

**9th Annual International Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Conference**  
**Extended Abstract Template**

**The Body Of Christ (“*Corpus Christi*”): Feast, Devotion and Local/Regional  
Tourism in Sao Manuel City (Brazil)**

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## **Abstract**

The contribution addresses the ceremony of The Body of Christ (“*Corpus Christi*”) in a town in the interior of Brazil in Sao Paulo State - the city of Sao Manuel, where since the 1940s the celebration mobilizes almost the a significant part of the local population in the task of embellishing the streets covered by the procession. Preparations include choice or defining drawings for walkways and ornamental rugs, arrangements concerning the material, including, in specific cases, the artificial coloring, molding, demarcation of soil, divulgation and logistics support to tourists, cleaning of streets post event and alike. The research and its importance for the religious tourism, includes the history of the date and his origin in the locality referenced, description of geographical, economic and others factors, seeking to clarify the changes in social/religious configuration, especially of the people of Sao Manuel. Bibliographical studies compose the theoretical reference.

## **Introduction**

The Religious Tourism is an activity developed by people who moved by faith, are willing to travel to participate in events of specific significance such as celebrations in spaces and others related to institutionalized creeds, such as the Roman Catholic Apostolic Religion. It is a segment able to generate employment and income, consolidate municipalities as destinations and contribute to better the quality of life of local populations. In this context are included the ceremonies, especially the processions performed and allusive to the Body of Christ (*Corpus Christi*, in Latin) present not only in Brazil, but also in different world regions.

Thus, this contribution addresses the event in the interior of the state of Sao Paulo (Brazil) - the city of Sao Manuel where, with peculiar characteristics, since the 1940s the celebration mobilizes almost the entire population in the task of embellishing the streets covered by the procession and annually attracting thousands of pilgrims and tourists.

San Manuel stands out for its peculiarities and tourist attractions. In addition to the potential in rural tourism, making it possible to visit the old and traditional coffee farms, it is possible to

admire the architectural and urban landscape works built in the golden age of this culture when the city stood out as a great power. It is also worth mentioning the Historical and Pedagogical Museum "Padre Manuel da Nobrega", one of the richest in the interior of São Paulo with more than 4,000 pieces cataloged. The building that houses it has the architecture as a replica of the Parliament of the city of Sydney - Australia and was for a long period occupied by the City Hall and the Municipal legislative chamber.

Other attractions are the Garden Bandstand and the Craft Fair. The first, located in the central public square garden of the city was built around 1905, receives, especially on weekends, children and adults, attracted by the beauty, safe leisure, tranquility of the place as well as by the musical concerts with presentation of the Philharmonic Society of Sao-Manuel and traditionally held on Sundays, starting at 8 pm, a tradition that is increasingly rare in Brazil. A fair is held together with various handicraft products.

Anyway, Sao Manuel is marked by tradition and faith, counting on several routes of religious tourism. The city is considered as one of the oldest, if not the pioneer, in which the current version of the creation of carpets and corridors in the ornamentation of the streets to be traversed by the procession allusive to the celebration of the Body of Christ would have originated.

It all began in 1948 as an isolated manifestation idealized by the Catholic Action, a religious group that intended to make the Process constitute an opportunity to reaffirm faith with the population externalizing, respectfully, through the singing of hymns and prayers to Jesus Eucharistic or God the Son, in an artistically elaborate setting. At that beginning the streets to be covered by the procession were adorned with a parrot's beak, a flower resistant to the sun and abundant in the region, as well as using several other vegetal species, some of which were crushed, allowing them to be inserted in order to complement the composition of the drawings.

The Parish Church then encouraged the initiative by making other religious entities, educational establishments and the general population to collaborate in doing footbridges and carpets, all to brighten the ceremony. Thus, over the years, the materials used in the decoration of the streets to be traversed by the procession were varied favoring those of easy obtaining, such as, rice straw,

coffee powder, colored sawdust, sand dyed, salt, eggshell mash, crushed glass, marbles and bottle caps. Currently, some of these materials are falling into disuse, with more preference for sugarcane bagasse (product found in abundance in the municipality), crushed and dyed cob, limestone, tire powder, thick salt dyed and fragments of maize or rice.

In the second half of the 60s of the twentieth century, the Body of Christ celebration of Sao Manuel became part of the tourism calendar of the state of São Paulo, which was planned in advance and the City Hall to be the coordinating center for the works corresponding to the event. In this way conditions were created for religious tourism to be increased and attract people from other parts of the country, leaving aside, in a sense, the aspect of a regional event. Today, the solemnity is included in the calendar of events of the municipality of saint-manuel.

