

## CHURCH LANDSCAPES IDENTITY IN THE COASTLINE OF NORD KURZEME

Madara MARKOVA, Natalija NITAVSKA

Latvian University of Agriculture, Department of Architecture and Building

Rigas iela 22, LV-3005, Jelgava, Latvia

Emails: madra.markova@llu.lv, natalija.nitavska@llu.lv

**Abstract.** Church buildings are visually expressive dominants of the landscape; however, the sacral landscapes in Latvia have not been extensively researched. In order to reveal the character of church landscapes and its elements, a thoughtful selection of indicators and their scale is needed. A particular method of research has been employed for characterisation of the church landscape in Nord Kurzeme, on the shore of the Baltic Sea and along the bay, synthesized by a way of such specific research method as imageability

**Key words:** church landscape, identity, character, Kurzeme coastline.

### INTRODUCTION

**The historical development and architecture of the landscape of Nord Kurzeme.** The coastal territory has an interesting phenomenon – rather many villages, unlike the rest of the territory of Latvia. This is due to the harsh living conditions and occupation - it is not possible to fish in the sea, going alone, so the Kurzeme coastal fishermen chose to go to sea together and build common fishing facilities. Of course, living in the villages is a traditional way of life for the Livonians, but also coastal Latvians lived together. Times change and, due to the changed conditions of life and occupation, many villages were dissolved because people preferred life in farmsteads.

**Religion and churches in Kurzeme.** Christianity originally came in Kurzeme peacefully and gradually. A number of changes in the landscape and the culture as a whole started along with the arrival of the Christianity, for example, in North Kurzeme cremations that had previously been typically here had disappeared. Each region in Latvia developed differently. Kurzeme was hardly affected during the time of the Livonian and Polish-Swedish wars, therefore in the second half of the 16th century the pronounced formation of differences had already started in the Duchy of Kurzeme (Courland) [1],[2]. Although there were little churches in the beginning, then in the second half of the 16th century the decision was accepted to establish in Kurzeme 70 church congregations and build or rebuild churches there [1],[2]. Many of these churches have survived to the present day and are the national cultural monuments. In Kurzeme, unlike other Latvian culture-historical districts, Christianity was not the only one that was more pronounced in common. During the time of the Duchy of Kurzeme (Kurland) Christian church was represented by Catholics, Lutherans, reformists (Calvin's teachings followers), Orthodoxies and Old Believers [2]. In the beginning of the 17th century paganism still had a major role in the Latvian spiritual life. Latvians of Kurzeme tightly clung to the religion of their forefathers. The period of baroque of Kurzeme is characterized by the simple, ponderous external presentation appearance. In the beginning of the 18th century fever epidemic made a great distress to Kurzeme [1],[2]. In the 18th century Latvia was not still a united territory and different development continued in various different spheres of life in each of the culture-historical districts, including religion. During the Soviet period the restriction of the Christian traditions and atheistic propaganda took place. Landscape visual protection on the European level has become current along with an implementation of the European Landscape Convention. Ever since the middle ages the feature of populated area is the buildings of public nature, designed for people gathering, buildings for living and church along with the burial area – as the local religious focal point [3] both in the visual aspect and in the spiritual and planning form. It is limited information available about church landscapes; therefore the determination of the landscape character is included in the fixation of the current state.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Objects.** The research area is the North Kurzeme – from the city Ventspils to the city Mērsrags. The objects of research are located in the North Kurzeme coastal area the Lutheran, Catholic and Orthodox

churches, as well as a Baptist prayer houses, hereinafter referred to as churches. The research includes 12 churches.

In year 2012 the Lielirbe Baptist Church building, which is nearly one hundred years old and once was located in Ventspils region, was moved to the Ventspils Seaside Open Air Museum. Starting with the Ventspils city the landscape of Nord Kurzeme seaside consists of territories included in the districts of Ventspils, Dundaga, Roja, Mērsrags. This territory is known as Livonian coast and typical by it's low population – small villages from Ventspils to Kolka, area that is away from motorway by Baltic seaside. Some part is also villages from Kolka to Mērsrags, by the motorway Tukums – Ķesteriems – Mērsrags – Kolka. Starting with from the city Venstpils the landscape of North Kurzeme seaside consists of territories included in the districts of Ventspils, Dundaga, Roja, Mērsrags.

