

Managing and Developing Communities, Festivals and Events

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11

Indulgence Feasts: Manifestation of Religious and Communal Identity

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Introduction

Indulgence feasts (including plenary indulgences, Church festivals) are first of all religious feasts of the local Catholic parishes. However, the most famous indulgence feasts went beyond the borders of the parishes and became an important celebration for neighbouring parishes, regions or even the whole country (Lithuania). Catholic bishops and church founders took great care in establishing indulgence feasts of a particular name; this was very popular especially in the period of the Counter-Reformation.

The tradition of indulgence feasts in Lithuania dates back to the 16th to 17th century. Some churches celebrate several indulgence feasts during the year. Usually, local fairs and various secular events accompany the indulgence feasts. These social and communal aspects of the feast have always been important, especially in recent years. Such feasts reinforce local identity and create a sense of community, pride or well-being (Jepson & Clarke, 2012). The preparation of the programme of the indulgence feast provides an opportunity to understand communal values, to promote local cultural traditions and to sustain partnership between local stakeholders.

The indulgence feast is an ideal time and place to manifest religious and communal identities. These identities form integral parts of an individual's personal or social identity, which may be defined as one's consciousness of one's self-perception, and others' perception of one's individuality (Yamin, 2008). In general, identity is related to the representation of one's values, personal experience, memory, intelligence, etc. The main factors of one's perception are gender, biological age, nationality, ethnicity, cultural values, religious orientation, wealth,

occupational role, etc. Erikson (1970, p. 72) refers to identity as 'some belief in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image.'

Religious identity refers to people's ways of relating to religion, how strongly they feel about their faith, and how they choose to demonstrate their beliefs during their daily lives or journeys. The main way in which people express religious identity is participation in various religious services, events or feasts, performing rituals and prescriptions of the Church. Some of the believers belong to religious communities, although membership in them depends upon the symbolic construction and imagined similarity (Anderson, 1991). Others manifest their identity in public or private discussions, read and quote religious books, use religious symbols (crosses, religious souvenirs), or use a combination of some or all of the above-mentioned elements.

Travelling to the indulgence feasts remains one of the indicators of a person's religious identity. The whole history of the pilgrimage journeys in Lithuania relates closely to indulgence feasts. During the different centuries the indulgence feasts were the major social sanctioned reason and motivation for travelling. Nowadays, the most popular places of indulgence feasts are integrated into regional tourism development and marketing strategies.

Today, the internal motives of pilgrims are very different, but the indulgence feasts still remain an important pull factor for the decision to make a pilgrimage. The tradition of pilgrimage is closely related to the social and cultural functions of these feasts, so it is important to analyse social and religious functions of indulgence feasts, and their role in contemporary Lithuanian society.

Pilgrimage as a form of expression: values and identity

Contemporary research deals with the complicated relationships between tourism and pilgrimage phenomena, including economic, political, social, psychological, emotional and other aspects (Liutikas, 2006). Mass tourists, pilgrims and locals use the same resource base, such as transport infrastructure and parking space around sacred places.

In travelling, values and identity are demonstrated during valuistic journeys (Liutikas, 2012). These journeys (also known as pilgrimage journeys or pilgrimages) also cover the journeys carried out within a geographical space, expressing identity and values. Such journeys help to develop or change personal or social identity and to express valuistic ideals, as well as to confirm and demonstrate identity.

Values fostered by valuistic travellers can be related to religion, can involve the search for a personal spiritual route, as well as embody

national, cultural or other collective ideals; or it may simply be the unique value of an individual (Liutikas, 2012). The clearly defined model of the concept of valuistic journeys allows for the identification of two major groups of such journeys: traditional (religious) pilgrimage and secular (unrelated to religion) pilgrimage (Table 11.1).

Processes of globalisation and secularisation have an impact on the social identity and values of people. Travelling to the indulgence feasts, or other sacred or valuistic places, helps people to discern between the relative values of the different beliefs. Surely, it helps to manifest and/or reaffirm existing personal or social identity.

