Largest Sacral Objects in the Archdiocese of Czestochowa - Assumptions and Reality

Aleksandra Repelewicz

1 Czestochowa University of Technology, Faculty of Civil Engineering, 42-200 Czestochowa, ul. Akademicka 3, Poland

arepelewicz@bud.pcz.czest.pl

Abstract. The largest church buildings were erected in Poland during the communist era, when there were many difficulties in obtaining planning permission for churches. Today these buildings are usually too large for their users. This is a significant problem for the administrators of these facilities and their parishioners. Finding a way out of this situation is a major challenge for both the church authorities and local communities. One should look for opportunities to use these huge spaces for other purposes, which would not be contrary to the fundamental role of a parish church. In this article, the problem of large churches, of which there are a great many in Poland, will be discussed with particular reference to the Archdiocese of Czestochowa.

1. Introduction

Between the end of World War II and the fall of communism, sacral architecture in Poland experienced a period of stagnation. The development of sacral architecture correlates strongly with the changing political situation. The improvement has appeared after 1989 and nowadays any obstructions in designing and erecting churches are imposed. In XXI century the dynamics of investments has decreased considerably, due to sufficient number of churches in the country.

2. Methodology of research

The analyses are based on the authors own researches conducted among 2010-2015 in the Archdiocese of Czestochowa. An inventory of the construction of each church building was done, the drawings were prepared and photographic documentation was made. Old churches drafts, information about estimate year outlays and data from parish records were collected from each parish and considered. Interviews with priests were conducted. The total area of sacral buildings, the area of church used strictly for religious rituals, the number of active faithful and the area per one faithful were analyzed.

3. Results

The problem of large churches will be discussed with particular reference to the Archdiocese of Czestochowa. There are 8 churches with a usable ground floor area of nearly 1000 m² or more, in the archdiocese: 6 in Czestochowa, one in Zawiercie and one in Radomsko.
Church of St. Adalbert in Czestochowa (Figure 1, 2)

Efforts to build a church in the neighborhood “Tysiąclecie” started in 1969, when the new parish of St. Adalbert was established. In 1976, after many efforts, the state authorities finally gave permission to build a church. The location of the church in a new, extensive residential area and the doubtful possibility of obtaining another building permit in the same area were the reasons which led to the design of a very large object. It was designed by Antoni Mazur and according to the data contained in the draft, its cubic capacity is 24,000 m³ and its building area is 1400 m² [2]. The surface area of the ground floor of the building, incorporating the main nave and the chancel, is approximately 940 m². The building has a complete basement and a large chapel is located in it under the nave. The sacral part is connected to a three-storey catechetical building. After construction, the church was fully utilized and religious education for all the children and young people from the district of “Tysiąclecie” and the neighboring district "Północ" was organized in the catechetical classrooms.

Since then, 3 new parishes have been created in "Północ", which fully meet the needs of the residents of this district. In “Tysiąclecie” district, two new churches have been erected within the bounds of the parish of St. Adalbert. As a result the number of parishioners has been significantly reduced. Currently, the parish covers an area inhabited by 10000 residents. Taking into account the percentage of people participating in holy mass, so-called “dominicantes”[3], recorded in Poland at an average of 40%, it can be concluded that the church is now actively use by about 4000 parishioners. Thus, the cost of maintaining such a large object has fallen on a relatively small number of people.

Church of Our Lady Victorious in Czestochowa (Figure 3, 4)

The parish was established in 1957 and permission to build a new church was granted relatively quickly, but was then withdrawn by the authorities. Only in 1975 did the construction of a large church designed by the architect Anthony Mazur begin. Due to the size of the object it took a very long time to complete the construction, and the church was consecrated in 2002.

