

Perspectives of Green Pilgrimage Tourism in Lithuania

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Abstract: *Relevance of the topic and scientific problem.* There are many types of tourism in the world that allow travellers to gain new experience, get to know new cultures, see exceptional tourist attractions, and more. One such type is green pilgrimage tourism. This is a fairly new, little-known type of tourism that was only started in 2009 with the establishment of the Green Pilgrimage Organization. Green pilgrimage encourages travellers to change behaviours and attitudes towards the environment, take care of nature, re-establish contact with the natural world - both during the journey and when returning home. Participants in this type of tourism are called green pilgrims who respect local culture and the environment. They try to reduce fuel consumption by traveling, eating, sleeping and volunteering in small local communities, contributing to the well-being of places they visit. Thanks to the green pilgrimage, great attention is paid to the maintenance of pilgrimage sites. Increasingly, these areas are being adversely affected: the local environment is not harmed and natural resources are rationally used.

Green pilgrimage combines tourism types such as pilgrimage tourism, spiritual tourism, religious tourism, sacral tourism, which are very interrelated and some authors use these types of tourism as synonyms. Abad-Galzacorta and Guereño-Omil (2016) describe a pilgrimage tourism in their work; other authors, such as Durán-Sánchez, Álvarez-García, de la Cruz del Rio-Rama and Oliveira (2018), Griffin, Raj (2017), Moufahim, Lichrou (2018), Sarumi (2018), Terzidou, Scarles, Saunders (2017) deal with pilgrimage tourism concept and essence. A description of religious tourism is provided in the work of Duran-Sánchez, Álvarez-García, de la Cruz del Rio-Rama and Oliveira (2018), Griffin, Raj (2017), Syamala, Kakoti (2016). Also Cheer, Belhassen, Kujawa (2017), Norman, Pokorny (2017) write about spiritual tourism. It is important to emphasize that the authors, such as Różycki, Dryglas (2017) and Temizel, Attar, (2015) describe religious or pilgrimage tourism and use it in their articles as the concepts of sacral and religious tourism.

In Lithuania there is no research on green pilgrimage, which emphasises the problem of the research as well as the topicality, as the first steps on this topic are taken.

The aim of the research - to explore the perspectives of green pilgrimage tourism in Lithuania.

Methodology of work: analysis of scientific articles, publications, documents, qualitative research - semi-structured interviews, systematization of obtained research data, graphic representation, formulation of conclusions and recommendations.

Keywords: green tourism, pilgrimage tourism, St. James's Way Lithuania.

