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The Sacred Space of Fatima as Perceived and Experienced by Foot Pilgrims

Introduction

This article is based upon a paper presented at the *IV International Meeting of Sanctuary and Pilgrimage Towns* (Fatima, 10 – 13th October 2001), on the theme of *Foot Pilgrimage: from the Past to the Future*. It is a brief reflection upon the subject of the foot pilgrim, essentially from a geographical perspective, although with interdisciplinary aspects, which forms part of a wider research project into the whole diverse heterogeneous phenomenon of the pilgrimage to Fatima.

It is for me a great honour to be able to describe for this journal some of the aspects of pilgrimages to the shrine of Fatima in Portugal. This comes in response to the kind invitation of Professor Antoni Jackowski, whom I would also like to thank for his collaboration to my research, which has enabled me to understand better the important contribution of Polish geographers to the field of Geography of Religion, a subject in which Professor Jackowski has worldwide renown.

This article is essentially concerned with the way in which the pilgrims perceive the sacred space of the Sanctuary that is the goal of their journey. Consequently, I have concentrated upon the qualitative dimension of the pilgrimage phenomenon, rather than the quantitative.

This work has two main objectives:

- To briefly examine some of the Human Geographical aspects of the foot pilgrimage phenomenon - *the spatial approach*;
- To present some of the data collected in the survey of foot pilgrims (their profile, experiences and perceptions) carried out at Cova da Iria – *the territorial approach*.

Combining both perspectives, we attempt to get a better understanding of the visitors that flock to Fatima, as real men and women and not merely as statistical data. Special attention is given to the foot pilgrims, who have had a profound effect upon the image of the Sanctuary itself and the routes leading to it.

1. Fatima as Sanctuary-City and Pilgrimage Centre

For those who are unfamiliar with the story of Fatima, it is perhaps useful to begin with a brief recollection of the events that led to the establishment of the Sanctuary.

In 1917, between 13th May and 13th October, three shepherd children who were watching their small flock in a place called Cova da Iria, claimed to have witnessed six apparitions of Our Lady and to have heard her religious message. The children were the brother and sister, Francisco and Jacinta (aged 9 and 7 respectively), and their cousin Lucia (aged 10) who is still alive. Francisco and Jacinta were beatified by Pope John Paul II, who travelled to Fatima for the purpose on 13th May 2000.

At the village of Aljustrel where the shepherd children lived, 2 km from Cova da Iria, we can see today three buildings that have been preserved, in an attempt to recreate the typical houses of this mountainous region at the time of the 1917 events. This is one of the few attempts to link culture and territory, indispensable for the reinforcement of memory, albeit symbolically, as it concerns the very residence of the main characters behind the Fatima phenomenon.

It was the awareness of the need to maintain at least some reference points related to identity in a context of growing decharacterisation of the landscape that



Sanctuary of Fatima
Sanktuarium w Fatimie - widok ogólny
(fot. D. Ptaszycka-Jackowska)

led the Sanctuary administration to undertake the restoration and protection of part of the route between Aljustrel and Cova da Iria covered by the little shepherds, as far as the so-called Hungarian Calvary¹ in Valinhos, keeping some of the local environmental features.

The importance and strength of religious phenomena is well illustrated in the case of Fatima, which, in just over eight decades, has changed from a mountainous, largely uninhabited, pasturing land, into an urban centre, upon which 5 or 6 million people converge every year.

Figure 1 contains a map which contextualises Fatima within the wider framework of the Portuguese territory, in national and ecclesiastical terms (dioceses).

The Sanctuary occupies a central position within the urban area of the city of Fatima. As such, it constitutes a unique example in Portugal of a city that developed out of a religious event. The religious function is so fundamental to the origins and subsequent development of Fatima that, having gained legal and administrative status in 1997, it has become a true Sanctuary city.

From whatever perspective one chooses to measure the importance of this Sanctuary, whether by size, breadth of catchment area or total number of visitors per year, its great religious significance, in national and international terms, is undeniable.

In fact, the Sanctuary was not merely the site upon which the urban area was constructed, it was the very reason for its existence, since the town is almost entirely oriented towards the pilgrims and tourists (religious houses, hotels, restaurants, shops, etc).

Although it began as a pilgrimage centre, and continues to be one, Fatima has



Fig. 1.
Fatima on the Diocese
map of Portugal
Fatima na tle podziału
diecezjalnego Portugalii.
Source: Anuário Católico de Portugal,
1996:49

also gradually become a focus of religious tourism; in addition to the numerous pilgrims, many religious tourist groups of different nationalities converge upon this site from all over the Catholic world.

