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## THE ROLE OF PARISH CHURCHES AND ADJACENT PARISH FACILITIES IN A CITY'S SPATIAL STRUCTURE

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### ROLA KOŚCIOŁÓW I ZESPOŁÓW PARAFIALNYCH W STRUKTURZE PRZESTRZENNEJ MIASTA

#### Abstract

The aim of the study is to determine the role of parish churches and adjacent parish facilities in a city's spatial structure on the example of southern districts of Warsaw. The research includes a description of the parish structure development and characterisation of urban elements surrounding existing parish churches and architectonic elements of the ecclesial buildings which link them to the exterior space. Within the area analysed, initially rural settlements developed surrounding churches founded by Catholic religious orders or landowners and later have been included within the city limits. New ecclesial buildings were erected in parallel to the new residential area. The churches have an important influence on their urban surrounding form. Their influence often extends beyond their nearest surroundings due to the vertical elements of symbolical character, which are a clear reference point in the urban landscape.

**Keywords:** church, city, ecclesial building, sacral architecture, urban development

#### Streszczenie

Celem badań było określenie roli kościołów i towarzyszących im zespołów parafialnych w strukturze przestrzennej miasta na przykładzie dzielnic południowej Warszawy. Przedstawiono rozwój południowej Warszawy na bazie rozwoju struktury parafialnej. Scharakteryzowano elementy struktury miejskiej towarzyszące kościołom oraz elementy budowli sakralnych łączące je z przestrzenią zewnętrzną. Na badanym obszarze początkowo struktura osadnicza o charakterze wiejskim rozwijała się wokół kościołów fundowanych przez klasztory i właścicieli ziemskich, a później włączona została w granice miasta. Nowe kościoły wznoszono wraz z budową osiedli mieszkaniowych. Kościoły mają istotny wpływ na formę ich urbanistycznego otoczenia. Ich obszar oddziaływania sięga często dalej niż przestrzeń miejska przylegająca do świątyni dzięki elementom symbolicznym o charakterze wertrykalnym, które są czytelnymi punktami odniesienia.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kościół, miasto, architektura sakralna, rozwój miasta, ogród kościelny

## 1. Introduction

In literature there are two terms characterizing the type of cultural landscape where sacred and religious values are important. The first one is the sacred landscape, which is related to material manifestation of the sacred, such as the presence of places of worship. M. Lehmann considers the sacred landscape as the spiritual and cultural heritage, expressed in religious buildings in landscape [8, 11]. The other term is the religious landscape. According to C.C. Park, the range of research on the religious landscape includes such issues as: sacred architecture and churches' spatial distribution and dynamics of changes [8, 16].

Sinha claims that the religious past of most societies is alive in religious buildings and sacred sites [17]. Parish churches in countries with a Catholic tradition are deeply-rooted in the urban landscape and in societies' culture. Sacred places together with places of power and places of commercial trade were always characteristic elements of urban configuration [14]. Norberg-Schulz pointed out that for centuries European architecture was mostly sacral architecture. Still today, the majority of European cities are dominated by a centrally situated church which shapes urban landscape and its meaning. The church explicitly determined the silhouette of Christian cities. It constituted a clear physical and meaningful centre. It was easily recognisable both in the spatial and symbolical aspects [15]. The influence of religious architecture on the landscape has attracted few researchers, especially within architectural and urban fields of studies. The role of churches in the urban landscape has been a subject of interest for Marek Grymin, Claudia Manenti, E. Klima, Alba Arboix Alió and Joanna Gil-Mastalerczyk [1–5, 9, 10, 12–14]. Grymin emphasises that to understand the present role of parish churches in the city landscape it is important to analyse the historical context. Contemporary cities were influenced by previous generations and the sacred architecture which they erected and which often still exists [5]. As pointed out by Arboix Alió, parish churches are significant buildings for understanding a city's development. The identification of the parish churches' structural evolution is crucial for understanding the urban layout and conditions of its spatial development, and also for understanding the ecclesial buildings nearest surrounding composition. These types of building combine the architectonic form, and political and economic conditions, which were the impetus for their establishment, as well as the mentality of the society and the culture of architects who designed them [1]. According to Marek Grymin, the range of research concerning the churches' role in the city landscape should include the space related to the sacral buildings, such as the surrounding parish facilities complex [5]. Alba Arboix Alió emphasises that sacred architecture influences the composition of the surrounding area. The urban space surrounding the church is a kind of open-air interior destined for the everyday use of the local community [1]. According to Marek Grymin and Alba Arboix Alió, there are diverse types of parish complexes' relation to their urban surroundings. Marek Grymin identifies: churches located next to a square, new sacral buildings within the inner city, "islands", temporary ecclesial buildings, "roadside" churches, temples within housing estates and churches "incorporated into green areas" [5]. Alba Arboix Alió identifies churches linked to a square, a passage or other public spaces,

