

CHURCHYARD ELEMENTS IN LATGALE UPLAND

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Abstract

Churchyard of Latgale Upland is one of the most important parts of cultural historic space of Latvia. The study is based on the materials from expedition made in summer and autumn 2011, as well as on literary studies. Architecturally compositional form of the church is a key part of the landscape, supplemented by other landscape elements. Research and evaluation of the individual elements give specific cultural space characteristics of each investigated area. Visibility in the main view points and links with residential buildings for the churchyard is vital. Each study of landscape area schemes formation is based not only on the church as a domination point expression. Separate churchyard elements - crucifixes, procession paths, burial area, meditation area and a planting in church gardens - are important in describing churchyards. The aim of the research was to find most common elements in churchyards to establish general guidelines for recording and evaluation of the churchyard in Latgale Upland in future. In perspective that could be used as basis for making the landscape typology. Results showed typical landscape elements in the churchyard. In describing churchyards is important to divide typical and unique elements. The research provides information that is important for the further local territorial development plans, focusing attention on the region's cultural values and identity preservation.

Key words: churchyard, landscape elements, landscape typology, regional identity.

Introduction

Latgale Upland is placed in the southern part of Latvia. This territory is rich with lakes and has a very picturesque landscape. Church landscape is an important cultural historic part of the history of Latgale. The church landscape has changed considerably in the last years. Trees have been cut a lot and new ones have been planted again. The use of the land surrounding churches has changed too. But this process has been done without any guidance.

The emphasis shifts from landscape as a product of culture to landscape as an agent producing and enriching culture (Comer, 1999). It is important to find the part directly developed by people. It has to be made in accordance with nowadays and not forgetting about history. Landscape has to be made while taking both the traditions and contemporary changes into account.

Latgale has had to start its life over from scratch five times, mainly because each time there has been a complete change of ethnicity and sociocultural field (Fjodorovs, 2009). The sacral landscape of Latgale is unique; it has a different development history than the rest of Latvia (Pidža, 2011). As it is characteristic to Latgale, we can find all the traditional confessions there (Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Old believers) and holy sites of Moses believers (Kaminska and Bistere, 2011). These differences make these landscapes even more special, and it is important to improve our knowledge about this part of the cultural historic places.

On the one hand, the church garden is used only on Sundays, and the parishioners are not outdoors then. But, on the other hand, it is an object for tourism

attraction, especially in Latgale, these places can be used for gatherings and relaxing walks.

Historic buildings form the most visible and tangible of all aspects of the historic environment. They are a finite resource and cannot undergo change without cultural loss (Morris and Therivel, 2009).

There are different ways of reading landscapes. For a long time, the methods used by students of landscapes, notably landscape architects and geographers were highly individual (Taylor et al., 1987). To be sure, reading landscapes is not as easy as reading books, and for two reasons. First, ordinary landscape seems messy and disorganized (Peirce, 1979). New researches in sphere of religion have been started in many fields. Geographical research on religion has grown immensely in the last decade, and many earlier silences have become nascent areas of research or even areas of emphasis (Kong, 2010). The quality of scenery can be evaluated by two different sorts of techniques - preference techniques and surrogate component techniques (Crofts, 1975).

The second one is being discussed in this paper. The technique is based on the identification and measurement of those physical components of the landscape which are regarded as surrogates of scenic quality. The individual components are isolated, their identification and measurement discussed and their combined utility within existing techniques evaluated (Crofts, 1975). Church landscapes are designed cultural landscapes (General, 1999). As they are manmade, we are responsible for their development and preservation.

Since the patterns we see are formed from the arrangement of different components, it is an obvious

starting point to describe and classify these components (Bell, 2004). There are numerous character-defining features of the landscape: topography, vegetation, circulation, water features, buildings and structures, site furnishing and objects (General, 1999). Landscape elements are individual elements that make up the landscape, including prominent or eye-catching features such as hills, valleys, woods, trees and hedges, ponds, buildings and roads. They are generally quantifiable and can be easily described. It is necessary to consider this aspect of the landscape to reach an understanding of the effect of development on a landscape resource (Guidelines, 2002).

At this stage of the research it is important to understand precisely what we need to look at and what we could possibly find. The aim of the research was to find most common elements in churchyards to establish general guidelines for recording and evaluation of the churchyard in Latgale Upland in future. In perspective that could be used as a basis for making the landscape typology.

Church building is important in landscape, because it is a visible sign to show beliefs with a building that is devoted to God (Kaminska and Bistere, 2011). And these buildings – churches - are supplemented with certain elements depending on the confession. In most of the cases, the landscape around the church has been developed without taking the churchyard into account. Unfortunately, the historical buildings have had to suffer because of the lack of caution.

