VISUAL RESEARCH METHODS IN THE STUDY OF TRADITION: THE CASE OF THE LATVIAN SONG AND DANCE CELEBRATION

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Abstract

Most researchers, focusing on the study of tradition, admit that the term *tradition* has several meanings that are open to different interpretations. Sociology, anthropology, and ethnology apply different approaches to the study of tradition; yet it has been often researched also interdisciplinary, using various theoretical and empirical tools. The choice of the empirical methods was largely determined by the theoretical approaches to the concept of tradition, especially ethnologist Simon J. Bronner's premise that all the explanations of tradition perceive it as a subjective phenomenon that does not easily yield to reflection and usually manifests itself as an intrinsic and intangible part of everyday life. The specific nature of tradition has encouraged the development of methods suitable to the analysis of symbolic practices which are difficult to read. The above considerations prompt to test the applicability of visual research methods hitherto seldom used in the study of tradition, choosing as the case study the everyday practices of the Song and Dance Celebration movement. The objective of the current research is to establish whether and in what ways the application of visual research methods to the study of tradition advances the understanding of tradition using as the example of tradition the arts groups' everyday practices during the Song and Dance Celebration interim in Latvia. We pose two central research questions: 1) what everyday practices are typical of the arts groups during the Song and Dance Celebration interim; 2) which aspects of tradition can be explored through visual research methods. The data lead to the conclusion that photo-elicitation is the best visual approach for encouraging reflection on the everyday practices and their motivation. It can be used as the only research method, while the visual data acquired by the researcher need supplementary methods, such as the in-depth interview. Visual data reveal the variety of everyday practices and assist in

describing the aspects that are difficult to formulate, e. g., to illustrate emotions and feelings. It is concluded that visual research methods lead to novel and original results, reveal additional everyday practices upholding tradition and open new possibilities for interpreting their significance and symbolism.

Keywords: *tradition, Song and Dance Celebration, visual research methods, visual data, photo-elicitation.*

Introduction

In view of the rapid changes taking place in the values and cultural environment of the 21st-century society, it is crucial to provide such mechanisms for the preservation and transmission of cultural traditions that would correspond to the nature of the current developments. The issue about the preservation and transmission of cultural traditions usually surfaces in the public space over the periods of radical changes, when economically and politically significant decisions concerning reforms and innovations are made. The interest of the academic circles in this phenomenon is upheld by the presence of tradition in individual and collective practices within the context of glocalization processes, which furthers also the development of methodological approaches for studying tradition.

Theoretical sources attest that the explanations of tradition are complex and multi-layered. It has always been challenging to study the phenomenon of tradition due to its intangibility and subjectivity. Folklorist Richard Bauman has described tradition as a symbolic construct creating a connection between the present and the past and imbuing particular cultural forms with value [Bauman 1992: 32]. Although various cultures and trends of thought may treat tradition differently, e.g., it can be perceived as an obstacle to development and innovations or as a renewable future resource, ethnologist Simon J. Bronner considers that all the descriptions of tradition see it as a subjective phenomenon [Bronner 2011: 5]. The high degree of subjectivity is demonstrated by the fact that not only theoreticians but also tradition carriers[1] understand and treat the traditions practised in ambiguous and differentiated ways. S. J. Bronner proposes that even the practitioners of a tradition are unreflective about their tradition [Bronner 2011: 5]; it can be explained not only by the intangibility of tradition and unawareness of its elements but also by its integration into everyday life. Researchers have divided opinions on the issue whether the tradition carriers' attitude towards tradition and their ability to reflect on it are related to its transmission potency: there are researchers who consider that

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[1] Although Bronner uses the terms *givers* and *recipients* to describe the practitioners of tradition, the authors of the present paper use the term *tradition carriers* popular also in Latvian.

practicing tradition does not require reflexivity, while others believe that reflexivity is an important instrument for inheriting tradition; for example, S. J. Bronner considers that understanding tradition might ensure one's sense of belonging [Bronner 2011]. Tradition can be perceived as an interdisciplinary phenomenon, which both expands the understanding of tradition and complicates its study, as the methods offered by various disciplines yield contradictory results motivating researchers to seek interdisciplinary approaches to exploring tradition that would comprehensively include the subjective forms of expressing tradition and allow tradition carriers themselves reflect on their tradition.