Religious pilgrimage to the indulgence feasts is also related to the notion of religious tourism. We can define religious tourism as the type of tourism where participants are motivated either in part or exclusively for religious reasons. We can distinguish three ways in relationship between pure pilgrimage and religious tourism (Liutikas, 2006, p. 43).

Table 11.1 A comparison of pilgrimages and tourism

	Religious pilgrimage	Secular pilgrimage	Tourism
Journey	Religiously and spiritually motivated journey	Journey motivated by secular values and identity	Journey motivated by recreational and cognitive needs, spending leisure time, consuming commodities and services
The main features of the journey	Structuralism, ritualisation, religious devotion, traditionalism, communality, adherence, institutionalisation, hardship during the journey	Individualisation, particularism, differentiation, secularisation, revitalisation of traditionalism, privatisation, ritualisation, commodification	Commodification, mass, institutionalisation, structuralism, unification of experience.
Social and economic environment	Leisure-time, money, social and political sanctions		
Forms of journey	By foot, by motor-vehicle transport, by train, by boat, by plane	By foot (treks), by motor vehicle-transport, by train, by boat, by plane	

Source: Liutikas (2006).

This relationship is seen in the discourse of the following issues: 1) pilgrimage is the same phenomenon as religious tourism (here the terms are used interchangeably, the conception of these phenomena is the same); 2) pilgrimage is considered to be a special form or specific part of religious tourism; 3) pilgrimage differs from religious tourism, which is considered to be an intermediate form between religious pilgrimage and secular tourism.

Comparison of religious and secular pilgrimage and tourism highlights similarities and differences among various kinds of journeys. Similarities could be social and economic factors affecting the journey, or the types of journey. Willingness to relate identity and values to the destination point are characteristic of both traditional and secular pilgrimage. It is natural that religious and secular pilgrims differ with regard to their values in life and attitude to religion, however, it is also important to note that although structuralism and rituality are more characteristic of the traditional religious pilgrimage, difficulties and privation are more appreciated in this kind of journey (Table 11.1).

Methodology

The practical working methods are those typical of the majority of research within the social sciences: document analysis and observation. The main task undertaken in this chapter is the identification of social aspects of indulgence feasts and the pilgrimages to them. This identification is based on document review and authors' observation at the indulgence feasts in Lithuanian rural areas. The main criteria which seemed to attribute religious and social practices were constant information about these practices in the literature (i.e. mass-media, internet, or other information sources), and existing traditions to implement these practices at the sites of indulgence feasts.

The tradition of indulgence feasts is especially vibrant in Lithuanian rural areas. All territories, which do not fall under the category of urban territories, or category of urban-type settlements, are considered as rural areas in Lithuania. Rural areas make up 97 per cent of the total area, one-third of Lithuania's population lives there and almost one-third of the employed population are employed in the sector of agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishery (Statistics Lithuania, 2014). The vast majority of the one thousand Catholic Churches of Lithuania are located within rural areas. Furthermore, most of the local feasts are combined with the indulgence feasts.

Sacred space and time

The main Catholic pilgrimage places in Lithuania are presented in Figure 11.1. This identification is based on the places visited by the contemporary pilgrims as well as taking into consideration the visiting traditions, the number of pilgrims who visited the place, and place significance. The most important pilgrimage places are listed in the Pilgrim Route of John Paul II, which was established in 2007.

Observations confirm that the contemporary social processes stimulate the rediscovery of different kinds of particularism and of localism. We need special spaces around us to feel safe from the speed of life and the challenges of the everyday. The need to find one's own secure place within the world becomes more and more essential. For such goals sometimes people turn to pilgrimage places and sites of indulgence feasts. Especially those places related with the family's traditions. The pilgrims go to the indulgence feasts at the sites where they were born or grew up, spent their youth or outlived important religious experiences.