those located directly along a street and churches with no visible relations to their urban surrounding. The author also claims that there are some sacral buildings whose relations with their surrounding are more extended because of their vertical architectonic elements visible from distant perspectives [1].

Manenti emphasises that since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, places of worship have become marginalised, and driving them into the private sphere causes the loss of their social and urban roles, which they performed until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century [14]. According to Marek Grymin, currently, due to the intensive and spontaneous urban areas development, buildings which created landscape identity and which were perceived as landmarks, such as churches, lost their historical role. More often, their location in the city landscape is random [5]. Because of their location and form, churches are now rarely considered as reference points in the city landscape. Often an initiative for a new sacral building establishment arises late, when urban development is already dense and there is no representative location. Sometimes, during parish structure formation and identification of the main centres of the Church organization, the complex urban system has not been taken into consideration [13]. Szymiski and Długopolski indicate four types of main problems concerning new churches: 'peripheral location', misunderstanding of the idea of the 'ecumenical simplicity', misinterpretation of the 'return to the roots of Christianity' and focus only on utilitarianism and pragmatism [18].

In the European Christian tradition, the church was a characteristic element of urban structure, a visible dominant, a strong form which served the local community as a centre of physical space of their environment. For ages, the church presence gave people a sense of safety, of belonging to the community of faith, thoughts, actions and hope [6]. The necessity to continue this tradition resulted not only from the spiritual need of local communities; it is also related to the need of symbolical emphasizing their identity [7]. The location of religious buildings should be linked to urban context. Worship places shouldn't be hidden or isolated. They should be placed within the space which concentrates the city's life, which performs social, recreational and commercial functions. Religious buildings should be visible and their form shouldn't be excessively monumental, but must be sufficiently representative [14].

The aim of this research is to determine the role of parish churches and adjacent parish facilities in a city's spatial structure based on the example of the southern districts of Warsaw. The study includes 28 parish churches currently existing there. The southern Warsaw urban landscape was mostly shaped from the 1970s to the 1990s and at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Its spatial composition is based on the historical road system of the previously existing rural area. Although the great part of the landscape is occupied by relatively new housing estates, the spatial complexes of the former villages with their internal road system are still preserved. The analysed area reflects a process of city development through incorporation of the rural area with the existing historical parish churches into the city boundaries and the establishment of new urban housing estates with new parish churches meeting the needs of new communities.



## 2. Materials and methods

The role of parish churches and adjacent parish facilities in the city's spatial structure has been considered in three aspects proposed by Alba Arboix Alió [1]:

- ▶ parish churches as objects which contribute to the form and process of urban development;
- ▶ spatial relations between parish churches and their urban surroundings – the church as strong architectonic form which agglutinates a certain type of urban element (e.g. churches linked to a square, a passage or other public spaces);
- ▶ architectonic form of the sacral buildings and especially those elements which link them with the exterior space, such as a cloister garden, churchyard garden, portico, arcaded galleries, stairs, towers, campaniles and domes. These last elements do not organize the space around a church but are important elements of the city's skyline; they are visible from a distance and perform the role of reference point and facilitate orientation in the city. In this approach, the church's topographical situation in relation to its surrounding is also analysed.

The main research method has been terrain observation, which allows the spatial relations between the parish churches and their surrounding to be identified and to recognize elements which link them to the urban surroundings. Simultaneously, historical written and cartographical sources have been analysed. This allowed the time and circumstances of the parishes establishment and churches construction to be determined, their location selection, their architectonic form, their surrounding composition, its transformations and the church's influence on city development.