1. INTRODUCTION

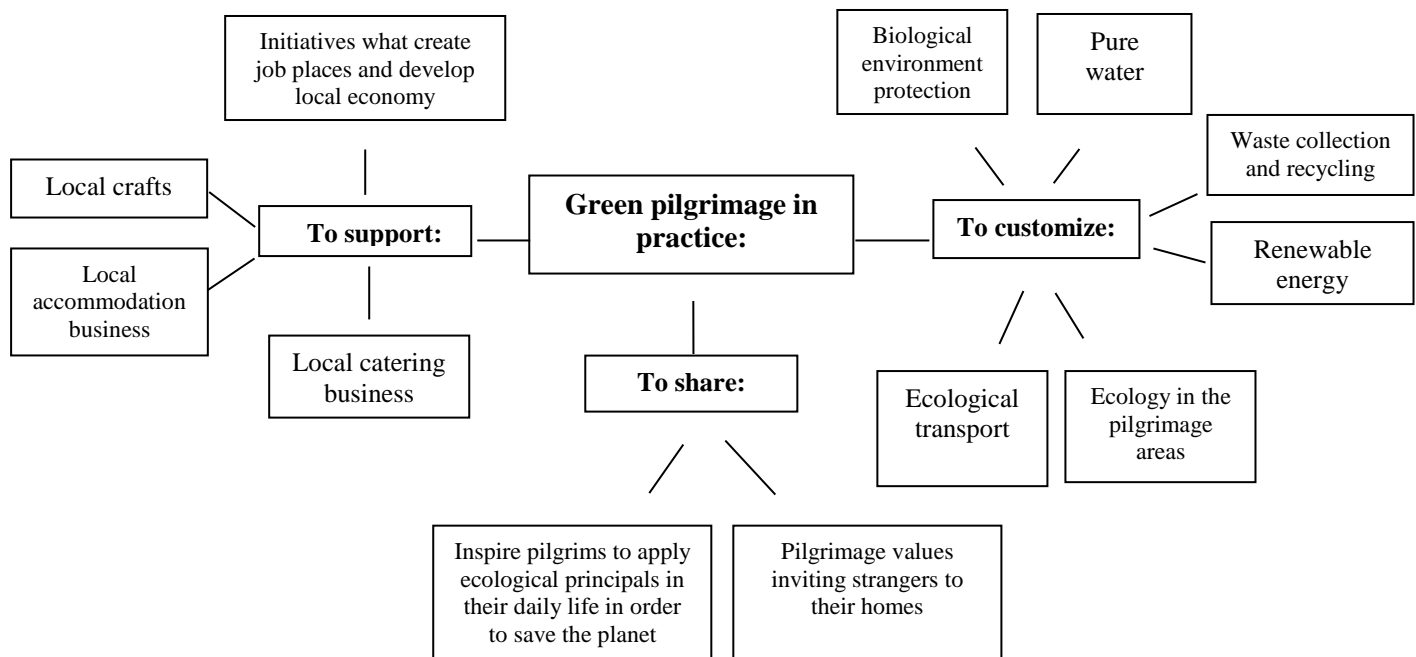
We can only consider the beginning of the Green Pilgrimage as a research object in the 21st century, because at that time the Green Pilgrimage Network (hereafter GPN) was founded, which aims to encourage pilgrims to travel less detriment the nature and more taking care of sacred places, to change the behaviour of millions of people rediscovering the relationship with the environment - both during the journey and returning home (The European Green Pilgrimage Network, 2018).

Visiting sacred places with the aim of seeing, praying, and nurturing is growing, and therefore almost all the pilgrimage roads are contaminated with garbage, which even increases the contamination of local areas, the use of pesticides, the threat to wildlife and other types of

environmental damage. (Alliance of Religions and Conservation, 2014). For these reasons, we started talking loudly about the green pilgrimage and its benefits. It is increasingly emphasized the need of to reduce the impact of pilgrimage on the environment. This means that energy resources, water, non-segregated waste and the release of carbon dioxide into the environment should be more appreciated, as pilgrim tourists contribute to the protection of our planet.

Scientists studying green pilgrimage problems group green pilgrimage into theoretical and practical. The European Green Pilgrimage Network is an organization that makes practical recommendations (see Figure 1), that show what steps need to be taken to minimize the impact on the environment.

Fig. 1. Practical Recommendations for Green Pilgrimage Application



Source: made by the authors according to the European Green Pilgrimage Network, 2018

Thus, these practical recommendations (see Figure 1) illustrate what green pilgrimage is and how to put it into practice. All recommendations are divided into three categories: to support, to customize, and to share. It can be seen that the focus is on the local communities, what encourages them to contribute to their social and economic well-being. It also encourages the use environmentally friendly measures, protecting biodiversity, providing clean water, and so on. To share means to express ideas, discussions, values that need to be shared with others, because only then you can find great solutions for harmony with nature and people.

So, with the increasing spread of world-wide travel ideas in addition to the aforementioned organization, the Green Pilgrimage Jerusalem community is currently operating in Europe, too, both of which are responsible for spreading the idea of green pilgrimage (in works and orally).

