

The multivocality of space and the creation of heritages: New shrines in an old city

Anna Niedźwiedź

Jagiellonian University in Kraków, a.niedzwiedz@uj.edu.pl

Abstract

This article examines the development of two Catholic shrines recently constructed in the suburbs of Kraków in southern Poland. The Divine Mercy shrine, dominated by new immense basilica (2002), and the nearby St John Paul II shrine (2011-13) are described here through the eyes and experiences of those visiting this rapidly growing religious complex. My prime focus will be on the concept of space as a lived, experienced, processual, interactive, generated and generative construct. The ethnographic material used for anthropological analysis here was collected among the visitors – mostly Poles and Catholics – to both shrines. Their narratives, emotions, experiences, movements through shrines reveal the multivocality of space which not only is lived, constructed, contextualized but also challenged and contested. Additionally, new religious spaces located on the outskirts of Kraków historic centre, which is associated by Poles with their “national heritage”, initiate complex processes of “heritagization” and reveal discourses between what is understood and experienced by people as “local” and “global”, “central” and “peripheral”, “modern” and “old”. The construction of these discourses confirms the processual dimension of space as well as its temporal dimension. Special attention is put also on personal narratives and experiences that reveal the emotional and embodied aspects of lived space.

KEYWORDS: space, Catholic shrines, Divine Mercy, John Paul II, heritage, religion

Introduction

At the end of August 2014, as a farewell to a passing summer school vacation, a group consisting of forty people (parents and their school-age and adolescent children) from a small town in south-eastern Poland, undertook a one-day bus tour. The aim of their excursion was the city of Kraków – the country’s second largest city and renowned as a popular tourist destination nicknamed “the old Polish capital” or “royal city”.¹ After wandering all

¹ The popular nicknames of the city of Kraków refer to its history. From the Middle Ages until the beginning of the 17th century Kraków was the official capital city and the seat of the Polish kings. Later it still possessed a strong symbolic position. Even though in 1609 the royal court relocated to Warsaw, Kraków’s cathedral for the next two centuries still served as the place of royal coronations and burials while royal regalia were kept in the city (see Purchla 1996: 32).

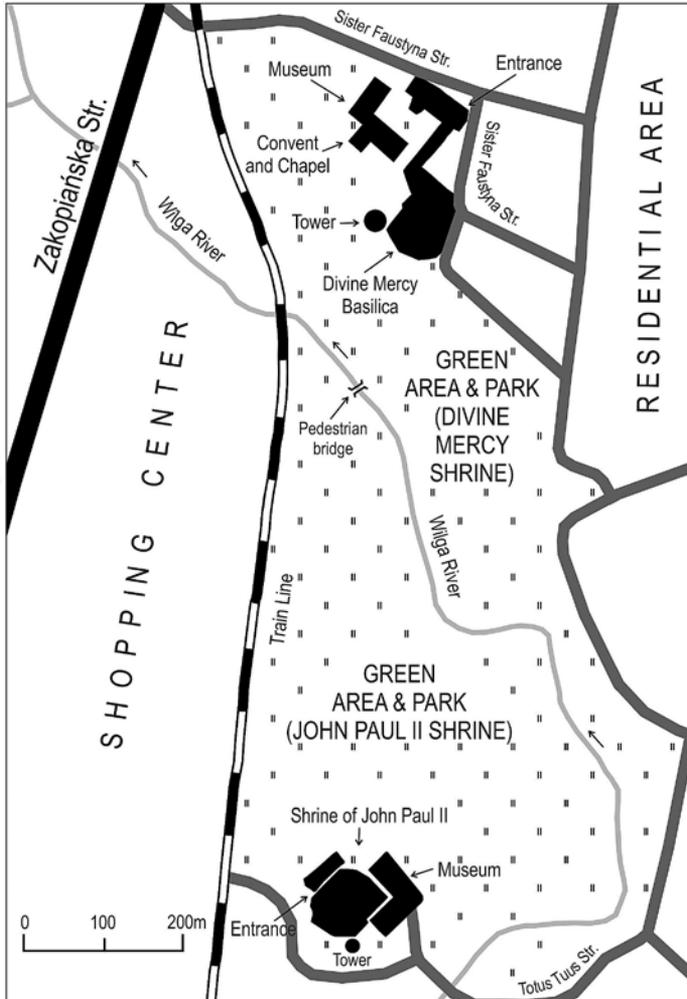
day through the Old Town, visiting museums, admiring historical monuments and medieval churches as well as enjoying restaurants, cafes and a zoo, the group took its bus to the city's southern suburbs, called Łagiewniki, and visited two modern Catholic churches: a colossal Divine Mercy basilica, which can hold up to 5,000 people and was constructed between 1999 and 2002, and the equally monumental shrine which was built in 2011-2013 and dedicated to the "Polish Pope" (St John Paul II).

When asked about aim and character of their visit to these shrines, two middle-aged men – the self-proclaimed organizers of the trip – explained that after visiting Kraków with its "historical churches", "cultural places" and "visitors *classics*" the group decided to stop in the suburbs to see "these new attractions" – as they described two religious buildings whose tall towers can be easily spotted from afar. Indeed, the Divine Mercy shrine advertises its 77 meter high tower as the highest point in Kraków and is equipped with a lift and an observation deck which provides a panoramic view towards the skyline of the Old Town, on one side, and the greener, suburban areas on the other.



Figure 1: The Divine Mercy shrine in Łagiewniki suburbs of Kraków. Behind the basilica and its tall tower stand the convent of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy with its 19th century chapel, September 2013, photo by the author

The Divine Mercy basilica and shrine of Saint John Paul II are located on two neighboring hills that are divided by a picturesque valley. The monumental silhouettes of these two churches signify two sides of an immense religious complex which covers an area of several dozen hectares.