Written fixation or description of landscape and its elements is important, because photographs do not accurately represent what is seen by the human eye, as it can distinguish elements by using a contrast range of about 1,000 shades between black and white, whereas a picture of the same view taken with a camera and shown on a computer screen will use only about 100

shades. This range of contrast is reduced to as low as 12 shades when printed on paper (Visual, 2006).

Elements are functional, decorative and they can be symbolic too. And symbolic meaning of these elements is a part of landscape identity (Nitavska, 2011). Landscape units are sections of landscape with different dimensions and chorological structure. Each landscape unit can be distinguished by its own, relatively stable set of natural and anthropogenic factors, and its functional expression is characterized by a specific complex of landscape elements (Nimann, 1982; Krönert et al., 2001). Visual impact capturing has a limitation, which is why field trip is very important. What can be found and seen at a place is much more than what can be captured by photography.

Materials and Methods

Latgale Upland was chosen as a research territory (Figure 1). Expedition to the churchyards of Latgale Upland was done from June till October in 2011, when a survey of 68 churches in the Latgale Upland was carried out. Churchyards were chosen randomly from rural and urban landscapes. Almost all churchyards, which can be found in Latgale Upland, were surveyed. The survey was done in good weather conditions during the daytime. Before going on the field trip, an object survey table was created, based on previous researches. Survey table consisted of three parts. In the first part the object had to be named, and its placement according to the road and urban places defined. The second part listed all separate churchyard elements that were expected to be found in the churchyard – fence, benches, trees in the perimeter of the church building, free standing bell tower, crucifix, churchyards, burials near church territory. Toward each element a note was made whether it is or it is not in the churchyard. In third part, the landscape was

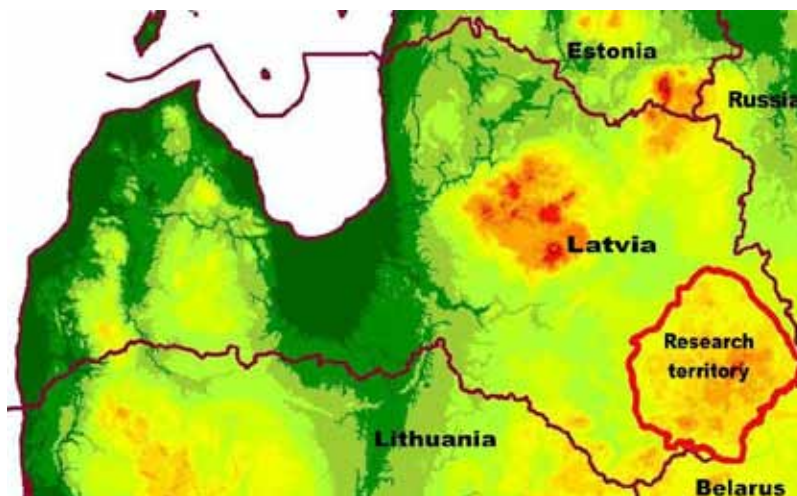


Figure 1. The location of research territory.

described – wideness, dominant, symmetry. Results of table second part were used for this research. During the expedition, written fixations supplemented with fixations by photography were used. In this part of research during the survey process it became clear whether the separate churchyard elements were present or not.

Results and Discussion

In the survey process of 68 churchyards it was found out that the typical elements that we expected to find in church gardens really were there, with a few exceptions. Even if there are some similarities, very important is that each place is specific and has its own individual elements, such as religious art objects or planting structures. These cultural landscapes are mostly filled with specific elements, characteristic only for churchyard.

The results were obtained in a profound survey process without trying to use some common methods from landscape analysis. This is the expert and psychophysical way, which emphasizes landscape features. All these elements are part of the landscape transformation process.

Culture interface deals with the differences in landscape values resulting from different cultural perspectives. It is the way different cultures perceive and interpret landscape that is in focus, as well as the way cultures give landscape the symbolic meanings (Palang and Fry, 2003). Historic landscape includes not only buildings, but although circulation features as roads and furnishing, including fences, benches, lights and sculptural objects (Charles, 2004). All churchyard elements are result of cultural expression. Outdoor elements of churchyard are as philosophical and compositional continuation of church building. The idea of symbolic garden design has its origins in ancient civilization. Each church garden in Latgale Upland uses slightly different elements to provide the same symbolic information. The research is focused on man-made landscape elements. Small-scale elements of churchyard can be decorative or functional or both.

Fences are the most common elements in churchyard; 76% of churchyards included in research had fences (Table 1). Probably nobody can imagine the world without fences. Fencing is mostly used for church garden boundary demarcation, although it delineates ownership and land use area. Almost all churchyards have fences or hedgerows. They are organizational elements of the landscape. These functional and visual relationships between spaces are integral to the historic character of a property (General, 1999). Sometimes there is no fence, only gates. These are decorative, functional and symbolic elements of churchyard. Fencing although symbolizes boundaries. It is not so much boundaries for land property, but

more between mental and material world. Gates are visual dominant elements of the churchyard, which are seen from distance (Figures 2, 3, 4).



