

Summary

NARRATING TRAKAI

This book is about Trakai – a place well known to all of Lithuania, yet few have truly discovered it. A place that to the local inhabitants is, first and foremost, their home and truly their own backyard. Each visitor coming to see Trakai castle at the same time can find themselves in a space full of memories and experiences. To discover it fully, one must first listen to what the locals say, try to look at Trakai through their eyes. A sedentary way of life and an innate connection with a place is one of the key conditions for that place's memory to thrive, for communities to settle, and for the stories that connect them to appear. Moreover, if several generations live in the same place, their cultural experiences become an integral part of the landscape.

In truth, Trakai seems to have two faces: one of them formed by imagery of Trakai as the *lieu de mémoire* of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL), while the other – by the everyday world of the people. This is the symbolic place of the so-called great national narrative, where a connection with the past is experienced, a past where the nation had thrived in its period of “greatness”. In the Lithuanian national narrative, this would mean the Middle Ages, the period of the rule of the Gediminid dynasty. Of course, the great narrative is not born on its own – it is formed by historians, reinforced by politicians, absorbed through commemoration of national holidays, through tourism and other forms of disseminating the culture of memory. Nevertheless, we should not overestimate the impact of this narrative on the self-identity of the local people. A significantly greater impact is made by daily life and subjective experiences. The everyday world exists in accordance with its own internal laws, which are determined by human activity, daily life, ethnic and religious identity, stories. In truth, it is impacted

by some elements of the imagery of Trakai as the location of memory of the GDL: the castles of the grand dukes (first of all, Vytautas the Great) acting as reminders of their great deeds, the church with the image of the Mother of God, hailed as the patron saint of the GDL, and the multi-ethnic variety of the local community. This seems to ensure the continuity of some of the features of the cultural place, which can be noticed when studying the stories told by the people. More and more often, they reflect interpersonal relations, as well as quite significant changes that took place in the 20th c., changes that affected the city's architectural face, the community.

The basis for the book is field studies, during which people were interviewed. The stories of their lives, their testimonies about places, historical events, people, were written down applying the in-depth interview method. This method is combined with participant observation, which is well-known in cultural anthropology – spending time with the people being interviewed, noting the motives for their behaviour, by participating in the life of the community. The ages of the people interviewed ranged from 50 to 94. Some of them were locals, born and raised in Trakai, while others were newcomers, yet had more or less settled down in this place. In total, 60 people were interviewed, of which 46 were quoted in the book. Of all the people who participated in the study, several main contributors were selected. Based on their stories, the main interview questions were formed, which eventually determined the thematic structure of the book. The most important interviewee was Michailas Zajančkovskis. He is the only person presented here with his full name and surname. I am particularly grateful to him for the many hours we spent talking about Trakai. We could say that in the monograph, Michailas' version of Trakai is reproduced. In the book, he and other interviewees are indicated with their initials, which correspond to the first letters of their name and surname. The list of people, with their birth date and nationality also listed, is presented at the end of the book. On the one hand, such a way of introducing the interviewees protects them from too-direct associations. On the other hand, the people of Trakai are encouraged to sort of play a game, to try and recognise their friends and neighbours from their stories and initials.

In a certain sense, this research has been taking place my entire life, as I, the author of this book, am from Trakai myself. When I began to collect

the memories of the local people, I realised that Trakai has many places with cultural content that was unknown to me, simply because I am not connected to this town through three generations. I consciously chose to study the stories told by people from the older generation, looking within them for the content that was missing from an entire generation, or even two generations of new settlers, who had come to Trakai in the second half of the 20th c. There are still newcomers even in the 21st c. Therefore, academic literature, such as this monograph, can become practically the only source to present such a portrait of Trakai, the most tangible manifestation of which can be found in the narratives of older-generation people from Trakai. In listening to these stories, I tried to understand how the orally transmitted experiences of other people began to impact mine. The stories that I heard opened up a treasure trove of knowledge about Trakai, which to me was new, but not foreign. Belonging to the same place facilitates communication and provides the premise for a smoother transition of personal experience into a more collective one. Thus, I was able to experience in practice Paulo Ricoeur's idea that in seeking to understand who is the primary mediator for remembrance – the individual or the collective – we need to consider both.

In this study, subjectivity plays a particularly important role. According to philosopher Mary Midgley, subjectivity is an objective fact, an integral part of our behaviour. Our internal experiences, according to her, are as real as stones or electrons. In Lithuania, not only among folklorists but among historians as well, increasingly more researchers undertake studies of the so-called life narrative. By applying such an approach – subjectivity is simply unavoidable. My interest in the life stories of the people I interviewed became the method that helped me understand how personal experience determines the topics of the narratives, knowledge about a place or event. Life narratives tend to often be made up of many different stories, covering a variety of different topics. For me it was important to discover within this sea of memories the narrative of Trakai. I aimed to perceive the subjective and intersubjective motives for the worldview and connection with Trakai of the people that I spoke to. This approach is closely related to the phenomenological one, which is more and more often applied by folklore researchers in Lithuania. On this basis, Giedrė Šmitienė explains that in

phenomenology it is important to understand and show that human reality thrives in the specific world context, that a person and the world that surrounds them are so connected that we can never know about one of them without the other.

Since most of the people participating in the study represented the older generation, the events and phenomena reflected in their narratives allow us to study a rather broad time scale, covering the inter-war period, WWII, Soviet era, and Independence. Most attention is paid to the earlier aforementioned period, as it coincides with the time that the people interviewed most often reflect on – their childhood and youth. The reconstruction of the spatial worldview and relation to place, typical to that time, is the basis of this dissertation, which consists of analysis and interpretation of the 1) town's territory, 2) the landscape of the lakes surrounding the town, and the 3) socio-cultural spatiality created by the town's community.

The space of Trakai is understood via geographical criteria as the Trakai peninsula, the lakes that surround it, and the territories that are part of the town located beyond the peninsula. The latter are understood twofold by the people of Trakai – as part of the city and as being outside of the city. Oral material indicates that the mental map of the town is not static; rather it is a living and ever-changing phenomenon, depending not only on the time period but also on the individual's life experience, on social and cultural factors. Nevertheless, a "local logic" exists, which provides a common denominator to many different narratives and shows that even people who do not know each other develop the theme of Trakai's space by leaning on identical cornerstones.

You enter Trakai not when you drive past the signs indicating the official border of the town, but rather when elements testifying to the world of Trakai are recognised. The peninsula is an effective landmark, but the objects located beyond it, the people living there, and the composition of the landscape also have a significant impact on the perception of the city. Approaching Trakai, things that are seen ahead of time activate knowledge, the emotions that follow it, imagination. Thanks to them, Trakai is experienced even before reaching the peninsula. For example, Trakai's castle and church are visible from far away when arriving on all of the roads leading

into the town (from Vilnius, Aukštadvaris, Semeliškės, Vievis, Rykantai). The feeling of entering the space of Trakai is also affected by the lakes, which are seen before actually driving on to the peninsula. Meanwhile, upon leaving, an opposite effect is noticed – while still being in the actual administrative territory of Trakai, one feels as if they are no longer in the town. In one case, the space allocated to Trakai expands, in another case – it narrows. From the perspective of the locals, we can talk about the ambiguous status of the city's access: “already Trakai”, “almost Trakai”, or “still Trakai” and “no longer Trakai”. The spaces on the peninsula itself are not equal either: “more Trakai”, “less Trakai”, “real Trakai”, and even “not Trakai”. The size of Trakai is a key factor in such assessments. The town is too small to not be covered in its entirety. On the other hand, it is too big for all its locations and spaces to be equally discovered.

Each person, depending on their place of residence, nationality, generation, life experience, has their own locality criteria and preferences on the issue of Trakai's identity. One part of the town can be associated with the “real Trakai”, while another part is visited so rarely that it might even seem like no longer one's own city. Individual understanding is intertwined with the collective topological system. It could be considered cultural heritage, but perhaps a more precise statement would be that it is a daily reality that persuasively affects the perception of some people in Trakai about their town.

Having presented the theoretical and methodological approaches to the study, in the chapter “Žvilgsnis iš šalies” [A glimpse from the side] the issue of Trakai as an image of memory is discussed in detail.

The historical and geographical features of Trakai are described, which are taken into account while examining the stories of the town's inhabitants in later chapters; the stages of the development of the urban community are introduced. In the next chapter, “Miesto erdvė” [The Urban Space], five parts of Trakai, as identified by the older generation, are examined. These are *Rogatka* (Rogatkė), *Miasto* (City, Centre), *Jursdyka* (“Church neighbourhood”), *Karaimščyzna* (Karaim street, Karaim end) and *Zamostė* (Zamosce, Užtiltė, “Beyond the bridge”, Bonkovščyzna). The premise is made that part of this territory historically formed based on already-existing jurisdiction from the 15–18th c. They all reflect the urban-administrative characteristics

that formed while the town was still in its early stages and have fragmentarily survived to this day.

Analysis of Rogatka, in the southern part of Trakai, revealed different opportunities for interpreting the borders of Trakai. In some cases the ends in the Trakai peninsula itself, in other cases – far beyond. In large part, it is related to the sizes of Rogatka. Most often, this name is given to the crossroads located at the beginning of the Trakai peninsula, which today is associated with the roundabout or station. Therefore, Rogatka is first of all associated with the beginning of Trakai, entering the city. However, some people use this name for a much larger territory, which begins practically at the city centre's Orthodox Church and ends at the Catholic cemetery. From the ethnic perspective, Rogatka is mostly associated with the Tatars.

The name Jursdyka is not well known today, historically covering the jurisdiction of Trakai parish church. This is indicated by the folkloric name of the place – Jursdyka. The participants of the study said that this is what they called the part of the town located around the church, all the way to Bernardinai hill. In researching Jursdyka, we presented Trakai as an important cultural centre to Catholics. In particular, mass, feasts and the related fairs resulted in the Trakai Church of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary becoming the most important object in the city for the people of Trakai and surrounding villages.

Miasto, Miestas or Centras (City Centre) is historically associated with the right to self-govern given to Trakai in the 15th c. This territory is the location of the most important administrative institutions (municipality, post office, police, etc.), as well as public spaces (market square, park, cultural centre, restaurants, etc.). In people's memories, it is associated with the Jews, a great fire that broke out after WWII, the wayside shrine of St. John of Nepomuk.

Karaimščyzna is related to the 15th c. Mažasis miestas, or the Karaim city. Only after WWII, people of other nationalities began to settle here. Due to tourism in the summer, Karaimščyzna becomes the busiest part of town. Karaims call this part of the city the real Trakai. Its border is between the wayside shrine of St. John of Nepomuk in the south and the bridge located in the northern part of the Trakai peninsula. In the narratives of the

Karaim people, the mental map of Trakai is based on people's knowledge of where their peers live. They can name all of their own people who ended up beyond the border of Karaimščyzna. In the stories of people of other ethnicities, the Karaims are described as being very clever and well-off, able to successfully grow cucumbers, they are sedentary by nature.

Zamostė is not related to any territory of the city located on the peninsula. If Rogatka can be considered a boundary zone, where features of the town and the countryside are intertwined, since it is located both on the peninsula and beyond it, then Zamostė should first be considered beyond-the-boundary, which, falling into the social and mental dimensions of the town, provides new geographical criteria for comprehending the borders of Trakai. The Karaim people consider this part of the city as their own because it was the home of several Karaim families and had a Karaim cemetery. Meanwhile, people of other nationalities indicate that actually more Poles and Russians lived here. Zamostė and Rogatka are often associated with the fights that took place between youth in the town.

In the chapter of the book titled "Ežerų pasaulis" [Land of Lakes], the relationship between people and the landscape is examined. The interrelated lakes of Galvės, Bernardinų (Lukos), Totoriškių, Nerespinkos (Narakampio) and Skaisčio surround Trakai. Historical sources and material from oral tradition allow us to believe that there used to be one lake, Galvė, which as the town formed earned the common name of Trakai Lake. The town came in to a world that until then had been dominated by the lake and the meaning of the cultural territory associated with it. The appearance of Trakai supplemented and changed these meanings, yet did not entirely suppress them. This way the lake became a representation of the past, of the other culture and the other time period. This aspect became particularly clear in the Trakai legend about it being necessary for one person to drown in this lake every year. Such a belief can be related to pre-Christian times. The city culture expanded this legend's meanings. It became part of a greater narrative that includes other motifs of drowning, victims, or punishments. This narrative also includes legends about the activities of Grand Duke Vytautas the Great and stories about the sculpture of St. John of Nepomuk, the patron saint of Trakai, which protects people from the dangers of the

water. The legend also eloquently reveals people's subjective relationships with the lakes. The fear of drowning is intertwined with the understanding that this is how it should be.

The lakes surrounding Trakai form a unified physical space. They frame the town in the dry land of the peninsula, yet they also expand it towards the farthest shores. The stories, collected during this study, about various activities that took place in the lakes, show just how much the livelihood of people of Trakai, their relationship with nature, was affected by the close proximity of the lakes. Even after 600 years, Trakai has remained a town between lakes. Such a geographical situation was very significant for the local agriculture, which was closely related to the lakes. The cucumber growing business was booming, and the older local people talked about it a lot, not only when describing their childhood, but in general the livelihood of Trakai's people, their dependence on the vegetable harvest, their personal relationships. The larger islands of Galvė Lake were also adapted for agriculture: here people mowed hay, grazed livestock. People also enjoyed spending time together and celebrating various occasions here. People also travelled on the lakes and this is evidenced by places, identified both in the town's territory and in the lakes, as "winter trails", or simply "trails". During the study, it was men who more often talked about place-names or activities related to the lakes, while the old fishermen were the most knowledgeable – they could list not only the names of all the lakes, but also hundreds of lesser hydronyms. The place-names that they knew not only represented cultural memory, but also revealed to the fishermen the natural features of a place, helped them orient themselves.

So-called Trakai castle, located in Galvė Lake, in the study is examined as part of the space of the lake. The narratives of the study's participants reveal how people saw this place when it was only ruins. It seems that it was more likely seen as one of Galvė's islands (Papilė), without accenting its historical significance. This is revealed by legends that tell of punishments carried out by Vytautas: the events of these stories took place not in the castle, but on the lake's islands and shores. However, there are legends, folkloric stories, where the castle is distinguished as a certain centre of the historical space and the location of the beginning of the time. These are

legends about the tunnel that connects the castle with other locations in Trakai or elsewhere in Lithuania, or the folkloric fiction presented by some people that Galvė is a lake of “ducal origin”. The cultural memory associated with the castle provides the entire lake space a unique folkloric content.

In the chapter “Kaita ir tęstinumas” [Change and Continuity], the Trakai community is discussed. This is one of many undiscovered local communities in South-eastern Lithuania, characterised by a variety of languages, where Baltic and Slavic culture are intertwined. Each one of them is unlike the other, because their ethnic organisational models, dialects, memories differ. This is why the Trakai study first says something about Trakai itself. Despite the fact that in various locations in Lithuania and neighbouring countries similar events took place, such as the Holocaust, repatriation, and arrival of new settlers, these similarities shouldn't be overestimated. Stories testify about each location's unique case. Every story's contents each time surprise us and open up new opportunities for broader research into places and communities.

From local narratives we can see that in the beginning Trakai was a more Polish place, while after the war it became Russian, and later – Lithuanian. Newly settled Russians, Lithuanians, and Poles did not form unified communities, each person needed adapt individually. Socialisation with one's “own people” on an ethnic basis was first of all facilitated by native tongue, since they did not know other languages or simply spoke them poorly. In this situation, the Karaims can be distinguished, who like a litmus paper, absorbed, mastered and creatively adapted the cultural changes of the tumultuous 20th c. In many families, all the languages are spoken. Together with the Poles, who had settled earlier, and the small community of Tartars, they became the connecting link between the past and present of Trakai. In assessing the stories of the older generation in Trakai, it is important to take into account the tendency of memories to present in brighter colours experiences from one's youth and unequivocally not polarise the old (prior to the aforementioned changes) and new (modern) communities. However, their narratives reflect much more than just nostalgia for the past. Narratives help us understand what creates a community: what impedes and what helps new arrivals join it.

The study of Trakai revealed that locality is a multi-faceted phenomenon. In the narrowest definition, it could describe one person's world, in the broadest sense – an entire region. In researching Trakai we took into account four local dimensions – the individual, community, urban, and geographic. A) at the individual level analysing with what location in the world a person identifies themselves, how they view in general their place on this Earth, it is established that a significant impact on each person's spatial relationship with Trakai is had by early life experiences, their first impression of Trakai (if a person settled here), the location of their home (both their native place and where they lived when the study took place), their activity and gender. B) at the community level Trakai was revealed as a socio-cultural space: such communicative aspects of oral culture as rumours, interpersonal relations, ethnicity, and language culture were studied. Also, narratives of ethnic and religious tolerance were examined, covering both the positive and negative aspects of viewing "others". The topics of the Jewish Holocaust, Polish repatriation, immigration of new settlers, were generally assessed negatively by the local people. C) At the town's level, various urban elements were revealed, the impact of different objects and their complexes on the understanding of the spatiality of Trakai as a whole and separate parts of the town. D) At the geographic level it was established that the volumes and limits of understanding space were significantly impacted by the type of their activity, nationality, religion, age, gender and place of residence. It is also revealed that the territory of Trakai peninsula, as well as the lakes surrounding the town, form the local people's understanding of the boundaries of the town's cultural spaces.

Finally, it is important to note that modern times changed, yet did not overwhelm the Trakai that the older-generation participants of the study talked about: the new settlers met with the locals, new construction took place in spaces of historical heritage, not only new town dwellers but locals moved into apartment buildings. Even now, the city does not lack elements of the same daily life that was noted by those who witnessed the 19th–early 20th c., or about which the old people of Trakai spoke.