

# Heritage and Festivals in Europe

Performing Identities

**Edited by Ullrich Kockel,  
Cristina Clopot, Baiba Tjarve  
and Máiréad Nic Craith**

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## **3 Comparative aspects of the Song and Dance Celebration of the Baltic countries in the context of nation-branding processes**

*Rūta Muktupāvela and Anda Laķe*

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### **3 Comparative aspects of the Song and Dance Celebration of the Baltic countries in the context of nation-branding processes**

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Traditions rooted in cultural heritage are a key element behind the well-known motto of the European Union, 'Unity in Diversity'. The year 2018 was designated as the European Year of Cultural Heritage, with the aim to raise awareness about the uniqueness and richness of national, regional and local heritage, while stressing its significance in overcoming modern global challenges such as demographic and climate changes, natural or man-made disasters, community isolationism and serious violations of the values of freedom, tolerance and democracy on which European societies are based. The European Cultural Heritage Strategy for the twenty-first century stresses that it is 'a key factor for the refocusing of our societies on the basis of dialogue between cultures, respect for identities and diversity, and a feeling of belonging to a community of values' (Council of Europe 2017). Both tangible and intangible forms of cultural heritage are considered as equally important in this Strategy. The forms of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) include several elements, among them the oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events. In this chapter, festival events are presented as one of the most popular and accessible formats of cultural performative practices. Not only do they serve the purpose of constructing national identity and presenting the peculiarities of culture but they also perform the function of the so-called soft power (Nye 2004: x), often referred to as one of the most powerful tools of cultural diplomacy, based on values and positive experiences, rather than military force and fears, as well as based on things that are often the products of people, cultural institutions and brands rather than governments (Dubber 2015). Cultural festivals as a powerful ICH transmission channel are important in a nation's branding process not only because of their aesthetic and entertainment aspects but also as powerful agent of social and political influence (Jovičević 2017: 140).

Among the various values constructing European identity, one of the most spectacular and noticeable traditions and performative practices, characteristic of all the three Baltic countries – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – is the Song and Dance Celebration (SDC). This chapter focusses on an analysis of the SDC in the context of the development of nation-branding. Two ways of developing international recognition can be outlined: special strategies created by experts and spontaneous, endogenous branding, stemming from traditional

cultural symbols important to people. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Baltic countries were involved in a purposeful state-financed policy to create their nation brands. During this process, the use of the informal symbol of 'singing nations', typical of the Baltic countries, was consciously avoided because of the recommendations of nation-branding professionals. Nevertheless, this symbol, expressed in the form of the SDC, is an important and influential agent from the cultural, social, ideological and economic point of view, as well as in contexts of international communication.

The SDC is a cultural tradition that best characterises and unites the Baltic countries. It is the only location in Europe where this tradition has not only survived but evolved into a distinctive manifestation of the heritage and culture of the Baltic countries, often perceived by researchers and the general public as a symbol of pan-national identity. On 7 November 2003, the tradition and symbolism of the SDCs in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were included in the UNESCO list of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO Latvijas Nacionālā komisija, n.d.).

Although there is a set of features common to the manifestations of the tradition in all the three countries, each country has specific strategies for transmitting the tradition and different performative practices that influence the use of the SDC phenomenon in nation-branding. The experience of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania gained in nurturing the SDC tradition reveals not only various scenarios for safeguarding the ICH but also different approaches to integrating certain cultural symbols into nation brands. The objectives of this chapter are to (1) explore whether and in what ways the SDC as an element of ICH is used in Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian nation-branding practices, (2) comparatively analyse elements of the tradition that allow it to constitute itself as an endogenous nation brand, and (3) determine whether or not the tradition is used in the new nation brands created by experts in the twenty-first century.

In order to achieve this objective, this chapter contains a brief description of the SDC as an element of the ICH and its historical genesis, analyses the theoretical aspects of the nation brand and the strategic nation-branding process in the Baltic countries, describes cultural heritage as a resource in nation brand management, as well as selects and compares those aspects of the SDC tradition that form a link with the nation-branding practice. The empirical comparative analysis of the SDC traditions is based on quantitative methodology, with data from a survey of the residents of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (Survey 2017).

### **3.1 The SDC tradition as an essential element of cultural heritage**

Despite the obvious triumph of globalisation in the twenty-first century, everyday experience bears evidence to the opposite trend – the revival of the local and traditional forms of culture and the actualisation of various aspects of local identity in social relations and cultural practices, which manifest themselves in different types of festivals and collective performances in Europe.

