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## GLOBAL CATHOLICISM, URBAN HERITAGE, NATIONAL POLITICS: THE 2016 WORLD YOUTH DAY IN KRAKÓW<sup>1</sup>

In 1985, in line with ideals of the “International Youth Year” proclaimed by the United Nations, the Roman Catholic Church announced the Christian celebrations dedicated to young people. The celebrations followed the previous year’s closure of the Holy Year of Redemption during which Pope John Paul II donated a large wooden cross – a religious symbol made for the Holy Year – to the young Catholics who gathered at the Vatican. The cross was sent on a “pilgrimage” to different dioceses across Europe. The Vatican gatherings themselves were proclaimed as the beginning of the “World Youth Day” – a new cyclical religious event dedicated to youth. The global dimension of this newly developing Catholic festival was clearly visible right in 1987, when the “Second WYD” was organized outside Europe: in Buenos Aires, Argentina. On a Palm Sunday, closing his trip to Uruguay and Argentina, Pope John Paul II led an open-air mass dedicated to young people who had arrived at the Argentinian capital from different countries and continents. Also, a “pilgrimage cross” was brought along and since then it has been known as “The Cross of the World Youth Day” and used during each subsequent event. The WYD itself started to be organized in the summer months, every two or three years, in a different country and continent, and usually, every second WYD is hosted by a European city interchangeably with non-European locations.

The current formula of the WYD developed around the mid-1990s and extended the “Day” into an intense one week-long<sup>2</sup> religious festival whose dynamics are shaped by densely scheduled activities performed every morning in language-based groups

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<sup>1</sup> This work is part of the HERILIGION project (*The Heritagization of Religion and the Sacralization of Heritage in Contemporary Europe*) within the HERA program *Uses of the Past* (2016–2019). This project is financially supported by the HERA, NCN, AHRC, FCT, DASTI, NOW. The project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement No 649307. The HERILIGION international consortium was initiated by Prof. Oscar Salemink, from University of Copenhagen, and since 2018 it has been led by Prof. Irene Stengs from the Meertens Institute in Amsterdam. The project’s Polish section is based at the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of History, Jagiellonian University and the author of this paper serves as the PI of the Polish team.

<sup>2</sup> Many participants spent even more time in the host country participating in the preparatory “Days in Dioceses” before the WYD as well as travelling or pilgrimaging after the official closure of the event.

and massive open-air “main events” attended in the afternoons and evenings by all the participants. The pope’s arrival is scheduled during the week and the climax of each WYD includes an open-air final mass led by the pope and combined with “sending the youth out to the whole world”. This “Mass of Sending” usually attracts not only all the young registered participants, but also numerous local people and travelers who arrive to witness “a historical event” or “pray with the pope”. The biggest WYD gathering took place in Manila, the Philippines, in 1995 where over 5 million participants gathered for the final mass led by the Pope John Paul II (Kieca, Kleska 2017, p. 16).

This brief history of the WYD reveals its successful development into a global, massive scale cyclical religious event dedicated to young Catholics. Through the WYD the Church promotes the transnational and global character of Catholicism, emphasizing its “universal” dimension. The event, which attracts young people from different cultures and continents, demonstrates and performatively forms the global dimension of today’s Catholic community. However, the WYD also needs to be understood from other perspectives. Even though the event is directly linked to the Vatican – from where the Pontifical Council for the Laity (and since the 2016 the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life) collaborates with an organizing committee in a host country – each time local political, social, economic and cultural contexts of the host state play a significant role in the formation of each WYD. This paper aims to describe the WYD as a multilayered event generating and mirroring conflicting and conflating discourses on the global, national, and local levels of Catholicism.

The first part of this paper will focus on the massive and festive character of the WYD, its branding potential as a typical mega-event and, *at the same time*, its religious dimension as a modern pilgrimage. I aim to emphasize the practical entanglements between what used to be distinguished as “sacred” and “profane” in post-Durkheimian scholarly examinations. Following recent developments in anthropology of pilgrimages and its embracing of political economy, I will analyze the WYD as constituted not only by “liminal relations between heaven and earth, but also [...] the encounters between religious, ethnic, political, economic, national and transnational frames of reference” (Coleman and Eade 2018, p. 11). Interestingly however, even though these “encounters” seem to be more and more cautiously and consciously described by scholars who work on religious phenomena in various cultural settings, they still seem to be strongly questioned, rejected or criticized as “unproper” by various *emic* discourses. While, in practice, interrelations between “religious” and “secular” realms are constantly transgressed, the main actors (e.g. the Roman Catholic Church) and many religious practitioners or observers on the ground tend to question these connections, producing discourses based on a strong ambivalence between “sacred” and “profane”. Additionally, the WYD, as a new form of pilgrimage tailored for modern societies and contemporary youth, in practice challenges the modernization *cum* secularization thesis, or at least its global scale. This challenge adds to the contradictions and discrepancies between discourses, declarations and practices revealed in relation to the WYD as a massive religious event and a global Catholic pilgrimage.

Further, I aim to accentuate yet another aspect of pilgrimage, specifically how the local setting, institutions and people in a hosting place influence and are influenced by a pilgrimage. This aspect of pilgrimage had been often neglected by scholars, who used to focus on pilgrims as the main actors, performers and producers of a pilgrimage and on the development of shrines as religious centers<sup>3</sup>. The specificity of the WYDs encourages questions related to local as well as national settings. The massive scale of the event and its length, as well as an official pope's visit to a host country, usually imply an extensive organizational involvement and a significant financial contribution by the host state and local authorities – aspects often questioned and criticized in national and local debates (see Góral 2016, p. 66; Halter 2013; Niedźwiedź 2017b; Mandes and Sadłoń 2018, p. 205). Hence, even though the event repetitively follows an established scenario created and petrified over the last thirty years, each WYD needs to be seen as a specific pilgrimage that interacts with a particular local religious landscape, cultural history and current politics of a host state and a host city. Complex national and local voices are expressed through official statements by representatives of the host state and host city, as well as through more grassroots responses, affects and attitudes experienced and expressed by local inhabitants.

