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A Festival For Locals or For Tourists? The Ritual Year in Three Southeastern Lithuanian Settlements

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Abstract: This article deals with the ritual year in the famous historical settlements of southeastern Lithuania – Trakai, Kernavė, and Medininkai. My aim is to show how newly created commercial holidays are perceived by local populations and to show the locations of these holidays in their 'personal ritual year'. In order to achieve this goal I have analysed the current state (non-working days), parish church and newly created local 'historical' festivals, analysing their duration, seasonality and how they are appreciated by local populations. The main source is ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2017 and 2019 within the framework of the Lithuanian Institute of History's Leisure, Celebrations and Rituals in the Vicinity of Vilnius: Social and Cultural Aspects programme. Online ethnographic sources were also used. In the article I come to the conclusion that the formation of new holidays is a rather complex process. Even the mobilisation of cultural heritage, the introduction of a commercial character, the longer duration of the holiday, and the right season cannot guarantee that the local people will really appreciate a holiday if it is not linked to a specific date with valuable content. Such holidays are St. John's Day, as a symbol of resistance to Soviet ideology, and the day of the coronation of the first Lithuanian king, i.e. State Day.

Keywords: local population, cultural heritage, commercialisation, ritual year

Introduction

According to the research of archaeologist Arvydas Molonaitis, who analysed local people's attitudes towards hillforts in Lithuania, despite the fact that the majority of his respondents mention the hillfort as a witness of the past, they first of all

view it through emotional and family prisms. Though residents cannot say much about 'their' hillfort, it is still a strong centre of attraction, a refuge where one can spend some time on one's own, relax, admire the view, take a breath, dream about something. Hillforts are places where children, grandchildren and guests are taken and shown around. As shown by the answers of his respondents, most residents are satisfied with hillfort neighbourhoods, which have become indispensable parts of their lives (Malonaitis 2019: 137). This is one of the rare glimpses of cultural heritage through the eyes of locals rather than tourists.

However, cultural heritage can be closely related to tourism and commercialisation. As John Helsloot noticed, in the 1970s new rituals and celebrations were devised on a mass scale in Western Europe. Their organisers sought to 'revive' and legitimise these celebrations. They usually formed a locally suitable product from the ingredients of folklore, tradition and history. In these kinds of festival, commerce, no less than other interest groups, tends to turn people's emotions towards specific rituals (Helsloot 2008: 98–99). In Lithuania, this process has been delayed for several decades. However, after Lithuania joined the European Union, we can already see those processes that took place in Europe being expressed in this country. As Reinhard Johler mentioned, in many parts of Europe, we can observe a massive mobilisation of "cultural heritage". The "local" became a museum object of interest, regional foodstuffs are extremely popular and trade fairs, farmers markets, regional festivals and customs are being revitalised in many places all over Europe (Johler 2002: 12). I have no doubt (and I have confirmed this during fieldwork) that cultural heritage is important to local people as a source of economic well-being. Many local people are involved in one way or another in serving tourists and organising public events. It changes the daily life of the local population. Leisure and entertainment infrastructure is being formed at their place of residence. But questions arise: how are people's festive lives changing, and what is their attitude towards these new local 'historical' holidays? And how do they value these holidays in comparison with the religious holidays of their parish and the state holidays?

This article deals with the ritual year in the famous historical settlements of southeastern Lithuania – Trakai, Kernavė, and Medininkai. My aim is to show how newly created commercial festivals are perceived by local populations and to show the place of these holidays in their 'personal ritual year'. It is very important to show this process when comparing holidays in settlements in different administrative affiliations and of different sizes. To achieve this goal, in this article I shall analyse current state holidays, parish church holidays and newly created local 'historical' festivities, analysing their duration, seasonality and how they are appreciated by local populations.

