
Pusztai, Bertalan: Religious Tourists. Constructing Authentic Experiences in Late Modern Hungarian Catholicism. Jyväskylä Studies in Humanities 27. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä 2004. 256 pages.

"Most of the participants are relatively highly educated; both women and men have higher education than the average of Hungarian Catholic population."

What does it mean to make a pilgrimage as an organized tourist trip? Who are the participants of such journeys in present-day Hungary? What kind of meanings does the journey have for the participants? Answers to these questions can be found in this thesis, which was discussed as a doctoral dissertation in Ethnology at the University of Jyväskylä in November 2004.

This study focuses on pilgrim journeys arranged as organized tours in Hungary today. Ordinary tourism, charter trips as well as the traditional type of pilgrimage are not new objects of research, but religious tourism and organized trips to famous places of pilgrimage

are a new and challenging topic for ethnological and anthropological research.

This thesis also brings us new knowledge about the cultural processes that have developed in East Central Europe since the fall of communism and socialism. This kind of research would not even have been possible before the change of the political system in 1989 as the public practicing of religion was hardly possible during the earlier regime. As religious worship was re-activated in the 1990s, also different new trends were developed. Bertalan Pusztai concludes that religious activities of present-day Hungary, also within the Catholic Church, are characterized by a variety of diverse and contradictory opinions and discussions. The change of system also made it possible to cross the borders, and to establish travel agencies. All in all, a new type of tourist industry started flourishing also in Hungary.

In the first chapter (*Introduction*) the author discusses profoundly the central concepts of the thesis - pilgrimage, tourism and religious tourism - as well as the theological background of Catholic pilgrimage. In the second chapter (*Pilgrim, tourist, researcher*) the epistemology of ethnographical research is first discussed in general and then from the starting point of this particular study. The author also scrutinizes his own role as a researcher. Bertalan Pusztai has conducted wide fieldwork in the years 1999 and 2003 by taking part on the pilgrim tours organized by the Macroworld Pilgrim Travel Agency. His discussion on the concept of field as well as his own role as a fellow traveler is very inspiring. Pusztai has joined several pilgrim journeys to places like Lourdes, Avignon, Rome, Milan, Padova and Torino as well as several domestic targets in Hungary. This means he has conducted fieldwork in continually changing surroundings. He has been part of the traveling group, made acquaintances with fellow travelers, discussed with them on busses as well as in hostels and churches. The reader meets them in the monumental cathedrals of Central Europe as well as on the swarming lanes of Rome or in small country churches. The book is illustrated by a lot of photos taken during the journeys.

While traveling Bertalan Puzstai has simultaneously – or sometimes alternately – been both a researcher and a traveler. In the latter role he has been sometimes a tourist, some other times a Catholic pilgrim himself leaving the researcher role aside for a while. He discusses his own role and position in the group in a natural and intelligent manner. After the journeys he has met his informants again at their homes. Besides these interviews he has had an opportunity to borrow their traveling diaries and the letters they have written to the travel agency. He has also interviewed the travel agents, and also some questionnaires were used in the starting phase to collect some basic data from the clients of the travel agencies. In sum, one of the clear merits of this research is the versatile collection of data and wide fieldwork.

The third chapter (*Tourism in Pilgrimage*) describes the background of pilgrim tourism starting from medieval pilgrimage and ending up with the present situation with religious tourism as prosperous business and a global phenomenon.

Bertalan Puzstai has also done his own "scientific pilgrimage" while working on this thesis – I might even dare say he has experienced "conversion" – by this I mean turning from one paradigm to another. Positivism and objectivist epistemology has a long tradition in the Hungarian humanities. As Puzstai describes in the preface of his thesis, his university education of Ethnology was "evolutionist and statistical description of what was at that time an extinct and stages peasant culture, presented as the ethnographical reality". This means he was also influenced by the strong tradition of positivism and started this study by collected a large quantitative data for statistical survey. However, there was also a need and a desire to get some deeper information as well. This resulted in qualitative approach with deep interviews and their interpretations, revealing the constructions of the meaning of pilgrimage. While completing his research Bertalan Puzstai has literally gone through his own change of paradigm.

The results of the questionnaires are presented in the fourth chapter (*Drafting religious tourists*), which gives us a lot of statistical background information. In the same time it also shows the meaning and importance of quantitative methods as well. We get a lot of interesting information about the persons taking part in pilgrimages. There are a lot more women than men; most of them middle-aged or elderly ladies, many of them married, but surprisingly many are also unmarried or divorced. There are only few men joining these journeys; most of them are either accompanying their wives or they are lay spiritual leaders of the journeys or priests. Most of the participants are relatively highly educated; both women and men have higher education than the average of Hungarian Catholic population. Least interested in pilgrimages are the divorced or widowed men with low education. The participants are very religious, living according to the teaching of the church, especially the elderly persons. However, there are also surprisingly many persons being religious "on their own way". This is the case in particular with the young participants. Puzstai concludes that in the post-communist Hungary this new type of pilgrimage is not only interesting for the elderly and confessional Catholic persons but also for the well-educated persons living in the cities. Especially the young have formed their own way of being religious.