2. ST. JAMES'S WAY AND ITS SECTION PRESENTATION IN LITHUANIA

The topic of green pilgrimage was inspired by the opened section of St. James's Way in Lithuania, which is a part of the sacred pilgrimage net, joining the world network in Santiago de Compostela (Spain), where one of the most known pilgrimage locations is, famous for St. James's tomb in Cathedral. Pilgrimages from all over Europe have been traveling along St. James's Way or Camino de Santiago for a long time to honour the apostle James (Camino Lituano, 2018). The believers have

been on this way since the X century and from then it remains one of the most popular pilgrimage directions. Based on European St. James's Way Federation data more than 300 thousand pilgrims arrived to this city in 2017 (278 thousand pilgrims in 2016). The number of believers is expected to grow even more, so the Galicia region and the city of Santiago de Compostela have joined the European Green Pilgrimage Organization to promote ecology and are already awarded 5 international environmental prizes.

St. James's Way in Lithuania or *Camino Lituano* is a 500-kilometer modern pilgrimage route across Lithuania, joining the European International Network of St. James's Way. The route begins at the Latvian-Lithuanian border, winds through Šiauliai, Kaunas, Alytus counties and reaches Poland, where it joins the *Camino Polaco* pilgrimage way in Poland. It was also established that the Lithuanian territory is crossed by the four international St. James's Ways - Samogitia/Königsberg, Siauliai, Kaunas and Vilnius, and all of St. Apostle James's temples, which we have eleven in Lithuania, are joined by the Lithuanian Inner Way - St. James's Ring (Račkauskas, 2016).

For the convenience of pilgrims traveling, the main *Camino Lituano* is divided into an average of 25 kilometres of daily travel, and the entire route is about of 20 sections. The way leads through cultural, religious, and natural objects.

Accommodation, catering facilities and other necessary infrastructure is available for the pilgrims and hikers at all sections” (Camino Lituano, 2018). According to the community of *Camino Lituano* (2018), the first sections of the way from Paberžė to the Lithuanian-Polish border and to the first stop of *Camino Polaco* in Sinai (Poland) have already been prepared. These sections are already fully customized and detailed on the *Camino Lituano* website, information about the road sections is also provided in the tourist information centres.

3. THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of the study is to find out whether green pilgrimage tourism has perspectives in Lithuania and can be developed.

The research method is a qualitative study using a semi-structured interview consisting of 6 open questions. Respondents were selected, who are directly related to St. James’s Way in Lithuania, has

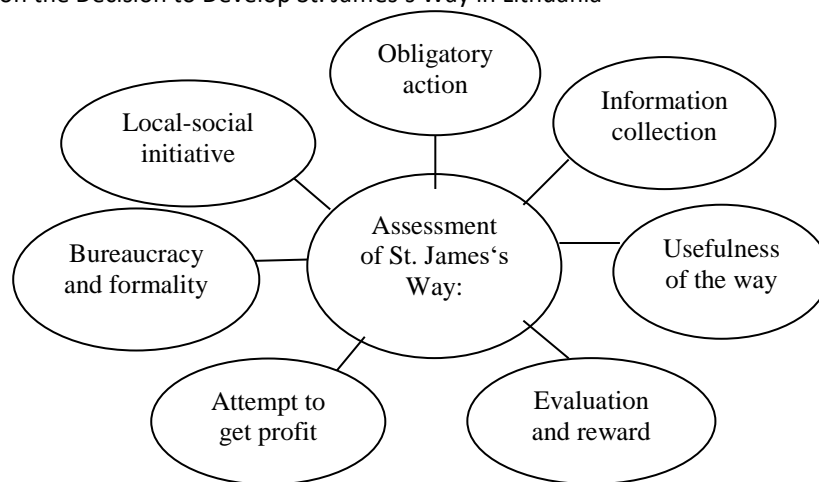
contributed to its implementation and has the most knowledge of this way and its potential prospects. 6 respondents were selected for the survey, as the other respondents’ answers started repeating the same. The study was conducted in March 2018.

4. THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

The study showed that the preparation of St. James’s Way in Lithuania is already marked by the interest of pilgrims both from abroad and from Lithuania, and a desire is noticed to come and try it. Most experts appreciate the decision to develop this way, and its establishment provides an excellent opportunity to develop green pilgrimage tourism in Lithuania.

It is important to know the expert's opinion on how they evaluate the decision to prepare a St. Way of James in Lithuania. The reviews on expert opinion you can see in Figure 2.

