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## **Sacred, cultural and educational places, contexts of pilgrimages and pilgrimaging**

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**Abstract.** Searching for the meanings hidden in the definition of a sacred place, we naturally root this category in concepts based on religious, spiritual or identity references. A sacred place is almost synonymous with the memory of the events it refers to, it is also related to recalling the origins of this place, which is associated with the categories of holidays and celebrations, a constant reminder of the sense that the place contains. A. Lipari presents the above account very vividly, recalling the already forgotten category of the bell of the lost in culture.

The bell of the lost is a tradition related to the place, which ordered to ring the bell, the sound of which was supposed to help pilgrims heading to the holy place to orient themselves in space and show the way to the goal, which is the pilgrimage and the sense of the effort of pilgrimage (Lipari, 2014, p. 19). For a place to exist and have a geographical significance, it is necessary to give it cartographic coordinates, these coordinates define the physical purpose of the road that leads to this place.

The subject of the text presented here is not the sacred place as a geographic space, it is primarily a place that is a source of meanings that are renewed whether in the educational spaces of pilgrimage and pilgrimaging, or in the meanings it holds, acting as a sacred place in culture.

**Keywords:** holy/sacred place, pilgrimage, pilgrimaging, culture, education, upbringing.

## Understanding and genesis of a sacred place

As noted by B. Nadolski (2006, p. 1451), a sacred place is a category that exists in virtually all cultural systems. Referring to J. Campbell's findings contained in *The Power of Myth*, he adopts a common definition for various cultures of a sacred place understood as a center of transformation, where the miraculous is revealed through the elements of the experienced world.

Campbell explains the need (existence) of a holy place with the fact that a man living every day in a way far from sacred, loses the deepest truth of his life – the sacred nature of the world. So he needs a special place where he could be born again, a place where 'the sacred is centered', where 'the sacred revolves around its axis' (*pivotement du sacre*), a place *par exelance l'Autre* – a place of the completely Other, who is God (Nadolski, 2006, p. 1451)

A sacred place is usually „created” by people or events significant for that place.

As N. Wolf (2013, p. 47) points out in fragments of the work *Where are we pilgrims, holy places „promise the fulfillment of a longing. And that is why they are also places of strength”*. A holy place is a place where it is possible to unite the reality of the human being making a pilgrimage to that place with the reality of transcendentals such as goodness, beauty or truth. In a holy place, therefore, it is possible to have a sensory experience similar to that given in mystical cognition. The place therefore offers the possibility of transformation, the fulfillment of a longing for release or purification. The place is therefore a place of fulfillment of the hope for change. The place reduces the distance between reality and the dream of a better tomorrow that accompanies the call to pilgrimage.

In a sense, M. Heidegger (1977, p. 142) draws attention to this in the text *The age of the world picture*. Following this lead, a sacred place can play a kind of role of a veil. It is, on the one hand, a historically produced place, whether by events or people associated with it, so it is a manufactured and produced category, leaving aside its history, clearly when a place is discovered as a sacred place, its subjective actualization of its essence takes place. A sacred place torn out of the space of its historical genesis, from the social context, becomes only a geographical or excursion destination.

## Social contexts of the holy place

The content contained in the genesis of a sacred place, if it is to be meaningful to the person or community discovering its power, must have its community-creative value; however, we do not understand this concept as the act of establishing a new community, but rather the disruption of decisions regarding the reintegration of the community in the intense feeling of the Heideggerian dimension of presence and being. These dimensions contained in the essence of a sacred place are pointed out by J. Campbell.

In a culture constantly fed by mythology, the landscape, as well as every phase of human existence, comes alive with symbolic allusion. Hills and groves have supernatural guardians and are associated with well-known episodes of the local story of the creation of the world. What's more, Campbell clarifies, special temples are erected here and there, because the places where the hero was born, worked or passed away into the void are sacred. (Campbell, 1997, p. 42).