Over the last decades, the social sciences and humanities have developed visual research methods as an innovative alternative to the conventional empirical data collection methods. In sociology and anthropology these recent developments are known as visual sociology and visual anthropology. However, the similar theoretical models and strategies used in both these disciplines make visual research methods into an interdisciplinary approach. Despite being often used by sociologists and anthropologists, who have developed the theoretical basis and practice, visual research methods still remain largely untried in many areas of the social sciences. Visual research methods constitute a large body of approaches based on the visual data acquired in empirical research and applicable to both data collection and analysis [Margolis&Pauwels 2011]. One of the advantages of visual methods is the capacity of the visual aspect to operate with symbolic potency, which visual sociologist Jason Hughes calls signifying power [Hughes 2012: xxi]. It is an essential argument for selecting visual methods in the study of tradition, which seeks ways how to disclose the implied symbolic meanings. Another advantage offered by visual methods is the possibility to differentiate the sources from which the visual data are acquired, separating the researcher from the subject of research or – in the present paper – from the perspective of tradition carriers, thus opening access to the research subjects' reflection on their tradition [Pauwels 2011: 8].

Taking into account the above-mentioned considerations, it can be proposed that tradition, being a subjective phenomenon, does not always yield sufficiently valid and nuanced explanations if it is researched by the methods of the social sciences and humanities (especially by the means of various questionnaires and interviews), because tradition includes intangible and symbolic aspects, whose significance cannot be always revealed through verbalization. As tradition is intrinsic to everyday practices, it motivates to seek special research methods that would allow tradition carriers to reflect on their traditions. Consequently, it is necessary to find such research methods that would account for the subjective expressions of tradition and allow tradition carriers themselves to reflect on their traditions.

The applicability of visual research methods to the study of tradition has been tested selecting as a case study the tradition of the Song and Dance Celebrations preserved at the national level in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, which includes also the preparations for the celebration. A significant contribution to the documentation and study of the development of the Song and Dance Celebrations as a tradition in the Baltic States was made by the preparation process of the candidature file for the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) list of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. In 2003, the tradition and symbolism of the Song and Dance Celebration in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were recognised a masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity [UNESCO Latvijas Nacionālā komisija]. This tradition is unique in the world due to its popular appeal, the scale and regularity of celebrations, the repertoire combining traditional and modern music, and the broad participation covering all ages. The Song and Dance Celebrations are a regular and cyclic process culminating in the Nationwide Song and Dance Celebration that takes place at specifically created locations once in five years. The tradition is based on a mass amateur movement led by professional conductors and choreographers that includes various forms of art. The Song and Dance Celebrations play a significant part in consolidating society and strengthening the national identity. Until now society and researchers have paid greater attention to the Song and Dance Celebrations as a set of events organized once in five years. There is no doubt that these celebrations demonstrate the artistic potential of people and vividly represent the national identity and patriotism. However, we would like to analyse the tradition of the Song and Dance Celebrations as a set of complex practices involving several hundred thousands of people,[1] who create it contributing incessant and systematic effort over the five-year period between the celebrations or the so-called "celebration interim" [Dziesmu un deju svētku likums 2005]. During the interim the arts groups carry out regular work, implementing various everyday practices. Researching these practices might assist in establishing their relevance for the transmission and preservation of the Dance and Song Celebration tradition.

The objective of the current research is to ascertain whether and in what ways the application of visual research methods to the study of tradition advances the understanding of tradition using as the example of tradition the arts groups' everyday practices during the Song and Dance Celebration interim in Latvia. We pose two central research questions: 1) what everyday practices are typical

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[1] In 2015, the community of the Song and Dance Celebration in Latvia consisted of approximately 145,000 members of various arts groups of all the ages [LR Kultūras ministrija 2015: 7].

of the arts groups during the Song and Dance Celebration interim; 2) which aspects of tradition can be explored through visual research methods; 3) what is the most appropriate application of visual research methods. In order to answer these questions, we will briefly characterize the theoretical aspects of analysing the phenomenon of tradition and the possibilities for interdisciplinary approaches to the study of tradition, as well as establish the hitherto typical trends in the application of visual research methods.

