

# CULTURAL HERITAGE-BASED URBAN FESTIVAL AS A TOOL TO PROMOTE LOCAL IDENTITY AND CITY MARKETING: THE CASE OF THE RADVAŇ FAIR IN BANSKÁ BYSTRICA, SLOVAKIA

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This paper deals with the processes of transformation of an urban festival – the Radvaň Fair in the city of Banská Bystrica, Slovakia – in a comprehensive way and from a chronological point of view. The main focus is on the development of the festival in the post-1989 (post-communist) period. The fair has been organised continuously since 1655 and went through a number of transformations. Its function has changed from a primarily commercial event of three centuries to a significant cultural and social hallmark festival in the 21st century. The key research questions concern the role of cultural heritage-based festival in identity building and city marketing, and the relationship between the festival and place (location). The paper also addresses the question of potential use/misuse of cultural heritage in current political discourse and practice.

Keywords: urban festival, cultural heritage, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia

## INTRODUCTION: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Urban festivals, fairs, rituals and other cultural events have attracted the attention of many scholars in recent decades – sociologists, human geographers, ethnologists, social anthropologists and economists.<sup>1</sup> The reason is obvious: the number of urban festivals has

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been growing every year. Urban events based on rituals, arts and culture have become a target of interest for local authorities. As Zukin noted, with the decline of industrial production and the disappearance of numerous local industries, many cities started to function as landscapes of consumption, not landscapes of production, and culture has become a new business opportunity for cities and their representatives (Zukin 1991; Zukin 1998: 1–2). Since the 1980s –1990s, urban development in many European countries has been influenced by neoliberal, culture-led urban regeneration strategies (Quinn 2013: 71). Urban events have become a significant part of these strategies. Urban scholars looked at festivals from different perspectives. Some researchers studied urban festivals as a way of strengthening the local identity, solidarity and pride or a way of re-establishing social cohesion and ties in the community where local people's personal identities are closely connected with their attachment to place (e. g. Quinn 2005; Jaeger and Mykletun 2013; Cudny 2016; Taylor and Kneafsey 2016). Others studied the role of festivals in the process of urban regeneration, marketing and branding with a focus on economic benefits. Local authorities increasingly view festivals as a tool to attract tourists and possible investors, and to bring economic revenue. For them, festivals present an appealing marketing device to use to enhance the city's image (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz 2011: 395). Urban events provide an opportunity to move towards the consumption of experiences (Getz 2008) or an experience economy (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Getz and Page 2016). Stasiak stresses that in the experience economy key commodities are not specific products, but emotions and experiences of visitors (Stasiak 2013: 36). These festivities are often consumer-oriented and seen as a means to contribute to new experience, to a positive image of the place and to economic growth (Herrero et al. 2007). However, growing commercialism of festivals might also have negative consequences – higher prices can make a festival inaccessible for local people (Quinn 2005; Van Aalst and Melik 2012).

According to Waterman, most urban festivals are cyclical (annual or biennial) and transform an urban place for a short period of time into a “festival space” (Waterman 1998). Van Aalst and Melik distinguish between various roles and functions of festivals in urban strategies:

1. the festival as a showcase for a city – if it is connected to a certain location, it can provide a city with a particular image or brand;
2. the festival as a creative destination and opportunity for specialization – some festivals may cater to specific tastes (such as jazz or folklore), attract creative people, connect producers, performers and audiences, and even support new talent;
3. the festival as an attraction for visitors – many successful festivals attract not only locals, but also a lot of tourists who are seen as important contributors to the local economy (Van Aalst and Melik 2012: 197).

Growing attention has been paid to the study of the relation between a place/location and a festival (place-bound or place-less festivals, e. g. Derrett 2003; Quinn 2005; MacLeod 2006; Van Aalst and Melik 2012). If a festival is always organized in the same place,

it may contribute to the strengthening of place identity and the brand of a city. Place-bound diverse and attractive social spaces create a positive atmosphere, which makes visitors feel inspired, involved, and connected to a place (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz 2011: 393; Lorentzen 2009: 840). Each festival requires the reconfiguration of urban spaces for festive activities that are different from everyday life, which means that ordinary spaces are usually transformed into festival spaces with different pace and rhythm (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz 2011: 394).