2. Foot Pilgrimage as a Specific Form of Geographical Displacement

Pilgrimage is a very specific form of temporary migration, given the challenge it offers to common presuppositions about human mobility. Under normal circumstances, man prefers to make use of the fastest and most comfortable form of transport, and the best, most direct routes available in order to arrive at his destination.

When on a pilgrimage, however, particularly when on foot, hardship is actively sought and desired, since the goal to be attained is not only a determinate point on the earth's surface, but also an objective of a spiritual nature, according to which the displacement may be seen as a means to perfection and asceticism. Thus, even the most tiring, slow and uncomfortable journey is liable to be experienced as spiritually gratifying, and offers an opportunity for the pilgrim to make contact with himself and with the transcendent.



The three little shepherd's: Jacinta,
Francisco and Lúcia
Pastuszkowie z Fatimy: Hiacynta,
Franciszek i Łucja

Consequently, this kind of spatial displacement should not be seen in the same way as other journeys, such as tourism or even pilgrimage by modern means of transport. While those journeys are measured in kilometres or hours of travel, pilgrimages are calculated on the basis of the effort and commitment/sacrifice needed, which is converted into a spiritual energy, hope factor, conversion, grace obtained or to be obtained, etc.

The current popularity of foot pilgrimages, particularly amongst the urban populations and younger age brackets considered remote from religious practices, is certainly due to the radicalism that these entail, and to the desire for a greater discipline and authenticity, often associated with cultural and environmental interests. This is particularly evident in the increase in the use of the pilgrimage routes to Santiago, recorded in recent years.

As regards Fatima, there has also been a similar trend, although without



The Lucia's house in Aljustrel village
Dom siostry Łucji w Aljustrel
(fot. D. Ptaszycka-Jackowska)

the same historical weight. As Cristino observed (2001:195), “foot pilgrimage is a phenomenon that does not appear to be diminishing”.

In the first of the *Rotas Marianas – Caminhos de Fátima (Marian Routes – Paths of Fatima)*, which describes the journey between Lisbon and Cova da Iria (the so-called *River Tagus Route*), the initiative promoters write that it arises from the “need to provide foot pilgrims to Fatima with safe and pleasant routes, where cars are replaced by walkers and the industrial belts of the great urban centres give way to rural landscapes of great cultural value”.

Thus, while pilgrimages today take on many different forms, often very different from the tradition model² (some having features in common with tourism, namely as a kind of religious tourism), the foot pilgrimage stands out as a particularly significant means of motivated religious displacement.

The example of Fatima is, in this light, especially suggestive. As is pointed out below, foot pilgrims represent today a very modest sector of the crowds that flock to the site, although they occupy a significant place in the imaginative world of the Sanctuary, as demonstrated by the preferential attention accorded them in the media.

It would not be unreasonable to assert that foot pilgrimage has an important part to play in the construction of the *brand image* of the social phenomenon that Fa-

tima has become; that is to say, it is one of the characteristics of its territorial identity. Indeed, one of the most well-known contemporary geographers of religion has said “what makes Fatima different from the majority of the major pilgrimage centres of Western Europe is the strong tradition of walking pilgrimages” (Jackowski, 1996: 174).

Certain types of sacred place probably nourish and are nourished by these fluxes that are associated with them: can anyone conceive of Santiago de Compostela without its *routes* and its typical pilgrims, or imagine the roads that lead to Fatima on the days before the 13th of May deserted of the files of travellers straggling along the sides of the road?

3. Fatima Foot Pilgrims: a Brief Description

Even if it were not our main focus here, there is a clear need to determine the approximate number of foot-pilgrims and the respective relative weight of the total movement of people at Fatima.

3.1. Estimate of the number of foot pilgrims



Statue of Our Lady of Fatima
in Apparitions Chapel
Figura Matki Bożej Fatimskiej
w Kaplicy Objawień
(fot. A. Koliba)

This section is based upon information gathered from surveys carried out between November 2000 and October 2001 amongst visitors at Cova da Iria³, using a sampling method that attempted to be statistically representative and scientifically objective. It corresponds to those respondents who claimed to have made all or part of their journey to Fatima on foot.

We thus obtained a general idea about pilgrims throughout the period of a year, in an attempt to cover the maximum number of situations, and not only the so-called ‘high season’ of Fatima (May to October)⁴, given that this seasonal tendency seems to be attenuated by a weekend flux throughout the year. Thus, the proportion of those that travelled on foot (3,3% of all surveyed) is not far from the percentage in real terms of this specific category of pilgrims of all annual visitors to Fatima.

In fact, an estimation based upon 1984 data gives a figure of between 75,000 and 95,000 foot pilgrims⁵, at a pe-

riod when the total annual number of visitors would have been approximately 3 to 4 million people, meaning that they represent a percentage of 2-3% per cent.

