

NEW CHURCHES IN THE CITIES OF SERBIA AND SITE SELECTION FOR THEIR CONSTRUCTION

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Abstract: New church construction in the cities of Serbia in the last 25 years is a consequence of restrictions and the marginalisation of religion during the pre-1989 socialist period. In the period from 1945 to 1989, almost no new churches were built, and urban planners in Serbia have not developed appropriate selection criteria for the location of new religious buildings. Religious buildings built in the period after 1990 were built on sites that were selected *ad hoc* without considering the needs of believers and churches. In the last 25 years, more than 400 churches have been built in rural areas and cities, which influenced the reshaping of the cultural landscape. In this paper, attention is given to determining the required number of churches, their location, and the distribution of the urban structure in relation to various relevant factors. The specific spatial organisation of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the homeland and in the diaspora is emphasized.

Keywords: Serbian Orthodox Church, new church construction, church location, religious tourism, religious landscape

Introduction

Since the 1990s the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) has erected and/or restored about 500 churches and monasteries. Despite the current economic crisis, church building has experienced a renaissance in recent decades in all areas where the Orthodox Church has its own eparchy – Montenegro, Republic of Srpska, Western European countries, North America and Australia. In Serbia alone, in the past fifteen years, more than 200 churches have been built, and around 100 places of worship are in the final phase of construction. The majority of churches are erected at the request of local believers who mostly help with the building of churches. Besides

generous donations from believers, church building is funded from state funds and the funds of local communities (*Molitwa* 2011).

New Orthodox churches are being built in almost all urban areas and many rural areas. The newly erected churches in the eparchial centres of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Serbia stand out in terms of their size and architecture.

Contemporary church architecture in Serbia

The expansion of the construction of churches in the cities of Serbia in the last 25 years has been the result of long-term marginalisation of religion during the pre-1989 socialist period and limitations on the construction of religious buildings. The atheist-oriented government in the years after the Second World War ignored the religious needs of millions of Orthodox Christians living in the multiethnic state of Yugoslavia, fearing the revisionist influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church (Kadijević 2010).

Fearing the awakening of Serbian nationalism and the renewal of suppressed religious life, the single-party government saw the construction of Orthodox churches as a threat to their favoured ideological position (Kadijević 2010).

Belgrade, the patriarchal centre, as well as the eparchial centres in the church hierarchy below it (i.e. civil macro-regional and regional centres), have always been important religious centres in their polyfunctional structures, towards which gravitate the believers and clergy of the Church in surrounding areas.

Due to the prolonged pause in the construction of churches, most Serbian cities left the impression of de-Christianized zones. On the other hand, the incorporation of churches into the surrounding landscape was much more successful in rural and sparsely populated areas (Kadijević 2013).

The attempt to create nationally recognisable symbols stands out as an important feature of contemporary church architecture in Serbia in order to emphasise the cultural identification of the area inhabited by the Orthodox population.

The prevailing respect for local architectural models in the construction of new churches in cities is based on a deep admiration for Serbian national ideals of Medieval architecture, which ultimately led towards the creation of regionally distinctive cultural traits, resulting from a variation of the Ras-Byzantine style of architecture in the construction of modern churches.¹ Such nationally recognisable churches of

¹ Literal and sole following of its own Medieval architectural models was exposed to criticism in the circles of art historians, in the sense that new church architecture should be transformed and more radically turned towards symbolic forms of expression in the architecture of religion. The deceased Patriarch Pavle, however, pointed out that it was much better to build a church based

the Serbian Orthodox Church can be found from Trebinje and Podgorica in the southwest to Belgrade and Novi Sad in the northeast.

In general, churches and their architecture greatly affect the appearance of the ambient urban environment and its tourist appeal. In the urban context, churches became cardinal “crowns” of urban environments and benchmark labels of their religious and cultural identity (Kadijević 2013).