All Catholic churches in Lithuania have their sacred names. Most popular of them are related with the Virgin Mary, Christ, or saints (see Table 11.2). The indulgence feasts are celebrated on special dates mostly

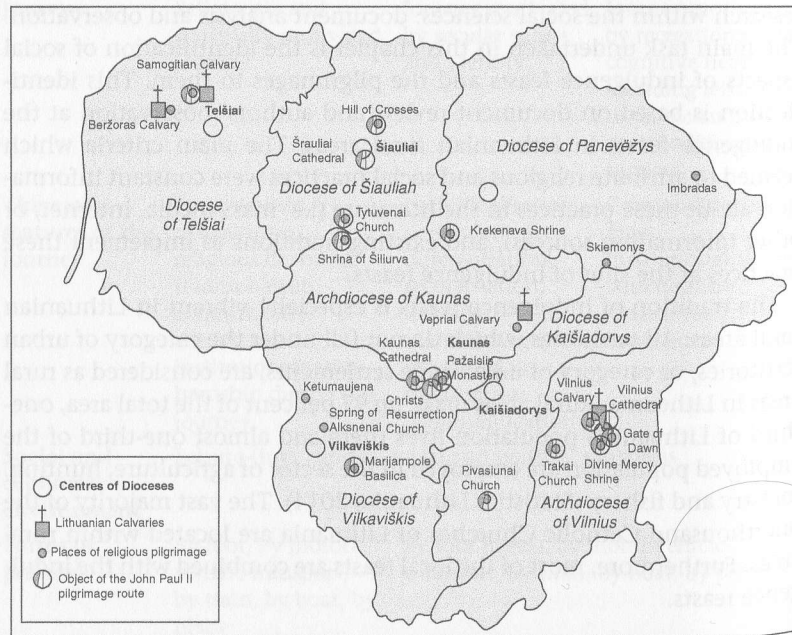


Figure 11.1 Catholic pilgrimage places in Lithuania

Source: Liutikas, 2006.

Table 11.2 Most popular names of the Catholic Churches in Lithuania

Related with Virgin Mary	Related with Christ	Related with saints	Other names
Assumption of Saint Mary	Transfiguration of Christ	Saint Ana	Saint Trinity
Virgin Mary of the Immaculate Conception	The Discovery of the Holy Cross	Saint Apostles Peter and Paul	All Saints
Nativity of Mary	Sacred Heart of Jesus	Archangel Michael	Guardian Angels
Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary	The Exaltation of the Holy Cross	Saint George	Divine Providence
Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary		Saint John the Baptist	
		Saint Anthony of Padua	
		Saint Casimir	
		Saint Roch	
		Saint Stanislav	
		Saint Joseph	
		Saint Laurence	
		Saint James	

Source: Liutikas (2006).

related with the name of the Church. The names of the indulgence feasts are known among locals and pilgrims, they are included in official programmes and newsletters.

The feast time could be grouped into the preparation period and the day of the feast. Preparation for religious pilgrimage and religious feasts consists of two elements: technical-organisational and spiritual. Contemplation about the event or the journey and spiritual purification (confession, penance) are the main parts of the spiritual preparation. For hosts from local communities preparation for mass pilgrimage includes preparation of:

- Various religious and secular events and their programmes;
- Surrounding environment (cleaning waysides, collecting litter, etc.);
- Basic services for pilgrims (bio-toilets, temporary places for fast-food, drinks, collection of wastes and treatment);
- Other technical aspects (issuance of licenses for market activities, hanging of various signs and markers, etc.).

Church feasts are usually celebrated during the liturgical year. They are usually feasts in honour of Christ, Holy Mary or saints. The dates of

indulgence feasts are well known and motivate for pilgrimage journeys (Table 11.3). Pilgrims come to these feasts even from remote parishes or different cities.

Quite often pilgrims travel to indulgence feasts because of the need to visit their birthplace. Memories from youth or loved ones, nostalgic feelings, are also important reasons for travelling to indulgence feasts.

