

THE SONG CELEBRATION AS POWER OF CULTURAL MEMORY AND A MISSION OF MODERNITY

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Abstract

Following the publication of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention in 2003, and its entry into force in 2006, the Song Celebration tradition and symbolism in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was added to the intangible cultural property. The tradition of the Song festivals, inspired by the protestant culture, has become an integral part of the Baltic States' identity. The Song festivals were created to demonstrate the diversity of heritage and national history; now they also make efforts to modernise cultural practice, which is passed on from generation to generation, and they still retain the positive, immediate, uniting and mobilising function that is essential for the survival of the nation. Declaring national identity and creativity, the Song and Dance Celebration of the Baltic States reflects their patriotic and historical barriers, ideological conformism, and cultural maturity. What is the common reality of the Song and Dance Celebration as a national cultural priority in all the three Baltic States? It is the programme, the participants, a developed tradition, the creative, ideological and artistic value, the relationship with the media, the role of innovation in the television broadcasts and online communication – all this forms just a small part of topicalities related to the Celebration that requires attention, evaluation and reflection. The article studies the tradition of the Lithuanian Song and Dance Celebration as a multifaceted phenomenon, viewing it through the prism of contemporary cultural discourse. Following the French philosopher Michel de Certeau, the article examines the Lithuanian Song Celebration as a modern cultural phenomenon, which shapes our collective representations of the past and imports our traditional cultural heritage into the cities. The Song Celebration is also defined as a site of memory (*lieux de mémoire*) the significance of which is outlined by the French historian Pierre Nora, and which is used to strengthen the national authority and promote patriotism.

It is also analysed as a practice of cultural memory (*kulturelles Gedächtnis*), which helps to reconstruct cultural identity and foster self-reflexive processes, as the German researchers Jan and Aleida Assmann claim. However, it can be observed that in recent decades many global memory projects integrate similar memory practices in transnational networks around the world. Besides, in the context of globalism, a very intense visual culture has emerged including a multitude of festivals and spectacles requiring revision and updating of the Song Celebration concept, which would allow us speak openly and boldly about the interpretation of the traditional culture and create new models of communication, without turning the Celebration into a commodity product, and finding original ways to discover a deeper meaning of ethnic culture.

Keywords: *the Song Celebration, tradition, place of memory, priorities, modernisation.*

Cultural modernisation is an inevitable process, even if it does not always occur simultaneously on all the three levels: modernising – inside an antimodernist division process; in the depth of an archaic restoration programme (this is where not only Europe’s “inner demons” were supposedly generated); and in exterior space – a postmodern reconfiguration that depends on the curiosity of the experimenters.

Vytautas Kavolis

At the time of remarkable transformations, endless changes, interaction of cultures, devaluation of identities, migration and mixing of the nations, our traditions, for instance, rituals and sacred acts have been preserved as a mental constant, the incarnation of continuity and formation of modernity. Today our traditions are appreciated more and more, even if they date back barely one hundred years. The Song and Dance Celebrations inspired by the protestant culture have become an integral part of our real identity. Passed on from generation to generation, the Song and Dance Celebrations promote positive, immediate, uniting and significant possibilities of survival for the nation. Declaring a national originality and creative potential, the Song and Dance Celebration of the Baltic States reflects a patriotic rise as well as historical barriers, ideological conformism, cultural maturity and conditional challenges.

After the announcement of the UNESCO’s *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* in 2003 and its entry into force in 2006, a new intangible heritage conception was prepared: it concentrated on fostering the

development of historical traditions and cultural identity of local communities, based on creativity, mastery and professionalism. In 2003 the Song Celebration tradition and symbolism in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was included in the Convention as the non-material culture. The list of verbal and non-material heritage masterpieces bears the name of the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The three Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania represent three nations, traditions, heritage and values. The three Song and Dance Celebrations' histories are unified; however, they also differ from each other based on their originality, priorities and choices, dispersion and aspirations for the future.

National cultures, cherishing folk traditions, songs and celebrations – these are the manifestations of nationality, which stimulates an original expression, heritage and innovation, strengthening a communal feeling of unity, and uniting the society that gives a cultural form to the national identity.

