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## Family Pilgrimage Along the Camino de Santiago in Poland: Forms, Conditions and Prospects for Development

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# Family Pilgrimage Along the Camino de Santiago in Poland: Forms, Conditions and Prospects for Development

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This study presents an analysis of the forms of family pilgrimage along the Polish sections of the Way of St. James. The purpose of the research is to understand the current status of family pilgrimage along the route to Santiago de Compostela in Poland, as well as to specify the determinants of the development of this type of pilgrimage. The forms of family pilgrimage along the Way of St. James in Poland and the importance of such pilgrimages in deepening intra-family relations are presented based on interviews and testimonies collected, as well as on several years of experience in organising and participating in family pilgrimages.

**Key Words:** Camino de Santiago, Way of St. James, marriage, pilgrimage, faith, family, relationships

## Introduction

The Way of St. James (Camino de Santiago), the medieval pilgrimage route to the shrine of St. James in Santiago de Compostela, is considered the most expansive and inspiring Christian pilgrimage and cultural route in the world. The exponential growth of wandering and pilgrimage along this route has been observed since the late 1990s, and continued until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 (Mróz *et al.*, 2019; Mróz, 2020). Last year – 2022, was a record year – in terms of pilgrimage traffic – in the modern history of pilgrimage to Compostela. Indeed, the Pilgrimage Office in Santiago de Compostela registered more than 438,000 people who reached the shrine of St. James on foot, bicycle, horseback or wheelchair (this was an increase of more than 90,000 compared with 2019, before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic).

There are several factors behind the phenomenon of the Camino de Santiago's development in the last three decades: the prominence of the Sanctuary of St. James

in Santiago de Compostela – one of the most important Christian pilgrimage centres; the more than 1,200-year tradition of pilgrimage to the tomb of St. James; the inclusion of the route on the list of European Cultural Routes and the UNESCO list of World Cultural and Natural Heritage (sections of the route on the territory of Spain and France); the multifaceted nature of the route – religious, cultural, tourist and natural; as well as the overwhelmingly individual nature of travel or – pilgrimage along this route (Mróz, 2019; Roszak, 2017). Most prominent, however, are the realities of this route – a route of encounter: an encounter with God, an encounter with another person, a route of giving and receiving, a route of conversion and of deep reflection on life (Doburzyński & Roszak, 2022; Mróz, 2020).

Pilgrimage along the Way of St. James (not infrequently over a distance of several thousand kilometres) is particularly conducive to inner maturation, provides an opportunity for insight into oneself, a revision of one's identity, and prompts one to begin a new stage of life (Chrostowski, 2015; Doburzyński, 2021; Roszak 2019).

