

# Conceptual planning in shaping sacred landscape in XVII century Poland. Historical research and preservation.

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## Abstract

This historical study concerns the landscape and composition of the baroque pilgrimage complex of Święta Lipka, a unique urban layout of the Jesuit Order in Warmia in the 17th and 18th centuries. The complex owes its unique position to the choice of location and the original “coded” composition. The location of the Święta Lipka complex was chosen with great care so that the existing elements of the natural landscape with a linear layout, integrated into the spatial arrangement of the architecture of the pilgrimage site, were two intersecting axes of the composition, forming a symbolic cross in space. The “landscape axis” of the complex is formed by a linear system of lakes connected by a small natural stream, while the “cultural axis” - a baroque church surrounded by a cloistered courtyard and a road with 15th small rosary chapels axially connected with the Jesuit complex, leading from the nearby town of Reszel. Such an unusual way of using the physiography of the area and landscape features shaped along with the construction of the sacred complex to obtain a large-scale, symmetrical composition makes the pilgrimage complex of Święta Lipka one of the treasures of the cultural and religious heritage of Europe, using the counter-Reformation symbolism of the cross, such as Utrecht or Hildesheim, and especially the famous baroque large-scale sacred complexes of the border region between Italy and Switzerland.

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*Keywords:* conceptual planning, sacred landscape, Polish Baroque, Święta Lipka - Reszel



Fig.1. The front of the Jesuit complex with the garden depicted on a 1750 drawing by Denitz IS PAN, neg. C. Wunsch).

## Introduction

In the process of Poland's integration with the European Union, the importance of culture and cultural heritage can hardly be overestimated. The lasting relationships that shaped the history of the different regions of Europe, the exchange of goods and ideas, and the movement of people

meant that cultural currents rarely stayed in place, spreading almost immediately and bringing a revitalizing stir to the neighboring communities. The landscape was also a spectacular forum of this exchange, and its characteristic, historic forms bring countries, regions, and towns together to this day, regardless of any administrative boundaries between them. One example of this is the baroque pilgrimage complex in Święta Lipka which, though it appears to be comfortably “local”, features extensive references which unite Polish regional heritage with the material and spiritual culture of the rest of the continent. This topic also draws attention to the study and preservation of cultural landscape, a field scientifically developing in Poland from the interwar period, between WW the I and II. Of note, it was by Polish initiative that the CSCE Symposium on the Cultural Heritage held in Krakow (Poland) in 1991 included a passage on the necessity to protect historic landscapes in its Final Document.

The Jesuit complex in Święta Lipka, connected by a pilgrimage route with the Jesuit complex in Reszel 6 km away, is without a doubt one of the grandest baroque architecture and landscape composition in Poland. Erected between 1686 and 1730, it represents an avant-garde style characteristic of the late phase of European Counter-Reformation. The composition features contemporary trends of monumental sacral architecture incorporating natural landscape. Such designs, created on an unprecedented scale with far-reaching spatial ranges and unique “encoded” compositions, are referred to in the literature as “conceptual planning”. [Corboz A.,]



Fig.2. Święta Lipka, the location of the Jesuit complex in the borderland of Catholic Warmia and Protestant Masuria, in lowering between two ribbon lakes. (Photo by W. Stępień).