## 3. Parish structure development

Four of the analysed parish churches initiated development process of new settlements which have grown around the place of worship and were later incorporated into the city of Warsaw. These churches are: the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary church (St. Catherine's parish) in Służew, erected in 1238, the St. Anna church in Milanów (later Wilanów), erected in the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the east of Służew, the St. Elizabeth church in Powsin erected in 1410 and the St. Anthony of Padua church with the Bernardines' cloister built in 1690–1693.

The historical churches were usually located in the centre of the settlement, often in the highest place (e.g. the church in Służew) or close to the residence of the landowner who founded the place of worship (e.g. the church in Wilanów). Some churches (e.g. the churches in Wilanów and Służew) were visually connected with and constituted an important element of the composition of the landowners' residential gardens. Churches were located along the main roads, which were parallel to the lineal elements of the terrain topography – the terraces of the Vistula river valley and the postglacial plain edge, the so-called "Warsaw escarpment". The historical roads became part of the street system of the present urban landscape.

The majority of the parish churches (twenty-one cases) and their urban surroundings were established almost at the same time. The ecclesial buildings were erected within newly built housing estates. The first new parishes were established after the Second World War. Other parishes were erected in the 1980s.

During the Polish People's Republic period, churches were built in less prestigious places which did not allow them to have a visual impact on the surrounding landscape. New churches, often surrounded by high blocks of flats, seemed to be 'pushed into' residential areas and were not perceived as landscape dominants [10]. An example of this kind of location is the church of Our Lady the Mother of Mercy in Stegny. An exception is the Lord's Ascension church in Stokłosy built in the centre of the housing estate, on the large square previously occupied by the marketplace, which was transformed into a representative public space. The church has unexpectedly become the dominant of the whole residential area [10] and the local centre which consolidates the surrounding housing estates. The last parishes were established after the decline of the Polish People's Republic in the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. After the political transformation in 1989, because of the necessity for increasing the number of worship places, sacral buildings were often located in areas originally destined for other purposes. For example, the church of Blessed Edmund Bojanowski in Wolica was built on the edge of the escarpment, next to the natural reserve area because the local authorities could not find another location for the sacral building in this neighbourhood.

Table 1. List of the analysed parish churches and adjacent parish facilities within the southern Warsaw districts

No.	Name of the church and parish	
1.	St. Madeleine Sophie Barat church, the Sacred Heart of Jesus convent in Grabów	Church erected in parallel to housing estates
2.	St. Thomas the Apostle church in Imielin	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
3.	St. Pio of Pietrelcina church in Moczydło	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
4.	Ladislas of Gielniow church in Natolin	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
5.	Sts. Peter and Paul the Apostles church in Pyry	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
6.	St. Dominique church and Dominicans cloister in Służew	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
7.	Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary church (St. Catherine parish) in Służew	Church erected before surrounding housing estates
8.	Lord's Ascension church in Stokłosy	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
9.	Blessed Edmund Bojanowski church in Wolica	Church erected after surrounding housing estates



10.	Lord's Offertory church in Wyzyny	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
11.	St. Antonio of Padua and St. John of Dukla churches (St. Boniface in Czerniaków parish) the Bernadine's cloister	Church erected before surrounding housing estates
12.	Church dedicated to Mission of the Lord's Disciples in Kępa Zawadowska	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
13.	Sanctuary of Our Lady Longing (St. Elisabeth parish) in Powsin	Church erected before surrounding housing estates
14.	St. Thaddeus the Apostle church in Sadyba	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
15.	Sanctuary of Our Lady Teacher of the Youths (Our Lady Queen of the Believers parish) in Siekierki	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
16.	St. Antonio Maria Zaccaria church (Barnabite Fathers parish) in Stegny	Church erected after surrounding housing estates
17.	Our Lady the Mother of Mercy church (congregation of Marianist Brothers and Priests parish) in Stegny	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
18.	St. Anna church in Wilanów	Church erected before surrounding housing estates
19.	Temple of the Divine Providence in Wilanów	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
20.	Our Lady the Mother of the Church church in Ksawerów	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
21.	St. Casmir the Prince church in Sielce (Resurrectionist Congregation)	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
22.	St. Joseph the Betrothed to the Virgin Mary church (St. Stephan the King in Sielce parish) Sisters of Nazareth convent	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
23.	St. Maximilian Kolbe church in Służewiec	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
24.	St. Andrzej Bobola church in Mokotów	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
25.	St. Michael Archangel church in Mokotów	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
26.	St. Stephen church in Mokotów	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
27.	Mary, Mother of God church in Wierzbno	Church erected in parallel to surrounding housing estates
28.	Most Holy Mary the Mother of Saviour church in Wyględów	Church erected after surrounding housing estates