Cultural performances not only represent but also constitute various typical elements of national and local identity, such as traditional local lore and crafts, folklore, culinary heritage and other manifestations, which are considered as part of cultural heritage.

Cultural heritage, especially in its intangible form, has become the basis for self-determination of European nation states ‘when nineteenth-century elites constructed readings of the past that were intended to generate a collective consciousness of a national historical destiny’ (Nic Craith 2008: 63), at the same time continuing the search for answers to the problematics of what factors legitimate the power of definition concerning the aspects of belonging to a cultural heritage.

Cultural heritage is considered to be one of the basic driving forces that cultivates a sense of local belonging, enhances cultural and creative space and contributes to the development of the society in general: ‘[Cultural] Heritage is seen as something that unites us. A solution to social problems. But it can be an engine of division, as people call on the past to make it their own, and to make futures of exclusion’ (Whitehead, Kockel and Nic Craith 2018). Researching practices of cultural heritage, it becomes possible ‘to identify means of sustaining and transmitting European heritages that may help foster more inclusive identities, and counteract division within European space’ (Whitehead, Kockel and Nic Craith 2018).

The most massive phenomenon of cultural heritage, which is of greatest significance to national identity and invariably surfaces in all the discussions of the collective performative culture of the Baltic countries, is the festival known in English as the Nationwide Song and Dance Celebration. In Lithuania it is called *Lietuvos dainų šventė*, in Latvia *Vispārējie latviešu Dziesmu un deju svētki*, in Estonia *Eesti laulu- ja tantsupidu*. It should be mentioned that this festival played a crucial part in the formation of the statehood of the three Baltic nations, resistance to the Soviet occupation and the so-called Singing Revolution that led to their liberation from the Soviet regime (Šmidchens 2014). Also nowadays when the Baltic countries are celebrating their centenary, the SDC is positioned as the central event of the whole festive cycle. At present the SDC tradition in the Baltic countries is supported both at the national level, through institutional and normative acts, and at the international level, through its inclusion into the UNESCO list of the intangible heritage where the Celebration is described as a ‘vital tool in nation-building in all three countries, while evolving into the most massive and inclusive communal event to celebrate Estonian, Latvian or Lithuanian cultural identity’ (UNESCO 2003).

The SDC is a traditional mass performance of amateur choirs and dance groups, every five or four years taking place in the capitals of the Baltic Countries. The main features of the SDC are:

- continuity of the process, which includes the intermediate preparatory period (i.e., preparation and acquiring of the repertoire, public shows, competitions, craft exhibitions, local regional festivals etc);

- high artistic quality, provided by professional composers, professional conductors, regular courses and workshops for participants and elaborated selection process; and
- multidisciplinary cultural events of different kinds of amateur arts and crafts.

Song festivals are considered a stable tradition, and their origins are to be found in the mid- and late nineteenth century, when Europe saw a surge of ideas related to national statehood (Lajosi and Stynen 2015). On the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, as elsewhere in Europe, collective singing and choral movement became one of the most effective vehicles for disseminating the ideas of nationhood. Social singing became a symbol which, according to Habermas, helped nationals transcend their inherited loyalties to village and clan, landscape and dynasty and construct a new form of collective identity generating an imaginary unity and making them aware of a collective belonging that, until then, had been merely abstract and legal, and only this symbolic construction makes the modern state into a nation state (Habermas 2001: 85). It was social collective singing that became the transnational phenomenon capturing nineteenth-century Europe and mobilising people to form nation states (Leerssen 2015; Habermas 2001; Brüggemann and Kasekamp 2014).

### **3.2 Historical aspects of song celebrations**

The nation states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were founded in 1918, while the tradition to organise song festivals and celebrations in these territories is half-a-century older. It is based on the Swiss and German choral singing movement that was spread in the territories of Estonia and Latvia by a distinctive ethno-social group, the so-called Baltic Germans, who linguistically identified themselves with the German-language space but saw themselves as culturally belonging to the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. Having adopted the Germanic structure of the song festivals, the leaders of the national awakening movements did not hesitate to fill it with original content derived from the local, ethnic culture – Latvian and Estonian composers arranged folk songs for choirs and created original compositions for instrumental groups and orchestras. In the late nineteenth century, this choral movement in the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire started to consolidate, and as a result, the First Estonian Song Celebration took place in Tartu (Dorpat) in 1869 (Kasekamp 2010: 79; Leerssen 2015: 31); the First Nationwide Latvian Song Celebration took place in Riga in 1873 (Grauzdiņa and Poruks 1990: 4–5; Grauzdiņa 2004: 34, Bērzkalns 1965: 45); and the first Lithuanian song celebration took place in Kaunas in 1924 (Zubrickas 1999: 731).