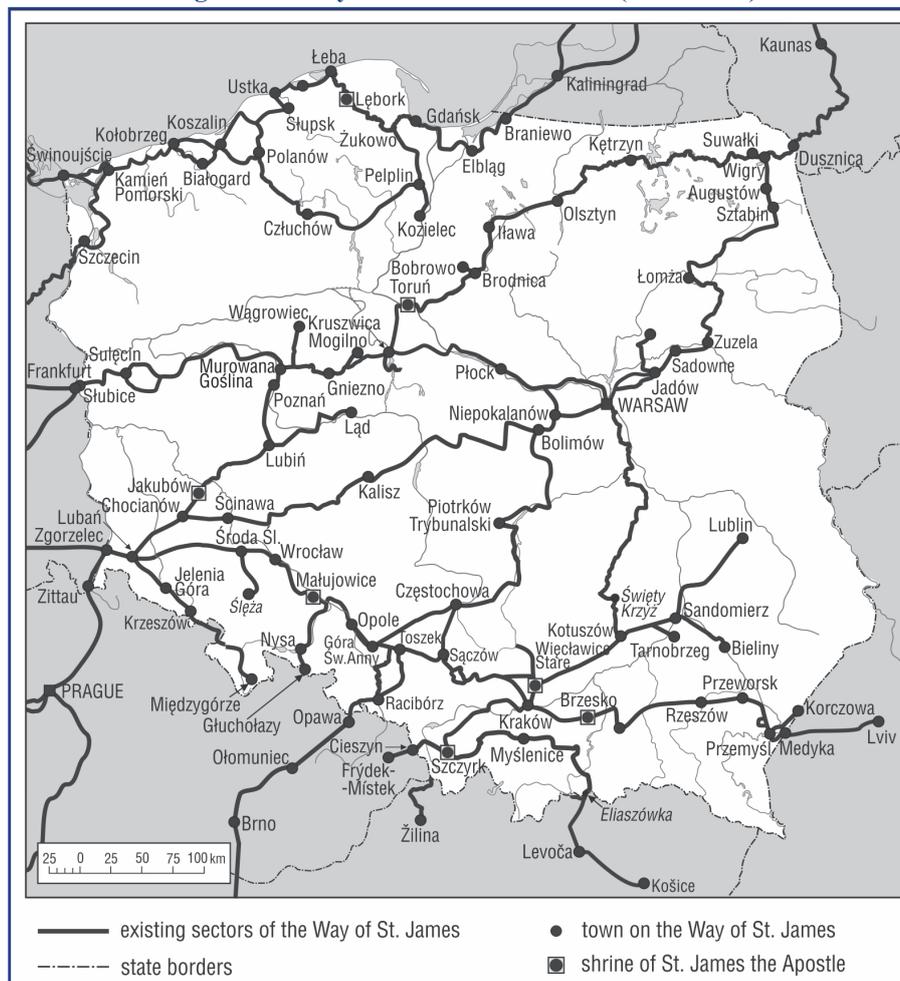
Sections of the Way of St. James occupy a growing importance in the pilgrimage space in Poland. Every year there is also a growing interest among Poles in hiking the Camino de Santiago on the Spanish, Portuguese and Polish sections of this ‘most beautiful route in the world’ – as the Way of St. James is often referred to by popular consensus (Mróz, 2020).

The immediate impetus for the first section of the Way of St. James in Poland was the marking of the Ecumenical Pilgrimage Route ‘Via Regia’ in Germany in 2003, the eastern end of which was then marked by the German-Polish border in Görlitz – Zgorzelec. In the following months, a group of Polish Camino de Santiago enthusiasts and people who had already made a pilgrimage to the tomb of St. James began work on delineating and marking Polish sections of the Way. In 2005, the first section of the Camino de Santiago on Polish territory – the Lower Silesian Way of St. James, leading from Jakubow to the

Polish-German border Zgorzelec – Görlitz – was opened in Jakubow (Mróz, 2017). The following years brought a huge number of initiatives related to marking new sections of the route, the organisation of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage and the development of the cult of St. James in Poland. As a result, by the end of 2022, a total of 38 sections of the Way of St. James had been created in Poland’s pilgrimage space, forming a network of more than 7,400km (see Fig. 1), and 7 shrines of St. James had been established (Jakubowo, Lębork, Więclawice Stare, Szczyrk, Małujowice, Brzesko, Toruń - Figure 2) .

The present study puts forward an analysis of the forms of family pilgrimage along the Polish sections of the Way of St. James. The purpose of the research is to understand the current state of family pilgrimage along the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela in Poland, as well as to analyse the importance of this type of hiking in deepening intra-family relations.

**Fig. 1. The Way of St. James in Poland (01/03/2023)**



Source: F. Mróz, Ł. Mróz

**Figure 2: Polish Shrines of St. James****a) Shell Sculpture at St. Jacob Church in Jakubów****b) Parish Church of St. James in Lębork****c) Saint James Church in Więclawice Stare****d) Church of Saint James in Szczyrk****e) Church of St. James Malujowice****f) Sanctuary of St. James in Malujowice****g) Statue of St. James in Front of New Part of Church in Brzesko****h) Church of St. James in Toruń**

All photos by Franciszek Mróz

## Materials & Methods

The analysis of the forms of family pilgrimage along the sections of the Way of St. James in Poland and the factors determining the development of this type of peregrination was possible thanks to field research during which we conducted observations and interviews with families. We conducted more than 30 interviews with married couples or family members, during family pilgrimages carried out in 2021–2022 along the Polish sections of the Way of St. James.