Apart from relating to some general aspects of the WYD, I will mostly focus on the event that took place between the 25<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>th</sup> of July, 2016, in Kraków, Poland, and discuss the interconnections between the cityscape, religious heritage and the formation of the WYD as a Catholic pilgrimage. I will draw on analysis of discourses and ethnographic material collected before, during and after the event among the city's inhabitants, the WYD's organizers and participants. Most of the material was collected by myself and a group of students from the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the Jagiellonian University with whom I formed the "Mobile Ethnographic Group"<sup>4</sup>. I also refer to two research projects conducted on the WYD

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<sup>3</sup> The book by Victor and Edith Turner published in 1978 was a seminal work that triggered a development of pilgrimage studies within Anglophone anthropology. Even though the authors mentioned various local and national contexts of Christian pilgrimages, the most influential concepts of their book were on pilgrims' perspectives and experiences (*communitas* paradigm) and the development of shrines as sacred places (Turner, Turner 1978). For a review of subsequent developments in Anglophone research on pilgrims and pilgrimage centers, which also considers non-Anglophone traditions of pilgrimage scholarship, see Albera, Eade 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Around ten students, including two PhD students, with whom I created the "Mobile Ethnographic Group" volunteered to contribute to the research in June and July 2016. Some of them worked under my supervision on their own thematic projects (for instance, one person who herself worked as a volunteer for the WYD, focused on the WYD's volunteers, another conducted research among pilgrims from Latin America), while others used an interview script and a research scheme designed by myself (including ethnographic diary and fieldnotes) within the HERILIGION project framework. All of us met regularly to discuss our observations and research. At the end of June and during the first three weeks of July we focused on Kraków's inhabitants and registered their various and changing attitudes toward the WYD. This research continued also during the WYD as well as later during the 2016 and 2017. In June and July 2016 we collected around forty interviews with Kraków' citizens (all of them adult, from different age groups starting 20 year old up to people in their 70s). Most of these interviews turned into lengthy discussions about the WYD, the city's involvement into this event and individual attitudes toward

2016 by teams of sociologists and cultural studies researchers who collected rich qualitative and quantitative data. Both projects have issued extended reports and released some of the data in Polish providing a very valuable insight into various aspects of the WYD (see *Odbiór Świątowych Dni Młodzieży i jego kulturowe konteksty* 2016; Bogacz-Wojtanowska, Gaweł, Góral eds. 2016).

#### MEGA-EVENT

Until quite recently, many anthropological studies on pilgrimages and other religious public rituals and festivals have tended to build upon “strong ideological distinctions between sacred and secular” that have discouraged “analysis of more ramifying and multivalent connections among religious, political and economic processes” (Coleman and Eade 2018, p. 2). In Western-biased scholarship, where understanding of “religion” was for many years strongly shaped by a normative and idealized concept of Christianity (see Lambek 2013, p. 13), the “religious” often happened to be associated with the “sacred realm” defined through opposition to the “profane”. From this perspective “religious marketplace”, “commercialization of religion”, “eventization of faith”, “religious branding”, “touristification of pilgrimages” were perceived as contradictory terms describing some sort of “desacralization of the sacred” and degradation of “real religion”. These theoretical conceptualizations have been challenged alongside a growing criticism of secularization and modernization paradigms or their universalizing claims (see Davie 2007). Recent anthropological and sociological approaches emphasize more nuanced, complex and contextualized reflections on religions in contemporary societies and focus on “porous” – intertwining, blurring and blending – borders between what is perceived as sacred and secular (Coleman 2019). The WYD is a contemporary event that not only exemplifies the interconnectedness and relativity of what is defined as sacred or secular realms, but also an event that stimulates public debates, social reactions, cultural questioning or reflecting on what is recognized and labelled as “religious” by institutions (including an institution of the Roman Catholic Church), official politics or grassroots movements, as well as various individuals or groups of people.

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religion in general. During the WYD we conducted ethnographic research participating in various, often parallel events (the mobility of researchers and a group work appeared to be crucial during this very intense week overloaded with events), conducting short interviews with participants (visiting some of them in their host locations or approaching pilgrims during lunch breaks etc.). Additionally, my personal experiences as a scholar contributing to an art exhibition prepared by the National Museum as an event accompanying the WYD and as an anthropologist of religion who was invited to comment on the WYD in various media (TV, radio, newspapers), allowed me to gain a better insight into some aspects of the WYD as a promotional event and a source of media discourses. Here I would like to thank the most active members of the “Mobile Ethnographic Group”: Bartosz Arkuszewski, Alicja Soćko-Mucha, Dominika Matejko as well as Kaja Kajder, Paulina Maciejowska, Joanna Sikora and Paweł Witanowski. During the whole event I also closely collaborated with a photographer, Marcin Wąsik, who documented the WYD for the HERILIGION project.