The tradition of song celebrations in the Baltic countries is unique due to its vitality and ability to adapt to various historical circumstances without losing its spirit of freedom even in the darkest years of the Soviet occupation. The Soviet regime introduced into the Song Celebrations a repertoire that lauded

militarism, the Communist Party, Lenin, Stalin and other red dictators in the hope that the popular appeal of the celebration would make it a powerful instrument for eliminating the unique cultural identity and creating a species of faceless *Homo sovieticus* obedient to authoritarianism.

However, according to the Latvian musicologist Arnolds Klotiņš, the plans of the USSR ideologues did not really come true, because

the most far-sighted part of conductors and choir singers upheld singing and the great celebration as virtually the only legal opportunity to experience and manifest national and universal values together with such a large section of society. Tribute to the alien ideology and tastelessness had to be duly paid; the repertoire always had to accommodate a number of compulsory Soviet propaganda songs. However, people often sang these unloved lyrics just not to lose the opportunity to sing, come together and express their national identity and patriotic feelings by their stance alone, as folk songs and part of the traditional repertoire were allowed.

[Klotiņš 1998: 34]

As an idiosyncratic and spontaneous form of resistance and protest against the dominant communist ideology, there sprang up in Latvia the phenomenon of informal communal singing, involving both the participants of the SDC and the audience. After the closing concert, they went home and on their way to the public transport stops and in trams sang together songs popular at that time, including songs the Soviet regime considered unwanted or had banned: 'In difference from the concerts of the Song Celebration, on these occasions there were no conductors and division into choir singers and listeners. Everybody sang, possibly even the ever-present KGB agents and informers to disguise their black duty' (Muktupāvels 2012: 314). After the Baltic countries regained their independence in 1991, the SDC also shed the fetters of the Soviet ideology. It is still considered one of the most essential elements of the national cultures of the Baltic countries and functions as a symbol and brand of 'the singing nations' being a relevant and influential agent from the cultural, social, ideological and economic point of view while apprehending identity, as well as in contexts of international communication or branding.

### **3.3 Interpretation of the nation brand and its role in promoting international visibility**

In the age of globalisation, the dominance of mass culture and consumerism heightens the value of originality and authenticity; therefore, the brand is gaining ever greater relevance not only at the individual but also the collective level. In the broad sense, the brand is an image, word, symbol or a combination of all these elements directed at marking or constructing identity with the aim to differ from others through demonstration of one's abilities, views and values in the competitive space of individual and cross-cultural communication. In

the contemporary consumerist socio-economic system, the greatest value is an unceasing growth of the consumption/supply of goods and services, and purchasing power is the main indicator of the welfare of an individual and the whole society. Under circumstances when, in almost all the spheres, values are confused with price (Mazzucato 2018), market terminology is increasingly more often found also in the discourse of national identity. In the twenty-first century, several countries of the world are literally obsessed with promoting their visibility and forming a positive image in the name of 'selling itself' wisely. If the idiom 'to sell one's country' used to be a euphemism for treason, then at present 'to sell one's country' wisely (Saffron Brand Consultants 2009) as if it were 'a tin of beans or a box of soap powder' (Anholt 2011: 8) is a necessity prescribed by globalisation. At present the nation brand helps to improve the country's image, attract investments and gain economic benefits. In the present chapter, preference is given to the definition of the nation brand offered by the local branding expert Keith Dinnie, who describes the nation brand as 'the unique, multidimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences' (Dinnie 2016: 5).