The church is located in a small space in the midst of urban high density housing of the 60s and 70s. The cubic capacity of the object is, according to data in the draft, 24000 m³ and the building area is 1400 m² [2]. Today the usable ground floor area is 1060 m². The church is a detached, two-storey building connected to a back-lacing leading to the sacristy. Currently, the parish serves an area inhabited by 8000 residents, and probably is now actively used by about 3200 parishioners.
Efforts to build a new church in a large residential district called “Błeszno” started in 1977 and three years later a project was drawn up by architect George Kopyciak from Częstochowa. The state authorities refused permission to create a new parish, so it was not until the Solidarity uprising in 1980 that a new parish could be established. At the same time permission to erect a church was also obtained. Just like the previously discussed objects, the church authorities decided to design and build a very large object. They feared being unable to obtain permission for further churches in this rapidly expanding residential area. The resulting two-storey building is integrated into the side of a hill. This complex of church objects includes a rectory and catechetical buildings. Due to the high complexity of the object it was completely finished and consecrated after 20 years, in 2000.

The lower level of the church contains weekly and funeral chapels and is situated about 6m below the main church called “upper”. The facility consists of: the nave, porch, chancel, sacristy and utility rooms. There is a separate chapel for mothers with children in the nave, and a two-level choir loft. According to the author’s calculations, the total area of the "upper" church is 1370 m². Currently 6000 inhabitants reside within the parish, of whom probably about 2400 actively use the church building.

Permission to build a new church on the territory of the Andrew Bobola's parish was finally granted by the provincial authorities in 1978, after long efforts by the Diocese, the parish priest and the faithful. The area chosen for the project had no utilities as it was situated on farmland on the outskirts of the city. The location was chosen because of the plans to build a new housing estate “Północ II”
nearby. It was expected that within a short time the parish would have to serve 40 thousand residents and the church was designed with such a large number of faithful in mind. However, the plans for a high density residential housing district have not been realized, and the parish currently has only 1800 inhabitants, of whom probably only about 720 actively use the church building. The author of the drawings was an architect from Poznan: Aleksander Holas. The church was designed on the basis of a circle with a diameter of 36 m. The ground floor area is 1020 m². It is a two-storey construction. The upper floor comprises the main nave, the chancel and the porch. The lower floor consists of two chapels, the sacristy and catechetical classrooms. Due to financial difficulties, construction work proceeded very slowly and it was not until 1994 that the church was completely finished. The draft of the sacristy and the projected choir loft were not realized.

Figure 7. Church of Saint Albert Chmielowski in Czestochowa

Figure 8. Ground floor of church of Saint Albert Chmielowski in Czestochowa

**Church of Sacred Heart of Jesus in Czestochowa** (Figure 9, 10)

Efforts to build a church in the district of “Stradom” started in 1969, when a new parish was established. Permission to build the church was obtained in 1978. The architect was Antoni Mazur. The Church was partially finished and consecrated in 1990. Solemn consecration took place in 2000, when the church was completed after 22 years of construction and furnishing. The cubic capacity of the building is 24000 m³ [2] and the usable ground floor area is 1100 m². Currently 7962 people live in the parish and probably about 3180 of them actively use the church building.

Figure 9. Church of Sacred Heart in Czestochowa

Figure 10. Ground floor of church of Sacred Heart in Czestochowa

**Church of blessed Ursula Ledóchowska in Czestochowa** (Figure 11, 12)

The plans for this church were drawn up by Jerzy Kopyciak in 1987 and in the same year building permission was obtained. In 1999, the church was partially finished and from then on has been in use.
To this day, it is not fully finished, for example there is missing external plaster. The usable ground floor area is 1300 m², and 7500 people live within the parish now, of whom probably about 3000 actively use the church.

