

## HOPE AND SATISFACTION

### TRAVELLERS' LETTERS IN TOURISM RESEARCH

Bertalan PUSZTAI

Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Szeged  
H-6722 Szeged, Egyetem u. 2, Hungary  
E-mail: bpusztai@mars.arts.u-szeged.hu

**Abstract:** Present paper is part of a larger study focusing on a special form of religiously motivated travel. The market leader on the field of religiously motivated organized mass tourism, shortly religious tourism, is Macroworld Pilgrim Travel Agency in Hungary. An important source of present research is the so-called travellers' letters, written feedback addressed to the agency. With the help of more than thousand letters, the author intends to point out some characteristic experiences of contemporary religious tourism.

**Keywords:** Religious tourism, modern pilgrimage, *communitas*, communication, travel agencies, normative behaviour

In this paper I would like to present one special aspect of religious tourism.<sup>1</sup> Ethnology and cultural anthropology have shown little interest in religiously motivated trips organised by specialised agencies.<sup>2</sup> Looking through the earlier studies it seems that most scholars are dealing with phenomena which appear exotic to them, as urban men. Most of the investigations on the present forms of religiously motivated travel deal with revivalist attempts, like the individual pilgrims to Santiago de Compostella, Spain<sup>3</sup> or the foot pilgrimage of youth to Czestochowa, Poland.<sup>4</sup> It seems that cultural scientists consider religious tourism a non-authentic phenomenon to be looked down on, something that is not worth investigating. In contrast, the individual foot pilgrims walking on the old pilgrim routes of Europe are found wor-

<sup>1</sup> In the following I define religious tourism as a branch of cultural tourism which is organised by specialised agencies. These agencies are widespread in the Catholic world. One of the leading and best known among them is Bayerisches Pilgerbüro. In Hungary there are two agencies working almost exclusively in that field: *Makrovilág Zarándok Utazási Iroda* (Macroworld Pilgrim Travel Agency) and *Catholica 2000*. I consciously exclude from the notion of religious tourism the different forms of religiously motivated travel I call *pilgrimages*. I do not consider as religious tourism the lonely foot pilgrims using the old pilgrim routes of Europe (POST 1994), the closed communities of intellectuals seeking spiritual change (Bishop Henry pilgrimages from Turku to Köyliö in Finland) (ANTTONEN 1998) and the surviving form of former peasant pilgrimages, where closed communities organise their pilgrimage. In my approach religious tourism is a form of travel where religious and tourist motivation exist together, which is organised by specialised agencies and usually collects and brings strangers for a trip.

<sup>2</sup> In the Hungarian literature BARNA (1996) has touched on the question. As more detailed studies we can refer to BLACK (1984) and RINSCHÉDE (1992).

<sup>3</sup> POST 1994: 85–100.

<sup>4</sup> JACKOWSKI-SMITH 1992: 92–106.

thy of attention.<sup>5</sup> Although this is not surprising if we take into consideration how Central European national ethnographies unconsciously excluded and still sometimes exclude such – for them – un-authentic phenomena and create an acceptable, legitimate but non-existing image of reality. Tourism<sup>6</sup> as such does not really fit into the traditional targets of ethnology.

Since I started to discuss the questions of authenticity at the very beginning, it is also worth devoting a few words to the connection of tourism and authenticity. Not only ethnology has a never-ending quest for authenticity. Undeniably one driving power of mass tourism is the quest for authentic experiences. Tourism or, to be more precise, the tourism industry creates and sells ‘authentic’ experiences, sometimes simultaneously demolishing or changing the elements of culture not fitting into its – or much more – the participants’ notions. Taking into consideration the world-wide effects of the modern tourism industry we can understand Edward Bruner’s opinion, who puts ethnographers and tourists side-by-side in the second wave of cultural exploitation.<sup>7</sup> Naturally, simultaneously with demolishing the authentic for the aborigines, tourism creates the attraction, the source of tourist experience. After that process has taken place, we have to consider this new culture as authentic, at least for the tourists, or an authentic part of the tourist culture. Can the researcher, without the risk of losing his role as a researcher, judge and decide which culture is more authentic? My answer is no to that straight question – although I know that in such situations ethnologists can find multiple personalities in themselves, and recognising the side-effects of the culture-creation process imposed by tourism they can have doubts. However, these mental problems belong only to us, since the tourists themselves never see the process of creation, the adaptation of the locals.

