

The Cultural and Social Peculiarities of Present-Day Holidays in the Republic of Slovak

Aliyeva Sarvinoz Abbosjon qizi

Fergana State University, EFL teacher

Annotation: In Slovak ethnology, the study of current holidays has become a unique tool for examining society since 2010. The research team of the Institute of Ethnology SAS first concentrated on the empirical study of the particular settings of the term "holiday" in Slovakia and mapped the variety of events that people currently refer to as holidays. The word "holiday" refers to a break in everyday routine, a moment that is annually remembered, or a time that is marked by customary or ritualistic behaviors and has a certain symbolic meaning. Our study revealed that holidays currently serve a range of practical purposes in addition to identity, ritual, and spiritual purposes that are significant for individuals or groups and are frequently investigated by ethnology. The focus of ethnology has changed to society as a whole and on how holidays reflect society as a whole as a result of the finding of the numerous overlaps between this phenomena and the ongoing social processes. It was possible to obtain a basis for a specific testimony about the contemporary social processes in the public sphere through an analysis of empirical materials from the observation and ethnographic description of the events in the public space during holidays, the study of holiday legislation, the activities of various institutions, the production of printed and electronic media, business, and advertising, which create the current content and ways of celebrating holidays. The relationships between holidays and politics, holidays and the economy, and holidays and citizens are the focus of this study in this setting.

Keywords: public holiday, present-day holidays, commemorative day, celebration of holidays, holiday, festivity, social functions of holidays, ritualisation, ritual practice, ritualised behaviour, social functions of holidays, national holiday, laws on holidays/holiday legislation, Slovakia.

INTRODUCTION

The study of present-day holidays has become an original tool for the study of society in Slovak ethnology in the second decade of the 21st century. There were two motives for elaborating on this research direction. The first one arose directly from the internal cognitional needs of the discipline, which has dynamically developed over the past decades towards anthropology and has focused on the present social phenomena. The second motive was the growing recurrent calls by journalists on ethnologists to make the public familiar, via the mass media, with the traditional, yet no longer known, picture of present-day holidays or reconstruct archaic elements in their current forms. They asked for an explanation of the links between various imported and new holidays as well as domestic cultural tradition. The need to understand the processes raised a challenge for ethnologists to study present-day holidays which were previously insufficiently reflected, and obtain an authentic, realistic view of the content, functions and development trends of this broad and dynamic phenomenon. After discovering the manifold overlaps of the holidays' phenomenon with current social processes, the focus has shifted to society as such and on its reflection in the mirror of holidays. In the first stage of their work, they intensively mapped the range of situations which people commemorate on a cyclical basis today, on which occasions they choose nondaily – ritual or ritualised – behaviour, and designate them as holidays. They subsequently concentrated on their formal and organisational framework and on the study of each holiday, an analysis of their contents, the ways of celebrating them and the factors of their acceptance.¹ This paper describes the context and the working methods, and also

¹ The ethnological study of present-day holidays within the Institute of Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava was covered by two consecutive basic research projects with the grant support by VEGA: What Is a Holiday in the 21st Century in

presents some of the results achieved throughout a six-year period that has lapsed since the launch of this research project.

THE TERM HOLIDAY

During the mapping of the range of cyclically recurring festivities, feasts and important moments each year, most commonly designated as holidays [sviatky in Slovak], their list turned out to be relatively broad. It ranges from those which are created, preserved, sanctioned and distributed by institutions, such as the State and the Church, through holidays which are considered by territorial, social and professional communities, subcultures and groups as an important part of their way of lives, up to the level of family. The life-cycle of holidays and the ways of celebrating them has been maintained for decades or even hundreds of years, with either preserved or updated elements. At the same time, new opportunities considered as holidays have been created and experienced. For people, they still represent an opportunity to recurrently break with their daily routine and live a certain period of time in an exceptional atmosphere. This guarantees relative immutability of holidays and their stable place in culture.