However, we would like to emphasise that our research also relies on several years of experience (since 2010) in organising and participating in family pilgrimages on Polish (and foreign) sections of the Way of St. James, including: Lesser Poland Way of St. James, Polish Way (Camino Polaco), Via Regia Way of St. James, Jurassic Way of St. James, Świętokrzyska Way of St. James and Beskidzka Way of St. James. Presenting the current state of family pilgrimage in Poland was also possible thanks to interviews with coordinators of sections of the Way of St. James, as well as interviews with pastors working in parishes along the route.

Our analysis applies only to this group of pilgrims, related to each other through kinship (blood ties) or affinity. We would like to underscore that an accurate statistical and comparative analysis of the family pilgrimage traffic on the Polish sections of the Way of St. James is extremely difficult. This is primarily due to the nature of pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago and the lack of accurate recording of this movement. Only a few sacred sites or pilgrim hostels located along the Way of St. James in Poland maintain registration of people walking the route. Unfortunately, most of this registration is incomplete, due to the fact that not all people walking the route sign the books, and pastors working in the centres, where such a register of pilgrims is kept, due to numerous responsibilities, are not able to record all the James pilgrims who come to the parish (Mróz, 2016).

The outbreak and subsequent course of the COVID-19 pandemic also had a major impact on pilgrimage movement and the registration of pilgrims (Mróz, 2021). Valuable source material for the study of the family pilgrimage movement on a local scale are the lists of

participants in initiatives undertaken by individual St. James Confraternities, St. James parishes, St. James associations and enthusiasts of the Way of St. James.

## Results

Pilgrimage along the Way of St. James is particularly conducive to the search for inner peace, leaving one's own boundaries, getting to know one's own personality and at the same time opening up to the presence of God. Pilgrimage is a time to experience grace, peace, forgiveness and improvement of one's lifestyle. Pilgrimage has an existential dimension as well as a spiritual one. Already in ancient literature and in the pages of Scripture we find the term *homo viator* ('pilgrim human', 'human on a journey'). The biblical vision of human-pilgrim oscillates around the theme of transition from earthly life to eternal life, as well as a process of striving for perfection or personal holiness (Dec, 1985). Family pilgrimage along the Way of St. James corresponds with this understanding of *homo viator* (Tykarski & Mróz, 2023). The pilgrim family reflects God's people wandering through earthly life toward an encounter with God in eternity (Anthony, 2018; Roszak, 2011; Roszak, 2014).

### *Organisation of Family Pilgrimages along the Way of St. James*

In the space of pilgrimage along the Polish sections of the Way of St. James, we record families who go on the route individually and independently organising such an expedition. This is virtually identical to the forms of pilgrimage along the Way of St. James on the Iberian Peninsula, or in France and Germany. However, a large group among families making a pilgrimage along the Way of St. James are those who go on a pilgrimage organised by the confraternities of St. James, associations of friends of the Way of St. James and pastors working in parishes and centres along the route (mainly in parishes of St. James). The organisation of family pilgrimages by confraternities, pastors and various associations is one of the key factors in the development of the Way of St. James in Poland. This group of enthusiasts of the Way and devotees of St. James has the largest share in the design, demarcation and marking of the more than 7,400km Camino de Santiago network in Poland (Mróz,

2017; Mróz, 2019). Currently (as of December 31, 2022), there are 13 confraternities of St. James in Poland (Jakubowo, Kętrzyn, Lębork, Więclawice Stare, Szczyrk, Ośno Lubuskie, Przeworsk, Sanka, Toruń, Kotuszów, Brzesko, Ulanów, Gdańsk), the Confraternity of the Holy Apostle James the Elder at the Field Cathedral of the Polish Army in Warsaw, the Friends of the Way of St. James in Poland: James in Poland Association, The Go Further Foundation and several local and regional clubs of friends of the Way of St. James. Between them they bring together about 800 people in Poland – enthusiasts of the Camino de Santiago.