Fig. 2. Expert Opinion on the Decision to Develop St. James’s Way in Lithuania



As shown in Figure 2, the respondents appreciate the decision to prepare the way in various ways. Some respondents highlighted the usefulness of this way by attracting more tourists from abroad and encouraging local pilgrims to travel. Usefulness notices when thanks to this way “pilgrims from all over the world learned about Lithuania and the possibility to travel along the certified St. James’s Way sections in Lithuania” (Respondent No. 3). They distinguished the preparation of this way in Lithuania as the act that had to be done as an important fact. The fact that when preparing the maps, “it was revealed what we have not even believed: in Lithuania we have not only the routes drawn by the Council of Europe, but the whole of St. James’s Way network” (Respondent No.1). It is also important to emphasize that joining the

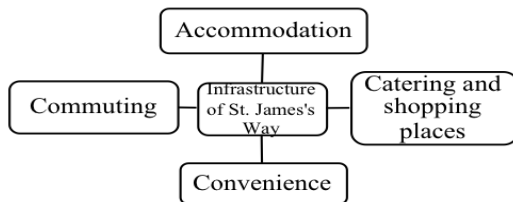
European St. James’s Way network is considered a great appreciation and achievement, as it contributes to the country's reputation throughout the world and Europe. In addition to this, communion is being created to people because the way connects states, traditions, people and other important things. However, not all experts appreciate the way preparation decision, saying it is simply an attempt to profit from a known name. Other way extensions are just a tourist trick when seeking to profit from it. Some critics also criticize the government's announced decision in 2016 on St. James’s Way through Lithuania. According to them, this resolution has no influence on the further formation of the way and it is only a bureaucratic formality and solution. According to the respondent, “the way must be alive and people

must check it, mark it, ..." (Respondent No. 5). It is a local-social initiative, therefore the state support for the smooth running of the work becomes very important. Thus, having summarized the received answers, it can be said that almost all the experts have a positive view of the planned decision to develop a St. James's Way in Lithuania. It is also important that respondents observe and believe in the perspectives of this way, although they have highlighted some negative things as well.

Establishing the way, it is important to identify the expert opinion on the key elements of the infrastructure that is necessary for a new St. James's Way in Lithuania (see Figure 3). In their opinion, one of the necessary elements is accommodation. It is described as a place where "pilgrims could stay at a low cost and get the

minimum amenities" (Respondent No. 3). The accommodation should be next to the pilgrimage object so that the traveller does not have to move away from the route and at least every 25 kilometres. According to the experts, much attention should be paid to better communication, which means the bicycle and pedestrian paths are needed on the way. It is important to note that the new road should have clear links and detailed travel routes that were divided into sections. Also, the way should go along the rural roads, paths that are comfortable and away from the main roads. When traveling, dining and shopping venues are also necessary, where you can eat or buy water and food, and they should appear every 10 kilometres.

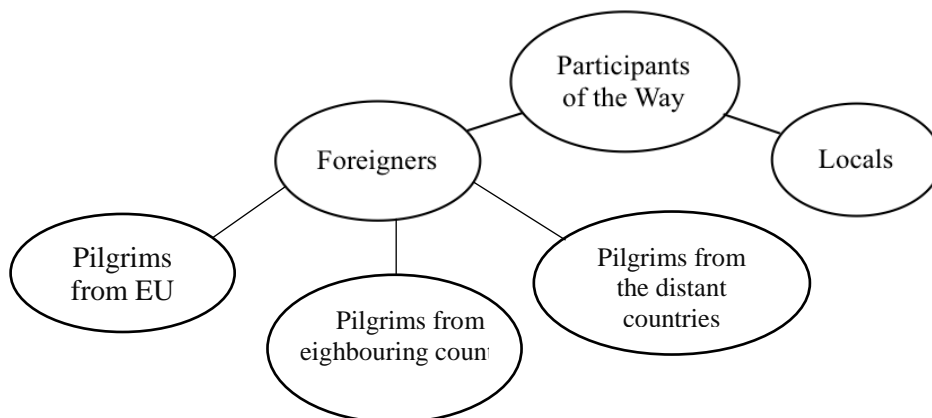
Fig. 3. Expert Opinions on the Most Important Infrastructure Elements in St. James's Way in Lithuania