Table 11.3 Main dates of indulgence feasts

Date	Name of indulgence feast	Places
4 March*	Feast of St Casimir	Seredžius, Vilniaus Cathedral
23 April*	Feast of St George	Daukšiai, Vilkija
Sunday after Easter	Solemn feast of Divine Mercy	Divine Mercy Shrine in Vilnius
Pentecost	Feast	Paberžė, Shrine of Crosses, Šiauliai Cathedral, Vepriai Calvary, Vilnius Calvary
13 June*	Feast of St Anthony	Kretinga, Telšiai, Tytuvėnai
29 June*	Feast of Apostles St Peter and St Paul	Kaunas Cathedral, Shrine of Crosses, Plateliai, Šiauliai Cathedral, Varniai
2–12 July	Great Feast of Samogitian Calvary	Samogitian Calvary
12 July **	Feast of the Blessed Jurgis Matulaitis	Marijampolė
16 July*	Feast of Scapular	Beržoras
22 July*	Feast of St Mary Magdalene	Šunskai
26 July*	Feast of St Anne	Alsėdžiai, Betygala
Last Sunday of July	Feast of the Hill of Crosses	Hill of Crosses
15 August	Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary	Alksnėnai, Beržoras, Kartena, Krekenava, Onuškis, Pažaislis, Pivašiūnai, Simnas, Sintautai
16 August*	Feast of St Roch	Kražiai, Palanga, Surviliškis, Raudondvaris
24 August*	Feast of St Bartholomew.	Sintautai
1–8 September	Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary	Trakai
8–15 September	Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary	Šiluva
29 September*	Feast of St Michael the Archangel	Ariogala
16 November***	Feast of the Gates of Dawn	Vilnius

* Transferred to nearest Sunday.

** From the Sunday before until the Sunday after July 12.

*** Eight days' interval of November 16.

Source: Liutikas (2006).

However, the main pilgrimage sites, indicated in Figure 11.1, are visited by pilgrims who do not necessarily have their friends or family links there.

Pilgrimage to the indulgence feast is usually a one-day trip without staying in overnight accommodation (about two hours is devoted to Holy Mass, and pilgrims could spend up to one or two hours in the market or in communication with friends, relatives or acquaintances). The exception is with pilgrimages to the Lithuanian Calvaries. Walking the Way of the Cross could take from two to five hours. So, together with the Holy Mass, the indulgence feast takes almost a full day.

Religious and secular practices at the indulgence feasts

Motivation of valuistic journeys depends on many reasons. The most important of them being the life experience of pilgrims, lifestyle, and social and cultural influence. This research has shown that the major motives of religious Catholic pilgrims are: asking for God's grace, health, expressing gratitude to Jesus or the Virgin Mary, as well as spiritual search and renewal. It is interesting to note that one-fifth of religious pilgrims are convinced that travelling to the sacred place is their religious duty (Liutikas, 2009).

Manifestation of religious identity constitutes different models of specific behaviour (Liutikas, 2012). Today, indulgence feasts are visited in groups or individually with organised or private devotions. Attendees of indulgence feasts vary from one to another, at low and high levels of visible expressions of religious identity, as well as specific behaviour.

Sometimes indulgence feasts could serve as an opportunity to renew religious identity or to strengthen it. The specific religious practices performed at the indulgence feast and the place itself can help to develop identity or even cause real religious conversion from a seeker to a believer.

Pilgrims perform various religious practices such as praying, singing hymns, carrying cross, or kissing the relics. In general, we can group all devotional rituals performed during the pilgrimage and at the destination place into four groups: 1) Internal (spiritual); 2) Oral (prayers, readings, singing, etc.); 3) Physical without artificial elements (kneeling, walking on the knees, praying with raised hands, etc.); and 4) Artificial items (playing musical instruments, lighting candles, etc.).

