HISTORICAL LAYOUTS OF CEMETERIES IN THE SPATIAL STRUCTURE OF BIG CITIES

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Résumé

Tradičné úpravy kresťanských cintorínov v štruktúre historických európskych miest sa týkali sakrálnych predmetov, hlavne farských kostolov, nemocníc, útulkov, atď. už od stredoveku. Umiestnené vo vnútri mesta, zvyčajne boli obkolesené vysokým múrom, ktorý pôsobil ako hranica medzi mestským životom a smrťou, tichom a pokojom cintorína. V 18. a 19. storočí, v dôsledku čistenia miest a zvýšenej hygieny, pohreby v meste boli zakázané a pre cintoríny sa volili nové lokality. Zvyčajne to boli okrajové oblasti vzdialené od intenzívne urbanizovaného priestoru.

Článok analyzuje súčasné umiestnenie individuálnych alebo komplexných historických cintorínov v priestorovej a funkčnej štruktúre veľkých európskych miest. Zdá sa, že najvýhodnejšia situácia zachovania vzhľadu historického cintorína sa týka prípadu zveľaďovania oblastí susediacich s pohrebiskom kvôli upravenej alebo poloupravenej zeleni. Také oblasti si vyžadujú prísnu starostlivosť, pretože ponechať ich neupravené v nedefinovanej forme by mohlo znamenať intenzívne potlačenie skrášľovania a – pri stavbe vysokých budov – by prispeli k devastácii okolitého prostredia.

Traditional layouts of Christian cemeteries in the structure of historical European cities were related to sacral objects, mainly parish churches, hospitals, shelters etc., since the Middle Ages[1]. Cemeteries were already sacred places protected by suitable legal regulations[2]. Situated inside the urban tissue, they were usually surrounded by a high wall which acted as a borderline between urban life and the death, silence and quietness of a cemetery. It also emphasized a division between the space of the sacred of a cemetery and the profane of the outside.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, as a result of tidying cities up and increasing hygiene, burials within a city were prohibited and new locations were chosen for cemeteries. They were usually peripheral areas at a distance from an intensively urbanized space. Sepulchral layouts were designed by well-known architects, gardeners or landscapists. They often included interesting solutions of a cemetery itself as well as vast compositions of landscapes with far insights into the surroundings.

The green areas of cemeteries made a significant part of the green areas of a city since the interwar period when plans of the spatial development of cities included a balance of municipal greenery.

Cemetery area against the background of total green area in a city in the 1940s

City	Year	Cemetery area (ha)	Total urban green area (ha)	Cemetery area /inh. (m²)	Total urban green area /inh. (m²)	Share of cemetery green area in urban green area
Wroclaw	1939	248,6	2043,1	4	32,9	12,17%
Bialystok	1939	37,94	195,75	3,8	19,6	19,38%
Częstochowa	1945	34,25	341,31	2,8	28	10,05%
Kielce	1945	13,95	137,81	2,6	26	10,12%
Radom	1945	15	87,7	2	12	17,10%

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[1] The 10th century began a tendency to locate cemeteries within cities and close to churches. J. Kolbuszewski, Cmentarze, Wrocław 1996.

[2] In 1059, the Roman Council sanctioned them as „sacred fields" with a right to asylum. J. Kolbuszewski, op. cit.

This table shows that the share of cemetery areas in big cities in the mid-20th century was 10%-20%[3]. Later in Poland, with a lack of the creation of new large parks and the rising number of big city dwellers, the share of cemetery green areas was much bigger.

As a result of the violent development of numerous big cities in the previous half-century, today's areas of sub-urban, especially 19th century cemeteries are situated inside the intensively urbanized urban space. The sur-roundings of resting places have changed significantly, too. Intensively used complexes of edifices are often located just outside a cemetery wall. Taller and taller service and residential buildings can be seen from behind it. Such new urban spaces destroy historical layouts of landscapes which were significant in the designs of cemeteries.

The existence of historical cemeteries in a strongly urbanized space makes them charming parks in the city centre frequented by walkers and young mothers pushing prams, especially where new burials are impossible or the existing tombs are still used. They astonish people with quietness, calmness, rich greenery with rare species of extensive old trees, coolness on hot days, the colours of spring and autumn, the twitter of birds and the presence of small mammals, rodents etc. The attractiveness of these areas is often increased by unique collections of sculptures made by famous artists, the creators of sepulchral art.

Picture 1   Walking space in Krakow Rakowice Cemetery.

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[3] A. Ptaszycka Przestrzenie zielone w miastach. Poznań 1950.