The WYD is a new form of Catholic pilgrimage that was invented during the mid-1980s and developed within a traditional institution of the Church as its response to modern conditions of a globalized world. This pilgrimage creatively includes and builds upon the popular culture, youth music and art, mass media (and recently also social media) as well as the commercial dimension of religious life in the context of contemporary global marketplace. Thus, as emphasized in recent anthropological approaches, it operates within various domains that reveal “the porosity of the boundaries that separate the experience of the sacred and secular spheres of modern life” (Steil 2018, p. 157). The WYD can be also seen as a phenomenon that confirms Ian Reader’s view on “pilgrimage as being in tune with, and essentially a product of, its times” (2014, p. 23). Like other contemporary pilgrimages, the WYD should be perceived as “embedded in a context of markets, consumer activity, publicity and promotion”, operating “not just in the marketplace but through it” (ibidem, p. 8). Hence, the WYD can be analyzed as a phenomenon that – apart from its more “traditional” and “conservative” religious dimension – embraces modern marketing strategies and functions as a Catholic brand and a relatively new religious marketing “product”. The WYD is *at the same time* a religious pilgrimage *and* a mega-event structured similarly to other cyclical mass events not related to a religious domain, like music festivals or sport tournaments (Olympics, World Cup etc.)<sup>5</sup>.

The successful development of the WYD as a global youth pilgrimage seems to have been achieved through the application of certain marketing practices pursued in other popular mega-events. Michaela Pfandenhauer, who studied the 2005 WYD in Cologne, Germany, focused on the “eventization of faith” as the Church’s “strategy for marketing its faith products” (2010, p. 383). In my opinion, it is important to go even further and see the WYD as not only a tool used for marketing the faith as a product, but also as a carefully and consciously branded event that turned into a product on its own. As already mentioned, the organization and promotion of the WYD is structurally comparable with other mega-events. Like regular music or cultural festivals and big sport tournaments, the WYD possesses its own characteristic and is globally promoted and recognized under its own brand. Each time there is a dedicated logo, a slogan, a musical “anthem” recorded and sung in various languages before and during the WYD. Various national and global celebrities serve as “ambassadors” promoting the event. Posters, advertisements, video spots, gadgets and souvenirs are produced in abundance. The centrality of the pope also suits modern pop culture that is based on celebrity-oriented patterns (see e.g. Povedák

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<sup>5</sup> Like other mega-events, the WYD is also used in the branding strategies of the hosts. Use of massive cyclical events for destination branding and promotion of global tourism to host cities is discussed broadly in studies on tourism (for a brief description of literature see e.g. Hemmonsby, Tichaawa 2019, pp. 252–253). Here it is important to mention that arguments emphasizing the growing visibility of a host city on the global tourist map and the expected increase in tourist numbers not only during the WYD (when global pilgrims arrive) but also years after the event were commonly heard during local and national debates about the WYDs in different locations. These arguments were also present in Kraków and promoted by the municipal authorities.

2014). The head of the Roman Catholic Church, during the WYD, appears not only as a religious leader whose presence “sacralizes” the festivities (Norman, Johnson 2011, p. 380), but also as a “mega-star”, a focal point of attention for participants, media, politicians, organizers and bystanders. The “popo-centrism” of the event transforms the pope into the “brand” for the Church (Hepp, Krönert 2009), a kind of the event’s “logo” (see Mandes, Sadłóń 2018, p. 207). Like other cyclical mega-events, each WYD follows the same schematic scenario with a spectacular opening, a profoundly celebrated arrival of the pope arranged on a course of the week and in the end a final mass during which the pope publicly announces the date and location of the next global “youth meeting”. This announcement is always cheered by a gathered crowd, as in other cyclical mega-events where various cities and countries compete for the status of being the host.

The popularized and marketed image of the WYD builds on the most iconic moments of the weekly scenario, therefore usually depicting the pope and his interactions with young people who represent different cultures and continents. These images appear in national and global media coverage. WYD is, then, seen as an event related to a specific “atmosphere” that highlights the intense energy and cheerfulness of youth as well as the cultural diversity of a global religious meeting. Michaela Pfadenhauer suggests that the WYD is a “mega-party”, a “religious festival”, but also “on the top of that, it is a marketing event” (2010, p. 391). In practice, all these aspects are closely combined with one another. A pilgrimage designed as a modern mega-event promotes religion as part of youth and globalized culture.

#### INCLUSIVE OR EXCLUSIVE?

One intriguing issue related to the branding strategy and the promotion of the popular image of the WYD as a modern youth festival is the lack of any direct connotations with religion or Catholicism in the official name of the event. “World Youth Day” focusses exclusively on the “global” and “youthful” character of the gathering. It seems that promoting the event as “worldly” and “youthful” allows the Church to negotiate its presence in the public sphere of different countries and political and social contexts. It avoids “religious” or “Catholic” labelling in situations where these words bring negative connotations<sup>6</sup>. Interestingly, during the ethnographic fieldwork in Kraków some interlocutors raised a point about this paradoxical situation, and spontaneously made comments about it. They were usually local residents, who were interviewed before the beginning of the WYD, and rather critical about the Catholic Church, due to the political involvement by a significant number of the Catholic hierarchy in nationalistic Right-wing factions in today’s Poland. These interlocutors

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<sup>6</sup> This aspect was, for instance, visible during the 2008 WYD in Sydney where especially the involvement of Cardinal George Pell was generating considerable controversy related to his sex abuses accusations.



were also unhappy about the idea of hosting a big Catholic event in their home city. The comments, collected in Kraków during 2016, resemble arguments that appeared almost a decade earlier in Australian public and political discussions before the Sydney 2008 WYD. During a parliamentary debate on a special bill supporting the WYD in Australia, one of the Left-wing politicians suggested that the lack of Catholic references in the name of the event pointed to the “marketing activities of the Catholic Church” (Halter 2013, p. 275). Avoiding direct confessional references was interpreted by some political factions as a strategy to gain access to public money and symbolic public spaces for “Catholic propaganda” (*ibidem*).

