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## HEAVENS ABOVE – A STATUE OF CHRIST IN THE LANDSCAPE

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### PONAD NIEBIOŚA – POMNIK CHRYSZTUSA W KRAJOBRAZIE

#### Abstract

The monuments of Christ erected from 1920s onwards in many places throughout the world are a specific group of dominants associated with sacrum. Their effect on the perception of the landscape is very strong because of the artistic form and, above all, the symbolic dimension they have. The aim of the work is to demonstrate that land development projects around sacred landscape dominants in the form of statues of Christ should be subject to careful consideration, both in terms of functionality and composition. The adjustment of the environment to the scale and rank of the object - so as to emphasise its special role in the landscape, but also the symbolism associated with the sphere of sacrum - plays a crucial role in this case. Comparative analyses were made for ten highest statues of Christ in the world. The research was also supplemented with a presentation of the concept of land development around the statue of Christ in Świebodzin.

**Keywords:** landscape dominants, sacrum in the landscape, statue of Christ

#### Streszczenie

Pomniki Chrystusa wznoszone od lat 20. XX wieku w wielu miejscach na świecie stanowią specyficzną grupę dominant związanych ze sferą sacrum. Ich oddziaływanie na percepcję krajobrazu jest szczególnie silne ze względu na formę artystyczną, a przede wszystkim symboliczny wymiar. Celem pracy jest wykazanie, że projekty zagospodarowania terenu wokół sakralnej dominandy krajobrazowej, którą stanowią pomniki Chrystusa powinny być starannie przemyślane pod względem funkcjonalnym i kompozycyjnym. Kluczową rolę odgrywa w tym przypadku dostosowanie otoczenia do skali i rangi obiektu – tak aby podkreślić jego szczególną rolę w krajobrazie, ale również symbolikę związaną ze sferą sacrum. Analizie porównawczej poddano dziesięć najwyższych na świecie pomników Chrystusa. Badania porównawcze zostały również uzupełnione o prezentację koncepcji zagospodarowania terenu wokół pomnika Chrystusa Króla w Świebodzinie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dominanty krajobrazowe, sacrum w krajobrazie, pomnik Chrystusa

## 1. Introduction

Spatial dominants in the urban landscape are primarily skyscrapers and engineering structures, but also castle towers, town halls and church towers. The specific group of dominants associated with the sacred are the monuments of Christ erected from 1920s onwards in many places throughout the world - on the outskirts of cities and in the open landscape. Like all high objects, they change the key elements of the landscape's scenic structure, such as: distant viewpoints, high-rise landmarks, or the silhouette of city panoramas [2, 3, 10, 14]. The impact of scaled high objects on the landscape is difficult to define and shape; still, such objects occurring in groups in urbanised space can create seemingly neutral vista backgrounds for other elements of the city landscape [17]. At the same time, according to Oleński: "one high-rise tower can be more visible in the city skyline than a cluster of high-rise buildings" [14]. Monumental statues of Christ have a similar effect on the perception of the landscape, with their impact being even stronger because of the artistic form and, above all, the symbolic dimension they have [11]. "Thanks to symbolism, architecture can form means of communication through the intentional, and independent from aesthetic and practical reasons, introduction of content elements – signs that evoke emotional reactions. The symbolism of the landscape can be demonstrated in the presence of symbolic objects, in the relations of the building to the surrounding space, in the symbolic shapes of the design and in the features of form, in the presence of archetypes, allegories and metaphors" [7]. The way of managing its immediate environment and location in the landscape is no less important than the very artistic form of the statue of Christ.

## 2. Aim and methods

The subject of the research is the specific landscape dominant associated with religious worship, in the form of statues of Christ located in many places around the world. The basic criterion for the selection of objects for analysis was the height of the monument, without taking the height of its base into account. The highest Christ statues, which are 20 to 33 meters high, were then ordered from the highest to the lowest. The analysis covered the location of the object in the landscape, the way of managing the nearest surroundings of the object, active and passive exposure, landscape dominants, with particular emphasis on the possible perception of the monument from the nearest town. The analyses were conducted on the basis of topographic maps of the areas, the available photographic documentation, descriptions and site inspections conducted in Świebodzin and Lisbon. The test results are summarised in a collective table.

The comparative research was also supplemented with a presentation of the concept of land development around the statue of Christ in Świebodzin executed under the supervision of the author of the present article in 2007.