In general, in the modern times this connecting tradition of the Baltic States, which appeared with the initiative of the profane (secular) – *profanus* movement, an amateur chorus, has become officially and widely acknowledged as a part of our identity and sanctity. “A human experiences sanctity because it *manifests* and reveals itself as something entirely different than secularism. If we wish to demonstrate how it manifests itself, we suggest the term *hierophany* which is suitable, even if does not have any additional meaning, it means only what lies in its etymology, it means that something sacred reveals itself to us” [Eliade 1997: 8–9].

A specific common feeling and ritualism as a ceremony, sacrifice or hierophany, during the time of the Celebration constitute a sacred space: it demonstrates the national self-expression and political choice to be together with the nation and its existential conditionality. The Song Celebration concept, which is based on a ritualistic canonical image: a tradition is created, transmitted and preserved, affected by changes, modernised, cherished, and continued, developed from the national musical traditions of the Song and Dance Celebration. Therefore the Song Celebration organisers in Latvia tried to develop and to support this unique modern national identity form, and they initiated a proposal to the UNESCO commission in 2002.

Today the tradition of the Song and Dance Celebration in Latvia holds an important value, and it is not just a cultural parade. In the opinion of the Minister for Culture Dace Melbārde, the most important value is the content that we attach to this Celebration, learning from the wisdom of our ancestors and contributing to the creation of our historical narrative. Having appeared as a general singing tradition, the Celebration developed into a political self-determination or a national resurrection movement for the nations seeking to regain their independence. In

the world history this movement is known as “the Singing Revolution in the Baltic States.”¹ In the study *The Power of Song: Nonviolent National Culture in the Baltic Singing Revolution*, which was published in 2014 by the University of Washington Press, an American professor of Latvian origin Guntis Smidchens has revealed the topical nature of resistance movement in the Baltic States. “Without the songs there would not have been these thousands of people, resisting without arms, and without the people there would not be an independence,” he said in a conversation about contemporary values [Smidchens 2012: 150]. Recent Estonian inquiries suggest viewing the Song and Dance Celebration as a political mobilisation ritual [Brüggemann and Kasekamp 2014: 259–276].

What constitutes a common reality of the Song and Dance Celebration as a national cultural priority in all the three Baltic States? The answer is: the programme, the participants, the tradition, creative, political and artistic value, relationship with the media, the role of innovations in the television broadcasts and online communication, however, this is just a small part of topicalities related to the Celebration.

The Realities of the Song Celebration

We are proud of the fact that about 37,000 singers and dancers usually participate in the Song and Dance Celebration in Vilnius. This year the Celebration brought together the participants not only from Lithuania, but also from other places of the world. However, in comparison with Latvia, where the ethnic relations are more complicated than in Lithuania (information of the year 2011: Lithuanians constitute 84.1% of the country’s population, Latvians – 62.1%), the Song Celebration of 2013 brought together more than 42,000 performers. The numbers are more eloquent when taking into consideration the population of the Baltic countries: according to the statistics of 2014, in Lithuania there lived 2.94 million, in Latvia – 1.99 million, and in Estonia – 1.32 million inhabitants (69.1% of them have the Estonian nationality). Nevertheless Estonians with the least population have organised the most abundant Song Celebration, with more than 42,000 participants. In 2013 a sociological study accomplished by Professor Marju Lauristin and the media researcher Peeter Vihalemm showed that the Song Celebration is supported by 96% Estonians – it has been confirmed by 2/3 of the 1301 questioned respondents, standard Estonian-speaking citizens, in the group of 15 to 74 year old [Lauristin, Vihalemm 2014]. If the average number of participants in all the three countries is similar, considering their population

¹ Address by the Minister Dace Melbārde at the conference “Cultural and Creative Crossovers”, Riga, 11 March 2015, Latvian National Library. Available: www.km.gov.lv/lv/doc/.../Runa_CULT_LV_080315opening_ENG.pdf (Viewed 12 Feb. 2015.)

and ethnic groups, Lithuanians rank last. What are the factors that determine it? Is it a worsening demographic situation? Is it a massive migration? Does Lithuania encounter it? Could there be a different reason, for instance, gaps in musical education? How do we have to prepare our children that they would not just be good performers, but also active performers in the future and the present Song Celebrations? One thing is clear, if we do not search for solutions, this non-materialistic value of our culture will become the victim of the sad collision of ideals and reality, the stream of historical and cultural identity tradition will run dry, losing its permanent revitalising source.

