
Consumers' society: feminist dimension

Anelė Vosyliūtė

*Lithuanian Institute of
Philosophy and Sociology
Saltoniškių 58, LT-2600 Vilnius,
Lithuania*

The peculiarities of feminist research (it stresses the perspective of women's experience) are revealed. Using the material of this experience, the author analyses, the process of consumption, the new roles of women in society, their style of life, changing consumer needs and interests. The individualisation and new forms of solidarity of women, their seeking to be represented in different power fields as significant moments are noted. The features of women's behaviour related with consumption and new identity formation, changes in consumption of space are reflected.

Key words: women's research, consumption features, consumption of space

INTRODUCTION

The social movement of women and the women's studies (gender research) in Europe and USA influenced a new feminist perspective in choosing research problems and methods. Traditional epistemologies exclude the possibility that women could be agents of knowledge; gender research suggests to take gender into account as the most significant variable. The new types of research suggest to accept a new explanatory model of the social world that focuses on both women and men, on the investigation of unofficial, private, less visible spheres of social life, where women's role is significant. As is noted by S. Harding, "one distinctive feature of feminist research is that it generates its problematics from the perspective of women's experiences. It also uses these experiences as a significant indicator of the "reality" against which hypotheses are tested" [1: 7].

In contemporary Lithuania we can see the growing liberation of women; at the same time a lot of conservative stereotypes concerning the role and position of women manifest themselves. The process of formation of new women's roles, styles of life, changing consumer needs and interests is going on. The individualisation and new forms of solidarity of women, their seeking to be represented in different power fields as significant moments are investigated by sociologists who are collaborating with feministic movement. (At the present time in Lithuania there are more than 60 women's organisations). The Lithuanian Association of University Women aims to represent Lithuania's women in international organizations, to encourage women to intellectual work and pro-

fessional development. Its members have published a number of related issues such as "Women in Šiauliai University" (Šiauliai, 1998); M. Pavilionienė's (Vilnius University) "Sex Drama" (Vilnius 1998), "Socialization of Girl: the Family and School" (Šiauliai University, 1998), "Women discrimination in the Labour Market" (Vilnius University, 1998) and s. o.

The process of globalisation has rapidly appeared over the last few years in social and economic fields. It influences the science and women movement too, it encourages new human and social relationships, the cultural and value systems. In social sciences, the process of globalisation is influencing changes in the methodologies of investigations, increases the knowledge, improves the interpretation used in the analyses and research carried out in Lithuania. It is very important to investigate the real power of women – at home, in household, in work institutions, their influence on the family and on all society. In Lithuania, at present there exist many different subcultures or social worlds of women – officials, politicians, youth (especially students), artists, urban or rural inhabitants, scientists. Some of them express their interests and features of lifestyle in public and private life, in mass media. There are many investigations on literal feminism (Marija Pavilionienė), violence against women, the situation in the sphere of work (Giedrė Purvaneckienė) and inequality (Vida Kanopienė), on the image of women (Leonarda Kuzmickienė). The researchers investigate the changing situation of women, their socio-economic status dynamics, self-evaluation (Danutė Tu-reikytė), their physical mobility, consumption and life experience (Anelė Vosyliūtė); some studies deal with the representation of women in school text-

books. The main sources of patriarchal mentality influencing the behaviour and thinking of today's men and women, such as Christianity, ethnocultural heritage containing 'soft' patriarchalism and tendencies coming from the Soviet time are analysed by Inija Trinkūnienė and Jonas Trinkūnas [2].

Women can use many classical works (of Ch. De Pisan, Mary Wollstonecraft, Joh Mill, Georg Simmel, Simone de Beauvoir, Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva) on feminism which have been translated into Lithuanian.

After long years of ascetic socialist consumption the beginning of the new era can hardly be imagined without the explosion of consumer 'hedonism' or without the development of mechanisms enabling people to satisfy long-restrained needs and desires. National independence of Lithuania also manifests itself in the orientation at Western culture, way of life, social and political norms of civilization. In public consciousness this phenomenon is reflected as the search of cultural pluralism, involvement in diversity of choices, transition to the world without frontiers.

The growing pluralism in post-socialist Lithuania is connected with the process of democratization, national freedom, economic, social and cultural reforms and new reality. The earlier social structures, old patterns of behavior have been destroyed, the new modes of life are being discussed in society. The slow-down in post-socialist transition in Eastern European societies is described by the Polish sociologist P. Sztompka with the help of the concept of "civilizational incompetence", comprising deficiencies in: 1) entrepreneurial culture, 2) civil or political culture, 3) culture of discourse, 4) everyday culture, indispensable for daily existence in advanced, urbanized, technologically saturated and consumer-oriented society. Some of the components of everyday culture include: personal neatness and cleanness, punctuality, body care, fitness, healthy eating, skills in handling household appliances and the like. The decades of socialism not only hindered the formation of civilizational competence, but in many ways helped to shape quite an opposite cultural syndrome – civilizational incompetence [3: 89].