The lack of direct reference to Catholicism in the official name of the event seems even more intriguing when we realize that the Roman Catholic Church in its own writings and internal documents often directly emphasizes the evangelical dimension of the WYD. This dimension reflects the “new evangelization” policy strongly shaped by John Paul II’s ideas and his vision of contemporary “post-faith” secularized Western societies and cultures, “depicted as estranged from [...] Christian roots” and thus, described as a potential “missionary territory” (Norman, Johnson 2011, p. 374). Hence, the Pontifical Council for the Laity built a strong discourse on the evangelical mission of the WYD “to reach young people throughout the world – not only active Catholic youth but also young people without a church background” (Pfadenhauer 2010, p. 388). However, these goals straightforwardly expressed for the first time before the WYD in 2005 (Temmerman, Trioen 2009, p. 190) seem to function as declarations rather than reality. Research, conducted in 2005 on the logistics and organizational strategies applied by the Church before the WYD in Cologne, revealed that in spite of the Vatican’s formal openness to non-Catholics and to “anybody who would like to take part” (*ibidem*), in reality the target group aimed at by the local WYD’s Office and organizers was, in practice, narrowed down to “young people who had already undergone church socialization” (Pfadenhauer 2010, p. 388). A similar picture was evident at other WYDs, for example in 2008 in Sydney or 2013 in Rio de Janeiro (see Halter 2013; Gonzales, Mariz, Zahra 2019).

Drawing on my own observations, as well as ethnographic interviews conducted in Kraków, it was clear that despite official declarations about inclusiveness and openness, the WYD 2016 was actually a rather exclusive religious event dedicated to those Catholic young people who already felt well connected to the Church. Even though there was no direct “Catholic” reference in the event’s name, the institutional connection with the Church was evident, for instance, through the registration procedure which was usually based on parishes or other official networks within the Church (prayer groups, charismatic brotherhoods, convents etc.). Most of our interlocutors in Kraków were very skeptical about the possibility of non-Catholics being seriously attracted by the WYD or welcomed as its participants. The findings by Sławomir Mandes and Wojciech Sadłoń, who analyzed extended quantitative and qualitative data collected among the 2016 WYD participants in Kraków, confirm these impressions. They describe the participants of the WYD as “the elite of young Catholics” with “an above-average level of religiousness” (2018, p. 216–217).

## VARIETY WITHIN

Additionally, the WYD is not perceived as an ecumenical or inter-religious event, nor is it promoted as such. One of my Kraków interviewees, whose parish church hosted monks of the Christian ecumenical Taizé community in France, remarked that on the Sunday preceding the WYD:

[...] a parish priest invited parishioners for prayer meetings led by the Taizé brothers. Unfortunately, he did not explain what this community is and did not mention its ecumenical dimension [...] And as far as I know other Christian churches in Kraków, for instance, the Evangelical parish, did not get any invitation and probably they even do not know that Taizé prayers will be held here in this church during the WYD.

Indeed, non-Catholic churches and non-Catholic parishes located in the city did not get involved in the WYD<sup>7</sup>. As in previous WYDs, the 2016 event was not designed to celebrate a “Christian ecumene” but rather to celebrate variety *within* global Catholicism<sup>8</sup>. This was, for instance, emphasized through the inclusion of elements of the Byzantine rite during some central events – a reference to the presence of Greek Catholic pilgrims and the participation of sixteen Greek Catholic bishops, who came mostly from Ukraine, various parts of Poland and Canada<sup>9</sup>. Also, the visibility of Charismatic groups, that were performing and leading prayers not only during the smaller events but also took a significant part in the central gatherings (for instance, during the Evening Vigil before the final mass) signaled the Catholic recognition of the global Christian turn toward Charismatic, Pentecostal-oriented, emotional and bodily expressive spirituality<sup>10</sup>. Nevertheless, in general, the whole

<sup>7</sup> This relates to the historically well-established Protestant (Lutheran and Calvinist) and Orthodox parishes in the city as well as other Christian communities and Churches (e.g. Methodist Church, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Pentecostal Church, King Christ Church, Church for the City of Kraków). In general, the religious map of Kraków is predominantly Christian where the Roman Catholic Church occupies a hegemonic position – a situation that mirrors the broader situation in Poland. Statistics show that 87.7% of the Polish population identified with Catholicism (data based on the National Census 2011, see Sadłoń 2016, p. 33). However, it is also important to observe the declining number of *dominicanes* (for the year 2017: 38,3% of Catholics in Poland) and *communicantes* (for the year 2017: 17% factor) (see *Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae in Polonia* 2019, p. 4).

<sup>8</sup> In Rio de Janeiro some Pentecostal groups protested against the event. However, Brazilian researchers who studied the 2013 WYD observed a changing dynamic in relations between Catholic and Pentecostal neighbors during the course of the event and a growing positive attitude among Pentecostals. The researchers even collected information about Pentecostals participating in some of the WYD activities by (Gonzalez, Mariz, Zahra 2019, p. 87).

<sup>9</sup> However, many inhabitants of Kraków, when interviewed right before the beginning of the WYD, remembered a conflict over the city’s Greek Catholic chapel (designed by an Orthodox painter, Jerzy Nowosielski). Just few months before the WYD, the Roman Catholic Curia stated that the interior where the chapel was located, was urgently needed for the WYD’s organizational offices and the chapel was closed.

<sup>10</sup> In the context of Polish Catholicism, the 2016 WYD can be seen as a turning point in the recognition of the significance of various Charismatic Catholic groups and the promotion of Charismatic religiosity by the Church. In the context of the global growth of Pentecostal churches, the Roman Catholic



design of the WYD was clearly oriented toward creating a vision of the Church as a global, united and attractively young community of Catholics who “by participating in the events and in the meeting with the Pope, reinforce their identity” (Mandes, Sadłoń 2018, p. 216).

