Studies on reconstruction of the Holy Cross wooden church in Wodzislaw Śląski

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Abstract. Wooden churches used to commonly appear in Silesia through the past centuries. Their location was the result of local people’s needs and the accessibility of materials necessary to construct them. The form and the nature of those churches were the fruit of intermingling influences of various national cultures of the inhabitants of those areas, craftsmanship experience of various structure builders and depended on the extent of wealth of the cities, towns and villages they were erected in. Wodzisław Śląski was among the places with wooden sacred objects, in the 19th century, it was a small town with population consisting mainly of Poles, Germans and Jews. The Holy Cross wooden church was a hospital object. The church itself was situated on top of a low hill with a brook flowing in its direct vicinity. In the periods of heavy rainfalls, the rapid stream used to wash out the hill, thus, affecting the church foundations, directly contributing to deterioration of the structure’s technical condition. The critically bad condition of the church structure was the main reason for the decision to pull it down after 1826. Throughout the recent years, the growth of the local patriotism induced the interest in the town’s history and its historical panorama. Relatively few pieces of information on the church and no drawings thereof have been preserved. The archeological and architectural research revealed a lot of interesting facts related to the church and concerning its structure and its supposed non-typical form. A realistic method to satisfy the curiosity how the church looked like in the period of its splendor was the construction of its model based on the research and studies carried out, the very construction of the miniature model in progress being a test site verifying some suppositions about the church’s appearance. The model built was added to the exhibits of the Wodzisław Śląski Museum, becoming a contribution to the discussion on methods of the dissemination of information on the historical view of the town and including the research results in the papers concerning the future form and the panorama of modern Wodzisław Śląski.

1. Introduction.
Wodzisław Śląski (Loslau, Wodislau, Vladislavia), as a boundary city combining multi-cultural, Polish, German, Czech and Jewish influences, was characterised by a diversified development with distinctive single structures, but also whole enclaves of urbanised space, with specific characteristics creating the unique colour range of the city [1]. The significant structures included the non-existent hospital wooden church of the Holy Cross. The literature sources available and the archaeological discoveries suggest that in addition to its typical features, the structure was distinguishable among other churches of this kind in Silesia[2]. The fact induced the idea to carry out studies and analyses allowing the reconstruction of its look. The growth of local patriotism noticeable through the recent years, mainly among small urban communities, raises the curiosity which the urban developments, that interest us, used to look like, in the past centuries, what was the nature of their non-existing development, how some single buildings, including religious structures, composed within the diversified development substance and simultaneously how they influenced the way of perceiving the urban centres as unique.
areas of specific charm and climate. The works taken up contributed to the reconstruction of the appearance of the wooden church of the Holy Cross, which has been visualised in the form of reconstructive model of the structure.

2. Wooden churches in Silesia.
The area of Silesia, through the period that interests us, is characterised by a large number of wooden religious buildings. Their distribution in the region was irregular and resulted from the demand for religious places of the local community in numerous cities and smaller settlements as well as from the availability of building materials characteristic for this kind of structures, such as timber, mainly of coniferous trees, clay and fluvial stone. The form of the churches resulted from the influences of German, Polish (mainly from Małopolska) and Czech wooden architecture, due to the historical conditions of the Silesian region, while the authors and builders of the structure as well as the local craftsmen supporting erection of churches with their skills are generally unknown. The wooden churches usually consisted of a single main aisle preceded by steeple, covered with straight roofing or spire steeple on a square plan with main entrance. The steeples mainly appeared in the structures built in a later period or they were added to the existing buildings. The opinions on the reasons for building steeples have been diversified by present time and the disputes thereon – unsettled. The aisle was extended by presbytery with simple finishing, we come across some more sophisticated forms of its finish, in the later structures. The presbytery height was generally lower than that of the main aisle, which distinguishes the Silesian wooden churches of the temples situated in Małopolska [3]. The reason for the differences in the structures located in neighbouring regions is difficult to establish. The roofs were covered with wooden shingles. As the time went by, some additional side chapels built later appeared and small wooden canopies surrounding the church building and forming undercutting, so-called „soboty”. They functioned as protection for pilgrims arriving to the church, against wind and rain before the temple was opened, they disposed of rain waters on the land directly adjoining the building foundations, protecting it against washing away the soil. The presbytery width was usually shorter than that of the main aisle, with few exceptions, which include the wooden church of the Holy Cross in Wodzisław Śląski. In the direct vicinity of the churches graveyards were located, after some time, they would be surrounded with wooden, stone or mixed-structure fences with roofed wickets or gates with more complex forms. The surrounding churches with fences were due to the fact that the buildings, in addition to their religious functions also played the role of places of retreat to the inhabitants running away from attackers robbing the settlements or the foreign armies during wars and borderland disturbances.