As data collected by the SEPE (Pilgrim Service) indicates that the figure today would be approximately 50% more (5 to 6 million), we can suggest two possible scenarios. In the first, this proportion would not be substantially altered, meaning that the annual total of foot pilgrims would presently be between 100,000 and 180,000. In the second, based on the representativity of the random sample in our survey, there would be a certain increase in the relative weight of foot pilgrims over the last fifteen years, which means that, when we apply the percentage of 3,3% arrived at from the survey, we get an annual total of foot pilgrims in the order of 165,000 to 198,000.

3.2. Profile of the foot pilgrim

As regards the profile of foot pilgrims, they are of Portuguese nationality (100%), Catholic (of which 68% claim to be lay observant persons), mostly female (55%), and relatively young, between 18 and 33 (45%), although other age-groups are represented with 32% (34-49), 18% (50-65) and 5% (over 65 years).

In terms of marital status, there is a clear balance of married (55%) and single people (41%), with widowhood representing 5%. As for the population agglomerations from where they set out and where they reside, respondents could be divided between urban (41%), suburban (14%) and rural populations (45%).

Most foot pilgrimages take place in May (27%) or in the summer months (46%, with the following distribution: June – 18%; July – 5%; August – 14%; September – 9%) and also in October (18%). It should also be noted that, despite the fact that the months of the *low season* in Fatima (November to April) are naturally less suitable in terms of weather and less significant from the point of view of religious events, 10% of pilgrims still choose this period for their foot pilgrimages.

As regards academic qualifications, 55% of pilgrims have attended some of the phases of the nine years of compulsory education in Portugal (Primary



Angel's place
Miejsce, w którym dzieciom
ukazał się Anioł
(fot. D. Ptaszycka-Jackowska)



The path of penance
Ścieżka pokuty
(fot. D. Ptaszycka-Jackowska)

School - 23%; Upper Primary School - 32%), while 27% of those surveyed attended Secondary School and 14% higher education (undergraduate and graduate). Only 5% were illiterate.

In terms of profession, many respondents were in the tertiary sector (41%) or did not work (27% - students; 14% - housewives); less people were employed in the primary and secondary sectors (5% and 14% respectively).

As for place of origin, many of these pilgrims were from Lisbon diocese (23%), from the dioceses of Leiria-Fatima, Coimbra, Santarem and Aveiro (each one with 14%). This is easily understandable given the demographic importance of the former and proximity of the latter (see Fig. 1).

As regards the organisation of the journey, most people chose to do the pilgrimage in a group (64%), although these were almost always informal groups (86% of those), consisting of the respondent themselves, family members and/or friends; the relative spontaneity of these initiatives seems to be underlined by the fact that only 14% were organised by religious bodies (parishes, dioceses, movements etc.).

4. Foot pilgrims to Fatima motivations, experiences and perceptions of the space

One of the important aspects of the survey carried out at Cova da Iria concerned the way in which its visitors experienced and perceived the sacred space. Particularly important were the territorial symbols that they selected, and the degree of sacredness that they attributed to different parts of the Sanctuary and to other