Through the empirical study of the specific daily contexts of the term holiday in the 21st century, ethnology takes advantage of the opportunity of obtaining an insight into society, and seeks to describe and get familiar with it. Based on the results of public discourse analysis in Slovakia today, the term holiday is used to designate an opportunity or a cyclically recurrent period of time of various duration, during which something important or exceptional happens or is remembered, specific and to a certain extent normative ways of behaviour are assumed or invoked, and which are ascribed symbolic meanings in various intensity. The practice of designating certain moments as holidays, which presumes the same active categorisation function of this term in certain social spaces, can be observed as culturally conditioned, and therefore worthy of ethnological reflection. Nevertheless, holidays are not the subject of exact definition and terminological analysis, nor are they treated as a precisely defined analytical term. What is studied is their specific content and context as social phenomena (Popelková, 2012). Holiday means an interruption of the daily routine, a moment or period accompanied by normative or ritual acts along with an ascribed symbolic meaning. In the analysis of ethnographic data, it is used to designate the framework for carrying out rituals and a communication tool for the dissemination of messages with socially relevant content. It could also be said that the ethnological perspective is not directed through society “towards” holiday and does not end there, but vice versa, it is the study of society “through” holidays. It is not the intention to explain holidays by society, but society by holidays.

HOLIDAY AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON

The research probes confirmed the general assumptions according to which the development of the holiday phenomenon and the way of celebrating them at the end of the 20th century was largely affected by the social and economic transition processes that began with the fall of the Communist regime in 1989, including the spread of communication channels and technical means. The interpretation attempts to explain the transformations of the past forms of holidays, and the observation of their course in real time undermined the stereotypical picture of them as an invariable complex with primarily spiritual functions. They also revealed their organic links to several spheres of society – politics, advertising, business, etc. The idea of conceptualising holidays as a scientific tool for the research of society also built on the assumption that they serve different social groups for the instrumentalisation of their plans, the achievement of their objectives, the presentation of their opinions and dissemination of ideologies, etc. The ways of experiencing holidays are individual or group-binding on one hand, and flexible and upgradable in terms of content and form on the other. Thanks to this fact, holidays, due to their

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essence, can fulfil a wide range of social roles and social functions and be used as a practical tool by the most diverse social actors. The research showed that apart from the identification, ritual and spiritual functions which are important to an individual or communities, as commonly observed by ethnology, holidays also fulfil a number of practical roles today. The symbolic content and ritual practice successfully disguise the actual plan of their actors, whether it is the communication of an important message about the social order, the distribution of power, or the pursuit of ideological and economic objectives. These can be revealed and the functioning of small or larger social organisms can be understood by observing specific circumstances, the social environment or the context of events related to holidays, their content and course

The broadly perceived public discourse on holidays became accepted as a space for the research of the holiday phenomenon, understood here as a framework, sum and way of using the terms, evaluations and opinions on holidays, i.e. what and how people talk about in connection with holidays. This opened a number of opportunities for their study and analysis. One of them was the observation of the range of meanings and ways of experiencing occasions which are considered exceptional and important in Slovakia at present. At the level of each holiday, we observed the actual functions of holidays in society, what symbolic and practical roles they play, what activities are related to preserving them, why there are differences in their popularity, who produces the forms of experiencing them, or who guarantees their preservation. The opportunity arose to obtain knowledge about the ways of communicating factual or symbolic information in culture, about the mechanisms of collective and individual identifications and distributions of power, and about the existence and forms of manifestations of affiliations and hierarchies within society. By means of the research on holidays, we sought to get familiar with the mechanisms of the effects of economic, political and other factors that influence the social processes in the present-day society in Slovakia.

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² Umaralieva, M. (2021). Some challenges in encouraging independent learning. *Academic research in educational sciences*, 2(4), 1878-1882.

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METHODS

The research team of ethnologists resolved to empirically study holidays, conceived as a social phenomenon, by describing their authentic manifestations and by analysing the space and conditions in which holidays develop at present. During holidays, they observed the course of events in the public space and systematically mapped the content of articles in printed media, texts and speeches disseminated via advertising, TV, radio and internet communication. The research resulted in the gathering and processing of authentic data in the form of concise ethnographic descriptions of the field observation and research photo documentation of various events through extensive bodies of data from website research, thematic media desk research, records of parliamentary sessions, internet discussions and blogs, and findings from quantitative representative research. Once the range was mapped, we tried to define the different categories of holidays (state, religious, national, political, etc.) as a tool to study society directly within the spheres in which they primarily work or which are considered to be such (e.g. religious holidays in relation to church or national holidays in relation to the State's policy). When talking about the ways of celebrating them, however, some assumed levels (for example, the attendance of religious rituals during the Easter holiday) did not show to be dominant, or links to many other social fields emerged (e.g. relaxation activities, tourism). It was found, that whatever approach we apply, the result is always groups with unclear and permeable limits, and shows that the attempt to strictly divide holidays into categories and study them in this manner is impractical and significantly narrows the perspective. It would be more effective to respect this apparent opacity, adapt the data collection and the asking of questions to the specific selected theoretical framework, and analyse the gathered specific material at all levels of the socially relevant context revealed by the research.