Del Barrio et al. have introduced the term urban cultural heritage festival that presents the spatial and cultural values of a particular place (Del Barrio, Davesa and Herrero 2012). They also talk about a festivalization of cities – a new process that can provoke cultural creativity and social cohesion, generate economic spending and political interest in enhancing locals' sense of belonging (Del Barrio et al. 2012: 243).

Cultural heritage festivals embedded in a particular public space are an encouragement to rediscover the city (Miśkowiec 2017: 109). These place-bound events often include festivities organized in honor of historical figures and events or local/regional traditions (van Aalst and Melik 2012: 198). If they are properly planned and developed, and focus on authenticity and uniqueness (Young and Kaczmarek 2008), they can contribute to strengthening the local identity and sense of attachment on the one hand, and fostering a positive perception by visitors on the other hand.

In order to strengthen the image and brand of the city, national and international cultural heritage initiatives (mainly inscriptions on representative national lists of intangible heritage, on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity or the European Capital of Culture project) have been often used to demonstrate cultural uniqueness of a particular city and its urban space and culture. Although cultural heritage has been recognized as an important factor in urban agendas, only limited space in scholarly literature has been devoted to its role in urban sustainable development strategies as described in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Perry et al. 2019).

This paper focuses on the transformations of the Radvaň Fair – an urban festival in the medium-sized city of Banská Bystrica in Central Slovakia – from a traditional commercial market to an urban hallmark festival based on cultural heritage. It shows strategies chosen by the municipality to build a unique festival in order to distinguish it from other festivals, however, it also reveals contested practices used as part of these urban strategies. Despite copious scholarly literature on urban festivals, most studies concentrate on large-scale and well-known festivals in capitals or large cities such as London, Edinburgh, Rotterdam, Stockholm, Łódź etc. (e.g. Jamieson 2004; Taylor and Kneafsey 2016; Miśkowiec 2017), however, a number of studies on festivals in smaller cities have emerged in recent years (e.g. Konsola and Karachalis 2009; Nelson et al. 2011; Lorentzen 2013). In addition, Cudny stresses that there is a lack of research studying “the phenomenon of festivals in a comprehensive way, starting from their definition, through history to the description of their influence” (Cudny 2016: viii). This study is an attempt to contribute to filling the gap in the research of festivals in small or middle-sized cities.

## METHODS

This paper draws on a three-year targeted ethnographic study of the Radvaň Fair in the city of Banská Bystrica (2017–2019). The key research questions concerned transformations of the fair in relation to its specific place and local population, particularly the impact of changes of the place on the fair and its visitors. It also followed strategies chosen by the municipality to build a unique festival in order to distinguish it from other festivals, and it revealed contested practices used as part of these strategies.

The methodology included a combination of ethnographic qualitative methods and approaches. It was based on direct participant observation at the time of the festival and fieldnotes generated during three years; nineteen informal and semi-structured interviews with key actors and participants; an analysis of visual material – photographs, festival site maps and programs; print media articles, press releases, social media statements and Internet sources; memoirs of famous natives of Banská Bystrica (Zechenter-Laskomerský 1974; Andrašovan 1994); archive documents, mainly documents from the municipality's committee meetings and local newspapers from the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1939) and communist Czechoslovakia (1948–1989); and key strategic documents of the city from the post-1989 period.<sup>2</sup>

As a native of Banská Bystrica, I have been visiting the Radvaň Fair annually for more than fifty years. I have a lot of personal memories of it and good understanding of the broader socio-cultural and political context. Moreover, when I decided to study the Radvaň fair, I returned to my research findings and diaries from the 1990s when I was researching post-socialist transformations of urban space on the example of the Banská Bystrica central square (e. g. Bitušíková 1998a, 1998b, 1999). Reading my old fieldnotes, I realized that the Radvaň fair was strongly present in the testimonies of my respondents, but did not play any role in the city marketing and planning at the time. The event started to be seen by the municipality as an important urban festival with a marketing potential in the first decade of the 21st century, but particularly after it was inscribed on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Slovakia in 2011.