The interviews and observations conducted allow us to make another conclusion that very often at the genesis of family pilgrimage – joint pilgrimage of spouses, parents with children, grandparents with grandchildren - is an individual expedition by one of them on the Camino de Santiago. After returning from this pilgrimage, this enthusiast of the Way of St. James, fascinated by the route, gradually draws their spouse, then their children and even grandchildren onto the Camino. Most often, spouses and parents with children make a family pilgrimage on the Polish Way of St. James. In the case of family pilgrimages organised for a larger group of families, parents with children predominate, and in recent years, grandparents with grandchildren are also becoming more common. Family pilgrimages involving only fathers with their sons are also rising in popularity.

Organised family pilgrimages are dominated by one-day or weekend pilgrimages. These are usually pilgrimages of relatively short distances of 10-15 kilometres, which is determined primarily by the age and physical exertion capabilities of young children. Organisers of such family group pilgrimages provide families with support along the pilgrimage route, as well as transportation to and from the starting point of a particular stage.

Group and family pilgrimages along the Way of St. James have been organised for several years, in many regions of Poland and along various sections of the route. The organisers of such pilgrimages are primarily St. James Confraternities, members of Enthusiast Clubs, pastors and enthusiasts of the Way of St. James. These events are organised under the names: 'Family Pilgrimage', 'Sunday Pilgrimage along the Way of St. James', 'Bike Weekend

on the Via Regia', 'St. James Trail Rally', 'Weekend on the Way of St. James' and 'Jacob's Bike Rally'.

Married couples (without children) most often take the Way of St. James on multi-day pilgrimages – usually during vacations or long weekends. The organisation of family pilgrimages (not group pilgrimages) in which children participate – the length of the route, resting places, accommodations, catering facilities – is always adapted to the capabilities and behaviour of children.

### *Forms of Family Pilgrimage*

The most popular form of pilgrimage along the Way of St. James to Santiago de Compostela is on foot. This form is also dominant among family pilgrimages in Poland.

The oldest organised walking pilgrimage in Poland leading the Way of St. James is the walking pilgrimage from the Glogow Collegiate Church to the 'Source of St. James' in the sanctuary in Jakubow. The organiser of this meeting on the Lower Silesian Way of St. James is the Brotherhood of St. James in Jakubow. The first pilgrimage was organised on April 9, 2005, the day after John Paul II's funeral, along the route of the then still planned Lower Silesian Way of St. James. The pilgrimage, each year is attended by dozens of people – families with children and individual pilgrims (Mróz 2017).

Since 2012. The Brotherhood of St. James in Więclawice Stare has been organising the so-called, 'Sunday Pilgrimage along the Way of St. James'. In each such pilgrimage, in addition to individual pilgrims, several married couples always participate, and sometimes parents with children, siblings, and grandparents with grandchildren. Between 2012 and 2022 (with a break in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic), 72 stages of Sunday pilgrimage were organised on various sections of the Way of St. James in Poland, and more than 160 pilgrims participated – the most in 2013 and 2014. The average per stage was 58 and 54 people, respectively; a total of 2,672 people took part in all stages.

In the Subcarpathian region, the 'Sunday Pilgrimage along the Way of St. James' has been organised since 2012 by the Brotherhood of St. James at the Sanctuary of the Holy Sepulchre in Przeworsk. Similar to the initiative

of the St. James Brotherhood in Więclawice Stary, the pilgrimage is attended by married couples and parents with children.

In 2019, family pilgrimage along the Way of St. James was launched in the Diocese of Tarnów, thanks to pastoral workers working at the parish of St. James and the Shrine of St. James in Brzesko and the support of the St. James Brotherhood in Brzesko. The main objective of this pastoral initiative was to promote the idea of community / family pilgrimage along the Polish Way of St. James during one-day pilgrimages. The first edition of this event took place in 2019-2020, when organisers set the goal of walking the Way of St. James Via Regia, from the beginning of the border of the Diocese of Tarnów to the western border. The increase in interest in family pilgrimage coincided with the Catholic Church's 2021 and 2022 Holy Year in Compostela (*Año Santo Compostelano 2021-2022*).