The aim of the work is to demonstrate that land development projects around the sacred landscape dominants in the form of statues of Christ should be subject to careful consideration,

both in terms of functionality and composition. The adjustment of the environment to the scale and the rank of the object – so as to emphasise its special role in the landscape, but also the symbolism associated with the sphere of *sacrum* – plays a crucial role in this case.

### 3. Statues of Christ in the landscape

At the beginning of the 1920s, colossal statues of Christ began to appear in the landscape, most of them in Latin America. Currently, there are 27 such monuments around the world, which are over 20 m high. None of them are as tall as the Buddha statue in Asia (Spring Temple Buddha), which is 128 meters high. The first object of this type was Cristo Redentor built in Rio de Janeiro – “It’s a religious symbol, a cultural symbol and a symbol of Brazil” – quoting Father Omar, rector of the chapel located at the base of the statue: “Christ the Redeemer brings a marvellous vista of welcoming arms to all those who pass through the city of Rio de Janeiro” [4]. Listed below are the ten highest statues of Christ in the world, ranked from the highest to the lowest (as of December 31, 2017). The test results are summarised in a collective table (Tab. 1.)

#### 3.1. Christ the King Statue (Christ the King), Świebodzin, Poland

Świebodzin is home to the world’s tallest monument of Christ the King, which is 36 meters high and is set on a 16-meter high base facing the town. Its author is Mirosław Patecki from Przyborów near Sława Śląska [19]. The statue was erected on an artificial mound covered with stone boulders (Fig. 1, 2, 3).



Fig. 1. Christ the King Statue – view from the road DK3, Świebodzin, July 2017  
(photo by M. Rzeszotarska-Pałka)



Fig. 2. Christ the King Statue – view from the mound, Świebodzin, July 2017  
(photo by M. Rzeszotarska-Palka)



Fig. 3. Christ the King Statue, Świebodzin  
– view from the parking lot, July 2017  
(photo by M. Rzeszotarska-Palka)

### **3.2. Christ of Peace Statue (Cristo de la Concordia), Cochabamba, Bolivia**

The Bolivian statue of Christ was built in 1994 on the San Pedro Hill in the city of Cochabamba. The statue is 34 meters high and stands on a base that is 6.24 meters tall. You can get to it by cable car or by climbing 2000 steps.

### **3.3. Christ the King Statue (Cristo Redentor), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**

The statue of Christ the Redeemer was erected on the top of the 710-meter-high granite Corcovado Hill. In 1921, the collection of money for the construction of the monument of Christ, which was to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the independence of the state, began in Brazil. Hector da Silva's project was selected for construction - the statue of Christ with open arms. The head and arms of Christ were designed by the French sculptor of Polish origin, Paul Landowski. The statue measures 30 meters in height and is set on a base that is 7 meters high. The sculpture was made in France and then transported to Brazil. The unveiling of the monument of Christ the Saviour took place in 1931 and was conducted by the lighting designer Guglielmo Marconi, who switched the illumination of the statue on from a yacht moored in the port of Italian Genoa. You can reach the monument by road or cable car, and then climb to the observation deck at the base with 222 steps, or take the lift or escalator instead. Nora Heimann, dean of the Department of Art at the Catholic University of Rio, says that Cristo Redentor stands out because it is a bridge between the classic European images of Christ on the cross and the more modern, less formal styles. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, Cristo is also the world's largest Art Deco sculpture.

### **3.4. Christ of the Knoll (Cristo del Otero), Palencia, Spain**

Cristo del Otero monument was erected in 1931 according to the design of the sculptor Vitorio Macho in the style that combined Art Deco with elements of cubism. The height of the monument is 21 meters. It is located on a stone hill in near the city of Palencia and faces it.

### **3.5. Christ the King (Christo Rei), Lisbon, Portugal**

The monument represents Christ the King with open arms and is a smaller scale copy of Christ from Rio de Janeiro. The 1959 structure measures some 100 meters, but the figure of Christ itself is 28 meters high. The monument is located on the southern bank of the Tagus, some 10 km from the centre of Lisbon (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Christ the King, Lisbon. View towards the city, May 2017  
(photo by M. Rzeszotarska-Palka)

### **3.6. Christ of Vũng Tàu, Vietnam**

The Vietnamese started the construction of the monument of Christ in 1974 and completed it 20 years later. The monument is 32 meters high, there are stairs inside the statue that lead to the viewing platform.

### **3.7. Christ the King Statue (Sanctuaire du Christ-Roi), Cerro del Cubilete, Mexico**

This statue of Christ is one of the largest monuments of Christ made entirely of bronze and is located on the top of the Cerro del Cubilete mountain in the state of Guanajuato in Mexico. Built in 1940, it is 20 meters tall. At its foot is a sanctuary building with facilities.