Consequently in Kaunas, on the 13th of November 2014 the Lithuanian musicians gathered for a conference, devoted to a discussion of the situation of the Song Celebrations. They were worried that the Song Celebrations were under a rising threat: “Today there is almost none of the mixed children’s choruses, children do not sing at schools. If the children do not sing, Lithuania will also not sing. Thus, we will find ourselves near the line of extinction at once. Due to the possibility that folk songs may disappear, though they have always united us, and it is not just a melody and harmony, the spirit of the soul pulsates in our folk songs, the conductor Petras Bingelis said encouraging musicians to turn to the Ministry of Education and Science and draw their attention to the musical education of children, while it is not too late.”¹

On the other hand, the recent Song Celebrations were notable for great and intriguing declarative rhetoric. The Lithuanian slogan: “Here is my home” impresses with its meaningfulness. Estonians had chosen the image of time: “Touch the time and the time will touch you.” The Latvian Song Celebration’s slogan was “Gaisma ligo Latvijā”, even if it is hardly translatable into other languages, it sounds rather poetic in the English language: “Light celebrates Midsummer in Latvia”. Without doubt, the slogans, declarations and pathos are inseparable part of the Celebrations, but the rhetoric pomp should not overshadow the appreciation of the situation *de facto*, it is important to seek the idea of being together, understanding and respect through our joint efforts.

The three Song Celebration programmes share many similarities although it is generally recognised that Latvia outdoes the other two Baltic countries with its individuality and originality. Estonia has provided the Song Celebration with an incredible demonstration of the public spirit: participation in the Celebration means an inherent declaration of national identity. “Even if we are not worse than Latvians and Estonians, we will not overtake them, God bless us, if we manage to

¹ V. Miškinis: “Nebūtų Dainų šventės – neturėtume šitių chorų”, Austė Radžiūnaitė, www.lrytas.lt, 27 June 2014. Available: <http://kultura.lrytas.lt/scena/v-miskinis-nebutu-dainu-sventes-neturetume-sitiuk-choru.htm> (Viewed 17 Nov. 2014.)

become equal to them. That is why we have to learn from Latvians and Estonians, we have to go to the Song Celebrations and to observe the Līgo celebrations,” Arvydas Juozaitis said in a discussion in the Vilnius Town Hall, presenting the publication dedicated to the 90th Anniversary of the Song Celebration [Tradicija, telkianti tautą 2014: 36]. Indeed, it is important to search for a common ground in the Song Celebration modelling opportunities. Is it possible that the profusion of events, days, intentions and ideas creates a new form of the Celebration’s industry, thus spreading infinitively and destroying the ritual of the Celebration? If we pay no attention to the reflections and to the features of evaluation, do we not find ourselves on the outside of our culture? If we focus on creating an exceptional Celebration, do we not lose the most important orientation of values, transforming creativity and innovation into a cultural eclecticism?

The Song Celebration as the Living Media of Culture

It may be no coincidence that the Song Celebration tradition has become the centre of attention for contemporary researchers: after seeking to integrate ourselves into the global areas, it becomes apparent that in the face of fatalism of identity loss there reappears the necessity to update and to extensively discuss our national identity, self-consciousness, traditional culture and values. After the euphoria of regained independence abated, Lithuanianness somehow became unfashionable: in the context of populist tendencies it is shown as something that is constructed and illusory. However, in the presence of complete homogeneity, not only the definition of Lithuanianness has become problematical, but also the comprehension, interpretations, expression and affirmation of the self. Globalisation stimulates our feeling of non-safety and non-stability, raising the importance of cultural memory and tradition, stimulating us to turn back to the past and to reveal the sense of existential roots. There has recently appeared a possibility to treat the Song Celebration as an important medium, of cultural memory and cultural strategy, which activates our historical memory, strengthening the structures of self-awareness.

In recent decades, the research of cultural memory has extended incredibly across various countries and disciplines. The German researchers of cultural memory Jan and Aleida Assmann claim that memory depends on the media, which passes over the cultural content [Aleida Assmann, Jan Assmann 1994: 120]. Understanding culture as a field of various cultural practices, Assmann suggests that not only written but also verbal (e. g. singing) tradition can be defined as the media of cultural memory. Cultural memory is not static and closed; on the contrary, “cultural heritage is always connected with topicalities and presence” [Assmann 1995: 130].

