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Methodology of Pilgrimaging

Pilgrimaging is a religious phenomenon - an attempt made by man to find God. This search takes place during the human lifetime. The spiritual dimension of human pilgrimages towards God, has nevertheless its material equivalent in actual earthly space. It takes a form of a pilgrimage to a holy place with the hope to find God and to meet Him. Covering the pilgrimage space, between the starting point and the holy place, which is the destination of the pilgrimage, is connected with making some physical and spiritual effort. A pilgrim usually meets God already on the way, before he reaches the actual destination of the pilgrimage. Since the idea of pilgrimaging is concerned with the spiritual and material spheres of human life, it is a special social and cultural phenomenon.

This paper is a short reflection aiming to introduce some order into the complex pilgrimage phenomenon from the methodological point of view. It is only an intellectual touch pertaining to that subject, made without succumbing to the temptation of exhausting it. And maybe it presents yet another form of perceiving the pilgrimage phenomenon and pilgrimages.

The paper also presents the problem of the interdisciplinary character of pilgrimaging as an object of analysis and research, as well as various possible approaches, in particular a bipolar view of this multifaceted phenomenon.

The complexity and “interdisciplinary” character of the pilgrimage phenomenon

The pilgrimage phenomenon has existed in human life since the earliest days of history. It results from the nature of man, longing for the *sacred* and for communion with a loving God. At the same time, it is connected with the nature of man full of cognitive anxiety and his need to traverse the new or newly discovered parts of the world in order to quench his desires and longings. That is why pilgrimaging as a phenomenon accompanying the development of human civilisation is perceived and

analysed also as a subject of research. Being in its essence a religious phenomenon, thus situated in the research field of theology and other disciplines dealing with religion, pilgrimaging is also a subject of many other academic disciplines and of knowledge, in the broadest meaning of that term. As a research subject, because of its inner complexity, the problem of pilgrimaging is clearly interdisciplinary.

The interest in pilgrimaging as a religious and spiritual phenomenon is the axis and the core of all research interests (Fig. 1). Theological reflection concerning pilgrimaging should precede other reflections in order to make them compatible with the essential truth about that phenomenon. The search for God made by a pilgrim is a vital element contained in the pilgrimage phenomenon and it makes it possible to describe, identify and define it as a religious phenomenon. Theology and the science of religion should be able to answer the following question: *What does the search for God undertaken by a pilgrim, who moves within a determined pilgrimage space with that goal in mind, consist of?*

Pilgrimaging is also a social, psychological, cultural, economic and legal phenomenon, because it depends on the sphere of various human activities and it also influences it. It often influences its social, economic, political and cultural character. Pilgrimaging is also a classic chorological (spatial) phenomenon, whose form and intensity change in time. That is why, geographical and historical sciences, as well as all disciplines that analyse spatial phenomena and their changeability in time, have really much to say in the academic analysis of pilgrimaging. Pilgrimaging is a constituent of human culture, but also an active “culturogenous” factor. Frequently it even changes the natural and geographical landscape into sacral landscape, let alone the changes in the behaviour, customs and mentality of local communities and their regional differentiation. Involving the mobility of large masses of people, pilgrimaging is a part of the notion of migration. In the past it stimulated the development of settlement and communication patterns, as well as the whole technical and service infrastructure. And so it does at present. It also modifies the functions of the already existing structures. Like all social phenomena it requires legal regulations. Thus, the existence of such a large number of disciplines that deal with the pilgrimage phenomenon to various extent and from different points of view is hardly surprising. (Fig. 1).

Such a multidimensional phenomenon as pilgrimaging is conditioned by various natural, civilisation and cultural factors on the one hand, and by social, political, economic and legal ones on the other. But at the same time pilgrimaging brings about some particular natural, civilisation, cultural, social, political, economic and legal effects. Thus, the conditions and the consequences – the determining and the influence on the entire human existence – seem to be the two sides of the multifaceted pilgrimage phenomenon. We should remember this while undertaking its academic analysis.