The main source for understanding the festivals celebrated in these areas is ethnographic fieldwork. My ethnographic fieldwork was conducted during short

one-day field trips between 2017 and 2019 within the framework of the Lithuanian Institute of History's Leisure, Celebrations and Rituals in the Vicinity of Vilnius: Social and Cultural Aspects programme. Through semi-structured interviews respondents were asked questions about the holidays they celebrated with friends[1] in the current year. The researched areas can be defined as a multicultural space. My respondents were mainly Lithuanians and Poles (15 and 4 respectively; all were Roman Catholic) as well as two Karaims (Karaite religion), one Russian (Orthodox), and one Byelorussian (Roman Catholic). Among the respondents, women dominated (18 females, 5 males); the age of the respondents ranged from 19 to 93, with most aged between 40 and 60. Online sources were also used, which became a form of supplementary material for field research on the examined locations. In order to obtain information on the most important public 'historical' festivals promoted by local authorities in these areas, I focused on online information from 2019, the last year before the Covid-19 pandemic (during which all festivals in Lithuania were banned).

Briefly about the studied areas

The history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's important political centres has led these areas to fulfil a different destiny today. The former capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (before 1323), Trakai, is a city and the administrative centre of Trakai District Municipality (5,426 inhabitants, majority Lithuanian). In 2020, it was the Cultural Capital of Lithuania. At the same time, it is most famous for its 15th-century island castle. Trakai is also famous for its Karaite cultural heritage (dating back to the late 14th century); its beautiful natural surroundings also attract tourists. According to Lina Leparskienė, "The people of Trakai were quite poor, but their lives improved significantly in the 1960s and 1970s. As soon as the rebuilt island castle became a museum, tourists flocked to the area. Construction of restaurants and apartment buildings began in the city, as did the paving of old and new streets" (Leparskienė, Baltėnas 2019: 27). Trakai is the only case among the areas studied where tourism began to develop during the years of Soviet occupation. Trakai Castle was reconstructed in 1961 and was the largest state investment in Lithuanian culture during the occupation (Rindzevičiūtė 2010: 181–203). In the last decade, Trakai has been the only area among those studied that has experienced population growth.



Fig. 1. Trakai, 2021. Photo: Ž. Šaknys.

Kernavė is the former administrative centre of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It was a large city in the 12th to 14th centuries and is often referred to as the former capital of Lithuania. Today, it is a small town (238 inhabitants, the majority of whom are Lithuanian). In 1938, it was described as a small church town with dozens of farms, three shops, a post office and a police station. Only a majestic church and a modern two-storey brick elementary school adorn the poor village (Lučūnas, Grigonienė 2021: 6). The State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė was established in 1989. The present cultural reserve, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004, contains complex archaeological layers from prehistoric times, and the entire area is used only for cultural tourism and scientific research (Kernavė Archaeological Site 2004). The majority of the town's population is involved in tourism and scientific activity. Kernavė is also home to the Museum of History and Archaeology, which dates back to the 1930s and was completely reconstructed and modernised in 2012 (Lučūnas, Grigonienė 2021: 7).



Fig. 2. Kernavė hillforts, 2021. Photo: Ž. Šaknys. 2021.

Medininkai village (413 inhabitants, mainly Poles Polish nationality) is famous for Medininkai Castle, the largest in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It was considered a town from the 14th to 17th century. Later, Medininkai fell into disrepair and has recently been reduced to the size of a village. In addition to the castle, there is a high school, a school for border guards, a library, and a post office. Since 2004, the castle has belonged to the Trakai History Museum, which adapted it for tourist purposes and restored the northeastern tower of the castle, the so-called *donjon* (dungeon). Between 2010 and 2012, the castle was further restored and turned into a museum. Educational activities are conducted there, as well as many events that attract tourists. Medininkai, like Kernavė, changes a lot during the holidays, when the number of visitors is many times higher than the local population.

These three places are small settlements close to Vilnius (within a radius of 30–35 km to the north, east, and west). However, all three are rich in tourist attractions and experience an increase in traffic during festivals and holidays. In addition to traditional, religious and ethnic festivals, newly created festivals are also celebrated, such as the Medieval Festival (Medininkai, Trakai), the International Festival of Experimental Archaeology, known as the Days of Live Archaeology in Kernavė, the Trakai Summer city festival, the Festival of Old Crafts (Medininkai, Trakai) and others (Šaknys 2023a: 48–51).



Fig. 3. Fragment of the Medininkai Castle, 2018. Photo: Ž. Šaknys.

