RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE OF VILNIUS:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL GLANCE

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The traditional religious landscape is changing considerably, and the current religious landscape exhibits a remarkable variety. The religious landscape was shifting. Today in Europe there are three general trends – secularization, new spirituality and immigrant religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism additional to Judeo-Christian tradition. Phenomenological approaches are crucial for developing new and deepening existing modes of cooperation between dissimilar cultures and religions. Using phenomenological approach we look on religious landscape of Vilnius as pluralistic from the two general views: old historical, traditional source and nowadays the increasing diversity. The article includes a short discussion about definition of "religious landscape" and the possibilities of its interpretation. Using definition *epochē* from phenomenological point of view we conclude that religious landscape of Vilnius is pluralistic.

Keywords: *epochē* and eidetic vision, phenomenological approach, religious landscape, *sacrum*.

"The young lieutenant of a small Hungarian detachment in the Alps sent a reconnaissance unit out into the icy wasteland. It began to snow immediately, it snowed for two days and the unit did not return. The lieutenant suffered: he had dispatched his own people to death. But on the third day the unit came back. Where had they been? How had they made their way? Yes, they said, we considered ourselves lost and waited for the end. And then one of us found a map in his pocket. That calmed us down. We pitched camp, lasted out the snowstorm and then with the map we discovered our bearings. And here we are. The lieutenant borrowed this remarkable map and had a good look at it. It was not a map of the Alps but of the Pyrenees".

The story of Albert Szent-Györgyi (the Nobel Prize laureate)

Introduction

In a period of evidently increased tension and conflict on a global scale, cooperation and dialogue between different cultures, religions should be regarded as an ethical and normative imperative. Phenomenological approaches are crucial for developing new and for deepening the existing modes of cooperation between dissimilar cultures and religions. In the 21st century Europe has become the scene of very contrasting tendencies where religion is concerned. These tendencies include secularization, religious revival, and the rise of immigrant religions, particularly, Islam.

From phenomenological approach to religious pluralism

The definition of "phenomenology of religion" was coined by Dutch philosopher Pierre Daniël Chantepie de la Saussaye in his book *Manual of the Science of Religion* (first edition in 1887). His aim was to bring together and to describe common themes across a number of religions. The difference between the essence of a thing and its manifestations to consciousness was very important for him. For Chantepie, the main stimulus of this differentiation was the attempt to organize religious phenomena along typological lines, to underline the different and diverse manifestations of religion. This distinction between the essence of religion and its different manifestations was taken up by many religious researchers in the 20th century whose studies are now associated with the phenomenology of religion: Rudolf Otto in a book *The Idea of the Holy*, Gerardus van der Leeuw in a book *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology*, and Mircea Eliade in a book *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. This stage and names were mostly associated with "descriptive phenomenology". At the same time, the names of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and others were associated with "hermeneutical phenomenology". Nevertheless, all representations of phenomenology of religion focused on contemporary or living religions rather than the historical development or origins of religion. The essential nature of religion is interpreted as an experience of the Holy or the Sacred. These definitions start to be more important and powerful in phenomenology of religion. The types of interconnections of meaning can be described differently according to different contexts, and they could include types of sacred objects (e.g. stones, trees, buildings, places). The basic type or structure of religious meaning is that all phenomena can be described as appearances of the Sacred. From the view of Leeuw, "all understanding, irrespective of whatever object it refers to, is ultimately religious: all significance sooner or later leads to ultimate significance" (Leeuw 1963: 684).

The methodology of phenomenology has the following typical principles of religion research: the essence of religion is an experience of the Sacred or the Holy; religious experience is qualitatively different from all other experiences; the parameters of religious experience and truth extend beyond the parameters of religious language. As Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, the phenomenological approach gives "a privileged opening toward wonder" (Heschel 1951). Scholars point out only description and some meanings of related phenomena with regard to their own way. They do not present any solution about phenomena that are live in different forms or morphologies in different religions.