During the soviet occupation, there were attempts to ban or redesign the religious background of indulgence feasts, replacing them with various secular feasts such as harvest or songs festivals, crafts or professional feasts. The model for these feasts was similar to the indulgence

feasts: official ceremony with speeches (an attempt to switch Holy Mass), entertainment (concerts, shows) and a fair (Mardosa, 2003, p. 265).

Certain rituals such as walking on foot to the destination place, participating at the Holy Mass, performing religious practices in receiving indulgence, communicating with friends and relatives, purchasing sweets, religious souvenirs and other things in the temporary market place are typical for indulgence feasts. These practices will now be analysed in greater detail. In general we can identify and discuss several typical practices performed at the indulgence feasts:

1. Reaching the destination place
2. Participating at the Holy Mass. Receiving indulgence
3. Taking part in other religious rituals (walking the Way of the Cross, visiting other religious sites nearby, etc.)
4. Communicating with friends and relatives
5. Purchasing items at local fairs
6. Donating to beggars
7. Participating in secular organised events (concerts, shows).

Reaching the destination place

Pilgrimages are carried out on foot, riding bicycles, in coaches or by car; the journey programme increasingly covers elements related to the motives of the journey (for example, visiting other religious places on the road). Between the traditional pilgrimage and tourism exists clear disparity concerning the hardship of the journey. Traditional pilgrimage needs to contain a challenging physical element. A hardship is part of the defining concept of a Christian religious pilgrimage. Pilgrims regard restrictions as a personal choice because they agree to abide by them when they decide to participate.

Exceptional kinds of pilgrimages tend to be a walking journey. This is the traditional way of travelling to Šiluva, Samogitian Calvary, the Gates of Dawn, Pivašiūnai, the Hill of Crosses, Krekenava and Trakai. The most popular walking journeys are steeped in old traditions. For example, journeys usually take place from Vilnius via Trakai to Pivašiūnai, from the Hill of Crosses via Tytuvėnai to Šiluva, from Kretinga to Samogitian Calvary (Figure 11.2).

Participating at the holy mass. Receiving indulgence

In Catholic tradition plenary indulgence is the forgiveness of sin and restoration of communion with God. The Catholic Catechism defines indulgences as 'a remission before God of the temporal punishment