**Methods.** Monographic or descriptive method, based on the existing as well as scientific knowledge and theory acquired during the research, was used for the theoretical foundation for the development, as well as for the compilation, the identification and interpretation of the results.

Several landscape research methods were used to characterize the church landscape of the coastline of Kurzeme: imageability method; descriptive inventory; definition of the perception criteria of the landscape visual overall image.

**Imageability method.** The characterization of church landscape of the coastline of Nord Kurzeme was carried out by the imageability method [4],[5]. Indicators of imageability in church landscape were defined during field surveys in 2012 and 2014 within the framework of the expedition, using aerial photographs as reference. An aerial photograph of the surveyed church landscape was prepared before going to the particular place. A detailed survey of each place was made on scouring the area and all access roads to analyze all the available viewpoints. The place imageability schemes of the landscape of particular churches where this method was used were made on the basis of aerial photograph to be able to clearly define the scope. On the other hand notably objects in the imageability schemes differ in which elements form the nature of the church landscape and landscape borders. Imageability schemes are made in „AutoCad 2012” programme, using a variety of graphical tools, as well as inserting there the aerial photo of particular church landscape.

**Descriptive inventory.** A fixation of church garden elements of the coastline of Nord Kurzeme, consolidation of the results and transformation to visual patterns were made by tying a quantitative method with a qualitative method. A descriptive inventory was used in the research of the garden landscape space and elements, which is widely used in the evaluation of visual resources [5]-[10]. Based on the experience of the previous research a matrix of survey and cartographic materials had been already prepared before the expedition using an electronic card system kurtuesi.lv. Survey matrix includes all the most anticipated parameters of the church landscape and elements of the church garden that would be useful for further research. On surveying the church gardens in the coastline of Nord Kurzeme, there were fixed elements existing in every church garden. Later data obtained in matrixes were summarized in the “Microsoft Office Excel 2007” program. The research focuses on the visible physical identity.

**Perceptual criteria for the visual overall image of the landscape.** Based on these theoretical visual perception levels of the landscape identity the visual survey matrix of the landscape was designed, which served as the data collection, surveying the research area. The survey matrix includes the total subjective visual evaluation of the landscape [9],[11]-[23]. There were determined following parameters for the subjective evaluation of the landscape: the visual availability, scale, topography, color, materials, texture, diversity, rarity, senses, movement, and natural landscape.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In general churches in the coast are distributed irregularly, differently, both clustering around the populated areas, and locating in a rural landscape. Churches are found in all four research territory districts. In the district Ventspils there is one church located in North Kurzeme coastal area – Lutheran church of Miķeļtorņis. There are five churches in the district of Dundaga coastal area – Lutheran church of Mazirbe, Baptist church of Pitrags, Lutheran, Orthodox and Catholic churches of Kolka. There are four churches in the district of Roja coastal area – Lutheran church of Ģipka, Lutheran and Catholic churches of Roja and Lutheran church of Kaltene. And from the district of Mersrags in research are included two churches – Lutheran and Baptist churches of Mersrags.

There are 12 churches in the survey territory in total, 7 of them are Lutheran churches, 2 Catholic churches, 2 Baptist churches and 1 Orthodox church. Most of observed churches are located in even though small, but still populated areas. Accordingly, other churches are located in the rural landscape, because large populated areas are not included in this research. The research area is divided into: “rural landscape” – territory outside populated areas, not excluding that there might be individual residential or non-residential buildings located next to the church, “rural populated area” – villages and small populated areas, small towns.

*Imagibility* is essential characteristic aspect of the church landscape. Factor that affects the visibility of the church is the height of the church building and expressiveness of the church building bell tower as a dominant in the landscape. All 12 churches of this research territory are above 6 metres, exceeding the height of the low-rise buildings. Churches are located in flat places as well as in relief. These factors influence that fourth part of the churches are visible from distance. The church landscape of the North Kurzeme is more visible and typical with massive church buildings. Half of the research territory churches are stone buildings with visible bell tower. In previous research territory – South Kurzeme more typical were miniatures church landscape spaces, where the church is not an expressive dominant, but often groups in the common building of the populated area, creating a single fishermen’s’ village landscape. Most of the church landscapes of North Kurzeme are placed in small cities or villages on side of the road.