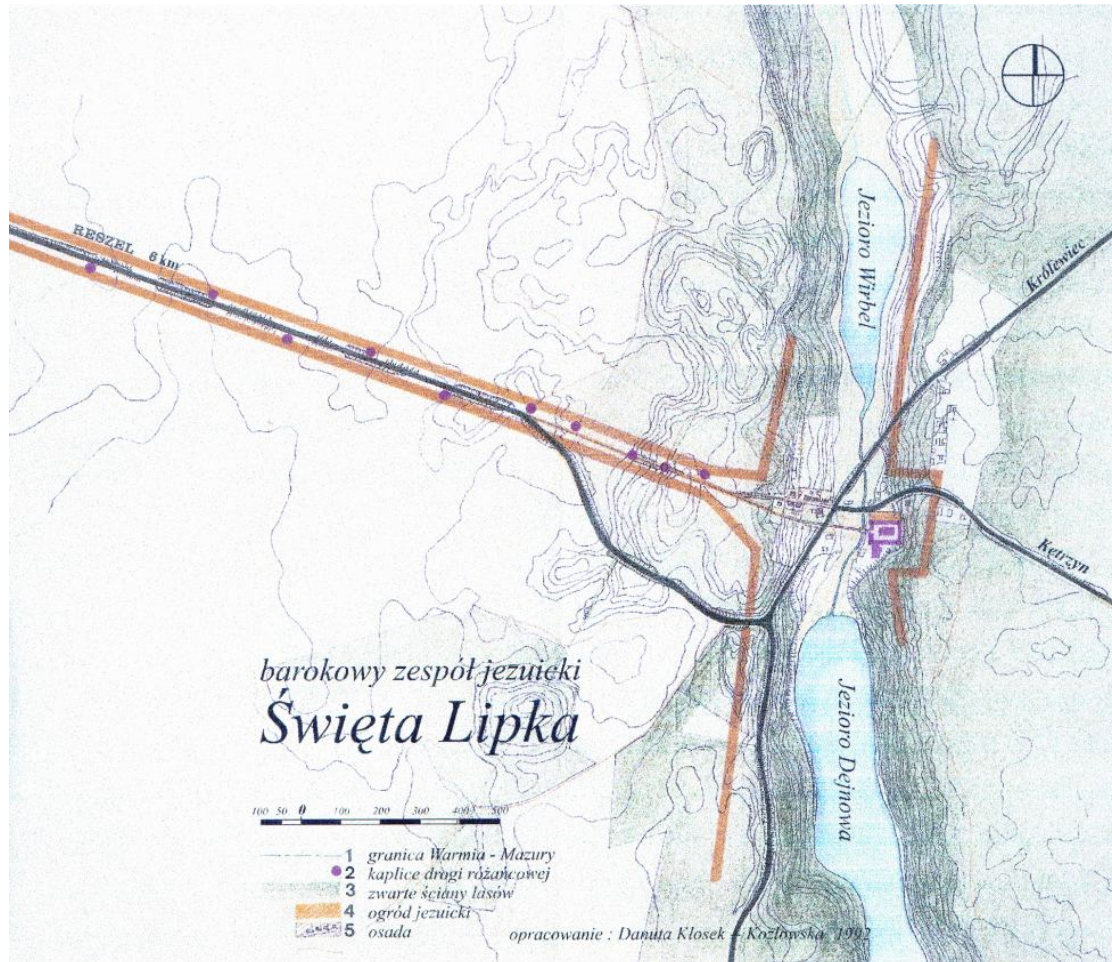


Fig.3. The “encoded” composition of the Jesuit complex in Święta Lipka. (by D. Kłosek-Kozłowska).

The key to interpreting these designs and deciphering their symbolic meaning should therefore be sought on a broad scale: in how the location was selected and the structural components laid out, as well as in the relations and spatial interconnections between them. This kind of “encoded” composition is a unique feature of the Jesuit complex in Święta Lipka. The exceptional care used in selecting the site allowed for employing features of the natural landscape as the elements of a large-scale composition, where the linearity of the countryside and the main axis of the baroque architecture and its dominant features are arranged in a symbolic cross in space.

Such an original use of the local geomorphology and landscape means that the composition of the Święta Lipka complex, while it unquestionably holds its rightful place among the most prominent foundations of the Society of Jesus's province in Poland, is also a uniquely invaluable site on the cultural map of Europe. It can be traced to established European notions of “concept planning” which used the symbolism of the cross; two examples of that, mentioned by Andrea Corbos, are Utrecht and Hildesheim.