In the fifth chapter (*The two texts*) the approach turns qualitative; now the pilgrims get "face and voice". Pusztaï has done deep interviews with 20 persons; seven of them have been chosen here. It is clear Bertalan Pusztaï has got a confidential contact with his informants. They tell him openly about their life, religiosity and the meaning of the pilgrimage in their life. While reading these skillfully written interviews, one gets acquainted with different persons and in a way follows the discussions the author is having with them.

The sixth chapter (*Imaginations in collision*) is an analysis based on the previous interviews, showing the different meanings that the pilgrim journeys and places have for different persons. The whole life can be re-interpreted in the light of the pilgrim experience. The trips can be experienced as conversion, or as therapeutic experience, or recovering from illness or some other turning point of life. In the same time the participants are questioning their identity of rather identification. Various different possibilities of identification become visible. These Catholic tourists are continually reflecting on the question of whether they are tourists, pilgrims or Christians while on the journey, and their opinions are varying even during one and same interview depending on how the journey developed.

This is one of the merits of this study; Bertalan Pusztaï doesn't even want to define the identity of a Catholic tourist as one monolithic and unchangeable entity, but he skillfully brings out the many different variations.

As the concept of identity is central in this chapter, I would have liked to see a presentation of the concept and the theoretical discussion on identity in the beginning of the work, together with presentation of the other central concepts. It is evident Bertalan Pusztaï is familiar with the theoretical discussion around the concept of identity, but he could have presented his knowledge here as well, as this thesis is an academic dissertation.

The Catholic connotation of pilgrimage places is also discussed in the sixth chapter. Pusztaï explains how the meaning of late modern pilgrimage place is actually delocalized; the meaning of concrete places is vanishing. Instead, late modern pilgrims have also the opportunity of alternative forms, for example taking part in 'virtual pilgrimages' by following the radio and TV programs.

The seventh chapter (*The Quest for Meaning in Contemporary Religious Tourism*) scrutinizes the activities of some professional travel organizations. And again, this analysis also shows the many different ways of understanding pilgrimage. At the end of the chapter there is a profound presentation of Macroworld Pilgrim Travel Agency, the co-operator of this research.

The eighth chapter (*Self and group in late modern Catholicism*) is a conclusion of this research; Bertalan Pusztaï discusses the relation between individuals and communities as well as the meaning and constructions pilgrimage in our late modern society. He also points out the relation of globalization and localization, being in opposition to Zygmunt Bauman's ideas. Pusztaï doesn't accept the critical and negative understanding of locality presented by Bauman. In this context he could have referred to some other authors of modernization and globalization, for example Jonathan Friedman or Thomas Hylland

Eriksen, just to mention some. Their views would have given more support to Pusztai's own ideas about the connection between global and local.

At the end of this chapter Pusztai gives hastily a throwaway remark on "Anderson". However, he could have tied this comment more precisely to the classical concept of 'imagined communities' by Benedict Anderson, as this is the central idea also in Pusztai's thesis. He points out that there is a special type of community developing between the travelers during the journeys, and it is re-constructed for each and every trip. This community is actually more important for the travelers than the original destination, some concrete place of pilgrimage.

Reading the concluding eighth chapter made me think that the author has, unfortunately, ended up in hurry before delivering the manuscript. The hectic last moment has forced him to finish the last chapter in a feverish hurry, which means he has not managed to show his writing talent in complete. Otherwise this talent has been visible and proved several times during the previous chapters. It would have been a benefit for this research if the author had had an opportunity to re-write the whole concluding chapter. As such, it is somewhat difficult to read. The Hungarian and Finnish summaries are, unfortunately, direct translations of the eighth chapter.

The opening chapter of the book (*Ethnographic Ecstasy*) shows us Bertalan Pusztai at his best. This text is an impression during a rainy day at Lourdes. The author throws a glance at his fellow travelers, thinks about his own role as a researcher-pilgrim, and wonders about the role of ethnography. I warmly recommend this chapter!

This is a very interesting study as a whole. Bertalan Pusztai shows how the need for organized pilgrimage varies individually, and the whole journey can be understood in many different ways. Also the concepts of tourism, religious tourism and pilgrimage are changing, sliding and partly overlapping. There are no simple or exact definitions at all. This kind of diversity is typical for our late modern time, and Bertalan Pusztai is very successful in presenting it in his thesis.

He has also been successful in doing his fieldwork. He has been able to create a confidential relationship with his informants; they have wanted to tell him their life stories and the reasons for their pilgrimage. Bringing this human voice – also a broken and suffering voice – so clearly to readers is one of the strong merits of the book. Pusztai has also courage to present himself. Also the scientific change of paradigm is clearly presented; being an innovative and less conventional researcher Bertalan Pusztai also challenges the Hungarian ethnology into a change of paradigm.

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