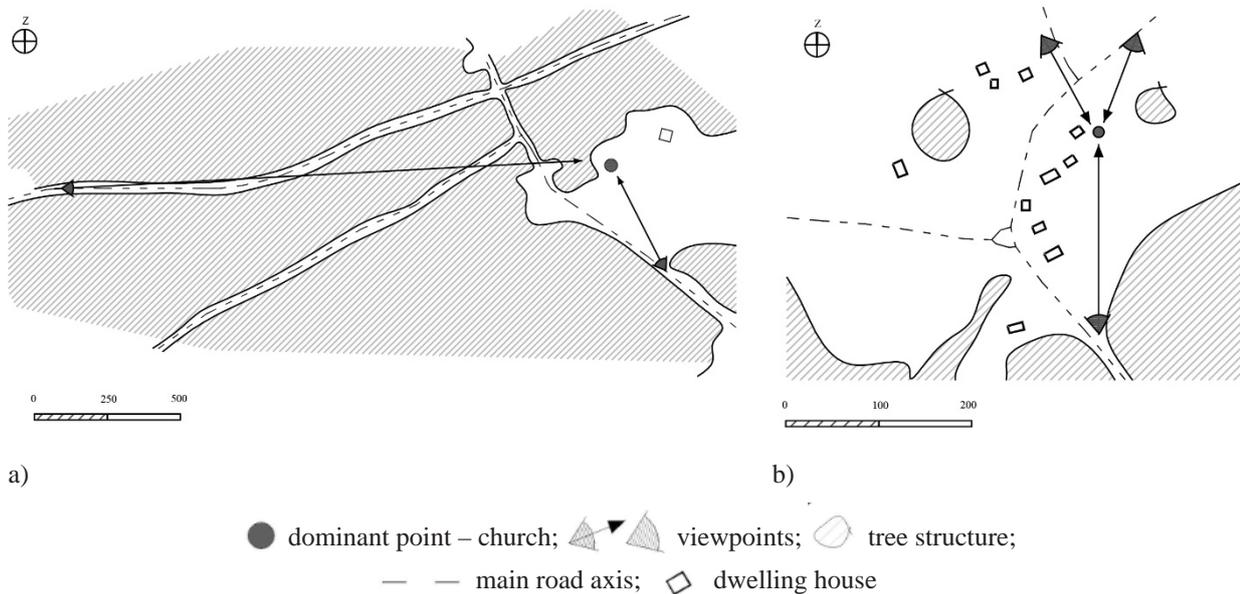


Figure 1. a) Lutheran church of Mazirbe; b) Baptist church of Pitragi

The church landscape of Mazirbe is clearly definable, because of the large scale and elements included, with a clear dominant of the church and as the second dominant is the pastor house. There are two long view lines, are almost 2 km and second 0.5 km. Background and coulisses are formed by seaside forest territories. Unique church landscape in context of other North Kurzeme research objects is Baptist church landscape of Pitragi. Unlike others it is low church building and fuses with surrounding dwelling houses. View lines are very short, not exceeding 100 m (Figure 1).

*Occurrence of elements in the church gardens.* Church landscapes and church gardens in the Latvian regions are formed according to different principles. These differences reproduce regionally different historical development and traditions. In general church gardens of the North Kurzeme have highly minimalistic nature. There are household buildings, sheds and outdoor toilets in the church gardens. Symbolic elements are met a little in these gardens. Often there are burials in or next to the church garden (Table 1). The same situation is with the decorative plants. Perennials and in only minimal amounts are only in half of observed church gardens. Most of the garden structures are asymmetrical.

The results of the percentage distribution of the occurrence of the elements in church gardens are rounded to the whole numbers to obtain greater transparency.

Table 1

**The occurrence of elements in church gardens in the coast of the South Kurzeme**

Nr.	Element	Occurrence of the element in the church garden, %
1	Fence	75
2	Small benches	75
3	Outdoor toilet	50
4	Burials inside the territory of the church garden	42
5	Woody perimeter	25
6	Crucifix	25
7	Household building	25
8	Well	25
9	Decorative facade lighting	8
10	Decorative pound	8
11	Children playground	8
12	Fireplace	8
13	Burials next to the territory of the church garden	8

**Occurred trees.** In the most of the church gardens we can find – pine, birch and lime trees. Quite often there is also lilac, maple and chestnut trees. Less we can see thuja, spruce trees. In few church gardens we can find rowan, oak, ash and apple trees. Pine trees are typical due to closeness of the sea. Trees such as linden, birch, maple are considered as a typical for the whole Latvian landscape. An interesting is application of the rowan in the church garden, which is placed at the entrance of the territory. It is considered for reverberation of sacred pagan traditions in a sacral garden area.