The nation brand in principle is the quintessence of the country's image created for cross-cultural communication and has a dual nature – it is based on the past and the present, yet functionally it is oriented towards development and the future. It is both reactive and proactive and tends to emphasise the opportunities the country offers to the international community (Jordan 2014: 22–23, 45). Positive news about the nation and the country helps to attract investments and increase export, to involve foreign talents and highly qualified labour or strengthen international partnership (Dinnie 2016: 17). Needless to say that nation branding is especially topical for small and relatively poor countries that wish to swiftly and effectively announce themselves as competitive players on the world stage. The nation brand usually consists of several traditional elements topical for international communication, such as language, culture, nature, history and culinary heritage; however, also contemporary globally recognisable commercial national brands, national iconic personalities, etc, can be used (Fan 2006: 12). Notionally, the branding process involves two ways of promoting international visibility, that is, strategic branding specifically created by professionals and internal or endogenous branding based on highlighting the symbolic aspects important for the given nation.

### **3.4 Strategic nation-branding process in the Baltic countries in the twenty-first century**

The strategic nation-branding process in the Baltics became especially active at the beginning of the twenty-first century when the governments initiated a purposeful, state-financed work on the brands that would help to highlight the individual nature of each country after the incorporation of the region in the European Union. It coincided with the state of affairs of that time, which

in line with the EU integration policy has manifested itself in a motto ‘United in diversity’ (Lähdesmäki 2016) with the aim ‘to work for peace and prosperity, while at the same time being enriched by the continent’s many different cultures, traditions and languages’ (European Union 2018).

At the time one of the suggestions made by foreign brand management experts was to avoid the seemingly self-evident idea of the commonality of the Baltic countries rooted in the twentieth-century history, since it might be an obstacle to their individual visibility (Saffron Brand Consultants 2009: 88), which is a precondition for creating the so-called brand value or capital (Lee et al. 2015: 41).

Thus Estonia, for example, after its victory in the Eurovision Song Contest 2001, created the brand ‘Positively transforming’, stressing Estonia’s readiness for positive changes. In 2009 it was changed to ‘Positively surprising’, sending the world a message about Estonia as ‘a small but proud nation that integrates extremes – old and new, established and innovative, cold and warm’ (Mändmets 2010: 76). At the moment, Estonia presents itself as a country of advanced information technologies, wittingly modifying the name of the country as ‘e-Estonia’ (e-Estonia, n.d.).

In 2008, Lithuanian society was introduced to a specially created brand ‘Lithuania the Brave Country’, which communicated the concepts of innovation and cultural diversity combined with a unique nature, warm-hearted people and a progressive approach to science (Lietuvos prekės ženklas n.d.). However, the communication of this brand was discontinued as early as in 2009 due to interior disagreements and financial insecurity (Puidokas and Kinzytė 2014: 50–64). In October 2016, the Lithuanian State Department of Tourism presented a new brand, ‘Real is Beautiful’, representing the nature and cultural heritage of Lithuania (Valstybinis turizmo departamentas 2016).

In 2003, at the invitation of the Latvian Institute, a team of specialists from Oxford University led by Wally Olins created the pilot project ‘A Brand for the Nation of Latvia’ and advised positing Latvia as ‘The Keystone of the Baltics’ (Frasher et al. 2003: 41–47). At the time Latvia was presenting itself with the brand ‘The Land that Sings’, selected at a nationwide competition as the best representation of self-identity, incorporating notions about nature, culture, business and people characteristic of Latvia (Frasher et al. 2003: 26). However, the foreign experts considered this brand ‘peasantlike’ and consequently insufficiently effective for communicating the idea of a modern, developing country (Frasher et al. 2003: 45). Despite the recommendations of the experts, the brand of ‘The Land that Sings’ remained in place for some time and only in 2010 was replaced with ‘Latvia – Best Enjoyed Slowly’, offering pleasant leisure time in a sauna (Your friend in Riga 2010).

### **3.5 Cultural heritage and crowd symbols as a resource in nation-branding**

It must be admitted that the contemporary formal cross-cultural communication is dominated by strategic nation brands created by professional business

companies; however, the reputation and image of a nation are influenced also by other factors independent of the experts' opinions and recommendations such as nature, state policy, economic situation, national stereotypes and especially culture. During the nation-branding process, culture arguably manifests itself in three aspects – landscape, art and cultural heritage (Dinnie 2016: 139). Nowadays precisely the tangible and intangible cultural heritage not only is becoming a source of inspiration for creativity and new aesthetic forms but also a relevant soft power and nation-branding tool for all countries, regardless of their geopolitical impact in a global perspective (Schreiber 2017: 52). Cultural heritage, as it is featured in UNESCO's definition of ICH, is closely related to such elements of national identity as language and folklore, traditional crafts, culinary heritage etc. With regard to cross-cultural communication, it plays a special role in promoting visibility, upholding dialogue and encouraging tolerance and inclusiveness (UNESCO 2018).