After these (self)critical notes we can openly speak about mass tourism and one of its special types, religious tourism. In this paper I pay attention to the communication between the travellers and the agency I have chosen to study. I try to investigate the public relations and marketing activity of the agency. My aim is to discover what kind of experiences, wishes and beliefs they are trying to evoke in the potential travellers and what kind of discourse is taking place in that communication. The peculiarity of these questions is that the goods for sale are religiously motivated trips, pilgrimages in the discourse of hosts and guests which is usually not considered to be a subject of merchandising because of its sacred character. In plain words: how can the religious experience be sold without destroying the essence of these trips (to meet with the sacred)? My aim is also to discover what kind of mission these agencies declare for themselves, whether they have another, secondary aim beside making a living. Do they aim to revive pilgrimages or to create religious tourism? Would

<sup>5</sup> In a detailed analysis of the diaries of foot pilgrims, Paul Post even speaks about a pilgrim-boom on the roads of Europe (POST 1994). However, the mental and social tensions of the old role and modern man are clearly pointed out by VAN UDEN–PIEPER 1996.

<sup>6</sup> I define tourism here according to Smith as an activity which needs free time, discretionary income and positive sanctions and a tourist as a person who travels to another place to experience a usually positive change.

<sup>7</sup> BRUNER 1989: 439.

they like to achieve a quality cultural tourism or to spread a pilgrim-culture, to create community? How do they define their activity?

Beside the communication of the agency the other part to be studied is the communication of the guests towards the agency. In this paper I shall present the preliminary analysis of a special form of communication, what I shall call travellers' letters.<sup>8</sup> From a formal point of view these are mainly letters, but they also include name cards with a few words and long diaries as well. The source material was provided to me by Macroworld Pilgrim Travel Agency (Hungary).<sup>9</sup> Although I am sure that other agencies receive letters too, there is one peculiar characteristic of these letters, namely, their origin. In order to receive continuous evaluation from its clients the agency launched a competition with prizes a decade ago. Books and expensive trips are drawn at the end of each year among those sending back a written evaluation about their trips. As a result of disillusionment or satisfaction, or simply the desire to win a free trip, the agency received more than 1000 detailed letters in the past ten years.

In the following I shall make a contentual analysis of these letters. According to my hypothesis similar experiences can be reflected in a similar way in the letters of similar origins. Analysing these letters we can point out the mainstream experiences typical of the religious tourist. In this paper I would like to point out only some of these experiences, since this analysis is based only on a part of the source material. In the following the ultimate and insolvable dilemma will appear a number of times: how tourists and pilgrims, tourist and pilgrim aims are mixed up, how tourist and pilgrim behaviour confront on these trips. There can be no doubt however, that certain aspects are not reflected in these letters written as open letters to an institution: deeper spiritual experiences are rarely described, but there are lengthy analyses about the service.

## TOURIST OR PILGRIM BEHAVIOUR – NORMATIVE CANONS ON THE JOURNEY

In researching religious tourism one of the most interesting questions is whether any kind of normative behaviour exists among the participants of these trips. Research on traditional pilgrimages clearly pointed out the community-regulated norms of this ritual behaviour. There are several factors in religious tourism which weaken or obstruct the formulation of such norms. First of all, these groups consist of participants with various origin, education, age and motivation. From the point of view of a coherent norm-system great differences can be found among the participants: between the already formed (such as parish) communities and between the

<sup>8</sup> Qualitative tourism research has already used sources produced by travellers. About the use of diaries see MARKWELL-BACHE (1998). Although performative in nature, SELÄNNIEMI (1996) considers tourist diaries as useable sources.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.makrovilag.hu> [visited 06. 06. 2003.]

so-called 'collected groups'. According to the experiences of the tour-organisers, closed communities usually bring their own customs and practices and in these cases the agency acts mainly as a service provider. In the case of 'collected groups', most of the participants got to know each other on the bus or plane. (Sometimes the tourists themselves refer to this intensified mood: "I felt uneasy as I was travelling alone".) The motivation of the participants could be extremely diverse: beside the 'pilgrims' there are participants who choose a Catholic agency because of the greater reliability (a pilgrimage-organising (= religious) agency seems to be a quality label for some participants) or because of the different route they offer (more cultural than shopping or sun-seeking). Selling something, the fact that the travellers pay for a service is definitely an obstacle to the formulation of a normative behaviour and that fact clearly points out the differences compared to traditional pilgrimages. Yet is there any difference from that point of view between these trips and other tourist trips? Investigating this question we can discover the ideas the guests have about these trips. We can make some slight statements about the religiosity of the participants. The self-identification of the travellers (pilgrim, tourist or religious tourist) can be discovered from these letters. Analysing the parts dealing with behaviour can throw light on whether the traveller community can influence the individual to gain touristic and/or religious experience. Do these experiences appear in community?