Two methodological principles or definitions which have become central to phenomenology of religion are *epochē* and eidetic vision. *Epochē* is the bracketing out of the observer's own system of belief; critical empathy is the practice of sympathy or more often privileging internal systems of explanation, and eidetic vision refers to the phenomenological practices of typology or morphology.

The *epochē* is not simply a method that can be applied in some cases and not in others. The *epochē* is always already at work as it pervades the understanding. *Epochē* is the practice of bracketing off. The *epochē* implies that one must turn away

from some things in order to turn toward others. The *epochē* is not merely judgment concerning the problem of truth; it is a value and a feeling at the same time. The principle underpinning such a procedure is that of empathy, the attempt to understand someone's experience from their point of view. It has been characterized as the principle of methodological neutrality or objectivity. According to phenomenology of religion, all prior beliefs, commitments, and value judgments should be bracketed out when the subject matter of religion is concerned. The *epochē* is the way for enacting such hospitable restraint and makes it possible to welcome the alterity of other religions and other ethnicities. The critical empathy is a kind of way by which researcher can enter religious phenomena. The eidetic vision is an intuition of the essence of a phenomenon. It assumes that religion has a separable essence which can only be understood in its own terms.

According to these two methodological principles of phenomenology of religion, we will analyze the religious landscape of Vilnius and will give the answer to the question: "Can the religious landscape of Vilnius be called pluralistic?"

The landscape of *sacrum* and *profanum*

The definition of *sacrum* and Eliade's interpretation will help us with the answer to the above-mentioned question. In various religions, sacred (from Latin *sacrum*, *sacrifice*), or holy, objects, places or concepts are believed by the followers to be intimately connected with the supernatural, or divinity. According to Eliade, "all the definitions given up till now of the religious phenomenon have one thing in common: each has its own way of showing that the sacred and the religious life are the opposite of the profane and secular life" (Eliade 1958: 1). Eliade underlines that a traditional man distinguishes two levels of existence: the sacred and the profane worlds. He argues that many traditional societies share common outlines in their mythical geographies. In the middle of the known world there is the sacred center, "a place that is sacred above all". Sacred space is the space where the Sacred manifests itself. Where the Sacred intersects our world, it appears in the form of ideal models (the actions and commandments of gods or mythical heroes). All things become "real" by imitating these models.

Eliade offers an initial definition of the sacred as the opposite of the profane. As an example of "sacred space" demanding a certain response from a man, he gives the story of Moses halting before Yahweh's manifestation as a burning bush. The sacred is the interface between the supernatural and the natural. It is not the power of the supernatural transferred to the natural, but simply the reality of the supernatural experienced in the natural. An example of *sacrum* is the church, whose door is a threshold between the profane on the outside and the sacred inside. An equivalent to the church in archaic cultures was the sacred enclosure, which opened upwards towards the sky, the world of the gods. Thus, a church can be seen as a sacred place, a religious service as a sacred time: both of them are particularly conducive to personal experience of the supernatural which was described by William James and Otto. The sacred has also been the subject of considerable contention. Some have seen Eliade's "sacred" as

simply corresponding to a conventional concept of deity, or to Otto's the "wholly other". According to Eliade, "all the definitions given up till now of the religious phenomenon have one thing in common: each has its own way of showing that the sacred and the religious life are the opposite of the profane and secular life" (Eliade 1958: 1). Eliade himself repeatedly identifies the sacred as the real, yet he states clearly that "the sacred always manifests itself as a reality of a wholly different order from "natural" realities" (Eliade 1959: 10). Yet, the sacred is identified as the source of significance, meaning, power and being, and its manifestations as hierophanies (holy), cratophanies (power) and ontophanies (being). The ambiguity of the sacred itself gives rise to the ambiguity of its manifestations. For Eliade, a temple is a new stage in a man's religious understanding of sacred space. A temple was an *imago mundi*, symbolizing the *cosmos*, the sacred order divinely imposed on primordial *chaos*. According to Eliade's interpretation, "a temple represented not only *imago mundi* (the world's image) but was a kind of earthly model of a heavenly world" (Элиаде 1994: 44). It was more than that: it was the house of the gods.