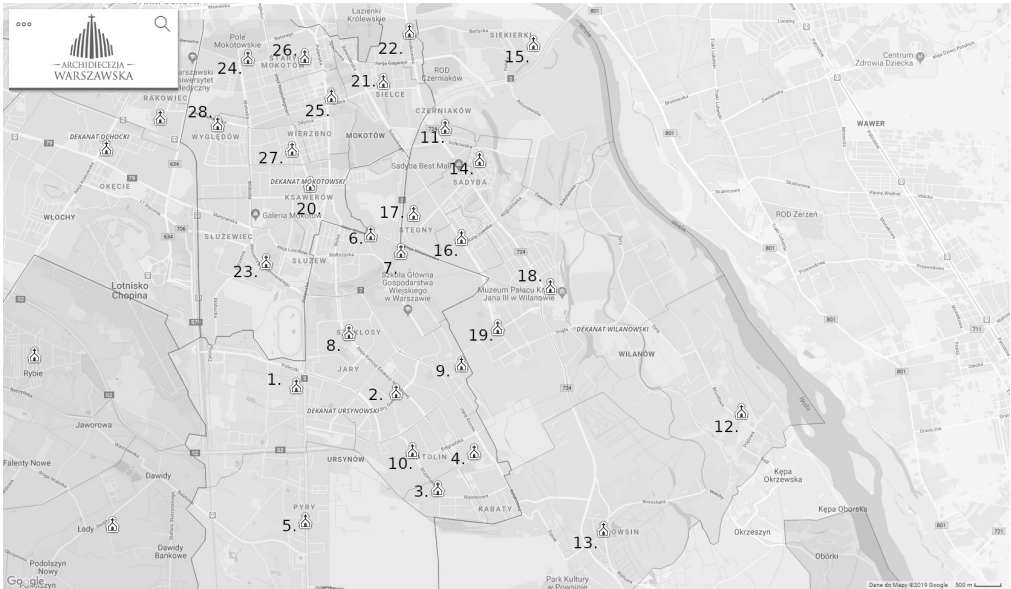


Fig. 1. Location of the analysed parish churches and adjacent parish facilities within the southern Warsaw districts. Church numbers according to the Table 1 (Own elaboration based on Warsaw parishes map retrieved from <https://mapa.archwwa.pl>)

#### 4. The parish church and its surrounding urban elements

There are two types of relations between parish church and the urban elements which surround it. The first situation (represented by eight sacral buildings) is a church linked to a square (the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary church, St. Catherine parish and St. Anthony of Padua church), a passage, or other public spaces such as gardens or passages. Particularly interesting are the Church of St. Anna in Wilanów, compositionally connected with the palace and garden complex of the former royal residence and the Lord's Ascension church in Stokłosy whose façade is the visual closure of the large square situated on the main compositional axis of the Pope John Paul II park.

The second situation is a church located directly along a street (twenty one churches). The majority of them (sixteen churches) are preceded by at least a small-sized open space created by the pullback of the church façade in parallel to the street or diagonally to the street.

Among churches of both types of spatial situation, there are sacral buildings whose relations with their surroundings are more extended. They are visible from many perspectives, both on the smaller and larger scales; they are distinctive architectonic forms, and actively create the image of the residential area. Two of them – the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary church, St. Catherine parish and the St. Dominic church are located on the highest places. The third sacral building, the Temple of the God's Providence in Wilanów, because of the large-sized dome which crowns the building, constitutes a characteristic landscape element, a point of reference which can be identified from many distant perspectives.

Five parish churches have been situated on building plots located at the end of a street. They constitute the closure of the perspective view which strengthen their role in the urban landscape and visual impact. A good example of this is the Avenue of the Polish Republic leading to the Temple of Divine Providence in Wilanów, which has a particularly representative character.



Fig. 2. a). St. Madeleine Sophie Barat church in Grabów located directly along a street.  
 b). The Avenue of the Polish Republic leading to the Temple of the Divine Providence in Wilanów.  
 c). The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary church, St. Catherine parish.  
 d). St. Anthony of Padua church. Both churches are preceded by intentionally designed squares compositionally related to the sacral buildings.