**Figure 11.** Church of Blessed Ursula Ledóchowska in Czestochowa

**Figure 12.** Ground floor of church of Blessed Ursula Ledóchowska in Czestochowa

**Church of Virgin Mary Queen of Poland in Zawiercie** (Figure 13, 14)

This parish was erected in 1957 but building permission was only obtained in 1974. The plans for the church were drawn up by Andrzej Zdzieniecki from Rzeszow. By 1982, the building was finished in a basic state, but the walls were cracked as result of defective workmanship on the foundations. A project to repair the damage was made by Professor Puchała, his assistant Kurek and PhD Sąsiadek from Cracow University of Technology. The cost of repairs delayed the object coming into operation. It was not until 2000 that the fully completed church was consecrated. The ground floor area is 1000 m². Currently, 9000 inhabitants live within the parish and probably about 3600 are active users of the church.

**Figure 13.** Church of Virgin Mary Queen of Poland in Zawiercie

**Figure 14.** Ground floor of church of Virgin Mary Queen of Poland in Zawiercie

**Church of Virgin Mary Mother of the Church in Radomsko** (Figure 15, 16)

The parish was established in 1984 and efforts to build a church began two years later. The project, designed by Andrzej and Zbigniew Białkiewicz, was drawn up in 1986. The foundation stone was laid in 1989 and consecration took place in 2008. The area of the building’s ground floor is less than 1000 m². Only 1800 people reside within the parish, and probably only 720 actively use the church building.

The huge churches in Poland are mostly situated within the cities with over 250 000 inhabitants, but can be found in the smaller urban areas and villages too. Comparing with other dioceses in Poland, less sacral objects were built in the Archdiocese of Czestochowa (Figure 1). This may be due to the fact that even Czestochowa, the biggest urban area in archdiocese, has now 228 179 inhabitants. Six churches have been erected in this largest city of the archdiocese. Two are situated in Radomsko.
and Zawiercie. Within the villages in the Archdiocese, smaller churches, with area less than 1000 m² are located.

![Figure 15. Ground floor of church of Virgin Mary Mother of the Church in Radomsko](image1)

![Figure 16. Ground floor of church of Virgin Mary Mother of the Church in Radomsko](image2)

**4. Discussion**

In 1945, throughout the country there were 7555 church buildings. During the first 25 years after the war, this number increased by 333 to 7888 in 1970 [6]. This slight increase can be explained by the tough policies directed against the church by the Stalinist state government. The situation began to improve towards the end of Gomółka’s term in power, and after 1970 it became possible to obtain planning permission for sacred buildings, but with restrictions on their size. The easiest permit to obtain was for a chapel with a building area of less than 250 m². A further category included objects up to 600 m². However, for larger churches it was still difficult to get permission [1, p. 128-138]. In the villages, which were less controlled by the authorities, it was easier than in the cities. Across the country, every moment of government instability was used by society to quickly build churches. In addition to meeting a real need for new facilities, churches were also built as an expression of protest against the government.

After another decade, by 1980, there were 8280 church buildings in Poland. Most of the restrictions on the new buildings construction ceased to apply after 1980. During Jaruzelski’s times (1981-1990) the building of 1126 new churches was initiated. By 1989, 9454 churches could be found in Poland. After the political transformation the number of churches erections initiated among villages decreased dramatically, whereas in the cities intensive construction continued for the next decade. The cities were responding to a real shortage of church buildings, while in rural areas it had been dictated largely by ideological considerations. By 2013, the total had reached 10466 sacral objects across the country. [6]

There were many adverse effects of the restrictions on obtaining planning permission for churches in Poland between 1945 and 1989. First, when building permission was given after years of failure to receive it, the Archbishop would decide to build a huge object, because the prospects of receiving further permissions were uncertain. Across Poland, there are still many sacral buildings whose usable area is 1000-1500 m² and even more whose area exceeds 1500 m² (Figure 17). A record number of such objects were built between 1984 -1992 (in 1988- 173 churches over 1500 m² and 66 facilities between 1000 and 1500 m²) [6,7]. Real decrease in the number of newly built very large church buildings occurred after 2000. Number of large sacral buildings built in archdiocese of Częstochowa between 1945-2005 presents figure 18.
Most of these objects are currently too large in relation to the needs of their parishes, which themselves have been reduced in terms of territorial area. In large residential areas other churches were built and the territories of the former parish were redrawn and reduced in size. Running costs, especially heating and maintenance costs, are too high for the parish. The area of the nave and various ancillary areas, as well as the overall building capacity are not fully used. Maintaining a huge object on the revenues of a relatively small parish community, creates considerable financial problems. These problems will be intensified with time as the buildings wear and require repair. A further reduction in the number of parishioners cannot be excluded, as a result of demographic changes and the secularization of society.