The temple standing there expresses and signifies the center of the world, a wonderful place where earthly reality meets the land of abundance. In this place someone discovered eternity. Therefore, it is ideal for fruitful meditation. As a rule, such temples are designed to mark the four cardinal directions, with the largest sanctuary or altar in the center symbolizing the Inexhaustible Point. The one who enters the complex of temple buildings and goes to the sanctuary repeats the deed of the hero worshiped there. It imitates a universal pattern in order to evoke in itself the memory of a focal and life-renewing form. (Campbell, 1997, p. 42)

The regenerative power, hidden in the memory, is revived in the construction of the space in which a given community is obliged to implement these ideas. That is why Campbell says:

Ancient cities are built like temples – their gates lead to the four directions of the world, and the main temple of the city's divine founder stands in the central place. The inhabitants live and work within the boundaries of this symbol. It is similar in the case of state and world religions – the lands inhabited by their followers concentrate around the hub, which is the holy city, Rome in Western Christianity, Mecca in Islam. (Campbell, 1997, p. 42)

A sacred place does not appear in an anonymous space, in an unmarked space. A sacred place can create space, but first of all it appears in a space that is already defined. The specificity of space determines the category of properties. A space deprived of its properties is not a significant space, which is clarified by the example of a desert, which is a place of purification, a place of silence, but not a place of mythical communication. The experience of the desert is an individual experience, if it happens in a specific space, it is the space of the interior of a person in confrontation with the area of the desert.

The experience of the true reality of the essence of a holy place can be shared by anyone who goes to such a place.

I ask myself, does something similar apply to today's pilgrims? They may not expect much after meeting the saint at the end of their journey, but don't many trust that on this journey they gain clarity about their own lives through purpose? If they succeed, then arriving at the place will be associated with an amazing experience for them as well. (Wolf, 2013, p. 51)

## **The importance of a sacred place in culture**

When looking for the meaning of a sacred place, one should find layers of meaning derived from the very fact of the existence of the mask as such. The sense of a holy

place is the need to experience it by a person coming to it. The moment of interaction occurring between the subject of cognition and the object of that cognition creates the space of the first meaning, the first word that is derived from that place. Understanding this impact shows the sacred place as a source of meta-rational meaning. The essential moment of agreeing on this sense is the active participation of man in the production of the discourse. Treating this communication as a text-analogue may cause either difficulties in determining the intersubjective content, derived from reading the mask, that exist in the community, or it may idealize the dialogue itself (Taylor, 1979, p. 26 et seq.).

Perceiving the meaning of a sacred place, a person seeks an interpretation of reality in it, which becomes all the more difficult because he is deprived of the possibility of verifying the correctness of this intentional interpretation. The control of this correctness is related to the owners of this place.

It is their understanding of this place that is the first to be realized by a person who gets to know the place. Therefore, when looking for the meaning of a sacred place in culture, one should pay attention to both the power flowing from its metaphorical form and the language used to describe this place, which is created by the owners of the place.

The language created in the space of the symbolic field of the sacred place by its owners is to convey its content that justifies both the existence of the symbolic field, expressed in various aspects of reading the sacrum, and the existence of the social structure created in this field. More complex and more interesting seems to be the context of individual interpretation of metaphors coming from a holy place. It is affected by both the language of the owners of the symbolic field and the poetic sensitivity of the recipient of the place. It can be assumed that the power of a metaphor contained in a holy place can be released only by its recipient. However, this recipient must perceive the place as a sacred place and make the effort to understand its meaning.

This sense-creating potential of the recipient, who constructs a system of meanings, is perfectly described by phenomenology. It is to the phenomenological reading of place, including sacred place, that M. Lewicka draws attention in her work *Psychology of Place*. An important feature of places that can be distinguished in his phenomenological analyses is its identity, distinctiveness, which are often referred to by the term spirit of place. From the phenomenological perspective, a sacred place is always associated with some power and is considered to be the place of the presence of this power. The power, which is the genesis of a sacred place, is not noticed in the everyday experience, in order to perceive it, specific conditions are needed, e.g. meditation or contemplation, so that this place can be read as a sacred place. The phenomenological reading of a holy place consists either in discovering the power that was its genesis, or in assigning an extraordinary, miraculous character to this place. This does not mean a different image of this space, but above all a different treatment of this space as a place detached from the ordinary. M. Lewicka finds the phenomenological meaning of a sacred place in the Latin category of *genius loci*. *Genius loci* was originally used to describe the spirit of a local God inhabiting

a temple erected for him. Over time, it began to mean 'the unique mood, atmosphere and character of the place.

