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Location Patterns of Small Sacral Architecture in Rural Landscapes – Case Studies from Eastern Slovakia

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Abstract. Specific locations of small objects of sacral architecture in the landscape represent both tangible and intangible values, which are the result of long-lasting ties between man – society and the landscape. The objects of small sacral architecture, small chapels, statues of saints, crucifixes, small belfries or other typological forms of small sacral objects, are located at specific places, important sites linked to the life of local inhabitants, on places with good visibility and accessibility, for example along roads, at crossroads, at borders of settlements, field boundaries, or elevated locations, determining compositional linkages in space. We have examined the location patterns of objects of small sacral architecture in rural landscapes of Eastern Slovakia, in selected cadastral areas of village settlements in the district Vranov nad Topľou, in the Prešov region. The results of the research show that most of the locations in the open landscape outside of the built-up area of settlements are the road-side locations along currently used roads or along the field roads and abandoned former roads which in the past connected the villages. Only a few are found on sites near springs of mineral water, or on elevated top-hill position. Within the built-up areas of settlements, the most of objects of small sacral architecture are located in the private fenced spaces of front gardens; only a few are located in public space. Many objects of small sacral architecture are abandoned, vanish from the rural landscape, deteriorate and fall into decay. The reinvention of their values and their valorization will help to preserve the character and traditional local identity of rural cultural landscapes.

1. Introduction

Small objects of sacral architecture are integral components of rural cultural landscapes of Slovakia. They represent values of cultural and historical heritage, spiritual values of Christian religion legacy, and values of traditional rural vernacular architecture and crafts. They are places of contemplation and memory, and symbolize the local and regional identity of the landscape [1-3]. The objects of small sacral architecture, small chapels, statues of saints, crucifixes, small belfries or other typological forms of small sacral objects, were located at specific places, important sites linked to the life of local inhabitants, or on places with good visibility and accessibility, for example along roads, at crossroads,



at borders of settlements, field boundaries, or elevated locations [4, 5]. Location of the objects of small sacral architecture has its merit and determines the compositional linkages in space. They should therefore not be unreasonably relocated [6-9].

Within the research project VEGA 1/0371/18 “SacralArch: Preservation of the Historical Legacy and Architectural Diversity of Small Sacral Structures in Cultural Landscapes of Slovakia” we have focused on examination and identification of the location patterns of objects of small sacral architecture in rural landscapes of Eastern Slovakia, in selected cadastral areas of village settlements in the district Vranov nad Topľou, in the Prešov region.

2. Methods

The research was conducted in the cadastral areas of rural settlements: Bystré nad Topľou, Hermanovce, Čierne nad Topľou, Zlatník, Vyšný Žipov, Skrabské and Petkovce, located at the area of the middle part of the Topľa river, at the foot of Slanské Hills and Beskydy foothills.

The objects of small sacral architecture were mapped using historical maps – maps of the First Military Survey, Second Military Survey, and Third Military Survey of the Habsburg Empire, and current maps available at the ZBGIS portal and Google Maps. Literary sources – municipal publications and planning documents were studied. After identification of locations by using maps, literary sources and planning documents, the village settlements were visited and the whole cadastral areas were examined on-site. Some objects of small sacral architecture were not found on the maps and they were identified on-site. The small objects of sacral architecture located within areas of cemeteries and churches were not included, as they are part of the sacral complexes. Two examples of small roadside memorial places of car crash accidents with commemorative decorations were found, and on the facades of houses, decorations with sacral motifs, but they are not included in the survey.

3. Results

3.1. Location patterns of small sacral architecture in examined selected cadastral areas of village settlements in the district Vranov nad Topľou, in the Prešov region

The objects of small sacral architecture were examined in landscape locations outside the built-up areas of village settlements and within the built-up areas of settlements. The following categories of landscape locations were identified: road-side location along used road, road-side location along abandoned or field road, location on elevated site or hill-top, and location near springs of mineral water. Locations within built-up areas of settlements fell in three categories: road-side location in public space, road-side location in front garden, and location in garden. Results are depicted in table 1.