It should be stressed here, that this vision was not only promoted but it was sensed, experienced and simultaneously performed by the WYD’s participants during the very intense week, filled with various meetings, prayers and activities. The emotional, sensual and massive dimension of the WYD, based on the extensive use of various “religious media” (understood as “mediators” of the transcendent, see Meyer 2013, p. 315), turned this festival not only into an attractive mega-event but also into an attractive *religious* mega-event. More “traditional” religious media and “sensational forms” – “relatively fixed modes for invoking and organizing access to the transcendental” (ibidem) – typical for the historically well-established Catholic imagery (see e.g. Baraniecka-Olszewska, Lubańska 2018), go along with newer and “modern” forms of prayers, creating a possibly attractive combination of continuity and innovation within a Catholic domain. The centrality of traditional Catholic imagery is emphasized through the celebration of Eucharistic masses, processions with a wooden cross, veneration of the “WYD icon” of Mary (a copy of the image *Salus populi Romani*), Stations of the Cross, rosary prayers, kissing of relics, the visiting of churches during a walking pilgrimage, the encouragement of individual confession etc. These traditional religious forms are combined with modern mediums: pop music, modern dance, artistic video, musical performances etc. For instance, the spectacular open-air Stations of the Cross attended in Kraków by 800,000 participants (Pokojska, Pudelko 2016, p. 27), revived this traditional Catholic ritual based on fourteen “stations” (meditations related to Christ’s Passion) with modern texts that were accompanied by very attractive contemporary music and dance performances prepared by young artists and watched on huge outdoor screens by a massive audience.

Actually, the massive character of the WYD, experienced especially during the central events when all the participants gather in one outdoor location, provided an impressive, direct experience of being part of a huge global Catholic community. The gathering of thousands and even millions of young people, who arrived for the WYD from different countries and had different backgrounds and appearances but, in the end, stood together and prayed in unison – even though using different languages – was also eagerly interpreted by the Catholic organizers as “a contemporary Pentecost” and “the great community of the universal Church” (*Pilgrim Guide* 2016, p. 9). This “great community” also celebrated in very festive and carnivalized ways on Kraków’s streets and markets (see Soćko-Mucha 2018). Before the WYD, young participants were encouraged to bring national flags and regional souvenirs. Various national groups spontaneously performed ethnic dances and music in public places, often wearing traditional costumes and characteristic features related to their

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Church probably realizes that Charismatic current allows many Catholics to fulfill their spiritual needs in their church, without turning to Pentecostal or neo-Pentecostal churches.

countries. Brazilians were walking drumming and dancing samba, Scots appeared playing bagpipes and wearing kilts and so on. For the whole week all the central locations in the Old Town were filled with an immense crowd of young people, cheerfully celebrating their national or ethnic identities but under the institutional umbrella of the Church and the leadership of the pope.

#### PILGRIMAGE FORMATION AND CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

Religious identity among the WYD's participants is reinforced through intense communal and festive activities as well as by "providing a peak religious experience of the universality and strength of the Catholic tradition" (Rymarz 2006, p. 487). Paradoxically, even though the WYD is consciously branded as a mega-event and a modern festival and whose official name (as mentioned earlier) lacks religious connotations, all the messages directed by the organizers to participants frame the meeting in Catholic terms. The *Prayer Book*, distributed among all the registered participants of the 2016 WYD, reminded them that "this is not just another outdoor gathering". Its "true meaning" lay in its spiritual dimension, prayer and Eucharist (*Prayer Book* 2016, p. 5). Consequently, the WYD is called "a pilgrimage" and its participants are named "pilgrims".

Interestingly, participants themselves had more complex and ambiguous opinions about their status. During interviews they often wondered whether they could be called "pilgrims" and whether the whole festive mega-event could be labelled a "proper pilgrimage". Some pointed to the hardships of the stay and the poor-quality accommodation as signs of a "real pilgrimage", that should be connected with some sort of penance and sacrifice (this statement appeared in relation to accommodation in a sports hall where hundreds of participants shared an open-space with a very limited access to shower facilities). In a similar vein, a high school student from northern Poland during an interview declared that he and his friends could be called pilgrims "because we walk a lot every day, and it is very tiring, as if we were walking during a real pilgrimage". Indeed, due to the limited efficiency of Kraków's public transportation, most of the participants had to walk not only to get to central gatherings and papal masses, but also for daily morning catechesis and meetings. Moreover, a Night Vigil before the final mass was often recalled as a special "pilgrimage-type" experience. Almost one million people spent the whole night at an open-air location outside the city (many of them had to walk a dozen kilometers to get there bringing their camping gear), camping and awaiting the final "Mass of Sending" scheduled for the morning.

Researchers, studying the 2008 WYD in Sydney, analyzed how the organizers applied the terms "pilgrimage" and "pilgrims" to the event and its participants "to separate the WYD experience from semantic associations with festival tourism" (Norman, Johnson 2011, p. 379). In their opinion, to achieve a "pilgrimage-oriented" perception of the WYD among its participants, the organizers created an experience

of a temporary “holy space”. This holy space was set up by the crowd gathered for a shared religious ritual around the sacralizing and centralizing figure of the pope (ibidem, p. 380–381). Kraków’s Night Vigil outside the city might partially confirm their diagnosis about the WYD’s central events forming a “travelling ritual space” as the “center of a pilgrimage”.