RESULTS

The analysis, therefore, included representatives of certain groups of holidays with the predominance of common features, e.g. Christmas as one of the holidays in Slovakia which is deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, or Halloween as a representative of new holidays introduced in Slovakia at the end of the 20th century. The observation of the attributes and content of holidays as ways of celebrating them resulted in their analysis as occasions during which people choose ritualised behaviour. We mapped the processes which stand "behind" the empirically captured and ethnographically described phenomenon, as well as the causes and practical reasons that influence the actors and their motivation and behaviour. As the nature of the studied phenomenon suggests, the case studies of the different holidays, while being connected to the most diverse elements of the social reality, revealed a large variety of new relationships on the basis of the analysis of empirical data, gradually leading to a more thorough elaboration on the multitude of levels of this phenomenon. Even though issues related to the specific empirical material often overlapped, the studied holidays can be presented as a part of several basic research segments. The first group is formed by holidays sanctioned by law. In the Slovak Republic, this refers to dates enacted by law in one of the following three categories: national holidays, public holidays (both of them are non-working days) and commemorative days (working days). By studying this group of holidays, we sought to discover the mechanisms used by the State for the production and distribution of information about the symbolic meaning of enacted dates which are important from the State's perspective. We focused on the process of creation and functioning of the legislation, on holidays as the subject of politics, and the functions of economic arguments in the political debate on their enactment or cancellation. We also tried to find out the degree of effectiveness of the State's efforts to spread the specific ideas about the enacted holidays among Slovak citizens. The studied topics included the following issues: political interpretation of the symbolic content of holidays, the ritual practice

of state representatives and the different political camps, the ways of commemorating historic events embedded in holidays, as well as parallel or antagonistic pictures of the past. In this segment, the case studies focused on the national holiday Anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising (29 August) and on one from the group of commemorative days – the Holocaust and Racial Violence Remembrance Day (9 September). International Women’s Day, which is not enacted by law in Slovakia, was subject to a detailed analysis in a similar context. Another national holiday – Labour Day (1 May) – was analysed as part of the study on the acceptance of various types of holidays (Popelková, 2014a; Vrzgulová, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2014a, 2017; Zajonc, 2016). The other group – holidays rooted in Christian religion – was represented in the research sample by Christmas. This term designates almost a month-long period before and after the Christian holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. Some days of this period are legislated as public holidays. The research studied the main form and content elements of the present-day Christmas holiday by mapping the activities of the municipal sphere and civic associations, churches, advertising, business and many other institutions, seeking to learn about their social-integration, spiritual or economic functions, the ambivalence of traditional and new ways of experiencing the different stages of the Christmas holiday by people, and what meaning they attribute to Christmas (Beňušková, 2014). The differentiated category, represented within the research corpus by urban holidays, Marian pilgrimages and student feasts, was the subject of the research on the processes of creation and preservation of group affiliation of professional (miners, wine-growers), territorial (municipality, town, neighbourhood), confessional (Catholic believers) and age (teenagers) groups. The analysis of the observations and descriptions of holidays and feasts as part of local development and integration strategies of urban and rural settlements focused on the relationship between the different forms of celebrating holidays and their social functions. Holidays were studied within this particular category (Bahna, 2016; Beňušková, 2013, 2016; Popelková, 2013, 2014a, 2016; Popelková, Zajonc, 2013). St. Valentine’s Day and Halloween represent in the research sample a group of holidays which are not formally embedded in Slovakia and, as a stereotype, are usually designated as new or foreign. However, they are generally well-known, and each year result in a wide range of various ritual activities on one hand, and marketing and advertising activities on the other. The confrontation of their elements with various domestic holidays and the analysis of the attributes, ideas, artefacts, the ways of celebrating them and related activities aim to explain their social functions and the degree of their acceptance or rejection³.

ANALYSIS

The data analysis and interpretation applied several theoretical models and concepts. We mainly used the theory of the epidemiology of representations by anthropologist Dan Sperber (1996) and his concept of cultural representations as ideas, expressions, versions, images or explanations of some cultural phenomena which are common to the members of a certain group. The degree of effectiveness of state instruments manifested in the dissemination of certain representations of holidays by the State can be put in relation with the fact that its citizens face the same sources of their distribution and communication networks (in this case, for example, in the form of mass media in Slovakia) (Sperber, 1996: 26, 32 ff.; Ferencová, 2009: 336; Ferencová, Nosková, 2009: 23).