One of the most important elements is convenience, the road sections have to be assembled properly. When traveling, there should be space where you can fill up with water, and according to the respondent, "various stands, rest areas where people can stop for rest" (Respondent No. 5). To sum up, while lodging and catering are the most important ones while traveling, however, communication and convenience are no less important on the way. Other things that are needed during the trip were not listed by the experts but are also necessary but less important.

When exploring the perspectives of this way, it is important to find out the expert opinion on what countries pilgrims it will attract and why. As it is shown in Figure 4, the experts identified three different categories according to the directions. All the experts unanimously agreed that St. James's Way in Lithuania will attract the attention of pilgrims from other countries. Most pilgrims who have already travelled to the traditional St. James's Way in Spain, all of them are potential travellers in Lithuania. Many travellers are interested in this way from Poland, France, Italy, Spain and other EU countries.

Fig. 4. Expert Opinion on the Attractiveness of St. James's Way in Lithuania to Pilgrims according to the Directions

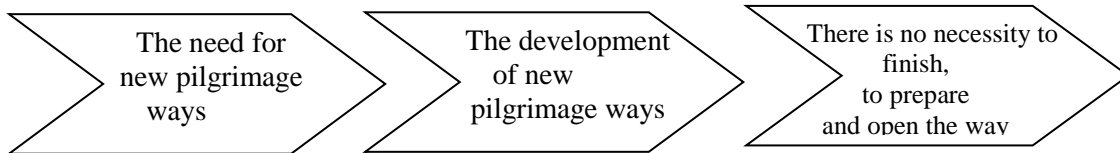


However, one of the experts pointed out that Lithuania is reachable even from the distant countries such as Australia, South Korea, the United States and other. Also, experts agree that this route can be attractive for Lithuania's neighbouring countries as well, because convenient connections and pilgrimage objects are much closer and easier to reach. It is also important to note that, according to the respondents, this way has led Lithuanians to participate more actively in traveling. It is noticed that more and more people like to go for a short weekend trip with their family or friends and overcome one section of the way. This way encourages independent travel and presence in nature. It is also highlighted that good weather has

less impact on pilgrims than ordinary tourists. Comfort and good conditions are important, but this is not the most important part of this type of trip. Summarizing all the answers given by the respondents, it is concluded that many pilgrims from abroad who have already tried this way in Spain are interested in St. James's Way in Lithuania. There is also increasing interest of Lithuanians to desire to travel in nature.

As pilgrimage tourism is becoming more and more popular, it is important to hear the opinion of the experts about the need for new pilgrimage ways in Lithuania, which would be attractive to both Lithuanians and foreigners.

Fig. 5. Expert Opinions on the Need for New Pilgrimage Ways in Lithuania

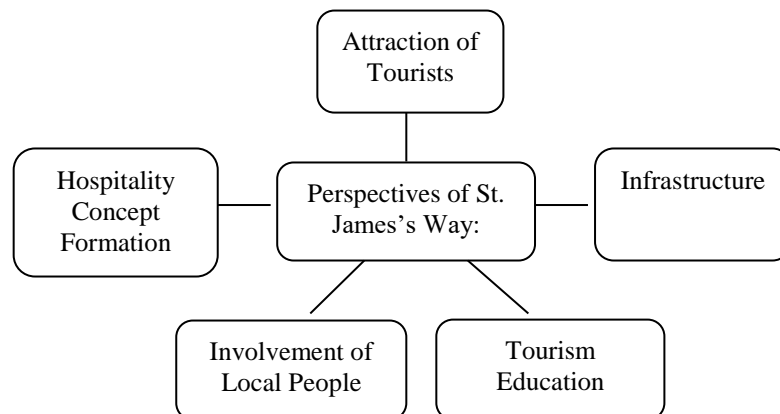


As it is shown in Figure 5 all the experts unanimously agreed that the pre-existing pilgrimage routes should be fully arranged and adapted to travel. Also, there is no need to create new routes at this time. One of the experts pointed out that it is now important to observe St. James's Way in Lithuania. First of all, it is needed to test this path with its strengths and weaknesses to be eliminated. It is also necessary to improve the current way conditions to make things smoother, more efficient in creating a new route. However,