State, church, and local newly created 'historical' festivities

Current state holidays (non-working days) in Lithuania can be divided into two categories. The first are traditional holidays, including Christmas Eve and the first and second days of Christmas (25 and 26 December), New Year's Day, Easter Sunday and Easter Monday, St. John's Day (24 June), Assumption Day (15 August), and All Saints' Day (1 November). Modern public holidays have no connection with religion and are a relatively recent concept, dating back at least 150 years. The oldest is International Labour Day (1 May, first celebrated in 1886), as well as three national holidays: State Restoration Day (16 February, celebrated since 1919), Restoration of Independence Day (11 March, since 1991) and State Day (6 July, since 1990); state holidays also include Mother's Day and Father's Day (always on a Sunday, both celebrated as state holidays in Lithuania since 1990) (Šaknys 2023b: 256–268).

Church holidays are specific parish holidays that are unique to one locality and distinguish it from others. These are defined as specific local holidays that bring together not only the people of the area, but also their relatives and friends, or complete strangers. According to Orvar Löfgren, the emergence of modern leisure is historically linked to religious tourism (Löfgren 1999). In the words of ethnologist Juozas Kudirka, in the 19th and early 20th centuries church holidays were not only

celebrated by the parish, but were also a traditional annual occasion for people to come together (Kudirka 1996: 18). The church holiday was a good opportunity for young people from several villages to get together; for girls it was often the only opportunity to visit another village or town and have fun (Šaknys 2001: 25). The Holidays and Recreation Laws of 1925 and 1930 state that "...holidays and days of rest are also local parish holidays, but only in the places where they are celebrated" (Švenčių ir poilsio įstatymas 1925; Švenčių ir poilsio įstatymas 1930). During the Soviet occupation, public celebration of religious festivals was restricted, with these holidays moved to weekends (Streikus 2002; Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2016: 9–34). In recent years, church holidays have usually been moved to a Sunday if they do not coincide with a state holiday, as local parish church holidays are working days.

Church holidays are usually held several times a year; the most important are the feasts of the saints after whom a particular church is named. In Kernavė, for example, the church of Our Lady of the Scapular is celebrated on three feast days: Our Lady of the Scapular (16 July), St. Roch (16 August), and St. George (23 April). All three holidays are moved to the following Sunday. In Medininkai, we have the Church of the Holy Trinity and St. Casimir, with the feast of St. Casimir (4 March), the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Angels (2 August), the transfer of the relics of St. Casimir (26 August), St. Francis of Assisi (4 October), and Pentecost (11 May to 12 June). This last holiday is celebrated at the traditional time, as the first day of the church holiday always falls on a Sunday. In Trakai, at the Basilica of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Day of Our Lady of Trakai, the patron saint of Lithuania, is celebrated for eight days, from the 1st to the 8th of September. This is the most important feast in Trakai, characterised by a large number of believers and numerous events. The holiday is characterised exclusively by religious events, with pilgrims receiving the most attention. Every year, on 15 August, during the celebration of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, and on 8 September, during the celebration of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, religious holidays are held in the church of New Trakai. These holidays are often called Trakiniai. Pilgrimage processions are organised from the Gates of Dawn, Aušros vartai, in Vilnius to Trakai. The tradition of such journeys, which was restricted and disappeared during the Soviet era, was revived after Lithuania regained its independence. Today, we can also see changes in the way the Nativity of the Virgin Mary is celebrated[2]. If we compare the religious holidays in Trakai with those in other areas, we can highlight more public events related to the services offered in this city. For example, during the feast of Our Lady of Trakai, the Festival of Coloured Smiles is held, during which the town community, pilgrims, and guests socialise to the sound of music. Creative workshops are organised for children and everyone feasts on so-called 'military porridge' and cakes baked by parishioners (Semionovė 2020: 371). On the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, in addition to solemn services, a

procession is organised through the town in honour of the painted image of Our Lady of Trakai – the patron saint of Lithuania, famous for her miraculous powers, a *Kopūstinis kermošius* (cabbage market) is held, and there are many events (traditional historical games, handicraft demonstrations) and performances by artistic folklore groups (Semionovė 2020: 371). This event attracts great interest from tourists from all over Lithuania and abroad. Meanwhile, Orthodox and Karaite believers in the city are known to celebrate their holidays more within the boundaries of the religious community.

However, we should distinguish the new, non-religious, local holidays celebrated in certain towns and villages. As the population of the areas surveyed is not the same and the number of holidays can vary, we used online sources to highlight the most frequently mentioned holidays in 2019.

