

CULTURAL POLICY AND POLITICS OF CULTURE IN LITHUANIA. VILNIUS – EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2009, AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL VIEW

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“European Capital of Culture” is one of the most effective and productive projects of European Union’s cultural policy. In 2009 this project was hosted by Vilnius, Lithuania. The designation of Vilnius coincided with the celebration of a national event, the millennium of the name “Lithuania”. In 2009 Lithuania was, after 20 years from the fall of USSR, on the international stage of European Union, breaking deeply with its soviet past and consolidating its EU membership. In this context European Capital of Culture’s project constitutes a mix between European instances and national rhetoric. While previous anthropological studies focused on the structural organization of the project “European Capital of Culture”, in this text more than to analyze and to evaluate the chosen programme, the events included and the costs, my point is to consider the general project in its proper historical, cultural, political and social context. Main subjects/objects of my research are those who give official representation of the events made through official documents and public statements, I mean politicians, bureaucrats, experts, journalists, artists and people involved directly in a different way. I also consider the interpretation and the feeling that common people will get from this event. The base of my research will be to keep the attention on the connection of this cultural event with political and economic field. I focus on a description of the event VECC and its role considering the general cultural policy of Lithuania and European policy to represent a common European identity based on cultural diversity.

Keywords: cultural performance, national culture, European identity.

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Introduction

“European Capital of Culture” is one of the most effective and productive projects of European Union’s cultural policy. Following the wish to create a common European identity among citizens of European Union’s member-states, in 1985 European ministers of culture agreed to develop a project that would give to the idea of European culture an official space in each member-state. Since that time the project has developed and on the initiative of ministers of culture has become

an official project included in EU’s agenda. The main statement written on official website of European Commission’s culture department is:

“The European capital of culture is a golden opportunity to show off Europe’s cultural richness and diversity, and all the ties which link us together as Europeans. The event is so attractive that Europe’s cities vie with each other fiercely for the honor of bearing the title” (European Union Commission).