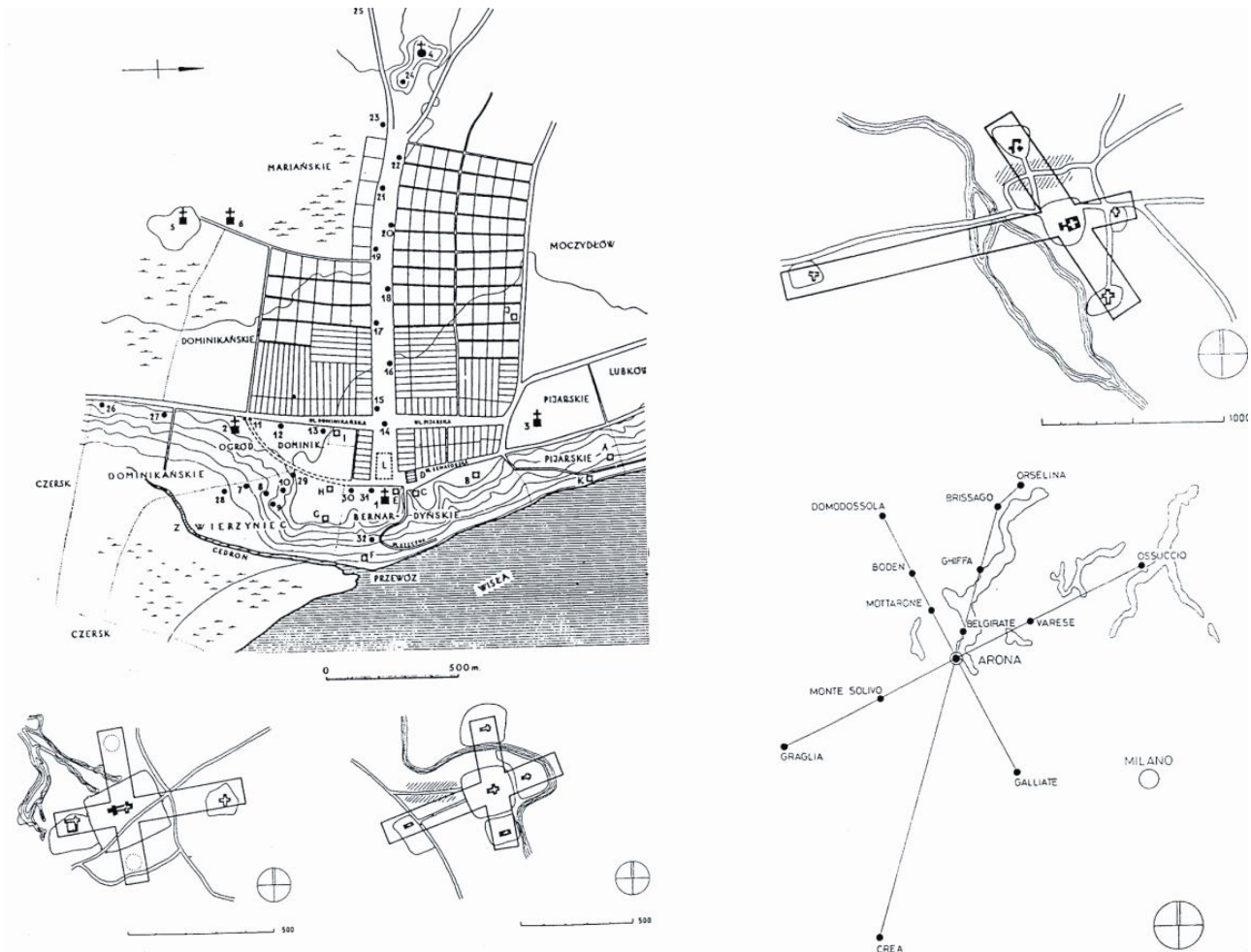


Fig.4. The baroque complexes and the symbolic use of the cross in a large scale landscape compositions; a – Góra Kalwaria by T. Zarębska i A. Liczbinski (the top left), b-Paderborn, c- Utrecht, d- Hildeshaim, e – Arona (Sacri Monti) by Andre Corboz (on the right and bottom).