Map 1: The Divine Mercy shrine and St John Paul II shrine in southern suburbs of Kraków, map prepared and edited by Ewa Łupikasza

The land belonging to the shrines is bordered by a train line and a shopping center on one side and residential areas, busy streets and wastelands on the other. The area between the two churches is covered with a green meadow and a park dotted with religious statues and small road-shrines. On the side where the Divine Mercy shrine is located, there is also a 19th century red-brick convent with a chapel, an open-air altar, hotel for pilgrims, cafes, bookstores and a boarding school run by the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, who live in the convent. On the other side, next to the shrine of Saint John Paul II there is a museum, offices, cafe and a busy construction area. The shrine, initiated and supported by

Kraków's archbishop after the death of the "Polish Pope", was developing into a religious center promoting his cult and at the time of writing of this paper (2015/16), the hotel and conference rooms were still under construction.²



Figure 2: Saint John Paul II shrine, April 2014, photo by the author

Over the last fifteen years Łagiewniki has gone through tremendous changes. The meadows and fields around the old convent as well as wastelands and old factory slag heaps have disappeared with the emergence of one of Poland's most important and rapidly developing Catholic shrines³. It should be thus not surprising that many Poles want to see

² This paper was written in winter 2015/16, before events related to the Catholic World Youth Day in Kraków (July 2016). The Łagiewniki shrines were significantly remodeled right before the arrival of those attending the WYD (e.g. a new broader pedestrian bridge connecting two shrines was constructed over the valley and a new train station was constructed next to John Paul II shrine as well as a tower). Here I am not discussing these newer developments and changes which confirm the dynamic character of Łagiewniki shrines spaces. These topics are part of my current research (2016-2019) carried out as a part of HERILIGION project funded by the HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area) Joint Research Programme "Uses of the Past".

³ The Divine Mercy shrine annually attracts as many as two million visitors (see Mróz 2008: 54; Garnett & Harris 2013: 82). The St John Paul II shrine is also attracting a similar number of visitors since many people visit both shrines during their trip to Łagiewniki. The development of the Divine Mercy shrine and the construction of a new Divine Mercy basilica was mostly founded by the Divine Mercy Shrine Foundation initiated in 1997 by Kraków's archbishop, Cardinal Franciszek Macharski. Kraków's archdiocese and the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy look after the Divine Mercy shrine. The "Center of John Paul II", which collects donations and was responsible for the construction of John Paul II's shrine, was founded in 2006 by archbishop, Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, who had been John Paul II's personal secretary between 1978 and 2005 and an archbishop of Kraków between 2005 and 2016.

Łagiewniki and are curious about its changing appearance and the new constructions. Indeed, during the ethnographic interviews many visitors to Łagiewniki, especially those arriving there for the first time, admitted that curiosity about “something new” and an eagerness to see “new developments” were the driving forces that attracted them to the place. However, usually during the interview, they revealed much more complex explanations which added to their reflections about these two shrines.

In this article I want to draw on Lefebvre’s understanding of space ([1974]1991; see also Knott 2010: 36) and embrace an anthropological concept of space as a multivocal, dynamic, relational, processual and contextual construct (see e.g. Rodman 2003; see also Hastrup & Olwig 1997) defined as ‘differentiated, kinetic, interrelated, generated, and generative’ (Tweed 2011: 117). I will focus on the relations between people and the Łagiewniki shrines. I will discuss the various – sometimes conflicting and contesting – ways in which these shrines are perceived, experienced and lived by those who use and co-establish these spaces. Visitors produce spaces *through* and *in* their movements and performative practices, as well as *through* and *in* the narratives and emotions that they attach to distinctive spatial elements experienced within the shrines. Simultaneously, as pointed by Tweed, space also ‘evokes different sensations and produces different associations’ (ibid: 122–3).

Having in mind the reciprocal (generated and generative) features of space, I also would like to emphasize its contextual dimension and analyze the dynamics between the Łagiewniki shrines and Kraków’s cityscape. I suggest that the construction of the two immense Catholic churches in Łagiewniki not only dramatically transformed the local suburban landscape, but also dramatically influenced the general image of Kraków and its religious geography.⁴ It challenged the conventional concept of center and periphery, generating new religious activities outside the historical core of the city and transferring some traditional religious-touristic routes from the Old Town toward new suburban areas.

The question to be posed here is: what role do the concepts of “old” and “new”, “past” and “modernity” play in the creation of new religious spaces and in ways they are being lived and perceived by people? It is important to realize that these concepts are also used by Catholic church officials, who orchestrate the construction of the shrines, and the city authorities, who promote religious tourism as an important development strategy. I am especially interested in how continuity and change coexist and work together in the complicated and manifold “modernization” of the religious landscape, as well as in the seemingly converse process of its “heritagization”. The invention, construction and formation of “heritages” seem to play an important role in the case of Łagiewniki’s religious spaces. “Heritagization” allows the suburban space of “new shrines” to be rooted in popular concepts of “past” and “history” which, in conventional Polish discourses, relate to

⁴ In this article I am confining the topic specifically to Catholic religious landscape. However, while Catholicism is the dominant religious denomination in today’s Poland it is also important to emphasize presence of other denominations and religions. After the collapse of Communism in 1989 there has been a dramatic rediscovery of Jewish heritage and an associated revitalization of the old Jewish quarter (Kazimierz) with its religious architecture. Other religions and denominations as well as new religious movements are negotiating their presence within Kraków’s dynamic landscape. My other research projects focus more on these aspects of the city’s religious geography.

Kraków's Old Town. This dynamism confirms not only the processual dimension of space but also a processual understanding of the city (Eade & Mele 2002: 4), which can extend itself by embracing new locations not only in the geographical sense but also through the development of their symbolic and imaginary interpretations.

By analyzing the rapid development and growing popularity of Łagiewniki shrines I propose to explore how people participate in the processes mentioned above and how they co-create these processes. I will draw on various ethnographic materials collected over the last ten years in Kraków. I have gathered these materials myself during participant observation fieldwork in Łagiewniki and have also drawn on statements by the Church and officials representing the city and the shrines, as well as various on-line materials. The main body of the ethnographic material, however, consists of 200 discussions and interviews with visitors to the shrines conducted by a team of students I supervised in 2013-2014. Most of our interlocutors were Polish people, who identify themselves as Roman Catholics, albeit to varying degrees, and whose visits to the shrines were described by them in varying terms. Their very diverse narratives appear to reveal the multivocality of space as well as the operational idiom of 'reciprocal conditionality' between cityscape and people's 'imagination' (see Bartmański 2012: 133).