the experts do not exclude the possibility of later creating and offering more interesting routes only without advertising them as pilgrimages. Thus, the fourth question suggests that there is currently no need to create new pilgrimage routes in Lithuania.

The experts were asked about the perspectives of St. James's Way in Lithuania assessing it in five dimensions.

Fig. 6. The Perspectives of St. James's Way in Lithuania on Infrastructure, Attraction of Tourists, Involvement of Local People, Tourism Education, Hospitality Concept Formation



In Figure 6 there are five dimensions for evaluating the perspectives of the way and the experts were asked to comment on each part of it. Firstly, all the experts have responded about the infrastructure possibilities, that this will improve the current

situation, contribute to its creation, nurturing and preservation. However, in the opinion of one expert, municipalities and regions create their own infrastructure of local significance, and the way simply connects existing paths. In his opinion, "the

increase in traffic would obviously require improvements in infrastructure” (Respondent No 5).

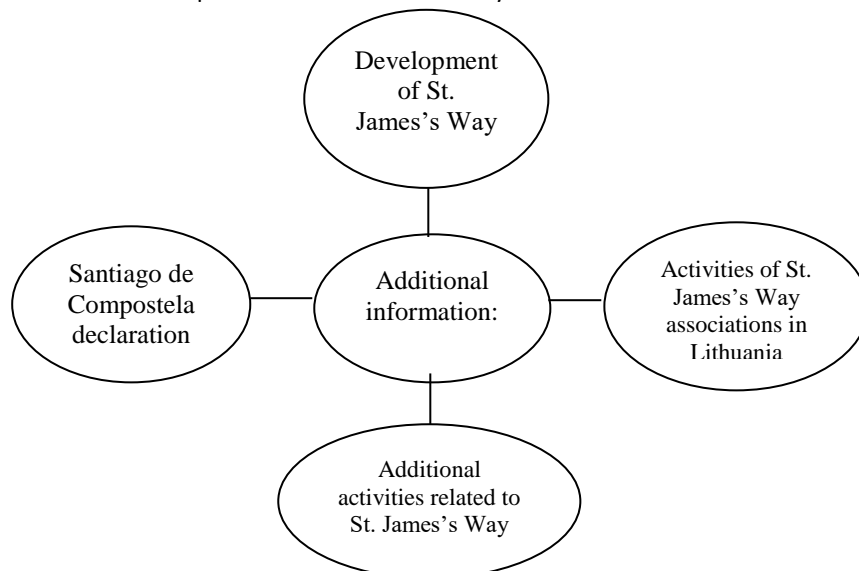
In asking about the attraction of tourists, experts highlighted the visibility of this way at European level and the fact that St. James’s Way in Lithuania contributes to the country’s reputation both in Europe and worldwide. It is believed that it will attract more pilgrims from all over the world because people more and more travel on foot or by bicycle. One of the experts said that improving infrastructure and attracting tourists is a matter of direct concern, and with the increasing number of travellers, the infrastructure needs to be gradually upgraded. Unfortunately, not all respondents agree with the statement that the way will help attract more travellers from abroad. “It will rather stimulate Lithuanian tourism in smaller towns through which it will go” (Respondent No. 4). Nonetheless, there is an increased interest in this way by pilgrimages, letters are received with the intent to enter the country, hiking trips are being organized from abroad.

