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## GORLICE CEMETERY- A FUNERAL SPACE IN THE LANDSCAPE

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### CMENTARZ W GORLICACH – PRZESTRZEŃ FUNERALNA W KRAJOBRAZIE

#### **Abstract**

In Poland nowadays new cemeteries are hardly ever designed. It usually comes down to designating an area and equipping with the necessary road system and fence. The design of burial fields, transport facilities, landscaping, and architectural cemetery facilities are not considered a necessity. When the city of Gorlice launched a cemetery project it announced an architectural competition, which was won by eM4 Pracownia Architektury Brataniec. Currently, the cemetery project has been submitted and is waiting for a building permit. This article presents the idea, concept, and design process of the cemetery – a contemporary sacred space that blends into the surrounding landscape.

Keywords: cemetery space, funeral home, cemetery greenery, cemetery alley, plant symbolism

#### **Streszczenie**

W polskich realiach rzadko zdarza się, aby cmentarz był projektowany. Zazwyczaj wyznaczany jest obszar, który wyposażony zostaje w niezbędny układ drogowy i ogrodzenie. Rozplanowanie pól grobowych, komunikacja, kompozycja zieleni oraz architektoniczne obiekty cmentarne nie są uznawane za konieczność. Miasto Gorlice przystępując do projektu cmentarza ogłosiło konkurs architektoniczny. Zespół eM4 Pracownia Architektury Brataniec został laureatem tego konkursu. Obecnie projekt cmentarza został ukończony i czeka na pozwolenie na budowę. Artykuł przedstawia ideę, koncepcję oraz proces projektowania cmentarza – współczesnej przestrzeni sacrum osadzonej w otaczającym krajobrazie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** przestrzeń cmentarza, dom pogrzebowy, zieleni cmentarna, aleja cmentarna, symbolika roślin

## 1. Introduction

In 2011, the local authorities in Gorlice announced a competition for the municipal cemetery. eM4 Pracownia Architektury Brataniec entered this competition and was awarded the first prize<sup>1</sup>. Formalities and complex procedures extended the design process and finally, in December 2017, the project obtained a construction permit in a modified form.

## 2. A cemetery as an element of the landscape

Death, like any act associated with life on earth, has its own forms of cultural expression that manifest themselves in many forms, ranging from non-material rites to memorials that last for centuries. Depending on the latitude and cultural circle, the dead body is treated differently, and traditional burial methods are often closely related to the natural conditions of the place [12]. In the Christian cultural tradition, the soulless body is buried. An honest human has the privilege of resting in sacred ground. Separating sacred ground from non-sacred ground requires a border. Therefore, cemeteries have always had their borders emphasized in a more or less distinct way.

The border separates the world of the living from the dead, the holy ground from the unholy land, the *sacred* from the *profane*. In the Middle Ages, cemeteries were located near churches; at that time they were an element of the city or settlement landscape [4]. The only exceptions were cemeteries associated with infectious diseases, which were located near to but outside the city. Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century these cemeteries satisfied the needs of a gradually growing population. Most graves were terrestrial and with time they disappeared, thus making space for subsequent burials.

The graves of people placed high in the social hierarchy were usually longer lasting. They were enriched with stone tombstones, often with decorative forms. Not infrequently were the tombs of the aristocracy and landowners located outside the cemetery in court and palace gardens [10]. At the same time, the bodies of the highest dignitaries rested in the crypts of temples or chapels, often mummified.

Cultural changes, the industrial revolution, and a significant increase in population resulted in cemeteries in settlement centres being liquidated and moved to the outskirts of the city or beyond<sup>2</sup>. This common tendency coincided with the development of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century garden art [5]. The need to design a large area for a cemetery led to the use of compositional tools drawn from the art of shaping parks and gardens. Cemeteries were shaped like vast parks, and greenery became their key element. They were a distinctive element in the suburban landscape. A clear form of high greenery containing unfamiliar class clearly

<sup>1</sup> Competition project for the design and spatial concept of a municipal cemetery at Dukielska street in Gorlice. Team: Marcin Brataniec – main designer, Urszula Forczek-Brataniec, Damian Mierzwa, Maciej Gozdecki. Cooperation – Paulina Nosalska; visualisations – Artur Stachura.