The proposal was aimed at willing people of all ages with a particular focus on married couples and their children. Assuming the participation of a wide range of people, efforts were made to adjust the individual sections in terms of difficulty of route and distance so that each participant was able to achieve the desired goal (the length of each stage was 15-19 km). Before leaving, each pilgrim was given important information about the route and the common points of the day, e.g. Mass times, sites to visit along the way, or the last point of the journey. Pilgrims decided for themselves how to take their pilgrimage. Some made the pilgrimage in family or friendship groups, and some took the path of pilgrimage alone.

The family pilgrimage organised by the Sanctuary of St. James in Brzesko proved to be a great organisational and pastoral success. In 2021, families made a pilgrimage along a section of the Way of St. James Via Regia in the Małopolska province. Over the course of 10 months, families covered nearly 140 kilometres from Zawada to Chelm, visiting many important pilgrimage sites and sacred centres of the Tarnów diocese – shrines in Zawada, Pilsen, Tuchow, Tarnow, Brzesko and Bochnia. An average of 80-90 people participated in each stage. A total of 150 people participated in the 2021 family pilgrimage – 60 pilgrims managed to walk more than

100km. The youngest participant – 3-year-old Fabian walked 2 stages, and 6-year-old Emil walked 120 km. The oldest pilgrims: women named Jadwiga, Maria, and Leokadia, were over 70 years old.

In 2022 'Family Pilgrimage' was organised on a section of the Beskid Way of St. James. The route from Litmanowa to Raciechowice was covered by a total of 250 people. On average, 90 people took part in each stage. During the pilgrimage, the participants visited, among others: the sanctuary in Litmanowa, the monastery of the Poor Clare nuns in Stary Sącz, the sanctuary in Limanowa, Pasierbiec, the St. James station church in Podegrodzie, and the St. James chapel in Rozdziele.

A very important moment of each passage was Mass, which, depending on the different stages, took place at the beginning of the route, during the pilgrimage route, or at its end. When there was a church or shrine along the way, pilgrims prayed together there with some prayer of their choice such as the litany, or the Divine Mercy chaplet. It was also a very common sight to pray together on the road. Pilgrims in groups of several people prayed the holy rosary.

An important part of the joint crossings was learning about the natural and cultural assets along the route and the wealth of local intangible heritage. When any places of importance in terms of faith, culture, history or tourism appeared along the route, pilgrims were encouraged to learn about them. Whenever possible, organisers tried to meet the challenge by providing local guides. An important part of each stage of the family pilgrimage was the presence of a guide, who took care of guiding the group, as well as informing participants about important sites or familiarising them with how to prepare well for the journey.

At each stage, pilgrims were accompanied by a pastor, who, in addition to celebrating Mass, was at the disposal of the faithful for their spiritual needs, and some also took advantage of the opportunity to talk with the priest. Thus, pilgrims described the Way of St. James as a fruitful opportunity for reflection.

Bicycle pilgrimages on Polish sections of the Way of St. James are becoming increasingly popular. They

are organised on almost all sections of the Camino de Santiago, and in some regions they are already cyclical. In 2022, for the ninth time, a group of enthusiasts of the Way of St. James in the Opole region, 'Pilgrims of Opole,' organised the 9th St. James Bicycle Rally on the Nysa section of the Way of St. James.

The Way of St. James in Poland has also become a space for the fusion of pilgrimage with sports. Since 2001, the St. James the Apostle Street Run - a distance of 10km - has been organised in Lębork. On the other hand, the St. James Half Marathon of 21.097 km has been organised in Olsztyn since 2012. The St. James Brotherhood in Więclawice Stare organises the Lesser Poland Run along the Way of St. James. The Sanctuary of St. James in Brzesko at the Way of St. James Via Regia, together with the 'Jacob Parish Sports Club' has been organising since 2018, a 10 km run along the Way of St. James, while the municipality of Przeworsk organises a Run along the Subcarpathian Way of St. James. Several hundred runners take part in each of these events – among them, of course, are married couples and parents with children. Running events are also a great time to integrate families and cheer each other on, facilitating bonding during the pilgrimage.