„Spirit of place” and its objective, not just subjective reality, is an important theoretical concept in the work of phenomenologists who try to inquire what features of places correspond to the subjective sense that a place has its own unique specificity, its „spirit”. In the phenomenological approach, the spirit of a place is recognized by man, but its source lies in the extra-subjective features of the place. As Seamon writes,

of course, both geographical location and people in a place contribute to the *genius loci* experience, but I believe that *genius loci* has its phenomenological reality and integrity, which is accessible to human cognition and involvement. (Lewicka, 2012, p. 61)

A sacred place is a place of experience. In the circle of discourse, the experience of a holy place is primarily the experience of a pilgrimage. In practice, pilgrimages have, on the one hand, the main axes of the historical message related to the holy place, and on the other hand, the construction of this place directly affects the content of its readable content. The essence of a holy place is to force a pilgrim to a current interpretation of the meaning of this place. A sacred place that does not disrupt the perception of space becomes only an insignificant architectural element. In order for a sacred place to mean something to the recipient, it must cease to be obvious. G. Canguilhem (2020), in the introduction to *Normal and Pathological*, notes that we feel the need for peace only because our thoughts are haunted by fear. The essence of a sacred place is to arouse interpretative anxiety, while its sense is the sense of peace resulting from gaining a substitute for certainty. Canguilhem adds that magical or experiential techniques are used to assuage fear, because we do not count on the power of forces hidden in nature. The sacred place, by its unnatural naturalness, seems to be an inexhaustible source of forces, both magical and experience-based, in its activity. After all, the experience of a pilgrimage to a holy place is both real and magical (pp. 17–20).

In order to give a chance to extract the content contained in the holy place understood as the purpose of the pilgrimage, it is necessary to use all pedagogical procedures so that this content is not only noticed but also authentically discovered in the person undertaking the pilgrimage.

## **Pilgrimages and pilgrimaging in education**

Pilgrimage in education is a journey or wandering to sacred places undertaken not only for religious reasons. The motive for pilgrimages and pilgrimaging can be an upbringing in moral values, cultural values and interpersonal solidarity or by a cognitive context.

In the modern world, one of the most important aspects of human upbringing cannot be omitted – upbringing to moral and cultural values. Their main goal is to shape attitudes in children and adolescents that enable them to function properly in society, in accordance with the applicable rules of conduct (Nagórny, 1994, p. 69;

Rogulska, 2013, p. 143; Pabich, 2020, pp. 383–384 ). In this sense, education in moral or cultural values also seems to be a special task of pilgrimages and pilgrimaging. This is mainly because group pilgrimages are a group and a community in which the shaping of these values is concentrated. This formation is carried out through the development of a person's desired attitude, i.e. the following behaviors: altruism, selflessness, loyalty, tolerance or kindness, based on a mature approach to the norms and beliefs adopted in the society in which he functions.

In the perspective of pilgrimages and pilgrimaging to holy places, the issue of religious tolerance and shaping the value system seems particularly important. This is related to the fact of recognizing holy places recognized by the followers of a given religion as sacred and sanctified, where the most important events for their religion took place, or recognized as such for another reason.

Pilgrimages and pilgrimaging are also conducive to the formation of bonds of interpersonal solidarity. These include, among others, mutual support, cooperation, coresponsibility and consistency in views, aspirations and conduct. In the process of upbringing, these bonds shape a person's identity, personality and attitudes through their public and communal nature. In view of this fact, pilgrimage and pilgrimaging, culminating in a visit to a holy place, is not only a religious phenomenon. This solidarity is conducive to broadening interests, allows you to get to know a different environment, other customs, other regions and towns. In upbringing understood in this way, the entirety of interpersonal bonds is a factor conducive to religious (denominational) solidarity, political (state) solidarity, national and ethnic solidarity, as well as social and cultural solidarity (Jackowski & Sołjan, 2007, p. 13–16).