<sup>2</sup> The Josephine edict from 1784 ordered church cemeteries to be liquidated and moved to “a decent place” beyond properties; it also prohibited establishment of new cemeteries within city borders, see: [www.starecmentarze.pl](http://www.starecmentarze.pl)

indicated a place of eternal rest. The majority of old urban cemeteries are of this type; for example, Rakowicki Cemetery in Krakow, designed by Karol R. Kremer, Zabłocki Cemetery in Tarnów [9], Rzeszów, Bochnia and Nowy Sącz cemeteries [13]. Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, cemeteries have taken on interesting forms, a famous example of which is the Swedish forest cemetery on the UNESCO list. It was designed by Gunnar Asplund and Sigurd Lewentz [1, p. 409]. It initiated the type of vast naturalistic funeral objects integrated into the environment (Fig.1). In Poland, noteworthy are the cemetery objectives by Romuald Gutt and Alina Scholtzówna, including the Warsaw Insurgents Cemetery from 1945.

The final form of a cemetery in a given place depended on the size of the settlement, the time of its creation, the pace of development, the wealth of the inhabitants and a combination of other economic and social factors. In some smaller towns, there were small cemeteries located near churches. In larger cities, the dominant cemeteries were in the form of parks with a clear compositional objective.

Cemeteries gradually grew as towns developed. However, the composition of greenery did not always follow the developed system of roads and grave fields. In many cases the old part of cemeteries is distinguished by a lack of continuation of the park's objective. The recent departure from earth graves in recent decades has further accelerated the process of enlargement of cemeteries and an increased demand for new burial spots. Unfortunately, newly designed cemeteries rarely become the object of architectural and landscape design. The layout of the greenery, spatial composition, or the selection of materials are pushed aside and often do not become the subject of design decisions. Thus, newly created cemeteries no longer take the characteristic form of a compact stand in the landscape, but are instead a horizontal arrangement of grave fields with a random arrangement of greenery resulting from the chaotic plantings of people visiting graves. Parallel to this process, the form of old cemeteries is gradually changing. The stands of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and post-war objectives have reached their age limit and are gradually removed for health or safety reasons. Renewing vegetation restores the old form, but new trees are often not placed where the old ones once stood. Thus, old cemeteries are gradually changing their shape, as a result of which funeral spaces in the landscape are steadily losing their characteristic features.

### **3. Landscape and cultural context of the designed cemetery**

Gorlice is a town on the Ropa River, at the foot of the Low Beskids. Its rich history is reflected in a high number of monuments, including those of a funereal nature. The Parish Cemetery in Gorlice, currently located in the city centre, is a high-class spatial objective. The decision about its creation was related to the decree of Joseph II on the merging and moving of burial fields to outside cities. The first plots were bought as early as 1850 and since then the cemetery has been gradually enlarged.

Jan Sas Zubrzycki was involved in the composition and decoration of Gorlice cemetery when designing Miłkowskis' chapel; J. Barut, an architect who took part in its reconstruction in the 1930s and other numerous artists, authors of tombstones of an exceptional artistic

value. The composition of the cemetery was based on the main alley and five sectors. Lime trees dominated the greenery. The architectural character was also shaped by the use of brick and sandstone (Fig.2). A unique and extremely extensive spatial objective is a chain of World War I cemeteries, spreading throughout the surrounding landscape. Cemeteries located on the Eastern front line of the Great War constitute a permanent commemoration of the battle of Gorlice and the war-related activity of those days.

The cemeteries present high architectural and landscape values, and the individual facilities are characterized by distinctive stylistics and symbolism [2]. We should also mention a peculiar building located near Gorlice. In nearby Zagórzany, on the site of the former estate of the Skrzyńscy family, there is a family mausoleum in the form of a pyramid. The author of the grave, which was a smaller version of the Egyptian Pyramid of Cheops enhanced by a cross growing out of it, was Teodor Talowski himself (Fig.3).

The newly designed cemetery is located on the southern outskirts of the city. In its immediate vicinity is Sękowa, a village with a famous 16<sup>th</sup> century UNESCO-listed wooden church, a neo-Gothic parish church from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and cemeteries from the First World War in the surrounding hills. One of them is cemetery No. 80, which was to serve as a representative cemetery of district 3. The idea was abandoned and the site was not completed in the planned scope (Fig.4). The main function was finally taken over by cemetery No. 91 in Gorlice.