Analysing the letters there is no doubt that a normative (pilgrim) behaviour exists during these trips. However, the participants themselves have quite different views about that. This non-canonised norm-system is naturally created and recreated on every trip according to the composition of the group. Similarly to other kinds of trips the participants of religious tourism not only *leave a place*, but a *change* occurs in their *perception*, too. That is why the tour-operators try to control the behaviour according to the sensibilities of the participants. Recognising and handling these sensibilities is not an easy task for the tour guides, as it will be seen later.

The following detailed description provides an example about the changes of perception: "I was happy that on this trip happiness and joking did not end in indecency, nastiness. I have already had bad experiences from another pilgrimage. Then I travelled with people collected from different villages. Once somebody innocently said an ambiguous word. Only one word! The group immediately became excited. Women started to scream and whinny. Seeing the effect the travellers scrambled after one another to the front of the bus. The microphone was glowing; with a whole stream of jokes of the most obscene type. The most successful was a tall, skinny man who had just been singing magnificent carols. He was a Catholic cantor, as it later turned out. The jokes were followed by Hungarian popular songs of the same type. I felt pity for the old, quiet priest, who tried to tone down the "good mood", suggesting that they could tell other, more acceptable, milder jokes, as well. He even told some, but his effort was unsuccessful. Especially when the previously nice young couple (teachers of religion) started to sing "Town of Eger, town of priests", a song insulting to priests (Letters 1996/9). Reading this account one can recognise that the perceptual changes of being on a journey caused an entirely different reaction in most of the travellers. Although a minority, some people were offended by the qual-

ity and quantity of 'happiness' and 'joking'. As a result of this perceptual change the travellers reject the kind of behaviour which otherwise they tolerate in their everyday life. The speciality of these trips is that an attempt is made to regulate the norms according to the increased sensitivity in contrast to the great freedom of average tourist trips.

The agency studied would like to popularise a kind of pilgrim-culture. According to their experiences this is possible and necessary mainly in the collected groups. As the leader and owner of the agency interprets it, during the Socialist decades not only the demand for communal religious experience was stamped out, but also the culture of traditional pilgrimages was demolished, except for small pockets and surviving fragments. This prevented the development of a behavioural standard for modern pilgrimages.

Being on a journey also results in a *mental transformation*. This is reflected in the account of a traveller who is retired: "We were already in the Austrian Alps, among snowy mountains, in the region of ski-resorts. We have to stop here! And we did! Mr. X. was again inventive. 'Get out of the bus!' – he ordered and we started a fantastic game of snowballs. There was screaming, laughing, running and of course bathing, etc. Everybody got refreshing snow on his head and neck. Refreshed, we continued our trip joking in the bus. The good mood was infectious. This is also an important part of such a wonderful pilgrimage" (Letters 1996/3). Did this "infectious good mood" have the same effect on everybody? As the above citations show, humour and good mood is theoretically acceptable for everybody on these trips. The agency itself considers humour as a tool for creating community: a pilgrimage can end not only in snowballing, but there is traditional Eastern sprinkling on the buses en route on Easter Monday. The above passages from letters point out that *perceptual transformation* creates increased sensitivity, sometimes separating the individual from the travelling community. It is the effect of *mental transformation* that makes strange things understandable or committable while travelling. A trip not only removes the travellers from their home environment but also alienates them from the norms of everyday life: leaving the structured world of workdays the *latent self* can appear. 'Melting', 'relaxing' or 'flowing' of the individual in the community and in the community experience is easily recognisable in the last citation.