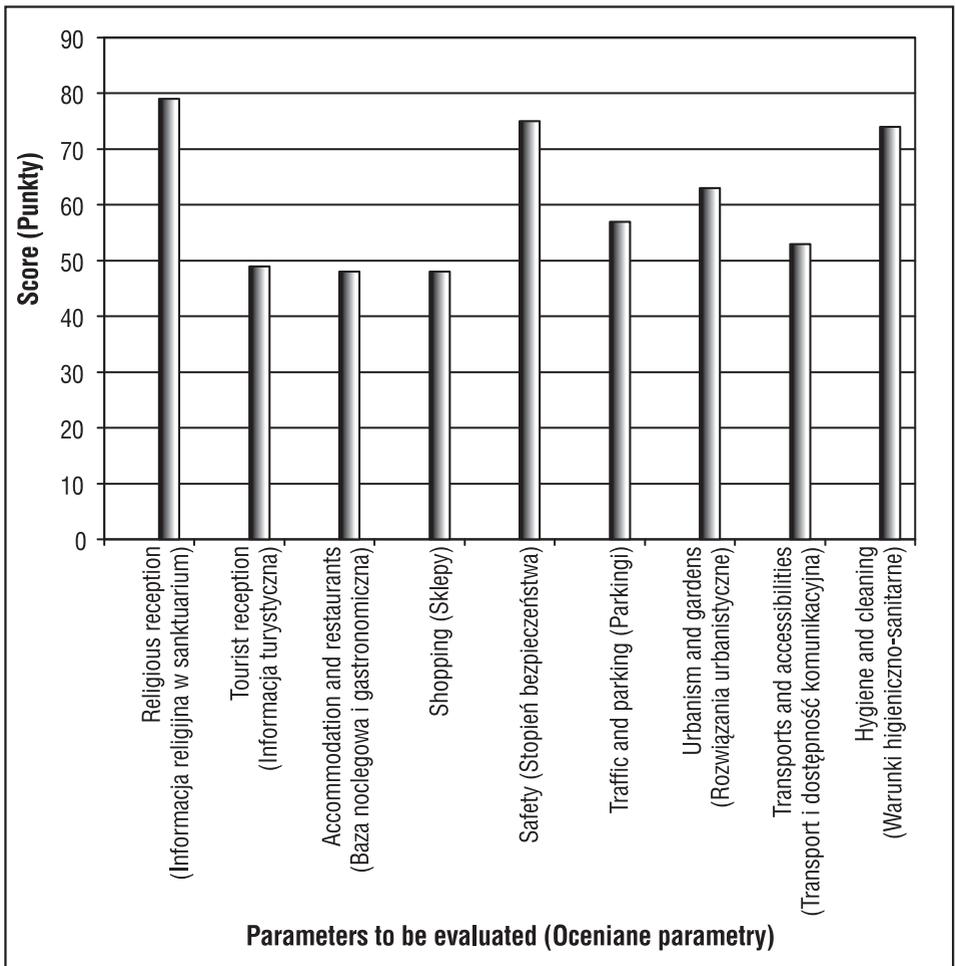


Fig. 2.
Pilgrims assessment of the city of Fatima
Sanktuarium i miasto Fatima w ocenie pielgrzymów

places in the vicinity that, although not officially part of the compound, were part of the religious story of the Fatima phenomena.

In fact, pilgrimage is in some way “a parenthesis in the life of the believer: he removes himself for some time from his life space, from his territory” (Bertrand & Muller, 1999: 62) of everyday, temporarily replaced by a religious territoriality anchored in sacred space, which explains the behaviour and attitudes revealed here by pilgrims, in accordance with their values and beliefs.

As might be expected, since the foot pilgrim is still today the paradigm of the *pure* pilgrim, whose motivation is exclusively or mainly religious, 95% of respondents considered themselves as such, while 5% considered themselves to be simultaneously pilgrims and tourists. In this context, it is worthwhile noting the clear disagreement manifested by approximately two thirds of respondents at the suggestion that their trip to Fatima was a way of occupying free time.

The main reasons given by pilgrims for the decision to embark upon the journey to Fatima were to do with the fulfilment of a vow⁶ or with the need to give thanks for grace received. When the respondents were allowed a maximum of two justifications for their pilgrimage, 64% claimed to be fulfilling vows, 59% as thanksgiving and 23% simply to pray.

Given this strong concern with vows, it may be possible to understand the pilgrimage primarily as the result of the fulfilment of a duty of a religious nature (around 73% of respondents fell into this category), despite the fact that pilgrimage cannot be considered by the Catholic as a binding religious obligation.

Probably because of this considerable religious motivation, all respondents claimed that the trip was really very gratifying and enriching from the spiritual point of view. This is despite the fact that half the people interviewed considered that the physical effort expended in the trip was *hard and tiring* (41% classified it as *moderate and bearable* and 9% *easy and not tiring*). Clearly, then, the journey was being valued in itself.

The same conclusion can also be drawn from the fact that, in many cases, pilgrims stayed a very short time at their destination: 77% of foot pilgrims returned home on the same day of arrival and only 23% stayed one to three days in Fatima.

Despite the short length of their stay, the foot pilgrims that we interviewed, many of whom use to visit Fatima with some frequency, still had opinions about the different aspects of the services available to them and about the city itself, assessing it through a classification system ranging from 1 (*completely unsatisfactory*) to 5 (*very satisfactory*). The responses were then summed to obtain a global score (see Fig. 2).

Both the *religious reception* extended to the pilgrims and the sense of *safety* experienced in the town were the parameters that were valued most highly, closely followed by *hygiene and cleaning* of public spaces. At an intermediate level, were *urbanism and gardens* and *traffic and parking*. Items such as *transports and accessibilities*, *tourist reception*, *shopping* and *accommodation and restaurants* scored lower.

We believe that this evaluation could be useful in order to make the relevant authorities aware of pilgrims' expectations, reasons for satisfaction and also disappointments experienced in Fatima.

We also sought to assess the main symbolic element that pilgrims associated with Fatima. In an inquiry carried out to this effect, they were asked to decide which of the various symbols present at the Sanctuary they considered the most emblematic, permitting immediate identification as the sacred place in reference. In the case of the foot pilgrims, the majority (86%) chose the image of Our Lady worshiped at Cova da Iria as being the one that best symbolises Fatima, while a mere 9% preferred the Chapel of the Apparitions itself, where the statue is commonly displayed, or choose the holm-oak tree (5%).

