

Sacred urban oasis opened to the public **The evaluation of the cloister form in contemporary sacral architecture**

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A delineated physical space provides security to the people. The church is a calm space where, excluding the outside world, we can meet God. Already at the dawn of the formation of Christianity, other transitional spaces have been attached to this sacral place, which spaces prepared man for entering the main contemplation space under protection, excluding the disturbing factors of the outside world – in the Middle Ages the cloister form was developed which provided the physical spaces of a complete lifestyle for the most dedicated, the monks.¹

The layout system of monastery idealized plan found in *Sankt Gallen* presents the completeness of monastic life, where one can find the place both for the prayer and for the work. (Fig. 1.) All elements of the daily routine are served by independent building parts; the complex functional floor plan assumes other free connections too. Already in this example, the narrow-sense sacral function had been arranged around the closed court, and soon it became the core of the construction projects of monastic orders. The Cistercian architecture already showed a denser, compact system, where the design of the closed inner world, ensuring the possibility of retreat, was in the focus. In the course of processing this topic, a specific scope of examples can be mentioned from *Transylvania*. The church is a 'mighty fortress' for the believers not only spiritually but also physically. At this eastern end of Europe, the church also had protective function: the population of the settlement could ensconce between the fortified buildings, where stables and additional storages were placed in addition to the small accommodation buildings.

Due to the heterogeneous cultural and social environment of our world today, several Christian community buildings in the cities apply cloister-form again. The form, which symbolizes belonging together, includes lot of features: besides the church itself, it contains community spaces with different sizes in order to reach the people with evangelization on several levels. The spirit of charity was widened at the turn of the millennium, people need to be addressed on multilevel. For this purpose, the most perfect form is the sample of a cloister, which finds its roles in specific urban environments too. On one hand, its compact world is not showy or obtrusive, which feature is very important in the light of current social expectations – at the same time its inner court creates such an open connection place through which one can get insight into the life of a community. Therefore, the spirit of inclusion has applied this form again, giving the opportunity to experience Christianity on multiple levels, from direct physical connection to the most secret mysteries.² It stays in the background reserved but it is genially open at the same time. Contemporary urban cloister is a spiritual island we can either pass through or get stuck there.

¹ Vukoszávlyev, Zorán: Light and Essence. In: *Óbuda University E-Bulletin* Vol.3 No.1. 2012. pp.173-182.; and: Vukoszávlyev, Zorán: Anyag és csend. In: *Építés Épitészettudomány* No. 39. Vol.3-4. 2011. pp.243-255.

² With references to the state of church in contemporary life: Fernández Cobián, Esteban: *Arquitectura religiosa contemporánea - El estado de la cuestión*. In: Fernández Cobián, Esteban (eds): *Arquitecturas de lo sagrado - Memoria y proyecto*. Netbiblo, A Coruña, 2009. pp.8-37.

Eight building complexes conveying this complex spirituality are to be presented. Besides the Middle and South European religious centers that have special architectural values, I will highlight the contemporary works of my own country, Hungary, the easternmost country of Western Christianity. These works reflect the spirit of the Second Vatican Council in the same way of thinking regarding not only the Catholic, but also the Reformed Churches.

The first example shows a newly settled suburban area. At the eastern part of the Bavarian capital *Munich*, next to the expo-city, the Ecumenical Christian Center was placed in the heart of the newly developed residential area. (Fig. 2.A) Narrow, alley-like openings lead us in to the high white walls that suggest closeness and distancing.³ However, entering the inner atriums, a friendly world reveals where day-nursery, elderly house, accommodation buildings and activity rooms are arranged around the Catholic and Lutheran Churches, this way providing space to a rich community life.

Not far from the downtown of *Pamplona*, Spain, a city famous for its star fort, but already beyond Arga River, the Parochial Center found its place edged between the block-houses of San Jorge district, which was developed along the railway tracks. (Fig. 2.B) It stands unobtrusively on the main street, being adjusted to the urban system; and its puritan appearance stands out of the surroundings with the high quality of the materials used.⁴ Both the exterior and the interior are characterized by the elaborate design of the exposed concrete surface. The two smaller urban spaces, located next to the church complex, merge into one in the central atrium. On one side of it, the community and educational rooms of the parish center open to this transitional space, while oppositely the huge alabaster window of the church can be seen. There is a close relationship between the spaces of spiritual enrichment – at the same time everything has its autonomous space.