However, bearing in mind the integration of new churches into the existing urban structure, insufficient attention was paid to the basic principles of urban planning, with not enough respect for the importance of religious sites in the presentation of a city’s tourist offering. Although the fitting of new churches into urban plans for the immediate vicinity was attended to, not enough attention was paid to the positioning of the landscape of the new churches, as well as to the conditions of their perception from essential communication and visual standpoints (Kadijević 2013).

The Serbian Orthodox Church, in turn, aiming to strengthen its social status, encourages the mass construction of churches (Kadijević 2013). Since the beginning of the nineties to the present, throughout the Republic of Serbia, Republic of Srpska, Croatia and Montenegro, over four hundred Orthodox churches of different structures have been built, whereas hundreds of places of worship, unfinished for decades, have been successfully completed² (Kadijević 2010).

Of course, the number of newly built and existing churches is a matter of rough estimates, considering that there is no single register of places of worship in Serbia. The Law on Churches and Religious Communities provides a register of religious communities, but not a unique register of places of worship. Not even religious communities themselves have a single register of their property, as well as most of the municipalities on whose territory they are located.

on the model of the main monuments of Serbian Medieval architecture (Gracanica, Kalenic and Lazarica), until it came to a new, acceptable style for Orthodoxy (indicated by Kadijević 2010, 116).

² Sacred architecture during the transition period saw a significant expansion, not only in Serbia, but also in the entire Balkan region. Similar architectural expansion is characteristic of Orthodox Romania, where many Orthodox churches were built in the post-communist period. Since 2007, the grandiose Church of the Salvation of the Romanian people has been under construction in Bucharest. It will be 120 meters high, 120 m long and 70 meters wide. It will be able to host 5,000 worshippers, while the surrounding complex will be able to receive 125,000 visitors. The increase in the construction of religious buildings is characteristic of other denominations in the Balkans. According to data from the Center for Islamic Architecture in Sarajevo, by 2004 over 550 new mosques were built in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Sarajevo, in 2000, the mosque “King Fahd” was opened; it can host about 5,000 worshippers and is currently the largest mosque in the Balkans. The construction of new mosques in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo is followed by criticism indicating the Arabisation of Balkan Islamic architecture. More and more mosques with more than one minaret are being built, which has not been a feature of Balkan mosques until now (Barišić 2008).

With the end of the single-party political system in Yugoslavia, and the introduction of the multi-party system, a national awakening and strengthening of the social role of the Church, the erection of Orthodox churches experienced an inevitable boom. The lack of places of worship in relation to the significant increase in population in the cities of Serbia as well as changes in their urban structure, brought on the need for a large number of new churches in cities (Kadijević 2010).

A turning point that marked a twist in the religious policy of the Yugoslavian government towards the Serbian Orthodox Church was its decision to allow the completion of the construction of the Church of St. Sava in Vracar, Belgrade. That decision was made in June of 1984, following multiple appeals by Patriarch German (www.hramsvetogsave.com).

The construction of new churches in places with an Orthodox population followed a pause which, in many cities, lasted for over one hundred years. During this period, cities grew in population 10, 15 or even 20 times, as a result of the process of urbanization and uncontrolled migration from villages to cities. Thus, for example, the last church in Niš was built in 1878, in Valjevo 160 years ago, in Kraljevo over 100 years ago.

Another moment that accelerated new church construction was the growth in Serbia's religious population, which was registered in all the censuses after 1991, as well as in a number of sociological studies on the religious beliefs of Serbia's inhabitants. Furthermore, the Serbian Orthodox Church became economically stronger, even though not all previously confiscated property had been returned by the government, primarily due to large donations from many sources, which was the financial basis for construction. In addition, the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church in society, particularly in relation to the country's new multi-party government, has clearly changed. The construction of new churches was aided by public funds and the funds of local communities.

After the political dissolution of Yugoslavia, all the newly independent countries experienced a distinct desecularisation of society. From the formerly multi-ethnic and multi-religious state with a large proportion of atheism-oriented citizens, more or less distinctly ethnic and religiously homogeneous states and entities appeared. Thus, in Serbia, according to the census of 2011, there were approximately 84.6% Orthodox Christians, while Roman Catholics accounted for 5%, Muslims 3.1%, and Protestants 1%; members of other religions 2.2%, while atheists and those who did not identify themselves in terms of religion accounted for 5.3% of the population (*Popis stanovništva* 2013).

