attention to how special it is. However, their motives and solutions are different. The following example is typical in a number of respects, incorporating elements of making something yourself, taking initiative and conveying other relevant messages.

"I usually agree with my husband about the price of our gifts, or we prepare surprises for each other, trying not to give it away :D That's what we do on all holidays. Granted, a box of sweets and flowers would be nice (for those who rarely get any), but I'd prefer more special and impressive surprises (it doesn't necessarily need to be expensive). For our engagement anniversary and for the birthday of my husband (on the same day), I prepared the following surprise.

I bought red candles (in jars) and created a large heart shape out of them behind our house. A friend of mine was there to help me and when I was ready, I had her tell my husband that he should step out to the balcony... Then, I wished him happy anniversary and told him how much I love him. xD It is not always MEN who should do something... If you want a special experience, do it yourself... The feeling you get out of it is so much better compared to being surprised yourself with something ... xD" Furba.

The above examples illustrate Valentine's Day celebrations in a well-functioning relationship between people living together. Still, it is very common to give friends or loved ones symbolic gifts or candles, or take them out for a coffee, or to the theatre, or a concert to celebrate close human relationships in a more festive atmosphere.

Symbols and cards with poems— continuation of folklore tradition

February being one of the coldest months of the year in Estonia, the tradition of giving flowers is not widespread because low temperatures may easily damage flowers. Conversely, in China, where Valentine's Day has been popularised over the course of the last 15 years by the younger members of the middle class, the custom of giving flowers is viewed as one upholding traditional values (Zavoretti 2013).

Historically, the roots of the idea of Valentine's Day cards are thought to reach back to Charles, Duke of Orleans, who wrote romantic poems to his wife when he was imprisoned in 1415. From the 16th century onward, Valentine's cards written with coloured ink on coloured paper were hugely popular. A number of motifs and techniques used at the time have survived to our day, such as cutting out shapes from paper and writing poems on them, or the first letter in each line of a stanza making up the loved one's name, or replacing some words with images.

In the early 19th century, black-and-white printed cards started to circulate and became very popular because explicitly expressing one's feelings was disapproved of by the moral sentiment of the era. Gradually, Valentine's Day cards evolved into true masterpieces, decorated with silk, flowers, gold leaf, or a printed or drawn Cupid, who became the symbol of Valentine's Day. Valentine's Day cards are an

important commercial article: for example, according to the website Howstuffworks (1998—2016), there are over 2,000 card printing companies in the US.

In Estonia, children generally give cards with short congratulation messages or simple greetings. However, adults typically resort to popular poems or aphorisms. Another interesting task for researchers is analysing Estonian-language cards with simple poetic forms and rhymes. It is often aphorisms and poems from the wealth of folklore heritage that are used:

"To cry, / you need someone to cry with. / To laugh, / you need someone to be happy with. / To be happy, you need a friend you can count on. / Nice day of friends!" or

"Real friends are like mornings. / You can't have them all day / but they'll be there when you wake up. / Today, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow... / Forever!" or

"Don't forget a friend, / Don't forget me, Don't forget a friend / Who loves you.—Happy Friends' Day!" or

"Day of Friends! / Friendship is the spark of heart, it does not burn in fire." (Postimees 2011).

Valentine's Day cards have emerged as a new field of application for aphorisms and poems. In Estonia, Valentine's Day cards do not feature all the usual symbols of romance, but only some of them, such as hearts and red roses representing strong feelings. At the same time, many card designs feature cute animals: a teddy bear with flowers or hearts, cute kittens or puppies sitting together or hugging each other. Images of people and couples in love are surprisingly rare. So it can be said that symbols and messages featured on cards mostly stand for friendship and traditional values and, to a lesser extent, for romantic love and courtship. The latter values are promoted by internationally marketed cards, the entertainment industry, and romantic films.

In Estonia, the role of media, including social media, should not be ignored: as with all other celebrations, people are encouraged to prepare homemade cards (the Valentine's Day card competition of

2011) and gifts. For a few years, a thematic singing competition (Valentinipäeva laulukonkurss 2011) was held in the capital of Estonia—similar projects help to come up with new, creative solutions.

Conclusions

Integration of new calendar holidays is a lengthy process that is likely to fail unless it receives support from institutional establishments as well as the media. In Estonia, the media support the regular celebration of St. John's Day (Midsummer), Christmas, New Year's Eve, Valentine's Day, Father's Day, and Mother's Day, stressing the importance of celebrating these holidays in the family or intimate circle.

Valentine's Day in the late socialist period began as a day to celebrate friendship and was observed in preschools (nursery schools) and schools. Homemade cards represent a modern means of validating the parent-child relationship. Valentine's Day has had a definite place in the institutional school calendar for over 30 years, being rooted in the post-socialist cultural space as an occasion for exchanging gifts, cementing friendships and having a good time.

According to survey results, a mere 20 % of adults celebrate Valentine's Day at home. In the context of the decline of calendar celebrations, such a process refers to the fact that the introduction of Valentine's Day has been a successful one.

The celebration successfully replaces International Women's Day on March 8, which lost its official status as a national holiday after Estonia regained independence in 1991 and after its appeal started to diminish as early as in the 1980s (Kõiva 2013). In terms of specific messages, Valentine's Day was an ideal substitute for the multifunctional Women's Day but was at the same time aimed at a larger target group: friends from all age groups, children showing appreciation to their parents, and loved ones—rather than being single-sex oriented, it seeks to take the position of a celebration cementing the relationship between friends or significant others. Valentine's Day has taken over certain elements of other adjacent holidays, including those of making cards (a characteristic feature of celebrating Mother's Day, later Women's Day) and giving flowers to mothers. Valentine's Day has become embedded in the post-socialist cultural

space as Friendship Day as well as a celebration of (eternal) love, creating opportunities for and requiring festivities as well as showing appreciation for one's friends and/or partners. While for some school students it is a part of the study process, for others the celebration requires self-initiated action. The celebration is also upheld by the commercial sector, international media culture and the entertainment industry. In addition to stereotypical forms of celebration, there are individual, creative solutions and various approaches. Celebrating Valentine's Day in the private space offers more creative freedom but copies what is seen in movies, etc. to a certain extent.

Celebrations of Valentine's Day in the late socialist era and the following period are not polarised. We can observe a complex of various trends emerging.

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