### **3.8. Christ of the Pacific Statue (Cristo del Pacífico), Lima, Peru**

The youngest giant statue of Christ, was built in 2011 in the capital of Peru - Lima. The monument is 37 meters high (22 meters tall statue of Christ with crossed arms, standing on a 15-meter pedestal). The construction was ordered by the former president of Peru, Alan García Pérez.

### 3.9. Christ of the Ozarks, Arkansas, USA

The Americans built their highest Christ statue in 1966 in Arkansas. It measures 20 meters. It is located among wooded hills away from the city. Stephen Colbert, a popular satirist in the USA, mocked the construction of the monument in Świebodzin saying that “the Book of the Apocalypse says that when the judgment day comes, a battle will take place between the greatest monuments of Jesus, and the true Christ will come to a country that will win the fight” [5].

### 3.10. Christ the Redeemer (Cristo Redentore), Monte San Biagio, Maratea, Italy

The statue of Christ the Redeemer is a tall marble statue, more than 20 meters high, built in 1965 at the top of the Italian Monte San Biagio. The author of the project is the Florentine sculptor Bruno Innocenti. A captivating statue resembling a white angel with outstretched wings was situated on the top of the hill, facing the town and the Tyrrhenian Sea.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of the location of the highest monuments of Christ in the landscape (own study)

Statue of Christ	Location of the object in the landscape	Development of the nearest surroundings of the building	Active exposure of dominants in the landscape	Passive exposure of dominants in the landscape
Christ the King Statue, Świebodzin, Poland	An open area surrounded by cultivated fields, housing development and a shopping centre located some 400m away.	Stations of the cross around the base of the earth mound, unpaved parking lot, catering facilities, sanitary protection zone	Visible from a distance of several kilometres, including a national road, it dominates in the open, flat terrain	Lookout on the mound at the base of the monument – in the foreground, we see the shopping centre, further back, the town
Cristo de la Concordia, Cochabamba, Bolivia	On a hill dominating the city, away from buildings (1–3 km)	Hardened square and road leading to the hill with a careful composition of greenery	Visible from a distance of several to several dozen kilometres, it dominates the hill	View of the city in the distance, immediate neighbourhood – composed greenery and hill slope
Cristo Redentor, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil	On the steep stone hill of Corcovado, a few kilometres away from the city	A small paved square at the top of the hill, access by steep stairs and a cable car	Visible from the city and the Guanabara Bay from several dozen kilometres, exposed on a steep cliff	Vista point at the base of the monument on the surrounding wooded hills, the waters of the bay, and the city in the distance

Statute of Christ	Location of the object in the landscape	Development of the nearest surroundings of the building	Active exposure of dominants in the landscape	Passive exposure of dominants in the landscape
Cristo del Otero, Palencia, Spain	On a low hill, on the outskirts of the city, a flat open area	A small chapel and museum in the building at the foot of the monument, a small observation deck, no cultivated greenery	Visible from a few kilometres on a flat landscape	View of the city and farmlands from the buildings at the base of the monument
Christo Rei, Lisbon, Portugal	On a hill on the banks of the Tagus River, the city centre is situated on the opposite bank of the river	Extensive area at the foot of the monument's foundation, developed with a careful composition of greenery, vista point on the city and the river, parking, catering outlets	Visible from a distance of several to several dozen kilometres from the city and the Tagus River, it does not dominate the city	View of the city, the river, Vasco da Gamma bridge in the foreground, rhythmic planting of olive trees
Christ of Vŭng Tâu, Vietnam	On a wooded hill a few kilometres from the city	A small viewing terrace, wide stairs leading to the foot of the monument, surrounded by natural greenery	Visible on a gentle hill from a distance of several kilometres from the city and the waters of the South China Sea	View of the city and sea waters, panoramic views from the stairs leading to the top
Sanctuaire du Christ-Roi, Cerro del Cubilete, Mexico	On one of the hills surrounding the city, a few kilometres from the city, in a hilly area	A large paved square surrounded by a circular building of a sanctuary, a wide access road surrounding the hill	Visible from a distance of several kilometres from the city and access roads, it is a small object in the landscape	A view of the city, surrounding hills, a circular stone square surrounded by a colonnade of a sanctuary building visible in the foreground
Cristo del Pacifico, Lima, Peru	On a range of hills located at the Pacific Lima Bay, a few kilometres from the city	Lack of land development, on a sandy elongated hill where degraded buildings are located	Visible from several kilometres from the city and the waters of the Lima Bay, it does not dominate the city	A view of the city and the Pacific, degraded buildings of „favela” visible at the base of the hill
Christ of the Ozarks, Arkansas, USA	On one of the many forested hills, a few kilometres from the town of Eureka Springs	A vast grassy glade with an amphitheatre at one end, surrounded by a thick forest	Visible from several kilometres, partially obscured by lush vegetation, it does not dominate its surroundings	View of the glade and open-air amphitheatre, distant views obscured by trees