## THE RADVAŇ FAIR: HISTORICAL MEMORY MATTERS

### HUNGARIAN MONARCHY (895–1918)/AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN MONARCHY (1867–1918)

The Radvaň Fair (*Radvanský jarmok*)<sup>3</sup> was founded in 1655 as an annual fair in the village of Radvaň situated near the royal mining city of Banská Bystrica (part of the Hungarian

<sup>2</sup> Plán hospodárskeho a sociálneho rozvoja mesta Banská Bystrica 2015–2023; Konceptia rozvoja cestovného ruchu Banskobystrického samosprávneho kraja na roky 2016–2021; Návrh stratgickej vízie rozvoja kultúry v meste Banská Bystrica 2015–2020.

<sup>3</sup> The Slovak word *jarmok* is derived from the German *Jahrmarkt* – an annual market.

Monarchy at the time). Fairs of this kind were usually closely related to religious holidays and pilgrimages, which was also true of the Radvaň Fair. The privileges given to the village to organize an annual fair by the Hungarian King Leopold I of Habsburg were partly related to privileges given to the local Catholic church to organize a pilgrimage. The date of the Radvaň Fair was therefore set at 8 September (plus additional two days) – the feast day celebrating the Nativity of Mary, and since then (1655) the fair has been annually organized in this period. Despite the religious reasoning behind the date, people have always considered the fair a festivity marking the transition between the end of summer and the beginning of autumn (Sklenka 2014a, 2014b; Kollár and Sklenka 2017).

The Radvaň Fair has become one of the largest fairs in Upper Hungary and was called “the fair of all fairs”. Its primary function for more than three centuries was mainly a commercial one. This fact has to be seen in the context of the economic development of Slovakia in Upper Hungary. For centuries, markets and fairs were connected with local crafts and agriculture – a self-supply based character of economy (Darulová 1995: 106). They were the most important ways of transmission and exchange of goods, but also a way of transferring cultural values and patterns between urban and rural environments, and between various ethnic groups. The Radvaň Fair became a stage for multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual exchange. Hungarian, German, Slovak, and Yiddish – all these languages were equally present at the fair until the beginning of WW2.<sup>4</sup>

Because of the unique status of the Radvaň Fair in the Hungarian Monarchy, the fair was given the right to be open to all sellers (not only to local ones, as was the case for most weekly or daily markets). Craftsmen and sellers from all over the Monarchy came to sell their hand-made products of all kinds: cloth, canvas and blueprint, laces and embroideries, leather or woolen boots, textile decorations, wooden cooking utensils, ceramics (jugs, mugs, saucepots), baskets, combs made of horn, knives and scissors (specific high-quality products from the village of Radvaň), traditional wooden musical instruments (particularly noisy wooden rattles, pipes, bag-pipes, the *fujara* – a typical Slovak instrument), fruits, vegetables, meat products and gingerbread hearts – traditional love gifts bought mainly by young men for their loved ones (Kovačevićová 1955; Darulová 1995).

An additional function of the fair was entertainment – carousels, fortune tellers, circus and live animals – especially “showing” bears, monkeys, parrots, crocodiles, snakes etc. Until the end of the Hungarian (from 1867 Austro-Hungarian) Monarchy in 1918, the Radvaň Fair remained this kind of image, stable location and function. It was one of the largest fairs in the monarchy, and it kept its rural characteristics, although it was closely connected with the city of Banská Bystrica. The fair attracted mainly rural, partly also urban participants from various regions of the monarchy.

The 20th and 21st century were the time of significant transformations of the fair and its incorporation into city life and place marketing. Studying changes of the fair in the

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<sup>4</sup> Multilingualism was a common feature in most cities and towns of the former (Austro-) Hungarian Monarchy as well as during the first Czechoslovak Republic.

context of various regimes, states and ideologies reveals interesting developments and contradictions.<sup>5</sup>

## THE FIRST CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC (1918–1939)

After the foundation of a new and democratic Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, the Radvaň Fair strengthened its status of an important commercial event,<sup>6</sup> but at the same time it gained a new function – it started to be increasingly seen as a festivity for urban people of the city of Banská Bystrica. In the 1920s, local sources reflected on discussions about the modernization of the Radvaň Fair, criticizing it as a conservative folk festivity, which had a potential to be developed into a larger trade show, built at the Hron river side as an all-year-round fair and entertainment. However, this plan was never realized (Hobl 1926). Still, in this period, about 30 to 40 thousand visitors took part in the fair every year (Kovačevičová 1955).<sup>7</sup> The fair was open to diversity, attractive to various groups of citizens (Slovaks, Czechs, Jews, Roma) and all social strata, and remained multilingual (Slovak, Czech, Hungarian, German and Yiddish).

