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Space and Time Usage in the Feast

During the pilgrimage feast of Our Lady of the Snow our research group had the task to observe the inside of the church and its direct surroundings - mainly the church corridor and the square in front of the church. We investigated how the role of the observed space was changing during the feast. We studied the different functions of the space observing how people behaved inside the church during this particular feast. We recorded our observation on maps and in notes. We also made interviews. We discussed the results of the almost two-day long observation. We realised already then, that in spite of our thorough fieldwork there were still insufficiencies. We were not able to be present everywhere and by the end of the second day we also got rather tired. We did not always have the possibility to use a tape-recorder or take notes. In the case of the events happening at the same time we had to decide which one to follow. Nevertheless we had valuable and interesting experiences during the fieldwork.

How the usage of the church and its surroundings changes in time depends basically on the schedule of the feast. We recorded the changes on the maps attached to this paper. The believers took part in religious and profane acts during an observation.

The solely profane events inside the church and its surroundings happened while preparing for the feast the evening before. In the afternoon on 1 August we had a short visit to the church and friary in order to get to know the scene. The altars were already being decorated and the church was being cleaned. The most popular place at this time was the entrance to the sacristy because of the taps being used in the preparations of the flower vases. The vases were taken to the altars. The following day, on Saturday morning the garland was made and placed around the main entrance of the church, the entrance of the parish, and onto the side-door of the church. (The space used at the time is shown in fig. 1.*) All the preparatory

* Maps and figures can be found in the Appendix.

work was carried out outside the inner church due to their being practical and perhaps profane. Mainly the believers of Alsóváros – both women and men – took part in it. The friars helped only occasionally.

The number of those joining religious activities during the pilgrimage feast – unlike other pilgrimage feasts – was very diverse. During liturgical events the number of the participants was extremely high, filling almost the entire church. (The official schedule of the pilgrimage feast of Our Lady of the Snow at Szeged-Alsóváros in 1997 is enclosed in the Appendix.) Although notes were taken and maps were drawn up of each event, here I mention two particular examples: the Stations of the Cross on Saturday night, which was not mentioned in the schedule, and the high mass on Sunday celebrated by the bishop followed with the procession.

The Way of the Cross (fig. 2.) started at 2 o'clock on Sunday morning and lasted for half an hour. Approximately 60 believers and 2 friars took part in it. In comparison with other pilgrimage feasts this number is relatively small. The traditional songs for the Stations of the Cross were led by friars, the prayers related to certain Stations of the Cross were read by the believers. Most of the believers in the church actively took part in this religious devotion. Despite the small number of the faithful the believers took part in this Way of the Cross as a community. Praying and singing was continuous. This was completed by the usage of religious objects (hymnbooks, rosaries) and unusually strong religious gestures. Moving from station to station helped the believers to get involved in the Stations of the Cross. The intensity of religious piety was shown also by the fact that the believers did not leave the church right after the completion of the Stations of the Cross. The same can not be said for other liturgical events. Though most of the participants were local people they continued praying, singing and their number decreased only at dawn. The space of the church could not be considered homogenous during the Way of the Cross. The most popular place was always where the group of the participants stayed, thus it continuously changed.

The holy mass celebrated by the bishop (fig. 3.) and the procession (fig. 4.) started at 9 o'clock on Sunday and lasted until about 11 o'clock. The church was filled to capacity during the mass. The people who could not find any room in the church, stayed outside and participated just the same. They stood at the corridor entrance and at the main entrance of the church and listened to the liturgy by way of loudspeakers. In spite of not being able to see the events happening inside the church, they seemed to get involved to the liturgy as participants. In this situation the square outside the church became an extension of the church interior where the liturgy was being celebrated. The piety of the people outside the church during the liturgy was of the same value as those inside. During the procession we also experienced the 'extension' of the liturgical space and constant changing of the sacred space outside the church. Most sacred was always the place where the Blessed Sacrament passed by. This was noticeable also in the gestures: the believers who

did not take part in the procession also knelt down and make the sign of the Cross when the Blessed Sacrament was in their presence. The church was empty during the time of the procession. Most of the believers who took part in the high mass also joined the procession although the behaviour of the group was not homogeneous: among the singing and praying, there were some believers who talked about the Sunday lunch. The streets were cordoned off by the police during this time, to allow a free flow of the procession. Although music was turned off at the fair during the procession, the roundabout continued working. Also shopping did not stop. At the end of the procession the clergy and most of the believers returned to the church and finished the holy mass. However, by this time all the participants could fit in the church, many of the believers left before the end.