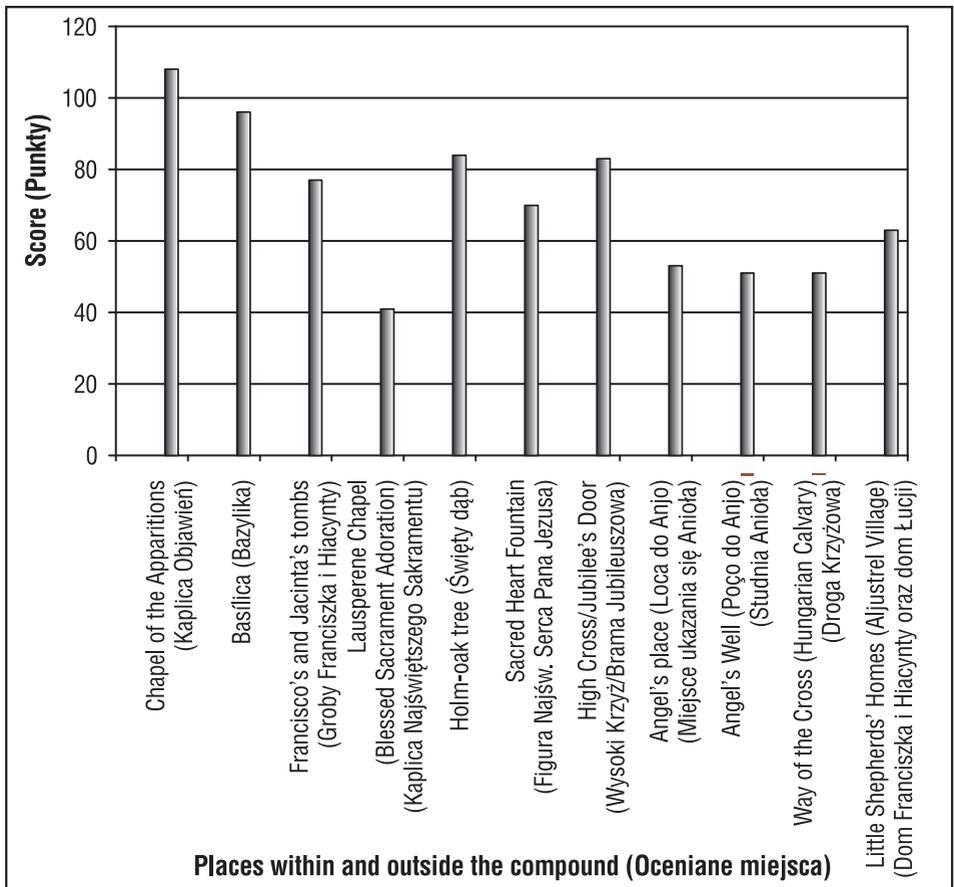


Fig. 3.

Places within and outside the compound
Sakralność wybranych miejsc w Fatimie w ocenie pielgrzymów



Procession with the statue of Our Lady of Fatima
Procesja z figurą Matki Bożej Fatimskiej
(fot. D. Ptaszycka-Jackowska)

Indeed, the cult of Mary, intrinsic to the Sanctuary of Fatima, is also evident in responses to the question about the recipient of their prayers and devotions when they are here: approximately 64% of foot pilgrims stated that they directed their prayers preferentially to Our Lady, with the rest praying directly to God.

Another aspect of the inquiry was related to the degree of sacredness attributed to different sites of religious interest at Fatima, thus permitting a differentiation of the space according to the perceptions felt and expressed by the pilgrims.

While interpretations of space always contain an affective and emotional component and can never be considered as exclusively rational and quantitative, this is particularly true as regards the eminently subjective determination of the degree of sacredness of different places. The distinction is not made on the basis of the effective importance of the place in theological or ecclesiastical terms, assessed objectively, but through the feeling that each person reveals. In this case, respondents were asked to evaluate a cluster of sacred spots, attributing points to them on a scale of 1 (*not at all sacred*) to 5 (*very sacred*).

We are aware that the perception of the sacred is not easily translated into numerical terms. Nevertheless, from the responses obtained, it was possible to visualise the relationship between man and the geographical space, touched, as Fatima

was, by phenomena of the *explosion of the supernatural* that confer upon it the character of a sacred space. This will subsequently be interpreted by individuals, in the light of their particular faith, and their knowledge of the events behind this religious centre or the use to which it is put in terms of rituals and other practices.

Figure 3 shows the total number of points, which, on a scale of 1 to 5, were attributed to the different places according to their perceived degree of sacredness. As can be seen in the graph, the *Chapel of the Apparitions* is considered the most sacred place in the compound, which is not surprising as it is the initial site where the events of 1917 took place, being thus the religious epicentre of the precinct.