Nowadays, new claims and ways of life are being discussed in society. People tend to take responsibility for their social relations; new social movements (those of landowners, businessmen, women) give a potential for new styles of life, new needs and interests.

Over the recent period the composition of the Lithuanian population has fully changed. Business now takes part of the Lithuanian free market system. Theoretically, business brings "equality" of genders. However, results of investigations show that the target of "equality" has not yet been attained. Even in business

women face obstacles, since business is still considered to be a men's job. It could be assumed that openness of the market and poor chances of employment elsewhere have offered specific opportunities to women and stimulated them to engage in business [2: 60]. Conditions for starting a business have become much more tough. Presently, governmental and non-governmental organizations could facilitate the solution of the problem by emphasizing women's role in business and by familiarizing the public with their social and economic contributions, which is conducive for a favourable image of businesswomen. Expansion of the activities and services of the NGO is highly desirable. Cooperation with local and international organizations and universities could increase the weight of businesswomen in society. The situation of women in society is changing also. The socio-economic status of Lithuanian women is changing, as is revealed by the data of their self-evaluation; dynamic data from the surveys carried out every year during 1991–1998 show a slow increase in the number of women who identify themselves with the higher steps of the socio-economic status [2: 80–85].

A significant orientation of investigation on women is their existential problems connected with the analysis of their life stories. The method of life stories is very useful for the understanding of women's life experience, their motivation and tasks, activities, relations to relatives and family members, of subjectivity. As D. Bertaux, noted "life stories constitute excellent tools to collect the lived experiences of people whose lives have been at some point embedded in a given type of social context" [4: 36]. Those stories show the social situation and feelings of women, their social world. The life history approach is used to reveal how the women impart significance to their life course. This method is applied in sociological investigations as the recognition of the competence of the subject. It coincides with the changing situation in sociology where the existence of a plurality of perspectives and local, contextual studies *versus* grand narratives, disorder, flux and openness are respecting. The respondents are continually involved in constructing narratives about themselves, the others, and the world around them in general. Narratives give meaning, connectedness, and directionality to a series of otherwise isolated events. Life stories also include valuation, they have a moral dimension, too.

The features of consumption in Lithuania

Consumption is a process related to the reproduction of the way of life of people; it is a system of organized relations between society and environment. Not only production or free time activity, but also the consumption level is the basis for the differences in so-

ciety. The attitudes and patterns of behaviour in the sphere of consumption are an important resource of new life strategies, especially in independent Lithuania. The system of public opinion is characterized by pluralism of political views, difference in attitudes to state and private property, new consumption forms and a new concept of everyday life comfort. The Lithuanian society moves away from the post-socialist state of lawlessness by gaining experience in different activities connected with new ownership, private property. Social actions are becoming more oriented towards such achievements as acquisition of material goods and property. The necessity of new choices in society leads to confusion. More and more different interest groups emerge who want their material, political and cultural rights to be represented in different fields of power. National independence of Lithuania also manifests itself in the orientation at European culture, way of life, social and political norms of civilization. In public consciousness this phenomenon is reflected as the search of cultural pluralism, involvement in diversity of choices, transition to the world “without frontiers”, turning to new directions, toward the confusional order of post-modern. People of the post-Soviet countries are preparing to live in a social space in which the distribution of wealth and risk overlap. According to Luhmann, liberal ideology contains a “hidden program for adjusting society to risks”.

Foreign goods were important for society not only with regard to their function, but as the symbols of availability, marking the end of the constant shortages of different consumer goods in the Soviet period. These goods also made it possible to get familiar with the European, Asian, American consumer culture and way of life.

Consumption and everyday experience tend to standardize tastes and values. Many middle-class families have replaced Russian-made cars (which are out of fashion now) by Western cars (Audi, BMW, Volvo, Opel, Mercedes and others). This process reflects the social and cultural change, the orientation of people at Western goods and culture. The display of material goods is part of a system of people's reputation and a mark of struggle for the taste. Today people are using the consumption behaviour to signify who they are to other people from whom they hope to gain approval.