Forms of family pilgrimage along Polish sections of the Way of St. James, which are not organised on the Iberian Peninsula, also deserve special mention. Such Polish caminics 'showpieces' include canoe pilgrimages also organised by the 'Opole Pilgrims' on the river section of the Nysa St. James Way, as well as ski pilgrimages along the Beskidzka St. James Way, which have been organised since 2011 (with a break in 2021 and 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic), which have been organised by the St. James Brotherhood in Szczyrk.

On July 25, 2021, the St. James 'Flis' (river float) with the statue of St. James was inaugurated at the sanctuary of St. James in Więclawice Stare and then under Wawel Hill in Cracow on the Vistula River. The pilgrims sailed from Krakow to Toruń and then to Gdansk, visiting St. James churches in the Vistula River towns: Opatowiec, Sandomierz, Piotrowice, Świerże Górne, Warsaw, Płock, Toruń, Niewieścina, Chełmno, Wielki Lubień, Niedzwiedzica and Gdańsk along the way. From Gdansk, the statue of St. James sailed on a sailing yacht to the

port of La Coruña, and from there, pilgrims carried it to the shrine of St. James in Santiago de Compostela in a three-day pilgrimage on foot. On July 25, 2022. – i.e. on the indulgence of St. James, the statue was consecrated in Compostela Cathedral, and then transported to Poland and placed in a chapel in Dobrzyń on the Vistula River. Thus, the water pilgrimage route from Poland to Compostela – which in Poland on the Vistula River section was called *Camino Vistula* – was recreated. Poland's pilgrimage space has been enriched this unique pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela. The Vistula Camino de Santiago has become a space for pilgrims – including families – to reflect on life, transform their lives and persevere towards a common goal. Flowing along the river, overcoming its often numerous meanders, dams and obstacles, a person learns in a unique and basic way how to persevere towards the journey's end.

It is also worth noting that family pilgrimage on the Polish sections of the Way of St. James is carried out on many other religious and pastoral initiatives that are not strictly pilgrimage in nature. Such initiatives include: The Extreme Way of the Cross, the Night Way of the Cross and the 'Procession of the Three Kings' on selected sections of the Way of St. James.

### *Motives and Intentions of Family Pilgrimage*

The research conducted allows us to conclude that the most common motives for family pilgrimage along the Polish sections of the Way of St. James are religious and spiritual. However, the cognitive-tourist aspect is also important. Families go on pilgrimage to strengthen family ties and improve relations with their spouse and children. The common motivations for spouses to go on the Way of St. James are wedding anniversaries, birthdays or important family events (Tykarski & Mróz, 2023).

Very often pilgrims set out on the route of St. James with a pre-selected intention. The main intentions are those related to family life – a request for God's blessing on the family, a request for health for the family, a request for a job, a request for a good result in children's exams, a request for healing of relationships and harmony in the family, for making the right choices, and for healing from addictions. Pilgrims also undertake various penitential sacrifices.

### *Deepen Marital and Family Relationships and Make New Friends*

The deepening of marital and family relationships is one of the main fruits of family pilgrimage along the Way of St. James. This support had both a physical dimension (helping carry luggage, preparing a meal, massaging legs, putting on bandages) and a psycho-spiritual dimension (talking together, praying together, motivating each other to travel further, showing love and care) (Tykarski & Mróz, 2023). As one father of two recalls, the family pilgrimage was a great opportunity for him to improve relationships in the family. Work and daily responsibilities made it difficult for him to do so, but he was able to be exclusive to his children during the family pilgrimage. Another very valuable testimony was the confession of one married couple, who admitted that the family pilgrimage was a great time to strengthen their marital relationship. Moreover, as they recalled, they had always wanted to go to Santiago de Compostela, but work and family obligations prevented them from fulfilling this dream for the time being. The family pilgrimage was a rekindling of their motivation to someday reach the tomb of St. James the Apostle. The pilgrims, Peter and Agnes, emphasised:

*We have always spent and continue to spend a lot of time with each other. Our family is cemented by God, by our being with each other. A big part of our life is the 'Faith and Light' community, of which we have been participants for a long time (our son Paul since birth, he went to his first camp at two months old). The family pilgrimage we discovered along the way further strengthens our relationships. Love, experiencing together the pleasant and difficult moments on the trail, 'feeling' each other without words – this is the human aspect of our Camino. Retreats on the road, contemplating God, recognising Him in others along the trail, in different situations ... We managed to infect several people from our surroundings with 'caminosis' and this also deepens our relationships. On top of that, while walking we meet new people who also influence us. We can say about quite a few of them that they have become our friends over time.*

