

# Lithuanian Literary Magazine *Kulturos barai* – Cultural Mission in a Modern Way

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Libellarium 10, 2 (2017): 161-170.

UDK: 655:070.488(474.5)

Professional Paper / Stručni rad

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15291/libellarium.v1i2.304>

## Abstract

The aim of this article is to present shortly the regulations and aims of Lithuania's cultural policy concerning cultural publications, to introduce publishing models of one of the biggest and most important Lithuanian literary publications *Kulturos barai* and to discuss its importance for the Lithuanian literary society. For a small country, culture is one of the most important features of its identity and that is why we need to recognize the enduring value and mission of literary media – to inform about literary life, to influence public taste, to be an active part of culture, a tool for societal education, and the space in which creators can express themselves. On the other hand, increasing globalization and changing society needs may raise a question if literary publications perform their mission in a modern way, if culture is not equaled to a narrower art concept. *Kulturos barai* is one of more than 20 Lithuanian literary periodicals with long tradition. Started in 1965 as an amateur publication, thanks to influential authors the magazine turned into a publication which is intended to shape the cultural strategy. In 1988, public discussion events organized by *Kulturos barai* gave an impetus to create the Reform Movement in Lithuania. At that time the whole cultural situation was changing in Lithuania – when Reform Movement was established, culture started to be understood as the basis for identity, and literary publications became the space which assisted to return memory. Literary pages were unprofitable for the mass media which had just been born, however, they were important as a sign of prestige. *Kulturos barai*, having played an important role in shaping the cultural taste in society several decades ago, still remains one of the most progressive and most modern literary publications, which performs its content management and dissemination organization in the best possible way. The research is based on the interview with an editor-in-chief of the magazine *Kulturos barai*.

**Keywords:** literary periodicals, *Kulturos barai*, publishing, Lithuania, cultural policy.

## 1. Introduction

Cultural publications are a small but specific segment of the media and have a significant *influence* on the maturity of a person and society. In Lithuania, it has always had a target audience and mature readers who have associated the need for cultural knowledge with intellectual activity. The content of such media is focused on the professional analysis of culture and art.

The aims of the paper are the following:

- present shortly the regulations and aims of Lithuania's cultural policy concerning cultural publications;
- analyze publishing characteristics of *Kultūros barai*, one of the biggest Lithuanian cultural publications;
- on the bases of the interview with Laima Kanopkiene, editor-in-chief of *Kultūros barai*, find out what strategies are adopted by the magazine in order to accomplish its cultural mission in a modern way, where the concept of culture is not squeezed into the narrow concept of art.

## 2. Does Lithuania need culture?

"Do we have a long-term cultural strategy? And what about cultural politics? And what has changed in our country since 1990? I can say that I started thinking for the first time, if we really understand the value of culture and its importance to our country. Some years ago I was sure that these things are self-explanatory. After all, we are not big, but quite a creative country. But one day I started to doubt about this<sup>[1]</sup>, says Leonidas Donskis, philosopher, professor of Vytautas Magnus University. This question is very relevant nowadays in Lithuania, because 'culture, invoked art, texts, ideas, has a potential to do those things, which economics and politics of small country would never be able to do."<sup>[2]</sup>

In Lithuania's cultural policy provisions, adopted in 2001, Lithuanian culture is defined as the expression of creative powers of an individual and the nation.<sup>[3]</sup>

In these provisions, three main Lithuania's cultural functions are provided:

- shape and reflect spiritual and material values of different society groups and national communities;
- help developing free, democratic and open society;
- foster the country's social economic development and strengthen its security.

Lithuania's cultural policy seeks to implement five main objectives.

1. It aims to preserve and foster national cultural identity. In order to implement this objective more successfully, state and municipal authorities guarantee the protection and continuity of the Lithuanian language, preserve local traditions, ethnic culture, protect cultural heritage, support Lithuanian communities living abroad and culture of national communities in Lithuania.
2. It seeks to stimulate creative activity and the diversity of art. In order to implement this task, state authorities support only professional art and creative activity, as well as organizations of creators.
3. The third objective of cultural policy is to develop the information society: to achieve this, state institutions pursue to facilitate information accessibility regarding Lithuania and the world. Also, they prepare culture workers to work in the information society. Institutions also promote access to native and foreign history, art and culture.
4. The fourth objective of Lithuania's cultural policy is to promote the openness of national culture. In order to implement this aim, it promotes access to knowing the cultures of other nations in Lithuania and takes care of disseminating Lithuanian culture abroad.
5. The fifth objective of Lithuania's cultural policy is to ensure the right conditions for the society to participate in culture and to consume it. The state, seeking to implement this task, carries out programs supporting amateur creative activities; it also supports creative activity of NGOs and implements the regional cultural policy.