Analyzing the contemporary location of individual and complex historical cemeteries in the spatial and functional structure of big European cities, we may distinguish diverse states of preservation and usage as well as kinds of the spatial shaping of their surroundings.

We may distinguish several typical situations with reference to the role and significance of historical cemetery layouts in the spatial structure of a city:

- □   liquidating a cemetery by:
  - covering any tracks of its existence,
  - transforming its area into a municipal park or lawn,
- □   transforming or extending a layout which blurs its original composition,
- □   surrounding the area of a park with intensive tall urban buildings having an administrative or residential function,
- □   developing areas which neighbors on a cemetery for the purposes of arranged or semiarranged greenery.

In the case of l**iquidating a cemetery**, we practically deal with two different situations. One of them concerns covering any tracks of its existence, completely different shaping of this space and not leaving any remnants of the existence of a historic necropolis in the past, even in the floor surface. These days, such an attitude usually appears in the vicinity of historical church layouts where central cemeteries were liquidated at the turn of the 18th century. Such cases sprang up in Kraków in the late 18th century when the Austrian authorities banned burials in the surroundings of temples. As a result of the transformation and beautification of the city, such layouts were not preserved around historical churches in the centre and the intensively developed area. Scarce cemetery walls separating the sacred from the profane were saved. The only example of preserving a historic burial place at a temple can be seen in the district of Kazimierz where an old Jewish cemetery surrounded by a wall neighbours on a synagogue.

In many cities, after liquidating a **historical and destroyed** cemetery, its area is transformed into a municipal park or lawn. It is the function of the area of a municipal cemetery founded by King Friedrich II in 1771 in Świnoujście between today's Chopina, Wyspiańskiego and Piłsudskiego Streets. In spite of its extension, it was filling up fast which led to the foundation of another communal cemetery in 1925. The destruction of the town during the war and the further devastation of the necropolis under communism covered most tracks of its past. In the 1970s, a park was established there; unfortunately, it did not mark the historical past of the place[4].

Historically, a lot of cemeteries were **transformed or extended**. Some actions formed a basis for new, interesting compositional solutions. Sometimes, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries, neighbouring areas were incorporated into the composition of a cemetery as arranged greenery or open areas. New cemeteries could be founded in the direct vicinity of a historical one[5]. Consequently, big cities have large complexes of single layouts, composed separately but forming clusters connected to partly arranged green park areas.

Such a situation took place in Krakow. Rakowice Cemetery, founded in 1800, was extended several times, for the first time in 1836. The well-known local architect Karol Kremer was commissioned to prepare a design. Its composition from 1839 referred to a park layout and strongly increased the attractiveness of the space of the cemetery. Unfortunately, its further extensions[6] did not develop these aspects of the design. However, after almost 200 years, it makes an attractive urban space with a valuable old-growth forest. Changing an original layout did not always bring in compositional or aesthetical values – they might just satisfy some utilitarian needs. Nevertheless, such historical solutions carry an important value in the space of a city owing to well-groomed greenery.

Another situation of change concerns **surrounding the area of a park with tall urban buildings having an administrative or residential function** which influences more and more historical cemeteries located in big city centers considering the cost of land.

4   Even though a walking space was planned, the lack of supervision and proper nurturing contributes to an unattractive usage of this space. See Dr. Józef Pluciński Dawne cmentarze Świnoujścia Świnoujście's website.

5   An interesting example is a complex of cemeteries in Berlin close to the Tempelhof Airport. During World War II, Standort Cemetery was located on the grounds of municipal Hansenheide Park near Friedrichs Werder Cemetery founded in 1762-1763. Earlier, in 1861, this area had a garrison cemetery; two years later – Old Turkish Cemetery for the Islamic members of the Prussian Army.

6   Originally, the cemetery was planned on 5.6 ha; Kremer's layout concerned this area after purchasing 10 units of land (approx. 5,600 m² each). These days, the area of the cemetery is 42 ha. It entered into the register of monuments in 1976.

Surrounding cemeteries with diversely sized buildings, mainly of service character, often breaks compositional and view sequences which made the basis of a necropolis. On the other hand, intensive development has an impact on noise and increased traffic around a cemetery. The implementation of tall administrative and residential buildings interferes in the space of a necropolis and makes it difficult to get away from earthly matters.

In Kraków, such a situation appears at the abovementioned Rakowice Cemetery. Two tall administrative and service buildings[7], erected in the 1970s, devastated its surroundings which consist of two-storey detached houses and villas.

Picture 2 Monument-cementery Murdered Jews of Europe – Berlin.