Religious and ethnic homogeneity is present throughout the territory of the Republic of Serbia with the exception of a few municipalities in the north of Vojvodina (Subotica, Kanjiza, Senta, Ada) and in the southwest of Serbia in the Raška region (municipality of Novi Pazar, Tutin and Sjenica), as well as on the fringes of Kosovo, where the predominant population is Muslim.

Considering that the percentage of those who declared themselves atheists and without religion is extremely low, the question is to what extent the return to religion, its values and behaviours is accomplished in reality? Numerous sociological studies have shown that the modern revival of religion by the population is more an expression of national identification and belonging (Djordjević 1990, 2009; Kuburić 2010; Blagojević 2009 etc.).

Newly-built churches in Serbia are of different sizes. The Orthodox world has never been characterized by large and lavishly-built places of worship. Compared to the places of worship of other religions, churches in Serbia were always of modest size. During the service in the Orthodox Church, believers stand, so that the architectural grading is 0.5 m² per person (Medvedev 1997). Despite this, the churches are not spacious enough to accommodate all the worshippers during important religious holidays.

The Church of St. Sava in Belgrade

The largest church of the Serbian Orthodox Church is the Church of St. Sava in Belgrade (Photo 1). The construction of the Church of Saint Sava began in 1935, forty years after the initial idea, or 340 years after the Ottoman Turks burned the relics of Saint Sava in Vracar. The foundations and walls of the church were built before the beginning of World War II.

The construction of the church was resumed in 1985, when Patriarch German with the presence of about 100,000 worshipers re-consecrated the church by laying a charter on continuing the work in new historical conditions. The exterior was finished in 2004, and the upcoming work is on the internal decoration of the church using the technique of mosaics.

The Church of Saint Sava is the largest Serbian Orthodox church and the largest Orthodox church in the Balkans and one of the largest Orthodox churches in the world. It is located on the eastern part of the square of Saint Sava, in Belgrade's municipality of Vracar. It was built on a site, which is thought to be the place where Sinan Pasha in 1595 burned the remains of Saint Sava, the founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

The church is located at the end of Belgrade's main pedestrian zone: Kalemegdan–Knez Mihailova–Terazije–Slavija–Church of Saint Sava. With its position the church occupies a prominent place in Belgrade's skyline and is visible from all parts of the city.

It was built in the Serbian-Byzantine style, with four towers, 44 m in height. The height of the dome is 70 m, while the main gold plated cross is another 12 m high. The church occupies an area of 3,500 square meters on the ground floor, with

an additional 1,500 m² of three galleries on the first level. The church is 91 m long from east to west, and 81 m from north to south. The church can host 10,000 worshippers. Under the floor of the church there is a treasury and the crypt of Saint Sava, as well as the “grave church” of Saint Lazar the Hieromartyr, with a total area of about 1,800 square meters.

Apart from the Church of Saint Sava in Belgrade, among newly-built churches there are also those which stand out with their monumental style and size, such as churches in Podgorica (area of 1,380 m²), Valjevo (978 m²), Nis (550 m²), Kraljevo (600 m²), Novi Sad, and also in other eparchial centres such as Krusevac and Zajecar (Photo 2 and 3).

Provinces of the Serbian Orthodox Church

In the Serbian Orthodox Church, according to the Constitution of the Church, there is an administrative division of its canonical area into eparchies, decanates and parishes. The Serbian Patriarchate, based in Belgrade, has over 40 eparchies and metropolitanates in the country and abroad (<http://www.spc.rs>). The heads of eparchies are bishops or metropolitans. The geographical scope of eparchies and parishes is precisely determined by the decisions of the authorised church body. The centres of eparchies are mostly found in larger towns with advanced functional structures.