According to historical and public media records (Darulová 1995; Kollár and Sklenka 2017), it was in this period (the 1920s) that a new tradition started, which gave the fair a strong symbol. It was the practice of buying and then using a wooden stirring cooking spoon by men to hit women's bottoms during the fair. This started as a fun practice in the 1920s, stressing the importance of a woman in the kitchen, and became popular to the extent that it has since been seen as the key feature of the Radvaň Fair, and a wooden stirring cooking spoon as the key symbol of the fair. In this sense, the fair could be compared to carnivals as folk festivities analyzed by Bakhtin that go beyond their boundaries (Bakhtin 1984). It is a well-known fact based on ethnographic data that many festivals allow people to behave outside the bounds of social norms using humor and satire (e.g. Falassi 1987, Addo 2009). In the Radvaň Fair, the practice of using a stirring cooking spoon bought during the fair by a man in order to publicly hit women's bottoms and then bringing the spoon home as a fair gift (termed *jarmočnô*) survived until the 1990s. During communism, this practice was highly popular among young people, as there was no awareness of or discussions on gender equality or women's rights. Young women particularly saw it as prestigious to be hit by men as many times as possible. On the other hand, we can find comments in the local media as early as the 1930s criticizing this

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<sup>5</sup> Just for illustration, representatives of the present oldest generation lived their lives under 7 different political regimes: the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the democratic state of the first Czechoslovak Republic, the fascist Slovak State, the post-war Czechoslovak Republic, the federal Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, the post-socialist Czecho-Slovak Republic, and since 2003, the Slovak Republic.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to traditional products, new industrial products started to be introduced – mainly metal-based products that slowly replaced traditional handmade ones (Darulova 1995: 108–109).

<sup>7</sup> The population of Banská Bystrica was about 10 thousand inhabitants at the time.

practice as unacceptable.<sup>8</sup> Still, it survived for many more years. With the rise of gender equality awareness, the practice has been disappearing and one can only rarely see boys at the age of 10–12 years trying to hit their female schoolmates, usually unsuccessfully. It is clear that this “tradition” will not survive, but the wooden stirring spoon has remained a key symbol of the fair and the traditional gift up to these days.

## THE SOCIALIST CZECHOSLOVAKIA (1948–1989): A PLACELESS RADVAŇ FAIR

In 1966, Radvaň lost the status of a village and became a neighborhood and part of the municipality of Banská Bystrica. As the city was growing, it absorbed a number of nearby villages (including Radvaň) and turned them into urban neighborhoods with a lot of new concrete blocks of flats. The fair was last organized in Radvaň in 1971 (Kollár and Sklenka 2017: 49). Consequently, it had to relocate – because the original place completely disappeared. The fair moved closer to the city. However, the municipality, the organizer and funder of the fair, could not find a steady location – almost every year the fair appeared in another urban area, mostly in the area of the city’s sports facilities (the sports stadium or outdoor swimming pool areas). The frequent relocation of the fair negatively influenced its attractiveness, image, and popularity. According to interviews and my own memories, during communism the fair was perceived by local residents as a cheap festive attraction promoted by the communists. Communist leaders tried to use the Radvaň Fair to strengthen their own legacies. In this period (1948–1989), the fair was used as a showcase of the communist propaganda promoting well-being and wealth. For three days, shops in the city and stands at the fair offered scarce imported goods (for instance Nivea cosmetics or exotic fruit such as bananas or oranges). As one respondent said: “The Radvaň Fair was an excellent spectacle made by the communists: during the days of the fair we were all supposed to believe that everything was excellent” (male, 63).