In consumptional process people are meeting with various production (*e. g.*, farms from various Lithuanian localities offer agricultural production, competing in Vilnius market places). In this way small producer communities are searching for their identity formation and expression of local features under regional or national labelling. The contribution of different localities to total Lithuanian culture are their ethnographical performances in Vilnius.

The degree of centre's involvement in the production and cultural sector of the country depends upon the level of centralisation. After restoring the Independence we have many discussions focused on the production and dissemination to other places of various goods and services in society. The advertising of various (material and spiritual) goods of local origin can invite the potential consumer or visitor to be a member of this imaginable community, to form his or her identity according to its features. These events express differences and similarity of various districts of the country and form their particular image in the social and cultural consciousness. So Lithuania is constructed from invented, historic and cultural versions of identity.

Despite the difficulties in economic life the population has preserved a relatively high purchasing power, which now can be used in Lithuanian shopping centers sized and structured according to Western standards. Earlier, people had to cover long distances travelling to the shops in other cities or even in other republics of the USSR to satisfy their consumer needs.

Nowadays consumption is the element that can structure (isolate or integrate) people in a new way. Based on the content and level of consumption we can distinguish several specific subcultures: those of rich people, commercial circles, of the poor, of young people, of pensioners, of town-dwellers and people living in the countryside, of people who are oriented towards foreign goods and those who prefer domestic products. The level and structure of consumption, social attitudes to consumption depend on some variables such as social class, age, sex, as well as on the situation (daily activities or festive occasions). According to P. Bourdieu, lifestyle is an expression of class position which is identifiable to the composition of types of capital – economic, cultural, social, and symbolic; the styles of consumption are the means not just of deploying economic resources, but also especially of exhibiting ‘cultural capital’; social distinction is marked by tastes which are formed as part of class habitus [5].

Our study (about 100 people interviewed) of the consumption behaviour and strategies of life of old people in one of the Vilnius Old Town districts reveals the differences in living conditions and consumption, which depend on income, family structure, health. Many interviewed people did not like the questions about the quality of their life, since it was not pleasant for them to admit their poverty. Most of them felt hurt, because they had been deprived of their savings. Their consumption has a domestic character. Women are acquiring more responsibility and power than men in the process of the distribution of means of subsistence. The role of women is

very significant in preparation of traditional meals for holidays and celebrations. Such meals are a cultural symbol, a component of historic memory.

The identity of pensioners is usually connected with the image of outsiders who need assistance and compensation to be able to pay for public utilities. Some of them are feeling fear and have no strength to fight for better life. Unlike elite or middle class (who are constantly looking for new fashions, new styles of consumption, new sensations and experience), the pensioners have a model of consumption that is determined by their poverty and living conditions. The city space of these inhabitants is very narrow, limited by shops and, occasionally, the church and the market. In summer they spend their time in a public park near Vilnius. The spiritual experience of old people is often related to suffering that can be explained by small income and poor health. Some poor people, unemployed people and socially neglected persons get charity food in special dining rooms.

At the same time, officials, politicians, top managers, owners of companies buy expensive, high-quality clothes in special shops with foreign goods. Well-off people possessing cars often visit wholesale depots. However, rich people have their own problems. They worry about their property, about physical safety of their families and their own. Psychiatrists maintain that often personal affluence changes the psychological state of the very rich.

Self-expression through consumption (especially clothes) is characteristic of the young, especially women. Young people are the frequenters of large market places where they are looking for cheap fashionable goods. The needy and the artistic clients like second-hand shops. Clothes are the factor expressing the female subjectivity, they give the possibility for the women to construct their identity. For example, late in the 19th century bourgeois women wore morning dresses, morning gowns, walking dresses, travelling dresses, riding suits, tea gowns, evening dresses and so on (E. Tseelon). Women's dress continued for a long time to be imaginative, playful and aesthetic. With female decorativeness we associate their expression of beauty.

In the new time the formation of many women's identities is closely related to the process and experience of consumption. Young girls especially actively participate in the process of the aestheticization of everyday life through the perception of the rapid flow of signs and images which saturate the fabric of life. The postmodern thinking emphasizes the new role – and the central one – of images in the consumer society [6]. Young people are oriented at new professions such as cultural intermediaries, managers, artists. They become more open to visual forms

of art. The old distinction between high and mass culture is gradually disappearing. The number of picture galleries, studios, exhibitions is increasing, testifying again to the aestheticization of life. The artists, the new taste-makers, are perceived as heroes in the subculture of the young, whose lifestyles are influenced by their art. The subculture of young people has some features characteristic of the postmodernism – transformation of reality into images, living in the simulation world, in an aesthetic hallucination of reality, in hyper-space. The understanding of consumption as an indispensable matter for existence (“the proper end of taking food is the preservation of the body by nutrition” as noted by Thomas Aquinas) is discussed in social opinion, thinking about the actual status of consumption in modern and postmodern society. Consumption has become a central mode of human existence. The movement towards mass consumption is accompanied by a general reorganization of everyday life and experience. We see a tension between self-discipline and pleasurable consumption. The generation of needs does not stop after one of them has been satisfied, new needs “come up all the time” without being a necessity.