Statue of Christ	Location of the object in the landscape	Development of the nearest surroundings of the building	Active exposure of dominants in the landscape	Passive exposure of dominants in the landscape
Cristo Redentore, Monte San Biagio, Maratea, Italy	At the top of Monte San Biagio hill on the Tyrrhenian Sea, a few kilometres from the town of Maratea	A picturesque road supported by arcades carved into the rock that winds up to the top among the ruins of the ancient town of Maratea	Visible from several kilometres from the Tyrrhenian Sea and surrounding towns, it forms the culmination of the highest hill in the area	Vista point at the foot of the monument with an extensive view of the Maratea coast

#### 4. Results of the analyses

The comparative analysis (Tab. 1.) demonstrated that Christ's statues are usually located a few kilometres from the city or its centre (Lisbon). The only objects located in the immediate vicinity of the building are the statues in Świebodzin – approx. 400 m from a shopping centre and detached housing and in Lima - there are degraded buildings, the so-called "Favelas" at the foot of the hill there. In Lisbon and Palencia, urban development is located a few hundred meters away from the developed area around the monuments. All objects analysed, apart from the Świebodzin Christ, were situated at natural heights that dominate the surrounding landscape.

The way of managing the nearest surroundings of monuments is conditioned by the location – objects erected at the top of steep rocky hills are usually surrounded by a small hardened observation deck. Only the monuments in Lisbon and Arkansas are surrounded by a vast, composed space, constituting the perfect foreground for the exhibition of the dominant. The Christ in Mexico was erected directly on top of the circular sanctuary building that surrounds the stone square. When we compare the land development mode, the worst performers are found in Świebodzin and Lima. In Peru, the area remains undeveloped. In Poland, on the other hand, the Stations of the Cross were placed around the base of the artificial mound covered with boulders and a decorative gate leading from the parking lot. Low quality catering facilities, the unpaved parking lot, as well as a fenced sanitary protection zone located 50 m away, are located nearby.

The best exposed in the landscape are objects located on high hills: statues in Rio de Janeiro, Bolivia, Lisbon, Vietnam and Italy. At the same time, these places also offer beautiful vistas of the neighbouring cities and the diversified surrounding landscape (including rivers, bays, sea waters). The monument of Christ the King in Świebodzin, despite being located on a small hill, dominates the town, and the open flat landscape of cultivated fields surrounding it from the south and the east.