Figure 2. Fence and gates of Kraslava catholic church.



Figure 3. Fence and gates of Berzgaļe church.



Figure 4. Fence and gates of Nīdermuiža church.

Second most common element in churchyards is benches (Table 1). Benches are used mostly around crucifixes or in front gardens. They are not placed symmetrically or in any other order. Benches are only functional elements. Benches together with crucifixes form meditation gardens. These small meditation gardens shape separate independent entities (Figures 5, 6, 7).



Figure 5. Benches and crucifixes in Berzgaile church garden.



Figure 6. Benches and crucifixes in Indricas church garden and river Daugava in background.



Figure 7. Benches and crucifixes in Dubna church garden.

Crucifixes in rural landscape of Latgale are a phenomenon. But in churchyards of catholic confession it is almost an inherent part. The crucifix is very common for catholic landscapes (Table 1). This is the most symbolic element of churchyards, but it is also decorative and functional.

Gardens are found in third part of the surveyed landscapes (Table 1). Most of them are small. Burials are not widely seen in churchyards and when they are there, they are more like memorial places or

signs. Burials in Latgale are invisible graves in the churchyard between flowers and trees.

Landscape of Latgale is not possible to imagine without trees. Trees are decorative, functional and with historically developed and enduring symbolic meaning. In small-scale churchyards, trees in the perimeter of church building are as frequent as crucifixes (Table 1). It is known that in urban places and near the building trees make more harm, than good. Trees can have bad effects on their surrounding structures and buildings. It is incorrect to plant any tree touching the building. The shadow of the trees should not fall on the buildings. The best way to keep the trees at bay is to cut off the branches of trees that touch the buildings. Damage mainly can be made by roots and falling branches.

Third part of research objects had trees in the perimeter of building (Figure 8). Sometimes historical trees in the perimeter of building have been cut down (Figure 9). Trees that are historic or landmark trees, strong species or trees well situated in landscape can be maintained. But if trees are weak species, short life species, trees that block desirable views, they have to be cut down. Hedgerow trees act as property boundaries. Usually, in churchyards of Latgale Upland, fences which are supplemented by hedgerow are used (Figure 10).



Figure 8. Trees in the perimeter of Kombuļi church building.



Figure 9. Cut trees in the perimeter of Peipiņu church building.



Figure 10. New planted trees in the perimeter of Rogovka church building.

Free-standing bell towers or campaniles are architectural features that are mainly typical for catholic churchyards. The bells in the free-standing towers are for calling people to congregate. Free-standing bell towers are frequently found in the churchyards of Latgale Upland - in 29% of surveyed landscapes (Figures 11, 12, 13).



Figure 13. Free-standing bell tower with a unique construction in Rečeņi.

Also an important part is burials near the churchyard territory, because churchyards are common in many countries but not always there are separate burials. Burials near the churchyard territory were in 22% of surveyed landscapes (Table 1).



Figure 11. Free-standing bell tower in Borovka.



Figure 12. Free-standing bell tower in Šķaune.

Table 1

Occurrence of typical churchyard elements

Element	Occurrence (%)
Fence	76
Benches	59
Crucifix	41
Churchyards	35
Trees in perimeter of church building	34
Free-standing bell tower	29
Burials near church territory	22

In local territorial development plans it is important to focus attention on the region’s cultural values and identity preservation, especially in Latgale region, where historical cultural values are the main tourist attraction objects. Attraction consists not only of the church building, but of the other churchyard elements too. Landscape elements, the same as landscape, act as stimuli to which observers respond (Taylor et al., 1987). To describe elements we have to look at landscape even in smaller scale. Elements are not separate things but integrations of systems (Motloch, 2000). Buildings have their own infrastructure, trees have their root system and roads have their network. In this research, elements were taken separately from all systems and taken as a starting point for these systems and further researches.

The study of the cultural interface in landscape research is extremely important for the understanding

of how landscape evolved in the past and how conflicts may arise in the future (Palang and Fry, 2003). Most of the features of churchyard we take as self-evident. With looking from a side we perceive more objective information and distance from imagination landscapes.

Conclusions

This is a small introduction in churchyard elements we could find in Latgale Upland. All described elements are found in the churchyards of Latgale Upland and are

important characteristic elements. Churchyards are unique thanks to these specific elements. In perspective, main guidelines of this research could be used as basis for making the churchyard element typology. The research provides information that is important for the further local territorial development plans. Element fixation makes detailed description possible. In further research there are many other elements that have to be included in inventory. Also research inventory needs a deeper survey not only of element types but also of their different forms.

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