The cultural and technological changes, the norms of civilization have made the woman's body a significant topic of public opinion. The process of aestheticization of life, the growth of mass sport and leisure have identified personal worth with the beauty of the body. In some spheres of social life the ‘quality’ of woman's body is very important, its presentation is connected with her and her family's value and social prestige. In public debates there exist the views that the woman's body is a social construction, it is produced by social practices. Now in the Lithuanian press and in magazines we can see especially much erotics; we can speak about a new image of sexually engaged women (and sexually aggressive who wish to be beautiful and rich). As M. Foucault noted [7], the body in modern societies has become the target of endless, minute and detailed forms of surveillance, discipline and control. Analysis of the features of women's image in the mass media (in journals for women) reveal the dominant images of the woman: mature woman and dependent woman [2: 95–100]. Conversations, discussions, articles and interviews with women helped to reveal the general characteristic and distinguishing features of these two images: 1) a mature woman: feels safe in the surrounding world, brave, strict to herself, knows how to take care of herself and of the others. Her main principle – to remain herself, to be modern, free and independent from old stereotypes; 2) a dependent woman: unable to act for herself, irresolute to make her own deci-

sions in a critical situation, seeks for a shelter in a man's shadow.

Our material about the social situation and feelings of elderly women, their social world reveals the meanings of the women way of life in the past and present (the data were collected in 1997–1999 during ethnographic expeditions in Lithuanian villages). Many respondents were living in rural areas as widowed and alone in their dwelling houses. The life history approach was used to reveal how the elderly construct meanings about their life course. Some meanings of the women way of life in the past and at present were submitted for consideration. We can classify all women's life conceptions into the following types: life as shared (when they could not separate their story lines from those of other family members), when religion is determining their relationship to the world, when life is seen as a struggle. As the results of the research show, the core items of the old women's situation are health (poor or strong), income, household and family status. Their mode of living consists of everyday routine practices, modest consumption activities (and poverty), calm identity with the traditional model of the elderly woman. The research reveals the women's power and attitudes to the family members and social relations, their consumption organization and activity. The communication of old women is not very intensive: they like the quietly life which is similar to isolation, but some of them are active participants of the opinion formation in their living places. Of most of women lower physical mobility is characteristic. The life histories reveal the social roles of women, the forms of solidarity and representation, their needs and desires. The elderly are not active agents in the formation of their children's ways of life, but their life is filled with anxiety, worries about children. Some of them are receivers of material support, mostly those suffering from health disorders. In their life histories there are some meanings connected with financial and psychological oppression on the part of their husbands, adult children. The spiritual activity of old women is related with religious behaviour (through participation in the holidays, church festivals). In the area of religion the elderly are more active than other age groups.

The values of the old age as cultural phenomena must be more integrated in the discourse of society; it is necessary to pay more attention to the material and psychological demands of old women and their security.

The problem of identity has been brought in recent years into the focus of social scientific and public debate. For people of a postsocialistic country, a

very actual question is to have a new identity related with modern western values. Sometimes it is not clear for them exactly what to do to get it. For the Lithuanian people to have an identity means to answer the questions 'who am I' or 'where I belong'.

Conspicuous consumption is a category of intentional actions in which the goal is to bring about an improvement in the opinions which others have of oneself. As T. Veblen noted, "wealth confers honour", the individuals consciously seek to "gain the esteem and envy of (their) fellowmen" [8: 888]. The fluctuations in an individual's perceived wealth will lead to changes in self-esteem. The emulative motive or desire to excel in their manifestation or 'impress' others 'is very significant for women. The function of food for the modern hedonic consumer is no longer just to satisfy hunger. Clothing purchases began to be more and more impulse shopping, 'self-fulfilment', or following the fashion.

Private cars are used first of all for the purpose of travelling to and from work, for leisure time trips. Nowadays, many of young people are dreaming of having an impressive car. Many girls and women are driving their private cars purchased in one of the old-car markets of Lithuania. The Lithuanian automerchants (mostly men aged 20–40) are always on the move, driving old cars from Holland or Germany to Lithuanian or Russian markets. In many cases these merchants are young men who escaped day-to-day routine work or were forced to do it, having been made redundant when large factories closed down. They are the agents of decentralization of the state social and economic power, of the structure of supply. The merchants fight for markets, they enliven and shape consumer's culture and behaviour in a new way. They form people's tastes, habits, way of life by means of advertising, offering new styles.