### A DUAL ROLE IN FORMATION: TOUR GUIDES IN RELIGIOUS TOURISM

The question of normative behaviour is present in another constant part of the letters assessing the tour guide. In the following I shall analyse the participants' opinions in connection with two tour guides earlier employed by Macroworld Travel Agency. Beside the tour guides, priests (spiritual guide, to use their term) are provided on each trip. The spiritual guide is not expected even at the pilgrimage place to act as a tour guide. His role is to make the trip more sacred (by his presence, by leading prayers, hymns) and to provide spiritual assistance for the

participants during the journey. Thus the agency tries to employ guides fully aware of the peculiarities of pilgrimages and shrines as well as that of other tourist attractions.

In the accounts of the participants special attention is paid to the behaviour of the guides since they represent the service provider agency. The participation of the guides in religious programmes is appreciated positively, stressing the double expectation (acting as a tour guide and participating in the pilgrim community) set for them. “Our leader XY was a young woman, a kind, helpful lady who showed her great erudition during our trip. She was well acquainted with geography, ethnography, art history and history. Her presentation was perfect; she spoke about religious – apparitions [of the Blessed Virgin] – and Hungarian-related events with enthusiasm, with ecstatic expressions. She always joined in our singing during our trip” (Letters 1996/42). My hypothesis is that the participants consider the guides as substitutes for earlier pilgrimage leaders and definitely expect their participation in the religious activities.

However, different conceptions about the normative pilgrim-behaviour are well reflected in the letters criticising the ‘profane behaviour’ or ‘profane approach’ of the same guide. “The guide’s personality caused us great anxiety. It is possible that we have different notions about pilgrimage, but that was clear. Although important for those visiting these places for the first time her presentations were made in a special “guide” style, i.e. they were profane. This trip should have had more sacrality. ... I have already mentioned the non-sacral approach of the guide. I could also mention the following: she always wore inappropriate clothes in churches (miniskirt!) and continued chewing her gum inside (!). She even committed this indecency while speaking to us with the “American style” in her mouth. Chewing in the church was especially shameless” (Letters 1996/58). “I – or I rather say we – had only one problem: the personality of our guide. If one is preparing for a pilgrimage spiritually, one expects certain things. Sometimes we felt that we were there for her sake, as if she were doing us a favour, although we paid for her service. If something displeased her, she answered rudely and angrily both to old and young. We expected some intelligence and tolerance. She spoke with chewing gum in her mouth not only in the streets but also in the churches. She wore a miniskirt in the basilicas (except St. Peter’s). She should have worn proper cloths because of the sacred character of the place, not because of us. ... In my experience she is not the proper person to lead pilgrimages” (Letters 1996/43). I think the key sentence is the last one in the citation above: “she is not the proper person to lead *pilgrimages*”. We can conclude that the critical travellers consider their trip as a pilgrimage and that is why profane guidance is not suitable for them.

In connection with another guide I am not going to speak about the collision of behaviours. The subject of the debate was about different religiosity. “My opinion is – similarly to other travellers – that you made a mistake in choosing AB to lead the group. There is no doubt that he has great knowledge and is well educated, but the ideas he presented (exorcism, bewitching, the activity of Satan, etc.) and how he presented them was extremely disturbing, sometimes hurting. ... I am sure other

travellers will also turn to you about their experiences of the trip" (Letters 1996/123). "We did not agree with the quantity and content of his commentaries expressed over the loudspeaker. He overwhelmed us especially with two of his ideas. One was the appearances of the Blessed Virgin in this century. ... The other notorious idea of his was the role of the great Scatterer (sic!) namely Satan, even including the importance of exorcism" (Letters 1996/122). However, there is also a different opinion from the same trip: "The best thing was the superb guide, Mr. AB. His wide knowledge, carefully polished Hungarian speech made this trip a delightful experience" (Letters 1996/103).

A participant of another tour similarly evaluated the same guide: "Mr. AB spiritualised the group with his historical knowledge, kindness and devoutness filling us with spirituality which can help to survive the problems of our difficult age. God bless AB and let him contribute to your success, because such a guide attracts people, the pilgrims" (Letters 1996/73). There are travellers for whom this is the proper spirituality as we can recognise from the following citation: "I was ill when I set out to this trip. At that time, like three years ago, Satan tried to prevent me from visiting that sacred place. ... I climbed up both hills without any great problems. Love can destroy the plans of Satan, it is true" (Letters 1998/150). The above citations clearly point out that there are different conceptions about the proper behaviour, and also that the religiosity of the guide is evaluated in entirely different ways. Considering the diversity of religious ideas even inside the group defining itself as religious in contemporary Hungarian society, it is not surprising that such borderline areas as the appearances of the Blessed Virgin or the role of Satan can divide even a seemingly homogenous group.<sup>10</sup>