One of the most significant and visible transformations of the fair during communism was the fact that it changed from a multicultural and multiethnic event into a homogeneous, monocultural and monolingual one dedicated only to Slovaks (Jews disappeared during WW2, most Czechs were relocated to Czech lands and the Roma were marginalized and not welcome). It turned into a cheap proletarian-based propaganda event, with a lot of stands of socialist enterprises celebrating working-class achievements.

## POST-1989 PERIOD: TRANSFORMATION FROM A PLACELESS RADVAŇ FAIR TO A PLACE-BOUND FESTIVAL

In the post-1989 era, the Radvaň Fair slowly developed into a prominent urban festivity in the city of Banská Bystrica and started to be promoted by the municipality as an important

<sup>8</sup> For instance, *Pohronský hlásník* No 37, 14 September 1935.

local attraction, as well as, increasingly, a tourist one. After many relocations of the fair, the municipality decided to give the fair a steady location in the historic city center – on the central square (the Slovak National Uprising Square) and its side squares and streets, which happened in mid-1990s after the reconstruction of the square.<sup>9</sup> The fair was also given new functions: in addition to the primary commercial function (offering various products for sale), a wide range of other activities were introduced to visitors, particularly numerous live performances staged at several public spaces, all free of charge and accessible to everyone. This development was part of the city's strategy to revitalize the city center after its physical change (Bitušikova 1998b). The late 1990s were a period when a transition from a fair as a primarily commercial activity to an urban festival is evident. In line with Cudny's definition, I consider an urban festival “an organised socio-spatial phenomenon, taking place at a specially designated time, outside the everyday routine, shaping the social capital and celebrating selected elements of human tangible and intangible culture” (Cudny 2014: 643). As Falassi stressed in his definition of an urban festival, the social function and the symbolic meaning of the festival are closely related to community values, social identity and historic continuity (Falassi 1987: 2), which can be also demonstrated in the case of the Radvaň Fair.

The decision of the municipality about a steady location for the Radvaň Fair on the main square, making it a place-bound festival, proved to be the right step towards a new chapter in its development.<sup>10</sup> The relocation of the newly designed festival to the most popular public space in the city led to its growing popularity and greatly increased participation by visitors. This fact testifies to the importance of and the effects that a place can have on a festival. Van Aalst and Melik note that the influence of festivals on places is well documented, but not much research has been done on the influence of places on festivals (Van Aalst and Melik, 2012: 198). However, there is sufficient evidence as to the success of place-bound festivals that became central to a city's identity as they were built on a particular local or regional heritage uniqueness. Ma and Lew's festival typology distinguishes four types of festivals, based on tradition (history) and place (geography): local heritage festivals, local modern festivals, national heritage festivals and global modern festivals (Ma and Lew 2012). Following this typology, the Radvaň Fair could be considered a local and in some aspects even a national heritage festival, that is shaped by mostly local/regional, but recently also national heritage traditions and the representation of authenticity – and is also promoted based on these criteria. It is grounded both in geography and history.

The historical Radvaň Fair has been playing an important role in local identity building after its relocation to the central historic square in Banská Bystrica – a place that has given local communities a sense of pride, identity and belonging for many years, even centuries

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<sup>9</sup> The central square was reconstructed as a pedestrian zone in 1994, after an ambitious initiative of a progressive mayor who was an architect. The square has always been the most popular and much-loved public space and a source of local pride for local inhabitants. The relocation of the fair to the central square emphasized the new significance of the event (Bitušikova 1998b).

<sup>10</sup> Despite new functions of the festive event and the transition from a fair into a festival, the municipality decided to keep the traditional name of the event – “the Radvaň Fair”.



(as a number of respondents in my research stressed). Zukin noted that “public spaces are the primary site of public culture; they are a window into the city’s soul” (Zukin 1995: 259). The central square in Banská Bystrica is such a window (Bitušikova 1998b, 1999), and its relationship with the relocated Radvaň Fair has become crucially linked with the local population and its identity.