Spiritual landscape

As revealed in the interview with two visitors recalled in the introductory part of this article, shrines in Łagiewniki seem to attract some people simply because they are new. They are often described as "modern" and appropriate for contemporary times and needs of today's pilgrims and visitors. For instance, people praise the spacious green area stretching between the Divine Mercy basilica and Saint John Paul II shrine and emphasize that it is needed for the open-air events, especially those dedicated to young people.⁵ Many are happy that 'shrines are not squeezed within the city', so they can spend time strolling around, seating on benches and contemplating 'green, open space, which is cared and clean'.

On a daily basis many neighboring inhabitants use the area as a local park where they can enjoy green meadow and trees. Those who have been living in the area for years, praise the spectacular transformation of the old factory slag heap into a green hill and a park surrounding the John Paul II shrine. During our research, on sunny warmer days my students and I encountered numerous parents walking with their children strollers and many older people enjoying nice weather sitting on benches and walking. Usually, these leisure activities were combined with religious ones. Parents living in an immediate neighborhood mention that, when strolling within the shrines' area, they usually pop into the churches for a short prayer or at least stop in front of the Stations of the Cross or the Rosary chapels, which are located on a meadow in front the Divine Mercy shrine and in the park area around John Paul II shrine.

⁵ During fieldwork conducted in 2013-2014 our interlocutors often referred to the Catholic World Youth Day planned for 2016 in Kraków. At that time Łagiewniki was considered as one of main locations for the World Youth Day events.



Figure 3: People praying along Stations of the Cross on a meadow located near the Divine Mercy basilica, August 2013, photo by the author

Others often admit that their open-air activities constitute a significant part of their visit to the shrines.

It seems, therefore, that the land belonging to the shrines happens to be associated with a special, spiritual and sacred ambience. The area is described as a green enclave within the city, which is quiet, soothing and calming; it deepens spiritual life and encourages religious reflection. A woman in her seventies, who lives in a distant district on another side of Kraków, every few weeks takes a tram from her place and after more than one-hour trip she reaches Łagiewniki. For her visiting the shrines and spending half of a day walking around is like “charging the batteries”. As she explained:

You know, I like to sit down here alone and contemplate this place. Here, I can feel somehow different. And here is a different feeling than in any other place. ... I can sit, warm myself up on a sun and reflect on life which is almost gone. ... For me it is truly an incredible place, I feel almost elevated here. When I cannot come here at least I try to watch on TV [every week the Divine Mercy chaplet prayer said in Łagiewniki is being broadcasted live on a local TV]. But it is different. There is something here which cannot be fully expressed with words. One has to be here and personally feel this ambience. This place really acts like that, in this special way. And also these trees, these buildings, they all act. You know, for me this place is sacred. There is no other place like that on earth...

The special atmosphere, the quiet and the peaceful landscape, which encouraged deep reflection, were also praised by the few interlocutors encountered within the shrines' area, who declared themselves as non-Christian, non-believers or non-church goers. Some use the Łagiewniki shrines area as a nice green shortcut during a bike ride. Some even chose this place to have a beer while sitting on the grass in more remote areas within the shrines' grounds 'where it is quiet and shrine guards do not bother you' and one can 'simply watch nature and think one's life through over a bottle of beer drunk in the open-air'.

Holy figures and their physical presence

Among the Catholic visitors, the sacredness of space and the spiritual dimension of the landscape were usually associated with two sacred figures related to Łagiewniki. The first figure is Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938), a local nun believed to have received a message about "Divine Mercy" during numerous visionary encounters with Christ. Faustina – known as an "apostle of Divine Mercy" – was recognized as a Catholic saint and canonized in 2000 by John Paul II. The second figure is John Paul II himself (1920-2005) who, before his election as pope (1978), served as Kraków's archbishop (under his original name: Karol Wojtyła). His long-lasting and complex relationship with Łagiewniki was often spontaneously narrated by our interlocutors. They pointed that, during the Nazi occupation of Poland, Wojtyła worked physically in a local chemical plant (the exact spot on a hill where the recently built shrine dedicated to him is located). On his daily walk to work he used to stop at a chapel in the Łagiewniki convent to say a short prayer and this is where he learned about the emerging devotion to Divine Mercy. Interestingly, for a long time this cult stayed very local and was not officially recognized. During the 1950s the devotion in a form promoted by Sr Faustina was banned by the Catholic authorities. There is no doubt that it was the sustained efforts of Karol Wojtyła (first as Kraków's archbishop and then as pope), which led to the cult's acceptance in June 1978 and its skyrocketing, global popularity (Czaczkowska 2012: 336–57).



Figure 4: Ex-votos left and exhibited in the Divine Mercy shrine, September 2014, photo by the author

As revealed during the field research, today's Polish visitors to Łagiewniki are usually familiar with these stories and they use them as significant tools to mark, create and interrelate important sacred spaces located within the huge religious complex. Many interlocutors emphasized that there could have been no Divine Mercy shrine without John Paul II and vice versa. The pope was mentioned as having deep personal piety to Divine Mercy. He is the one who supported the Divine Mercy devotion (for years not recognized officially by the church), established the feast of Divine Mercy, canonized Faustina, consecrated the basilica in Łagiewniki and named it the "World Center of Divine Mercy", thereby popularizing both the place and the cult throughout the globe. All this justified in the eyes of many people the location of John Paul II's own shrine next to the Divine Mercy shrine. Some also provided additional explanations that linked John Paul II to the prophecy in Sr Faustina's diary about 'the spark that will come from Poland' (Kowalska 1987: 612). According to these explanations, by popularizing the local cult and making it global, John Paul II had stopped or postponed the "final coming" of Christ, thereby helping to reveal God's mercy to the people all over the world.

Stories about Sr Faustina and Pope John Paul II establish many meaningful layers through which people were attached to the Łagiewniki shrines. One of these layers relates to a concept of historical continuity and specific ideal of 'historical logic' and time. Since



Figure 5: People pray in front and touch the statue of saint sister Faustina Kowalska in Divine Mercy shrine, April 2009, photo by the author

‘space’ refers ‘to both extension and duration’ it incorporates a temporal dimension within a ‘spatial “interval”’ (Tweed 2011: 120). Through stories about Sr Faustina and John Paul II time and visions of “past”, “future” and “presence” are incorporated within the contemporary space of the Łagiewniki shrines. Relics and memorabilia related to physical presence of both saints, memorial plaques, information about their biographies, portraits and images, clothes once worn by them and ordinary objects once belonging to them are now exhibited inside both shrines. These artifacts create the rich ‘material culture of religious practice’ that interlocks ‘the temporal and the spatial’ (ibid.).