In addition to eight largest churches described above, there are other large objects in the Archdiocese of Czestochowa which are worthy of mention. Examples include the churches of St. Peter and Paul with an area of 750 m² and St. Francis of Assisi with an area of 700 m², both of which face similar problems. Only the scale of these problems is smaller. There are also many objects that have a smaller sacral area, but huge catechetical buildings. These objects are no longer fully utilized as religious education has been reintroduced into schools. It is necessary to look for opportunities to use underutilized spaces in a worthy for the benefit of the whole parish.
Some positive examples of the change of use of church buildings can be found in the Archdiocese of Czestochowa. The catechetical building at St. Adalbert’s is rented out as a school and at the same church musical concerts are organized during the festival “Archisacra”.

In Western Europe, the sacred is taking a different course. In the face of falling church attendance, churches in the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany or Ireland are changing their purpose. The mass closure of churches creates a characteristic phenomenon – temples are sold and then converted into flats, libraries or concert halls. [5] An example would be adaptations of the Dutch church in Maastricht which was converted into the Selexyz bookstore or the conversion of a chapel into a residential house in Utrecht. Similarly, in England – a church building in Bowness has been adapted into a house [5].

5. Conclusions
There are a significant number of churches that are currently too large for the needs of contemporary parishes in Poland. The Archdiocese of Czestochowa has 8 buildings which, in the author’s opinion, fall into this category. These are objects with a surface area of more than 1000 m², five of them have two-levels. After redrawing the boundaries and a subsequent reduction in the area of the parish, the number of parishioners is too small compared to the cost of their maintenance (heating, lighting, ongoing maintenance) and repairs. This is a serious problem for the administrators of these facilities. Finding a way out of this situation is a major challenge for both the church authorities and local communities. It is necessary to look for opportunities to use these huge spaces for other purposes, which would not be contrary to the fundamental role of a parish church.

In the case of large and very large churches, it might be possible to share church buildings in such a way that the rental income from the church provides the parish with sufficient funds for the maintenance of the building. Ongoing demographic processes and the gradual fall in church attendance will in a relatively short time make such action necessary. Otherwise, church buildings, which are often works of architectural art, will fall into disrepair.

It seems that in the future it will be necessary to step up this change notion of use and, for example turn the lowest levels of churches like St. Adalbert’s into spaces for Christian youth clubs, senior clubs, and charities or for artistic events. The problem will grow as the churches will require major repairs as a result of continued everyday use.

References
[1] Białkiewicz A., „Sacred architecture: Between art and reality”. Sacrum et Decorum. 2008, R. 1, pp. 124-138
[2] Mazur A., „My churches”. Wydawnictwo Czuwajmy. Kraków 2003.
[3] „catholic Church in Poland 1991-2011”. Zakład Wydawnictw Statystycznych. Warszawa 2014.
[4] Wolnicki P. (red.), „Archdiocese of Czestochowa. Catalog 2011”. Kuria Metropolitalna. Częstochowa 2011.
[5] Malinowska-Petelenz B., „In search of the lost sacred”. Technical Transactions Architecture 1-a/2015 3 Czasopismo Techniczne Architektura pp.55-79
[6] http://biqdata.wyborcza.pl/koscioly-w-polsce-po-1945-roku, available 15.2.2017.
[7] http://architektura7dnia.pl, available 15.2.2017.
[8] http://kuriaczestochowa.pl, available 15.2.2017.