

## THE PROBLEMS OF EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH BUILDINGS OF HISTORICAL VALUE – CHANGING USES OVER THE YEARS

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### Abstract

There are many Eastern Orthodox church buildings throughout the Lublin Province. Over the years, these architectural objects have undergone multiple transformations, both in terms of changing religious denominations and rituals and also adaptation to new functions, such as warehousing.

This article classifies and presents the transformations carried out in selected Eastern Orthodox churches in the Lublin province. By using comparative analysis of the buildings' primary condition and their current state, it was possible to identify the risks and opportunities arising from the process of adapting these buildings and their rich historical background. Additionally, the article includes a subjective assessment of the adaptation works and their influence on the physical form of the Eastern Orthodox churches examined. To present the adaptation methods currently applied to religious buildings located in Poland, this article focuses on examples of already-transformed properties that used to have a religious function in the past, but that have now been turned into commercial properties.

**Keywords:** Eastern Orthodox church, adaptation, transformation, Lublin province, voivodeship.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the religious faithful in Poland being particularly outstanding in terms of numbers, some attention should be paid to the Catholic and Orthodox religions. The most widespread Catholic denominations are Roman Catholic (Latin rite), which in 2011 accounted for 10,177 parishes (including 268 in the Archdiocese of Lublin), and Greek Catholic (Byzantine-Ukrainian rite), numbering in 2011 135 parishes, including 78 in the Archeparchy of Przemyśl-Warsaw. Of the Orthodox denominations, the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church should be mentioned, which totals 233 parishes, including 28 in the Lublin-Chełm Diocese [2].

It should also be noted that “... along with the expansion of the Polish territories eastwards, large Orthodox population groups were incorporated into the Polish state. This situation changed only after the Second World War, when the Orthodox Church in Poland lost over 90% of its holdings” [2]. This means that a large number of Orthodox churches, particularly in southeastern Poland, have lost their former importance, especially in terms of their primary function. This unquestionable issue (for the Greek Catholic churches from the sites belonging to the Greek Catholic Diocese of Przemyśl) was noted by Monika Rzepiejewska (editor of the post-conference materials entitled ‘Abandoned – Rescued Orthodox Greek Catholic church complexes in southeastern Poland’), in an article on churches for which adaptation to a new function can lead to improvement of their technical condition. [7].

The situation of the Orthodox churches in the Lublin Province appears to be better. Even so, there are now only a small number of Orthodox believers in the region, meaning a reduction in the number of masses held, and thus the unavailability of churches and the lack of ideas on repurposing them have all led to a significant part of the churches not being used to their full extent. The rules of the Polish State with respect to the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church are defined in the Act on the Relation of the State to the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church of 4 July 1991[8] (including both legal and property issues). The articles on the transfer of property to the Orthodox Church free of charge have proved to be particularly important in the context of church buildings, including, for example those “ ...which were subject to the Act on regulation of the legal status of properties of the Orthodox Church of 23 June 1939 (*Journal of Laws No. 57, item. 370*), regardless of whether or not they are in accordance with the Act passed by operation of law on the property of the state” [8] [Section IV, Chapter 1, Article 46.1.1) – authors’ note].

## 2. THE LUBLIN-CHEŁM DIOCESE

The Orthodox Diocese of Lublin-Chełm covers an area of the Lublin Province (as well as various areas of neighbouring provinces, including Podkarpackie (Sub-Carpathia). In comparison, until 2011 there were 28 parishes (as described in the introduction), and now there are more than 30 parishes with the main temple being The Cathedral of the Transfiguration of the Lord in Lublin (Lublin is also the seat of the Archbishop). The diocese currently consists of 48 temples. Thanks to the efforts of the diocese, most of these have undergone restoration work. The dioceses' activities are not limited only to maintaining existing properties in the best possible condition, but also to attracting new believers and cultivating the customs and history of the Church. These aspects have been developed through preservation of the traditions of the Orthodox Choir, the activities of the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth, and also (since 1990) publishing activities [16]. The popularization and maintenance of their existing resources is supplemented by a desire to help believers. This has led, for example, to construction of the Orthodox Nursing Home in Lublin [17].