Nowadays, the motive of pilgrimage and pilgrimaging, apart from the religious motive, is the motive of cognitive travel, in other words pilgrimage or cultural tourism (Jackowski, 1998, p. 8).

On the basis of this interpretation, a pilgrimage and a pilgrimage to a holy place is a kind of journey or trip with the possibility of educating children and youth to get to know not only monuments, cities and regions, but also to visit places related to the history and tradition of the society in which they live. The indicated cognitive motives are part of the patriotic education to respect and love the homeland by visiting holy places related to the history of the nation and the state. It is also civic education, which involves getting to know the culture of the nation, which is one of the elements of national awareness, such as beliefs, religion and customs.

## **Educational aspects of pilgrimages and pilgrimaging**

Nowadays, a growing interest in traveling for religious and cognitive reasons has been observed. For the traveler, a pilgrimage is both a route to a holy place and a unique process involving each experience on the way to the destination. According to K. Wiśniewska (2021), the analysis of a pilgrimage as a research object can take two forms. Narrower – limited to the religious, cult or liturgical dimension, where the main focus will be on the feelings and private matters of the participants, as well

as their relationship with God and individual motivations for pilgrimage. A broader one – in which the pilgrimage is analyzed as a collective creation leading to the creation of a field of specific interactions, community activities and the post-agoral effects derived from them (p. 29). A broader perspective indicates the educational aspect of the pilgrimage.

The educational task of a pilgrimage and pilgrimaging in a cognitive context is therefore to familiarize oneself with the history of a holy place, its architecture, as well as to acquire knowledge in the field of geography, ecology and the biological environment (Goliszek, 2012, p. 212). Pilgrimage also enables learning through experience. It can be defined as a process of individual cognition, reflection on lived experience, where everyday life is the main subject of learning. Some theorists emphasize the affective and participatory dimensions of experiential learning. Others emphasize the role of learning in social change.

Experiential learning is seen as both a philosophy and a practice. And just one of the elements of this practice is pilgrimage. Getting to know new places motivates to ask questions, awakens cognitive curiosity.

## **Educational aspects of pilgrimages and pilgrimaging**

Above all, pilgrimage is a very important part of religious education. It is accepted that religious education has an important role to play, especially in the modern world (Łobocki, 2008, s. 300). It is to promote universal and timeless values, which is particularly important in the era of post-modern fluid reality.

According to K. Wiśniewska, a pilgrimage group is a kind of educational environment. During the journey, the individual is affected by various stimuli, shaping the volitional and emotional spheres, as well as the attitudes of individuals towards the surrounding reality.

They stimulate the assimilation of moral values and social behavior consistent with them (Wiśniewska, 2021, p. 269). The pilgrimage group is a mosaic of human beings. For some time, people with different views, character traits, temperaments, mental level and physical abilities must coexist with each other.

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People without disabilities meet people with disabilities and deficits and dysfunctions. A common journey to sacrum places causes the Stranger to become Other, different, but not threatening. This contributes to the formation of an attitude of tolerance, understood as spreading understanding and respect for different views and behaviors. An attitude of openness to otherness is built, and altruistic attitudes and sensitivity to the needs of others are formed.

The pilgrimage also contributes to the formation of the attitude of gratitude for the good shown (which is also associated with perceiving the good done to us),

readiness to learn from others, teaches discipline understood as subordination to established rules and principles and responsibility for entrusted tasks.

Pilgrimage also teaches you to control your emotions, to extinguish anger, to maintain rationality in a dangerous situation. Pilgrimage teaches fortitude and courage (Wiśniewska, 2020, p. 269).

Pilgrimage creates natural conditions for developing the emotional sphere and aesthetic, sensitizes to the beauty of the environment and the world. Pilgrims learn cooperation, responsibility for themselves and others, develop their own perseverance, become resourceful in different life situations.