What is more, in accordance with the dynamic – spatially and temporally – concept of space, the “past” and the historically framed presence of holy figures are *embodied* in contemporary pilgrims’ movements within the shrines. It seems that holy figures and their historical biographies to certain degree can manifest themselves or can be reenacted in pilgrims’ bodies as they move to or across sacred spaces. For instance, Marlene, a middle-age woman encountered in front of the Divine Mercy basilica, reflected on young Wojtyła’s everyday route to work during the 2nd World War. She loudly wondered about the exact route he would have followed. Then she stated that probably some of the paths are preserved somewhere around. She also empathized with him, recalling his bodily feelings and experiences when he had to walk from the convent toward the chemical plant, supposedly wearing not very comfortable clogs. Finally, she remembered her own wandering through the area between the two shrines and exclaimed: ‘Maybe we are even walking in his exact footsteps!’.

The process of embodiment and empathetic identification with holy figures is significant because it creates a very personal relation between people and saints, who are experienced within a sacred space. It adds a very important affective layer to people’s relationship with Łagiewniki spaces. In fact, “affective force” can be described as one of the most important factors transforming Łagiewniki into a multivocal “thick” place – it means space that is dynamically conceived in relation to personal experiences of self as well as individual and communal belongings (see Casey 2001: 683–5; Duff 2010: 882; Niedźwiedz 2014: 82).

Indeed, a very familial and emotional dimension is accorded to these two saints by their devotees. In many ways they are perceived as “contemporary saints” for “contemporary times” – they are close to people’s current needs and problems. Since John Paul II died only recently (in 2005) he is remembered as a living person and many visitors to the shrines use very emotional and personal language when referring to him. Participation in mass religious events – for instance, in so-called “papal masses” (open-air masses organized during John Paul II visits to Poland which gathered thousands, and sometimes even millions of participants) – was often described in terms resembling an individual, family or friendly meeting with a person well-known.

A very affectionate, familial relationship with the pope was almost always revealed when people were recalling their memories of John Paul II death and funeral. Numerous interlocutors compared his death to the loss of a loved one: ‘It was as if someone very close, someone very dear to one’s heart, was dying’. Some people even compared his death to a loss of their own grandpa or husband - ‘the nearest and dearest person’. When pointing

the pope's holiness people often emphasized the "contemporariness" of this saintly figure. 'He is a saint, but he lived in our times, in front of our eyes' stated a 40-year-old woman from Kraków, who frequently visits Łagiewniki and both its shrines. Regina, another visitor in her forties, pointed that 'John Paul II lived next to me, and I could see that his life was holy'.

In another article I analyze how John Paul II is inscribed into Kraków's cityscape as a 'real inhabitant of the city' and "one of us", as well as how the cityscape itself is transformed into an idea of the "pope's home" (see Niedźwiedź 2017). Here it is worth stating that Łagiewniki and its shrines play an important role in these processes. It is very clearly visible during the annual "Pilgrimage in the Footsteps of Karol Wojtyła the Worker", for instance.



Figure 6: "Pilgrimage in the Footsteps of Karol Wojtyła the Worker" – pilgrims on their way to Łagiewniki, October 2013, photo by the author

This ten kilometer walk is designed by its organizers to cover the route that Wojtyła had to follow from his home near the city centre to the chemical plant. This pilgrimage depicts the "Polish Pope" in very human terms: as a worker, a regular city's inhabitant, someone who led a very poor and modest life and suffered because of solitude and the loss of those close to him. Those who every October walk to Łagiewniki on this pilgrimage can easily identify themselves with his experiences, as well as gain strength and hope from his life story (ibid.). This pilgrimage can be analyzed in terms of movement

as performative and embodied action (see, for example, Coleman & Eade 2004: 16). It not only confirms the sacredness of Łagiewniki, but also establishes a physical connection between the new shrine of John Paul II and various places associated with his time as a regular dweller in the city.

Even though Sr Faustina's life is much more remote in time than the pope's and only the oldest inhabitants in the Łagiewniki suburbs seem to remember meeting her in person, she also is depicted and experienced as someone important for the "modern world", someone very "real" and close to the problems of contemporary pilgrims⁶. Her physical and spiritual suffering, modesty, poverty, and the mistreatment she encountered in her own convent are frequently recalled by those visitors, who discussed her with the ethnographers. The fact that she was misunderstood by her superiors and that the devotion, which she promoted, was not officially recognized for many years and even forbidden paradoxically sounded attractive to many people. It empowered them and made them feel that their own spiritual searches, life dilemma and mystical experiences, which did not always follow the Church's teachings, were not to be dismissed as "theologically naïve", "imagined", "wrong" or unimportant. Poorly educated Faustina fascinated her followers as a "holy fool", someone who was very simple, deeply mystical and challenged the official hierarchy and structures of the Church. This aspect of Faustina's devotion allows many people to identify with her and see Łagiewniki as a place where they can experience and freely develop spiritual dimension of their faith.

Global center

The physical link between space and the concrete holy figures described above appears to be one of the most important aspects in the narratives collected among the visitors to the Łagiewniki shrines. However, the "physical presence" of the "sacred" relates not only to Faustina and the pope but, first of all, to Jesus Christ himself and to the concept of Divine Mercy. Marlene, whom I already recalled describing Wojtyła's paths within the shrines, when asked about reasons of her own frequent visits to Łagiewniki, answered:

Here [in Łagiewniki shrines area] I can feel huge amount of energy, I feel a divine touch. I sense something very peaceful. A presence of Christ. This is something incredible. But it is the way I experience it. I am just conscious that Christ was walking here! We probably cannot point where exactly he appeared to Faustina. But there is this idea alone, that he was walking here... And now we are having this tangible proof of his presence here – here is this place, this shrine [the basilica of Divine Mercy] where I received so many graces.