A significant feature of civilization is the abundance of both choices and temptations people face as consumers. In the behaviour of women, the feeling of tension between self-discipline and pleasurable consumption is noted. Even when one need is satisfied, another will soon replace it. The control of one's consumption means the control of oneself, the relation to oneself, it is the question of the self-forming activity or asceticism. Some women are seeking for conspicuous consumption as for a way of improving their social standing. In this case consumption is viewed largely as a matter of gratifying wants and desires by means of goods and services that are viewed as nonessential (luxuries), in which case it is typically regarded as an arena of superficial activity. Consumption is contrasted with real,

significant activities such as work, religion, or politics. For others the preparation of meals, the control of consumption in family are the means which reflect their dynamism and activity. Analysed can be the changing meanings of products: national and foreign, everyday or festive, prestige or not. Examining the situation of women in the sphere of consumption we can analyse their satisfaction with the quality of life. The cosmopolitization of the mode of life influences the features of national kitchen, the meanings of food, beliefs and attitude systems of commensality, entertainment. The tastes are changing, they are becoming as symbols of multiculturalism. The choice of products is for many women the act of individualisation.

Changes in the consumption of space

The national rebirth and independency, the reformation of social and cultural structures in Lithuania include changes in space division. We can see that distinct functional zones of space are being used for industry, production of market (postmodern shopping malls) and commodities, universal cultural means, communication, travel and s. o. As M. Lefebvre noted, the space is always socially constructed. In postmodern sociology the terms like "locality", "landscapes", "places" are very frequent in both empirical and methodological studies. The very acceleration in the flows of people, the physical movements, the tendencies to globalisation have brought place into focus of investigation. We tend to think of the world as of a coherent place, whole-earth, where the contours of place seem to be in flux. New division and regeneration of space is represented in the social discourses associated with major projects of place renovation where the attitudes and expectations of different social groups are reflected. As D. Massey noted [9], places have multiple identities: "The people are connecting with places physically, by phone, or by post, or in memory and imagination... Places are constructed out of a particular constellation of relations articulated together at a particular locus (comprising)... particular interactions and mutual articulations of social relations, social processes, experiences and understandings, in a situation of co-presence". T. Barnes and J. Duncan (10) have discussed the hermeneutic process whereby places are constructed: "Places are intertextual sites, because various texts and discursive practices based on previous texts are deeply inscribed in their landscapes and institutions. We construct both the world and our actions towards it from texts that speak of who we are or wish to be. Such 'texts in the world' then recursively act back on the previous texts that shaped them". The actions of

mass consumerism in post-Soviet reality are among the most powerful place-building processes connected with the dynamism of people activity. Visiting commercial places (f. e., eating out place), buying goods we form our consciousness of places; it helps us construct new ones, ephemeral through their meanings. The composition and images of places are influencing the cultural experience of women.

The new global network of information influences the formation of identity. As Z. Bauman noted, culturally and spiritually places are being devalued and disempowered. "Localities lose their own, autonomous agoras and their meaning-creating and value-selecting capacity. The signals, the images, the patterns to follow and the ideas to believe in come from afar; strictly speaking, from nowhere... People may still have fixed addresses, but the sources of their information, values, desires, dreams, Weltanschauung – do not" [11: 206–207].

Women are paying more attention to domestic space; through consumption they are seeking for aesthetic identity and absorption of sights and cultural meanings. The ideas of the good life are influencing the cultivation of new tastes, the aesthetics play within spaces of consumption. Women are experiencing a wide variety of self-expression forms. Many stories are related with consumption events.

The home is as a site of everyday, aesthetic practices of consumption. It provides not only an ontological security, but also a 'magical' and tactile resource for the making of identity. Expenditure on alcohol at home, eating and drinking in restaurants, expenditure on travel (domestic trips and travelling abroad) and on recreational and cultural services are increasing. Many other women seldom ever leave home, their immobility is similar to that of their grandmothers. With regaining the Independence of the country the process of people mobility, the liberation of exchanges, images and information is increasing. The freedom of mobility, the possibility for the people to be in the situation 'without frontiers' is becoming the value which is associated with the Independence of the country (because the Soviet period was characterized by prohibition to move to the foreign lands). The possibility to visit Western countries means for women a significant contested value and is an indicator of social stratification.