Tradition as an interdisciplinary phenomenon

The term *tradition* is widely used in several disciplines of the social sciences and humanities, such as anthropology, folkloristics and sociology, as well as in history and culture studies. Each discipline interprets tradition differently, thus expanding the multi-layered explanation of tradition as an interdisciplinary phenomenon. Therefore, the concept *tradition* does not *belong* to any discipline in particular and the contemporary studies of tradition emphasize precisely its interdisciplinary perspectives [Finnegan 1991; Bula 2011]. The different interpretations of various disciplines have caused lasting problems by constricting the concept of tradition into specific categories instead of offering a comprehensive and essential view; thus, anthropology and folklore have described it as a positive category, while sociology has treated it negatively and has stated that tradition has no place in the studies of modern society, because it does not correspond to modern social structures [Bula 2011]. Only in the 1980s, sociologist Edward Shils's work *Tradition* (1981) introduced changes that marked the interdisciplinary turn in the study of tradition; the author objected to the practice of using tradition in various areas of human activity and describing it in the sources of various disciplines while ignoring the essence of tradition and its contribution to everyday life [Shils 1981; Bula 2011: 143]. Thirty years later was published a book that is one of the most outstanding contemporary works on tradition and treats it as interdisciplinary; it is folklorist Simon J. Bronner's book *Explaining Traditions: Folk Behavior in Modern Culture* (2011) [Bronner 2011]. Most tradition researchers admit that the term *tradition* contains many meanings that are open to different interpretations and covers pronouncedly different phenomena, which complicates the possibility to arrive at an unequivocal definition. Tradition researchers have used various epistemological instruments to specify the scientific interpretation of this phenomenon: they have sought its etymology in different languages, researched its origins in various sciences, offered explanations and descriptions of this phenomenon, compared it to other phenomena and summarised various approaches to it. Yet very few authors have attempted a straightforward definition. One of them is historian David Gross:

The term "tradition" refers to a set of practices, a constellation of beliefs, or a mode of thinking that exists in the present, but was inherited from the past. [..] A tradition, then, can be a set of observances, a collection of doctrines or teachings, a particular type of behavior, a way of thinking about the world or oneself, a way of regarding others or interpreting reality [Gross 1991: 8].

This explanation of tradition shows it as a multi-layered phenomenon that manifests itself as a set of various practices or beliefs but excludes the material forms of the process it transmits. According to Gross, artefacts, symbols, images, or institutions are not traditions but may be grounded in traditional values [Gross 1991:8, 9]. E. Shils, however, considers that in the process of transmission anything can become a tradition: artefacts, natural objects, all accomplished patterns of the human mind, and all patterns of belief or modes of thinking and technical practices. In addition to this, the understanding of tradition can be very narrow, designating some specific tradition, for example, *The Socialist Tradition* or *The Tradition of Modernity,* etc. [Shils 1981: 3; 16]. The divergent, complicated and sometimes contradictory explanations of the term *tradition* found in different disciplines clearly demonstrate that it is impossible to operate with the whole set of meanings within the boundaries of one research, therefore researchers tend to choose one aspect of tradition that is relevant to the specific discipline, theoretical stance or research.

The present research will pay special attention to the tradition carriers' ability or inability to reflect on and communicate their ideas of tradition, because the research will focus on the possibilities to study tradition. This problem is discussed in the works by E. Shils and S. J. Bronner. E. Shils believes that when tradition is accepted, it is vivid and vital to those who accept it; it is the past in the present but it is as much part of the present as any very recent innovation [Shils 1981: 13]. S. J. Bronner continues this theme discussing the argument that tradition carriers who encounter tradition as lived experience are incapable of reflecting on it. This does not imply that the significance of tradition diminishes, because the inability to reflect on the traditions practised only confirms how relevant and sometimes also intrinsic traditions are to their carriers. To reflect on tradition means to speak about such powers and functions that are difficult to explain and, in attempting to do that, one faces the prejudice that tradition should simply be without any rational explanations that might belittle its sacred nature. Such prejudices appear, because one of the explanations of tradition lies in its symbolic nature; by revealing the importance of human interaction in the processes of tradition, it is possible to reveal the symbols it contains, the ways these symbols are transmitted and values that in modern culture are grounded in society and political and psychological influences, for traditions form the basis of religion, as well as law, politics, art

and other areas related to the progress of society. Researchers should not assume that people practice tradition because everybody does it; there should be some reason that people often are unaware of. And understanding the significance of the tradition they participate in would assist tradition carriers in achieving a sense of belonging and finding their bearings in the modern individualized society. It is not accidental that S. J. Bronner equates the ability to reflect on traditions with the preservation of one's social identity [Bronner 2011; 5–10]. This aspect is crucial to the expressions of the Song and Dance Celebration tradition. *The Questionnaire of the Participants of the Song and Dance Celebration* (2014) organized by the Research Centre of the Latvian Academy of Culture indicates that the participants perceive the celebration as a very essential instrument for constructing patriotism and national identity [Latvijas Kultūras akadēmijas Zinātniskās pētniecības centrs 2014].