The rapid growth of the shrine, the construction of a huge basilica, the many pilgrims from different continents appearing in Łagiewniki are often seen as visible proofs confirming that the message about Divine Mercy brought by Faustina and popularized by

⁶ It is important to point that Faustina during her relatively short life stayed in different locations and convents and her stays in Płock, Vilnius or Warsaw were very important. In Kraków-Łagiewniki she spent five years in total, including the three last years of her life (she died in 1938 in the Łagiewniki convent) (see Czaczkowska 2012: 117).

John Paul II is important to all people all over the globe. Even those of our interlocutors, who distanced themselves from deep devotion or described themselves as being rather “religiously skeptical”, usually admitted that the space of the Łagiewniki shrines was “impressive” and that the Divine Mercy devotion seemed to be becoming truly internationally and globally popular. The Polish visitors frequently mentioned the presence of foreigners in Łagiewniki. For instance, a man in his sixties, who served as a marshal at the convent chapel, after describing his conversion and the miraculous healing he experienced several years ago at the shrine, shared his reflections: ‘I work here, thus I regularly observe Divine Mercy shrine and I am able to say that there are people coming from all over the world. From far, far places of this planet. Even so remote places that hardly can be find on a map. And I think, there must be something in this...’.

For many Poles, especially those from the older generation who had hardly ever travelled abroad, these encounters with foreigners seemed to be relatively new and unusual experiences that challenged some ossified concepts and images of the world and themselves. It is important to point out that the national-ethnic identities declared by Poles are strongly homogenous.⁷ Furthermore, the stereotypical image of a “Polish Catholic” shapes not only ideals of “Polishness” but also popular concepts concerning “Catholicism” (see, for example, Zubrzycki 2011: 25–6). The realization that there are deeply Catholic people on other continents and that the Divine Mercy devotion is tremendously popular among people from diverse cultural backgrounds and lifestyles is a significant, mind-opening discovery. Such a realization also helps many contemporary Polish Catholics to build links between their local lives and a “global world” which, for many years during a Communist regime (which lasted in Poland since the end of the 2nd World War till 1989), was not accessible for most people.

The idea of a Catholic church as a worldwide, international community is communicated to local Poles through the Łagiewniki space and the devotional practices performed there. Many interlocutors pointed that the Divine Mercy prayer reported by Sr Faustina to have been announced to her by Jesus Christ himself (Garnett & Harris 2013: 80) and repeated every day at 3 o’clock in the Divine Mercy basilica, the Saint John Paul II shrine and the old convent chapel, is usually said not just in Polish but also in different languages. 3 o’clock in the afternoon is the time associated with Jesus Christ’s death and was described by Faustina as a daily moment of special mercy and grace. For visitors it can also mean participating in a “global community” of prayer. As a man in his late fifties explained:

I am personally fond of the Divine Mercy Hour. This is [the hour] when we connect with the whole world. There is the praying of the Divine Mercy chaplet in different languages. And it makes me think that it is not only us praying here, but that the whole globe is praying with us, because it is in different languages, in English, and others... Usually it depends which pilgrimages arrive on a given day. One-tenth of the chaplet is said in their language, and so on. It’s a very beautiful prayer. It’s the ‘Hour of Mercy’ for the whole world.

⁷ According the last National Census (conducted in 2011) 94.8% of people living in Poland reported to have Polish national-ethnic identity, 2.26% had dual national-ethnic identity (Polish and non-Polish), while 1.55% had non-Polish national-ethnic identity (Gudaszewski 2015: 29-30).

This “global community” is also mediated through Łagiewniki’s space, especially through the shrines’ architectural design. When asked about the significant spatial elements within Łagiewniki, many of our interlocutors pointed to a tabernacle located in the Divine Mercy basilica. It is situated in the central part of the altar and forms a focal point within the basilica’s immense, oval-shape interior. The tabernacle is a globe with clearly visible outlines of all the continents and is surrounded by a metal sculpture resembling a ‘tree of life’, whose branches ‘are tousled by a gale’ (Cęckiewicz 2004: 4). It visualizes the idea that the Divine Mercy message is dedicated to all people, all over the globe. This message is described as very timely because ‘people nowadays are more and more lost and Divine Mercy can be a refuge for everyone, regardless the level of religious commitment or depth of faith’.



Figure 7: The main altar in the Divine Mercy basilica. Tabernacle in the shape of the globe and an image of the Divine Mercy, April 2006, photo by the author

The diversity of those arriving at Łagiewniki is reflected in the lower part of the basilica, where the various chapels – each dedicated to a different nation – are located. Currently, pilgrims can visit the Slovakian, German, Italian, Hungarian and Ukrainian chapels. The global diversity of the pilgrims and the universal dimension of the Divine Mercy message are also demonstrated outside the basilica, through an impressive collection of various national flags. Furthermore, the phrase – “Jesus, I trust in You” which people know from the famous image of the Merciful Christ painted according to Faustina’s visions – is calligraphed in various languages and alphabets and exhibited on a big wall located in the oldest part of the shrine. A metal box with a notice that says: ‘Please write the words *Jesus, I trust in You* in Your language (in a language that is not on the wall)’ hangs there too.



Figure 8: Various national flags displayed above the wall where phrase “Jesus, I trust in You” is calligraphed in various languages and alphabets, June 2013, photo by the author

When looking at the words already written in most of the European languages as well as in Arabic, Hebrew, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin and numerous others, pilgrims reflect on Łagiewniki as the “Global Center of Divine Mercy”. They describe the shrine as a ‘place where Sister Faustina presented the Merciful Christ to us’ and that is why now Divine Mercy ‘radiates from here to the whole world’. The idea of Divine Mercy is described as a simple message of forgiveness, hope and love and, therefore, seen as universal. The simplicity of the phrase ‘Jesus, I trust in You,’ for instance, was pointed out by Magda, a young woman working in one of the cafes at Łagiewniki. In her opinion this phrase appeals to everyone regardless of their national, racial, cultural or educational backgrounds:

‘Jesus, I trust in You’ – this is as if I said to you: ‘Paulina, I trust in you, I trust you’, isn’t it? [Paulina is a name of an ethnographer conducting this interview] It is like entering a brotherly, close, friendly relationship.... This phrase establishes closeness and intimacy with Christ, because we turn to him in such a direct way.