The new places of consumption and recreation established in the country space are connected with new styles of life, new needs to move from post-Soviet anomies to the new modes of social self-expression.

All the time space incorporates particularly symbolic landscapes and sites. In Eastern Europe the mass removal of statuary commemorating communist leaders and heroes is the most recent dramatic

example of a change in the arrangement of national symbols in the landscape. Some national sites in Lithuania are now the focus for many conflicting and contesting meanings. For example, the representatives of culture and politicians are discussing about placing the Soviet monuments in a park. One opinion is: the Soviet monuments are symbols of the national genocide in the occupied country and they cannot be a museum. An other interpretation is connected with the vision that those statues are the heritage of some historical period and reflect official Soviet history and the former political power; they can mean a neutral exposition for visitors and tourists in future. Particular attention in society is given to the national environmental ideology which reflects how the central places of cities and localities in Lithuania will be reconstructed.

We can note that consumption acquires the function of structuring (integrating or isolating) the people in space in a certain particular way. The sociologists describe changes of the urban landscape and behaviour of various social strata in it. Searching for sameness in visiting the markets, in choosing the restaurants, in traveling allow to observe a variety of identities which recently have emerged in relation with consumption patterns and expectations. In the cultural sense, market is a carnival of desires, the place where people from various strata mix together. In the market place people form their opinion about goods, evaluate them and make conclusions as to the quality of goods. The shopping malls are very important places in a city. Those spaces are a combination of inert materiality and fluidity of sociality. For women it is a place that generates emotional very fluid gaze.

In the sphere of consumption in Lithuania new places as signs of other cultures are emerging: Chinese, Japanese restaurants, Pizza huts. For example, McDonalds restaurants for many people are a symbol of liberal democracy, Western civilization and way of life. In such places food can be ordered and consumed quickly. "Fast food" is a sign of the new epoch, but at the same time it contradicts the traditional culture. Such places are a result of the globalization process – the "McDonaldization" of the world.

In this economically difficult time the majority of Lithuanians usually eat at home. However, on festive occasions they eat out – with their friends or relatives or in public places. In everyday life, work and travel are the primary causes of eating out. For the young people (students, politicians, clerks) eating in a café or restaurant symbolizes a modern way or spending their time, respectability. Rich people prefer to eat in Chinese, Japanese restaurants, Pizza huts. To eat out means for a person to declare independence and freedom, to establish social rela-

tions, to be open to others. An important function of going to a café for post-socialist youth is to get involved in a dialogue/discussion, in a peaceful interaction, open exchange of views which is characteristic of a democratic society.

The Lithuanians are mobile people. They live in the mobile world. Some people in Lithuania are becoming 'sedentary in travel' (J. Clifford). As M. Benedikt noted, "the very significance of geographical location begins to be questioned. We become nomads – who are always in touch"(12). Nomadism and mobility come to various people in different forms. Some women, the new elites of politicians, mass media or business spheres are very mobile; they can choose places of living or recreation.

Travelling patterns are changing too. If in the Soviet times tourism was identified first of all with shopping tours, now this experience includes the consumption of signs, symbols, culture. The character of leisure varies for different groups of people. For example, for the "nouveaux riches" than for other groups, vacation is associated mostly with spending money and consumption. Some post-socialist tourists are similar to Western tourists, who "are searching for authenticity in an increasingly meaningless world" or live in such a social environment where travel is the marker of the status. For others travelling is a pleasure, a compensation for everyday efforts, communication with their family, friends, culture and nature.

The experience of consumption of space by women is identified with the travels to the foreign, mostly Western countries where they are making an acquaintance with cultural heritage, symbols and signs, or are searching for authenticity in an increasingly meaningless world. The travel for women is a pleasure, a compensation for everyday efforts; the leisure and vacation are associated with some kind of communication among the members of family, relatives, friends, natural environment and culture.

Many old buildings or structures are now used for exhibitions, as show rooms for furniture, cars, clothes, housekeeping goods, etc., shop-windows as well as packed goods are becoming more aesthetic-looking. Shops are located not only in the center of cities or villages, but also in remote districts. In private trade the shop-assistants have become more polite. The city space reflects new signs and symbols of consumption – new signs with the names of the companies and shops appear on the buildings. However, Lithuanian names are more understandable for people and they often do not like foreign names of shops, information about goods which is written sometimes only in foreign languages.

Memory and history play a very great role in the understanding of the cities and places. They are of-

fering interpretations of past events. The monuments in space are preserving the memory of the country or the city, they create a sense of 'national belonging'. The buildings have their validity because they represent architectural style and beauty, are the objects of national heritage and documents by which the members of a community recognize one another. The monuments have deeply embedded in national culture. National landscapes, monuments and the selection of elements utilised to represent national character are equally subject to contestation. The meanings of particular national symbolic sites change over time.