Hierophany is the manifestations of the sacred in the profane world, to which a man gave the rank of saint. They are a different kind of sacrum representations. Everything which has a possibility to transform into other, as it was before, is hierophany. For this reason, the material things which moved to *sacrum* space, territory or place start to be sacral and get the rank of saint. This Eliade's dialectic idea is very important for us when we start to think and explain the situation of sacral architecture, cemeteries or ancient symbols of pagan belief.

The profane place or space of non-religious experience can only be divided up geometrically: it has no qualitative differentiation and no orientation, and is given by virtue of its inherent structure. From Eliade's point of view, "it is evident that, for more than a century, the West has not been creating a "religious art" in the traditional sense of the term". Jan Patochka also underlines that the secular architecture is only an attempt to inherit the sacral architecture. He stresses the historical importance of sacral understanding of the architecture.

Religious pluralism is the space where *sacrum* has many forms of manifestation. Religious pluralism is the diversity or heterogeneity of religious movements within a particular geographical area, and the theory that there are more than one or more than two kinds of ultimate reality and/or truth; and that, therefore, more than one religion can be said to have the truth, even if their essential doctrines are mutually exclusive. Religious pluralism refers to the theological attempts to overcome religious differences between different religions, as well as the attempts to overcome religious differences within different denominations of the same religion. In the wide context religious pluralism is the recognition of the fact of the presence of various religions and various forms of expression of religious feelings; the theory recognizing the presence of several ways of Absolute comprehension and religious truths, even if you recognize the doctrines as exclusive; a recognition of the value of each religion; refusal from a choice between them and refusal from general evangelization, missionary work as such. At the same time, through the immigration and secularization we are faced with

something more than simple religious pluralism: we have to deal with a veritable cultural and ethical pluralism which results in the coexistence of different ways of procreating, marrying, and dying. The fascination with religion or indifference to it are a part of a process wider than merely the religious or worldview situation, and the religious pluralism as a part of diversity has a strong connection with the common possibility to choose from a big diversity of political, cultural and life-style preferences. It means that diversity or pluralism on the whole (same as in the religious sphere) is not only a process from the outside, but from the inside as well (traditional religious minorities, non-traditional religious movements, New Age, etc.). Religious pluralism gives great possibilities to view and to describe many images of *sacrum*.

Short discussion about the definition of the "religious landscape"

The next important definition for us is "the religious landscape" which it is possible to interpret in different ways. This definition mostly means the concrete religious situation in the concrete place or space, such as continent, country, state or province, or town. The definition "religious landscape" is close to Western definition "religious marketplace" which means the social arena where religions compete for members and resources. Geographical, administrative borders limit the space of a landscape. The confessional structure, the population by religious confession, the inhabitants by confessions, the number of churches, denominations, parishes, the number of believers within the religious organization as such, and other statistic information create the image of the religious landscape. For example, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life delivers timely information on issues of intersection of religion and public affairs which include such subjects as the religious composition of the USA, changes in Americans' religious affiliation, a brief history of religion, and the USA census. The title of its report is *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey. Religious Affiliation: Diverse and Dynamic*. Another example of the religious landscape investigation is The Pluralism Project which started in Harvard University in 1990 and has not finished until today. Some generations of students joined Professor Diana Eck to visit every religious community in Boston area. They began to discover and document the religious landscape in the process of contemporary transformation. One of the results of this project was the CD-ROM the main section of which was titled: "Exploring the Religious Landscape". It provides portraits of some 300 communities of faith in 18 cities and regions of the US, including churches, mosques, and temples; second section "Discovering America's Religions" includes an introduction to fifteen religious traditions in the American context. Both these examples have statistic, visual, and narrative approach which is possible to be named a statistic-descriptive one. In this case it is not important how big the religious organization is, and how many followers it has. The phenomenological approach gives the possibility to describe and pay equal attention to every religious body and phenomenon. The *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* characterized it as "a very competitive religious marketplace" which is growing as a result of religious change by which religious groups are simply gaining new

members at a faster rate than they are losing members. The statement such as that: "a substantial number of people (nearly 4% of the overall adult population) say that as children they were unaffiliated with any particular religion but have since come to identify with a religious group," – give us the possibility to analyze the changes of the American religious landscape (*U.S. Religious Landscape Survey…* 2008).