A pilgrimage is a specific type of journey, because it combines both a cognitive and educational component, as well as a philosophical or spiritual one. Broadly understood education aims at integrating these elements. Pilgrimage is conducive to the development of an individual in all spheres of its functioning.

It seems to change young people in particular and broaden their minds to include cultural aspects. Active travel makes them sensitive to human needs, encourages them to take care of their health, makes them aware of the need for intellectual, moral and social development, and has aesthetic and sacral values. (Niewęglowski, 2007, p. 462)

## **Sacred place as an object of education**

The role of place in the life of modern man is the subject of interest in the pedagogy of place. In the opinion of I. Copik (2013),

there is a dialectic relationship between pedagogy as a scientific discipline and the anthropologically understood place, which results from the simple fact that all educational processes necessarily take place „somewhere” and are located in a specific space. (p. 170)

According to H. Kwiatkowska (2001),

a place (...) is an ordered structure of meanings”. In other words, „places are not neutral and objective segments of physical space, but sites of specifically human involvement. (...) Places are a gift, an asylum, especially in difficult times, they are a source of meaning. (p. 64)

In this sense, M. Mendel (2006) points out that: „the pedagogy of a place, together with ontological thinking about a place, creates an immensity of educational possibilities”. Possibilities of influencing not only „directly” on the pupil, but also entering into educational interactions with him through the places where they take place. In this interpretation, a place can be assigned an educational role and one can talk about an „educating place” (p. 26).

Undoubtedly, sacred places are part of the pedagogical vision of the impact of a place on an individual and individuals on a place. Sacred places are often the destination of pilgrimages of followers of various religions, therefore, in their pedagogical impact, certain conceptual categories can be distinguished: dialogue, intercultural education, identity, history. Sacred places can be an impulse to start a dialogue with



the Other. Dialogue enables the harmonious functioning of entities with different concepts of the world and themselves.

Dialogicality legitimizes the agreement on meanings, shapes the understanding of the world in which differences should come to the fore as an element that enriches and does not threaten the integrity of the individual. Through dialogue, we learn about different cultural discourses. Conducting a dialogue contributes to an empathic understanding of differences.

An important element of the educational impact of holy places is intercultural learning. Because they are a place of peaceful meeting of representatives of many cultures, they are an important element of intercultural education. This education is based on the paradigm of coexistence of different individuals, it assumes learning with and from Others. The primary category is irreducible difference. The result of meetings with the Other in holy places is the elimination of stereotypes and prejudices, an empathetic look at the problems of another person. The impact of a sacred place is also noticeable in the construction and reconstruction of individual and social identity and in stimulating the process of self-discovery. A certain dichotomy is noticeable here: on the one hand, a sacred place can „root” an individual in a certain limited space, and on the other hand, meeting the Other allows you to go beyond yourself, beyond a certain limitation.

We can also assign an educational role to sacred places. They allow you to look at historical facts related to a given place. The above perspective pointed to sacred places as a meeting of representatives of different cultures and their educational implications.

An additional pedagogical impact will have places important for a given religion for its followers. They will shape indigenous values, sense of community, acquisition of cultural competences – mother language, values, customs and rituals. They favor rooting in the so-called small homeland.

## Conclusions

The purpose of the article presented here was primarily to point out the potential for meaning contained in the processes of discovering, or realizing, what a sacred place is and what its role is in both religious studies and educational contexts.

In the world of easy movement or traveling in contemporary culture, these places have acquired, above all, the features of holiday destinations, and their proper meaning has been covered with layers related to describing it as a must-see place.

Perhaps the appropriate conclusion of our remarks is the sentence contained in the work of P. Różycki (2016), which is important for the issues we are discussing,

Both physical activity and spiritual growth are equally necessary for people to live. Pilgrimage provides the opportunity to realize both of these values. Similarly, tourism can be a field for the implementation of these two factors important for existence. In particular, however, a pilgrimage on foot, also in silence, is an opportunity to discover a better, fuller, richer and more natural way. (p. 77)

Because this chance is what is at stake in contemporary education and popular culture.

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