

Feast as a Mirror of Social and Cultural Changes

An International Interdisciplinary Conference
Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations, Jagiellonian University, Kraków,
Poland
28-30 September 2017

Call for Papers

Feasting seems to be an inseparable element of peoples' - especially their collective - lives. According to the *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* (1995), feast (understood as a celebration), festival or festivity is "a special day or period, usually in memory of a religious event [or person], with its own social activities, food or ceremonies, or an organised set of special events". The social activities and special events, performed on days free from ordinary, everyday work, comprise, among others, public gatherings, parades, manifestations, games and entertainment. The same source gives also another meaning of a feast, here understood as food: "a special meal with very good food or a large meal for many people". The latter definition has a secondary meaning and points to one of the aspects of a feast, namely, to the abundance that distinguishes a feast from ordinary days (*e.g.* Caillois, Duvignaud, Canetti). Nowadays this aspect is disconnected from its old function and is not necessarily used in its primeval context. It is also used as a metaphor; *e.g.* any kind of art can be a feast for the eye. There are plenty of different definitions of feast that highlight its various aspects and characteristics not specified above. However, all of them stress one of the most important functions of the feast, which is the strengthening of bonds, relations between people, very often in collective effervescence, regardless of the place, culture or time (Durkheim).

A feast is always organised around a special value which is important or even venerated by a group or groups of people, often manifested symbolically. Thus, the institution of the feast protects and renews that cultural value, and feasting on a certain day becomes a tradition in which the feast finds its justification and motivation. This tradition shapes societies and preserves specific forms of rituals and customs suitable for the contemporary way of social life.

Feasts are also perceived as an ideological regulation of the life of a nation, society, group or class. Thus, depending on the changes in the system on which functioning of a society is based, traditional feasts undergo a re-evaluation; they might be adjusted to the new circumstances or even disappear and be replaced by completely new ones. Hence, the event commemorated by the feast does not have to be religious or even legendary, it can be purely secular – just historical. Both religious or secular feasts might be celebrated with joy and playfulness, but they can also be devoid of these elements and instead take a form of a solemn ceremony infused with immersion in deep thoughts (meditation) and/or grief.

The phenomenon of the feast and its analysis provides exceptionally precious material for researching social and cultural changes, including the influence of urbanisation on rural feasts. It allows us to look, at the same time, at the traditional and new elements of a particular culture, which coexist next to each other or with each other (Żygulski).

How far have we gone astray from the primeval idea of celebrating the feast, from understanding tradition in terms of Eliade or Durkheim? Are there still any traditional, in its very meaning, feasts – as a whole? If not, why are they called “traditional”? What elements have changed and why? What has had the greatest impact on celebrating feasts? What are the new factors influencing the course of a feast’s celebration?

The conference seeks to provide an international interdisciplinary forum for the discussion of various aspects of feasts, festivals and festivities (with at least a 100-year tradition) perceived as a mirror of social and cultural changes in the 20th and 21st centuries. We invite scholars whose papers draw on empirical or theoretical research, and make use of precise scientific approaches or methodologies to address a theme.

Papers are welcomed that deal with any of the following themes:

- ❖ integrating (socialisation of an individual) and/or disintegrating aspect of the feast;
- ❖ feast as a platform for cultural self-identification;
- ❖ feast as a mechanism for the transmission of cultural traditions;
- ❖ public display, (re)validation and renewal of values essential for people feasting;
- ❖ secularisation of feasts;
- ❖ fragmentation and re-semantisation of feasts;
- ❖ replacing old feasts with new ones;
- ❖ economic aspect of the feast - feasts as commercially exploited festivities;
- ❖ role of the feast in the dynamics of social and cultural life;
- ❖ place, space and practice, and their interconnection with life and governance;
- ❖ artistic aspect of the feast;
- ❖ feast as an instrument used in local, regional or national policy;
- ❖ feast as leisure time associated with recreation, games and fun;
- ❖ feast as a temporary suspension of social order;
- ❖ feast as an occasion for manifesting the roles played in a society on a daily basis;
- ❖ feast as an event evoking emotional tensions of various kinds;
- ❖ feast as an occasion for a group reconciliation, expiation and compensation;
- ❖ relationship between the feast and tourism;
- ❖ the role of mass media in feasting;
- ❖ any other topic related to the main theme of the conference.

All paper proposals (abstract of 200-300 words) must be submitted on the application form available on the conference website (<http://www.feastconference2017.wordpress.com>) at feastconference2017@yahoo.com by ~~23 April 2017~~. The deadline for submitting the application forms has been extended till **14 May 2017**. Notification of acceptance will be given by **23 May 2017**. The organisers reserve the right to refuse the proposals that do not fit the theme of the conference.

Papers should be of approximately twenty minutes duration to allow for a short discussion period afterwards. The conference language is English.

The conference fee is 120 Euro (500 PLN), and includes materials, coffee breaks, lunches, conference dinner.

A selection of peer-reviewed papers will be published in a post-conference volume.

Further information (e.g. concerning payment and accommodation) will be announced on the conference website (<http://www.feastconference2017.wordpress.com>) subsequently.

Further queries on any of the above should be addressed to: feastconference2017@yahoo.com

Organisers:

- Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland;
- Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Institute of Geography.

Organising Committee:

- Dr. Bożena Gierek,
- Dr. Bożena Prochwicz-Studnicka,
- Dr. Tobias Boos

Administrator of the conference website:

- Dr. Wojciech Kosior