This cultural discourse is considered to be a turn to the historical memory field. Collective memory of the nation finds itself in the epicentre of research. Comprehension of memory as a national project has entered into the global frames of discourse; the national memory trajectories have led to a net of worldwide memory preservation.

The case of the Song Celebration is not an exception. It can be observed as it is crossing the national culture boundaries by trying to connect the Lithuanian communities in different parts of the world. Its potentiality becomes apparent in the context of the world heritage and global tourism. After all UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), which has admitted that the Song Celebration tradition is a masterpiece of the humankind's verbal and intangible cultural heritage, is a part of international network. It operates in a global space of education, science, culture, information and communication, and unites the world countries into a forum, by stimulating and supporting originality of various nations and communities, cultural heritage and memory preservation projects. Therefore, UNESCO considers memory to be the most important concern. Thus, the preservation of cultural heritage is one of the most urgent political questions [Amrith, Sluga 2008: 251–274]. In this way, a national memory enters the international arena. Globalisation process does not confine itself to new communication technologies, mobility of the citizens and migration processes. It defines general frames of discourse, which stimulates to revise our cultural values and traditions, considering our national identity and sociocultural integrity.

The practices of local cultural memory inevitably find echoes from globalisation. At the same time a certain “synchronisation of transnational cultural memory” occurs [Assmann, Conrad 2010: 5]. In the arena of global communication an attempt has been made not only to preserve a national culture and a space of memory, inducing pride in our feeling of culture. A certain competition has also occurred naturally among the countries seeking for attention of the world. In this context various celebrations acquire great importance in culture politics, which originally reflects the local and general processes. In this context the uncomfortable questions continue to arise: Do transnational connections have the influence on the disappearance of national differences? Can a local culture memory become a global memory? This is why theoreticians of culture are asking: what kind of functions does the transnational memory politics really perform [Assmann, Conrad 2010: 8]?

Therefore the regions are not limited to local institutions and agents as important sources of memory. Although, generally speaking, memory and globalisation should work in both directions. Nevertheless, a cultural memory, revealing the

originality of culture and traditions, is fostering collective identity and social union, though it also gets into the traps of globalisation.

The researchers of memory culture recognise that celebrations, ceremonies and rituals have always supported the pillars of cultural memory (the living media). Assmann's research of the ancient civilisation has revealed that shamans, mandarins, priests, rabbis and poets have always been the transmitting source of communicational memory. However, only the forms of institutional memory have ensured the dispersion of cultural memory [Assmann 1995: 129]. In ancient civilisations there were various rituals and celebrations which gave an opportunity for the community to participate in a live cultural memory environment.

Aleida Assmann distinguishes between "preserving memory" (*Speichergedächtnis*), which preserves experience of a culture, and "functional memory" (*Funktionsgedächtnis*), which transmits certain cultural forms through concrete practices for the future generations. The preserving memory is a stream of functional memory, Assmann defines it as memory's memory. The functional memory is active in social space, which directly or emotionally connects the community to its past [Assmann 1999: 134–136]. Changes in the life of a culture determine how our collective memory is transformed into the functional memory. It could be said that the Song Celebration is a form of the functional memory, the media of vital cultural memory, which involves different art ensembles, communities and societies, updating the past and tradition. Without this update the past would simply stop functioning in the present.

This form of functional cultural memory is based on the concrete past and the grounds of ethnic culture, though it not only preserves it, rather it turns culture into symbols and imagery, revealing the profoundness of the past and the modification of the present. That is why this form of memory provides us with the opportunity to merge together a myth, history and presence; to increase our actual imagery, and to stimulate our patriotism and national consciousness. This kind of mission should be carried out by the Song and Dance Celebration.

The Song Celebration as a Memory Place

The term *lieux de mémoire* (place of memory), coined by the French historian Pierre Nora, is also fruitful for the analysis of the Song Celebration [Nora 1984]. This term "memory place" (describing not just concrete places, museums and monuments, but also celebrations, memorable events and other forms of representation) has had wide repercussions in different countries. In a traditional society the "memory place" served as mnemonics – a specific method for recollection. In modern society, according to Nora, it has acquired certain ideological characteristics, and now it is applied to the discourse of nationalism. The majority of

“memory places” and streams were created and invented to serve the Nation state. Hereby it has become a part of identity politics and functions by emphasising the most important national history terms, facts and ideas; reminding and inscribing them into the mentality of the nation.