The *Basilica* is also highly rated, being a great temple and, in a sense, the focal point of the whole architectural structure of the Sanctuary. The *tombs of the Beatified Francisco and Jacinta*, although situated inside the Basilica but considered separately for this purpose, are seen as less sacred, indeed on almost the same level as the *High Cross/Jubilee Door*, which marks the entrance into the religious compound, thus clearly defining the boundary between sacred and profane space.

Particularly interesting is the high degree of sacredness conferred upon the *holm-oak (quercus rotundifolia)*, situated next to the little Chapel, and which many believe to be the original tree, above which the apparitions took place, but that no more exists. Manifestations of the supernatural are often associated with certain elements of nature, which are themselves seen to be sacred, or, as happens here, are endowed with a sacred character through their association to religious occurrences.

A similar observation may be made concerning the classification of the *Sacred Heart Fountain*, where many pilgrims collect water to take home with them, in an attempt to prolong the effects of the pilgrimage.

In contrast to these, little sacredness was associated with the *Lausperene Chapel (Blessed Sacrament Adoration)*, resulting from a general lack of knowledge about its existence as a place of personal and not crowd worship (55% of respondents claimed that they had had no information about it).

Outside the compound, other reference points associated with the Apparitions (*Angel's place - Loka do Anjo, Angel's Well - Poço do Anjo, Way of the Cross/Hungarian Calvary and little Shepherds' Homes*) were given by the pilgrims almost equal status as regards degree of sacredness, which is understandable given their less well-known role and greater distance from the centre of religious activities (Cova da Iria).

In general terms, almost everyone (95% of people interviewed) agreed completely that Fatima should be determined a sacred place. For 73% of those, the Sanctuary is a *unique and irreplaceable* place or at least an *important place* (23%); only 4% considered that there are various sites that compared to it.

Therefore, it is not surprising that around two thirds of respondents consider that the title of *Altar of the World (Altar do Mundo)* to be an appropriate epithet for Fatima. For the rest, the most appropriate would be the *Sanctuary of Portugal* (23%) or the *Sanctuary of the Diocese of Leiria-Fatima* (14%).



Pilgrims light special candles behind the Chapel of the Apparitions
 Za Kaplicą Objawień pielgrzymi zapalają świece
 (fot. D. Ptaszycka-Jackowska)

In any case, it is the *Message* that was revealed here in 1917 that most distinguishes Fatima from other religious sites, in the opinion of almost all respondents (95%).

Final note

If, from the religious point of view, the *foot pilgrimage* is a traditional form of spirituality to be rediscovered (it has been said that, in this way, *one prays with one's feet*), it may also be seen as the affirmation of a certain territorial identity and, therefore, the importance of foot pilgrims exceeds its mere quantitative expression.

For this reason, pilgrims ought to be supported in their journeys of faith and accorded a suitable reception at their arrival, both by church bodies and by public and civic organisations. They demonstrate a certain authenticity that gives force/power to an image of a religious spirit that refuses to be trivialised by mass forms of travel. As such, it contributes to the vitality of the Sanctuary itself, reinforcing its specific nature.

In the face of growing globalisation, in which everything, everywhere, is being equalised, the foot pilgrims may also play a part in accentuating the difference.

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- ¹ Named after the Hungarian Catholics who offered it, having been in exile in Western World (inaugurated 12th May 1964). Here we can see the stone walls (made of local materials) and the vegetation characteristic of this mountainous terrain. This place is perhaps one of the few tranquil spots in the area, an example of a felicitous linking of a religious route (Way of the Cross) with a natural track.
- ² This model originated in the Middle Ages, as the pioneers in the geographical study of religious facts point out; “the Catholic pilgrims of medieval Europe were essentially foot pilgrims; the pilgrims’ staff became legendary, as the religious routes were basically pedestrian, sometimes no more than simple footpaths” (Deffontaines, 1948: 312).
- ³ From data supplied by the Leiria/Fatima Tourist Board and the Pilgrim Service (SEPE), it has been possible to calculate the number of foreigners (20%) and Portuguese (80%), out of a total of 668 surveys undertaken at random times and days throughout the period of fieldwork, within the Sanctuary precinct.
- ⁴ Strictly speaking, “Fatima begins its main pilgrim season at Easter, even before the month of May” (Guerra, 1992a: 26).
- ⁵ According to the Sanctuary administration, “on the basis of counts made at Pombal, town where pilgrims converge from the North, North-East and East Central region, we can presume that the number of foot pilgrims ranges between 3000 and 30,000. The upper figure will be noted in May, while in August, there may be 15,000 and, in the other months, from 5000 to 3000” (Guerra, 1992b:51).
- ⁶ This appears to be common to other kinds of pilgrimage. In general, “the main motivations for the pilgrim appear to be devotion, fulfilment of a vow, and the quest for a calm spiritual atmosphere. There are many pilgrims who have made vows” (Cristino, *op. cit.*, p. 197).