Since the prefecture of Sao Manuel took over the organization of the traditional the Body of Christ ceremony, the negotiations began to be planned months in advance. Defined the path to be fulfilled by the procession, the next step is the definition of the theme to guide the making of treadmills and carpets. These, if in the past, favored floral or geometric motifs, over the years the drawings reproduced sacred paintings, generally linked to the liturgy of the Eucharist, such as the chalice, grape clusters, Bread, candles, fish or the Adoration of the Angels. Later, it was the turn of moral reasons of great artistic expression.

Currently, the motives have been inspired by the themes derived from the Fraternity Campaigns annually developed by the National Confederation of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB). It is important to notice that The Campaigns of the Fraternity developed annually by the this catholic organization during Lent Season, or during the forty days preceding the main celebration of Christianity, Easter, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, aims to awaken the solidarity of Catholics and society in relation to a concrete problem that is involving the Brazilian population, searching for solutions. For example, in this year of 2017 the chosen theme was "Brazilian biomes and the defense of life".

On the special day of the Body of Christ Solemnity, the city of Sao Manuel is transformed. The population shares with pilgrims coming from neighboring municipalities, localities of the state of

São Paulo and tourists from regions of the Brazilian territory the magnificence of the event. These visitors have been estimated in the last years around 40,000 and agree with the ideal that the Procession is not only an act of faith, but a meeting in which in unison, a pure feeling emanated from the ceremony is conveyed.

## **Literature Review**

According to data mentioned by Aragão (2014, p. 56) based on the Brazilian Ministry of Tourism, such category displaces in the country approximately 18 million faithful people over the year, considering that faith and religiosity constitute some of the remarkable signs of the national culture, as, for instance, pilgrimages, processions and liturgical holidays, which gather up crowds to honor the saints of devotion. The country appears within the segment's worldwide leaders, beside nations such as Spain and France.

Aragão (2014, p. 55) points out that religious tourism is a segment of cultural tourism, since going to such places like sanctuaries and churches, besides the dogmatic aspects, reveals, also, a form of cultural knowledge. In what it says respect to religion, when the faithful are proposing to go to the places considered sacred, it experiences a meeting with the essence, the identity of the group and its culture.

Anyway, the work is not explicitly a field study, but much more a description of an event experienced by the authors whose bibliographic sources are still scarce. The theoretical framework was an elaboration of the authors themselves as a result of knowledge about religious tourism and the observations arising from the presence in this feast over the past few years.

## **Methodology**

The methodology used in this survey is of exploiting nature with qualitative approach, grounded on religious and economic assumptions, and identifying the determinants of such tourism. According to Lima (2008. p. 30), the exploiting aspect arises from the expectation that the collection of various information types provides better understanding of the subject under study.

The qualitative nature is featured by the bibliographic studies that constituted the theoretical reference, averaging the understanding of the reality facilitated by the participation of the authors of this contribution, for the last years, in said festivity or commemoration, as well as contact with religious entities.

The methodology is supplemented by a field survey which was used to extract data and information directly from reality through the use of collection techniques such as interviews or surveys to obtain testimonials about the character of the Corpus Christi procession in the city of São Manuel

## **Results**

The Body of Christ Procession in Sao Manuel certainly provides opportunities for the development of the city and it is an improvement of cultural manifestations helping in the transformations with benefits to the population, including the regional one.

Events such as those of that nature or type described as well as other external manifestations of faith, break with the everyday of social life, moving the collective and have the primary function of always updating in time the legendary, the mythical religious.

Opinions contrary to this statement may occur, but it is necessary to recognize that in the absence of the decoration of the streets to be covered by the procession under consideration with artistic walkways and carpets, this would take the color, popular participation, the motive of tourist attraction and the impulse to meet new localities and customs. Altogether, three aspects stand out: religious, of appreciation of the Eucharist, popular, of participation of all the community, and tourist, of attraction for thousands of people certainly moving diverse economic activities. In addition, there is a collective contagion with a mystical atmosphere of devotion transcending joy, faith, peace and hope.

Certainly the approach given in this contribution on the Body of Christ Procession in the city of Sao Manuel, in the state of Sao Paulo - Brazil, valued the celebration as a religious, social and artistic tourist activity, comprising the sacred distinct from the profane.

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