Fig. 3. The Lord's Ascension church in Stokłosy is the visual closure of the large square, situated on the main compositional axis of the Pope John Paul II park, which serves both liturgical and social activities



## 5. Compositional elements of sacral buildings which link them with exterior space

The most frequent compositional elements of the sacral buildings which link them with exterior space are stairs leading to the main church entrance. They are present in twenty-three churches analysed. In ten cases, the stairs consist of only a few steps and in thirteen churches they have a monumental character and they constitute the extension of the open space or the public square which precede the temple. In eleven churches, the entrance leads through the portico which symbolizes transition from the profane to the sacred sphere.

Three sacral complexes include a traditional cloister garden; however, they are isolated from the urban space and are not accessible to secular users. A large number of sacral complexes (fifteen) include at least a small garden surrounding the church and parish facilities. These gardens are open to the public during the whole week. They serve not only a liturgical function (e.g. processions), parish fairs and festivities, but are also used by local residents as a place for walking and recreation.

Half of the analysed ecclesial buildings have symbolical vertical elements (a tower or a dome) which are a visible reference point in urban landscape.

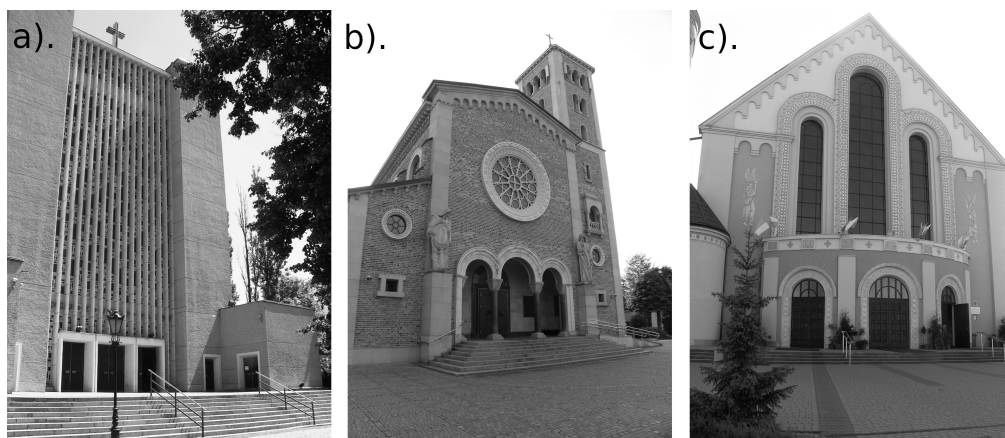


Fig. 4. Church entrances: a). the St. Michael Archangel church in Mokotów, b). the Sts. Peter and Paul the Apostles church in Piry, c). the Lord's Offertory church in Wyżyny

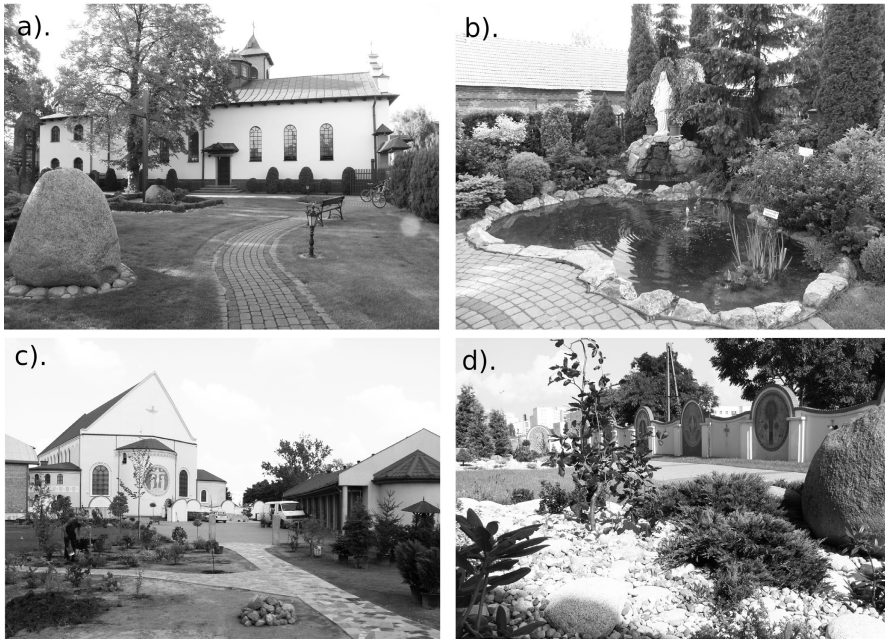


Fig. 5. a). and b).Garden surrounding the St. Madeleine Sophie Barat church and the Sacred Heart of Jesus convent in Grabów. c). and d). Garden surrounding the Lord's Offertory church in Wyzyny