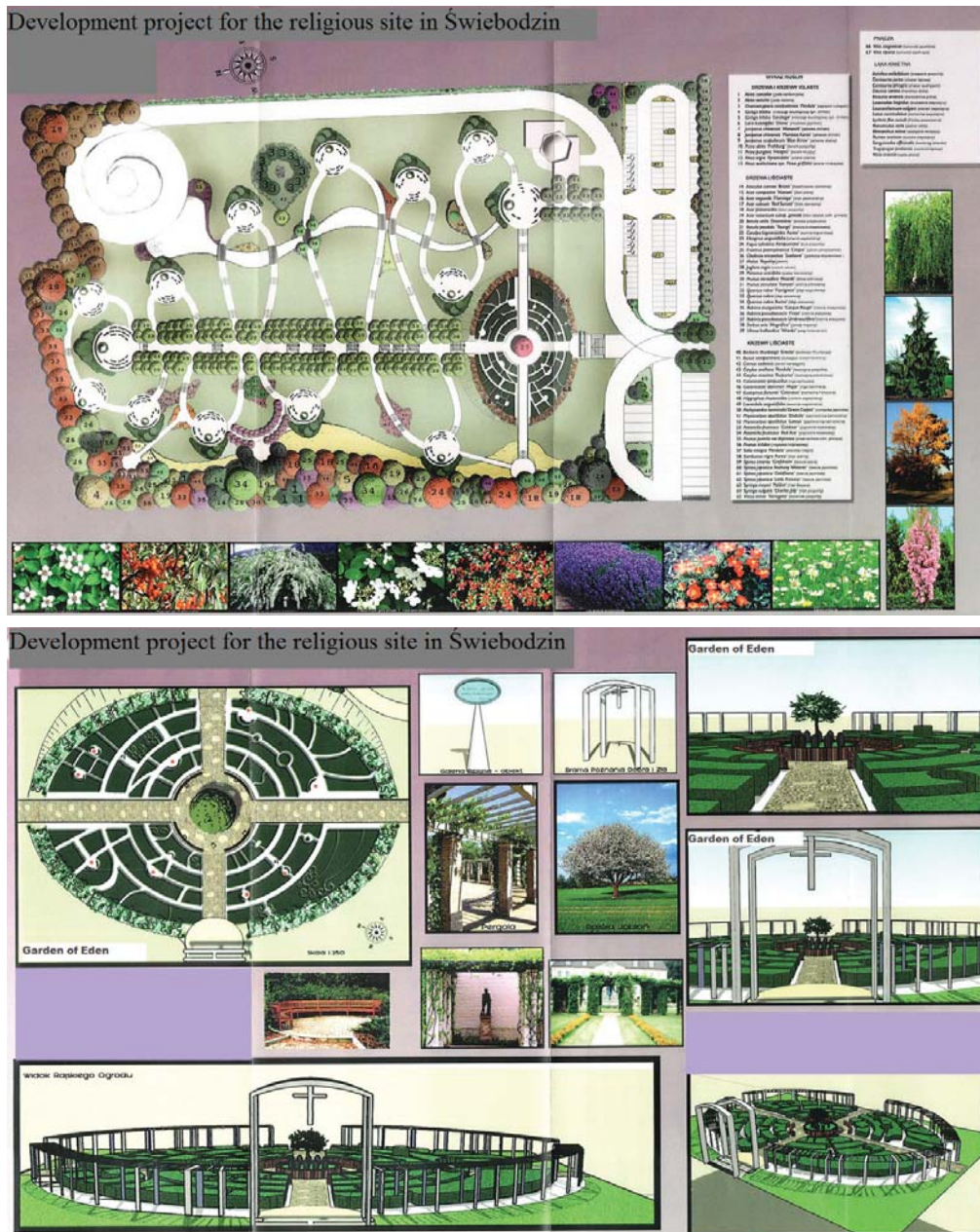
## 5. Land development plan at the monument of Christ the King in Świebodzin

The proposed land development project around the monument of Christ in Świebodzin was designed in 2007 simultaneously with the construction of the monument itself, as a result of consultations with rev. S. Zawadzki [18]. It uses both compositional elements and vegetation with a symbolic dimension.

Świebodzin is a town with over 20,000 inhabitants in the Lubuskie Lake District, some 80 km from the Polish-German border. The town is an important transport hub through which the following national roads run: the DK2 Berlin–Warsaw–Terespol and the DK3 Świnoujście–Świebodzin–Jakuszyce (Fig. 1). The area where the Christ the King monument was located covers an area of approx. 10 ha located on the outskirts of the town and in the immediate vicinity of cultivated fields. From the north, at a distance of about 500 m, we can find detached housing (Fig. 2), and from the west, the town swimming pool and service areas are located at a similar distance: a large shopping centre with a car park. The dynamically shaped area rises naturally to a height of 12 m in the south-easterly direction, which is why the mound extends a panorama of the town, surrounding farmland and the nearby expressway linking the north of the country with the south (DK3). The most prominent element in the surrounding landscape is the supermarket, located some 60 m from the monument, as well as the sanitary protection zone, bordering the designed area from the east, and a gas distribution plant, which is approx. 150 m away.

The scope of the project includes: a Calvary route with 14 stations, a project of the “Garden of Eden” and a service section. The pilgrim service zone includes a car park for passenger cars (120 spaces) and coaches (17 spaces) and Pilgrim’s House at the end of the Olive Alley. To get to the Garden of Eden and, at the same time, to the entire premise, we must cross the symbolic Gate of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which introduces us to a world full of biblical symbolism. It includes the Garden of Eden at the entrance to the area where the Tree of Life is designed - the paradise apple tree (*Malus* ‘Royalty’) around which there are stone tablets with the ten commandments of God engraved on them. The garden is filled with a labyrinth of evergreen boxwood, in which delicate spatial forms with Biblical texts from the Old Testament were placed. The main alley - the Way of Life studded with a double row of decorative birch trees (*Betula utilis* ‘Doorenbos’) with snow-white bark leads to the east of the garden. This species, although extremely rarely used in aisle systems, emphasises the main compositional axis, and in the winter, when the leaves fall, its white trunks and branches create an openwork composition, referring to the form of the Gate of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The way of Life is interwoven with a sinuous path leading to individual stations of the Way of the Cross, referring to the well-known Calvary compositions [12]. The first station of the Way of the Cross is located near the Pilgrim’s House. There are two roads leading to it – one from the Garden of Eden side and the other from the parking lot. The composition of all 14 stations is similar - on the oval square, there are delicate, transparent spatial forms with scenes depicting the passion of Christ. At the foot of the monument, a spring was designed, from which cascade water flows, creating a basin at its base. Then, it turns into a stream and ends its run at the first station of the Way of the Cross. From the places covered by the symbolism of the sacred,