The eparchies found across the territory of the Republic of Serbia without Kosovo are found in an area that is largely homogenous in religious terms. The centres of eparchies are located in towns with a high degree of geographical, administrative, and economic value. In Serbia, there are 14 eparchies and they are usually related to regional and macro-regional centres. Deanery centres are found in settlements with lower level of centrality. They are most often functionally and territorially congruent with municipalities in the administrative divisions of Serbia.

The eparchies found across the territory of the former Yugoslavia welcome all Orthodox Christians of different ethnicities: Serbs, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Vlachs, Roma, and others. In Bosnia and Herzegovina there are five eparchies. The spatial configuration of Bosnian and Herzegovinian eparchies is not the result of the gravitational principle, which was well established in this republic after the Second World War. It is more a reflection of tradition. A similar situation is found in Montenegro, where parts of its territory are included in the eparchies of other republics, such as the case of the Eparchy of Milesevo. In Croatia, eparchies are established according to spatial and ethnic criteria, i.e. the territorial allocation of the Serbian people before the war in the period 1991–1995.

The eparchies found across the territory of the neighbouring countries of the former Yugoslavia united the congregants who had inhabited these spaces for centuries,

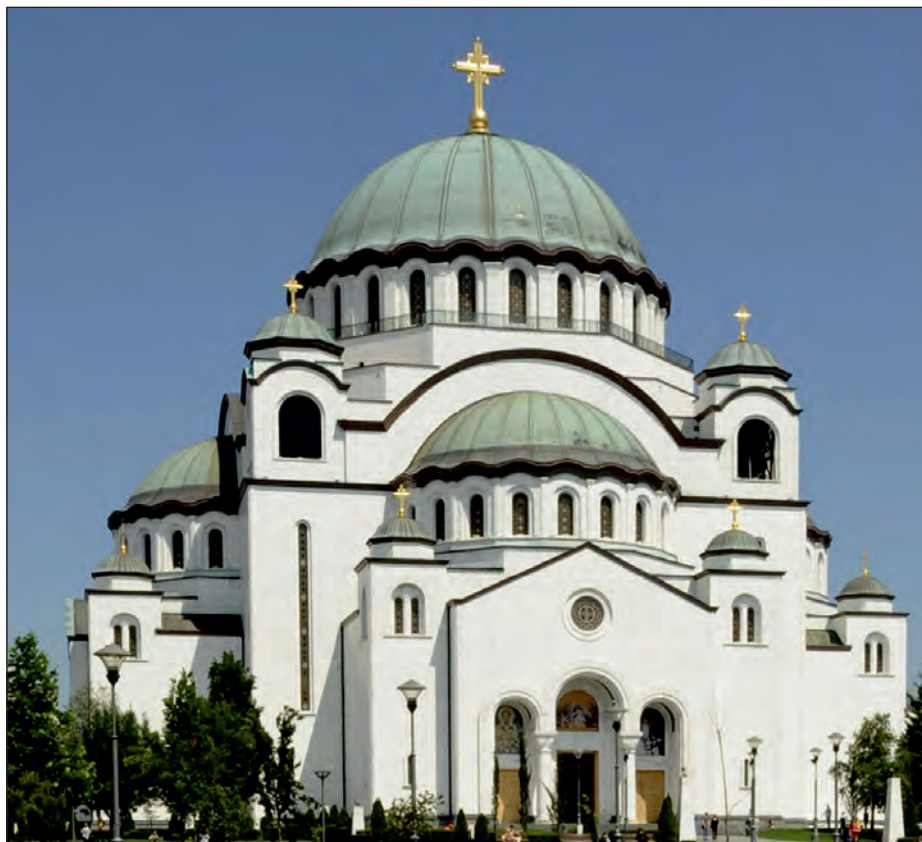


Photo 1. Temple of St. Sava, Belgrade (photo – novosti.rs)



Photo 2. New cathedral in Valjevo, Serbia (photo M. Spasojević)



Photo 3. New planted Church in Kraljevo, Serbia (photo M. Spasojević)

but after the Versailles Conference they remained a minority outside the Kingdom of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia. It was the Serbs in the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Hungary and Romania who were religiously organised into the Eparchy of Budim and the Eparchy of Timisoara even before the regrouping of eparchies in 1920. The Eparchy of Budim is now administered from Belgrade, the Eparchy of Timisoara from Vrsac, the centre of the Banat Eparchy.