It can be concluded that, due to the diversity of theoretical approaches and the interdisciplinary interpretation, the phenomenon of tradition cannot be adapted to some comprehensive understanding of this term and its definition. When analysing a particular tradition, it is more expedient to use the aspects of tradition mentioned in various theoretical sources. All in all six aspects characterizing tradition have been identified. These are: **continuity, changeability, innovation and creativity, the aspect of time, intangible and symbolic aspect, tradition carrier.** The above-mentioned definitions of tradition cannot be very well applied to its explanation, while the enumerated aspects of tradition can become the basis for a more inclusive analysis. The continuity of tradition is ensured by its uninterrupted transmission from one generation to the next, thus establishing its authority [Bauman 1992: 31; Vaz da Silva 2012: 41]. Understanding tradition is related also to the aspect of time, because tradition, being an uninterrupted transmission process, contains references to the past and consequently to the changes brought by history [Shils 1981; Finnegan 2011: 112; Bula 2011: 124]. Tradition can be inherited if it not only contains the past values but also adapts to the values of a particular society at the present moment, therefore it should include the aspect of changeability [Gross 1991: 10, 21; Bronner 2011: 13; Vaz da Silva 2012: 40]. The sources of changeability and adaptability to modern needs are creativity and innovation [Bronner 2011: 97; Vaz da Silva 2012: 44]. The most important element in the transmission process of tradition is not handing down material values but the copying of symbolic and emotional values from the past into the present [Bauman 1992: 32; Bronner 2011: 31; Vaz da Silva 2012: 45]. Furthermore, tradition cannot be transmitted if there is no subject that transmits it and receives it. S. J. Bronner uses the terms *giver* and *recipient* [Bronner 2011: 27, 28]. The above-identified aspects of tradition will

not be analysed in greater detail, however, they will be the basis for the interpretation of the acquired empirical data.

The theoretical sources analysed discuss how tradition should be studied. Although the authors of these works do not offer precise methodological descriptions, only some case studies, they map out the trends in the modern humanities and social sciences. One of the most useful summaries is offered by the Latvian folklorist Dace Bula: 1) interdisciplinary studies predominate; 2) studies are based on qualitative methodology, for which fieldwork is very relevant; 3) there is no definitive list of methods to be applied to the analysis of the material [Bula 2011; 74]. The good practices in the study of tradition are as follows: to study tradition in the context of social and political processes; to take into account the change-ability and transformations of tradition; to take into account the values of tradition carriers and specific circumstances; to focus on the everyday life practices. As the study of tradition permits a certain degree of speculation in order to analyse symbolic practices that are difficult to read, methodological innovations can be introduced. It prompts to attempt a description of the visual research methods that have not been hitherto widely used and to establish their applicability to the study of tradition [Bronner 2011: 10, 30; Finnegan 1991: 110, 114; Bula 2011: 47, 174].

Visual research methods

In difference from conventional research methods, visual research methods have entered the social sciences and humanities quite recently. They are grounded in the idea that valid scientific insight into society can be acquired by observing, analysing and theorizing its visual manifestations, such as human behaviour and material products of culture [Pauwels 2011: 3]. Although visual methods lack a homogeneous theoretical foundation and only few authors have attempted to create a homogeneous methodological basis, the increasing number of visual studies over the last years suggests that researchers are becoming aware of their advantages. Visual materials have had a long and venerable history as one of the major subjects of study in the social sciences and humanities, yet the discussion of visual research methods has gained relevance exactly at this point in time. There is no doubt that visual elements have become central to culture in contemporary Western society, which is proved by the increase of visual information acquired from electronic appliances (television, the Internet, printed materials, etc.), yet, as visual sociologist Gillian Rose notes, it is not valid to attribute the topicality of visual research methods only to the development of technology. It cannot be denied that scientific methods evolve and are influenced by the development

of technology; yet the central argument why researchers are becoming more interested in visual methods is their symbolic significance and narrative potential that is extremely important in cultural studies [Rose 2012]. Visual sociologist Jason Hughes also marks that the visual cannot be taken as something granted and obvious merely because we live in an increasingly visual world, because in reality the power of the visual material lies in its symbolic potency and it is imbued with a signifying power [Hughes 2012: xxi]. It means that with the help of visual methods it is possible to reveal not only the superficial and obvious visual layer but also the deeper symbolic meanings that people attribute to things, events, and decisions. Precisely this symbolic potency of the visual and its interdisciplinary features motivated researchers to apply visual methods to the analysis of tradition.