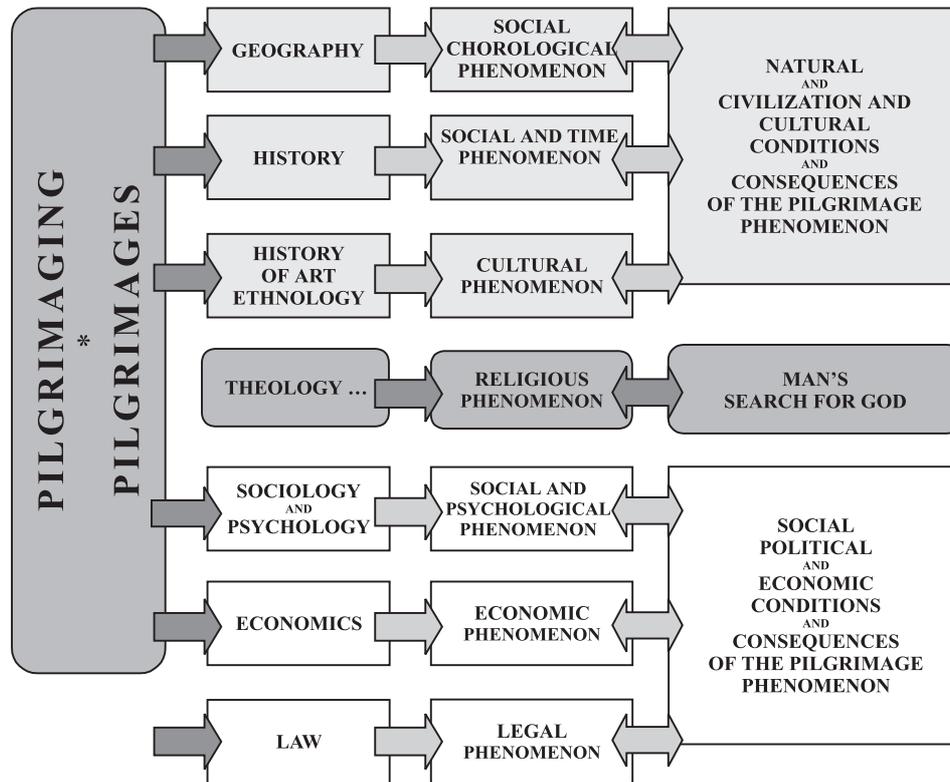


Fig. 1. The complexity and the "interdisciplinary" character of the pilgrimage phenomenon

The types of approaches to the pilgrimage phenomenon

The multifaceted nature of the pilgrimage phenomenon allows us to imagine the plethora of approaches, methods and techniques used by various disciplines for its analysis. At some level of generalisation we can reduce them to two types of approaches: theoretical (cognitive) and practical (applied), (tab.1). They attempt to describe the phenomenon in a particular way and they require certain skills of methodical activity.

The theoretical (cognitive) approach requires the identification ability, which is necessary to recognise the pilgrimage phenomenon among the related phenomena or to describe and characterise the phenomenon, to specify its characteristic features, especially the attributive features, but also the secondary ones. Lastly, it requires

Tab. 1.
Approaches to the pilgrimage phenomenon

APPROACH	Abilities / needs (desires)
THEORETICAL AND COGNITIVE	1. Ability to identify – to recognise the pilgrimage phenomenon, to distinguish it from other similar phenomena
	2. Ability to describe – to characterise the pilgrimage phenomenon, to specify its attributive and secondary features
	3. Ability to determine the context of the phenomenon – the background and conditions of pilgrimaging, as well as the diverse, anticipated consequences
PRACTICAL AND APPLICATIONAL	1. Ability to – think over – to plan a pilgrimage, – prepare – to organise it, – fulfil the plan and the programme, – conduct the pilgrimage – to be its guide
	2. Ability to use the pilgrimage – for educational purposes (development of man), – for educational and cognitive purpose
	3. Ability to present it for information purposes (e.g. for the media)

the ability to perceive and to determine the whole context of the phenomenon – the conditions of a pilgrimage, as well as its diverse, short-term and long-term anticipated effects.