Cultural heritage manifests itself in symbols and collective practices that serve each nation not only to represent its values but also to confirm its idiosyncratic and unique nature to itself and others. This self-understanding rooted in culture and expressed through symbols becomes the basis for the interior or endogenous nation brands which in a way resonate with 'national crowd symbols'. 'National crowd symbols' is a concept coined by the Nobel Prize winner writer Elias Canetti and designates the notions and emotions people usually associate with their nation. According to Canetti, crowd symbols may represent natural phenomena, such as the seas, forests and mountains appearing as symbols in myths, dreams, tales and songs. They can be also mythic or historical events and artefacts, which have played a significant role in the self-definition process of a nation (Canetti 1978: 170).

The crowd symbol for the countries on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea is singing and the song, which, according to Johann Gottfried Herder, 'loves the masses, it loves to take shape from the common voice of the multitude: song commands the ear of the listener and the chorus of voices and souls'. (Herder and Bohlman 2017: 50). Singing, as it was mentioned above, is embodied in the idea of the statehood of all the three Baltic countries and their independence would be hardly imaginable without the collective singing, reaching its highest point in the national crowd symbol we call the Song and Dance Celebration. The SDC is not only collective performances and concerts. An equally important aspect of the celebration is the nurturing of local identity and creativity in the interim periods when choirs and dance groups practice intensively in the regions and traditional costumes, jewellery and symbolic objects are made, which leads to interpreting the SDC as a social movement, whose function is to confirm the cultural identity and to promote social self-initiative, self-organisation and inclusiveness. The Baltic SDC tradition as the quintessence of traditional collective performative practices has become one of the most relevant endogenous, not exogenous (from outside), strategically created nation brands, which despite the recommendations of branding experts serves as a symbol uniting the Baltic region.

The SDC is a performance of traditional collective culture, the greatest celebration of communicating ethnicity/nationality rooted in the traditions of the three Baltic countries (Kuutma 1998). As this celebration has regularity, stability of the form, clearly predictable diachronic structure, rich symbolism and emotionality, it recalls and consolidates in the social memory the narrative about the late nineteenth-century cultural movement, which grew into a socio-political force and crystallised the will, ability and power of the Baltic peoples to become independent nations. The symbolic meaning of the SDC is so great that it is sacralised and likened to a ritual at various levels of communication not only in daily publications but also in academic discourse (Brüggemann and Kasekamp 2014: 259–276; Lauristin and Vihalemm 2013: 46; Veidemann 2015: 49; Rubavičius 2015: 16–29; Repšienė 2015; Bula 2000: 95; etc.).

### **3.6 Current branding practices of the Baltic countries and the SDC**

The sacralising attitude of the public and academic discourse consolidates the positions of the SDC as a nation brand. At the same time, observations of strategic branding lead to the conclusion that the dominant trend in this sphere still marginalises the symbol of the singing nations. Thus Estonia continues to develop its brand highlighting the kinship of its environment and temperament with the Nordic countries, especially Finland (Jordan 2015: 228). The Lithuanian nation brand is still based on the events, images and figures from medieval history (Eidintas and et al. 2013), and Latvia brands its nation using other aspects of its rich cultural heritage, its unique art and language followed by the concepts of a ‘green’ country, innovative technology and the regional visibility of Riga (Latvijas Institūts 2018).

Nevertheless, the SDC tradition maintaining the images of ‘the singing nations’ still exerts a very strong influence on the discourse of national culture and identity in the Baltic countries, which makes it possible to describe this tradition as a sustainable endogenous brand. The sustainability of this tradition and the complex artefact in the cultural environment depends on several factors, such as:

- the involvement of the state and public sectors through legislation and financing,
- culture infrastructure,
- system of cultural education,
- models for transmitting the tradition in families,
- interaction between amateur arts and professional arts within the framework of the tradition,
- principles of drawing up artistic programmes etc.

However, the three most relevant aspects in the context of nation-branding are participation of the population, local belonging/identity and emotions.