Another approach to the definition of the "religious landscape" is wider and pays attention to the functions, social context, theological and doctrinal matter of religious denomination. For example, in the speech "The Shifting Religious Landscape" by Piet de Klerk, Dutch Human Rights Ambassador, the attention was concentrated on the relationship between Islamic immigrants and a Christian-nation-in-transition, religious precepts and human rights, state and church. The book "The Changing Religious Landscape of Europe" edited by Hans Knippenberg focuses on religious development in different countries of Europe and includes the changing religious composition of the population, the geographical distribution of the religious communities. Knippenberg found such challenge as globalisation and its consequences, massive immigration and the rise of immigrant religions, deterritorialisation, which means the disembeddedness of religion from its national territory and reterritorialisation of which the new territorial order of the European Union seems to be the most important (Knippenberg 2005). Silvio Ferrari in his speech (later was published as an article) "The Transformation of the European Religious Landscape: A Legal Perspective" pays attention to two factors: the first – internal (immigration), and the second – external (individualism). Both factors have played an important role in this weakening process and have paved the way to the birth of a European culturally and ethically pluralistic society. The author concludes that "today we are faced with something more than simple religious pluralism: we have to deal with a veritable cultural and ethical pluralism" (Ferrari 2007). In this case, the definition the "religious landscape" was used rather as a metaphor.

Vilnius as space of *sacrum*

Using the phenomenological approach we look at the religious landscape in Vilnius as pluralistic for the reason that this city has many typical pluralistic things: the increasing diversity and remarkable dynamism, most of inhabitants have different denominational self-identification, the diversity of Christians and other religious groups, including such smaller groups as Jews and Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus. Vilnius is the center of Europe, where common confessional structure looks the following way: 49.5% are Catholics, 15.7% – Muslims, 12.7% – Protestants, 8.6% – Orthodox, 0.4% – Jews, 25.4% – non-religious. Vilnius is in the center of the borders transition process. The new borders inside the European Union are non-territorial, which confirms the new paradigm about the weakening factor of territorial belonging as such. New borders divide the images of sacrum in the same space.

There are two general sources of religious pluralism in Vilnius which can be named old (historical, traditional) and modern (not culturally and historically rooted).

Old sources are linked with historic circumstances: the changes of belonging to different states, natural migration, the invitation of different national groups with different professional skills, the result of proselytism and missionary activity. As wrote Benjamin J. Kaplan "Europe's religious borders ran not just between major states, but around <…> enclaves and exclaves, cartons, noble estates, cities <…> and parishes" (Kaplan 2007: 156). The modern sources of religious pluralism are more complicated and less investigated. A new openness to the religious pluralism was to be observed in the first years of the Lithuanian independence. Religious pluralism does not adopt the same forms in Western and Eastern Europe. The Eastern European religious pluralism is rather moderate. The situation of religions can be characterized from one side by national and religious homogeneity, from the other side by prevalence of regional national and religious minorities and vigorous activities of non-traditional religions.