When asking about the involvement of the local population, the responses received suggest that the local population is encouraged to contribute to the way. The locals willingly help, invite pilgrims to their homes and provide accommodation for the travellers. Residents are given new opportunities

to set up accommodation, catering services, familiarize with their craft, sell their product, etc. These people also contribute to the education of tourists as they introduce local traditions, food. In this way, the traveller has the opportunity to see the country from the other side. Various publications with detailed information on localities, local communities, history, etc. – it important, but everything you need for a traveller can be found on the Camino Lituano website. It is noted that the most important and best way to provide the necessary information is lively communication. According to the expert, co-operation between the community and travellers contributes greatly to tourism education. Finally, the experts were asked about the concept of hospitality and they highlighted the mutual understanding, hospitality, and cooperation between communities and pilgrims. The received responses showed that all five dimensions (see Figure 6) are closely related and important. Despite the negative feedback from several experts, it can be said that St. James’s Way in Lithuania is promising, pilgrims are already well aware of it and local people are increasingly involved in contribution to this way.

Finally, the experts wanted to share their additional insights about St. James’s Way in Lithuania, what was not asked about (see Figure 7).

Fig. 7. Additional Comments from Experts on the St. James’s Way in Lithuania



Here are some of the experts who shared more information about the activities of this way association, which is actively taking care of this pilgrimage way. For example, the Lithuanian Association of St. James’s Way Municipalities is one of those organizations that actively collaborates with the European St. James’s Way

Federation and actively contributes to the internationalization of this way. Another expert says that the Lithuanian Association of St. James’s Way Friends is initiative that has become the first step in Lithuanian way idea. There is also a willingness to share ideas about additional activities related to the way. Also one of the

specialists is interested in the development of the way, and he is interested in "how it will take place when the tourist flow increases" (Respondent No. 2). Another expert identified the Santiago de Compostela Declaration, which is important in describing the measures to be taken by the Europe Council in revitalizing St. James's Way tradition. Thus, in summary, there are a number of additional activities related to this way. It is important that the activities being developed are not reduced and further developed. Thanks to this issue, we have also learned about important activities of some organizations in Lithuania that cooperate with European organizations.

Summarizing the results of the interview, it can be stated that green pilgrimage tourism has excellent perspectives for successful development in Lithuania. The results show, that St. James's Way in Lithuania has elements that meet green pilgrimage.

5. CONCLUSIONS

1. Having analysed scientific literature and other sources about green pilgrimage it can be claimed that green pilgrimage has only begun in the 21st century, and the main problem being investigated is the damage caused by pilgrims to the sacred places. Green pilgrimage encourages pilgrims to travel more responsibly, rediscover the link with nature, support the local population, apply ecological principles in their activities every day. In order to succeed in spreading this idea, three organizations have been set up, one of which operates globally and the other two organizations are active in Europe.

2. Having reviewed the literature related to St. James's Way in Spain it is known that this way has been extensively visited by prayers since the ancient times. There is a section of St. James's Way in Lithuania, too, leading to Spain and becoming more and more popular over the world. Three organizations founded in Lithuania take care of the maintenance of this way: St. James's Way Friends Association, St. James's Way Municipalities Association and Camino Lituano Organization. At the moment, to prepare St. James's Way in Lithuania the founding work is carried out that is running smoothly.

3. The empirical study (a new green pilgrimage object - St. James's Way) showed that the perspectives for the development of green pilgrimage tourism are good, as respondents appreciated St. James's Way in Lithuania very much, which can be described as a purified object of this kind of tourism. Respondents see this way as a great opportunity for a foreigner to see Lithuania in the view of the local people and they

pointed out that St. James's Way will help attract more tourists from abroad, not only those who are interested or already have tried St. James's Way in Spain and would like to try this pilgrimage in Lithuania, but also those who didn't know about it. The study showed that the development and popularity of this pilgrimage would be driven by the development of infrastructure and the provision and establishment of missing services. According to the respondents, active involvement of the local communities into various activities on the way would contribute to their economic and social well-being, as local people willingly assist traveling pilgrims in their homes for overnight, rest, socializing, and providing the necessary information. Finally, there is still a lot of work to be done to bring out St. James's Way's negative effects in Lithuania, but experts are currently distinguishing really positive perspectives.

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