In order to do a comparative analysis of the relevance of the three above-mentioned factors in the development of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian endogenous brands, a cross-sectional research strategy was used to obtain representative quantitative data about the participatory experience, attitude and opinions on issues related to the SDC of the residents of the Baltics. The methodology and instruments of the research were developed by the staff of the Research Centre of the Latvian Academy of Culture within the framework of the project CoHERE of the programme Horizon 2020 financed by the European Commission. The fieldwork of the survey was carried out simultaneously in all three Baltic countries in August 2017 (the fieldwork was carried out by the research, information and consulting agency Kantar TNS Latvia). The target group of the survey were the residents of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in the fifteen to seventy-four year age bracket. Considering the ethnic composition of the populations of the Baltic countries, the method for obtaining data was a specialised survey using as an instrument a questionnaire in Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian and also in Russian. The population of the survey was: in Latvia, 1,611,326; in Lithuania, 2,150,968; and in Estonia, 980,821 residents. For the purpose of the survey, socio-demographic parameters of the target group, such as gender, nationality, age and region, were monitored. The sample size was 3,030 (1,010 in each country). The data obtained can be generally referred to all the residents of the Baltic countries; their interpretation is based on the obtained qualitative data, analysis of political documents and other sources.

### **3.7 Participation of the population**

One of the most essential indicators of the Baltic SDC as an endogenous brand is the high degree of participation of the population both in the events of the Celebration week and the SDC movement in the interim period. The extensive participation largely depends on the fact that in practice there exist different forms of participation in the nurturing of the tradition. The research identified three levels of participation: active participation, passive direct participation and passive indirect participation. In measuring active participation several indicators were used:

- 1) being a participant of the SDC (members of choirs or folk dance groups, conductors, dance group leaders etc);
- 2) working as a paid professional with the arts groups participating in the SDC (répétiteurs, accompanists etc);
- 3) organising the celebration (also as a volunteer or an assistant/ a coordinator appointed by the organisers);
- 4) supporting the celebration (rendering financial support/providing accommodations/sewing the costumes, etc.);
- 5) informing about the celebration (journalist, researcher etc); and
- 6) rendering services during the celebration (catering, trading, providing technical support etc).

Passive participation was measured using the following parameters (see Table 3.1):

- 1) went to some events of the celebration;
- 2) went to see the procession of the participants;
- 3) followed the events of the SDC week through the mass media;
- 4) followed the events through the social networks; and
- 5) watched the events of the SDC on TV and/or listened to the radio broadcasts.

Passive forms of participation require less time and fewer financial resources, consequently a higher percentage of the population has the opportunity to be involved. At the same time, the great number of passive participants in the tradition attests to the size of the community supporting transmission of the celebration and makes it possible to discuss the wish of this group of the population for emotional involvement and solidarity with the active participants and the support for the values and symbols of cultural heritage manifested during the celebrations. The passive forms of participation are of considerable social significance because they demonstrate that the tradition creates the frame for multiform expressions of cultural participation and not only this. The segment of passive participants may introduce new interpretations of the symbolic meanings of the elements of the tradition, encouraging dynamic transformations of the tradition corresponding to the modern cultural, social, economic and technological context and contributing to the development and interpretation of the SDC tradition as a part of the ICH. If we compare the dispersion of various forms of participation in the Baltic countries (see Table 3.1), the data indicate different strategies of participation and tradition transmission, which largely determines the different practices of the natural constitution of the tradition as a brand.

*Table 3.1* Participation level of the residents of the Baltic countries in the Song and Dance Celebrations (Survey 2017)

<i>Participation Level in the Song and Dance Celebrations</i>				
LATVIA	Non-participants	<b>13%</b>		
	Participants	<b>87%</b>	Passive indirect participation	74%
			Passive direct participation	45%
			Active participation	38%
ESTONIA	Non-participants	<b>5%</b>		
	Participants	<b>95%</b>	Passive indirect participation	82%
			Passive direct participation	65%
			Active participation	37%
LITHUANIA	Non-participants	<b>16%</b>		
	Participants	<b>84%</b>	Passive indirect participation	63%
			Passive direct participation	51%
			Active participation	31%

The analysis of the forms of participation of the residents of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the Song and Dance Celebrations indicates different branding strategies in relation to this element of intangible cultural heritage both within one country and across the countries. In the case of Estonia the tradition represents a distinctive national symbol, which is evident from the support of Estonian society rooted in democratic participation. The residents of Estonia 'position' the SDC tradition as a national and ethnic brand, which is expressed in the emotionally heightened attitude to this phenomenon and the experience of ethnic unity created by this celebration.