In research practice, the most often used visual data are photographs, which have been incorporated into social research projects. The most common application of photography in research is twofold: 2) as photo-elicitation, also known as photo-interview, where photography is used as visual stimulus [Hatte, Forin, Adams 2013].

Theoretical sources indicate that photography can be widely applied for scientific purposes, yet, over the history of the development of the social sciences, its use has caused divided responses. One of the central counterarguments is that its use is merely documentary and illustrative [Banks 2001: 115–118]. Therefore, great effort is devoted to developing the scientific foundation of photography, differentiating its uses for scientific and documentary purposes. Although sociologist Howard Becker points out that the purpose of any photograph is to study society [Becker 1974], the use of photography in empirical social inquiry differs, because it is used as part of a clearly defined research design, establishing a logical link between the research questions and the choice of data sources and analytical approach, the boundaries of inquiry are mapped out, the selection is sufficiently extensive and the primary concern is not data representation but data analysis [Wagner 2007]. It should be taken into account that basing a research exclusively on the analysis of photography could be very complicated. Research practice proves that one of the advantages of photo documentation in fieldwork is the co-operation with the subjects of research that can be as beneficial as the analysis of the images. For example, an artisan may be asked to pause in order to register some stage of his work process, at the same time creating a possibility to learn more about the significance of this process [Banks 2012: 122; Gold 2012: 89]. Visual researcher Steven J. Gold admits that photo documentation most often supplements other methods, such as literature reviews, participant observation, in-depth interviews and the inspection of statistics [Gold 2012: 91].

One of such approaches can be derived from visual methods; it is photo-elicitation or photo-interview, where the photographs created by the researcher, the informant or some other person are used as a visual stimulus during the interview. It means that, during a conventional in-depth interview, the researcher shows the informant the photographs and the informant may use them as a basis for reflection on the issues the researcher is interested in. Already during the very first experiments with using photography in interviews, John Collier concluded that the subjects of research may be for various reasons unwilling to answer the questions of an in-depth interview and feel uncomfortable [Collier 1967]; therefore it is essential to break the verbal pattern of questions-answers. Photographs have the advantage of not posing questions but rather initiating a conversation about them, therefore psychologically they are perceived as a third party in the conversation. In difference from in-depth interviews, a relationship between three elements – the researcher (interviewer), the subject of research (informant) and the stimulus (photograph) – is established and the authority in the dialogue shifts from the researcher to the subject of research [Lapenta 2011].

Analysing the experience of researchers, it becomes evident that photo-elicitation is one of the most perspective approaches in visual methods applicable to the interpretation of intangible phenomena and orientated towards the co-operation between the researcher and the subject of research [Hatte, Forin, Adams 2013]. The studies of theoretical sources indicate that, although photo-elicitation has many advantages, its disadvantages should not be ignored. The analysts of visual research methodology [Hurworth, 2003; Hatte, Forin, Adams 2013] have listed several pros and cons in the use of photo-elicitation, which we have integrated and offer as a systematized set of pros and cons (table 1). The pros of photo-elicitation can be divided into three groups: 1) its ability to adapt to various research designs; 2) increasing influence of the subject of research and decreasing authority of the researcher; 3) as a result of reflections it is possible to acquire deeper insight into the phenomenon researched. The cons can also be divided into three groups: 1) due to the close co-operation with the subject of research, the researcher must be open and flexible; 2) it may be complicated to access the data; 3) the need for a specific and sometimes expensive material-technical base. It has been concluded that photo-elicitation approach in visual methods has many essential advantages that are especially relevant in inquiries seeking deeper insight into the research problem, e.g., attempting to interpret and analyse some abstract or intangible phenomenon, such as tradition, which is weakly rationalized and incompletely understood by the subjects of research.

Table 1.

Photo-elicitation: pros and cons

PROS	
Flexibly adapts to the research design	• can be used at any stage of the research (as the pre-research or as the central approach); • can be combined with other methods (in-depth interview, focus group, etc.).
Decreases the authority of the researcher and increases the influence of the subject of research	• diminishes the researcher's control over the choices and interpretations made by the subject of research; • establishes trust between the researcher and the subject of research and expands the possibilities of communication; • allows the subjects of research to reflect on themselves.
The possibility to acquire deeper insight into the phenomenon researched through reflection	• allows to combine the verbal and visual languages, establishing a link between the psychological and physical realities; • allows to visually represent ideas as a unified whole; • opens a possibility to view the phenomenon from the *inside* and see the context; • generates unpredictable information; • elicits conscious and unconscious knowledge that informants evade mentioning or find difficult to mention; • allows the informant to discuss personally significant abstract or complex concepts; • helps to express feelings and values through the psychological and emotional elements and symbols of the visuals.
CONS	
The researcher must be open and flexible	• the approach is time-consuming and requires patience on the researcher's part; • the researcher must intensely communicate with the subject of research, especially in cases when reflexive photographs are necessary; • the research process may diverge from the plan and radical changes may be introduced; • the researcher must be ready to include in the minutes of the interview the photographs, as well as to re-consider whether and how to include the photographs, depending on the agreement with the particular informant, which makes taking minutes more complicated.

