Historic Church of the Holy Cross in Kielce – Valuable Substance and Cultural Heritage in the Space of the Modern City

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Abstract. In the frequently modified city fabrics, sacral architecture still plays an important role defining aspects of spatial forms and their compositional relations to the surroundings. The historic church of the Holy Cross in Kielce (1903-1939) has been a characteristic sight, a landmark and a contributing factor to the structure of the modern city. Large dimensions and dominant vertical shapes give a sturdy, recognizable form to the church architecture. The body of this Neogothic church, original and distinguishable from its surroundings, has been highly appreciated by the community members. The church provides an example of the aesthetics of the time in which it was built, it also documents changes in the people’s lives and attitudes. It shows Poland’s economic, legal and social transformation. The church has gained a status of one of the symbols of the city.

1. Introduction. Background identification.
In Poland, the architectural objects and urban layouts dating from the first half of the 20th century are widely believed to constitute a part of the cultural heritage that should be protected. However, the changes in the urban space, analysed against the background of cultural processes, have to be accounted for in cultural heritage protection.

The historic church of the Holy Cross in Kielce is considered to be an important part of national cultural heritage, both from the material and formal perspective, and also due to the content of ideas it represents, which reflect the values and achievements of the past. The church has been a witness to different phenomena, engagement in artistic pursuits and major changes taking place in culture, technology, society, economy and politics of the country.

The Holy Cross church in Kielce was erected at the beginning of the 20th century with a contribution from outstanding Polish builders. In spite of difficult economic conditions at the beginning of the century, the architecture and urban arrangement of the object provide an attempt to continue with valuable spatial solutions, respond to the needs of the community and maintain quality professional standards.

In the 1920s and 1930s, with the construction of the Holy Cross church in Kielce, a new quality benchmark was established in the urban space. It fostered changes in, and contributed to the activation of the selected parts of the city structure. Due to historical value and artistic level, the church has brought nobility to the surroundings. It has provided a valuable content, and an example if cultural heritage in Kielce urban setting.
2. Church of the Holy Cross – historic substance and cultural heritage in the city’s structure

2.1. History of the church

The idea of building a church dedicated to the Elevation of the Holy Cross appeared at the turn of the 19th and 20th cent. ¹. The initiative must have been related to a considerable increase in the population of the city, and also major changes in economic, social and political context of the time.

In 1895, a railway line, being a part of the line running from Ivangoordok to Dąbrowa Górnicza, and also a railway station was built in the city. That produced a significant effect on the development of industry, increase in population and the city’s territorial growth. The construction of the railway line established the directions of urban expansion, and became a major factor contributing to Kielce town status².

The sacral objects were constructed on the initiative of Kielce bishop Tomasz Teofil Kukliński. The church was funded by the bishop and also by Karol Malski. Money raising by the local people and other givers contributed to the funding of the church.

In November 1902, Stanisław Szpakowski³, an engineer, developed an initial design of the church in Neogothic style, dedicated to the Holy Cross. Formal contract for the design documentation was finally concluded with Stanisław Szpakowski in 1904. The contract for the construction work was awarded to a construction entrepreneur, Ludwik Klima [1].

2.2. The position of the church in the urban structure of Kielce at the beginning of the 20th cent.

The church became located on the north-western outskirts of the town, in Staro-Warszawska street, in the “factory and railway” part of Kielce. The church was constructed at the centre of a large land plot, irregular in shape, elongated around the east-west axis (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Location of the church of the Holy Cross in the city map of the 1920s [1]; Photocopy of the city map of 1917 [3]](image)

¹ That is indicated by bequests included in the will, as found in notarial deed of 22 Sept 1901, in which Karol Malski, landlord of Rogienice, together with his wife, donated part of his property to build the church [1].
² In 1869, the number of the residents of Kielce was 7,689, and in 1902, it increased to 14,270. After the year of 1868, due to the lifting of the ban on Jewish settlement in towns, the number of Jews grew from 7.1% to 38.1% in 1897, and in 1916, following the migration of Jewish people from Volyn, it reached 42% [2].
³ Assistant to the engineer-architect of the kielecka guberniya, and starting from 1905, a chief engineer [1].
The construction project was delivered over the years 1903 – 1939, and stopped a number of times due to the lack of funds. After the construction of the bay and the purchase of the altar, upon the request of the faithful, the bishop Antoni Łosiński canonically installed a new parish in 1913, although the building of the church was not completed. In February 1918, Salesian priests arrived to provide pastoral care, and in 1927 they completed the building of the church.

The construction of the sacral objects became an example of defining, in an interesting way, the urban space by incorporating the dominant church form into the typical urban landscape. The engagement of the local residents and church builders gave the building a special place in the spatial and social framework. The completion of a new object, together with an important role it played in the town, enhanced the scope of construction works on the part of the Salesian priests and changed the spatial structure of this part of the town. Further fundraising led to establishing a vocational school and a dormitory, designed by Tische and Gąsowski architects. The institution was located east of the church, whereas the western part of the plot was intended to accommodate a small sports stadium. The crafts school, provided with a boarding house, taught tailoring, carpentry, and shoe-making. In 1932 monastery building was constructed, and in 1935, four hectares of land was purchased in Zagnańska street for the parish cemetery.