Another project which is valuable to both the diocese as well as the architectural value of the Orthodox buildings themselves is planned to run from March 2014 to December 2015, and is entitled the PL08 project for 'East Slavonic cultural heritage – conservation, restoration, digitization of the historic Orthodox Church'. The project is part of the 'Maintenance and Revitalization of Cultural Heritage' programme, which deals not only with the renovation and restoration of seven Orthodox churches, but also their combination into a unified religious tourism route, complete with digitization of the work and activities involved in its implementation [18].

## 3. NEW FUNCTIONS FOR ORTHODOX CHURCHES

So far, there have been many publications on the architecture of the Orthodox churches in the Lublin Province, both wooden and brick-made. In her article entitled 'Sacred architecture as a manifestation of the multicultural traditions in the Lublin region' [10], Joanna Zętar described the basic determinants of the architectural canons for Catholic, Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches.

Using buildings in Korczminia as an example, the author describes the most common type of wooden Orthodox churches: "... *the building was founded on a square or rectangular plain, with three apses in the sanctuary and one cupola (dome) crowning the whole building*" [10]; Greek Catholic churches "... *divided into three main parts: the narthex (vestibule), the nave and the sanctuary, with one or two sacristies at the sanctuary, often with a bell tower*

*over the narthex*”[10]. Zętar also describes aspects of brick buildings, highlighting the fact that “... *no distinctive type of brick churches were developed in the Lublin Province*” [10].

As mentioned above, historical events have led to the loss of not only a significant number of believers, but also of sacred buildings held by the Orthodox Church. As such, Orthodox buildings have, over the years, served other purposes, including the lay. Additionally, their owners have changed as these buildings were often passed into the care of the Roman Catholic Church.

In recent years, the condition of a number of buildings belonging to the Orthodox Church has been improved, although some of these are still owned by the Catholic Church. The authors of the further parts of this publication cite examples of the current use of selected churches.

### **3.1. The former Greek Catholic church in Wojsławice**

The present Our Lady of Kazan Russian is a filial orthodox church of the Orthodox Parish in Hrubieszow, Wojsławice. It was built in 1771, and funded by Marianna Potocka of the Danilowicz family. In the 19th century it was taken over by the Orthodox Church and was kept in good condition until 1947, when many of its members left the city. Over the following years, the building was used as a warehouse for various raw materials, until becoming a temporary warehouse for the Lubelska Village Museum. Since 1996, when renovation of the building began, its function has often changed.

Conservation activities carried out on the church so far have included work on the façade of the building, including plastering and reproduction of architectural details, as well as in its interior, such as on preservation of its polychromes [9]. Unfortunately, despite the completed restoration works, and as previously mentioned, the fact that the building is a filial parish of the Orthodox Parish in Hrubieszow means that regular services are not held there. However, there is a particular period in which the church is one of the most important elements of the municipal centre there, and this is the time of The Meeting of Three Cultures. (There are temples to three religions in the village: a Catholic church, a synagogue and the currently-discussed Orthodox church). As a result of this initiative, organized periodically (in 2014, the meeting was held for the sixth time), Vespers was celebrated for the first time in many years [13].

### **3.2. St. Basil the Great Greek Catholic church in Belżec**

This is a wooden church, construction of which was begun in 1756 [12]. Differing information exists, which gives the date as 1838. Janusz Laskowski refers to this as the time the church was moved from Lipsko to Belżec (the author of this publication also reports that the church was erected in 1757 in

Lipisko) [5]. In a paper presented on the website of the Municipal Cultural Centre in Bełżec, Agnieszka Kozyra writes: “*Date of construction – 27 September 1838. The date is present on the lintel of the main entrance, next to an inscription listing the time of creation of the previous church, which suggest that the portal as well as the narthex come from a building erected in 1756*” [12]. The same author also cites a paper by P. Sygowski citing this very date [12].

Other purposes that the church has been put to include as a warehouse [5]. Various other changes were made to the building after 1997, since when it has been extensively renovated. Over the years, a number of work projects have been carried out, including the re-siting of the building on new foundations, and replacement of the roof truss. Andrzej Adamek writes “... *according to the civil engineering design and a conservative restoration report, it was proposed that the building be adapted to serve as an exhibition place*” [1]. Currently the former orthodox church is being used as an Orthodox Church Gallery, run by the Municipal Cultural Centre [12].