The area of the future cemetery is a gentle hill with a height of up to 354 m towards the Beskids. The slope of the hill bends naturally towards the south and is crossed by greenery of arroyos and ravines. In the neighbourhood there are several residential buildings; in the north there is a regional road, Dukielska street. From the west, the area adjoins a wooded part of the hill (Fig.4). In terms of habitat, it is a transition zone between a fertile Carpathian beech forest and an oak-hornbeam forest, so naturally there are beeches and firs, as well as hornbeams and oak trees.

In terms of landscape, this is an extremely attractive place. The opening towards the south allows for a wide view onto agricultural valleys semi-enclosed by forested mountain ranges. The area is also very exposed to the outside, therefore the spatial structure introduced in it will be significant for the surrounding landscape (Fig.5).

#### **4. The evolution of the project**

The cemetery project was shaped in two stages. The first one was a competition whose scope of rich content was determined by the rules. A large area covering the entire surface of the hill was provided for development. The design brief covered a grave site, two funeral facilities, i.e. a chapel and a secular pre-burial house, a dissecting room, technical rooms and a parking lot. The extensive surface of the burial fields called for a complex landform. As a result, the composition of the cemetery took the form of terraces joined by the main circular communication route in the form of serpentine and pedestrian paths (Fig.6).

The composition of greenery took into account two basic assumptions. The first was the creation of a dominant element in the form of a cemetery alley. At the same time, the composition of the entire area had to match the surrounding structure of fields and forests.

As a result of combining these two factors, a structure was created which is dominated by the straight lines of the main roads and naturalistic streaks of complementary greenery accompanying pedestrian paths. This complex form allowed us to achieve the effect of blending into the surrounding landscape while maintaining the clarity of the main alleys.

The scope provided for in the competition was limited at a later stage. The subject of the construction project implemented several years later became a piece of the original composition<sup>3</sup>. Its area covered the western part of the hill (Fig.7). The program assumptions were also reduced, which resulted in a smaller number of buildings.

## 5. The cemetery space

The cemetery project in the new scope maintains the main ideological assumptions by adapting the form and solutions to the revised guidelines. The main alleys and the terrace arrangement of burial fields have been preserved. On the other hand, the size and number of buildings, the location of the entry zone and the area of the grave fields have been changed. The space of the cemetery was built from four main parts: the pre-entry zone, the entrance, the ceremonial space and the burial ground space (Fig.8).

### a) The pre-entry zone

The pre-entry zone is a very important part of the building, and although it plays an auxiliary and mostly utilitarian role, it is the threshold of the *sacrum* sphere. The parking lot covers a significant area; however, in the detailed plans we ensured proper connections with the use of walking paths and blending with the existing landscape.

Caring for proper traffic routes is already evident in the approach to correction of the edge of a provincial road. The pavement was moved behind the moat and, as a result, kept away from the busy street. This pavement leads directly to a pedestrian path through the parking lot surrounded by greenery. This collision-free solution not only increases safety, but also facilitates the use of public transport. Access by car is from the cul-de-sac at Łąkowa street. Parking spaces have been covered with permeable paving overgrown with grass. The use of this type of surface in a place fully occupied only several times a year is justified because it allows for quick recovery of greenery, and thus mitigates the visual and environmental impact of the car park.

Greenery is an important element of spatial composition. Here it is formed by clusters of trees and shrubs that reflect the surrounding patterns. Thanks to this arrangement, the geometrical layout of the car park was complemented with a free green structure and thus integrated into the surrounding landscape.

The car park borders a group of technical buildings that are adjacent to the service facility and the pre-burial house. The technical and service part, which is built into a slope and covered with a green roof, gives way to more representative buildings.

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<sup>3</sup> Projekt cmentarza komunalnego w Gorlicach, team: Marcin Brataniec – main designer, Urszula Forczek-Brataniec, Damian Mierzwa, Maciej Gozdecki, Marek Bystrzeń. Cooperation –Paulina Nosalska, Kraków 2017.

#### b) The entrance zone

A gate opens onto the entrance zone, which separates the outer zone from the sacred space. After passing through the gate, we step into a square. From the north the square is occupied by the funeral house facilities; from the south there is a pergola opening toward the landscape. The western frontage is formed by the greenery of the cemetery leading towards the main alley. The square is slightly sloping and faces towards the southeast. The pergola is the setting of the view and, at the same time, it creates a spot for a pause, reflection, and meetings, before crossing the threshold of the pre-burial house (Fig.9).

#### c) The ceremonial space

The ceremonial space is for the sacred and the act of the last farewell. The pre-burial house, together with the courtyard, the cemetery alley and the place of burial, create the framework of the last road and constitute symbolic elements that are inscribed in the sequence of the rite.