Complicated access to the data	• not all the informants can be asked to create reflexive photographs (such as children or people who do not know how to operate even with the basic equipment); • the subjects of research may be for various reasons unwilling to take photographs, e.g., because it is time-consuming or they are not interested in photography; • the researcher may fail to acquire the promised photographs, because the subjects of research may not send them or do not wish to send them, because they, for example, regret taking them; • the subject of research might have chosen to take different photographs if he / she did not have to show them to the researcher.
Need for the material-technical base	• special equipment (camera) that requires larger financial resources; • the necessity to ensure against the possibility that the subject of research may lose or break the equipment.

Methodology

The possibility to apply visual research methods to tradition and the type of information acquired by these methods have been tested in a research focusing on the everyday practices of the arts groups in the Song and Dance Celebration interim. In the introduction of the paper we have already stated the necessity to research these practices, establishing not only the relevance of the Song and Dance Celebration's culmination point but also the part played by the everyday practices of the numerous members of the arts groups in preserving and transmitting tradition.

The research is designed in accordance with the basic principles of qualitative methodology and has six stages (table 2) that are predominantly grounded in two approaches derived from visual methods and are supplemented by an in-depth interview as a method of data collection. The visual data used in the research are photographs acquired using the two approaches in visual research methods described above: 1) the analysis of the visual data created by the researcher during fieldwork; 2) photo-elicitation using the visual materials created by the informant. Applying the first approach, the researcher carries out fieldwork doing observations and taking photographs that register the everyday activities of the arts groups (rehearsals, concerts, etc.), supplementing them with notes and contextual information. The second approach focuses on the participation of the informants in acquiring data; the members of the arts groups were asked to take photographs of their everyday activities, which were later used as a visual stimulus

in the interviews with the very same members of the arts groups. Although the first approach mostly focused on acquiring data for analysis, while the second approach was used as a visual stimulus, it was concluded that the photographs taken by the informants allowed drawing valid conclusions about the everyday practices of the arts groups.

Table 2.

The design of the research: six stages

Stages of the research
1	Selection of the arts groups, pre-research and communication
2	Fieldwork (observation of the arts groups and acquiring visual data)
3	In-depth interviews with the leader/leaders of the arts groups and other persons involved
4	Acquiring reflexive visual data from the members of the arts groups
5	Photo-elicitation sessions with the members of the arts groups
6	Data analysis

All in all, 14 arts groups participated in the research. All the arts groups involved in the research were studied visually: the researcher did observations and created photographs, but in 9 cases an in-depth research was carried out, organizing in-depth interviews and acquiring the photographs created by the members of the arts groups that were later used in photo-interviews. The overall number of the visual data (photographs) used in the analysis is 1971. 1815 of them were acquired during fieldwork, while 156 were acquired from the members of the arts groups. 13 in-depth interviews and 7 photo-elicitation interviews were acquired.

Methodology and the methods of acquiring data in the present research have a twofold purpose: to provide insight into the phenomenon researched, as well as to test the applicability of visual research methods to studying the everyday practices of arts groups. In the present paper we will not give detailed information about the results obtained in studying the everyday practices of the arts groups but, in accordance with the research questions, focus on the conclusions about the applicability of visual research methods to the study of tradition reached in the course of the research. Data analysis was orientated towards the comparison of the informative and explanatory value of the data acquired during fieldwork and photo-elicitation for studying various aspects of the everyday practices of tradition. The amount of evidence acquired was sufficient to reach the conclusion that the visual and in-depth interview data are mutually supplementary; moreover, the visual

data essentially expand the understanding of the research subject. Although in the course of the research certain conclusions about the goals and motivation of the members of the arts groups were reached, a comparison of the results concerning the identified everyday practices will follow.