In 2009, the municipality, the main organizer and funder of the festival, decided to use the Radvaň Fair as a tool to strengthen the local identity as well as for new city marketing. To achieve this, it applied for an inscription of the Radvaň Fair on the national Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. This decision meant that the city’s strategy towards the design of the festival had to be reconfigured so as to meet the criteria of the national competition. The municipality, in close cooperation with key cultural actors in the city (both those within the city’s jurisdiction and those in businesses and non-governmental organizations), prepared a new concept for the festival built on traditional cultural heritage – traditional handicrafts, cuisine and folklore. The aim was to make the festival unique and different, and to build it on the “old” Radvaň Fair legacy. As Johansson and Kociatkiewicz stress, “uniqueness is crucial in order to establish a ‘real connection’ with a place” (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz 2011: 399). Young and Kaczmarek also mention authenticity and uniqueness as factors contributing to building local identity and sense of attachment (Young and Kaczmarek 2008).

Since 2010, the festival has changed its design and has been hosting about 300–400 craftsmen from Slovakia and neighbouring countries presenting and selling their products every year. In order to be accepted to the festival, they have to fulfill strict criteria – not only should their products represent traditional culture (they have to be made of natural materials and follow traditional patterns, form and function), they should also be presented in an “authentic” way, and the seller should wear a traditional costume (the folk costume of the region that s/he represents). Following and fulfilling these criteria, the Radvaň Fair was inscribed on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Slovakia in 2011, and aspires to be inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

As is generally known, UNESCO heritage labels are being increasingly seen as a commodity that can attract new “heritage” tourists. Some scholars argue that with the growth of globalized tourism, real authenticity can be easily replaced with a “staged” authenticity in which local cultures and traditions become simulated for customer or tourist consumption (MacCannell 2008; Cohen 1988). The organizers of the Radvaň Fair try to organize it in order to reinvent its authenticity. However, staged authenticity should be mentioned – authenticity connected to consumerism of experience.<sup>11</sup>

The Radvaň Fair has become a space for the presentation of traditional tangible and intangible heritage. As del Barrio, Davesa and Herrero noted, (urban) cultural festivals are

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<sup>11</sup> Authenticity/staged authenticity is a topic worth further research, but it was not possible to analyze it in more detail in this paper.

an important commodity from an economic point of view, but they also form a major expression of cultural heritage, particularly immaterial cultural heritage (del Barrio et al. 2012: 237). In addition to traditional cultural phenomena, related genres such as ethno, world music or jazz are also regularly presented. Musical and dance performances based on traditions are accompanied by other kind of shows, such as fashion shows of young designers who are inspired by Slovak textile traditions. Cultural phenomena from the UNESCO lists of intangible cultural heritage have been presented there since 2011 – each annual festival is devoted to one of the phenomena from the UNESCO list (such as the musical instrument *fujara* – performance and the way it is produced; singing from the Upper Hron region; or traditional puppet theatre).<sup>12</sup> In this sense, the Radvaň Fair can be defined as an integrative site where “the tangible and intangible properties of cultural heritage cohere and collide, with both positive and negative consequences” (Perry et al. 2019: 2).<sup>13</sup>

It is important to stress that the municipality’s cultural strategy to connect the Radvaň Fair with traditional cultural heritage was not accidental. Banská Bystrica is situated in the Central Slovakia region with numerous living cultural heritage traditions. Folklore is still alive and popular in the region. There are ten well-established folklore ensembles of high quality in the city itself as well as sixteen folk music bands (including youth ensembles and bands), and many, many more in the region, which means that traditional culture-related activities find thousands of thrilled actors, supporters and viewers. Although the municipality tries to attract more outside visitors to the city, the Radvaň Fair has attracted mainly local people and people from the region and their family members and friends from the wider urban and rural areas. As Derrett stresses, “the emotional attachment to the natural landscape and the built environment, climatic changes, and shared memories of communal heritage allow individuals to come together for formal or spontaneous interactions like festivals and community cultural events. Place is said to have spirit or personality” (Derrett 2003: 50).

Indeed, the festival creates good opportunities for social interactions across generations, as it is popular both among older and younger generations. It remains a strong source of local identity, as a respondent confirmed: “The Radvaň Fair is deeply rooted in the city’s genetics. When one mentions the Radvaň Fair, I can immediately hear the call ‘Let’s go!’” (male, 21). Another respondent expressed: “Urban festivity is when people come to the square for a particular reason, it is the time when they can identify with their city. Like at the Radvaň Fair. We need more festivities such as the Radvaň Fair...” (female, 17).