Memory places bring together communities in the public space, express a collective past-knowing experience, and evoke the integrity of the state and emotional communal feeling. When participating in such actions, the society not only takes over their inherited cultural contents but also supplements it with new meanings. Thus, this ritualistic action becomes not just a memory preservation but also a creation process, originally materialising our national and political identity. By the end of the 20th century, these symbolic ceremonies, rituals, traditions and celebrations have been recognised as important nation-building phenomena, thus they have rightly been called the “invention of a tradition” (conceptualised by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger) [Hobsbawm 1983].

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the reconstruction and strengthening of tradition has once again become one of the most important cultural topics. From 30th October 2000, the continuity of the Lithuanian Song Celebration traditions is protected by the resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, emphasising the need to preserve this unique phenomenon, which has a positive influence on our culture’s vital capacity, the dispersion of the culture of regions and consolidation of all the nations. Although, this is an implacable wish to speak openly and to analyse – what is the modern meaning of this tradition and what role does it play today? Is it important only as a form of representation of the past, or is it an educational form of patriotism? How does the interplay of the past and the present manifest itself in the current forms of the tradition? How are the new communication possibilities involved? As Marcelijus Martinaitis accurately observes “every age unlocks literature in its own way” [Martinaitis 2002: 13], as well as folklore, myths and art heritage, which is deciphered and interpreted in its own way.

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In today’s totally homogenised world, where the dominating paradigms of consumerism and visual culture enslave our imagination, stimulate alienation and distance us from each other, the Lithuanian Song Celebration is a multiple-meaning act of culture and an important communication channel with the past. Cultural approach to the Song Celebration allows us to explore this phenomenon as a mnemonic cultural and social practice, important in the life of society and state. As a “connecting element” of the nation’s Song Celebration, it creates a symbolic space for transformation of identity. As cultural *memory practice*

(Assmann) and *memory place* (Nora) the Song Celebration is an exceptional space for the symbolism of the Lithuanian cultural and historical memory, constituting an important part of our contemporary cultural politics.

However, it should be understood that this *memory media*, created by the modern state as a medium of remembrance and revision of the past, has to undergo changes without becoming another “object” of consumerism, the tool of manipulation, disguising emptiness and incapability to find our identity. Finding itself in the contemporary discourse, the Song Celebration should not be comprehended as a formal representative model, but also as a possibility to recognise traditional culture as our own “otherness”, to increase the field of self-reflection, to expose the changes of contemporary society and identity, turning to the past in order to think about the present society and about our ideals for the future.

The Song Celebration’s Phenomena and the New Communication

As a communal phenomena, the Song Celebration in Estonia demonstrates increasing tendencies of attractiveness. It attracts more and more of those who wish to participate in every festival; it seeks new records, its applications come from the entire world. There were almost 61 000 unregistered participants at the Estonian Song Celebration in 2014.

Usually the Song and Dance Celebration takes place once every five years. The Youth Song and Dance Celebration is organised every year as a foundation



The famous selfie of the Estonian president Toomas H. Ilves, 2014. This photograph was liked by 37 000 visitors on *Facebook*, and it became the most popular image of the Celebration.

of the National Song Celebration. From 2010 the Virtual Song Celebrations (*Digi-laulupidu*) are organised, seeking to present the long-lived Song Celebration tradition via IT format, which has made Estonia famous. From 2008 the Song Celebrations (*Öölaulupidu*) are organised during the night, twice a year, in spring and autumn. By the way, it is intended to perpetuate the Song Celebration's heritage in a traditional way, for instance, there is a Song Celebration museum with three permanent exhibitions launched in Tartu, in the classical building designed during the first half of the 19th century; and they have innovative ways how to promote the Song Celebration, for instance, interesting publications in the world press, like the BBC coverage of the Song Celebration in Estonia, called "Estonian lessons for the Arab Spring" or the CNN news "The Song Celebration – more popular than Michael Jackson's last concert in Estonia" and similar intriguing forms.

The Song Celebrations are appreciated as a unique traditional space created by a communal feeling and contemporary communication, reaching out to involve all active citizens. This cultural space is in search of new forms of sustainability and future development. Therefore gathering all forces on all levels of national, Baltic and northern regions, it is expected that we create a monitoring system, which will help us to develop the tradition in all the three Baltic countries. It is intended to apply the sustainability criteria of the Song and Dance Celebration traditions, to evaluate the vitality of other cultural traditions and basis for the national identity, such as Joninés (Dew Holiday), the Day of the Dead, singing traditions, food preparing traditions, etc.