Results

The research attests that the most vivid expressions of the everyday practices in the Song and Dance Celebration interim are: 1) rehearsals; 2) concerts; 3) the traditions of the particular groups and other informal practices. The visual data were acquired and systematized in accordance with these expressions of practices and in each case specific aspects of tradition emerging through the visual data were identified.

The main stages of **the rehearsal process,** such as preparing for the rehearsal, physical or vocal warm-ups and trying out the musical instruments, learning new songs, musical pieces, or dances, practicing and preparations for a concert can be identified through observation and the visual data analysis. Likewise it is possible to identify such important elements of the rehearsal process as discipline, the presence or absence of breaks and partially also the suitability of the premises for the rehearsal. The visual data and information acquired by photo-elicitation allow to identify such stages as individual preparations for and planning of the rehearsal that take place, for example, in somebody's home to which the researcher has no access except through the informant himself/herself. On the other hand, with the help of in-depth interviews such factors as the time and frequency of rehearsals can be established. Moreover, it should be taken into account that such stages of the rehearsal process as recruiting, testing and selecting the members of the arts groups happen relatively seldom (usually once a year); therefore, the researcher cannot be always present in person, especially because these decisions are taken by the leader of the arts group. This omission was filled in by an in-depth interview with the leader. A telling example is the observation of creating the right atmosphere before each rehearsal. Figures 1 and 2 show the custom of preparing a cup of coffee for the conductor and lighting a candle to create the ambience practised by a seniors' choir. During the in-depth interview, the conductor of the choir indicated that such a process of preparation for each rehearsal creating the right atmosphere should be encouraged and is especially important for seniors, because the meetings of the arts groups often are one of the most positive events of the week and a possibility to communicate with other people. On the other hand, observations and the acquired visual data imply that youth arts groups do not require such ways of creating a special atmosphere. In this case more important is tuning for serious work and attitude building that the leader of the arts group is largely responsible

Figure 1 and Figure 2. Seniors' choir creates a pleasant atmosphere
and ambience before the rehearsal.

for. For example, the assistant of the leader (repetiteur) of the youth dance ensemble from the region considers that before the rehearsal it is very important to deliver a motivational speech reminding of the shared goals and encouraging the dancers to keep high standards of performance. Visual data provide valuable insight into the experiences of creating the emotional atmosphere among tradition carriers during the rehearsals and indicates how everyday practices in this respect vary in the arts groups of different ages, especially concerning the motivation systems.

The concert life of arts groups relatively is one of the most representative everyday practices. The data lead to the conclusion that the arts groups participating in the research perform in at least 13 types of concerts, such as annual or regular events at the state or region level; large projects; anniversary concerts; charity concerts; concerts at private events; competitions. It is possible to visually analyse all these types of concerts if they have been photographed during fieldwork; however, the data demonstrate that some types of concerts do not happen on regular basis, not even every year, which makes it difficult to identify all the types of concerts. The types of concerts can be identified also by asking the leaders of the arts group to submit the schedule of the whole concert season; however, occasionally small minor concerts take place that are not included in the schedules. Unless they are observed in person, the data about them can be acquired only with the help of photo-elicitation and in-depth interviews. It also refers to such important aspects of concert life as the frequency of concerts, the decision to participate in a concert, planning concerts, the most active concert season and demand for concerts. However, it has been established that the best approach to studying concert life is the photographs taken by the researcher, because they not only demonstrate the wide range of concerts but also offer a possibility to understand the relevance of concerts in everyday practice and their part in motivating the members to participate in the arts group. A valid example here is the argument grounded in the researcher's observations and visual data that concerts are an essential factor in motivating the members to join the arts group, because they produce emotions

Figure 3. The leader of a middle-aged dance group from the region encourages
a dancer seized with uncharacteristic stage fright before the concert.

seldom found in everyday life – pleasant excitement, pride at being on stage, a sense of unity and the feeling that you are not alone, because the members of the arts groups grow closer exactly during concerts. For example, it was observed that before a concert a member of the middle-aged dance group from the region was seized by uncharacteristic stage fright and the leader of the dance group tried to calm her down and encourage her (figure 3); while a youth dance ensemble from the region performed their good luck ritual before going on stage, thus confirming their belonging to the group and emotionally charging themselves (figure 4).

Figure 4. A youth dance ensemble performs their traditional
good luck ritual before the concert.