3. The History of the church.
The first mentions about the hospitals wooden church of the Holy Cross situated on the outskirts of the city, in Wodzisław Śląski originate from 1525. However, it does not mean that the church was not erected earlier. In the years 1618 - 1648, during the 30-years-war, the church was temporarily a Protestant temple as such was seriously destroyed, which was contributed to the Swedish army. After being said, it was returned to its role of a Roma-Catholic church, but its condition in the notes available dated 1652 was described as ruin. The church was reconstructed in 1676, however, actually a new wooden church building was erected, maintaining the form of the previous building plan, based on the foundations of the earlier temple. The information from 1719 mainly concern the interior of the church and its furnishings. The flat wooden ceiling is mentioned as well as 3 altars (main and two side altars) and a small spirelet situated on the aisle roof, equipped with a bell. At that time, a note about a small graveyard located in the direct vicinity of the church building. The wooden church building was a single aisle, covered with wooden shingles, with altars directed to the east inside. According to the preserved map, characterised with high accuracy of the outlines of the building existing at that time, the church was 17 m long and span reaching 7 m in the widest point. The very outline of the building was characterised with a rare shape indicating larger width of the bilaterally closed presbytery from the main aisle. A similar layout of the plan, in the case of wooden churches, can be observed in separate cases, as the church in Miedźna and St. Michael the Archangel church in Katowice. Moreover, there is a conspicuously large asymmetry of the length of the northern and southern part sides, including the adjacent presbytery. The main aisle narrowed to the east. The building was surrounded with small canopies with an undercutting (so-called “soboty”) and a fence with entrance
wicket characteristic for wooden churches of that time. The plan on the map shows non-typical, difficult to explain for structural reasons, deformed shapes of the structure. Although the church survived the fire in 1822 (Figure 1), which almost entirely destroyed the city, its deteriorating technical conditions cause the decision on its demolition, between the years 1826 and 1830, and the elements constituting the interior finishing were moved to the parish church in Wodzisław (germ.:Loslau).

Figure 1. The situational plan of the city of Wodzisław Śląski dated 1822 [1, 4]

4. Studies carried out and research methods.
During the works on the reconstruction of the appearance of the Holy Cross church (Figure 2), a wide range of research works was carried out. In addition to the literature overview, based on the archive materials, the insight thereto obtained in state archives, and through the access to the museum exhibits, a list of materials was developed including the description of the look and liturgical items and the interior of the church concerned. Moreover, the photographic and illustrative documentation concerning the existing wooden churches of the area of Silesia, we were interested in, was overviewed and subjected to the target-analysis. Typological structures close to the solutions that were or potentially could be used in the Holy Cross Church were analysed. Furthermore, talks and consultations with specialists at the wooden construction engineering, historians and people working at the museums and working on the said subject matter. Information gathered in this way were used as the base and the guidelines for works on the reconstruction of the church appearance in the form of a model, as a part of so-called experimental modelling, its task being to obtain the temple’s miniature as close to the original as possible.
Figure 2. Multimedia reconstruction of the wooden church of the Holy Cross, scale 1:25 [4]

5. Model reconstruction.
The starting points for works on the wooden church of the Holy Cross were studies and analyses of the form of the building’s outline and its deformation, based, without limitation, on the map dated 1822 [4]. The document is characterised with a very accurately made cartographic-planning drawing of the development existing at that time. The development outlines and of single structures were made with an exceptional accuracy, which was found out during the comparative research concerning few buildings or the trace remaining after it including comparison of the outlined in the document. Thus, the doubts about any accidental nature of deformations marked on the map drawing could be rejected.