The microdistricts of Plattenbau buildings belong to a special urban field of the post-socialist countries. Within the settlement parts, gathering tens of thousands of people, the zones designated for the community buildings were usually not utilized completely – thus, after the collapse of the ideological system, it became possible to place church centers there, providing spiritual care for people.⁵ In *Debrecen*, Eastern Hungary, the religious center designated an area for its purposes in between the block-houses, and encircled it with walls. (Fig. 2.C) However, this arrangement, which can be derived from the medieval history, here appears to be somewhat distant – and the architect tried to solve this problem with designing free connections between the building masses. Within the frame of harsh building blocks, the additive system of building parts, housing the community activities, turns to be picturesque.

Boccone belongs to the tiny settlements of the Rome Orbital, the beltway running around the city. The church complex is located at an interchange; it can be accessed through a small public square. (Fig. 2.D) At the same time, the disposition turns away from the heterogeneous environment (condominiums, detached houses, industrial buildings), the sheltered atrium is

³ Church Centre in Munich. In: *Detail* No.10. 2005. pp.1124-1130. < <http://detail-online.com/inspiration/church-centre-in-munich-103167.html> > Last visited: 10. April, 2014.; See also references and wider aspects of German church architecture: Zahner, Walter: La construcción de iglesias en Alemania durante los siglos XX y XXI – En busca de una casa para Dios y para el hombre. In: In: Fernández Cobián, Esteban (eds): *Arquitecturas de lo sagrado – Memoria y proyecto*. Netbiblo, A Coruña, 2009. pp.38-71.

⁴ Fernández Cobián, Esteban: Egy ház - A pamplonai Szent György templom, Spanyolország. In: *Octagon: architecture and design*. Vol.83. No.10. 2010. pp.21-24.

⁵ Katona, Vilmos - Vukoszávlyev, Zorán: Modern Tradition and Liturgy: The Ways of Modernism in Hungarian Church Architecture in 20th Century. In: *Architektura & Urbanizmus* Vol.46. No.1-2. 2012. pp. 2-23.

placed behind the emerging block of the church.⁶ The two-story piazza is encircled with servant building parts: there is a community room on the ground floor, on the main floor the parsonage, group rooms and the attached large loggia can be found, while guest accommodations are placed upstairs. The row of elements, which are rich in function, is unified by the generous architectural gesture of the atrium court that is suitable also for outdoor church services.

The small town of *Portalegre* is located at the foot of the mountain range that makes a natural border between Spain and Portugal. In 1979, the district of Bairro dos Assentos was established in the northern part of the town, which is a socially complex environment even today. Between the terraced houses and condominiums, the church complex is hidden behind abstract, high white walls. (Fig. 2.E) Between these space-walls, one can enter the inner court where the social functions (day-nursery, elderly house, community rooms) were placed on the two sides.⁷ The life of the church space separated with a glass wall, and that of the public institutions meet in the sheltered atrium.

Dunaújváros, the heavy industrial center developed in the era of socialism, is located in the middle of Hungary. The Lutheran community got a plot on the outskirts of the residential zone with small detached houses, nestled in the valley under the building blocks standing on the hill top, in order to establish the spiritual center on this no man's. (Fig. 2.F) The architect decided for building together the multiple functions.⁸ He placed a three-nave church mass on top of an elliptic floor plan, enclosed with walls. However, the form is not perfect: as if we would see a basilica cut in half. The House of Children was placed in the remaining part of the court, to be the place of learning through free play. This small, pyramid-roofed house is the starting point of everything.⁹

The last but one example can be found in the southern suburb of *Munich*. The building complex distances itself from the heterogeneous environment with its apparently simple geometry. (Fig. 2.G) The architects created not only a church space that is liturgically new compared to the old church in the heart of the settlement, outgrown by the congregation, but with arranging the functions around a court, he also provided a frame to several levels of the service.¹⁰ The atrium is fully paved; it is encircled by the priest's home, the office, accommodations and the community house – and all of them are opened to this inner open-air space with a calm visual connection. The symbolism of the walls, built from bricks put on each other, silently draws the attention to togetherness – while the purist white cube of the interior focuses on openness and the possibility of inclusion.

⁶ Sammiceli, Marco – Vukoszávlyev, Zorán: Egy városi monostor: Kegyelmes Szűz Mária templom, Casal Boccone, Olaszország. *Metszet* 2011:(2) pp. 46-49.; See also references and wider aspects of Italian church architecture: Della Longa, Giorgio: La arquitectura religiosa contemporánea en Italia – y la experiencia de la Conferencia Episcopal Italiana en su promoción. In: In: Fernández Cobián, Esteban (eds): *Arquitecturas de lo sagrado – Memoria y proyecto*. Netbiblo, A Coruña, 2009. pp.106-129.