## EXPERIENCING COMMUNITAS

In dealing with religious tourism I consider it central to investigate whether the experience of *communitas* is present or not on these trips. It is clear that this special status can appear on tourist trips as well. Victor Turner, the most influential scholar of pilgrimage, states that *communitas* is a fundamental element of traditional and modern pilgrimages. That is well exemplified in his summary about the French pilgrimage place, Lourdes: "In Lourdes there is a sense of living *communitas*, whether in the great singing procession by torchlight or in the agreeable little cafes of the back streets, where tourists and pilgrims gaily sip their wine and coffee. Something of Bernadette has tintured the entire social milieu – a cheerful simplicity, a great depth of communion."<sup>11</sup>

In the letters of the pilgrim tourists very similar accounts are recorded on *communitas*, as for example in the following citation about Lourdes: "After dinner we

<sup>10</sup> This diversity among Catholics in Hungary has been recognised recently by the sociology of religion. TOMKA 1991: 11, 13.

<sup>11</sup> EADE 1992: 20.

went directly to the cave, the Grotto, where thousands of pilgrims were waiting for the procession. It was an inspiring experience to visit the cave shining from candle-light again. I was touched when I heard the thousands of pilgrims praying the Rosary in a number of different languages, then thousands of candles were raised when we sang the Ave Maria. The imposing procession ended with a blessing” (Letters 1996/42).

The desire to experience *communitas* and its fulfilment is recorded in the following letters: “We were full of happiness and great expectations. We soon found that we were not disappointed! Both of our leaders turned out to be wonderful personalities. ... They could handle the whole group, whose members got to know each other quickly and it was as if they had been acquainted for a long time. The group consisted of loving and helpful people who shared the same feelings” (Letters 1996/3). “Imagine, a small family was travelling together already on the second day. Everybody was as happy as in a big family. Everybody was satisfied, happy, healthy and joyful. ... The bus was like a land of smiles” (Letters 1996/71). As these letters show, it is clear that a number of travellers have a positive community experience during these trips. For them to gain this community feeling is a fundamental condition for the success of these trips.

The experience of *communitas* is usually present on a trip made by a closed community. To help modern, alienated man to feel this community experience is one of the greatest challenges for the guides in the case of the so-called ‘collected groups’. To strive after and experience such a mental transformation could be similar to the fast and asceticism of the traditional pilgrimages. The agency considers this as its most important mission as it is reflected in the introduction of its catalogue for the Holy Year 2000: “The pilgrimage agency with its special means brings different parishes closer to each other, strengthens the feeling of affinity between the faithful, and would like TO BREAK DOWN THE WALLS of modern alienation. THE FUTURE IS UNITY.” Nevertheless, *communitas* is not achieved each time. “The guide of the group, AB, is an educated good narrator. Despite this he caused a bad mood on the trip. He could have recognised on the very first day that this group consisted of two parts: more simply believers, who came first of all for the pilgrimage and more educated intellectuals, who were more interested in the tourist trip. These two demands could have been harmonised to satisfy both groups. Instead, he pitted them against each other and let the confrontations develop” (Letters 1996/122). This citation clearly points out that sometimes even the participants recognise that both *tourists* and *pilgrims* participate on these trips. “The other problem was that the company was very heterogeneous. The applicants should have been told that this was a pilgrimage, where singing and praying on the bus was a normal activity. There was too much praying for the tourists, and too little for us, so everybody remained unsatisfied”<sup>12</sup> (Letters 1996/103). We can sum up that the *tourist* and the *pilgrim* are funda-

<sup>12</sup> The reaction of the leader of the agency on this letter throws light on his approach to the lack of *communitas*: “The most important thing in pilgrimage is to live our everyday Christian life. We do not single out the so-called true believers. On the contrary, we are happy if there is a mixed group, since



mental, self-creating counterparts of each other in this peculiar discourse. Because of their historical connections tourists and pilgrims are rarely depicted by the scientific literature as such mutually exclusive counterparts. Valene Smith, analysing the connection of tourism and pilgrimage, stresses the combination of the different roles, their continuous transition. According to her, the pious pilgrim and the secular tourist are not two distinct roles.<sup>13</sup> Surveying the visitors of pilgrimage places we are more likely to find the different variations between these two extremes. It seems that the emic definitions at this point strongly contradict the etic categories: there are participants who distinguish themselves from tourists or pilgrims.<sup>14</sup> Investigating the activities and experiences of the travellers there is no doubt that these pilgrims are tourists as well. The agency itself would not like to draw sharp lines, but considers religious motivation and activity as complementary parts which are the *differentia specifica* of their participants in the wide flow of cultural tourists. Critiques by the participants in these letters clearly point out that these travellers do not want to travel with ascetic self-organised groups, but expect service in proportion to its value from the provider.