one should also mention the Green Cape Cypress, which is made of 12 cypress trees of the *Chamaecyparis nootkatensis* 'Pendula' species, planted in a circle. *Catalpa bignonioides* 'Aurea' is planted in front of the gazebo, with its beautiful heart-shaped leaves in yellow-green colour.



The whole composition is to symbolise the twelve apostles and Jesus Christ. A cereal field has also been designed – symbolic wheat, which stretches with its gentle arches along the planting at the northern boundary of the area, creating a colourful composition with tree stands.

The design includes the symbolism of the gate, as the border between the sacred zone and the profanum. The gate is the main entrance to the sacred area, and after crossing it, the mystical journey along the Calvary paths, which begins with the passage through the Garden of Eden, starts. In Christian symbolism, the directions of the world correspond to the four gospels. The symbol of the number four appeared in the design of the pilgrimage park in the form of four lodgings in the Garden of Eden, which are to symbolise four evangelists – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The cross is a sign of Christianity and a symbol of faith – it serves as a sign identifying the sacred places [8, p. 13]. In turn, the cross was placed at the Gate of Knowledge of Good and Evil, it also creates an arrangement of walking paths in the Garden of Eden. Plants also play an important role in religious symbolism. The tree is the most perfect creation of the vegetable world. Sacred trees are found throughout the history of every religion, in folk myths, in archaeology and art around the world [8, p. 151]. The specific features of a given plant are used to draw analogies between the world of nature and religion [9, p. 256]. Many species of plants with sacred symbolism have been used, including: oak (symbol of strength, faith and perseverance, which leads through the main entrance to the park), olives (symbol of peace, immortality and wisdom – forms the Olive Alley), vines and wheat (sacramental symbolism) and plants at the Calvary road stations: tamarisk, acacia, apple tree, pine, plane tree, boxwood, viburnum and holly (Fig. 5.).

## 6. Summary

The presented statues of Christ are objects of worship that clearly organise the space, subordinating the functioning of other landscape elements [13, p. 22; 15]. As demonstrated by the analysis of the location of the highest monuments of Christ in the world, the way of managing their immediate environment is most often conditioned by their location. However, in the vast majority of cases, the area around the monument has a representative character, often underlined by the composition of greenery allowing for a proper exhibition of the object in the landscape. The surroundings of the monument of Christ the King in Świebodzin require adjustment to global standards. The comparison of the presented conceptual design with the existing examples from abroad allows us to state that it can be an interesting proposal for the harmonious creation of space around what is currently the world's highest statue of Christ. The composition of the area surrounding the monument, attractive and adapted to the character of the object, would enable its appropriate perception in the landscape [1].

For centuries, people around the world have been trying to mark the place of religious experience (hierophany) commemorating them in a material form: “chapels, roadside crosses in places of accidents, monuments (sometimes as huge as the cross on Giewont, or the statue of Christ in Świebodzin), and even monumental temples” [16, p. 37]. According to Professor Dąbrowska-Budzifłło, religious content has a unique impact on the shape of

the landscape, a “(...) associated cult places were signs with often unmatched clarity” [6, p. 130]. This is also confirmed by the analyses carried out for selected Christ statues located in various places around the world and in different spatial contexts. The influence on the landscape perception of these specific sacral dominants is always significant. However, as the above analyses demonstrated, it is not always enough to give the sacred landscape a symbolic value – even in such a large-scale form, to obtain a beautiful and harmonious space. So, the statement that “raising the landscape to the status of a symbol, allows to obtain space that is not only beautiful, but also significant, expanding the world of human experiences, and thus improving the quality of life” [6, p. 131] must also be conditioned by a carefully thought-out location of the object in a harmoniously shaped environment.

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