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Percepcja przestrzeni sakralnej Fatimy przez pieszych pielgrzymów

(STRESZCZENIE)

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie fenomenu pielgrzymowania pieszego do sanktuarium w Fatimie w czasach współczesnych, zwłaszcza w kontekście osobistych doświadczeń i przeżyć pielgrzymów. Głównym przedmiotem rozważań autorka uczyniła:

- zjawisko pielgrzymowania pieszego w ujęciu geografii humanistycznej
- prezentację pieszych pielgrzymek do Fatimy (struktura ruchu pielgrzymkowego, percepcja przestrzeni sakralnej).

Artykuł oparty jest na materiale przedstawionym przez autorkę podczas IV Międzynarodowego Kongresu Sanktuariorów i Miast Pielgrzymkowych, który miał miejsce w Fatimie, od 10 do 13 października 2001 r. Podjęta tematyka rozpatrywana jest zasadniczo z perspektywy geograficznej, z uwzględnieniem jednak jej interdyscyplinarnego charakteru. Ponieważ podstawowym pytaniem, na które autorka poszukuje odpowiedzi jest sposób postrzegania przez pielgrzymów przestrzeni sakralnej sanktuarium i miasta, dlatego prowadzone badania i analizy miały bardziej wymiar jakościowy aniżeli ilościowy.

W początkowej części artykułu została krótko przedstawiona geneza ośrodka, związana z objawieniami Matki Bożej. O powstaniu i rozwoju Fatimy jako centrum pielgrzymkowego z pewnością zadecydowała i nadal decyduje funkcja religijna. To dzięki niej można mówić o fenomenie Fatimy, która z małej pasterskiej osady stała się wysokozurbanizowanym ośrodkiem o znaczeniu międzynarodowym, przyjmującym rocznie 5-6 mln pielgrzymów i turystów. Miasto jest prawie całkowicie nastawione na obsługę pielgrzymów. W celu związania historycznych miejsc z dzisiejszym obrazem sanktuarium i miasta specjalną ochroną objęto obszar między Cova de Iria (miejsce objawień, dzisiejsze sank-

tuarium) a Aljustrel (wioska, w której mieszkali wizjonerzy, obecnie w granicach Fatimy). Powstały tam stacje Drogi Krzyżowej, a w samym Aljustrel zachowano oryginalne domy Łucji oraz Hiacynty i Franciszka. Stanowią one przykład typowego dawnego budownictwa górskiego w tym regionie Portugalii i niewątpliwie wzbogacają walory kulturowe miasta. Jest to ważne również z tego względu, iż w ostatnich latach Fatima staje się znaczącym centrum szeroko pojętej turystyki religijnej.

Wśród pielgrzymujących do sanktuarium w Fatimie, piesi pielgrzymi stanowią ok. 3%.

W ujęciu liczbowym (w zależności od przyjętego źródła danych i metody obliczeń) wielkości te przedstawiają się następująco:

a) 100 000-180 000 rocznie (na podstawie danych porównawczych z 1984 r., przy założeniu, że piesi pielgrzymi stanowią 2-3 % ogółu pątników)

b) 165 000 – 185 000 rocznie (na podstawie badań prowadzonych od listopada 2000 r. do października 2001 r. przez Fatima Tourist Board and the Pilgrim Service).

Wśród sanktuariów położonych w Europie Zachodniej Fatima zdecydowanie wyróżnia się wysoką liczbą przybywających tutaj pielgrzymów pieszych. Trasą mającą szczególne znaczenie dla podążających pieszo jest droga z Lizbony do Fatimy (Cova de Iria) t.zw. Caminhos de Fátima.

Podstawą poniższych analiz stały się badania przeprowadzone na reprezentatywnej grupie przybywających pieszo do Fatimy w okresie od listopada 2000 r. do października 2001 r.

Uzyskana ogólna charakterystyka pieszych pielgrzymów przedstawia się następująco: w 100% są to Portugalczycy i katolicy, w większości kobiety (55%). W strukturze wiekowej dominują ludzie stosunkowo młodzi: od 18 do 33 lat (45%). Grupa od 34 do 49 lat stanowi 32%, a grupa powyżej 50 lat – 23%.

Uwzględniając status rodzinny pielgrzymów zauważa się niewielką przewagę ludzi żonatych (55%). Najwięcej osób pochodzi z ośrodków wiejskich (45%) i wielkomiejskich (41%).

Szczyt pielgrzymowania przypada w maju (27%), w miesiącach letnich (od czerwca do października –46%) oraz w październiku (18%).