In the Serbian diaspora, the pattern of forming territorial units of eparchies is different. In European countries outside the Balkan region, the basic spatial unit of the aggregation of eparchies is the territory of the country where Serbs live. They reside in those countries as forced and voluntary emigrants. It is therefore the former political and the recent economic emigration, which is concentrated in the most developed countries of Western and Northern Europe. At this moment, they are the Austrian-Swiss Eparchy, the Eparchy of Britain and Scandinavia, Central European Eparchy and Western European Eparchy (Popović 2013).

On other continents, the forming of territorial eparchies is somewhat different. In the United States, due to the size of its territory, the number of Serbian immigrants and their territorial distribution, there are three eparchies – Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Eastern America, Serbian Orthodox Diocese of New Gracnica – Midwestern America, and the Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Western America. On the American continent, there are also the Canadian Diocese and the Diocese of Buenos Aires, i.e. South American Eparchy, which is still in the process of formation. In Australia and Oceania, there is the Metropolitanate of Australia and New Zealand. Eparchies in the U.S. and Australia had dual structures in the period from 1964 to the early 1990s as a result of the conflict within the Church in the Serbian diaspora during communist rule in the former Yugoslavia. The conflict was resolved in the early 1990s and parallel structures were integrated into single eparchies (Popović 2013).

Archpriest deanates are spatial units that are between an episcopacy and a parish in the Orthodox hierarchy. The bishop uses them to facilitate the administrative management of the clergy. The head of the deanery is the dean, appointed by a bishop. The archpriest dean oversees several parishes and represents the eparchial archpriest. He must have the rank of *protojerej stavrophor*. He is recognized by the gold pectoral cross, which he carries at all times.

Each eparchy has from 5 to 10, and sometimes more deanates. They are usually matched with the municipalities in the administrative division of the territory. The centres of deanates are usually urban centres of lower rank in the hierarchy of urban settlements. Deanates may be designated according to the name of the area in which they are located (deanates in the Šumadija eparchy are for example Temnicko, Jasenicko, Beļicko, Levacko) or according to the name of the given municipal centre. Deanates are divided into a number of parishes.

The parish is the lowest territorial unit in the spatial organization of the Serbian Orthodox Church. From the earliest times, it marked a local community of congregants who gathered for the church service led by a priest. With the church in its centre, the parish was a monolithic community. It fit the ambience of the community and was the centre of its spiritual life. The parish later lost its homogeneity because its space was to be filled with other contents. "The church has not been the biggest nor the central building for a long time" in the cultural landscape, especially in urban areas (Kolundžić 2006).

Variations in the population size and spacing of church units

The size of a parish depends on the type of settlement and the stability of its population structure. In rural areas, the number of parishes was once equal to the number of churches. The parish comprised of a village and if the village did not have a church, the parish included several neighbouring villages. Parishes in rural areas can have from one thousand to several thousand members. Smaller urban settlements formed one parish, and bigger urban settlements had more parishes that comprised of several neighbouring districts. It is believed that in larger cities a parish should have approximately 10,000 members (Kadijević 2013, 78).

Eparchies also have different spatial and population sizes. In Serbia, eparchies feature larger populations, but are smaller in area than those in the diaspora. In the Republic of Serbia, there are 14 eparchies that have a population ranging from 200,000 to one million inhabitants. The most populated is the Archbishopric of Belgrade and Karlovac with over one million inhabitants; and in the Eparchy of Vranje there are about 200,000 inhabitants.