The other approach – the practical (applied) one – is concerned with issues pertaining to the organisation of a pilgrimage and making use of it for various purposes. The applied approach requires some practical abilities, such as: contemplation, planning, preparing and organising a pilgrimage, implementing its programme in accordance with the accepted plan and mastering the skill of being a guide. The practical approach is also connected with the necessity and ability to make use of the pilgrimage mostly for educational and cognitive purposes. Thus it should become a

significant event in the life of a pilgrim. It ought to enrich him somehow and not just through providing him with external aesthetic and cognitive experience and fatigue. It is supposed to stimulate the inner, spiritual development of man. To a great extent this depends on the pilgrimage guide – his personality and skills. The educational and cognitive purposes of a pilgrimage should always constitute the peripheral and secondary goals, achieved as if “by chance.” The practical and applied approach also implies the ability to present the pilgrimage to the media and for informative purposes in such a way that the information about it should be presented truthfully and thoroughly. It should also encourage reflections.

Pilgrimage as a spiritual and religious phenomenon, which it is in the first place, should be analysed separately (tab.2). The approach chosen for that purpose aims at finding the answer to the following question: *What does it mean to wish (to desire) to experience a search for God “on the way” to a holy place* as pilgrimages always head for holy places. The second question is following: *What does it mean to be a pilgrim and what does the full participation in a pilgrimage consist in?* The composition of a pilgrimage, the diversity of its participants, and frequently also their individual expectations, approaches and motives make us ask these general questions: *What does it mean to be a pilgrim? Is every participant of a pilgrimage a pilgrim? Does participation in a pilgrimage mean being a pilgrim? What does the full participation in a pilgrimage mean? Is each instance of participation in a pilgrimage a full participation?*

Tab. 2.
Approaches to pilgrimage as a spiritual and religious phenomenon

APPROACH	Needs (desires)
SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS	1. To wish (desire) to undertake (experience) a search for God “on the way” to a holy place
	2. To be a pilgrim – to participate fully in a pilgrimage

Bipolar Analysis of the Pilgrimage Phenomenon

The interdisciplinary character of the interest in the pilgrimage phenomenon enables its multifaceted study. A bipolar view seems to be very useful here. In the diagram (Fig. 2) are presented some aspects of the phenomenon grouped into pairs.

The phenomenon is viewed as if from two poles – two opposed places. It is easy to observe, however, that the bipolar view has some features of the complementary perception of the pilgrimage phenomenon. It seems that light is cast on it from two different points and because of that it is better and more completely visible.

The complementary nature of the bipolar view of pilgrimaging is visible already in the first pair of its basic aspects. There is *God*, on the one hand, and on the other a *man* trying to find God and to come close to Him. God appoints man to search for