Many discussions in public opinion were related with the role of Vilnius (as the capital of Lithuania), a symbolic space which is a network of sites reflecting national glory, majesty and patriotism. If the conception of the Gediminas Square is stable (as the place for sacred and state ceremonies, where upon the landscape of Šventaragis the mythical power of the Lithuanian Gods and old earthly rulers are deeply inscribed), the public opinion about the use of the Lukiškės Square is not unified: one interpretation is related with the national memory, the competing one – with the festive celebration of 'New Age' and carnival values.

The development of Lithuania as an independent country can be understood as the opening up of new economical, cultural centres and recognizing old religious centres. In the sphere of tourism, orientation to West Europe is noted. The experience of consumption of space by students, intelligentsia is identified with travels to the foreign, mostly Western countries.

Actually we are facing a tension between identification with the nation and with the other spaces: larger (f. e., Europe), smaller (native village) and also virtual and imaginative spaces (cyberspace). The challenge from Europe as the dominant centre is for our people one of the significant moments to be not 'other', not peripheral. The importance of cultural systems of the European space is recognized in various travels to Western countries. Domestic touristic travels within the native country help the people to form their national identity. It is an attempt to identify 'national landscape ideologies' (J. Short) which incorporate valorised rural realms and symbolic sites. Statues of key historical figures and epic national monuments are situated at locations around which social life is organised. During the national touristic and cultural events the population participates in national rituals and religious occasions, anniversaries, in collective memory events, celebrations.

The acquisition with the national culture is the process in which the identity formation through the

meanings of culture and history occurs. The production of a new tourist space is connected with the development of tourist industry in the country. In the period of globalisation national tourism is part of the international system constructed to satisfy the demand for this experience. In this case the patterns (forms of holidays, standards of comfort and consumption) of national tourism are becoming similar to the international forms of tourist space. Incorporation into the world system of tourism means for national tourism the global influence and regulating power according to the normative level.

For a normal representation of the Lithuanian touristic places, the developed industry of souvenirs, travel programmes and guides, postcards, travel accounts, guidebooks, good photography are needed. Films and television programmes inspire the creation of tourist attractions.

Religious and cultural dimensions as the national heritage are emphasised also in their territorial form. In Independent Lithuania are going on the processes of cultural construction of the nation, its inscription in the national space through the production or renovation of symbolic sites, too. The way of perceiving the landscape is highly influenced by the sacred places, around which performances and everyday life are organised.

For pilgrims (mostly women) the sacred destinations of their journeys are more important for their spiritual properties than any aesthetic qualities. The distinction between secular and religious tourists is apparent: the central purposes of the pilgrim's visit is to gain a religious status, to worship and celebrate the heavenly, experience the power of the divine. Both visitors are engaged in buying souvenirs of the place. For the secular tourists, more significant are the aesthetic qualities of landscapes, emotions and commodities, recreational activities, the ethnography and history of places. Of pilgrims (mostly women) characteristic are such activities as meditation of the holy, identification with the sacred place, self-destiny and history. In the case of domestic pilgrimage, the visitors as usual are making acquaintance with the places of collective memory of the nation, especially of the victims of Soviet regime (because in the conception of nation we have actually a very strong connection with religious feelings and then ethnic articulation of identity). Sacred centres are repositories of common memories, myths and tradition and the sites for a range of collective and individual performances of ritual and pilgrimage.

A significant element in culture is the level of self-identification with the environment. Many women and men have their favourite places, which are a means of regulating pleasant and unpleasant fee-

lings. The self-involvement in a physical and social environment is the precondition of stable adaptation and integration in everyday situations, in the network of social relationships. The favourite places can be used to regulate pleasurable and painful feelings and in coherence of self-experience, and to maintain a favourable level of self-esteem. The satisfaction with various characteristics of the living conditions is closely related with the feeling of security and confidence. F. e., a sociological study of the Visaginas city people (mostly women) has shown that its inhabitants are greatly satisfied with their city, its architecture and landscapes [13].

Psychological findings show that possessing favourite places of space in childhood and adolescence may provide an escape from daily pressure as to evoke the well as feelings of well-being, peace and comfort. A study on adult memories has suggested that special places in childhood and adolescence play a role in the development and sustenance of mental health and in the evolution and shaping of one's self. The young generation emphasizes the desire to approximate their ways of life to those of large intellectual, cultural economical centres. They propose to open in their towns new institutions such as universities, entertainment centers. F. e., video games form one of the central parts of contemporary media culture. They are an entertainment and part of children's culture. As M. Lahti noted, around video games the social power is negotiated. In the public sphere, video games for the most part are masculine texts [14].