There is no doubt that the spatial distribution and population of the territorial units of the church are primarily affected by whether they are located in the mother country or abroad. Furthermore, the size of the territorial units of lower level depends on whether they are found in the city or in rural areas. Among the important factors that determine the configuration of spatial units, there is a set of demographic characteristics, such as the degree of religious homogeneity, density, stability of the demographic structure, i.e. whether it is decreasing, stable or growing. Last but not the least important factor is the general level of economic development, economic power of believers, and their willingness to donate to the church.

Selection of sites for new churches in cities

The question is how large parochial churches in the major cities of Serbia should be and where they are supposed to be located. In the absence of a proper analysis, it was thought that it would be most appropriate in the vicinity of elementary schools (Kadijević 2013), as the choice of the location for the construction of primary schools is oriented according to the place of residence and consequently these principles of location should be used in the analysis of the distribution of churches.

Certainly, the expansion in the construction of churches in Serbia caught urban planners in Serbia unprepared to answer many questions regarding the needs and the location of religious facilities in major cities. The location of new churches is usually selected without previous analyses of the site. Besides that, there were no serious analyses concerning the number of churches needed and their spatial distribution in cities.

The location of newly built churches were not chosen by understanding basic urban planning factors relevant to religious sites, but the change of the purpose of the sites that had been planned for other users of urban land. That is how the largest new church in Niš was built on a site that, in the urban master plan, was chosen for the construction of business and service centres. The new Episcopal Church in Kraljevo was built in an old city park; the church in Valjevo was built on the grounds of a former open market area, and so on.

Therefore, in cases when the choice of the church site is not based on pre-defined urban planning criteria, without a regular procedure proscribed in the site selection of public facilities and a public debate, and without the compliance of other users of urban space, we talk about *ad hoc* locations. If in the selection of the church location there is no valid criteria to answer the question why here and why not there, then such a location is chosen on the basis of the subjective criteria of suitability and its functional purpose. The decision-makers analysing potential sites are donors themselves, often tycoons or, after democratic changes, the newly elected political establishment at various levels. A volunteer approach to defining new locations involves a lot of compromises, which, through their use, show all their negativity. The choice of the religious site must be incorporated in the master urban plan at the stage of its adoption, and not as its subsequent amendments.

One example from the urban planning practice of Niš, a Serbian city of about 250,000 inhabitants, the third largest city in the country, deserves the attention of public professionals and scholars. Niš has had a long Christian tradition and it is the birthplace of the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great; thus, the issue of the construction of churches transcends the local level.

The Department for Urban Planning in Niš, under the direction of architect Mihail Medvedev in 1997, conducted an "Analysis of needs and possibilities

of location of Orthodox churches in the general urban plan of the city of Niš.” The starting point was the fact that in over 100 years not a single Orthodox church had been built, and that the city in the meantime increased its population more than 20-fold. Considering the fact that religious needs represent one of the city’s public functions, important not only for believers, but for the city itself, efforts were made to use the analysis for reviewing the needs of believers and the clergy in finding the optimal number, spatial distribution, and optimal size of new churches.

This analysis concluded that the existing Orthodox churches did not correspond to the modern urban structure of the city, that is, to the distribution of residential areas and other primary functions of the city. There were four Orthodox churches located on the outskirts of the city centre, while there were two mosques, a synagogue and a Catholic church situated in the centre. The existing churches with their capacities did not meet the needs of the city’s growing population. The largest church of about 480 m² was built in 1887 and can host up to 1,000 congregants. The Old Church has an area of about 216 m²; St. Pantelej Church 150 m² and St. Nicola’s Church 100 m². Eighteen municipal parishes, as there were in the late 1990s, were directed towards these churches.

The analysis of optimal distribution included the accessibility of newly constructed churches as the first criterion, which implied availability regarding the allocation of existing and planned residential zones and other city functions. Accessibility was observed in the gravitational model, where the diameter of the circle around the church was defined with isochrones within 15 minutes in terms of pedestrian traffic, or in a radius of 1,000 m. When the gravitational circles of these dimensions were plotted onto the urban structure of the city, in a rectangular shape of 20 km (east-west) by 10 km (north-south), it was determined that a new cathedral was to be built in the city centre, as well as 12 new parish churches, which would cover existing and planned residential areas. From the planned 12, three churches have been built and consecrated so far.