During the pilgrimage feast the above mentioned events can be considered the peak of the common religious piety, the most sacred time.

At the feast during the intervals between liturgical events pilgrims have the possibility to follow their individual and group devotion. However, already according to the official schedule the liturgical events followed each other rather frequently. Considering also the preparation time before each event (choir rehearsal, the cantor teaching songs, rehearsal for the altarboys) there was only half an hour for the believers to pray together and sing their songs about the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The most intensive and almost only time for common prayer out of the liturgies were the periods between the masses on Saturday night. There were not always foresinger, the prayer often died down and sometimes due to the lack of a leader the believers could not agree on which prayers to pray. A part of them wanted to sing traditional religious folksongs, while others insisted on singing old Hungarian church hymns. The position of the praying group is shown in fig. 4. Some of the believers remained around the altar, while another group sat next to the corridor entrance. Here women from Kiskanizsa were sitting from the moment they arrived on Saturday evening to Sunday morning. They must have chosen that particular place as it was easier for them to leave the church to have a rest and something to eat in the corridor.

During the day between the liturgical events there was no common prayer. The number of those praying privately was higher right after the masses, however, after a while this number decreased considerably. Thus the intensity of the pilgrimage feast was at its lowest during these periods of time. Only Sunday afternoon was an exception. At this time more visitors arrived at the church. Families, relatives - sometimes several generations together - came and prayed for a short time. The number of those just looking around increased as well.

According to our experience, common devotion was not a highlight at the pilgrimage feast of Szeged-Alsóváros. This can be explained by the fact that most of the believers participated in the feast individually, with relatives or some friends. Even if arrived with an organised group of pilgrims, they stayed only for one day,

often because of the limited possibilities of transportation. There were surprisingly few organised pilgrim groups at the feast. On Saturday a smaller group arrived from the village of Kiskanizsa, although they did not come in a procession. Others came from the surroundings of Szeged with their families or acquaintances. On Sunday the only procession was from the village of Ozora, and four other organised groups. They took part mainly in the Sunday morning liturgy. Thus at the pilgrimage feast of Szeged-Alsóváros the believers had the possibility to practise their faith both in the forms of private devotion and liturgical events led by the clergy.

So far I have distinguished the space and time of religious practise and profane events. However, in the religious practise of the community the sacred and the profane space and time sare often mingled. Here are some illustrative examples to prove this statement.

Already on Saturday morning the office of hours started which many lay believers also took part in. Meanwhile a woman was still decorating the altar of the Black Mary. Suddenly she happened to brake a vase, then collected the broken pieces and changed the vase. In the benches an elderly couple was talking, however, sometimes paying attention to the prayer. Meanwhile the worship of the friars went on without disturbance. On Saturday night several believers fell asleep in the church, others discussed the railway timetable during the rosary. These were the most extreme cases of the kind. Most of the profane activities such as eating, drinking, talking, also interviews by ethnologists took place in the corridor. The sacred and profane space mingled most obviously at the corridor entrance of the church. This entrance made it possible to leave the church without causing a disturbance. Thus the common prayer was heard very well, also the masses were broadcasted by loudspeakers. During liturgical events the corridor became noticeably less noisy and the place around the corridor became an integral part of the church during the high mass on Sunday. Yet, a little bit further on people were talking and relaxing. This corridor can be considered as a thoroughfare where people were either following the holy liturgy or only passing by. I intend to discuss the most frequent places of private devotion later on, yet in connection with the function of the corridor I must make mention of the crucifix located there. It did not have any special role in common worship, though during the feast days people prayed individually in front of the crucifix and also put flowers underneath it and touched the crucifix. At this time the area around the crucifix became sacred for those praying privately. However, we can always consider this part of the corridor sacred independent of private devotion.

So far we have seen how the sacred and the profane space and time intermingled during the feast. Similarly the place and time of common and private devotion coincided as well. We had the possibility to observe several examples of this, sometimes even surprising acts. We often noticed believers praying privately during the masses. In the procession there was a woman singing entirely different songs from the others. When she was told that she was not singing the proper song, she an-

swered that she was aware of the fact and continued singing her own song. The most interesting case was, when two elderly ladies stepped in front of the Holy Cross altar – in the middle of the church – during the mass on Sunday noon while the Gospel was being read. They prayed there for about ten minutes then left the church. Nobody told them that they were disturbing the mass, and seemingly they did not disturb anybody.