However, in my opinion, in case of the 2016 WYD in Kraków, as well as other WYDs organized in European locations, the historical dimension of host cities and their relations with the history of Christianity, play a very significant role. The “religious potential” of space in historical European locations is consciously used by the Church to develop WYD as a Christian pilgrimage. When organized in European locations, WYDs refer to the concept of European identity based on Christian roots. During both the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI the idea of “Christian heritage” was discussed by the Church leaders in relation to the secularization of the “Western world”, the abandonment of spiritual roots and “loss of Europe’s Christian memory” (John Paul II 2003, p. 5)<sup>11</sup>. As already mentioned, the WYD was designed as part of the “New Evangelization” strategy. One of the aims of the event was to revive Christianity in the “old continent”. The WYD’s European locations – Santiago de Compostela (1989), Częstochowa (1991), Paris (1997) Rome (2000), Cologne (2005), and Madrid (2011) – were carefully selected and always depicted as old, historical “pilgrimage centers” and places suffused with an immense “Christian tradition”. In all the European locations the WYD was both depicted as a new pilgrimage for new times and as rooted in a Continental past, labelled as “Christian heritage”.

Christian heritage can be experienced through historical architecture (cathedrals, basilicas, monasteries), religious treasures (venerated images, relics of holy figures), and rituals (pilgrimages, prayers). During each WYD local “Christian scenery” – sacred spaces and religious buildings – gets involved in the formation of the religious and Catholic dimension of the event. For instance, during the 1989 WYD in Santiago de Compostela, Pope John Paul II performed the “Rite of the Pilgrim”. He entered the cathedral in traditional pilgrim’s attire, prayed at the tomb of the Apostle James and embraced his statue. This rite related to the Way of St. James as “the most ancient pilgrim route” in Europe. During the final gathering in Santiago de Compostela, the pope handed pilgrim’s sticks to young representatives of five continents. He signaled that “the heritage which St James has left” is “not just to Spain and Europe, but to all the peoples of the world” (*Address*). Sixteen years later, during the WYD in Cologne, the local cathedral with its relics of the Three Wise Kings, was depicted at the most emblematic symbol of the city and the *Catholic* church (see Pfadenhauer 2010, p. 387). The figures of the Three Wise Kings formed a biblical and ancient prototype for young pilgrims. The participants of the WYD were described

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<sup>11</sup> Numerous official documents by the Vatican and public statements by John Paul II and Benedict XVI referred to “European Christian heritage” as an important part of “European identity”. Both popes were very active during political debates on the EU constitution and its ratification. They criticized the Preamble formulated in 2004 that mentions “religious and humanist inheritance of Europe” but does not refer directly to Christianity.

as those who follow the Kings' paths. Their arrival at Cologne was framed by the event's motto – "We have come to worship him". This was a quote from the Gospel of St. Matthew who mentioned the arrival of the Wise Kings at Bethlehem. Michaela Pfadenhauer also points out that Catholic references were strongly emphasized in the WYD's trailer movie (in Germany the trailer could have been even seen as not welcoming Protestant Christians). She also pointed to the omission of any secular-touristic aspects connected with the host city. For instance, in the movie there was no mention of the cathedral being the UNESCO world heritage site and no references to the famous Cologne carnival (*ibidem*). These examples suggest that in a discourse created by the Church and addressed to the young pilgrims, the "past" and "tradition" are framed in religious terms. The authority of history can be used not only to justify contemporary presence of Catholic practices in European public spaces but also to promote deeper and more "authentic" religious experiences among contemporary young Catholics. In these discourses the pilgrims are positioned as "inheritors" of the "Christian heritage". They not only participate in contemporary youth festival but can also connect with the "past" to reinforce their religious identity. When hosting the WYDs, the historical cities in Europe are depicted as permeated with "Christian heritage".

#### "THE CITY OF SAINTS"

As in other European locations, Kraków's scenery was depicted by the local organizers as saturated with "Christian heritage". Offering a unique spiritual experience, the cityscape played an active role in the formation of the event as a religious pilgrimage. The 2016 WYD was organized during the Catholic "Year of Mercy". Kraków's nomination to host the event was by no means accidental. For the last twenty years the city has been promoted as a center of the Divine Mercy cult and a pilgrimage site related to Sister Faustina Kowalska (1905–1938), a Divine Mercy visionary, whose grave is located in Kraków. The global popularization of this devotion – that until 1978 was not recognized by the Catholic authorities – is directly linked to the support provided by Pope John Paul II. As a Kraków citizen (since 1938) and the local bishop (since 1958) he was familiar with Faustina's story. His activities as bishop and later as pope (from 1978) led to recognition of the cult, canonization of Sister Faustina (2000), global promotion of a Divine Mercy devotion and construction of a Divine Mercy shrine in Kraków (2002) – named the "World Center of Divine Mercy" (see Garnett and Harris 2013). Not surprisingly then, that after his death in 2005, rapidly developing cult of the "Polish Pope", was immediately connected with the Kraków's Divine Mercy basilica. Soon, in its direct neighborhood a new Shrine of Saint John Paul II was constructed (2011–2013)<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> During ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Kraków in 2013–14 some visitors to the shrines described creation of a separate Shrine of Saint John Paul II as problematic and creating a competition between two devotions (to Divine Mercy and to Saint Pope John Paul II). They suggested that it would

In my other publications I have analyzed the complex process that within the last dozen years transformed Kraków into the “city of the Pope” inscribing his figure into “Kraków’s religious heritage” (see Niedźwiedź 2017a; Niedźwiedź 2017c). Here, let me only emphasize that since his death in 2005 John Paul II is depicted as a “contemporary saint”, someone who lived in the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, and is listed in a long row of saints who, since the Middle Ages, were born or lived in Kraków<sup>13</sup>. In this discourse he appears as a continuation of a centuries old tradition that depicts Kraków as the “city of saints” and *Altera Roma* – a city filled with Christian relics. Like other “Kraków’s saints”, John Paul II is inscribed into various spaces and places within the city. These places are believed to trigger unique experiences among visitors, who follow the Pope’s “authentic footpaths”: they visit a number of the apartments he lived in, walk to a quarry where he worked during World War II<sup>14</sup>, look at his “original skis” and the kayak he used, contemplate his clothes (for instance, his bloodstained cassock from the assassination attempt in 1981), enter the helicopter he travelled in when he visited Kraków as the pope, pray at the “original tombstone from his Vatican first grave” that was installed in his new shrine and kiss the relics that are exhibited in various churches in Kraków (see Niedźwiedź 2017a, 2017c; Arkuszewski 2017).