In 2019, the main focus of the media was the celebration of Trakai Summer 2019. The celebration lasted three days, from 31 May to 2 June. There were events for children, an amateur art festival, a wind orchestra festival, an international tourism fair, a yacht regatta, an international children's football tournament, a fair, a concert with the castle as a backdrop, and a festival of national minorities with Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, Jewish, Karaite, Tatar, Roma, Greek, German and Armenian song and dance ensembles (Trakai kvapą gniaužiančiu... 2019). According to the fieldwork, the festival was primarily aimed at tourists. Therefore, my interviewees couldn't say anything about it. The festival is named after the Summer Opening Festival, a popular festival genre from the Soviet era. However, its history as a city festival began in the 1990s. That was the year when Lithuania was finally free of atheist propaganda, and it was possible to celebrate traditional holidays.

The town of Kernavė, based on online sources, still celebrates two of its most important festivals, which are related to the state calendar and were well known to my respondents, many of whom were involved in their organisation. Rasos (St. John's Day) is worth distinguishing here. According to the promotional information for 2019, during the festival, bonfires are lit, wreaths are woven and floated on local lakes, people search for a mythical fern flower, and they sail, dance and sing. The event ends in the morning with people greeting the rising sun (Joninės Kernavėje 2019). The next festival – Live Archaeology Days in Kernavė – lasted three days, from 5 to 7 July 2019. It is a festival of experimental archaeology and historical reconstruction, a celebration of archaic crafts, warfare, and music that has been bringing like-minded people from different places in Lithuania and Europe together for 20 years (Kernavė Archaeological Site 2019).

Rasos in Kernavė can be called not only a traditional but also a historical holiday. This holiday has been celebrated by academic youth since 1967 as a reconstruction of pre-Christian customs. In an effort to avoid the attention of the Soviet authorities, the first festival was organised in 1967 in the ancient Lithuanian capital of

Kernavė by the Society of Friends of India, which was founded in Vilnius and included a number of philology professors and students from Vilnius University. In reality, the festival should be associated with the Ramuva Club of Vilnius Regional Ethnographers, which was founded only in 1969. Three festivals (in 1967, 1968 and 1969) were held on a semi-legal basis. In 1969, the highest government institutions banned the festival. As early as 1970, participants in the Rasos festival in Kernavė were evicted on the pretext that the festival could not be held in the reserve. In KGB documents, the Rasos festival in Kernavė was called a "nationalist rally", and the organisation of the festival was considered anti-Soviet activity. However, despite all the obstacles, bans and persecution, the Rasos festival continued to be celebrated in Kernavė and other Lithuanian towns (Ramanauskaitė 2004: 55–56; Matulevičienė 2007: 64–69; Šidiškis 2008: 56–63; Šaknys 2014: 141). It is true, as the people of Kernavė said, that during the Soviet era the locals did not take part in these celebrations, rather it was a celebration by and for visiting academic youth. The locals were attracted to St. John's Day when it started to be celebrated legally and the holiday took on a commercial character.

Mindaugas' Coronation Day, on the other hand, was 'invented' as a holiday only in 1990. And the Days of Live Archaeology in Kernavė have only been celebrated since 1999.

The two-day Medieval Festival is held at Medininkai castle. In 2019, it was the main festival in that town. It is organised by the Trakai Museum, of which the castle is a branch. According to Alvyga Zmejevskienė, director of the Trakai Museum, the Medieval Festival was born and held in the castle on the Trakai peninsula for 21 years. In 2019, however, the castle was reconstructed and the festival moved to Medininkai. This festival is also held in June. The festival features not only medieval warfare, weapons demonstrations and knight's tournaments, but also handicrafts, medieval dances, and music.

In the words of Pierre Nora, history is a reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present (Nora 1989: 8). The question therefore arises as to whether these celebrations, from the point of view of the local population, can be called a *lieu de mémoire*, a memory space?