The church plan was characterised with a specific deformation, which brought suspicions that the building structure during its exploitation was subjected to a long-term effect of preliminarily undetermined external factors, which caused the occurrence of such a significant range of the deformation in the church building. The deformations were so extensive that they must have been the result of a massive destructive impact on the church foundations. The answer to this question appeared to be the stream flowing in the direct vicinity of the church, marked on the map mentioned before. The land where the church was situated on had a clay base. Erecting the structure on relatively shallow foundations on clayey and sandy soil without curing and reinforcing with at least fluvial stones exposed the church building to continuous washing out of the structure with high waters of the stream during intense rainfalls, which often used to occur in this area. This became the cause for local landslides and affected the destruction to large parts of the building. The comparative analyses and studies of literature sources left few doubts that the structure had a steeple typical for most of the wooden churches in Silesia, while the ridge over the presbytery showed significant lowering in relation to the main aisle structure. The plan on the map explicitly showed that in an untypical way the presbytery’s width was bigger than that of the church aisle, capped with a small spirelet mentioned in the literature. The church had small canopies forming the undercutting (so-called “soboty”), the entire roofing was covered with wooden shingles. The church was surrounded with wooden fence with entrance wicket and canopies made from wooden shingles, the same as the church roofing. The space between the church building and the fence, except the pilgrim route, was occupied by the burial ground of the deceased patients of the neighbouring hospital [2]. The particular milestones of constructing the model based on subsequent approximations, verification of proportions of the particular fragments of the church building and studying the penetration and the method of joining the
particular structural elements enabled, after numerous corrections, final true reconstruction of the look of the miniaturised Holy Cross Church (Figure 3, 4).

![Figure 3. Multi-mediamodel of the Holy Cross Church in Wodzisław Śląski, scale 1: 25. A view on the steeple and deformations of the building and a view on the south-eastern facade [4]](image)

![Figure 4. A fragment of permanent historical exhibition of one of the rooms in the Museum of Wodzisław Śląski. An exposition of the reconstructive model of the non-existent wooden church of the Holy Cross](image)

6. Conclusions
Wooden churches commonly appeared in Silesia. They provided functions related to religious practices and additional tasks in the fields of defence or burial of the dead, also those from hospitals located near some of the churches, which significantly affected the life of entire communities inhabiting the areas. Being the foundation for the spiritual life, they also functioned as the places
disseminating education and supporting defence of the settlements, in those areas. Thus, there is no
doubt that even in the case of religious buildings that exists no more, but the memory about their
existence, in the past centuries, is still alive, the attempts to reconstruct them and restore their look, in
the years of their splendour, is fully justifiable. These are significant component elements of the local
community culture, their historical consciousness and their impact on present days, in spite of
dramatic changes in the very functioning of the society and life, according to the different algorithms.
The sense of the common roots enhances the foundations for the common actions in the local
community, the creation of new initiatives aimed to the improvement of living standards based on the
sense of common responsibility and memory of the common past. The reconstruction of the
appearance of significant historical structures in various forms – including miniaturised replicas – is to
prompt the local city authorities to form the spatial development of the areas based on historical
knowledge emphasising the characteristics permanently current for the areas. The sense of bond in the
local society is to favour the sense of building the future on the strong foundations. The reconstruction
of the look of the wooden church of the Holy Cross in Wodzisław Śląski should serve as one of the
elements of enhancement of this very important historical consciousness.

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