⁷ Da Cunha, João Alves: JLCG Arquitectos, St. António Church, Portalegre, Portugal. In: *Architectural Review* No. 1355. January 2010. pp.60-65.

⁸ Stock, Wolfgang Jean: *Architectural Guide : Christian Sacred Building in Europe since 1950*. Prestel, München - Berlin - London - New York, 2004. pp.310-311.

⁹ For references to Lutheran church architecture in Hungary: Krähling, János – Vukoszávlyev, Zorán (eds.): *Új evangélikus templomok / New Lutheran Churches*. Luther Publisher, Budapest, 2008.

¹⁰ Personal interview with the architect Andreas Meck: Vukoszávlyev, Zorán – Katona, Vilmos: Szakrális komplexitás - anyag, szellemiség és építészeti magatartás. In: *Octogon: architecture and design*. Vol.83. No.10. 2010. pp.37-40.; See the original interview: <<http://szakralis.wordpress.com/2011/01/11/interview-with-andreas-meck/>> Last visited: 10. April, 2014.

In *Gödöllő*, north to the Hungarian capital, there is a building complex composed on basis of similar symbolic concepts. With the open court the disposition invitingly turns to the dreary world of concrete blocks of flats. (Fig. 2.H) The embracing form created by the two building wings leads us to the opaque wall of the church, designed with huge pillars. In line of the additional building parts, which contain the parsonage and the rooms of the community house, a small chapel and a library is placed next to the church space.¹¹ This way, spaces were created for providing community care and also rich spatial connections were formed. At the same time – as it can be seen in all examples – the design holds on the principle of gradualism with the aim of allowing the soul, converting or returning to the Faith, to feel the freedom of choice, instead of giving the direct linkages. Narrated by architectural compositions.¹²

In our presentation we briefly reviewed the complex functional demands which emerged as a need in case of constructing urban parochial centers. In favor of the unity of the cultural pattern, we analyzed European examples with focus on recent urbanization challenges. Besides the forward-looking examples of Western and Southern Europe, we outlined especially the solutions applied in post-socialist countries because of their different socio-political aspects.

IMAGES

Figure 1.: Sankt Gallen, Carolingian idealized plan of a monastery, around 820.

Figure 2.: **A:** München-Messe (D), Ecumenical center, 2001-2003. Architect: Florian Nagler. **B:** Pamplona (ES), San Jorge, 2005-2008. Architects: Tabuenca & Leache. **C:** Debrecen (HU), Calvinist center, 1997. Architect: István Lengyel. **D:** Casal Boccone (I), Santa Maria delle Grazie, 2006-2010. Architects: Francesco Garofalo - Sharon Yoshie Miura. **E:** Portalegre (PT), San Antonio y Centro Social S. Bartolomeu, 1993-2008. Architect: João Luis Carrilho da Graça. **F:** Dunaújváros (HU), Lutheran center, 1992-1996. Architect: Tamás Nagy. **G:** München-Neuried (D), Sankt Nikolaus, 2002-2009. Architect: Andreas Meck. **H:** Gödöllő (HU), Saint Trinity, 2001-2007. Architect: Tamás Nagy

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¹¹ Vukoszávlyev, Zorán: Church At The Border: Church Architecture in Hungary from the start of 20th Century. In: Della Longa, Giorgio – Marchesi, Antonio – Zahner, Walter (eds.): *Arte Architettura Liturgia Esperienze internazionali a confronto 6: Atti dell'8° Convegno Internazionale Venezia 21 e 22 ottobre 2010*. Venezia: Alcion Edizioni, pp.17-41.

¹² Vukoszávlyev, Zorán: Clearer Formulas: Contemporary Sacred Architecture in Hungary. In: Wesselényi-Garay Andor (eds.): *Model of the Universe – Contemporary Hungarian Church Architecture*. Modem, Debrecen, 2010. pp.39-43.