Table 1. Statistic supplement (2005)

Vilnius religious statistics	Vilnius inhabitants by confessions
Catholic parishes in Vilnius – 94	Roman Catholics – 66.1%
Catholic churches in Vilnius – 110	Orthodox Believers – 9.9%
Orthodox churches – 5	Old Believers – 1.2%
Old Believers churches – 1	Evangelical Lutherans – 0.2%
Evangelical Lutherans – 1	Evangelical Reformats – 0.2%
Evangelical Reformats – 1	Jehovah's Witnesses – 0.1%
Jehovah's Witnesses – 1	Sunni Muslims – 0.2%
Sunni Muslims – 1 House of Prayer	All Gospel Church – 0.1%
All Gospel Church – 1	Pentecostal Church – 0.1%
Pentecostal Church – 2	Judaists – 0.2%
Judaists – 1 synagogue, 2 communities (Orthodox-Mignadim and Chasidim)	Balts Believers (Romuva) – 0.1%
Balts Believers (Romuva) – 1 center	Baptists (and other independent churches) (less than 1%)
Baptists (and other independent churches) –2	Seventh-Day Adventist Church (less than 1%)
The Word of Faith – 1 parish	Buddhists (less than 1%)
Seventh-Day Adventist Church – 1	Society for Krishna Consciousness (less than 1%)
Zen-Buddhists – 1 center	Karaites 258 (less then 1%)
Society for Krishna Consciousness – 1 center	Shri Sathya Say Baba movement 107 and others (less than 1%)
Karaites – 1 parish in Trakai (Representation in Vilnius and Medresa)	Other confessions – 0.1%
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) – 1 center and philanthropic organization "SOS for children"	Not any – 12.9%
Shri Sathya Say Baba movement – 1 center	Not indicated – 8.6%
The Unification Church – 2 centers	

In general, modern and powerful sources of cultural and religious pluralism are including mass migration from East South regions and bring new tendencies in religious and cultural landscape in Europe. But in the case of Lithuania, referring to the chain "migration-religious landscape-religious pluralism", we really do not find the

pressure of immigration. Massive immigration is not typical of Lithuania at all. On the contrary, today the process of migration has a one-way ticket to Western Europe and does not strongly influence the religious landscape statistically. Today, over 80% of the population consider themselves Catholics, while ethnic Lithuanians are 94% Catholics. Catholicism is an inseparable and vital part of the Lithuanian culture. Using the definition of *epochē* as the practice of bracketing off, we turn away from some things that quantitatively dominate today in our religious landscape in order to turn toward other things which are developing in the whole Europe and step-by-step coming to Vilnius.

Conclusions

1. Religious pluralism is a reality, an objective gift of the end of the 20th century, the regularity and the line of historic development of mankind.
2. From phenomenological point of view, the religious landscape of Vilnius is pluralistic.
3. The weakening factor of territorial belonging is a general source of changing the religious landscape in Vilnius and abroad.
4. The process of Vilnius inhabitants' migration with one-way ticket to Western Europe and invitation of different national and religious groups as "guests-workers" is a source of religious pluralism.
5. Vilnius is only on the road to changing the religious landscape and this tendency will intensify in the nearest future.

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VILNIAUS RELIGINIS PEIZAŽAS: FENOMENOLOGINIS ŽVILGSNIS

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Santrauka

Tradicinis religinis peizažas kinta labai pastebimai, o dabartinis demonstruoja ypač didelę įvairovę. Nūdien Europoje vyrauja trys bendros tendencijos – sekuliarizacija, naujasis dvasingumas ir imigrantų religijos, tokios kaip islamas, budizmas, induizmas greta judaistinės-krikščioniškosios tradicijos. Remdamiesi fenomenologiniu požiūriu, žvelgiame į religinį Vilniaus peizažą kaip į pliuralistinį, atsiveriantį iš dviejų bendrų perspektyvų: senoji istorinė, tradicinė versmė ir nūdien augantis skirtingumas. Straipsnyje imamasi trumpos diskusijos „religinio peizažo" tema ir apie šio apibrėžimo interpretavimo galimybes. Pasitelkiant sąvoką *epochē*, fenomenologinio mąstymo perspektyvoje prieinama išvada, kad Vilniaus religinis peizažas yra pliuralistinis.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: *epochē* ir eidetinis matymas, fenomenologinis požiūris, religinis peizažas, *sacrum*.