Some emphasize not only the transnational but also the transdenominational dimension of the Divine Mercy devotion, suggesting that other Christians find it attractive as well as Catholics. Łagiewniki is depicted, then, as a place for ecumenical meetings and dialogue⁸. In this respect also the “Polish Pope” is described as a spiritual, global leader dedicated to the Divine Mercy piety and to promoting global dialogue. Visitors to shrines recall that during his papal visit to Łagiewniki in 2002 John Paul II ‘in this place [...] entrusted the whole world to Divine Mercy’. Therefore, the newly constructed shrine dedicated to him and located close to the Divine Mercy basilica is yet another “tangible proof” of the global dimension of Łagiewniki’s spaces. As one of our interlocutors commented, there are two “sides” to Łagiewniki: ‘Faustina with her local tradition and John Paul II who popularized this tradition all over the world [...] Today in Kraków these two sides meet in one shared locale’.

Constructing heritages

Indeed, various “sides” meet in the Łagiewniki “locale”. The statement quoted above points to the “local” and “global” aspects of Łagiewniki and situates them around two holy figures and their two shrines (Faustina & John Paul II). Here, I propose to challenge this very binary view by revealing the complex relations between “local” and “global”. I will also add a temporal perspective constructed around the concepts of “modernity” and “past”. As already mentioned earlier, space is related not only to geographical but also to temporal “spatiality”. Duration and temporal intervals are incorporated into geographically extending spaces (Tweed 2011; Bender 2002). Since the recent development of the two suburban shrines happens not without intriguing links with the city itself, when analyzing

⁸ Around 2005 to 2010 the Divine Mercy shrine in Łagiewniki was associated with ‘Łagiewniki-Catholicism’, a term which appeared in public discourse and was associated by the media with the more liberal faction of Polish Catholicism, open to the transnational dimension of the Church and to international, interethnic and interreligious dialogue. However, during time of our research (2013-2014) this term was used and recalled only by some of our interlocutors.

the spaces of the Łagiewniki shrines it is worth putting them in the context of Kraków and its temporal spatiality.

The image of Kraków among Poles is very strongly related to its historical past. It is renowned as the old Polish capital whose charming and meticulously renovated medieval Old Town, entered on the UNESCO World Heritage list, attracts thousands of visitors. For the huge majority of Poles the name “Kraków” resonates very strongly with the concept of “national heritage”, while the city itself is perceived as spatially representing the Polish “past” and its national history. Religion and religious spaces play a significant role in this national discourse. The medieval Wawel Cathedral provides probably the clearest example of how Kraków’s religious space is incorporated into the national imagery. The Roman Catholic cathedral, accompanied by the imposing Royal Castle, is located on a limestone hill overlooking the Old Town and flanked by the river. This river view of the Wawel Hill, crowned by the cathedral’s towers and the castle’s walls, forms one of Kraków’s most scenic and picturesque landscapes and is reproduced on thousands of postcards and other tourist-oriented products and souvenirs.

For numerous Poles, however, a visiting to the cathedral involves a complex experience related both to its religious associations and the historic ideal of “Polishness” and sacralized “national heritage”. The relics of local saints, including those of the official patrons of the old Polish Kingdom, monarchs, patriotic heroes and 19th century artists, make this edifice not only an important religious space but also a national Polish pantheon and a monument seen by many as preserving “national history” (Ziejka 1994: 15; Niedźwiedź 2015: 76). Similarly, the numerous other historic churches, shrines and monasteries scattered across Kraków’s Old Town are very strongly associated with the concept of a highly valued “past”. The “past” is represented *through* and embodied *as* architecture and other artifacts that form the cityscape of Kraków’s Old Town. Thus, the act of visiting the city has been described by contemporary Poles as encountering a ‘historical heritage of immense weight’, while Kraków itself is depicted as ‘a symbol of Polish continuity’ and a place that ‘unites Poles’. The city is also called a “cradle of sainthood” since stories of numerous local saints are associated with the cityscape. (This tradition leads back to the 11th century and Kraków’s first saint and martyr: St Stanislaus, the city’s bishop murdered by the king).

The image of Kraków as a “holy city” is also very strongly present in the city’s promotional strategy and its branding through the religious tourism industry. For instance, a few years ago the regional council supported the creation of a ‘route dedicated specifically to tourists-pilgrims’,⁹ and signs were put up at various locations related to Christian saints who lived in Kraków in the past. The “Kraków, Trail of the Saints” covers as many as nineteen churches and begins at the Wawel Cathedral, goes through various locations in the Old Town and its immediate neighborhood, and finishes in Łagiewnikiat the Divine Mercy basilica and the St John Paul II shrine.¹⁰ This trail physically connects Łagiewni-

⁹ See <http://szlakimalopolski.mik.krakow.pl/?szlaki=spacery-po-krakowie-cz-11-krakowski-szlak-swietych> (accessed on 5 May 2016).

¹⁰ See <https://www.visitmalopolska.pl/sacrum/Strony/krakowski-szlak-swietych-32.aspx> (accessed on 2 April 2016).

ki with Kraków, therefore. It works also as a symbolic, imaginative link transforming Łagiewniki shrines into the spatial extension of “sacred Kraków” and into its temporal continuation. “New Kraków’s saints” – Faustina and John Paul II – appear as figures that continuing the tradition of the “historic” saints who were born, died or lived in the city. Łagiewniki’s shrines may be declared as “new shrines for new times” but their “newness” is strongly embedded in the past.

The link between Łagiewniki and Kraków’s sacred past is clearly visible, for instance, inside the John Paul II shrine. A huge wall painting exhibited there depicts ten Polish saints, who were canonized by the Pope himself during his pontificate (1978-2005). They congregate on both sides of John Paul II who stands in the center of the painting. In the background, right behind the pope’s hand risen in a gesture of blessing, a panorama depicts the characteristic outline of the Wawel Hill with the Kraków’s castle and cathedral next to a silhouette of St Peter’s basilica in Rome. The painting confirms, therefore, the story about Kraków as a “cradle of sainthood” as well as the “beloved city of John Paul II”, while the Polish pope is depicted as an integral part of the city’s imaginative landscape.