The duration of the holidays

Traditionally, the most important holidays in Lithuania lasted several days. In eastern Lithuania, at the beginning of the 20th century, the three most important annual holidays – Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost – were celebrated for four days each. The Holidays and Recreation Laws of 1925 and 1930 stipulated that two days should be set aside for the celebration of these holidays. Good Friday and Holy

Saturday before Easter, and Christmas Eve were also designated non-working days (Švenčių ir poilsio įstatymas 1925; Švenčių ir poilsio įstatymas 1930). During the Soviet occupation, Labour Day was celebrated on two days (1 and 2 May), as was the anniversary of the October Revolution (7 and 8 November). Thus, we see that several days of rest (non-working days) were reserved for more important holidays. In recent years, Christmas and Easter have been celebrated on two days each in Lithuania, and Christmas Eve is also considered a day off work or school (Šaknys 2015:103–107).

The feasts of the Trakai Catholic Church and the accompanying secular events vary in their duration. The Day of Our Lady of Trakai lasts the longest, up to eight days, and the Feast of the Assumption in this town and its accompanying events (in 2019) lasted four days. From the local festivals we analysed, we can see that the Trakai Summer festival and Live Archaeology Days in Kernavė were celebrated for three days, the Medieval Festival in Medininkai for two days, and only Rasos (St. John's Day) was celebrated for one day. However, this holiday also began in Kernavė on 23 June at 12 noon with the opening of the craft, folk art, and culinary heritage fair and ended on 24 June at 4.30 am with greeting the rising sun and washing in dew on the hills. The duration of these events thus corresponded to the duration of the most important holidays. On the other hand, this duration was important for tourists and for the organisation of commercial aspects. But is this an important indicator of the popularity of the holiday among the local population?

Holiday and season

Another question is whether the seasonality of the newly created 'local holiday' is important for tourists and locals. Due to Lithuania's climate, most tourists arrive in the summer. For example, in 2019, 37.4% of tourists who came to Lithuania that year arrived between June and August. Thus, summer is the best time to organise festivals and attract tourists (Turizmo statistika). The visitor statistics of the Trakai Tourism Information Centre also show very different tourist flows in different months. In February 2019, 3,950 tourists were served, while in August this was 24,095 (Trakų turizmo informacijos centro lankytojų statistika)[3].

The first attempt to commercialise holidays was made during the Lithuanian national revival at the end of the 19th century. Martynas Jankus and other public figures from Lithuania Minor initiated the revival of certain Lithuanian customs in 1884. Midsummer on Rambynas Hill was celebrated with a magnificent bonfire and an eloquent programme that included not only pagan priests and priestesses, but also speeches exhorting the audience to hold on to their national aspirations, not to be broken in spirit, and to retain their Lithuanian identity. The festival became a tradition. In 1896, Lithuanian activists bought part of the hill. The formerly private

land became an area for Lithuanian public events in the Kingdom of Prussia. The purchase of the rest of the hill for Lithuanian needs was planned. However, the need to create a Lithuanian identity was accompanied by the desire to raise funds for Lithuanian organisations. There were plans to build a restaurant on the reclaimed land, which would bring profit to the Lithuanian associations (Šaknys 2014: 138).

However, the seasonality of the holiday does not always guarantee its popularity. Previous analysis of the dynamics of the development of national holidays shows that four holidays were considered the most important between 1919 and 1940: the Day of the Restoration of the State of Lithuania (16 February) 1919–1923, the Day of the Constituent Assembly of Lithuania (15 May) 1924–1928, Žolinė (Assumption, 15 August) in 1929, and the Day of the Coronation of Vytautas the Great (8 September) 1930–1939. These holidays acquired special significance at different times. The most important state holiday chosen by the government was called National Day. Each change in National Day was justified by the fact that the climatic conditions and the (heavy) workload of the people on the farms made it more convenient for the general public to celebrate the holiday. However, the timing of a particular festival in spring or summer did not guarantee its longevity; the most important holiday today is still the celebration on 16 February (Šaknys 2018: 129–154), even though it is in winter, during the coldest month in Lithuania.

If we compare the seasonality of state holidays, parish church holidays, and the most important new local holidays from 2019, we notice some differences. While state holidays are celebrated in all seasons, church holidays are concentrated in the warmer seasons and local holidays are celebrated only in summer. Undoubtedly, the cold season is more suitable for family celebrations, while parish church holidays are associated with pilgrimages and public entertainment, and are therefore more suitable for the warm period. Local festivities, which began a few decades ago, were combined with the interests of tourists and the best summer months were chosen for these events. However, only the local holidays in Kernavė have been adapted to the Lithuanian ritual year (state holidays). Of the church holidays, only the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Trakai coincided with a state holiday. But how do the locals perceive these holidays?