This physical and sensual presence of the pope within Kraków’s cityscape was extensively used during the 2016 WYD. Next to Sister Faustina, the image of John Paul II appeared all over the city on WYD banners. Both of them, known as “Apostles of Mercy”, were announced to be “Patron saints of the 2016 WYD”. A “Pilgrimage of Mercy” was designed as a few hours walk to the John Paul II sanctuary and the Divine Mercy Shrine. This walk, described as “a kind of catechesis «on the road»” was an obligatory point for each registered participant and a reminder of the “pilgrimage-oriented” character of the whole event (see *Pilgrim Guide* 2016, p. 79).

Particularly interesting was yet another project named “City of Saints”. It was promoted with the slogan: “Experience the spiritual side of Kraków!” (ibidem, p. 86) and recalled the “many saints and blessed” who “lived in Kraków in different periods of time throughout the over one-thousand-year history of Christianity in Poland” (ibidem). The program encouraged the WYD’s participants to both physically and mentally imitate the practices of a particular Kraków saint at an exact spot – a place “specifically associated” with the saint. The project listed 12 “Kraków’s saints” and led participants to 13 different locations within the city. Through this project the cityscape was presented as filled with numerous sacred spaces, sacralized through a historically proven connection with a particular Catholic saint. Visiting selected places enabled

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be better to keep the cult of John Paul II within the Divine Mercy shrine, instead of constructing a new immense church nearby (see Niedźwiedź 2017c, p. 83).

<sup>13</sup> This discourse is present not only in Catholic pamphlets but also in promotional materials produced by the city authorities.

<sup>14</sup> During the Nazi occupation, Wojtyła, as a young man over 18, was obliged to be officially employed. When studying at the underground university he was employed as a worker in a quarry and a chemical plant in Kraków. Since 2005 an annual “Pilgrimage in the Footsteps of Karol Wojtyła the Worker” follows his daily route from his home and a parish church to an old quarry (see Niedźwiedź 2017a, p. 93–95).

the participants to experience an embodied and spiritual encounter with the sacred. For instance, pilgrims were encouraged to confess in St Mary's Basilica, where "the confessional in which Fr. Karol Wojtyła regularly heard confession in the '50s, can be found" (ibidem, p. 88), or to pray in the Wawel Cathedral before the "Black Cross" in exactly "the same place St. Jadwiga prayed" during the 14<sup>th</sup> century (ibidem, p. 92). "City of Saints" promoted historically remote and rather local figures together with two globally recognized and more contemporary "Apostles of Mercy" (Sister Faustina and John Paul II). One of our interviewee, a 20-year old student from Kraków, was enthusiastic about the project and promotion of Kraków as "the second city in the world in terms of number of saints [...] The second, after the Rome!". The project depicted Kraków as a strong pilgrimage center and positioned the WYD participants as continuators of an ancient pilgriming tradition.

#### BRANDING A "CHRISTIAN NATION"

The centrality of John Paul II in the promotional strategy of the 2016 WYD – even though explainable due to Wojtyła's links with Kraków and Divine Mercy cult as well as his role as the founder of WYD – should be also analyzed with reference to the Polish political and national context. John Paul II is perceived in Poland as, first of all, the "Polish pope" – often depicted as not only a Catholic saint but also a national hero and a "great Pole"<sup>15</sup>. As such, he was strongly promoted during the WYD. However, in 2016 this marketing strategy reverberated with complex and ambiguous resonances in Polish society. The success of the Right-wing party, Law and Justice in the 2015 parliamentary and presidential elections resulted in nationalistic oriented and conservative Catholicism becoming stronger with visible governmental support (see e.g. Kotwas, Kubik 2019, p. 460–461). The WYD in Kraków and the official visit by Pope Francis, who was seen as a moral voice speaking up for refugees (clear discrepancy with Polish governmental policy in 2016<sup>16</sup>) and who emphasized the more universalistic dimension of Christian values than the majority of Polish bishops, led to political tensions and social discussions about the "Polish Church" versus the "Church of Pope Francis". A month before the WYD Polish bishops wrote a short pastoral letter of "invitation to the WYD" where they mentioned John Paul II three times and did not refer to the current pope at all. This letter and its omission of Pope Francis entered

<sup>15</sup> The popular image of John Paul II as a national icon does not limit itself to devout Catholics and relates not only to his religious activities but also to his role in political history (especially in the context of the fall of Communism in East-Central Europe in 1989/90) and his global recognition as a famous leader. However, his popular reception in Poland is much more diverse, for instance due to current debates on the sexual abuse scandals in the Church that took place during his pontificate. Additionally, younger generations do not remember the "Polish pope" as a famous living figure.