The Lithuanian Song Celebrations excel in their genre diversity. In 2014 the programme was extensive and diverse, and it suggested many options. According to "Spinter research" data, the Song Celebration is first and foremost connected with singing, as the interest in the dance programme has decreased twice. In general, folk art exhibition at the Museum of Applied Arts and Design, a traditional craft city for children near the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania and the concert of *kanklės* "Skambėkite, kanklės" at the Saint Jonas Church has received the least attention of the participants.

The song day "Here is my home" was selected (by 43 percent) as the most popular event, more popular among women and villagers. The Song Celebration's opening concert at the Cathedral Square was mentioned by the respondents aged 46, the residents having an average income, inhabitants of smaller towns, regional centres and villagers. The procession from the Cathedral Square to Vingis Park was mostly appreciated by villagers.

On the one hand, a variety of events have become an exceptional feature of our Song Celebration, on the other hand, by adding a multitude of events under the umbrella of the Song Celebration, we are extending the field of meaningful

events to infinity, therefore we may lose the Celebration's sacral magic. Rituals that are an integral part of every celebration should not be turned into the profane, requesting a dimension of an alleged variety. The secret of the Celebration should be protected and transmitted from generation to generation by carefully choosing the elected inheritors and estimating the attempts "to reform" its meaning.

A new and relevant study *Choral Societies and Nationalism in Europe*, edited by Kristina Lajosi from the University of Amsterdam and Andreas Stynen from Archive and Documentation Centre for Flemish Nationalism (ADVN) appeared in 2015, published by Brill as 9th book of the series *National Cultivation of Culture*. There were many authors from twelve regions – Germany, France, Norway, Scotland, Wales, England, Denmark, Belgium, Catalonia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria, the Basque Countries and the Balkans, who examined the connections of choral traditions that emerged during the 19th century and nationalism. As stated by the editors, this is an innovative study, valuing the role of singing communities in the process of forming nations in the 19th century. On a wide scale publication the meaning of organised singing communities is revealed at the national and international level, highlighting the power and originality of the mobilisation phenomena in different European countries. The book is valued as an important contribution to the studies of nationalism and to the research of social history, revealing the importance of music, as well as the choral expression in the 19th century. From Norway to the Basque Countries, from Wales to Bulgaria, the influence of choral associations was studied and compared, reflecting on the development of the national awareness in different political and social circumstances.

"Forgotten" realities

While orientating to the tradition of the Song Celebration in the Baltic States, an important part of this Celebration – symbolism, was forgotten. Based on the traditional comprehension, symbolism could be described as an entirety composed of signs and images that reveals itself and substantiates the origin of the phenomena and the essence of symbolic expression. What kind of symbols is specific to the Song and Dance Celebration? Is it a virtual bird flying through time and space, or the ornamented columns, or playing with lighting in the fountains? Without doubt, time dictates its priorities, though the Celebration's symbolism is described as predetermined by tradition, conservative, real and meaningful heritage. It is no accident that the Commemoration of the 90th Anniversary of the Song Celebration took place on the 28th of June, 2014 in Kaunas. This traditional event did not include meaningless songs and unsuccessful dance choreographies; it had a positive feedback as an attractive "celebration".

In the application of the Song and Dance Celebration prepared by UNESCO it was affirmed that this Celebration and the processes connected with it create a great inestimable value; and they have a symbolic meaning construction for strengthening the communities [Multinational Candidature File 2001: 6]. The Celebration and the traditions are appreciated as heritage, a phenomenon given by culture and history, on the other hand, the symbolic meaning has essential value of the Song and Dance Celebrations.