An even more drastic example of such actions concerns a monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe unveiled in Berlin in 2005 which consists of 2,711 steles imitating a cemetery. (Photo by KNA-Bild)

It seems that the most profitable situation of preserving a historical cemetery layout concerns the case of developing areas neighbouring on a necropolis for the purposes of arranged or semi-arranged greenery.

Such an action is fully justifiable because it facilitates the preservation of the historical spatial layout of a cemetery as well as of all the compositional relationships with the external areas, i.e. the spatial situation of an original layout. In Kraków, such a situation concerns two cemeteries. Salwator Cemetery, located on a slope of St. Bronisława Hill in the western part of the city, is still surrounded by mostly historic 19th century modernist suburban villas and vast green areas making the foreland of Kościuszko Mound. The areas are protected culturally and scenically.

A similar situation can be observed at the historic cemeteries of Podgórze which was founded in 1784 by Emperor Joseph II as a rival town for Kraków. Two necropolises[8], divided by an important and busy transport artery in the southeastern part of the city, still neighbour on vast, partly unarranged green areas. Near Old Podgórze Cemetery, there are extensive areas of unarranged greenery accompanying St. Benedict's historic fort and Romanesque church. The continuation of these areas is one of Kraków's most beautiful parks founded in a former quarry. New Podgórze Cemetery is surrounded by unarranged and semi-arranged greenery related to Krakus Mound, the former Lebanon Quarry and the grounds of a former German camp. Only its entrance part has little handicraft plants and storehouses. However, the lack of a final definition of the green areas is dangerous – they may be developed. For the time being, it concerns their part at a distance from the cemetery. Interesting layouts of this type include two complexes of necropolises in Berlin. I have already mentioned the layouts in the district of Neukölln, at Columbia damm near the Tempelhof Airport. The vast areas of the green municipal Hasenheide Park[9] are compositionally connected with the layout of the 18th century complex of Friedrichs Werder Cemeteries and the Jerusalem Cemetery. Standort Cemetery was founded during World War II in a part of the park and at St. John's Basilica. To the south of the park, there is the 19th century Garrison Cemetery, the Turkish Cemetery and some sports grounds. Slightly to the southeast of the complex, there are the layouts of St. Thomas and St. Michael's Cemeteries.

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[7] Eleven-storey seat of Polish Telecommunications with an exchange; seven-storey complex of health centres.

[8] Original Podgórze Cemetery is more than 230 years old. It was closed down in the late 19th century on account of a lack of burial places and topographical conditions. The new cemetery was founded in 1990 several hundred metres east of the previous one. Their separateness and historic significance lies in the fact that they both served the residents of Podgórze – an independent urban organism.

[9] Volkspark Hasenheide was founded in the early 19th century for gymnastic exercise although its recreational tradition dates back to the 17th century. It has many spaces for sports and strolls. In 1936, its sports facilities were used during the Olympic Games. These days, it covers the area of 50 ha. In 2006, it a summer swimming pool was built. C.A. Wimmer, Parks und Gärten in Berlin und Potsdam. Berlin 1989.

Picture 2 Monument-cementery Murdered Jews of Europe – Berlin.

The other layout is situated in the vicinity of Hohenzollernkanal and Plötzensee in the northwestern part of the city. It includes the historical Evangelical cemeteries of St. John, the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth and St. Paul founded in the 19th century which directly neighbour on Goethe Park (more than 40 ha). The areas of Spadau Forest located to the west were cut down during World War I. A municipal park, designed by Albert Brodersen, was founded here in the 1920s (115 ha together with Goethe Park). A necessity to extend the cemeteries caused the creation of a new layout to the south of the park between Hohenzoller Canal and Plötzen Lake. At present, the old cemeteries act as a park. A cemetery – a monument to the victims of World Wars I and II – was founded on the northern shore of the lake. Such large green layouts on the outer edges of the city centre increase the attractiveness of the space as well as guarantee the preservation of its green background as the surroundings of historical and contemporary cemeteries.

Conclusions

This brief analysis of selected examples of the role and significance of mainly Christian cemeteries in the structure of green areas in big cities indicates that:

☐ historical cemeteries make environmentally and culturally attractive spaces in the city centres, which may be of park character after desisting from burials,

☐ situated in central spaces or on their outer edge, they may form compact complexes of greenery, at least partly used for walking purposes, filling in the gaps in these green areas,

☐ historical layouts have not always been appropriately protected,

☐ a possibility of forming a suitable setting for such layouts is related to the creation of large green areas in their vicinity,

☐ the effectiveness of such protection, however, requires precise management of the green neighbourhood because leaving it in an undefined form may cause intensive development and – while introducing tall buildings – contribute to the devastation of scenery.