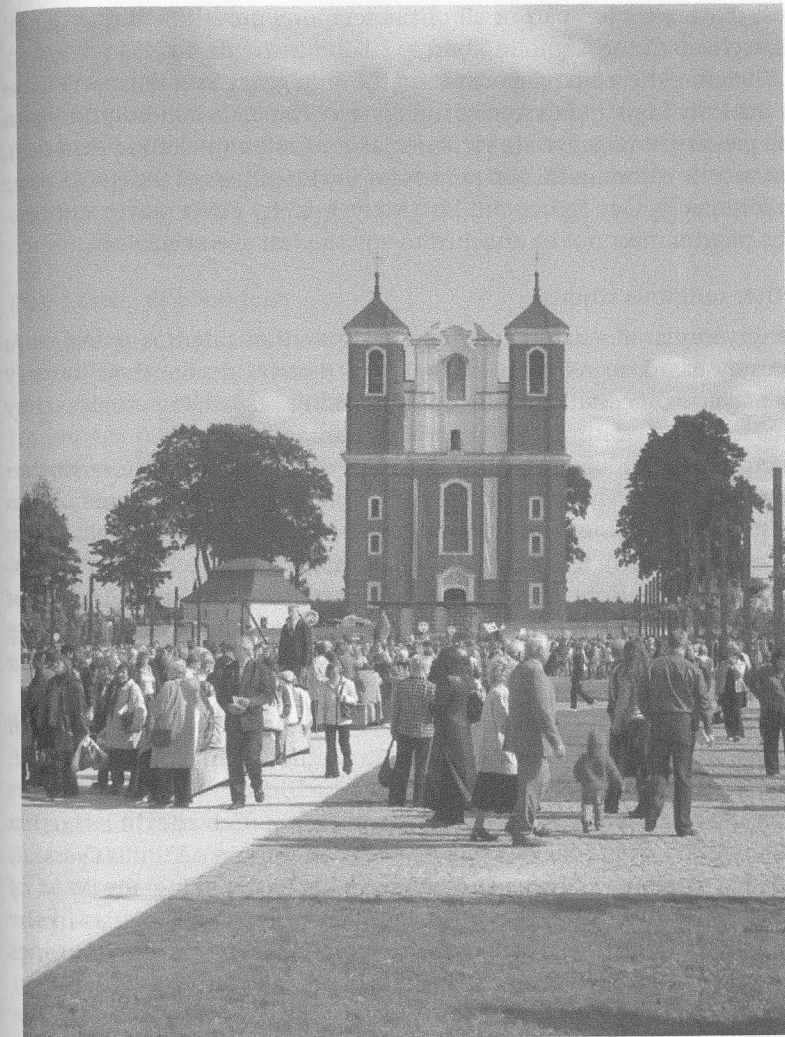


Figure 11.2 Pilgrims at Šiluva

Source: Author (2015).

due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints. An indulgence is partial or plenary according

as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin' (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2015, paragraph, 1471).

Therefore the main religious aim of the indulgence feast is to participate at the Holy Mass and to receive indulgence. The main conditions to gain the plenary indulgence are sacramental confession (including penance), Eucharistic communion and prayers for the intentions of the Holy Father (traditionally, Our Father and Hail Mary, but any other prayer suffices). The pilgrim must not be attached to any sin, not even venial sin.

Other religious rituals

Observations of religious pilgrimages show that pilgrims going on a journey based on religious and spiritual motives devote their journey to prayer or meditation and communicating on religious topics, they analyse issues relating to sense or the meaning of life.

During the indulgence feasts pilgrims pray or perform various other religious rituals. There are many types of prayers and forms of praying in existence today (the Rosary, praying in the prone position, praying with raised hands, etc.). An example of other rituals could be religious processions (with the Holy Sacrament, with the copy of miraculous images of the Virgin Mary, etc.). And examples of devotional practices could be: walking on the knees, singing hymns, playing musical instruments, or the lighting of candles.

The Way of the Cross, the route to commemorate the Passion of Christ, is established in most Roman Catholic Churches. However, pilgrims mostly travel to Calvaries, in which the Way of the Cross is typically dispersed in an open area. There are four Calvaries in Lithuania (Figure 11.1): Žemaičių kalvariija (Samogitian Calvary), Vilnius (Verkiai) Calvary, Beržoras Calvary and Vepriai Calvary. Walking the Way of the Cross is an integral and important part of indulgence feasts in the Lithuanian Calvaries. Pilgrims also visit cemeteries to clean tombstones and graves to honour their dead relatives.

Communicating with friends and relatives

Communitas (Turner & Turner, 1978) and communication with others are important elements of the indulgence feasts. The mass events such as indulgence feasts are also a local feast and have a high degree of socialisation attached to them. It is an opportunity to visit friends and relatives who live at the village or in the neighbouring villages. The relatives celebrate this important meeting and usually pilgrims stay overnight with relatives or friends.

If pilgrims are not planning to stay overnight, they usually have a picnic-type lunch with neighbours or friends. They typically bring some snacks from home and buy some confectionery at local markets. It is commonplace to eat in town squares, churchyards or space nearby, or on lawns on the way home. Temporary outdoor cafés and kiosks also provide spaces for eating and communication. The tradition of eating together is an action of social unity; the sharing of meals symbolises communal and family links.