Furthermore, in the context of the celebration associations with ethnic belonging dominate over associations with belonging to a nation or a state. In Latvia the artistic quality and management of the celebration are guaranteed by the financial and administrative support of the state and local authorities indicating that the SDC is strategically and purposefully used as a nation brand. State intervention in the brand maintenance is supported by a large sector of society (almost 45%) that at some point in their lives has practised one of the forms of active participation, and there is also a considerable community of passive participants. In Lithuania, the SDC is rather perceived as the brand of the community of the tradition bearers (members of the arts groups, artistic directors and chief conductors). The data cast doubt on the assumption that the residents of Lithuania predominantly perceive the SDC tradition as a symbol of national or ethnic belonging and a nation brand. It implies that in Lithuania participation in the SDCs associates rather with the opportunity to increase one's social capital than to strengthen one's sense of identity and national belonging, which lessens the effectiveness of the celebration as an endogenous nation brand.

### **3.8 Branding local belonging/identity through the SDC**

The SDC is a part of the cultural process in the Baltic countries allowing the constitution of various levels of identity and belonging such as the local place of residence, the country and the European Union. According to the data, there exists a certain correlation between the forms of participation in the SDCs and the assessment of the sense of belonging to the place of residence, region, country and the European Union. Those residents of the Baltic countries who are not involved in the SDCs have a weaker sense of belonging to the place, region, country, the Baltics and Europe (Survey 2017: 43–44). The data indicate that the SDC as a cultural practice on the national scale is closely related to branding local identities on a higher (national) level, which makes it possible 'to show your district through song and dance' (Jaunzems 2018). The representation of the residents of the country and town territories in the celebrations has left an impact on the symbolism of the celebration and the development of the tradition. According to sociologist Tālis Tisenkopfs, '[a]lthough the Song Celebrations take place in a city, they are not a city celebration. They are a celebration in a city made special by the singers and dancers from the regions' (Tisenkopfs 2002: 78). According to the survey of the

participants of the SDC in 2013, 40% of the active participants came from the countryside, 30% from towns and cities and 17% from the capital Riga (Laže 2014). The data of the 2017 survey also attest that regional representation is prominent in all three Baltic countries. In Latvia, rural residents constitute 36% of the active participants of the SDC, while urban residents and the residents of Riga constitute 34% and 30% of the active participants, respectively. Similarly, in Estonia the rural segment also constitutes 36% of the respondents actively involved in the celebration, with the urban residents and the residents of Tallinn constituting 29% and 34% of the active participants, respectively. In Lithuania, rural respondents represent 36% of the actively involved respondents, while urban locations and Vilnius account for 29% and 18% of the actively involved respondents, respectively.

One of the most powerful manifestations of local identity during the SDCs is the procession of the participants; one of its major goals is to represent various municipalities as it embraces practically all the regions and districts, demonstrates the banners of arts groups, regional folk costumes and other symbols typical of the local communities of ICH. The procession is broadcast on television and social networks; there are interviews with the participants, comments on the individual traits of each district etc. According to the survey, the procession is listed among the most important events. For example, 51% of the residents of Estonia, 62% of the residents of Lithuania and 34% of the residents of Latvia have at some point in their lives attended the procession of the celebration (Survey 2017: 18). We can conclude that the SDC is a sustainable and useful platform for manifesting the specific traits of various territorial cultures and exchanging local values. The participation of amateur arts groups from various districts augments and enriches the symbolism of the celebration strengthening its position of an endogenous nation brand.

### 3.9 Emotional aspects of the Song and Dance Celebration

As it was mentioned before, the most significant events of Baltic cultural history, including the so-called periods of national awakening, are closely related to collective singing. It has accompanied the social restructuration processes inspired by social conflict. Collective singing as aesthetical, performative practice permits to effectively initiate, accumulate and translate both symbolic meanings, both strong emotions, characteristic for the situation of unclear social identity (Turner 1991). Similarly, Tisenkopfs also considers the possibility to treat the Song and Dance Celebration as a transition from one cultural situation to another, from one symbolic extreme to another: individual–society, past–future, life–death. They are saturated with a special emotionality and cancellation of usual social norms (Tisenkopfs 1987: 21).