The Wawel Cathedral is also recalled in the design of one of the chapels located in the basement of the John Paul II shrine. The Priesthood Chapel is designed as a replica of the cathedral’s Romanesque Crypt of Saint Leonard. The original crypt is directly connected with Kraków’s part in the biography of John Paul II. This is where, in 1946, at the dawn of Communist Poland, Karol Wojtyła said his first mass as a newly-ordained Catholic priest. Later, when he became the archbishop of the Kraków diocese, the Wawel Cathedral served as his episcopal church until 1978, when he was elected pope and moved to the Vatican. Constructing a replica of the famous crypt from the Wawel Cathedral in the basement of a new shrine in Łagiewniki dedicated to John Paul II confirms the link between the Pope and the city of Kraków (and between the new suburbs and the historic city center). The meaningfulness of this space is even more striking when we realize that the chapel hosts a symbolic “grave” of John Paul II.

As mentioned earlier, the Wawel crypts are seen as constituting a Polish pantheon and are incorporated into the concept of Kraków as part of national heritage and a place destined to preserve precious relics of the past. Since John Paul II died as the pope of the Catholic Church, he was buried in the crypt of St Peter’s basilica in Rome. This generated some disappointment in Poland, where right after the pope’s death in 2005 a rumor appeared that the pope’s funeral might take place not in the Vatican but in Kraków (see Niedźwiedz 2017). Surprisingly, the idea of having the pope’s “grave” in Kraków reemerged in 2011, when John Paul II was beatified. The casket with his body was exhumed and moved from its original grave in the Vatican crypts to be reinterred in the main Vatican basilica, above the floor level, following the Catholic tradition that relics from the body of a saint can be placed on an altar. At this moment a decision was made by Vatican and Polish church officials to donate the original tombstone from the crypt to the new shrine of John Paul II in Kraków. As a result the tombstone was installed within a new sacred space which replicated the Crypt of Saint Leonard from the Wawel Cathedral in Kraków’s Old Town.

For Polish visitors, who come to see the new shrine, the Priesthood chapel is simply “the Pope’s chapel” where they can pray in front of his “grave”. A massive white marble

tombstone (with engraved letters: JOANNES PAULUS PP II, 16 X 1978 – 2 IV 2005) stands in the center of the chapel. This is where visitors genuflect and kneel down, touch the tombstone and kiss a golden reliquary attached to the top of the tombstone. For many, especially those who cannot travel to Rome, this is the real “grave” of the Pope, where they can ‘feel his presence’ and realize that ‘he blesses this space’ as many visitors noted.



Figure 9: Pilgrims praying at the John Paul II tombstone in the Priesthood chapel at the St John Paul II shrine in Kraków, October 2016, photo by the author

The Pope’s grave in Łagiewniki reveals the complexity of what is defined as “local” and “global” as well as what roles are attached to visions of “past” and “modernity”. The figure of the Pope, as well as the figure of Sister Faustina, function as dynamic links between “local” imagination and “worldly” ideas. This two-dimensional aspect of both figures and religious cults growing around them is embedded in spatial design of Łagiewniki. On one hand, the idea that the Divine Mercy devotion is universal and that the “Polish pope” was a global leader and now is a globally recognized saint seems to be very strongly promoted through space and architecture of Łagiewniki. Due to that both shrines are not only signed as a part of “Kraków’s Trail of the Saints” but also as a part of a transnational route leading to Santiago de Compostela (there is a Compostela trail sign in Łagiewniki as well as a chapel dedicated to this pilgrimage route). On the other hand, locality of Kraków is promoted too. Local stories and individual biographies of saints root both figures in a concept of local heritage and relate them to the Kraków’s past. Evidently both saints went through a process of heritagization and are already seen

as part of Kraków's heritage. However, they are still very contemporary and very close to experiences and needs of modern people. They not only link "local" and "global" but also the "past", "present" and "future". One of our interlocutors reflected that Łagiewniki shrines being constructed today will in future serve as 'heritage for generations to come. Let us leave them something from us'.

Lived or contested?

However, here I need to point that in the multivocal narratives about the shrines and in a variety of experiences related to Łagiewniki space people often revealed conflicting, ambiguous views concerning the aesthetic value of "new religious architecture". Many found it difficult to accept the modern style of the new churches built there. The most popular complaints focused on their monumental size and their "lack of spiritual ambience". Some people praised the old churches in the city center where 'one can feel something magical, the unusual atmosphere and sacred dimension of these places' – aspects that were absent in the new Łagiewniki churches according to some interlocutors. Thus, it is not surprising that the 19th century chapel located in the old cloister was usually characterized as "the most spiritual" place in Łagiewniki. Interestingly, the chapel with the Pope's "grave" described above was also praised as "spiritual" due to its small size and intimate interior designed according to old, medieval architectural patterns.

"Modern" churches are evidently perceived in much more utilitarian terms. They are designed to serve many people who arrive at Łagiewniki and, therefore, they need to be large. Yet, the price of this grand design is a failure to support the spiritual needs of the pilgrims, who find comfort in the green open area surrounding the churches and in much smaller interiors, such as the chapel mentioned above.

When discussing the routes taken by the pilgrims across the huge area of Łagiewniki we realized that it is very hard to find one pattern. The variety of places and activities leave pilgrims without a standardized schema of expected behaviors. This aspect of Łagiewniki space was seen by some as disadvantage; they felt "lost" or "overwhelmed" by the variety of choices and buildings to visit. On the other hand, many found this dimension of Łagiewniki attractive. Those who visit Łagiewniki frequently seem to appreciate the variety of opportunities available. They can choose their own routes, design their visit according to their needs and focus on their beloved places, while rejecting those that seem meaningless or unappealing.

Łagiewniki is seen, therefore, as a space that promotes the individualization of religious practices. For instance, some pilgrims avoid the large Divine Mercy basilica, and focus exclusively on the convent's chapel where Faustina's relics and famous image of Merciful Christ are exhibited. At 3 pm when the Divine Mercy chaplet is prayed in at least three different locations within Łagiewniki, many people deliberately choose the small convent's chapel even though it is usually very crowded at this time. A retired photographer, who lives in walking distance from the shrine, explained his choice in a very telling manner:

I come here [to the convent's chapel] where the Chaplet is being said by sisters. In this new church [the Divine Mercy basilica] there are no sisters leading the Chaplet prayer – it is always a priest who does it. Only in this old chapel there are sisters who lead the prayer. And that's why I prefer to go there for the Chaplet rather than to the new church. There it is more... I don't know how to explain it, but the prayer there seems to be experienced with greater attention – it is more intense.