The provisions of Lithuania's cultural policy set out the following principles: democracy, identity, decentralization and openness. Based on them, all aims and tasks of cultural policy are implemented. The principle of democracy provides that every society member has a right to participate in decision-making concerning culture, to take up any cultural activity in accordance to his hobbies and interests, and to have access to services of culture. The principle of identity means that Lithuanians and national communities in Lithuania have a right to preserve and foster national culture. The principle of decentralization provides that decisions and responsibility for the formation and implementation of cultural policy are divided among the state and municipality institutions, and conditions are provided to develop cultural self-government. The principle of openness states that conditions should be made to disseminate Lithuanian culture to the world and to have access to the cultures of other nations.

In accordance with the principles set out, all objectives and tasks of cultural policy are implemented by the Lithuanian Council for Culture, the Lithuanian Association of Artists, College of Culture Self-government and other social organizations of relevant culture spheres.

Lithuania's change guidelines for cultural policy<sup>[4]</sup> were adopted in 2010, and the culture governance model was significantly updated. The guidelines state

that society's creative skills are the main source of its sustainability and ability to compete, while the presence of culture ensures democracy and the person's free self-expression. Also, the guidelines state that it is highly necessary to relate cultural policy to other state policy spheres and to create an effective cooperation model between institutions, which will ensure more substantial financing from state resources.

The guidelines provided for the establishment of the Lithuanian Council for Culture, thus separating cultural policy design and implementation and creating continuous monitoring of culture processes. This was implemented in 2013, when the Lithuanian Council for Culture became operational. However, according to research done in 2014, it started operating not as an independent institution of cultural self-government, but as a budgetary authority with very limited decision-making powers.<sup>[5]</sup> It works under the authority of Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania. According to the report made in 2014<sup>[6]</sup>, during this year, Lithuanian Council for Culture financed 2420 culture and art projects; besides, it allocated 438 grants for culture and art creators.

The aim of The Fund for the Support of the Press, Radio and Television is to provide support, following a tender procedure, for cultural, society information security, media literacy development and educational projects implemented by public information promoters and organizations of culture and art creators. The Fund invites for public information tenders and projects are funded from six programs<sup>[7]</sup>: periodical cultural and art publications, national periodical press, regional periodical press, national radio and television, regional radio and television and Network media financing programs.

According to general conditions of tender specifications of 2016, 25 per cent of the Fund support should be allocated to the first program, namely, periodical art and culture publications. However, the sum allocated may not exceed 80 per cent of the total project sum and may not comprise over 200,000 EUR per year. Only those publications that implement main tender goals are subject to receive the support of The Fund for the Support of the Press, Radio and Television. Specification of tender conditions provides for 11 goals which should be met by projects seeking support. Firstly, they should communicate the main culture, art and scientific advances to the public and promote professional communication of creators in Lithuania and the whole world. Such publications should have educational characteristics, promote citizenship, critical thinking, public awareness, ability to assess information independently, media and information literacy, etc.

While evaluating projects that apply for the periodical culture and art publications program, not only the quality of a project's content, but also the publication's present and planned circulation, span of dissemination and the means to increase it, are taken into account. Besides, if the project has received support of the Fund before, qualitative changes are considered. It is emphasized that the

content of periodical culture and art publications projects should be available on the Internet.

Specific priorities are applied for the projects of periodical culture and art publications programs. The projects that generate and promote new creative ideas, present new works of international significance on culture science, present the analysis of culture and art processes as well as Lithuanian cultural heritage, have better access to finance.

The state, which implements the objectives of cultural policy, is interested in supporting the edition of socially valuable educational periodical publications. Supported projects should have the following characteristics: foster values and traditions, build artistic and cultural capacity, also, promote scientific knowledge and critical thinking. They have to be creative, original in choosing their topics, focused on developing personal dignity and sense of community.