Biorąc pod uwagę wykształcenie pątników najliczniejszą grupę stanowią osoby z wykształceniem podstawowym i gimnazjalnym (55%). Pątnicy z wykształceniem wyższym to 14 % pielgrzymów. Zaskakująco duża jest liczba studentów – 27%.

Zasięg terytorialny pieszego pielgrzymowania do Fatimy ograniczony jest głównie do diecezji położonych w stosunkowo niewielkiej odległości od sanktuarium, najwięcej z diecezji lizbońskiej (23%), a następnie z diecezji: Leiria-Fatima, Coimbra, Santarem i Aveiro (po 14%).

Jeżeli chodzi o organizację pielgrzymek to większość pątników przybywa w grupach, głównie jednak nieformalnych (rodzina, przyjaciele). Tylko 14% pielgrzymek organizowanych jest przez organizacje religijne (parafie, diecezje, ruchy religijne).

Prawie wszyscy respondenci pytani o motyw pielgrzymowania wymieniali wyłącznie motyw religijny (95%), jedynie 5% uważało się za równocześnie za pielgrzymów i turystów. Głównym powodem podjęcia wędrowki do Fatimy było wypełnienie złożonego

ślubu lub podziękowanie za otrzymane łaski. Pobyt w Fatimie w większości przypadków był krótki, 77% wracało jeszcze tego samego dnia do swego miejsca zamieszkania. Pozostali zatrzymywali się na okres od jednego do trzech dni.

Kolejna grupa badanych zagadnień dotyczyła stopnia rozwoju infrastruktury na terenie sanktuarium i miasta (ryc. 2). Najwyżej zostały ocenione: informacja religijna na terenie sanktuarium, stan bezpieczeństwa i warunki higieniczno-sanitarne. Najniżej oceniono: informację turystyczną, bazę noclegową i gastronomiczną.

W doświadczeniu respondentów najbardziej charakterystycznym elementem symbolizującym sanktuarium jest figura Matki Bożej Fatimskiej (86% respondentów). Z innych elementów wymieniano Kaplicę Objawień (9%) oraz święty dąb (5%). Kult Matki Bożej odgrywa niezwykle ważną rolę w sanktuarium, 64% pieszych pielgrzymów w swych modlitwach zwracało się bezpośrednio do Maryi.

Respondenci pytani byli również o stopień sakralności poszczególnych miejsc w Fatimie. Za najświętsze miejsce pielgrzymi uznali Kaplicę Objawień, miejsce, w którym w 1917 r. objawiła się Matka Boska. Na drugim miejscu znalazła się bazylika będąca głównym punktem w architektonicznej kompozycji sanktuarium. Zaskakująco wysoko oceniono też Wysoki Krzyż i Bramę Jubileuszową, święty dąb oraz figurę Najświętszego Serca Pana Jezusa. Wysoki Krzyż z Bramą Jubileuszową stanowią swoistą granicę między strefą sacrum a strefą profanum. Cześć jaką otaczany jest dąb, rosnący w pobliżu Kaplicy Objawień, wynika z wiary wielu pielgrzymów, iż jest to oryginalne drzewo, nad którym ukazywała się Maryja. Z kolei figura Najświętszego Serca Pana Jezusa wznosi się nad studnią, z której pielgrzymi zabierają do domów wodę, wierząc w jej cudowne właściwości. Bardzo niską ocenę uzyskała Kaplica Wieczystej Adoracji Najświętszego Sakramentu. Można to tłumaczyć faktem, iż ponad połowa badanych (55%) nie wiedziała o jej istnieniu.

Miejsca położone poza sanktuarium (Droga Krzyżowa, Studnia Anioła, miejsce objawienia się Anioła, domy dzieci) otrzymały zbliżoną ocenę, niższą aniżeli miejsca w samym sanktuarium. Wynika to z ich mniejszej roli i większej odległości w stosunku do głównego centrum religijnego (Cova de Iria).

Prawie wszyscy respondenci (95%) twierdzili, że Fatima jest miejscem sakralnym. Dla 73% sanktuarium fatimskie to wyjątkowe i niezastąpione miejsce lub przynajmniej ważne miejsce (23%). Zaledwie 4% uważało, że miejsce to jest porównywalne z innymi. Dlatego też, 2/3 respondentów przyznało Fatimie tytuł: *Ołtarz Świata*.

Podsumowując rangę i rolę pielgrzymek pieszych autorka podkreśla, że mogą one odegrać istotną rolę w czasach współczesnych, czasach powszechnej globalizacji. Wbrew dążeniom do przyjęcia pewnego jednolitego standardu, pielgrzymki piesze charakteryzują się bowiem silną indywidualizacją i różnicowaniem.

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