Choosing certain routes and rejecting others can be seen as an empowering experience as well as an expression of criticism toward some official decisions made by the Church hierarchy. Some pointed out that the splendor and monumentality of the Divine Mercy and Saint John Paul II shrines was against not only Christian values but also the modest way in which both Sr Faustina and John Paul II led their lives. The heaviest criticisms were levied against the John Paul II shrine. Sometimes people even claimed that it was constructed against the will of the pope himself, and was contrary to his ideals. 'Would he really like this splendor?' asked one interlocutor pointing to the very costly interior decorations of the new shrine. Paintings and splendor of the place were also seen as supporting the 'pride of living bishops' rather than promoting deep devotion to John Paul II. Even though, as pointed earlier in this article, the location of two shrines near each other is usually seen as logical, some interlocutors were concerned that they might compete with one another and that the papal shrine might 'pull away pilgrims from the Divine Mercy shrine' (which would be against the pope's will).

During our discussions with people numerous questions were posed concerning the commercialization of the religious space too. The transformation of the holy figures of Faustina and John Paul II into 'marketing products' and the shrines into 'tourist attractions' promoted by the 'business-oriented decisions of the Church hierarchy' were issues that were raised by some visitors. Those, who lived in Kraków, were particularly concerned about the financial issues and wondered about how much money had been spent on building the shrines and about the land property issues, since these were topics that appeared regularly in the local media and were always hotly debated.

Concluding thoughts

Despite these criticisms many people still came to the shrines. Indeed, a growing number of visitors were creatively responding to the spatial and architectural development of the area and this article has sought to provide an insight to their varying experiences and ideas. Some kept to the older area around the convent, some discovered a beloved open-air place for contemplation, some admitted to feeling comfortable inside the vast interiors of the Łagiewniki churches or inside particular chapels, while others criticized some recent developments. The majority of people we talked to during our research experienced the shrines as meaningful "thick" places. They could relate their lives and emotions to tangibly experienced exact sites, where their individual memories and affects met collective imaginations.

Peoples' movements contextualize Łagiewniki's spaces and connect them with other meaningfully burdened places located in distant times and remote areas. On the other hand, the shrines fascinated contemporary visitors because they were seen as new and "modern". The shrines have emerged in front of peoples' eyes and it is the visitors' response which activates and co-establishes these spaces. Łagiewniki seems to be not only a grand construction area where new religious architecture has been produced but also a grand laboratory dedicated to "space construction" where the multivocality of space is generated, experienced and felt by visitors. Finally, it is worth pointing out that spaces are not only produced and changed by people. Spaces can influence and transform visitors and their lives. The spaces of the shrines become incorporated into peoples' experiences and biographical itineraries and reveal their power in the creation of both individual and communal identities.

In this article, I have focused on the variety of visitors' stories and discussed aspects that seem significant for understanding the interactions between Polish Catholics and their new religious spaces¹¹. If we agree that spaces and places are 'about doing as much as ... about being' (Nikolaisen 2004: 100), it might be important to realize that "doing" relates not only to people's actions but also to the agency of spaces themselves.

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¹¹ It is also important to point to the physical visibility of the shrines within the cityscape of Kraków. The two towers of the Łagiewniki shrines are visible from different areas of the city including one of the most important traffic routes leading toward the city's southern exit. The tourist-oriented promotion of the city through the figures of John Paul II and Sr Faustina Kowalska influences not only the Catholic part of the Polish population but also those who do not identify themselves with Catholicism. These aspects are subjects of my further research on the multivocality of Łagiewniki's shrines, while in this article I focus on Polish Catholic visitors to the shrines. I also should add that at the time of editing of this paper, a team consisting of geographers of religion published their study dedicated to diversified motivations and behavior of the visitors to the Divine Mercy shrine (see Liro, Soljan & Bilka-Wodecka 2017).

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Povzetek

Vsebina članka raziskuje razvoj velikega religioznega kompleksa Łagiewniki, ki je bil med leti 1999 in 2013 zgrajen na obrobju mesta Krakov na južnem Poljskem. Analizira izkušnje in doživljanja obiskovalcev enega od večjih religioznih kompleksov na južnem Poljskem, ti. i. Łagiewniki, ki obsega kapelo Svete Milosti, veliko baziliko (2002) in bližnjo kapelo Sv. Janeza Pavla II (2011-2013). Predstavljeno etnografsko gradivo se osredinja na izkušnje in doživljanja obiskovalcev tega "svetega prostora", med katerimi prevladujejo Poljaki in katoliki. Njihova pripovedovanja, emocije, izkušnje in gibanja med posameznimi religioznimi objekti razkrivajo multivokalnost pomena prostora, ki ni zgolj živet, ustvarjen in odvisen od konteksta, temveč je tudi neskladen in včasih celo sporen. Namreč številni Poljaki enačijo Łagiewniki religiozni kompleks, ki se nahaja na obrobju zgodovinskega in religioznega mesta Krakov, z nacionalno kulturno in religiozno dediščino. Prav to pa v religiozni pokrajini Łagiewniki sproža zapletene procese "ustvajanja kulturne dediščine". Le ti, na eni strani odstirajo osebne narative in izkušnje obiskovalcev, ki ustvarjajo t. i. živeti prostor, ki je emocionalen in utelešen. Na drugi strani pa se skozi nacionalne in religiozne diskurze vzpostavlja kulturna Krajina dediščine in dediščinske politike. Pomen prostora se torej razteza med "lokalnim" in "globalnim", "centralnim" in "perifernim", "modernim" in "starim". Prav to pa potrjuje procesualno naravo prostora kot tudi njegovo časovno dimenzijo.

Ključne besede: prostor, katoliški kapeli, Sveta Milost, Janez Pavel II, dediščina, religija

CORRESPONDENCE: ANNA NIEDŹWIEDŹ, Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, ul. Gołębia 9, 31-007, Kraków, Poland. E-mail: a.niedzwiedz@uj.edu.pl.