<sup>16</sup> The Law and Justice party used very strong antirefugee discourses during its electoral campaigns in 2015. After winning the parliamentary elections the party fulfilled its promises by withdrawing from the EU program that expected Poland to accept asylum seekers.



a public debate when a renowned Polish journalist, Adam Szostkiewicz, criticized it in his blog published by a popular center-left weekly (Szostkiewicz 2016). During the ethnographic interviews many Kraków inhabitants recalled this criticism and pointed out that the visual representation of the WYD focused on images of John Paul II, while those of Pope Francis were almost invisible. This impression was so striking that it even triggered an artistic, grassroots action and a public performance. Two students from Kraków's Art Academy, Maria Olbrychtowicz and Jana Shostak, who also served as the WYD volunteers, made a portrait of Pope Francis. The image followed the official visualization of the WYD and portraits of John Paul II and Sister Faustina. The two students hung their banner with the face of Pope Francis next to the image of the "Polish pope" at the main Market Square just a day before the official opening of the WYD. The action named "Who is Your Pope?" turned into a symbolic comment on the official promotional strategy of the WYD and the nationalistic branding of John Paul II<sup>17</sup>.

Naturally, using national icons and heroes in the promotion of a local destination and a host state during mega-events is a broadly applied strategy. The 2016 WYD in Kraków was used by various national and regional agencies, tourist organizations and educational institutions as a great opportunity to promote the country, the region, the city and various related products. Here let me only mention few examples of government sponsored activities dedicated to the promotion of Poland. All of them focused on branding the "Polish nation" in relation to "Christian heritage". Special emphasis was put on the 1050 anniversary of "Baptizing of Poland" celebrated in 2016. A spectacular open-air concert dedicated to this anniversary was organized during the WYD and it was recalled during numerous smaller events. The Ministry of International Affairs also issued a special pamphlet titled: *Ambassador of Polishness*. This colorful booklet, circulated in 250,000 copies, was distributed among all the families who hosted the WYD's participants in their homes. It contained advice about how to be a "good host" and how to present Poland to foreign visitors becoming – as suggested in the title – "an ambassador of Polishness". "A task for Poles is to promote our traditional values and remind about these values to the world", explained the editorial (*Ambassador polskości* 2016, p. 2). Emphasis was again placed on national history and cultural heritage framed within the 1050 years of "Polish Christianity". The preface by the Polish President mentioned "a jubilee of the most important event in our history – the 1050th anniversary of the baptizing of Poland" (*ibidem*, p. 1).

Other government sponsored activities organized during the WYD also focused on Polish "Christian identity" and its historical continuity. An open-air exhibition titled

<sup>17</sup> The schedule of the 2016 WYD – as in case of other WYDs – was strongly framed around the figure of the current pope – Pope Francis. Quantitative data as well as qualitative research among the WYD's participants confirm that meeting with the Head of the Catholic Church was one of the most attractive and expected aspects of the WYD (see *Odbiór Światowych Dni* 2016, p. 8). In that context a promotional strategy that did not use the potential and celebrity dimension of the current pope, focusing mostly on the "heritage of John Paul II", was interpreted by many Polish observers as a political issue.

“Christian Traditions in the Polish Army” showed the history of “Polish soldiers” since the 966 “Baptism of Poland” till the Second World War. This exhibition was presented at the Market Square where soldiers from the Polish Army were distributing bread-and-lard among crowds of pilgrims. Even the “Polish Pavilion” – the flag governmental exhibition promoting the most recent Polish technological innovations among the WYD participants – was presented in frames of “one thousand years of Polish history” and a 3D movie on Polish history welcomed visitors to the Pavilion. As officially declared, the Pavilion aimed to “depict Poland as permanently inscribed in history of European and Christian civilization” and “present it as a dynamic, innovative, touristic and culturally attractive country” (*Pawilon Polski*). During the WYD governmental agencies fostered the image of the hosts as the “Christian nation”. This strategy could be interpreted as an indirect political statement that praised religious-nationalistic policy suggesting that it was in line with ideals of the “Polish pope” and his vision of “Christian heritage” and European “Christian identity”.

#### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This article emphasizes that WYD is a multidimensional and complex mega-event that can be analyzed in various contexts: as a modern form of pilgrimage, a marketing event, a Catholic brand that emerged in contemporary global religious marketplace. Even though the WYD is organized cyclically and follows a general, established schedule, references to local and national contexts shape and influence its form in the specific environment of a host state and city. This paper discussed particular aspects of the 2016 WYD in Kraków, which demonstrate that in European locations the concept of Christian heritage is actively used by the Roman Catholic Church in framing the event in religious terms. This framing relates to the “New Evangelization” policy through which the Church seeks to revive Christianity in an “old continent”, as well as emphasize the religious and spiritual potential of historical Christian sites, objects and practices in the context of an international global youth gathering. Additionally, the Kraków’s case pointed to the important role played by local and national political contexts and the branding strategies of the Polish Church and the Polish government.

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ANNA NIEDŹWIEDŹ

GLOBAL CATHOLICISM, URBAN HERITAGE, NATIONAL POLITICS:  
THE 2016 WORLD YOUTH DAY IN KRAKÓW

**Key words:** World Youth Day, Roman Catholic Church, pilgrimage studies,  
Christian heritage, Kraków, Poland

This paper analyzes the World Youth Day (WYD) – a cyclical Catholic global youth gathering – by focusing on the 2016 WYD in Kraków, Poland. The WYD is described as a multilayered event that generates and mirrors conflicting and conflating discourses operating at the global, national, and local levels of Catholicism and various perceptions of these discourses. The paper discusses the massive and festive character of the WYD, its branding potential as a typical mega-event as well as its religious dimension as a modern pilgrimage. Even though the WYD is organized cyclically and follows a general, established schedule, references to local and national contexts shape and influence its form in the specific environment of a host state and city. This paper shows that in European locations the concept of “Christian heritage” is actively used by the Church framing the event in religious terms. This framing relates to the “New Evangelization” policy which seeks to revive Christianity in an “old continent”, as well as emphasizes the religious and spiritual potential of historic Christian sites, objects and practices in the context of an international youth gathering. Additionally, the Kraków case study demonstrates the role of local and national political processes and the branding strategies of the Polish Church and the Polish government.

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