Another methodological inspiration was the possibility of dealing with holidays using the concept of ritual, which is one of the ways of looking at the organisation of the world in social sciences. Given the intention of studying contemporary society through various contents of the holiday phenomenon, i.e. the context in which holidays exist today, our attention did not focus on ritual as such. The interest was also in phenomena which are studied in social sciences as rituals and acts commonly designated as rituals. The opinions of the religious studies scholar Catherine

³ Umaraliev, M. M. (2014). THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING. In *ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОЕ ЛИНГВООБРАЗОВАНИЕ* (pp. 433-436).

Bell (2009) served as a basis in this case. She elaborated on the criticism of the reflections on ritual as a universal category or a sign of human behaviour. With her proposal to define ritual practices as a situational strategic activity, which can only be understood in relation to other activities, she turned her attention to the surroundings of ritual, i.e. on its specific social context and the wider relationships between activities and social life. Instead of an attempt to discover a special logic and symbolic structure from the ethnographic descriptions of familiar genres of ritual practices, regarded as traditional rituals (transition, calendar, initiation, etc.), she proposed the study of those activities in modern societies which are not ritual in the traditional sense of the word, but are undoubtedly considered to have qualities similar to rituals. When we talk about rituals as a form of acting, Catherine Bell suggests using the term ritualisation. She defines it as a process, a flexible and strategic way of acting, typical for a number of diverse routine activities (Bell, 2009: 138 ff.). The concept of ritualisation became attractive for the interpretation of the discourse related to present-day holidays because of its flexibility when used in the analysis of human acts in experiencing moments designated as holidays.

The analysis of the present-day holiday discourse in Slovakia was also based on the elements of the approaches to the study of rituals in European ethnology. Some of them were further elaborated by Klaus Roth in 2008. Roth decided to use the vague and ambiguous social science concept of daily life, in line with Norbert Elias's criticism of 1978, in the ideologically least-burdened opposition of daily vs. festive. Roth managed to grasp the study of the process of adaptation of holidays and rituals by the population of European countries under the Communist regime in a very specific way and with ethnographically graspable economic and social characteristics of life (Roth, 2008: 14–18, 23 ff.). The traditional theoretical concepts of transition rituals (“rite de passage”) by Arnold van Gennep (1997) and Victor Turner (2004) were used in the analysis of the festivities related to important stages of students' lives and to the period of reaching adulthood. Relevant to the study of the segment of the social discourse related to national holidays are the points presented by Pierre Bourdieu in his essay *State Nobility* (1998: 87–89), in particular the analysis of the symbolic effectiveness of the state power embedded in the cognitive and evaluation structures of its citizens. On the other hand, the degree of their effectiveness or normativeness can be verified by an analysis of the ways citizens spend their national holidays. The sociological reflections by Jan Keller (2003: 77 ff.) also offered a tool in this regard, interpreting the symbolical logic of people's holiday behaviour in modern societies as an expression of collective ignorance of national holidays. The specific type of depiction of the changing, highly complex and hard to define reality used by politics can be observed and analysed from the perspective of the concept of the political representation of reality. Politics place at the forefront some elements of the non-transparent complex of social relationships, while shifting others to the margin or leaving them unnoticed. It is able not only to confer the assumed contours on the changing subject, but to form it, as well. This type of representation aims to trace the essence of an object. Its quality is measured by the degree it convinces others, whether it reaches a social effect or brings social recognition to its producers (Schwarz, 1994).

DISCUSSION

In the final part of this paper, I will seek to present the potential and cognitive possibilities of the described ethnological approach to holidays as an instrument for the study of society. The results of the analysis of holidays from the perspective of legislation and politics in the Slovak Republic in the 21st century can be modelled as an intersection of three imaginary sets: the sphere of politics represented by state institutions, political parties and churches; the sphere of the economy; and the sphere of citizens or the community of Slovak inhabitants. Holidays are what connects these spheres in this working model and through what they communicate. Therefore, I will outline the mechanisms of this communication, as well as the picture of present-day Slovakia as it appears in the mirror of holidays.