The grand sacral complexes around the Italian-Swiss border bear much similarity to the spatial concept of Święta Lipka, especially in terms of the ideological background. There, monastic and residential complexes even more prominently come together in the shape of the cross, creating a “sacral landscape” of a kind, as is the case with the Sacro Monte in Arona – the home town of Saint Charles Borromeo (1538-1584) situated by the Lake Maggiore. These solutions derived directly from Counter-Reformation symbolism and the post-Tridentine recommendations of Borromeo, the great Cardinal Archbishop of Milan, whose 1573 sacral architecture programme demanded that churches dominate the surrounding landscape through size and situation.

The cardinal's efforts in shaping the architecture and planning of his family grounds by Lake Maggiore, and the many debates and meetings in his residence on Isola Bella, where prominent guests spent their free time during the Trent Council, might have made a great impact on the entire Catholic Europe.

## Foundation of the complex

The Jesuit complex in Święta Lipka was constructed on a site which had been famous for miracles since the Middle Ages. The legend says that the statue of Saint Mary sculpted by a reformed prisoner and put on a linden tree by the road from Kętrzyn to Reszel had healing powers and became an object of veneration and worship, attracting much attention and ever-growing numbers of pilgrims.

The first documented mention of pilgrimages and the existence of a chapel at this site dates back to late 15th century. But it was not until the times of Counter-Reformation that the St. Mary sanctuary in Święta Lipka gained importance, primarily because of its location right between Protestant Masuria and Catholic Warmia. It did not immediately pick the interest of the Jesuit Order, whose Counter-Reformation efforts naturally focused in cities. The Jesuits were rather looking to expand the Braniewo complex in Warmia, already in existence since 1564 – the first complex of the Order on Polish territories, founded by Stanislaus Hosius (1551-1579), a notable leader of Polish and European Counter-Reformation, also of a great Carlo Borromeo's friend. At the time, the Order was more interested in consolidating its relations with Königsberg, the capital of the Duchy of Prussia. Hence, the efforts to attract Jesuits and bring them to Święta Lipka took Stefan Sadorski, parliamentary envoy from the Duchy of Prussia and secretary to Sigismund III Vasa, many long years, even though he could count on the support of the zealously Catholic king and the bishop of Warmia Szymon Rudnicki (1604-1621). Ultimately, in 1618, Sadorski purchased Święta Lipka from an East-Prussian landowner, general Georg Heinrich von der Groeben, and endowed the land to the Society of Jesus, an act he officially confirmed in his testament in 1624. He also made Jesuits sure the endowment had some prestigious protectors: the bishop of Warmia and king Sigismund III Vasa himself.

Yet, it was not until six years later that Jesuits decided to accept the gift from Stefan Sadorski, when after a four-year siege of Braniewo by the Swedish army they judged it impossible to regain their presence there. But even then, they tried to persuade their benefactor to shift his attention towards the nearby Reszel, a medieval town with an abandoned Augustinian monastery and church, where they saw potential for opening schools. In the end, the Warmia chapter allowed Jesuits to open schools in Reszel and they settled in the post-Augustinian complex, which was conveniently situated according to the Order's preference: in close vicinity of the city walls and the bishop's castle, with the church's front closing the view from the market square. After year-long adaptation works and having settled in the town, the Order also accepted the endowment in Święta Lipka with the intention of creating a mission there, a subsidiary of the Reszel Jesuit complex.

But in 1660, the mission in Święta Lipka gained administrative independence when crowds of pilgrims had grown so considerably that it became clear the existing small chapel in the woods would have to be replaced with a bigger settlement and a proper church, and that a fixed presence of the Order would have to be established there. Since then, the relationship between Święta Lipka and Reszel would forever be manifested as a common, large-scale spatial composition. The Jesuit complex in Reszel and the pilgrimage centre in Święta Lipka 6 km away would become two closely connected extremities of a bipolar spacious baroque composition with Counter-Reformation symbolism encoded within.





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Fig.5. Reszel, the Jesuit Order in post-Augustinian complex, next to bishop's castle.

Fig.6. Święta Lipka Jesuit complex: the two-tower church surrounded with a cloistered courtyard accentuated in corners with domed chapels. Two bipolar points of the big-scale landscape composition.