Examination of the features of the environment and the attitudes of the residents is the way of exploring the underlying social and cultural values that these perceptions reflect. The Nuclear Power Station as a landscape feature is very expressive, has many contradictory meanings. On the one hand, it represents the scientific progress, technological achievement (it is the feature of the masculine culture), on the other its functioning poses threat for the population and environment. In the young girls' and boys' opinion are reflected attachment to the native town, the belief in its excellent future, but also the danger, catastrophic feelings about possible accidents. The Nuclear Power Station is the social symbol which represents the technological and ideological power of the former Soviet Union. This symbol embodies the economical and military domination in that period, reveals changes of the earthly meanings in the consciousness of people in relation with the threat of this place. The town (in which many inhabitants are Russians) itself makes efforts towards integration into the social and cultural life of the country; orientation to cosmopolitical culture is also present. Through the use of space (travels, partici-

pation in national feasts, holidays, consumptional patterns) now the process of adaptation of the town population to the Lithuanian landscape and culture is going. The young people of multicultural Visaginas are proud of the nice forms of their town, they identify their favourite places. But more a important problem of their future is the safety of the Nuclear Station. The majority of adult people are feeling discomfort and anxiety. In this case the societies surrounding the NPS are "risk societies". The relationship of between the centre and the periphery is of great importance in how we characterise ourselves and others. Visaginas is a periphery, but its young inhabitants are feeling as civilised, intellectual, urban, rational, related with progress, i.e. as living in a city. The social world of the young people of Visaginas is closely related with hyperspace, with cosmopolitic culture. The youth (mostly boys) is characterized by a more intensive use of the electronic mass media, of the production of images and information which threaten our sense of reality. As M. Featherstone noted, "the triumph of signifying culture leads to a simulational world in which the proliferation of signs and images has effaced the distinction between the real and the imaginary" [5]. Young people are seeking for the geographical and intellectual, cultural centres related with the formation of informational society, where the production of culture and meaning has reached the level of simulation (J. Baudrillard). With the new technologies developed for the distribution of information, this simulated culture and meaning confronts with the intersubjective creation of meaning in face-to-face interaction.

CONCLUSIONS

In contemporary Lithuania we can see the growing liberation of women; the process of the formation of new roles, styles of life, changing consumer needs and interests of women is going. The individualisation and new forms of solidarity of women, their seeking to be represented in different power fields are investigated by sociologists who are collaborating with feminist movement.

After the long years of ascetic socialist consumption, the beginning of the new era can hardly be imagined without the explosion of consumer 'hedonism' or without the development of mechanisms enabling people to satisfy long-restrained needs and desires.

In public consciousness the phenomenon of consumption is reflected as the search of cultural pluralism, involvement in a diversity of choices, transition to the Western world without frontiers.

Nowadays consumption is the element that can restructure (isolate or integrate) people in a new

way. Based on the content and the level of consumption we can distinguish several specific subcultures. Self-expression through consumption is characteristic especially of women. Their clothes are the factor expressing female subjectivity, they give the possibility for women to construct their identity.

Most of Lithuanian shopping centers are sized and structured according to Western standards. Women are the frequenters of large market places, second-hand shops where they can look for fashionable goods.

The experience of consumption of space by women is identified with the travels to the foreign, mostly Western countries, where they acquaint with new cultural heritage, symbols and signs, or are searching for authenticity in an increasingly meaningless world. The travel for women is mostly a pleasure, a compensation for everyday efforts.

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Anelė Vosyliūtė

VARTOJIMO VISUOMENĖ: FEMINISTINIS ASPEKTAS

S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje tyrinėjami vartojimo visuomenės bruožai, aptariami moterų kaip atskiros grupės poreikiai ir vartojimo ypatumai. Pabrėždama feministinės analizės kaip suteikiančios prioritetą moterų patyrimui svarbą, autorė remiasi moterų požiūrių, jų veiklos būdų, vartojimo kultūros tyrimų medžiaga. Kaip svarbūs momentai pabrėžiami visuomenės individualizacijos ir naujų solidarumo formų kūrimasis. Straipsnyje taip pat aptariami kai kurie moterų sociologinių tyrimų metodologiniai ir metodiniai aspektai, vartojimo reikšmė moterų identiteto formavimuisi, elgesio erdvėje ypatumai.