The locations of new churches would be in unoccupied or partially occupied areas or in areas that would be obtained by the reconstruction and change of the purpose of the space. The specific location of the church in the gravitational zone would be determined depending on property ownership, neighbourhoods with similar facilities (schools, libraries, cultural centres), infrastructural accessibility, and other similar factors. Regarding the location of parochial churches in towns, it is obvious that secular criteria are subordinately present, at the expense of urban criteria and principles.

The capacities of the planned churches vary and are generally a function of the number of inhabitants in existing and planned residential areas. Smaller churches range in their capacity from 200 to 300 congregants, medium-sized ones from 300 to 400 and large churches from 600 to 800 congregants. It is believed that such a distribution would satisfy the needs of 7,500 to 12,500 people, which corresponds

to the assumption that, from the total population, approximately 3 to 5% of the population are devoted believers who regularly participate in religious activities of the Orthodox Church (Medvedev 1997).

Tourist significance of newly built churches

Contemporary Orthodox church building in Serbia, in addition to the obvious positive effects from the point of view of Orthodox believers themselves and meeting their spiritual needs, there are some external effects provoked by the construction. The question that arises, namely, is to what extent does recent church building encourage the development of certain forms of tourism, and also to what extent does the expansion in the construction of churches affect clearer cultural identification of the landscape?

In relation to the development of tourism, it is quite evident that new churches found in cities have complemented the existing tourist supply of metropolitan and regional centres, which has certainly enriched the tourist supply of religious tourism. Newly built churches, in their scale, location and aesthetics, contrast the urban greyness in which many cities in Serbia found themselves during the transition period over the last 25 years.

There is no doubt that the newly built churches will be found in the travel itineraries of many religious journeys and will be visited by tourists of different backgrounds. From the standpoint of the development of religious tourism, new churches are convenient starting points for tours of sacred sites in the urban environment, which tourism industry workers, who are becoming more and more numerous within the Church itself, will undoubtedly be able to design. Frescos are not painted on the walls of new churches and that fact reduces their current tourist attractiveness. The tourist evaluation of newly built churches must take into account the views of art historians, who state that all of them are the variations of the styles of the Medieval religious tradition.

Over the past 25 years, there have been major changes in the area of tourist demand. In fact, a number of sociological studies have shown an increase in the general religiosity of the population of Serbia. There is an increasing number of visits to religious monuments of religious as well as ordinary tourists. Particularly important is the appearance of religious tourists and organisations of pilgrimages by eparchial and ordinary travel agencies (Markov 1999; Nedeljković, Markov 2006, 2007).

External effects of the choice of the location and construction of religious facilities in cities were often not widely discussed. Churches were built at ad hoc sites, at locations that were designed for other purposes. In the case of most Episcopal centres, an opportunity to concentrate religious facilities at selected new locations near large churches was missed.

Conclusions

Newly built churches and other religious facilities in urban and rural areas have created a prominent national and regional geopolitical feature, which strongly emphasizes the cultural identity of the landscape, creating an impression that Serbian cities are less de-Christianised than they were in the recent past.

Religion is obviously finding its place in the newer social relationship in Serbia, thus once again becoming an important element in shaping geographical space. The imprint of religion on the cultural landscape is becoming increasingly apparent in Serbia, especially when religious structures appear in environments that were shaped by styles created under the influence of the secular establishment.

Activities that clearly indicate the re-establishment of religious and cultural continuity are returning. Long-term changes in the religious profile of cities are clearly evident.

The expansion of church architecture will continue and it is certainly the segment of the superstructure that will not be delayed in its development any longer. It has accelerated not only in the environments that have grown in population, but also in rural areas, where new religious facilities occupy prominent hilltops, but where there are very few believers due to depopulation and emigration.

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