### 3. *Kultūros barai*: "Import" and "Export" of Culture Ideas

Out of over 20 Lithuanian cultural periodical publications, *Kultūros barai* has a long tradition. It was first published in 1965 as a publication for amateurs. However, with the help of influential authors, it became a magazine meant to develop a cultural strategy. In 1988, it was public discussion events held by *Kultūros barai* that gave an impetus to create the Reform Movement (Lith. – *Sąjūdis*); the circulation during the revival period reached 75 000 copies. At that time, the cultural environment was changing – after the Reform Movement started, culture came to be seen as the foundation of the nation's identity, and cultural publications became the medium which could revive nation's memories. The pages dedicated to culture were not profitable, but were considered important signs of prestige. *Kultūros barai* played an important role in forming cultural public taste. Today, it remained one of the most progressive, modern cultural periodical publications, having the best content management and distribution organization. Although the general financing of the publication was reduced by 40 per cent compared to 2015, and compared to 2014 by as much as 60 per cent, *Kultūros barai* still has the highest circulation among cultural publications, namely, around 3000 copies. 'When we go to eurozine meetings of European cultural periodicals, colleagues envy us. Their circulations are very low, while ours even exceeds the publications of big countries', editor-in-chief shares her joy.

Why is this the case? One possible reason is that *Kultūros barai* follows a more general content approach, according L. Kanopkienė, it chooses highly topical and acute subjects, it does not enclose itself in a one-direction niche, and it has the so-called *textus connectivus*, a connective tissue that embraces many various aspects of cultural subjects. It attracts more readers and increases circulation.

Even though *Kultūros barai* qualifies as a universal type of cultural publication, it creates the impression of an entirely niche magazine at first sight. It is not likely to be found at everyone's home, not likely to be seen purchased very often. The cover seems to be very simple at first sight: there are no visible efforts of the publisher to attract attention, no headings, only a colorful reproduction of a picture and a very pronounced title of the publication on a white background. Such a decision creates the impression that the publication positions itself as a magazine which, instead of attracting readers, is found by its readers themselves. This approach allows differing interpretations. On the one hand, readers might be interested to take the magazine and see what it is about. On the other hand, one would not often see readers standing at the publication desk, wasting their time while trying to figure out what the publication is about. And, with such a fast pace of life today, people expect to receive information on what subjects are covered by one magazine or another clearly laid out. However, this approach is unique.

The possibility to hire outstanding authors and prepare highest quality texts is another great advantage of *Kultūros barai*. One of the exclusive cases is the interview cycle by Almantas Samalavičius, where a culture historian and critic, literature science specialist and essayist has talks with Lithuanian and foreign academic and cultural elite. The famous names are among people interviewed, like Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, culture critic Henry Giroux, higher education analytic John Nixon... To find, make talk and hold a talk is a qualitative indicator highly esteemed by readers as well. 'Culture journalists have to be more self-confident and fight for themselves with greater boldness', says editor-in-chief of *Kultūros barai* Laima Kanopkiene, assuming that regular publication schedule makes readers trust the publication: delays greatly undermine the credibility of periodicals. And this is how certain quarterly cultural publications behave, thinking that one week delays are insignificant. They also tend to choose very niche places of distribution, like small specialized bookstores. Meanwhile, *Kultūros barai* is quite flexible as to the question of organizing distribution: the publication is sold in all press sale points, including petrol stations which are not looked down upon as places undermining the prestige of the publication. On the contrary, modern supermarkets, where readers can sit down and browse through the magazine, are viewed as a matter of prestige by Laima Kanopkiene. According to her, 'to hide naively means to show we are non-existent'.

Since 2003, *Kultūros barai* is a partner of eurozine.com portal. Eurozine provides the possibility of intensive intellectual exchange – not only 'import', but also 'export' of culture ideas and its interpretations. The portal authoritatively represents national cultures. Joining European debates activates exchange of critical thinking and promotes cultural polilog. It is an excellent platform to promote Lithuanian culture and the Lithuanian language in the virtual environment: texts on the portal are presented in the original language (in this case, Lithuanian), and they are also translated into English, French, German, or other languages.