### Iconographic sources

The way topographic components of the surrounding scenery intersect with the compositional elements of the main axis of the Święta Lipka complex to form a symbolic cross in the open countryside has hitherto gone unnoticed by researchers. That this composition is not coincidental can be seen from surviving iconographic sources and historic maps. Before they began construction works at Święta Lipka, the Jesuits took great care to thoroughly explore the grounds. Two surviving field sketches contain a comprehensive inventory of the area.

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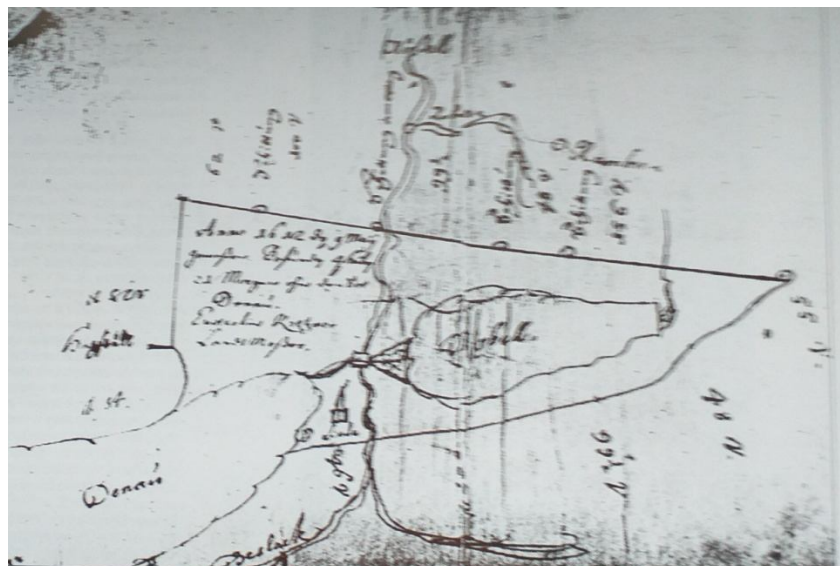


Fig.7. Eustachy Kretzmer – surveyor, “Święta Lipka topography”, 9th May 1612, drawing from nature. Diocesan Archives in Olsztyn (ODWO), sygn.6/1.

The first dates back to 1612 and was made, according to the inscription, “on the 9th of May by Eustachy Kretzmer – surveyor”. It could have been attached to the deed documenting the purchase of Święta Lipka by Stefan Sadorski from Heinrich von der Groeben. It also could have served Sadorski in initial negotiations with the Jesuits. It shows the measured surface area: “4 lams 21 morgs – less Dejnowa lake”, along with characteristic elements of landscape and topography, including the lakes Wirbel and Dejnowa joined with a stream, the tall scarps and a system of roads, including a winding route to Reszel. The drawing also shows the boundary between the Catholic Warmia and Protestant Masuria, which was delineated with granite boulders marked and described on the map (two of which have survived to this day). The sketch also marks the site of the existing chapel – “linde” (linden tree), which was soon to be replaced with a new one, founded by Sadorski – and another site marked by Kretzmer with a square at the intersection of the line formed by the lakes and the layout of the roads. It is at this spot that the Jesuit complex was to be construed: a baroque church surrounded by a cloistered courtyard and an adjacent monastery wing.



Fig.8. Eustachy Kretzmer – surveyor, “Mappa Lindensis ex tempore facta”, the state of investments at the beginning of the XVIII century - drawing from nature which shows the shift of the stream connecting two gutter lakes (ODWO), sygn.6/1.

The second surviving drawing is equally interesting. It was most definitely used to inform the landscape design works around the planned building complex, which consisted in adapting the countryside to achieve the envisaged compositional goals. The piece is dated to mid-1630s, but its content suggests that it might have been produced as late as in early 18th century. The “*Mappa Lindensis ex tempore facta*”, also drawn from nature, contains numerous details of land development and markings representing the existing buildings, which suggests that the construction works at Święta Lipka were already at an advanced stage at the time. Alongside the elements that had already appeared on the previous drawing (the local topography, road system, town limits), the map also shows buildings such as the “new inn”, the “priests' residence”, the “church” and a rectangular outline of the courtyard around the church. One can also spot the “old border stream” and, closer to the site marked as “church” - “new stream for the use of the fathers”.