The emotions experienced during the SDCs enhance the sustainability and vitality of the celebration as an endogenous nation brand. ‘Feeling moved’, ‘elated’ and ‘inspired’ are keywords used to characterise the SDC phenomenon (Survey 2017: 35). The results of the survey demonstrate that participation in

the SDCs is explained by the argument that it creates strong feelings not to be experienced anywhere else. Some 40% of the residents of Latvia and 61% of the residents of Estonia agree with this statement. In Lithuania, 22% of the residents consider the emotional aspect the main benefit of participating in the SDCs.

It is important to view the emotional aspect of SDC in the context of regularity and tradition. The data show that for the most part adults participate in the tradition of celebration because they have been involved in it already in their childhood or school years and have a positive experience, often connected to bright, inimitable emotions, which humans wish to experience again. This is a motivation to participate in the celebration also in later periods of life. The biggest part of the population have been involved in different informal, out-of-school activities (for example, in singing, dancing, instrumental music-making etc) already during the school years, as they have a need to express themselves creatively. In the case of Baltic countries, these processes are stimulated by a special school youth song and dance celebration, which is organised on a regular basis. The survey of school students carried out within the framework of the project CoHERE also attests that 74% of the respondents consider emotions the main benefit of participation in the SDCs (Survey 2018).

The strong emotions experienced through participation in the SDCs are probably related not only to patriotism and aesthetic experience but also to the large scale of the events in combination with the synchronicity instantly recognised and accepted by the community of the participants of the SDC (Turner 1982: 48; Lewis 2008: 41) manifesting itself in various activities: communal singing, dance patterns, the procession etc, which strengthens the solidarity of the community of participants and offers an answer to the question significant to the whole nation 'who we are?' using a cultural performance as a meaningful system of symbols, which gives value and significance to the existence of nations and states (Gīrcs 1998: 238). The range of unique emotions experienced and demonstrated during the SDCs is both a powerful motivation for participation in the celebration and an instrument for communication of the acquired artistic experience. Thus emotions become an essential element in maintaining the SDC as an endogenous nation brand.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

The Baltic countries currently have different practices of strategic brand management; at the same time, many common parameters presuppose the development of the SDC as an endogenous brand indicating, for example, the performative expressions of tradition, or the celebration as a platform for the interaction between local and national identities. Of special significance for the development of the SDC as an endogenous nation brand are the high degree of involvement among the population and the genesis of various forms of participation, the dynamics of constituting local identity and the presence of strong emotions in the manifestations of the tradition. However, there are also several factors, such as the uneven structure of participation in the celebration in Estonia, Latvia and

especially Lithuania, and differences in the intensity of emotional involvement among the residents of the Baltic countries. It should be also noted that the scenarios of the development of the SDC tradition, and the image of 'the singing nation' as endogenous brand, have the potential to make a significant impact on strategic brand management practices. The strong emotional attachment of the active heritage community encourages the transference of this tradition as an endogenous brand to the strategic brand management practices.

Although the SDC and the brand of 'the singing nation' may be oriented towards the past and 'peasant-like', they are imbued not only with strong symbolic and emotional significance but also with political, social and economic contents. There are several indications that, despite the variety of expressions and attitudes, these endogenous brands will continue to exist and unite the Baltic region in the future, resisting the pressures of globalisation, technological development and contrary recommendations of branding experts. Returning to the concept of the crowd symbol, it may be added that a nation's consciousness of itself is characterised by persistence and stability and changes only along with its symbols, which 'are not as changeable as it may seem' (Canetti 1978: 171).

The study of the experience of the inhabitants of the Baltic states shows the importance of mass participation and emotional uplifting in maintaining sustainability and vitality of the endogenous and exogenous national brand associated with ICH and performative practices. While our analysis of participatory and emotional aspects in maintaining ICH practice was established by quantitative and qualitative data collected on the Baltic SDC, more generalised conclusions need further comparative research rooted in different cultural environments (both in Europe and other regions of the world), considering diverse performative practices and nation branding experiences and focusing on sources of participation and emotions and their importance in preserving cultural heritage and maintaining traditional performative practices. Interesting case studies in this regard include the Mòd tradition in Scotland or the Eisteddfod in Wales, both high-profile festivals linking ICH with nation-branding efforts. Comparative analysis of sources of participation and flow of emotions in the context of diverse cultural heritage practices could help to (1) identify effective local heritage conservation tools, (2) develop cultural 'soft power' tools for intercultural and international heritage communication and (3) clarify scenarios linking inheritance practices with endogenous and exogenous nation brands.

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