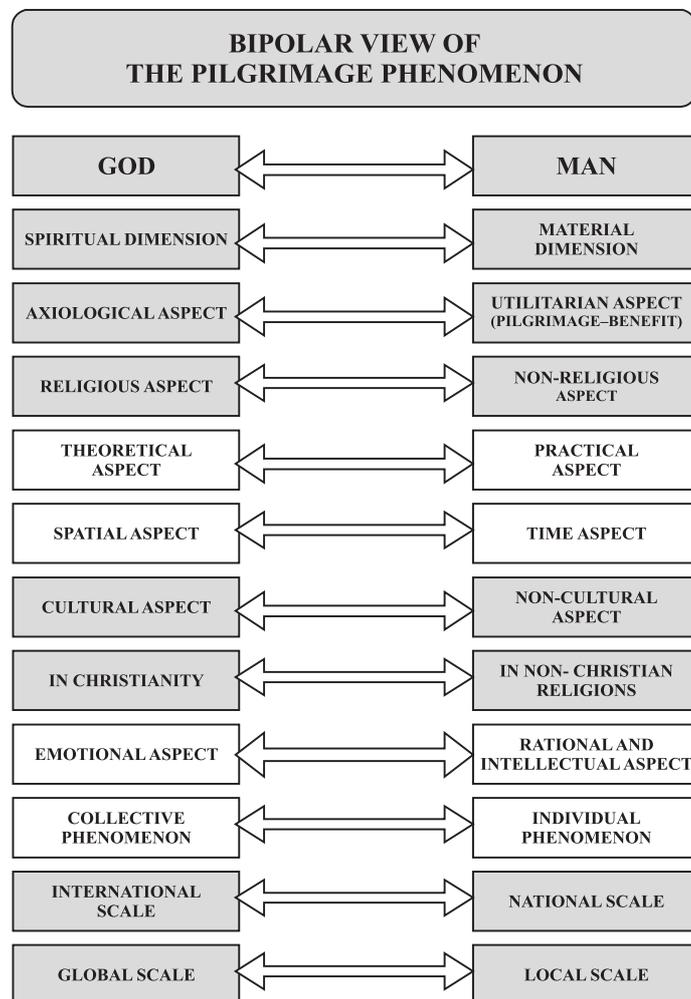


Fig. 2.
Bipolar view of the pilgrimage phenomenon

Him and to find Him. God wants to be found and allows man to “discover” Him. He helps man by bestowing numerous gifts and graces upon him in order to make the pilgrim’s search effective, to make man see Him, become closer to Him and get immersed in God’s Love,

A pilgrimage has a distinct *spiritual* dimension on the one hand and a *material* one on the other. The spiritual dimension makes a pilgrim concentrate on the search for God, while the material one focuses on covering, often with much effort, the pilgrimage space that hides somewhere the main pilgrimage destination. And God can be discovered “on the way” in nature – in the pilgrimage environment or in one of the holy places visited on the way or at the end of the pilgrimage trail.

For a pilgrim a pilgrimage has a special value (*axiological* aspect), but to a tourist agency that organises it brings a measurable material profit (*utilitarian* aspect). The analysis can be even wider if the phenomenon is lit from two poles (*religious* aspect and *non-religious* aspect) in a different way. Pilgrimages are a religious phenomenon and this claim does not have to be proved. Nowadays, however, when the number of pilgrimages and pilgrims is growing, they require efficient organisation. We face the non-religious aspect when for commercial reasons special institutions (tourist agencies) take part in organising a pilgrimage. Organisation as such is basically a non-religious activity, but when it is not commissioned to a specialised tourist agency many participants of a pilgrimage are involved in making arrangements concerning transportation, providing of food, accommodation and health services, etc. They do it in the atmosphere of love and free of charge. The services rendered for fellow-pilgrims become a form of participation in a pilgrimage. Under such circumstances the non-religious activities, such as providing food or communication, assume some special significance. In a way they become sacred.

A pilgrimage can be analysed in a *theoretical* and a *practical* aspect. The former is characteristic of the typically academic approach, while the latter is connected with the sphere of tourism economics, which experiences vivid development and involves also rendering services for the pilgrimage movement.

An exceptionally important instance of bipolar view is the analysis in terms of the *space* and *time* aspects. Pilgrimage is a space phenomenon, since it takes place on a certain way leading from some starting point to some destination. It involves covering a certain pilgrimage space and environment. At this point we can also take into account yet another form of chorological view – pilgrimage *within a country, a continent, the whole globe* – coming to know the network of pilgrimage trails and holy places.

On the other hand, however, pilgrimage is a *time* phenomenon – a pilgrimage takes some particular amount of time – several hours or several days. A longer duration time requires a bigger effort, but it also enhances fuller development of reflections, thoughts, prayers and contemplation. The “*time*” approach includes also the development of the phenomenon throughout history of mankind, from the most ancient time until the present day. This aspect clearly points to the universal

and timeless nature of the pilgrimage phenomenon, which is inscribed in the nature of the earthly existence of man.

We can see that the juxtaposed “poles” of view allow us in a way to extend the field of pilgrimage characterisation. They enable its fuller description and an outlook into the core of the phenomenon. Obviously, these are only selected examples that suggest one method of describing and analysing the phenomenon.

The above-presented free reflection shows how many possibilities of the academic analysis of the pilgrimage phenomenon there are. It seems necessary to apply a more general approach, which could validate pilgrimages and pilgrimaging not just as a subject of practical considerations but also of theoretical ones, thus making it a significant part of the research of the geography of religion. Of course, only a certain way of perceiving and discussing the pilgrimage phenomenon is presented in this article and it has by no means been exhausted.

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