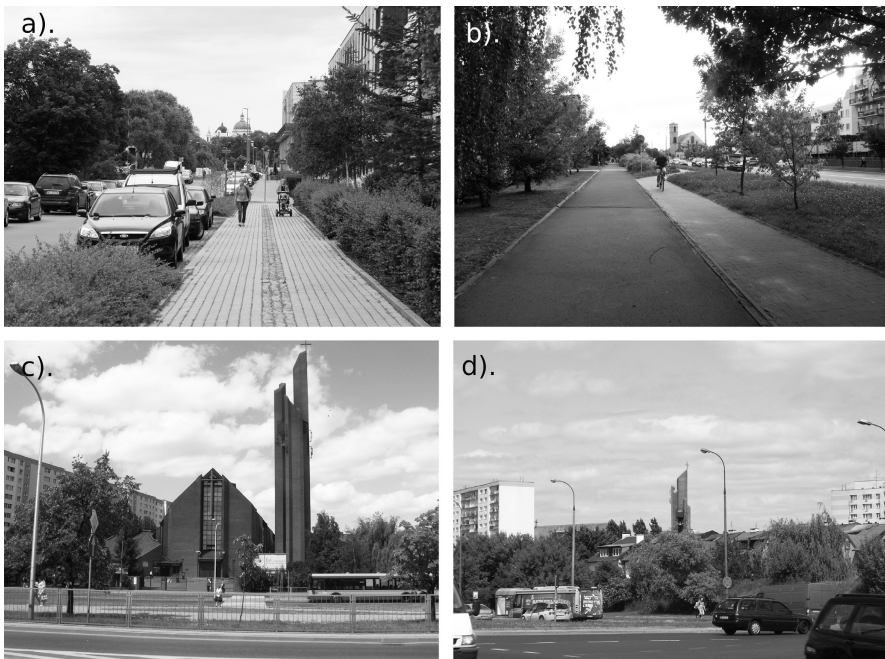


Fig. 6. Fig. 6. a). The St. Anna church in Wilanów. b). The Lord's Offertory church in Wyzyny. Ecclesial buildings with symbolical vertical elements which are a visible reference point in the urban landscape. c). and d). Bell-tower building of the Our Lady the Mother of Mercy church in Stegny seen from different perspectives

## 6. Conclusions

The analysis of the parish churches' structural development is useful for understanding the process of urban landscape shaping. Within the analysed southern Warsaw area, initially rural settlements developed surrounding churches founded by Catholic religious orders or landowners and were later included within the city limits. Despite further urban development and changes in the buildings character, the layout of the historical roads leading to the churches and their originally formed surrounding (e.g. a square) have been preserved in the structure of Warsaw. New ecclesial buildings were erected in parallel to the new residential area. Unfortunately, because of the political conditions, new churches, erected during the Polish People's Republic, were not taken into consideration in the planning process for the new housing estates. This situation was common for Polish cities. The greater part of churches erected between 1945–1988 were 'pushed into' residential areas consisting of blocks of flats [10].

The parish churches have an important impact on their surrounding urban form. The ecclesial building often is set deeper back from the street than the other buildings or is preceded by a square. For this reason, it stands out from its background and its façade is clearly visible. The impact of the sacral buildings is bigger if the church nave's main axis is continued in the composition of surrounding urban space (e.g. in pavement layout, vegetation composition or representative avenue). The sacral buildings also possess elements such as stairs, entrance porticos or are surrounded by garden areas. They are transitional spaces between the sacred space of the church interior and the surrounding public space.

The area of the parish churches' influence often extends beyond their nearest surroundings (e.g. street, square). The majority of parish complexes includes vertical elements of symbolical character which are a clear reference point in the urban landscape.

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