Observing the behaviour of the believers in the church, together with the most frequented places of private devotion we concluded that the so called sacred inner place of the church did not compose a consistent whole (fig. 5.)

The space of the church can be divided into 3 parts:

- I. entrance to the pews
- II. nave
- III. sanctuary

Within the three main parts of the church we distinguish other smaller units of greater importance during the days of the feast. Among them the most significant is the altar of the Black Virgin of Czestochowa and its surroundings.

The altar of the Black Virgin of Czestochowa is situated to the right of the main entrance under the choir loft. The altar picture is a copy of the miraculous image of Czestochowa. It became black because of candles put in front of it, and got its name after this colour. The result of our investigation verified our presupposition that this altar was the most frequented place of private devotion in the church of Alsóváros. During the pilgrim feast there was always somebody praying in front of this altar. Often there were several believers kneeling not only on the kneelers, but also on the carpet around it and on steps of the altar. Sitting on the benches around the altar elderly ladies practised their private devotion for longer periods of time. Some of the believers were praying, kneeling even during the masses and not participating in the liturgical events. Others noticing that some places became free around the altar, stopped following the liturgy and knelt in front of the copy of the miraculous image. Others came to kneel down at the altar right after holy communion. Finishing their prayers at the altar, they sat down on the pews at the back of the church and continued their private prayers. Between the masses believers came into the church only to pray at the altar, and then left the church. People expressed their feelings more overtly in front of the altar of the Black Virgin than in other parts of the church. For instance, they knelt down only at this particular altar while praying. They were standing very close to the altar. They cried, kissed and caressed the altar cloth. Some believers placed letters on the altar, and almost everybody placed money into the collection box. According to the friars the largest amount of money was collected there. The believers were not disturbed in their private devotion by those standing around. (At least to a lesser extent than in other parts of the church.) I asked the believers why and what they prayed in front of the altar. I got the following answers: 'The locals from Alsóváros came here to ask for

help in their great sorrow.' 'I pray the rosary for my alcoholic son.' – said an elderly woman crying. 'I never miss praying at this altar when I come to the church. I have my usual prayers in the mornings and evenings, so I continuously ask for help for the success of my life and family.' – said a 84 year old woman. Huge amounts of flowers were placed around this altar by the believers. The friars had the task of arranging the flowers in the vases. During the feast days only the friars were allowed to organise the altars. The locals of Alsóváros regularly came to this altar to pray and bring flowers, but they never put them in the vases on the altar. They do not intend to touch the flowers brought by others. This could possibly mean that they consider the objects placed on the altar as sacred. On the altar candles were burned continuously, but they were not lit by the believers. This rear part of the church – the altar of the Black Virgin and its surroundings – has an intimate atmosphere. It is isolated with a column from the main nave, above there is the choir loft making the area smaller. In the candlelight a certain 'microclimate' is created by the light and smell of candles attracting people to calm down, to be alone. The objects around the altar, such as a kneeler, a pew, a poem of Gyula Juhász about the altar picture, a text on the history of the miraculous picture and the votive marble plaque draw the attention of the non-faithful as well. The custom of Alsóváros locals praying in front of the altar and putting flowers on it has an obvious effect on those visiting the church from other areas. Next to the altar of the Black Virgin there is a statue of Saint Anthony which makes the altar even more attractive, playing a less important, yet significant role in that rear part of the church. The movable pew next to the column was placed in a way so that the believers could pray towards both the altar of the Black Virgin and the statue of Saint Anthony. Several believers were praying also in front of the statue, many put money into the collection box in front of it. We noticed that a number of people entering the church went directly to the statue of Saint Anthony – often without making a sign of the Cross – put some coins into the collection box and left the church. Obviously this activity can not be considered religious, it is rather a peculiar kind of piety.