During the Nazi occupation of Poland, the educational activities of Salesians were disrupted. In 1944, school buildings burnt down as a result of the bombardment. They were rebuilt to house a school of tailoring that operated until 1952 [1].

2.3. The church position in the modern urban structure of the 21st cent.
The Holy Cross church, with its façade facing the south, is located in what is currently 1 Maja Street. To the south, the site is adjacent to the Salesian order buildings, and to the west it borders the area of the coach station (Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Location of the Holy Cross in Kielce against the functional structure of the surrounding modern city [5]](image_url)

The erection of the new church, located in what was originally the outskirts of the city, actually brought new quality to the site. The new structure offered the residents a lively urban site. The vertical shape of the church, visible from many parts of the city, made it fit perfectly into the city fabrics. The institution, appreciated by the members of the local community, is an active social and cultural centre, and a component of the city spatial structure.

The historic church of the Holy Cross in Kielce, renowned for its exceptional aesthetic properties, is a clearly distinguishable landmark in the urban landscape. The features of natural topography enhance the visual impact of the object, which dominates the local landscape and is highly valued for its artistic

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4 After the death of the designer Stanisław Szpakowski in 1926, further design work was done by Stefan Szyller (who designed "tops of towers and antechnambers") and others [1].
and cultural assets. This object of sacral architecture has won a permanent place in the urban structure of the modern city of Kielce.

2.4. Architectural analysis of the monument

The historic church of the Holy Cross is an interesting example of Polish sacral architecture of the beginning of the 20th cent. In accordance with the preferences of the donors, it was built in the Neogothic style, following the aesthetics of the Kościół Świątkrzyski in Warsaw\(^5\) [1].

The church of the Holy Cross occupies a central position in the architectural and urban complex, and is flanked by buildings that have educational, social and residential function.

The plan of the church is longitudinal, in the shape of traditional Latin Cross (Figure 3). The church has a three-aisled structure, with the nave located in the central part, and a transept. At the end of the nave, aligned on the nave axis, a wide chancel with the altar is placed. On the other side, a choir, opening into the church, is positioned.

Single-bay chancel, is closed on five sides and oriented towards the west. The church nave is preceded, with axes aligned, by the antechamber with annexes placed on both sides.

The transept arms are two-bay, rectangular in shape, with one bay extended beyond the aisles. On the outside of the chancel, chapels closing the aisles, and also a turret on the plan of a square, and antechamber with a trapezoidal plan were designed. At the corners, two side vestibules triangular in shape were added between the trapeze and the aisles.

![Figure 3. Church of the Holy Cross. Layout plan, church cross-section, 1913, designed by Stanisław Szpakowski [4]; tower cross-section [1]](image)

The church shape shows the arrangement that symmetrical around the longitudinal axis. In the external part of the church architecture, a gradation trend can be observed. The basic and the tallest part of the structure consists of the nave and the transept that are of the same height. Three-aisled base building is flanked by two towers and a two-storey antechamber positioned between them. Two adjacent aisles, slightly lower in height than the nave, symmetrically adjoin the base building on both sides. Another structure attached to the base building is the chancel, which is closed on five sides. Between the transept and the aisles, two side vestibules, topped by triangular front walls on the faces of the building, were added. The principal façade was designed to be symmetrical with two towers and an arcade frieze. The towers are separated by the Golgotha scene and the figures of twelve apostles. They were built in 1931 and made of sandstone from Szydłowiec (Figure 4).

Such a bequest was included in the will, as found in notarial deed of 22 Sept 1901, in which Karol Malski, landlord of Rogienice in the Włoszczowa district, together with his wife, donated part of his property to build the church [1].
Figure 4. Church of the Holy Cross. Front façade (west view), 1913, Rear façade (east view), 1913, designed by Stanisław Szpakowski [4]

Although the church has a simple modernist shape, certain traits of the picturesque concept can be found in its façade. They are manifested in the material, its texture, and also the combination of bricks and stone. Stone blocks, arranged alternately, can be seen in the corners, band courses, door and window openings. They act as structural components and strengthening elements.

The central section of the façade wall, above the main entrance to the church, features a large profiled portal with columns that have carved heads. The portal was made of stone according to the design by Borowiecki, an architect, in 1934. [6]. A large stone rosette filled with colourful stained glass was placed above the portal. A large steel cross topped the wall above the portal and filled the area between the towers wall.

Side facades followed the pattern described above, they are composed of the side frontal tower with the figures of two apostles, the face of the aisle, the end wall of the transept, and the side wall of the chancel with many annexes (Figure 5, 6).