## FOLK COSTUME DAY: A CONTESTED FESTIVAL

In September 2018, a new initiative (already called a new tradition by the Slovak media) was introduced by the popular journal *Slovenka* as part of the Radvaň Fair, following and

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<sup>12</sup> The International Puppet Theatre Festival is now connected with the Radvaň Fair.

<sup>13</sup> The positives and negatives of the Radvaň Fair will be discussed in the next part.

using a big boost of public interest in heritage and traditional culture in recent years.<sup>14</sup> The journal announced a “Folk Costume Day” (*Deň kroja*) on 8 September 2018 during the second day of the Radvaň Fair and encouraged any Slovak citizen/s (groups) to take part in the festival dressed in a traditional folk costume. The idea was highly encouraged by the Slovak political establishment (the government coalition led by the SMER party at the time) to show the dedication of the top national leadership to celebrate traditional Slovak culture (without mentioning any other cultures or ethnic groups and minorities living in Slovakia). At the end of the day, 2,679 citizens dressed in folk costumes from all over Slovakia were documented on the central square in Banská Bystrica, including the Prime Minister and the Mayor of the City of Banská Bystrica (Redakcia 2018). For any visitor, the event was a visually impressive performance of people’s strong emotional ties to Slovak traditions and particularly traditional costumes. My personal participation, observation and informal interviews with the people who visited the Radvaň Fair dressed in folk costumes could only demonstrate passion, love and pride of the participants to display their traditional clothing at this event. The festivity was promoted through various social media links, but primarily through *Matica slovenská* (a national cultural association established in the 19th century) that helped to organize and fund transportation – hundreds of buses bringing people from all over Slovakia to Banská Bystrica.

Despite positive emotional expressions of many participants during my participant observation and interviews, an anthropologist should look at this kind of festivity from a broader and critical perspective. This event, although organized by an “independent” popular journal, has become a political tool for supporting nationalist and populist agendas of the Slovak government (at the time) – the Prime Minister dressed in a folk costume giving a speech at the event was proof of it and was part of the pre-election populist propaganda.

The second “Folk Costume Day” took place during the Radvaň Fair the following year, on 7 September 2019. The Mayor (dressed in a folk costume) welcomed visitors with the words: “The Radvaň Fair is the fair of all fairs and Banská Bystrica has become the capital of the Slovak folk costume and folklore” (Miková et al. 2019: 4). The cultural (folklore-built) program on the main stage was followed by a parade of 3,882 documented people dressed in folk costumes from more than 150 villages. The event had wide media coverage and, as in the year before, was highly promoted by politicians – the Minister of Culture and the Prime Minister who again took part in the event dressed in folk costume. In an interview for the *Slovenka* journal before the event, the Prime Minister (at the time) Peter Pellegrini said: “Promotion and support of folklore is one of the priorities in my government. I consider folklore a DNA of our nation... I support the Minister of Culture to add an additional 2 million EUR just for the support of folklore... Folklore festivals as well as Folk Costume Day are the soul of our nation” (Miková 2019).

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<sup>14</sup> This surge of interest in traditional culture has been connected with the popular TV show *Zem spieva* (The country sings), but also with growing nationalism and populism of part of rhetoric of politicians who use folklore and traditions as a means to win more voters.

Growing interest and support for Slovak traditions (folklore, folk costumes, design based on folk traditions etc.) goes hand in hand with the growth of populism, intolerance, racism, antisemitism, extremism and even fascism. Representatives of all populist, nationalistic and fascist parties and right-wing movements use the so-called “national” – Slovak traditions and folklore – as a powerful emotional tool to manage and manipulate their followers and voters, and use public funding to do so. Ethnic tensions and hate politics towards any others (particularly the Roma minority, new migrants, and LGBT+) are part of these strategies. The political impact of urban (heritage) festivals based on contested narratives of “our pure traditions” might therefore have significant consequences – for example in the results of parliamentary elections.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Radvaň Fair with its continuous tradition since 1655 has gone through several transformations, but has generally changed from a rural commercial fair of more than three centuries to a 21st century cultural heritage urban festival. This paper presented a chronological perspective of the developments of the Radvaň Fair, because historical context of the development of any event with such a long period cannot be ignored.