Table 1. Location patterns of small sacral architecture in examined case study areas

	<i>landscape locations in cadastral areas of settlements</i>				<i>locations within built-up areas of settlements</i>		
	road-side location – used road	road-side location – abandoned (field) road	location at elevated site (hill top)	location near spring of mineral water	road-side location – in public space	road-side location – in front garden	location in garden
Bystré nad Topľou	2	1		1		4	
Hermanovce	1			1	1	1	
Čierne nad Topľou	1	1					
Zlatník	2	2				1	
Vyšný Žipov		1	1		1		
Skrabské					1		
Petkovce	1	2				1	1
Summary	7	7	1	2	3	7	1

3.2. Objects of small sacral architecture in landscape locations in examined cadastral areas of settlements

The results of the research show that the most of locations in open landscape are the road-side locations along currently used roads (figure 1), but also locations along the field roads (figure 2), or along the abandoned former roads which in the past connected the villages, as for example between Petkovce and Skrabské, Petkovce and Michalok, or Zlatník and Hlinné. Locations are selected so that objects form significant landmarks, with visual ties, and marking, for example, a road across a hill to a neighboring village. Specific are, for example, locations near springs of mineral water, as in Bystré nad Topľou, in the form of small chapels devoted to Virgin Mary, or locations on elevated sites, on the top of the hillsides, as in Vyšný Žipov (figure 3).



Figure 1. Road-side cross situated next to the road between villages Bystré nad Topľou and Čierne nad Topľou. Photo by K. Kristianova, 2019.



Figure 2. Cross situated next to the field road connecting Bystré nad Topľou and Čierne nad Topľou. Photo by K. Kristianova, 2019.



Figure 3. Cross situated on the top of the hill in a location which offers a beautiful view in Vyšný Žipov. Photo by K. Kristianova, 2019.

3.3. Location patterns of small sacral architecture within the urban fabric of built-up areas of examined rural settlements

Within the urban fabric of rural settlements, the most common situations are the locations in the private fenced spaces of front gardens, as for example in Hermanovce nad Topľou (figure 4). Usually, they were erected by families, to the glory of God or as gratitude, and it is possible, that in the past these front gardens were not fenced, so these objects were probably part of the public space.



Figure 4. Cross situated in the front garden of the family house in Hermanovce nad Topľou. Photo by K. Kristianova, 2019.

Within the urban fabric of the examined rural settlements only a few examples of roadside crosses were found, which are situated in public space, for example in Hermanovce nad Topľou, or in Skrabské (figure 5).



Figure 5. Road-side cross situated in the public space in Skrabské, Photo by K. Kristianova, 2019.

Neither of the mapped small sacral objects is included in the List of Cultural Monuments, although some of the objects of small sacral architecture represent materially preserved architectural and artistic values, such as wooden carved crosses with a painted tin corpus of Christ and a tin roof in Petkovce. Some of the historical crosses are in a poor condition, such as the cross at the old connection between Zlatník and Hlinné. In some cases, the newer secondary crosses probably replaced the original ones, so the artistic craft values of the original objects were not preserved. The cross between Petkovce and Skrabské, erected in 1866, was renewed several times, in the years 1902 and 1967, but it still retains significant architectural and artistic values, although it is currently in poor technical condition and would require renovation again.

4. Conclusions

The research of the location patterns of objects of small sacral architecture in rural landscapes of Eastern Slovakia, in selected cadastral areas of village settlements in the district Vranov nad Topľou, in the Prešov region, show that the most of locations in open landscape, outside of the built-up area of settlements, are the road-side locations along currently used roads, or along the field roads, and abandoned former roads, which in the past connected the villages. The most of locations in the built-up area of villages are in the private fenced spaces of front gardens, only a few are located in public space. The objects of small sacral architecture and their specific locations in the landscape represent both tangible and intangible values, which are the result of long-lasting ties between man – society and the landscape. Today, rural cultural landscapes in Slovakia are facing processes of transformation – the remote areas, processes of abandonment, and the areas close to urban centers, processes of urbanization [10]. In both cases, rural landscapes gradually lose their original cultural landscape character. Many objects of small sacral architecture are abandoned, vanish from the rural landscape, deteriorate and fall into decay. The reinvention of their values and their valorization will help to preserve the character and traditional local identity of rural cultural landscapes.

Acknowledgments

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