The altar of the Suffering Souls is situated opposite the altar of the Black Virgin, in a place similar to it. Though there were less believers praying in front of this altar and they stayed only for a shorter time, the altar of the Suffering Souls is the second most important place of private devotion inside the church. Believers prayed more loudly here, made the sign of the Cross and kissed the altar cloth. Everybody prayed there standing. This was the only place where the believers lit candles though there was not a special candleholder. This made this part of the church different and significant. The candles were put on the steps in front of the altar. A 84-year old woman told me why she lit a candle: 'As a respect to the Virgin Mary and ... now, as I can not go out to my parents' grave, to my husband's, as I am not strong enough ..., I can not walk there any more. It is in the cemetery of Alsóváros. I can not go out there, so I lit this small candle to express my gratitude. I often light candles also at home ..., as a sign of respect.' Presumably most of the believers light a candle in remembrance of

their dead relatives. For those who do not know this church, meaning of this altar remains a mystery. Several visitors behaved hesitatingly in front of the altar. For instance a teenager girl did not know what to do when her mother, who came to the altar with her, kissed the altar cloth. The girl hesitated to follow her mother. (Certainly, there could be other reasons in the background why she did not follow her mother. Anyway, the girl seemed to practise her faith.)

The centre of common worship was the sanctuary as in other Catholic churches. Usually the sanctuary is at the same time the most important place of private devotion. In the case of Szeged-Alsóváros the situation is entirely different. Certainly, the sanctuary served as the main centre of different liturgical events involving mainly the clergy and the altarboys. The pews were filled with believers only during the most frequented masses. Only rarely did the people use the sanctuary for private devotion. Only a few believers went as far as the main altar. They stood there for some minutes praying, noticeably without any expression of feelings. More of them went up to the main altar to pray there for a short time. Interestingly those who prayed in the sanctuary, prayed also at other altars - mainly at the altar of the Black Virgin and the Suffering Souls. What is the reasons for this great difference between other pilgrimage churches and the church of Alsóváros? Why is not the sanctuary the centre of private devotion? Perhaps, as it is too spacious and the distance between the main altar and pews is quite significant, the believers do not feel comfortable to go there. The pews in the sanctuary are used by the friars, thus people consider this part of the church as a closed area. For example, at Saturday evening at 8 o'clock right before evening prayer the cantor asked the pilgrim groups to come and join the friars in the sanctuary. Only after a while did the groups make a move towards the sanctuary singing a traditional church song. Perhaps, they wanted to express their dislike for Gregorian melodies. However, after common singing they went back to their original places and did not return to the sanctuary any more. This fact verifies the above mentioned conclusion referring to the special status of the pews in the sanctuary. On the other hand, as the sanctuary is a light and spacious place in a central position, all the gestures can be seen very well from all parts of the church. So it is not really suitable for private devotion. Also, the masses, preparations, choir rehearsals following each other very frequently occupied the sanctuary for longer periods of time.

Provided the liturgy happened in front of a side altar or somebody wanted to practise private devotion there, the pews around the side altar became used more frequently. However, during the two days of the feast masses were celebrated solely at the main altar and only a few believer were praying in front of the Holy Cross altar and the Pieta.

During the feast the guestbook of the church was first put next to the newsstand. Later it was placed in the centre of the nave, after which more people looked at it. Most of the inscriptions of the book were written on Sunday afternoon.

A form of private devotion at a pilgrimage is confession. At Alsóváros confessions were heard not in confessionals but in a more personal way, in the rooms of

the parish house. Thus all these rooms together with the parish corridor parts in front of them were part of the sacred space used by the believers. However, we did not have the possibility to carry out thorough investigations in connection with confession.

Inside the church there are still some more points which can be distinguished from their surroundings. For instance the news-stand where church papers and journals are placed. Also the sacristy, though it is used mainly by the clergy and not the believers.

So far in this paper we divided the inside of the church according to the behaviour of the faithful. However, during the feast there were several visitors inside the church who did not seem to be religious. For example, they put some money into one of the collection boxes, but did not make the sign of the cross or pray. They usually stayed in the church only for a short time and they used a limited part of the church building. Presumably they came to the fair to enjoy the entertainment and visited the church. In most cases after entering the church they went as far as the column and not further inside. They behaved more modestly and carefully than religious people. When it started to rain some of them looked for shelter inside the church, but they did not sit inside the pews. Among those who did not have any religious gestures a separate group of people could be distinguished, namely the tourists. They entered the church and naturally walked around the church. Certainly, we can not say that they are non-believers, as they may belong to other parishes.

During our investigation there was another group of people inside the church, our fellow researchers and ourselves. We did not study the behaviour of our group, but surely our presence had an influence on the events. We made notes, asked the people and recorded the events with a video camera. Our observation in the pilgrim feast of Szeged-Alsóváros and the analysis afterwards makes it possible for us to practise ethnological observation and analysis by discussing methodological problems. At the same time we got valuable information in connection to the pilgrim feast itself. In my paper I summarised the results of our observation and analysis.