Figure 5. Church of the Holy Cross. Side facades, the building body with the tower cross-section, 1913, Source: Archives of the Holy Cross Church Parish in Kielce [4]
The basic body of the church comprising the nave, the aisles and the vestibule is covered by a gabled roof. The roof of the same shape was designed above the transept. However, a part of the chancel is covered by the three-sloped roof structure. The crossing of the ridges of the three main roofs is marked with slender four-sided bell turret, crowned by a pyramidal roof. Two angular towers dominate the church façade and the roof slopes. They are covered by tented roofs that have a complex design. The roof tips, covered in copper sheet, hold steel crosses. Three low-height annexes, adjacent to the chancel, were covered with five-slope roofs.

The whole of the church was built of red brick, but the faces of the building also contain light-coloured highlights, including stonework elements, buttressing, clearly marked skirts and window aprons. All window openings are in the shape of slender rectangles topped with pointed arches with tracery. In some wall recesses, small slot windows, arranged as biforia, were designed.

The church is accessible through external few-step stairs, built in the years 1933-1939, running along the whole length of the façade [7].

The internal space of the church consists of the nave with the chancel, and also aisles and front vestibule, above which musical choir is located. The church interior is a three-aisled hall, with a transept and a chancel. Spacious interior of the nave, positioned on the main axis, is separated from the aisles by pillars on plinths. Pilasters and columns with carved heads are attached to the pillars.

Profiled arcades, supported on pillars are placed between the nave and the aisles. Both the nave and the aisles are five-bay. Square bays of the nave are twice larger than the bays of the aisles. Transept arms were designed to be rectangular, two-bay, with the end bays projecting beyond the aisles. The nave was covered with a four-arm stellar vault. The aisles were covered with ribbed vaults. The chancel was designed to be single-bay and covered with six-arm stellar vault. The choir also has a stellar vault, and it opens onto the nave through the arcade, on which tracery balustrade, made from stone, was placed. The interior décor of church of the Holy Cross shows modern style.

The high altar, the interior highlight, is located centrally and features the figure of Christ crucified. Neogothic side altars, positioned on both sides of the chancel, confessional and stations of the Cross are located in the aisles. All white and cream paint colours contribute to the harmony of the church interior. Coloured stained glass windows, created in the years 1933-1939, decorate the space inside [7]. Particular emphasis should be put on the stained glass windows located behind the high altar. Sunlight shining through stained glass windows, projecting plays of colour and light throughout the space brings a special atmosphere to the sombre interior, heightening the sense and mystique of the divine.

After 1945, stone tile flooring was installed in the church and a new organ was purchased. Generally, it could be concluded that the designer created a spatial interior that has all the functionalities, and which clearly echoes the outer architectural form.

The church is surrounded by a wide strip of adjoining land, and the whole property is encircled by tall trees.

The church of the Holy Cross clearly refers to traditionalism features, which is manifested in the use of the architectural form. The church reveals distinctive characteristics of the Neogothic style. The object
provides an example of traditional sacral architecture that shows great aesthetics and stately feel, which account for its distinctive quality (Figure 7).

In 1972, the church of the Holy Cross was entered in the register of historic monuments. The church underwent major conservation work at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st cent.

**Figure 7.** Church of the Holy Cross, March 2017

3. Conclusions
The historic church of the Holy Cross in Kielce is one of the most representative examples of sacral architecture in the Kielce Diocese. It truly depicts the life of the community which undertook the task of having a new church erected. The object is a record of material culture and also of spirituality of the people. It reflects the legal issues and the level of the economic development of the country (Figure 7).
Historic monuments have always played an important role in the urban structure of modern cities. The church of the Holy Cross in Kielce undoubtedly is a component of authentic urban fabrics, which should be protected. The church contributes to the system that cements and enhances the urban structure [8]. Therefore, it is important that, there is time to a better configuration of strategic projects of rebuilding of chosen places and areas as well as of the developments of infrastructure which are being realised for years so that – owing to the logic of compositional and functional ties – there appear elements which crystallise the new stage of development of an urbanistic structure in keeping with the historic layouts [9].

With respect to the cultural heritage items and theory, it is vital that the discussion on heritage protection should include the areas that can become battlefields decisive for the future of Europe’s cities. One speaks here of games between many subjects taking decisions which are strategic for a city – decisions whose mutual relations finally influence the structure of an urban layout and urbanistic form [9].

Summing up, it can be concluded that in spite of modifications in the urban structure, sacral architecture objects have remained landmarks of the city. Churches are strong components of urban fabrics, which form and define public spaces. As strong and recognizable architectural forms they can have the status of the symbol of the city and of the świętokrzyski region. Sacral architecture object has become permanent components of urban structure. They have formed inseparable part of the city, and quality that is unique in the composition of modern urban environment [10]. As a valuable element of spatial arrangement that includes streets, squares, city parks and other features, they affect the attractiveness of urban space, and thus the quality of city life and variable standards of urbanity. Summing up, it is worth quoting the statements by Zuziak: Respect for heritage is the most important – one could indeed say – constitutive feature of a model of the European city. The expressions thereof are the recognisable morphological features of its fabric with a strong position of the historic centre and a layout of structural units which are linked to each other, in which one may find groupings which serve as ‘nodes of urbanity’. They are areas which, owing to the developed network of public space and the respective concentrations of variegated activities, focus urban life and organise its forms into greater wholes. [9].

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