The research, interviews, and observations conducted allow us to conclude that in the case of organised group

family pilgrimage, despite the large size of the group (sometimes more than 100 people) and the constant arrival of new people, there is a family atmosphere in the group. Many families emphasise that during these pilgrimages they make contact with previously unknown people – families – which very often turns into friendship. A wide audience of different ages is conducive to making new acquaintances among children, young people and adults. The consequence of such processes is that, after several stages, an organised group of family pilgrims begins to form a Camino 'family'. Importantly, it is not a hermetic family – but one that is constantly open to new people, to new families, which it welcomes with openness and kindness and naturally absorbs into its 'Camino Family.'

The Camino marriage fosters conversations that spouses don't have time for in the whirlwind of daily professional and domestic responsibilities. These conversations include the subjects of love, forgiveness, fidelity, support, appreciation, health, personal or shared passions, professional work, marital crises, life choices, memories, plans for the rest of life, as well as discussing current affairs and current problems in the family and among friends (Strobel, 2021; Tykarski & Mróz, 2023). One respondent admitted:

*Our Camino marriage is the most beautiful days of the year. It is the best vacation with my husband, but also the best retreat on the road. During the Camino, we have time just for ourselves, away from our daily responsibilities and the constant reel of tasks. We also have time to pray together on the road, and thus get closer to God.*

We would like to draw attention to one more important aspect of family pilgrimage, and that concerns the deepening of family relationships – between parents and children, or parent and child. Our research allows us to conclude that every year fathers with sons are choosing to walk the Camino de Santiago. Frequent pilgrims along the route call this the 'Male Camino.' One respondent, recalling such a trip with his son, emphasises:

*Not always - on a daily basis these relations of mine with my son are good. On the Camino we were actually dependent on each other. It was a great time to finally ask and listen to my son,*

*and an opportunity for honesty. It was also great that in some of the more difficult moments on the trail it was from him that I received support ...*

Connection between teenagers and their parents protects them from loneliness, alienation and a kind of family 'homelessness' (Pilarz *et al.*, 2019). Thus, the space of pilgrimage-walking along the Way of St. James provides tremendous opportunities for personal growth and the deepening of marital and family relationships – between parents and children (especially teenagers), between siblings, and between grandparents and grandchildren (Echarri, 2021).

The family pilgrimage also has a nurturing and educational element. On the road, parents have more time to strengthen their child / children's core values: honesty, justice, respect for others, courage, helping the weak, solidarity and forgiveness. During the pilgrimage, children have the opportunity to draw positive attitudes from their peers and discuss their concerns with other parents.

### **Camino Reset**

The peculiarity of hiking / pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago and the religious, cultural and natural richness of the space of this route also has a great therapeutic dimension. Bernard Ollivier – a French traveller and journalist and promoter of the Camino de Santiago method of rehabilitating prisoners – discovered while hiking to Compostela that 'walking is more of a spiritual exercise than a physical one' (Ollivier, 2011:41; Mróz & Matuszczak, 2019). Hiking the pilgrimage improves mental and emotional well-being (Faria *et al.*, 2022; Klimiuk & Moriarty 2021; Mikaelsson, 2012). Koyama (1974) points out that walking – proper speed and proper posture – is one of the best ways to prepare for meditation – and that the sacred must be approached slowly, humbly, and respectfully (Koyama, 1974).

Hiking is also the most effective way to communicate in active movement. People who have made the pilgrimage, or hiked along the Way of St. James, emphasise that the Camino de Santiago makes it possible to reduce emotional, mental, and even physical stress (Franck, 2021). This Camino reset is, for most pilgrims, an entry

into a state of relaxation and improved self-acceptance (Seryczyńska, 2019). The journey resets, influences behavioural changes and improves marital, family and friendship relationships (Roszak & Huzarek 2022; Vidal-González & Sánchez, 2019).