The church surrounded with a cloistered courtyard and the stream in front of it were two characteristic elements of the complex still in construction in late 17th century. From the Jesuit documentation it follows that before ground was broken for the construction of the church on 11 November 1687, a large part of the hill alongside the eastern part of the courtyard was removed. The information about the “new stream” on Kretzmer's drawing is very significant. It suggests that other, equally extensive works were being implemented to have the waterway joining the two lakes moved closer to the site and used as an important compositional element by the entrance to the complex.

Source documentation, maps and field research all confirm that this was not an isolated instance of such complex engineering as part of the project. There was also considerable re-routing of the old road from Reszel in the direction of Prussia to have its 6-kilometre section between Reszel and Święta Lipka function as a pilgrimage route incorporated into the whole of the large-scale composition. The last, wooded section of the road, coming down a slope, needed re-routing and cutting down some trees in order to achieve the spectacular effect of a straight view towards the complex and the twin-towered façade of the Święta Lipka church.

Other field works consisted in forming the edges of the scarps and forest lines around the complex. Roads and avenues had to be planned and cut through the woods in straight lines, like the broad avenue along a slope to the east behind the complex, the garden to the north and the forest sections of the rosary tract. All these efforts have led to bringing the vast expanse of the landscape together into a disciplined sequence of compositional elements sharing one long axis, achieving an exceptional harmony of natural scenery and architecture.

### Landscape-based composition

The Jesuit pilgrimage complex in Święta Lipka stands on an intersection of the line of the lakes and the roads, in a spot clearly marked on Kretzmer's sketch. It is situated almost perfectly in between the two ribbon lakes Wirbel and Dejnowa, which are joined by a small waterway (*new stream for the use of the fathers*), and occupies the central part of the 400-m wide depression surrounded by tall scarps. Thanks to these scarps, the complex could be seen from above by pilgrims coming from all directions, which was of no small importance to them. The roads descend towards Święta Lipka from high scarp edges which clearly form a deep, elongated basin, with the complex at its bottom.

This precise choice of location was by no means an accident. It was, without doubt, a result of careful exploration of compositional features of the area, which was also the case with all Jesuit projects in Poland, including those considerably older than Święta Lipka. The vividly outlined, legible linear pattern of the lakes was a “ready-made” axis, one of the arms of the symbolic cross, perpendicular to the main compositional axis of the baroque architecture: the two-tower church surrounded with a cloistered courtyard whose corners are accentuated with domed chapels. The facade of the church, with a prominent vertical composition, faces the Jesuit centre in Reszel – the town on the opposite side of the grand composition – and is the starting point for the 6-kilometer pilgrim route that joins both complexes.





Fig. 9, 10. Jesuits complex in Święta Lipka (golden gate and entrance to the church), photo D. Kłosek-Kozłowska



Fig.10. The pilgrim 6-kilometer route from Reszel to Święta Lipka with the 15 rosary shrines situated alternately on both sides. By D. Kłosek-Kozłowska.

Notably, the road is divided into two almost equal straight-line segments by a small hill. It probably used to be called Lipowa Góra, which name is now borne by a small village right by the pilgrim route. It was specifically used or maybe man-made for the purpose of hiding the way the road turns there between Reszel and Święta Lipka, to make it easier for the pilgrims to follow straight lines in open countryside. Along the route, there are 15 identical rosary shrines situated alternately on both sides of the road. The first is located right at the town limits of Reszel. As one follows the tract to Święta Lipka, around the middle of the distance the spacing between the shrines becomes more and more reduced, from 300 to 200 metres.

Along the most picturesque section leading through the woods with a lovely slope, the shrines are only 150 and 100 metres apart. The scenery is particularly meaningful here, functioning as an intimate and varied background to the shrines. The paved fragment of the road beyond the forest is already part of the rigid axial composition of the baroque complex in Święta Lipka. It gently descends from the scarp, merging into the central axis of the architecture by way of a little bridge over the stream and an iron gate adorned with a line of statues, which leads into the courtyard and towards the church entrance.