Purchasing at local fairs

Another important issue is with regard to local markets or fairs during the indulgence feast. Visiting fairs is another very important motivation of the journey (Mardosa, 2006, 2007). An old tradition is to bring home handmade sweets or other fairings. During the fairs, traders usually sell sweets, rolls or cookies, but also devotionals and other religious souvenirs, books, arts, bijouterie, craft works, toys, etc. The majority of the traders come from bigger cities, but also there are local ones. During the fairs pilgrims can also buy religious souvenirs and religious literature and memorabilia such as signs to take back to their homes. The most popular goods were small-scale production: sweets and rolls, devotionals and bijouterie (Figure 11.3).

Donation to beggars

The custom of almsgiving to beggars is related to the piety of the beggars (Liutikas & Motuzas, 2014). Their prayers were taken as very effective. The intentions of almsgiving were compassion for the poor and belief in the powerful prayers of the beggars. They were asked to pray for successful farming, good weather or the dead. People believed that their prayers helped the souls in purgatory. They were thought of as intercessors between the living and the dead. Today though this tradition has been changing, and quite often begging-related anti-social issues are seen to take place with the use of alcohol and aggressive behaviour.

Participation in secular organised events such as concerts, shows

Today the indulgence feast is a local feast for all the community. Local governments often organise various events such as concerts, shows and other communal initiatives. In this case it is a challenge for pilgrims not to lose spiritual track and to resist commodification and secular thoughts.



Figure 11.3 Local fair at indulgence feast in Pivašiūnai

Source: Author (2015).

At the beginning of the 20th century indulgence feasts were already attracting outdoor comedians and clowns. There were also movies shown or other types of entertainment. Even in the 18th century fairs caused a lot of problems for bishops. For some attendees of indulgence feasts the fair was an opportunity to buy and use alcohol, to dance or amuse in other ways. Amusements and markets broke down the sustainable and spiritual atmosphere of the indulgence feasts, so priests and bishops tried to reschedule the trading of non-religious commodities to the days after the indulgence feast (Mardosa, 2010).

Pseudo pilgrims

Here we discuss the origins of modern tourism from the end of 19th century, as influenced by the *free time* concept – that being the leisure time available to increasing numbers of people without immediate and specific obligations and in search of new experiences (Tomasi, 2002, p. 18). Leisure time has become a social phenomenon, breaking the routine of everyday life. Travelling has become a popular form of recreation, as well as an opportunity to gain new experiences, recognition, and restoration of physical and spiritual strength.

Therefore, better transport systems, more effective travel planning, better possibilities for places to stay, as well as conveniences in sacred and valuistic destinations make the pilgrimage in many ways very similar to tourism. During the centuries, even the infrastructure originally established for religious pilgrims has changed. Historical paths of religious pilgrims became roads, while pilgrims' hospices became bars and inns. Little shops beside churches, both secular and religious, traded in foodstuffs, beverages and souvenirs as well as other items necessary for travellers.

The tradition to visit and indulge in the feast sometimes doesn't have any valuistic motives at all. The societal transformations from the beginning of the modern era have allowed mixing *sacrum* and *profanum* in travelling, so being able to set clear borders between pilgrimage and tourism is becoming increasingly difficult. Often local feasts in pilgrimage centres become a focus of interest for tourists. Pilgrims, during their journeys, also visit famous objects such as relics on the road. After Holy Mass some attendees of the indulgence feasts also visit other famous cultural and natural objects in the surroundings of the village.

Liutikas (2009) introduced the concept of the pseudo pilgrim, the person travelling with a group of pilgrims on motives different from the expression of values and identity. Values fostered by pseudo pilgrims usually are not related to religion, rather they manifest tourist identity and have their own unique behavioural traits.

Lithuanian pilgrims who travel around indulgence feasts are also very different (Liutikas, 2012). Sometimes the journey to the indulgence feast is understood in a similar way as a tourist journey: a way of spending leisure time, seeking new impressions, and new possibilities for expression. Social reasons to come to the indulgence feasts are aimed at changes of the inner life, or fostering new social relations. Sometimes the journey to the indulgence feast is just a need for accompanying family members or close friends, or a wish to sell goods in the local market as a means of financial income.