### **3.3. The Our Lady of Help Orthodox Church in Bończa**

This is an orthodox church that was built from 1878-1880. It is located in the Deanery of Zamość, and has its filial church in Wolka Kraśniczyńska (The Brightest Virgin Mary), built in 2006. In recent years, the building has undergone major renovation. In 2006, the basement walls were fitted with horizontal insulation [3], and in 2009 the first major renovation phase was completed. The first part of this included replacement of the structure and roofing of the towers [15, 11]. The second stage was entitled ‘Revitalization of the historic Orthodox Church with roof renovation (joists) and replacement of the windows’ wood work in the external façade of the church’ was conducted in 2010 [4, 6]. Over the years, the church’s icons have also undergone renovation [14]. Currently, services are held in both churches – in Bończa and in Wolka Kraśniczyńska.

## **4. CONCLUSIONS**

The examples and figures from recent years presented in this paper show that Orthodox Church architecture has an important place in the historic resources of the Lublin Province, both in the number of active parishes – Orthodox and Greek Catholic – and in its representation of the multicultural traditions of the region.

These traditions have become a resource for the organization of various meetings and events, held to draw attention to this fact. The nature of these

activities may sometimes allow for reactivation of the sacral function of these buildings; a function which may not have been present for some time. Examples include The Meeting of Three Cultures in Wojsławice, during which the local orthodox church is revived. The number of believers in a given area is not sufficient to allow regular services, however, as shown by previous years. But the potential of the region, including of its Orthodox sites, may still be utilised in a less conventional manner, thus not disturbing the function of the sacral building.

It is not possible to provide examples of towns or municipalities where cultural meetings of a regional or cross-regional nature are organized on Orthodox church premises (including full usage, however occasional) and there is no rationale for doing so. Yet having those resources available offers a chance to adapt these buildings to the expectations of a modern society without significant interference in assumptions about their primary function. Indeed, both the new and the original functions can complement one another.

Attempts to transform the orthodox church building in Bełżec into an exhibition centre (even of local importance) had this outcome, born not from a desire to erase its original functioning as an orthodox church, but rather to preserve the building itself in the best possible condition. To quote Andrzej Adamek “... *it is difficult to predict to what extent it would be possible to achieve the museum plan, but I am glad that a building of such historical value is in good hands. After all, it is proof of the coexistence of two nationalities and religions that have formed Bełżec’s cultural landscape for over three hundred years*” [1].

Elsewhere, the Orthodox church in Bończy is an example of a temple that has not lost its sacral character. Although this can be regarded as an asset, it would still be worth engaging in a discussion of the functional aspects of the building which could stand to influence a rise in its popularity. Thanks to its refurbishment, it can now be regarded as representative of the region.

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#### PROBLEMY ZABYTKOWYCH OBIEKTÓW CERKIEWNYCH - ZMIANA FUNKCJI UŻYTKOWYCH NA PRZESTRZENI LAT

##### Streszczenie

Na obszarze województwa lubelskiego ulokowanych jest szereg zabudowań cerkiewnych, co stanowi niezaprzeczalny, ale niewystarczająco rozpropagowany walor opisywanego terenu. Warto docenić obiekty architektoniczne na przestrzeni lat podlegały wielokrotnym przekształceniom zarówno w zakresie zmiany wyznania i obrządków religijnych, którym miały służyć, jak również daleko idącym adaptacjom na funkcje użytkowe, w tym, przykładowo, na obiekty magazynowe.

Celem artykułu jest klasyfikacja i opis przekształceń, którym podlegały wybrane zabytkowe cerkwie z obszaru województwa lubelskiego. Poprzez analizę porównawczą pierwotnych form opisywanych obiektów z ich stanem obecnym wskazane zostały zagrożenia oraz szanse, płynące z procesów adaptacji zabudowań o bogatym rysie historycznym. Zaproponowana została subiektywna ocena słuszności przeprowadzania działań adaptacyjnych oraz ich wpływu na formę obiektów cerkiewnych. Przytoczone zostały także przykłady zabudowań, które poddano procesom przekształceń, skutkującym zmianą funkcji, również z funkcji *sacrum* na funkcję komercyjną.

Słowa kluczowe: cerkiew, adaptacja, województwo lubelskie.

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