The data analysis leads to the conclusion that the third and often the most motivating group of everyday practices is **traditions and other informal activities**, here the term *tradition* is not used in its broader sense but with reference to traditions as regularly performed activities, such as common celebrations; birthday greetings; greeting on other important life occasions; the parties of the arts group; camps; events promoting the arts group; charitable initiatives and other informal activities, such as team-building events and trips abroad. In the analysis of traditions and other informal practices, it is possible to visually analyse all those activities captured by the researcher but the limits of fieldwork allowed to identify about a half of the tradition only through the photographs sent in by the informants and photo-elicitation. The researcher also encountered the problem mentioned in the theory, namely, that tradition carriers are not always able to identify and reflect on their traditions. Consequently, it was possible to identify long-standing traditions

and one-time activities only during photo-elicitation and in-depth interviews. In the course of the research, it was concluded that the most appropriate approach, especially for identifying everyday practices, is to ask the informants to send in the photographs from the personal archives accumulated over a longer period of time, not to ask the informants to take new photographs over a particular period of time during the research. A good example here is a member of a youth dance ensemble from the region who sent in the photographs that were not taken during the research but over the period of the last three years. Although in the course of the research it was established that at Christmas the dance ensemble has a tradition to organize the charity event *Labais vairo labo* ("Good Begets Good") in the town's market place, where they share greetings, hot soup, tea, and embraces with the inhabitants of the town (figure 5), only the photographs sent by the informant revealed that an essential part of this tradition was also the preparations for it the day before (figure 6).

Figure 5. The youth dance ensemble's annual Christmas charity event
Labais vairo labo ("Good Begets Good") in the town's market place
(the researcher's photograph).

Figure 6. The photograph showing the preparations
for the annual charity event *Labais vairo labo* sent by the informant
for photo-elicitation.

Conclusions

Concerning the applicability of visual research methods, it can be generally concluded that the photographs taken by the researcher during observation allow identifying the everyday practices of arts groups and their forms of expression. The visual study of the three types of the arts groups' everyday practices identified in the research – 1) rehearsals; 2) concerts; 3) traditions and other informal practices of the arts group – leads to certain conclusions about the advantages and disadvantages brought by this method to research. Visual data prove the existence of material objects and the occurrence of events that allows describing them; therefore they are useful in explaining and especially in assisting tradition carriers to explain the issues that are difficult to interpret, such as mutual relationships, the atmosphere in the arts group and the emotional ambience. However, the visual data alone do not help to explain purposes and motivation; therefore, supplementary methods should be introduced and photo-elicitation might be one of them, as it combines visual data and in-depth interviews. Photo-elicitation plays an especially significant

part in forming the reflexivity of tradition carriers, for it helps the informants to reflect on emotions and recall the most vivid events of their lives through the medium of documentary and symbolic photographs, adding a broader perspective to the phenomenon under analysis. This method can be used also in cases when the researcher lacks resources and cannot undertake extensive fieldwork. The visual methods applied lead to the conclusion that photo-elicitation can be used as the only research method, while the visual data acquired by the researcher need supplementary methods, such as the in-depth interview. The visual data can also supplement the data of an in-depth interview, e.g., to confirm that the statements are not contradictory and correspond to reality.

It must be admitted that the application of visual research methods in the analysis of tradition can provide essential and irreplaceable information. First of all, visual data allow identifying the different stages of tradition and its practices that take the form of different activities. Secondly, visual data, especially in combination with the conventional research methods, as in the case of photo-elicitation, give tradition carriers more freedom to reflect on their traditions and reveal the aspects that observation or in-depth interviews would not disclose. Thirdly, photo-elicitation's reflection on the visual data helps to reveal the symbolic and intangible aspects of tradition that are difficult to formulate, such as emotions and feelings.

In our opinion, a special feature of acquiring and applying visual data is the possibility to acquire supplementary data for various sets of data formed through observation and interviews. Visual data are essential and valuable as a source for constituting new significances and meanings, analysing and interpreting the sets of data acquired by other means and consequently producing new results. Essential here is also the flexible research design that presupposes a high degree of reflexivity on the parts of the researcher and the subject of research at all the stages of the research from the planning to the interpretation of the data. The relevance of reflexivity manifests itself in the fact that in the course of research the emotions, memories, and judgments activated by the photo-elicitation method influence the tradition carriers' attitude towards various aspects of tradition and helps to rationalize their motivation. The application of the photo-elicitation method encourages the processes of reflexivity that theoretical sources consider to be one of the elements that strengthen tradition. We consider that the interaction between the researcher and the tradition carrier that takes place in the course of acquiring visual data, especially in the case of photo-elicitation, brings the research nearer to the design of participatory researches and indicates an essential aspect why these methods are relevant for the study of tradition.

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