The Radvaň Fair has always been an important part of identity of the region and the city, however, research results show that there is a strong correlation between the fair (festival), the place of the fair (festival) and local (place) identity.

The relocation of the fair from the neighborhoods of the city to the central square area demonstrated how important the selection of a public place was for the success of the development of a new (or newly designed) urban festival. The Radvaň Fair has been attracting an increasing number of people in recent years. The average attendance has been 60–70 thousand visitors.<sup>15</sup> One of the reasons has been related to the importance of the place – the location: the festival is now situated on the central square, the most popular part of the city, and thus, it can be seen as a place-bound festival. Organizing the festival on the main square reinforced the symbolic significance of this public space in the eyes of its inhabitants. In this perspective, Setha Low’s theories of social production and social construction of space (Low 2005) are relevant and inspiring. Low sees the social production of space as social, economic, ideological and technological factors whose goal is the physical creation of the material setting; and the social construction of space as “the actual transformation of space – through people’s social exchanges, memories, images, and daily use of material setting – into scenes and actions that convey symbolic meaning” (Low 2005: 112). The physical reconstruction of the central square in Banská Bystrica – the most important public space in the city that has for years had a crucial impact on

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<sup>15</sup> In 2019, the population of Banská Bystrica was 76,000 inhabitants – the city has been facing a population decline every year in the last decades.

local identity – can be seen as a social production of space that happened already in 1994 (based on the long history of the square). The square was also socially constructed through social interactions, common local community experience and memories, images and symbols. The Radvaň Fair significantly contributed to the strengthening of a newly socially constructed urban space, and its symbolic meaning in the view of local residents.

The Radvaň Fair plays an important role in the life of the Banská Bystrica inhabitants – it is a reason and opportunity for family reunions and bonding with friends. At the beginning of September one can feel a special atmosphere of expectation in the city. Wherever you go, you can hear about the festival: Which day are you going to?; Where shall we meet to?; What is the weather going to be like? It is clear that the festival is deeply inscribed in the local and regional context, but this has been changing with the introduction of “the Folk Costume Day” when thousands of people from all over Slovakia come to Banská Bystrica. It is too early to see the impact of this new initiative on the festival. With the growing attraction of the fair, critical voices can also be heard: too many people, too expensive, too noisy or even too political. That is what goes hand in hand with each festival that becomes popular. The municipality increasingly uses the Radvaň Fair in city marketing strategies, and recently also in the newly planned creative city strategy, where handicrafts should play an important role. Furthermore, as Banská Bystrica will apply for the title of “The City of Culture” within the national competition (2020) and also prepares its nomination for the European Capital of Culture 2026 competition, the Radvaň Fair will be firmly incorporated into these projects.

The case of the Radvaň Fair has confirmed that urban festivals have become a permanent part of urban culture both in large as well as smaller cities. These festivals play an important role in building the local identity and a sense of belonging, but can also help cities to strengthen their marketing and branding strategies.

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## URBANI FESTIVAL UTEMELJEN NA KULTURNOJ BAŠTINI KAO NAČIN PROMOCIJE LOKALNOG IDENTITETA I GRADA: SLUČAJ SAJMA RADVAŇ U GRADU BANSKÁ BYSTRICA U SLOVAČKOJ

Ovaj se rad bavi procesima transformacije urbanog festivala – sajma Radvaň u gradu Banská Bystrica u Slovačkoj – na sveobuhvatan način i iz kronološke perspektive. Glavni je fokus na razvoju festivala u postkomunističkom razdoblju nakon 1989. godine. Sajam se održava bez prekida od 1655. godine te je prošao kroz nekoliko transformacija. Njegova se funkcija promijenila od prvenstveno komercijalne, koju je imao tijekom tri stoljeća, do značajnog kulturno-društvenog događaja u 21. stoljeću. Glavna istraživačka pitanja vezana su uz ulogu tog festivala utemeljenog na kulturnoj baštini u izgradnji identiteta i promidžbi grada, kao i odnos između festivala i mjesta (lokacije). U radu se također obrađuje pitanje potencijalnog korištenja/zlouporebe kulturne baštine u trenutnom političkom diskursu i praksi.

Ključne riječi: urbani festival, kulturna baština, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia