

Abstract

Vítání občáňků which translates to “Welcoming of Little Citizens” is a rite of passage celebrated by Czech parents with newborns at their local town or city council. It was invented during the Communist era with the aim of replacing baptism. A reason for its continued popularity even after the shift to democracy is its function as a rite of passage at a difficult life situation but also its successful re-invention. Transition to parenthood is difficult in contemporary society due to high societal expectations of parents as well as contradictory ideals. Rite of passage helps ease the transition for the parents, but it also involves the broader community and the newborn. In addition, it puts one’s life journey into a bigger perspective and provides a platform for a family gathering and for using symbolic language. Both its invention and re-invention were done by inducing a sense of continuity via elements invoking past traditions and universal values. Thanks to that, the desired new meanings and values have been accepted by the public. A crucial role in the (re)inventing process has been played by a so-called institutional entrepreneur, an actor who has the skills, resources and motivation to achieve it. Originally, it was the Communist Party who played the part, while in the re-inventing process it has shifted to a more local level. It is typically mayors or clerks from the local council who enable the process with the high interest from the public giving them the needed support. Apart from becoming a local and not anymore state event, it has also managed to diminish its anti-religious overtones and become a platform for (post)modern and post-secular meanings and needs.