### **Promotion and New Initiatives of Family Pilgrimage**

In the promotion of family pilgrimage along the Way of St. James in Poland, the greatest contribution is currently made by social media (social networks – mainly Facebook, pilgrims' blogs); websites of St. James Confraternities, Associations and enthusiasts of the Way of St. James, individual sections of the Camino de Santiago; as well as press coverage and features of the trail on television (broadcast on the local, regional and national scales).

## **Conclusions**

Based on the research conducted, it can be estimated that the Polish sections of the Way of St. James are visited annually by at least 1,000 people in family groups. Last year – 2022 – brought a renewed development of group and family pilgrimages along the route under initiatives called 'Family Pilgrimage' and 'Sunday Pilgrimage along the Way of St. James.'

The positive impact of pilgrimage on the pilgrims themselves and their families cannot be overlooked. The impact can be *ad intra* (inward) forming the pilgrim's personality, shaping their character by overcoming the hardships of hiking, personal weaknesses or limitations. Spending time with oneself provides tranquillity, an opportunity for reflection, self-insight, drawing conclusions, reformulating life goals. The impact of pilgrimage can also have an *ad extra* impact, i.e. it can have an outward effect on interpersonal relationships (especially among those on pilgrimage together) and also strengthen marital-family ties. Pilgrim spouses as well as parents with children (or other family members) have the opportunity to get to know each other better, trust each other, show concern for each other, provide mental-emotional support and help each other during the journey together. Such behaviours are very useful for building strong and satisfying relationships, deepening relationships and creating space to show love to the other.

It should be assumed that the popularity of family pilgrimage along the Polish sections of the Way of St. James will clearly increase in the coming years, and such a trend will be influenced by: the further development of the cult of St. James in many Polish parishes, the promotion of the Camino de Santiago and family pilgrimage along this route in the mass media, new initiatives related to pilgrimage along the Way of St. James, and new forms of pilgrimage along the Way of St. James.

Recognising the very positive impact of pilgrimage on marital and family relations, efforts should be made to promote this idea. Of great importance in the implementation of this project are various associations, brotherhoods and enthusiasts of the Way of St. James in Poland. Using their past experience, similar events can be initiated. Creating proposals for family pilgrimage on selected sections of the Way of St. James in various places will be an opportunity to increase accessibility.

Recognising the therapeutic importance of family pilgrimage, it may be worth thinking about establishing cooperation with various marriage and family support centres, so that they also include pilgrimage along the Way of St. James as part of their forms of work. Sharing a common hardship or simply a break from the daily grind, can become a unique opportunity to improve mutual relations. It will also be a good proposal for spending free time together.

With the growing popularity of hiking the Way of St. James in Poland, the improvement of infrastructure along the route should go hand in hand. Associations responsible for individual sections should strive for proper signage, updating maps and apps or organising pilgrim-friendly places and small tourist infrastructure facilities (shelters, tourist shelters, benches, tables). Another important element is the creation of information points where it will be possible to obtain information on tourist fabric, interesting places worth seeing and accommodation facilities. This will certainly facilitate and encourage those carrying the intention of planning individual and family pilgrimages.

A very important task in the pastoral aspect is to establish contacts with parishes located on selected sections of the Way of St. James in order to build the awareness of pastors

who may meet with pilgrims. Creating opportunities for prayer, conversation, and the use of sacramental services will certainly be important for the spiritual side of the pilgrimage. Another pastoral suggestion will be to organise joint pilgrimage retreats. The presence of a leading pastor will provide an opportunity for conversation and the opportunity to receive sacramental services.

The enormous potential that the Camino de Santiago carries is constantly being discovered. The unflagging interest in initiatives that have been going on for more than a dozen years, as well as the constantly emerging new proposals, are confirmation of this. Pilgrimage in marriage and family has many positive effects. An important aspect is the spiritual dimension, which should be inseparable from pilgrimage. On the part of various associations, confraternities and lovers of the path of St. James the aim is to promote these initiatives as well as to create better and better conditions to encourage more and more people to go towards the Tomb of St. James.

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