The real motives of the pseudo pilgrims, however, are spending leisure time, curiosity, psychological comfort, self-renewal, and others aspects not related to the religious motives of seeking indulgence and redemption from sins. The main values of such pilgrims are to create new impressions at a new environment and have a good opportunity to relax and take a break from the routine of everyday life. So through visiting indulgence feasts the other needs of pseudo pilgrims, the social, recreational or psychological, are covered.

Such a notion was based on various research carried out by Mardosa (2003, 2010), Liutikas (2009, 2012). Mardosa (2003, p. 263) pointed out that the notion of the indulgence feast as providing the opportunity for the remission of sins was more common for elderly visitors. For youth, however, the indulgence feast is associated with a holiday or self-indulgent festival.

Discussion and conclusions

Pilgrimage to the indulgence feasts is an opportunity to manifest a religious and communal identity. Visits to indulgence feasts could be also related to family tradition, nostalgic feelings, and the wish to meet friends and relatives.

Journeys to the indulgence feasts are restricted in space and time and are steeped in old tradition. Various practices and rituals performed by pilgrims could be grouped into the most common motivating factors: reaching the destination place; participating in Holy Mass; receiving indulgence; performing other religious rituals; communicating with friends and relatives; purchasing items at local fairs; donating to beggars; and participating in secular organised events.

Pilgrims have to withstand the secular challenges and challengers, forget secular rhythm of time spent every day, and not break down the sustainable and spiritual atmosphere of the indulgence feasts by amusements and consumption. However, not all pilgrims visit the event for valuistic purposes. The concept of a 'pseudo pilgrim' is a result of secularisation and globalisation. The tourism system helps to mix *profanum* and *sacrum* spheres. The religious aims of the indulgence feasts sometimes are covered by secular amusements, the motives of the pilgrimage fall among any other possible reasons of tourist journey.

Another view of indulgence feasts is that they have the possibility to manifest religious and communal identity and values. It's time to show *who you are* or *who you would like to be*. Visible expressions of personal or social identity as well as specific behaviour are very common for the pilgrims. Pilgrimage sites are a sacred and special space, which

distinguishes them from everyday or routine spaces and allows them to demonstrate specific practices. Moreover, as Voye (2002) pointed out pilgrimages may be used to reaffirm various levels of particular social and religious identities that constitute an answer to the challenges set forth by globalisation.

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12

Developing a Community Festival Amidst Civil Unrest

Adrian Devine, Frances Devine and Clare Carruthers

‘The people of West Belfast and this community festival (Féile an Phobail) is a shining example of what ordinary people can do against incredible odds’.

(Michael Moore, 2003,
Academy Award-Winning Filmmaker)

From 1968–1998 Northern Ireland was a war zone with an ongoing cycle of protest and violence fuelled by sectarian division and hatred. During this period, which is often referred to as the ‘Troubles’, over 3,600 people were killed and over 30,000 injured. Understandably this had an adverse impact on festivals and events as local organisers struggled to plan and run their events while those who owned the rights to international events were reluctant to commit to Northern Ireland. However, amidst such turmoil and carnage a new community festival was established in 1988, called Féile an Phobail (Irish language). When translated into English Féile an Phobail means ‘festival of the people’, an appropriate name, given the impact it has had on community life in one of the most troubled parts of Northern Ireland, West Belfast.

Féile an Phobail was set up as a direct response to the Troubles. Its purpose was to celebrate the positive side of the community, its creativity, its energy, its passion for the arts, and for sport. One of its main objectives was to provide entertainment at a price that the majority of those living in West Belfast could afford. Since 1988 Féile an Phobail has grown from a relatively humble parade of floats, bands and Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) sports clubs walking in their club regalia, to now being the largest community arts festival on the island of Ireland. This chapter will discuss how Féile an Phobail has developed and the impact this event has had on the community. However, to appreciate