We should develop the major priorities, respond to challenges and pay attention to threats, which appear to be present for the Celebration; we should embrace the status of the event, appreciate our heritage, traditions and activities connected with nationality, seeking to excel in abundance, variety and “originality”, and raise the political awareness of the uniting and strengthening content of the Celebration. Altogether, the meaningful concepts of the Song and Dance Celebration as a *vital tool in nation-building*, as *the most massive and inclusive communal event* and *cultural expression*, joining together all the three Baltic countries, reveal the true nature of distinctiveness [Multinational Candidature File 2001: 5]. General historical repertoire in all the countries is valued as a guarantee of immutability (ritualism). Enlarging the visual, ideological and factual inventory for the Celebration, we lose our conceptual purity, and we find ourselves in an abundant infinity, in constant changes and in eclectic traps. Maybe it is worth to devote more restraint, modesty, simplicity and thrift for this Celebration that is protected by UNESCO and cherished in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. “Let us divide this weight of the Celebration among ourselves: let us solemnly celebrate our National Day not every four years, but every year. One year – to enjoy amateur theatres, folk ensembles, folk art exhibitions, in another year we will not miss the ensembles’ evening, *kanklės* (Lithuanian stringed instrument) performance, in the third year let us go to see a dance day, in the fourth year let us meet in the most important part of the Celebration under guardianship of UNESCO – in the Song Day” [Nakienė 2014: 67]. In this way the Song Celebration will not become a burden, and it will stimulate congregating of the people and experiencing the ritualistic alliance.

The Estonian society have given a sacral status to the Song Celebration. A “Singing Nation” is not just a metaphor. In the opinion of the professor Marju Lauristin from the Tartu University, the aim of the Song Celebration is to gather the largest part of the Estonian citizens to celebrate a shared set of sacral values. Of course, there are some people who would say that the Song Festival’s time has come to an end. Nevertheless a research done by Estonians demonstrates that the Song Celebration is a celebration by the majority of Estonians, where they gather to experience their main national values together and to feel that they belong

to their own community. The participation in the Festival is very important as a common divergence from our everyday routine to appreciate the values that connect us with our past. It is similar to a religious feeling and perception. A research has also shown that Estonians have a great need for the sacral, and they also have grounds for this tradition.

Uniting and assembling the power of the Celebration, the appearance of the sacred in a *profane* environment, ritualistic experiences, when everything happens here and now, and the tradition that dates back almost one hundred years; and an opportunity is created for a civil choice. All of this oblige us to create meaningful politics, to preserve and stimulate culture, according to Antanas Maceina, the real objectification of a Lithuanian soul is the song, giving it “a form of existence to our life”, and believing that “the song is a kind of being together, where everyone present has to participate” [Maceina 1993: 145].

When appreciating our spiritual priorities, should we forget the materialistic side of the Celebration? “It is the saddest thing for me that we are the biggest country from all the three countries but our funding is diametrically opposite in proportion. The smallest country – Estonia receives almost five times more funding for everything – from preparation works to the estimate of the Song Celebration, and for the support of the vitality of ensembles. Latvian funding is three times bigger than ours; we are lagging behind,” claims the President of the Lithuanian Choral Union, Artistic Director of the choir “Ažuoliukas”, the professor Vytautas Miškinis in a press conference in the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, on the 26th of February, 2015, comparing the Song Celebration’s funding in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia¹. We can generally estimate that the Song Celebration is the cheapest medium for education of patriotism and citizenship, therefore, taking into consideration its importance and popularity, we should increase the financial support for the Song Celebration’s moral authority, and then we can create a future for the Celebration together.

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In the trilateral meeting of the Baltic culture committee that took place on the 23–24th of October, 2014 in Tallinn, the trilateral Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian programme for culture cooperation in 2015–2018 has been prepared and signed. It was decided to stimulate the participation and exchange among the countries in all sectors of culture and creativity, sharing information about rule making initiations, culture policy, and to continue collaboration in a multilateral

¹ Available: <http://www.15min.lt/naujiena/laisvalaikis/ivairenybes/kulturos-zmones-baiminasi-del-dainu-sventes-likimo-61-487610> (Viewed 5 March 2015.)

format for the Baltic and Nordic countries, to collaborate in order to implement UNESCO conventions and programmes, focusing on trilateral and international formats, new and relevant documents for all the three countries entering UNESCO's "World's memory" register. In the programme it is also envisaged to restore the structure of the Committee for the Baltic Coordination in order to preserve and revive the Song and Dance Celebration traditions, preparing a collaboration plan for the year 2015–2025.

Mutual culture policy of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, should not remain just a "protocol for good intentions" parallel research, sociological inquiries, instead it could open new perspectives for culture development, preserving and developing national priorities, collective memory and contexts, uniting all the three Baltic countries. Living without determining our culture priorities is the same as living without consciousness and wondering why one is lost in the complicated historical and cultural memory labyrinths. The sacred has to be fostered in mutual and unifying rituals of the Celebration that brings people together.

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