Holidays and politics Several years after the political upheaval in November 1989, which was followed by a complicated process of post-socialist transition in Czecho-Slovakia, the building of the liberal economy and a

multi-party political system, the Czecho-Slovak federation broke up and two new independent states were established in Central Europe in January of 1993. One of them was the Slovak Republic. The need to formally define the symbolic interpretation of certain dates by law – from the position of the State – continues to be on the social agenda in the 21st century as well. This is highlighted by the fact that the Slovak Republic proceeded to the interpretation of a group of selected dates and to their legislation immediately the first year of its existence. The process of amending Act No. 241/1993 Coll. on National Holidays, Public Holidays and Commemorative Days resulted in the Slovak Republic now having more than thirty legally sanctioned dates in its calendar: five national holidays, ten public holidays, and eighteen commemorative days. During fifteen of them, citizens are not required to work, since they are defined as non-working days⁴.by law autonomously. It is a fact, though, that the State does not seek to openly interpret the meaning of those which are conceived as Christian (Christmas days, Easter holiday, All Saints' Day). For the dissemination of the interpretation of enacted dates falling into the category of national holidays and commemorative days, which were declared as important moments in the history of the Slovak Republic, the State constantly uses the public press agency and distributes it via the ritual practice of its representatives at public celebrations. The meanings of national holidays are communicated via the mass media towards citizens much less frequently than in the case of most commemorative days. It is the national holidays as such that create the space for state representatives to interpret their contents and present them to the public directly by organising celebrations or by accepting sponsorship, through their own holiday activity or by means of speeches from stages at symbolic places.

The content of the historic events is interpreted according to the current intentions and needs of politicians who use the massive symbolic potential of holidays as an effective tool. The different political groups disseminate their largely competing interpretations of historic events by means of holidays. As a result, we cannot speak about a comprehensive and stable political discourse on holidays in Slovakia that would prove the existence of a more general nationwide consensus with regard to the symbolic expression of the relationship to the past and to spiritual values and ideas. It rather seems that, even in the 21st century, there are several political holiday discourses that exist in Slovak society which are parallel or in temporary conflict. Such examples include the Freedom and Democracy Fight Day (17 November), the Day of Victory over Fascism (8 May) and the Anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising (29 August). The images of the past, as presented by politicians through holidays today, show the differentiation of the opinions on present-day Slovak society and the existence of symbolic borders between different population groups with different political convictions⁵.

A special category in the political debates on holidays is the issue of legislated church holidays. Even though this term cannot be found in legislation, it is commonly used in political discussions. Eight out of ten public holidays and one national holiday (St. Cyril and Methodius Day) are thematised in this way in Slovakia. They prevail in

⁴ Includes the following national holidays: Day of the Establishment of the Slovak Republic (1 January); St. Cyril and Methodius Day (5 July); Anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising (29 August), Day of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic (1 September), Struggle for Freedom and Democracy Day (17 November); and the following public holidays: Epiphany (The Three Magi and Christmas Day of Orthodox Christians) (6 January), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Labour Day (1 May), Day of Victory over Fascism (8 May), Day of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows (15 September), All Saints' Day (1 November), Christmas Eve (24 December), Christmas Day (25 December), St. Stephen's Day (26 December). Refer to: Act No. 241/1993 Coll. on National Holidays, Public Holidays and Commemorative Days

⁵ These holidays remind us of concrete historic events, but due to their different interpretation they have a polarising effect on society. This is caused by the different interpretation of the country's modern history in the key points – the orientation of the regime of the wartime Slovak Republic in 1939, the relationship between Czechs and Slovaks during their co-existence in the common state in 1918–1989 and the causes and circumstances of its split in 1989 within the different political groups. The analysis of the ritual practice and the speeches of politicians during the celebrations of the Anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising revealed that an irreconcilable political struggle is fought for the content and interpretation of the anniversary of this historic event (Vrzgulová, 2014a, 2017).

political discussions on occasions when the number of holidays is compared to other European countries or when the influence of the Catholic Church on the political power in the Slovak Republic is judged. We could also observe in these discussions an informal assignment of Good Friday to the sphere of interests of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession and the designation of January 6th – the Three Magi – as the holiday of the Orthodox Church. The research also showed that, with the exception of the September holiday of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows which – due to the ban on its public celebration during the Communist regime – is perceived as Catholic, but partly has a political connotation – the holidays in this category have a certain common feature, which raises the problem of manipulation with them in the political fight⁶.