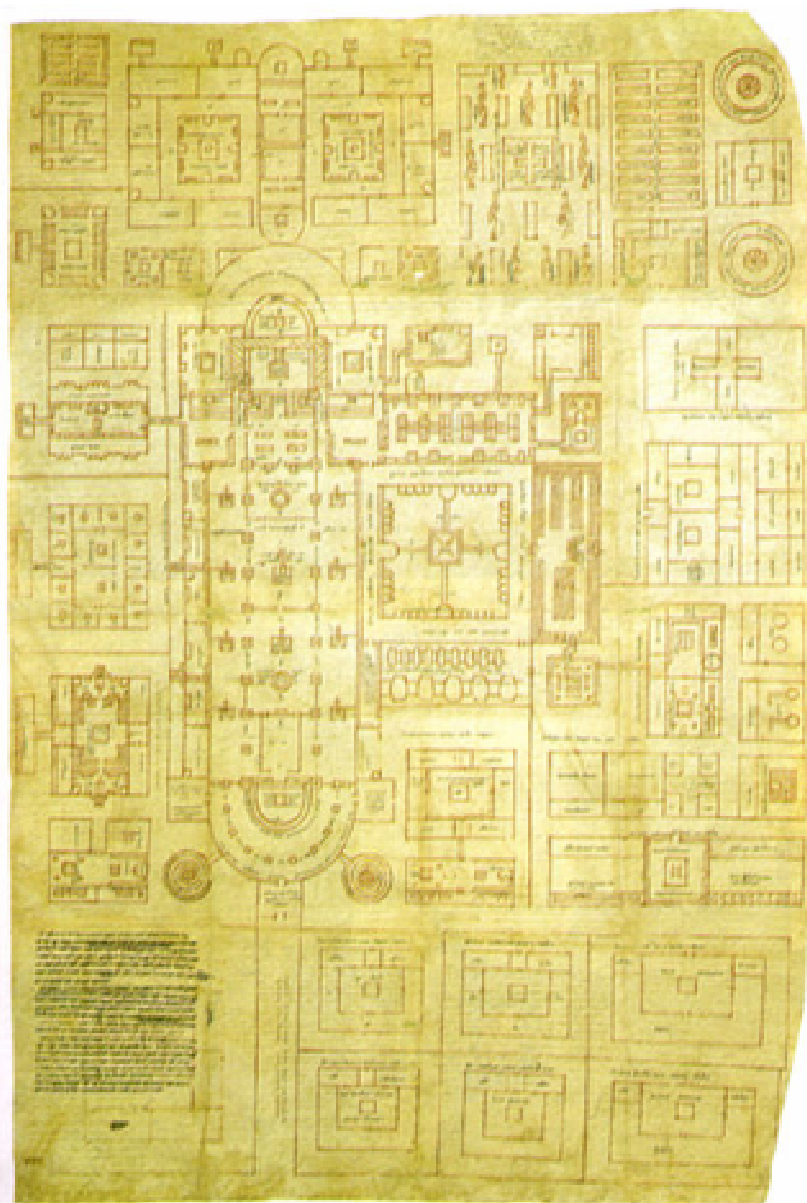


Figure 1.

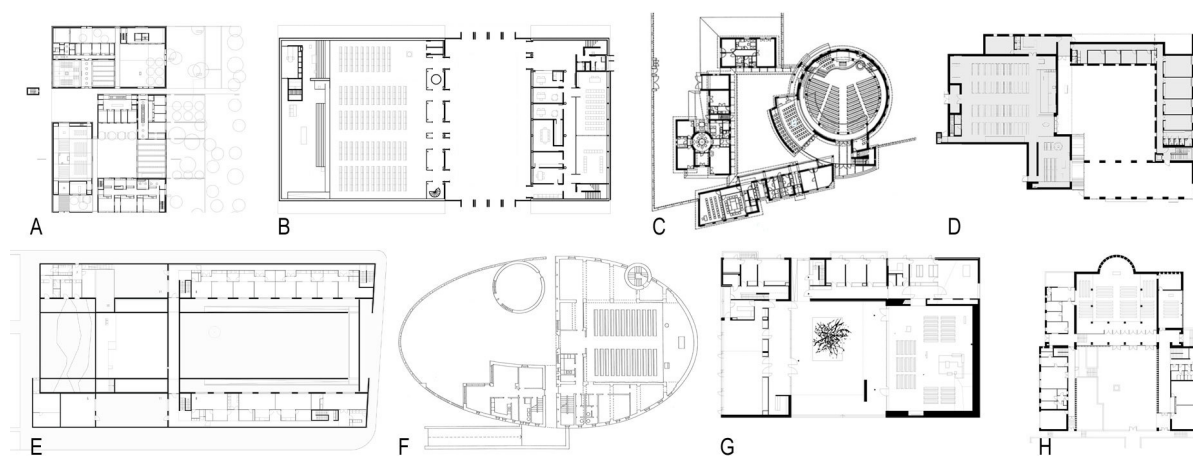


Figure 2.