Season	Local festivals	Church holidays	State holidays
Winter			Christmas Eve 24 Dec. Christmas 25–26 Dec. New Year's Day 1 Jan. State Restoration Day 16 Feb.
Spring		St. Casimir in Medininkai 4 Mar. St. George in Kernavė 23 Apr.	Restoration of Independence Day 11 Mar. Easter 22–23 Apr. Labour Day 1 May. Mothers' Day 5 May.
Summer	Trakai Summer 31 May–2 Jun. Medieval Festival in Medininkai 15–16 Jun. Rasos (St. John's Day) in Kernavė 24 Jun. Live Archaeology Days in Kernavė 5–7 Jul.	Pentecost in Medininkai 9 Jun. (in 2019) Our Lady of the Scapular in Kernavė 16 Jul. Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Angels in Medininkai 02 Aug. Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Trakai 15 Aug. (public events 15–18 Aug.) St. Roch in Kernavė 16 Aug. Transfer of St. Casimir's Relics in Medininkai 26 Aug.	Fathers' Day 06 Jun. St. John's Day 24 Jun. State Day 07 Jun. Assumption Day 15 Aug.
Autumn		Holiday of Our Lady of Trakai 1–8 Sep. St. Francis of Assisi in Medininkai 4 Oct.	All Saints' Day 1 Nov.

Figure 4. Seasonality of local festivals, church and state holidays in 2019.

Most popular holiday among friends

To determine the popularity of the holiday among local people, we chose a social community of friends that is not constrained by place of residence or neighbourhood, and friendship is not a biological but a culturally determined social category. It is formed by free choice, common interests and the need to spend some leisure time together. Respondents were asked which holidays they celebrated with their friends, in the hope that their answers would reveal the most popular holidays for the local population. When I asked which holidays were most important for

the residents of these areas to get together with their friends, they pointed to the following.

Most popular celebrations with friends	First	Second	Third
Trakai	New Year	Easter	**St. John's Day**
Kernavė	**St. John's Day**	Christmas	**State Day** and Valentine's Day
Medininkai	Christmas and **St. John's Day**		Easter and International Women's Day

Figure 5. Popularity of holidays and festivals

As you can see, state holidays are the most popular holidays among friends. Only in Kernavė did the holidays singled out by the media as the main town/village (local) holiday coincide with those celebrated by my respondents with friends. St John's Day is popular in all localities, but State Day, as one of the most popular holidays, was only mentioned in Kernavė, where the Live Archaeology Days are celebrated at the same time[4]. So, we can agree that cultural traditions, being a part of cultural heritage, are significant factors that shape local, regional, national, and European identities (Kockel et al. 2020: 2).

The mood of the holiday reminds us of the Church holidays of the past. According to a 75-year-old woman, relatives and friends came to visit her, and she gave them a tour. A 64-year-old woman said that she spent this holiday on the castle mound with family members, friends and former colleagues. The status of St. John's Day as the most celebrated name day in Lithuania is also an important factor explaining the popularity of St. John's Day. I have been celebrating my name day since I was 18, said a 63-year-old man. "With friends, we go to the mound, then we gather at my place to celebrate, because my name is Jonas (John). Friends used to give me a tie, a shirt on this occasion, now they usually give flowers." On the other hand, some respondents worked on State Day: "I am working on that day, there is no time to celebrate, the Live Archaeology Days are the main working days for me," said a 39-year-old respondent.

In all localities, Christmas and Easter were singled out, as well as the popular New Year holiday. The second day of Christmas and Easter are traditionally designated for meeting friends. For example, a 37-year-old respondent from Trakai stated that he celebrates the first day of these holidays with his family. On the second day, he goes to his friends, and sometimes they light a fire. A 55-year-old Russian Orthodox believer from Medininkai celebrates these holidays with friends according to the Gregorian (Catholic and official) and Julian (Orthodox) calendars. For

one respondent from Kernavė, it was important to meet with his friends on State Restoration Day (16 February).