Holidays as a tool for the promotion of the interests of the different groups of Slovak society serve not only political parties and the State, but also Church institutions. On one hand, Churches are the authors and keepers of several historically rooted dates, interpreted by means of Christian symbolism, and the distributors of related ritual practices which form the fundamental element of celebrating these holidays by the members of the particular Church. On the other hand, the Catholic Church is an actor in the State's holiday legislation. In 2000, the Basic Treaty between the Slovak Republic and the Holy See created a specific legal framework for the dates legislated by the State. In this treaty, the Slovak Republic formalised ten dates from its own legislated holiday calendar as de facto Catholic religious holidays or festivities, having defined some of them differently compared to the act from 1993 (for example, January 1st as the Day of the Foundation of the Slovak Republic as the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God). This specifically suggests that the State as such does not fully respect its own Holiday Act as a legal norm binding for all its citizens. It also proves the presence of mechanisms by which a part of holidays which are proper to the Slovak Republic, including their symbolic and economic aspects, is controlled by another state. The fact that the Church plays a fundamental role in the legislative sanctioning of holidays in the 21st century is a demonstration of the close link between the State and Church institutions. In this context, it can be considered direct involvement of the Church in the State's political decisions.

The links between the economy and holidays are specifically manifested in Slovakia's labour legislation. The fifteen dates legislated in the non-working days category have many economic consequences given the specific labour regime sanctioned by the Labour Code. 8 It is a considerable item for the State in terms of public finance, and it means interruption of production for employers and entrepreneurs, the closing of operation facilities, costs of extra pay for work during holidays, or additional costs for employees related to non-working days, relaxation activities, planning of holidays, etc. If we present holidays as a tool for the promotion of the interests of the State, Churches and the economic sphere citizens or the community of Slovak inhabitants can be perceived as the target group of the contents spread via holidays. An analysis of the opinions of the readers of Slovak internet magazines, who presented their views on the possibility of cancellation and shifting of holidays, showed that the representations linked to certain holidays and the ways of celebrating them are not determined exclusively by the process of institutional formalisation. While from the legislator's perspective the different status of the dates was and is still determined by the ascribed symbolic value. From the perspective of the citizens the acceptance of the symbolic values can include their regime in the context of labour regulations, i.e. the fact whether it is a working or non-working day. For one group (entrepreneurs and employers), this relates to the organisation of work, including costs (e.g. compensation for work during holidays) and the planning of working holidays, for others (individuals or families) to the preparation of the ways of spending their spare time. Regardless of the ideological –

⁶ Besides the St. Cyril and Methodius Day in July, there are several non-working days during the Easter and Christmas holidays and All Saints' Day, which remain untouched by the current political struggle. According to our findings from printed media, electronic media and advertising, their inviolability is primarily due not to the fact that politics would not respect and recognise without objections and with consensus their religious content or the need for religious spirituality experienced by the population (Popelková, 2014a: 42).

political or spiritual – meanings, the number and information about the specific dates of legally defined non-working days in a given year are important for the citizens of the State.

Individuals and groups build on various sources of the contents and forms of celebrating holidays and use them on the basis of their own needs and experience. In addition to the different degree of acceptance, there can therefore be many parallel representations of the same holiday. For example, Halloween as a holiday already established in Slovakia is either tolerated or rejected. It also has a wide range of representations as a fearful, funny, new, foreign (more specifically, Western or American), forced, commercial or pagan holiday (Zajonc, 2014). At the same time, citizens sort the holiday elements (for example, in terms of the ethical categories of sacral and profane) on the basis of their own classification principles. The example of the Christmas holiday showed that even though this holiday has long been institutionalised by the Church, its representation as a secular holiday is also widespread. The ways of celebrating it are related mainly to the reiteration of the unity of families, communities, partnerships and friendships, the manifestation of the meaning of solidary interpersonal relationships, accentuation of their positive aspects and the effort to bring joy to people. The rather profane elements can act as a sacred part of Christmas for some people or groups and, conversely, some religious elements, though not an ideological taboo in Slovakia anymore, are put aside or modified by commercial elements (Beňušková, 2014). The diversity of the representations that the different groups of Slovak inhabitants link to specific holidays forms the basis for the diverse manifestations or ways of celebrating them. Hence, the changed form of celebrating holidays also relates to the development of the social functions of holidays.

CONCLUSION

fulfil a unique function of regularly appearing, relatively stable points in the dynamic course of the life of society, its communities, family and each individual, also in Slovakia in the second decade of the 21st century. I have attempted to show that they can be considered a clearly defined research field, by the recurrent observation of which a perceptive observer can learn not only about holidays as such, but – through this prism – about society as a whole.

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