The Święta Lipka complex owed its exposure to the vast green plain in front of it. The area, located between the lakes, was wet and swampy, which made it impossible to build there. It lay opposite the complex, on the other side of the stream, offering a place for the pilgrims to rest and contemplate. The plain was surrounded with tall trees and dominated on one of its sides by the front of the complex and the twin-towered church facade with a so-called blessing lodge at the centre between the towers. From that lodge, shaped like a balcony, pilgrims were blessed and preached to. The green yard in front of the complex could therefore be used as an open-space temple whose structure and material was provided by the carefully engineered landscape. The main frontage of the yard was complemented by a small garden with a geometrical, axial composition situated by the north side of the complex, where the old highway to Prussia and Kętrzyn climbed the height of the scarp to pass a small pilgrim village and cut deeper into Masuria. The front of the Jesuit complex with the garden is depicted on a 1750 drawing by Denitz.

### Meaningful landscape and the sacred space

The literature about the complex in Święta Lipka draws attention to the richness of meaning coded mainly in the church, arguing that at the time of Counter-Reformation, it was not just the size of the church and the beauty of the interior that were to convey a symbolic message, but that the architectural order, too, played a role in this respect. Hence, one should also look for symbolism in the other elements that formed the space. Certainly, the cloistered courtyard with its four corner chapels was to symbolise the four evangelists, the Solomon's temple or Jerusalem. The symbolic of the cross was a direct reference to the “holy city” of Jerusalem, popularised in late 16th century by the work of Christian Kruik van Adrichem, also known as Adrichomius, and widely used by the Counter-Reformation movements. It was this vision that informed the design of the city of Góra Kalwaria founded by bishop Wierzbowski in 1670. The symbolism of the cross was therefore well established in the 17th century Poland, though the complex in Święta Lipka was the first site where it was implemented on such a large scale. As a compositional whole, scenographically engineered in the midst of a natural landscape of the lakes and woods of Warmia, it constitutes a work of art on its own merits, the first of its kind to ever be seen in Poland.



What is special about the complex is first and foremost the original way in which the natural geomorphology of the area and the elements of scenery were used as materials in shaping the large-scale composition and encoding the symbolic meaning of the “sacred space”. Within this space, the natural scenery subjected to the compositional rigour creates a unique “meaningful landscape”, the only of its kind in Poland and the whole of Central and Eastern Europe. The sacred character of the space is marked by the rosary shrines spaced along the 6-km pilgrimage route that joins the bipolar composition of the two Jesuit sites in Reszel and Święta Lipka. The expanse of the layout means that to protect the reception of the area and the interpretation of its values it is important to preserve all the compositional elements of the site, together with their carefully shaped surrounding areas. It is particularly necessary to protect the scale of the complex, which encompasses the many prospects and interiors relevant to the scale of the landscape.



Fig.11. A village in Święta Lipka, photo D. Kłosek-Kozłowska.

## Conclusions

The emergence of “modern spiritual travels” we are now witnessing in Europe and around the world may expose the most valuable sites, especially large-scale compositional elements, to losing their cultural values. Święta Lipka is a small village with very few inhabitants, which has developed around the Jesuit sanctuary and relies economically on the pilgrimage and tourist movement. What becomes an important issue for the preservation of this site is therefore its “functional capacity”, i.e. the limit of interference the village, the historic complex and the surrounding landscape can safely absorb. The large-scale composition faces a number of threats now. The grounds available for the construction of buildings in the village are very limited, and the limit of sustainable development allowing to preserve the unique quality of the landscape will soon be achieved. Considering the



popularity of religious tourism in the 21st century, any conservation initiative aimed at preserving these values bears a considerable level of responsibility and also the question: are we to “freeze” the growth of such communities in the name of protecting the landscape composition and the cultural heritage associated with it, or it is rather one of the inalienable rights of the unique cultural heritage of Europe and around the world.

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