Other calendar festivals, which are working days, are also celebrated with friends. In the village of Medininkai, International Women's Day is popular, which, from 1965 to 1990 was considered an official holiday in Soviet Lithuania. As people of all ages were interviewed, Valentine's Day was mentioned quite often, which has been celebrated in Lithuania only since 1993. It is more of a youth festival. For example, the youngest respondent, a 19-year-old from Medininkai, meets her friends and exchanges gifts on this day. In this area, according to this submitter, informal holidays such as the beginning and end of summer (which were created during the Soviet era to replace religious holidays) are also celebrated among friends, as well as the beginning of the school year, 1 September.

Only two respondents mentioned that they met their friends during Church holidays, on the feast day of St. Roch (16 August), and one respondent mentioned the Feast of Our Lady of the Scapular (16 July) in Kernavė and the Assumption (15 August) in Trakai, although festive events lasted for as long as four days in 2019 in Trakai. It is interesting that some inhabitants of Trakai do not celebrate the Assumption at all. A Lithuanian man, born in 1955, said that only his grandparents used to celebrate this holiday. Meanwhile, a Polish nationality woman born in 1970 in Trakai did not celebrate this holiday, although she jokingly admitted that she was a botanist by profession (Assumption in Lithuanian is *Žolinė*, which can be translated as 'grass day') but did not celebrate this 'professional' holiday. With the decline of religiosity and the increasing number of mass secular events in the town, Church holidays have lost their former social value, and the secular entertainment associated with the holiday has become more of a tourist attraction.

Ethnic holidays also bring friends together in a multicultural environment. A Karaite respondent from Trakai mentioned the ethnoconfessional spring festival Tymbyl chydžy, which brings Karaim friends together (celebrated for a week at a similar time to Easter)[5]. However, friends of other faiths are not forgotten. For example, according to a 47-year-old Polish Catholic woman from Trakai, Karaims treat their friends to Easter meals, and their co-workers sometimes replace them at work during this holiday.

Conclusion

So, to summarise my article, I would like to point out that the creation of new holidays is a rather complex process. Even the introduction of a commercial character, a longer duration and the right season cannot guarantee that the locals will really appreciate the holiday if it is not linked to a specific date with valuable content. Examples are St. John's Day as a symbol of resistance against Soviet ideology, and the

day of the coronation of the first Lithuanian king – State Day. Kernavė, the smallest of the areas studied, attracts both tourists and locals to the town's celebrations, who rate them as one of the most important holidays to celebrate with friends. Comparing state, parish church, and local commercial holidays and festivals we can say that state holidays are the most important for communities of friends. In general, the most important holidays for friends are St. John's Day, Christmas and Easter (including the second days of both holidays), New Year, and in some cases also festivals such as International Women's Day and, in Kernavė, Valentine's Day. Thus, the ritual year of friends includes both traditional holidays and those created in recent decades. Religious holidays, which in the past were of great importance in facilitating communication between local people, are losing their former significance due to the decline in religiosity. An example of this is the fact that the Feast of the Assumption in Trakai is not celebrated by the local population, although it is also a state holiday.

In conclusion, we see two different ritual years in the areas studied. One has a clear seasonal character and is aligned with the tourist season. Some local people associate these holidays with work rather than days off. The second is based on the most popular holidays for local people, the opportunity to meet with loved ones. In most cases this category has nothing to do with the tourist season, with the exception of holidays celebrated in Kernavė.

Notes

[1] The concept of friendship is taken to mean social relations between people of the same gender, leaving aside any intimate relationships between people of the same or different genders (Šaknys 2019: 298).

[2] In 2022 this day was mentioned as the birthday of the city of Trakai (Trakai was first mentioned in 1322) and the celebration acquired not only a religious but also a secular and more commercial character.

[3] In 2019 4,849 visitors were served in January, 3,950 in February, 5,235 in March, 9,333 in April, 13,501 in May, 19,882 in June, 20,453 in July, 14,788 in September, 7,826 in October, 5,013 in November and 9,130 in December.

[4] For example, according to my research data, in Vilnius, State Day was not celebrated by more than half of my respondents, and only International Labour Day and Assumption were less popular (Šaknys 2019: 256).

[5] For more about this holiday, see Šaknys 2015: 125.

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