Portal Eurozine not only provides its partners with the possibility to participate in the dialogue of European cultures, but also becomes a sort of 'intellectual bank': every year, hundreds of articles are announced, written by outstanding personalities of various European countries, namely, creators, critics, analysts of cultural processes. It is an excellent space for text exchange and inspiration.

#### 4. Living on a geographical boundary does not mean being outside culture

In 2016, the project carried out by *Kultūros barai* titled *Lithuania's cultural prospects* received quite a substantial financing. The Fund for the Support of the Press, Radio and Television allocated it the amount of 54 000 Euros.

"The emptiness of meaning, which opened in modern culture, more and more obvious sliding on the surface, carnival-like attitude, trivial rhetoric is of great concern, signaling that the foundation of this, probably, last bastion of civilization is also starting to crack,' says Laima Kanopkiene, presenting the new project. 'It is not only necessary to promote society's creativity, but also to develop cultural awareness, critical thinking, the feeling of national identity, citizenship and dignified attitude."

The consumer society more and more obviously lacks idealism, therefore, fostering culture, once regarded as an integral part of a creative personality, is not an obligation taken for granted any more. The role of culture becomes secondary. One of the tasks of *Kultūros barai* is to start changing this short-sighted attitude of society, this flawed way of thinking, because indifference for national culture increases social apathy and nihilism. The project seeks to find out strengths and weaknesses of culture, to identify its possibilities as well as threats.

*Kultūros barai* tries its best to reflect development processes of culture and art in as objective and detailed way as possible, to disclose orientations of values, prospects and trends. Only the culture that practices a continuous and critical self-reflection can become a foundation of society which is balanced, open, self-confident and respectful of others.

Every sphere of culture has to look for its own methods and tools how to promote and preserve national identity, with historical memory being its live foundation. *Kultūros barai* has set itself the objective to discuss how architecture, arts, literature, music, photography, theatre and cinema can contribute to developing the Lithuanian identity. They believe that the more closely and deeply we look at the past, the clearer future horizons will be, and Lithuania's culture prospects will become more defined.

Another task that *Kultūros barai* undertakes is to discuss the prospects of culture in the world that is rapidly globalizing, already fitting in a computer screen. What



should be done in order for Lithuanian culture to become a full-value entity of European cultural diversity? What lies behind the concept of cultural identity and how to ensure the dynamics of its development? International discussions will help to look at local problems in a more universal way, to compare our experience with the practices of other countries. It will make it possible to learn not only from our own mistakes, but also from the mistakes of others.

"Once, talking about a cultural publication *Naujoji Romuva*, which was published between the two world wars, I said this was a magazine which understood its duty to cause turmoil in the government. I wish *Kultūros barai* would also do the same," says Laima Kanopkiene. Let's wish them success. Otherwise, *Kultūros barai* is already successful. And the following facts support this statement:

- Ex-mayor of Vilnius Artūras Zuokas did a survey on what publications Vilnius schools wished to subscribe for financed by the municipal budget. Two publications received a positive answer: a popular magazine *Psichologija tau* and *Kultūros barai*.
- In *eurozine*, a conversation between Almantas Samalavicius and a culture critic Henry Giroux, "Higher Education and Neoliberal Temptation" was announced the best article of May.
- Every new issue of *Kultūros barai* is announced in the Lithuanian National Radio's morning broadcast *Morning allegro*. It is an excellent opportunity to advertise the publication and to be heard.

Not a small success for a literary magazine published in a small country.

## 5. Conclusions

1. State cultural policy is determined by underlying and fine tuning institutions. The aim of the cultural policy is to promote access to culture, provide funding for arts and cultural projects as culture is a very relevant part of the national identity and can not be supported by private funds only.
2. Culture is one of the most important features of a small country's identity. That is a reason, why we need to recognize the enduring value and mission of literary media: to inform about literary life, to influence public taste, to be an active part of culture and the space in which creators can express themselves.
3. Literary magazine *Kultūros barai* is one of the most progressive, modern cultural periodical publications in Lithuania, probably having the best content management and distribution organization. *Kultūros barai*



follows a more general content approach, it does not enclose itself in a one-direction niche, but embraces many various aspects of cultural subjects.

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