Communitas in the Turnerian sense consequently does not always appear on these trips. Although we must add that the Turnerian tradition has been strongly criticised in the last two decades and especially in connection with pilgrimages. Although communitas was elaborated by a number of leading scholars in the anthropology of tourism, critique is now dominant. Bryan Pfaffenberger in his article about serious pilgrims and frivolous tourists criticises the model of Turner on the basis of his fieldwork in Sri Lanka. He points out that pilgrims are as diversified in their behaviour as tourists.<sup>15</sup> The strongest critic of Turnerian communitas is however Sallnow, who problematises the term on the basis of his South-American fieldwork. In his article "Communitas reconsidered" he describes the pilgrims investigated by him in the following way: "From a sociological point of view, then, group pilgrimage in the Andes is a complex mosaic of egalitarianism, nepotism and factionalism, of brotherhood, competition and conflict."<sup>16</sup> And last but not least John Eade questioned whether communitas is a general phenomenon in connection with pilgrimages. He pointed out the lack of communitas on the basis of his lengthy fieldwork in Lourdes.<sup>17</sup>

---

Christians have to act as leaven. God is happier if you and we through our example bring one soul closer to him, than to listen to a prayer" (Letters 1996/103b).

<sup>13</sup> SMITH 1992: 4. Although I am not aiming to deal with the history of tourism and pilgrimage this is a good place to note that while tourists are frequently likened to pilgrims in scientific discourses, pilgrims are never compared to tourists. Nevertheless, the parallel would be as creative as the other one has been in the last decades. Paying attention to the above-mentioned comparison it is a must to mention a wider allegory of Zygmunt Bauman which draws a parallel between modern man and tourists or depicts the inner transformation of modern man as from pilgrims to tourists.

<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, we have to add that there is a small minor voice seeking both tourist and pilgrim elements on these travels.

<sup>15</sup> PFAFFENBERGER 1983: 57–74.

<sup>16</sup> SALLNOW 1981: 176.

<sup>17</sup> EADE 1992: 18–32.

### WHAT IS THE HOPE WHICH IS SATISFIED?

In analysing the letters, an important question is what these pilgrim tourists consider as the most important experience, what the sacred centre of their trip is. If we accept the discourse of the agency and the claim of most of the travellers that these trips are pilgrimages then the most important target is to gain spiritual grace which cannot be found at other places. The pilgrimage places, the Holy Land, Rome and the other shrines are prominent geographical locations in Catholic mental geography. Following this line, gaining indulgence would have to be one of the most important aims of pilgrimages. But this is not reflected in these letters. Moreover, the spiritual transformation of alienated urban man is rarely present<sup>18</sup>, although it can appear in secular tourism. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm of the cultural tourist is clearly stated in these letters: how magnificent it was to see the architectural wonders or shake hands with the Pope. At this point we have to pay attention to the representative capacity of these letters. How suitable are these letters in researching religious tourism?

According to MacCannell<sup>19</sup> the formulation of a tourist attraction is based on the presence of three elements: the *tourist* (in his discourse a half-semiotic), the *phenomenon* which is the basis of the attraction (an object, a building, natural beauty) and the *meaning* justifying and stressing the importance of the phenomenon (based on previous studies, reading or on the discourse of the guide). The connection of these three elements is needed for the formulation of the tourist attraction. Analysing the *meaning* connected to the targets of the religious tourists we can conclude that it is a specific combination of religious and profane content. In the letters the cathedrals of Rome are addressed not only as sacred from the religious point of view, but as places worth seeing. (Although it is still a question whether the two strata of meanings can be separated at all by the researcher dealing with the ethnography of travellers.) However, the religious content is roughly the same as the artistic or art historically important meaning or sometimes it is synonymous with the feeling of community. In that way the cultural context in which our travellers interpret the places visited is closer to that of the secular cultural tourists than to the indulgence and salvation-seeking pilgrims of the Middle Ages.