**VISUAL AVAILABILITY**

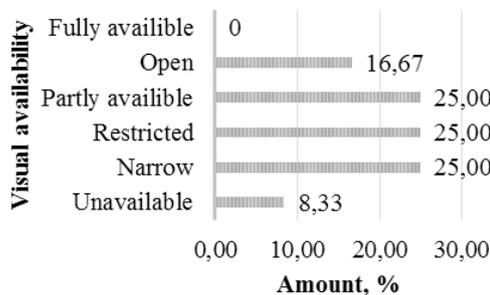


Figure 2. Visual availability

**SCALE**

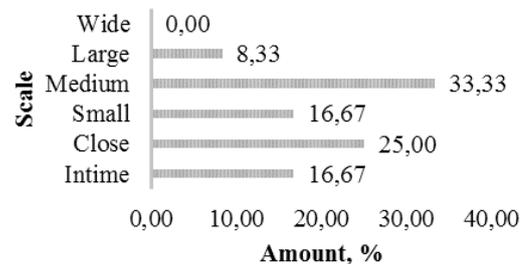


Figure 3. Landscape Scale

**FEELINGS**

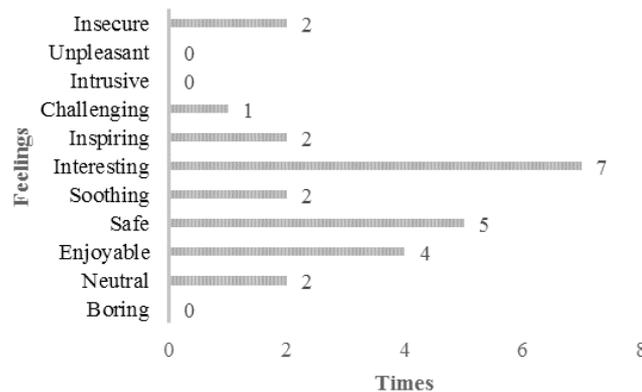


Figure 4. Feelings

**Criteria of the perception of the visual landscape overall image.** The visual availability of the coastal church garden landscape of the Nord Kurzeme after the results of the research is narrow (25%), restricted (25%) and partly available (25%), more rarely open and restricted (Figure 2). It is based on a coastal mosaic structures in rural areas or on a fully enclosed areas formed by coastal forests, as well as the small and medium scale of the churches. It is proved by the landscape scale after the results of the research which in 33,33% of cases is medium, 25% – close, 16,67% small and only 8,33% – large. (Figure 3). In addition this visual limitation is also explained by the churches located in flat areas rather than a flat hill tops that elsewhere in Latvia – 33,33 of cases the terrain is easy wavy and ~ 25% flat with some rolling hills. The coastal church landscape identity is also closely connected with the used materials, which here is represented by a brick (in 3 cases), wood (in 3 cases), plaster with stones (in 8 cases) and stone (in 7 cases). The texture of the landscape is generally rough (66%) and fine (34%).

The coastal church landscapes fundamentally are natural landscapes with some human-made elements (66%), because they are mainly located in rural landscape. Thus the landscape movement is also explained, which at the results of the research is defined as quiet (67%) or dead (25%). The prevalence of the natural landscapes and a distance of a people and civilization community created interesting (7 times), safe (5 times), enjoyable (4 times) feelings (Figure 4). On evaluating the coastal church landscapes they are defined as unique (16%) and typical (75%), which in turn is connected on the one side with the the typical architecture with the tower to the most of the churches, but in return with a common readable elements that bring this typicality and common landscape features.

## CONCLUSIONS

Church landscape of North Kurzeme is integral part of coastal landscape identity. Church building scale marks out and dominates in common landscape, but because of coastal forests they are not seen from very far viewpoints. Appropriate to architecture of Livonian fisherman villages – small scale wooden churches are not found in this territory, more we can find middle size stone buildings with typical church architecture, bell tower and burials inside the territory of church garden. These church gardens and burials are like extension of pine tree coastal forests, with separate birch, lime, lilac, maple and chestnut trees. Most typical garden elements are fencing, gates and benches. Common mood for church landscapes is interesting, safe and enjoyable, what is based on landscape closed space and middle scale, waved coastal relief and little population with quite territory.

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