Using a different research method and source material we can say that the representational capacity of these letters is limited. They form a part of a particular discourse, namely the agency-traveller discourse. Most of them deal mainly with the quality of the service. From the beginning of my research I have employed other methods for the interpretation of religious tourism at the end of the century. In the spring of 1999 I started to carry out questionnaire surveys among travellers. One of the most important preliminary conclusions of this survey is that about half of the participants define indulgence-seeking as a motivation of their trip. In contrast, such

<sup>18</sup> "It was good to break away from the everyday problems, to pray and sing in peace the whole day" (Letters 1996/150).

<sup>19</sup> MACCANNELL 1976: 41–56.

spiritual reasons or experience are rarely mentioned in the signed letters sent to the agency.

When I told the staff this conclusion, they confirmed that indulgence-seeking was not the most important aim for most of the travellers. As an example they told me the following story. During a short one-day pilgrimage in the spring of 1999 the guide mentioned to the travellers that there was a possibility of gaining indulgence at the pilgrimage place visited. As a result large number of travellers used the possibility. At this early stage of my researches we can conclude that the representative capacity of these letters is limited although peculiar: these are emic perspectives where the travellers summarise their experiences and describe their ideal trips sometimes with stories given as examples. Sometimes we can get to know lonely pilgrimages, asceticism, abstinence in the midst of a happy crowd. At the same time we can find narratives describing revelation of community experiences to alienated modern man.

## LITERATURE

- ANTTONEN, Pertti  
1998: One Martyr, Two Pilgrimages: The Commemoration of a 12th Century Bishop as a Spiritual Movement in the Late 20th Century. *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 43, 1–16.
- BARNA, Gábor  
1996: Die Wallfahrt in Ungarn: Touristen-Wallfahrt oder religiöser Tourismus. *Villa Rana* 2, 15–22.
- BLACK, Georg  
1984: Das Bayerische Pilgerbüro und sein Dienst am Menschen Unterwegs. In: KRISSE-RETTENBECK L.–MÖHLER, G. (hrsg.): *Wallfahrt kennt keine Grenzen*. Zürich: Schnell & Steiner, 168–177
- BRUNER, Edward M.  
1989: Of Cannibals, Tourists, and Ethnographers. *Cultural Anthropology* 4 (4): 438–445.
- EADE, John  
1992: Pilgrimage and Tourism at Lourdes, France. *Annals of Tourism Research* 19, 18–32.
- JACKOWSKI, Antoni–SMITH, Valene L.  
1992: Polish pilgrim-tourists. *Annals of Tourism Research* 19, 92–106.
- MACCANNELL, Dean  
1976: *The Tourist. A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Schocken.
- MARKWELL, Kevin–BASCHÉ, Christopher  
1998: Using personal diaries to collect data. *Annals of Tourism Research* 25, 228–231.
- PFAFFENBERGER, Bryan  
1983: Serious Pilgrims and Frivolous Tourists. The Chimera of Tourism in the Pilgrimages of Sri Lanka. *Annals of Tourism Research* 10, 57–74.
- POST, Paul  
1994: The Modern Pilgrim. *Ethnologia Europea* 1994/2, 85–100.
- RINSCHÉDE, Gisbert  
1992: Forms of religious tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* 19, 51–67.
- SALLNOW, M. J.  
1981: Communitas Reconsidered: the Sociology of Andean Pilgrimage. *Man* 16, June, 163–82.
- SELÄNNIEMI, Tom  
1994: A Charter Trip to Sacred Places – Finnish Tourists in Athens, in: SELÄNNIEMI, Tom: *Paketti-matka pyhään paikkaan*. Jyväskylä: Etnologian laitos, 146–155.  
1996: *Matka ikuisen käsään*. Helsinki: SKS.
- TOMKA, Miklós  
1991: *Magyar katolicizmus* [Hungarian Catholicism]. Budapest: Országos Lelkipásztori Int. Katolikus Társadalomtud. Akad.
- VAN UDEN, Marinus H. F.–PIEPER, Joseph Z. T.  
1996: Pilgrims to Santiago. *Studies in Spirituality* 6 (6): 276–288.