The motif of a cliff as a border was used in the composition of a key part of the cemetery. The problem with the natural slope of the terrain was solved in the form of a step that brings to mind the natural forms of erosion of the Carpathian Flysch Belt. In this way we created a retaining wall in which columbarium units, steps, and benches are integrated. This is complemented with buildings that bring to mind rock boulders in terms of both layout and the material used. They will be made of mass-coloured concrete in a colour inspired by the coarse, yellowish, local sandstone (Fig.10). This composition is the main part of the cemetery. It is consistent in terms of layout and is inspired by the natural process present in the landscape; in its symbolism it refers to the last farewell. Based on the drama of the rite, it creates a scenographic landscape which worthy of profound experiences.

#### d) The space of the burial fields

The burial area has a terrace layout. It is well-integrated with the help of wide alleys. Pedestrian paths run across the terraces. The arrangement of these paths refers to the natural shapes of gorges and watercourses that cross the surrounding hills. Seating places surrounded by trees and shrubs are placed along the paths. Walking paths for cross communication run along the terraces.

Large trees frame the main alleys and the foot of the composition is complemented with regular rows of hedges. The transverse paths are framed by free compositions of small trees and shrubs that refer to the surrounding vegetation.

The burial fields are divided into smaller sectors focused on individual terraces. They are separated by the main alleys and cross the transverse paths. In addition, groups of greenery and natural hedge screens were introduced in order to divide the sectors of the burial fields into parts.

## 6. Greenery

### a) Composition

The greenery composition was greatly influenced by the demanding surroundings as well as the site's significant function. The composition was based on two structures: the geometric lines of the alleys and the free streaks crossing them. The main outline of the system consists of linear alleys and rows of tall trees. They are meant to make the place unique and give it a distinct cultural character both in the view from outside and in the view from the cemetery. In the plan the alley follows the main traffic structure, thus constituting the core of the composition. The geometrical arrangement is cross-cut by transverse greenery systems, with the aim of softening and integrating it into the surrounding landscape. Their form refers to nearby green streaks that accompany watercourses and mid-field trees. They constitute the surroundings of the pedestrian routes that complete the communication structure of the main alleys.

In the entrance and the ceremonial area, the greenery perfectly matches the form of the square and courtyards between the buildings. It creates naturalistic but geometrized marquetry in the form of cracks, thus forming a characteristic pattern inspired by the terrain.

In addition to the main composition of the cemetery, greenery was used to mask and strengthen the slopes. The overall plan consists of alleys, transverse paths, decorative compositions, greenery surrounding the car park, and greenery strengthening the slopes.

### b) Species selection

The area of the cemetery is a hill slope with a southern exhibition exposed to strong winds. Because of the difficult initial conditions, sycamore was selected for the alleys. It is a common admixture tree in this area. While it is resistant to drought, wind, it is also long-lived and beautiful. Lindens grow nearby on the roadside, so maple alleys differ from the roadside trees and will not imply a continuation of the communication system. Hornbeam hedges will be planted at the base of the alleys. Hornbeam is the main element of the oak-hornbeam forest; it responds well to trimming and will effectively complement the sycamore alleys. Their arrangement runs along the contours, so they will be clearly visible and will frame picturesque views toward the southern side.

The main alleys, which run across the slope, cross the paths, thus facilitating communication between the particular grave fields. Their nature brings to mind the free ribbons of watercourses that cut into the surrounding hills. The free streaks of greenery surrounding the paths are filled with smaller local trees that occur on the boundaries and accompany the watercourses but are also resistant to the difficult initial conditions. Their form and arrangement are intended to refer to the natural groups in the surrounding landscape. These are mostly fast-growing trees such as willows, birches, haws, aspens, rowans, and hazel. These plants will give way to the main alleys that are different in colour and structure, thus ensuring the assumed spatial effect.

The new cemetery designed from scratch. With regard to plant material, this means a change in conditions as the plants grow [7]. Both the plants and the environment they create and grow in will change. The shaded areas will gradually expand; the air humidity will increase and the level of insolation will be limited to the feet of tall trees. In the initial stage



of maple growth, woody and shrub-like forms of afforestation will be dominant and made up of rapidly growing plants. They will provide shade and help achieve the effect of blending into the landscape. Several years later, as a result of the gradual growth of the maple trees, the composition will begin to change and the alley system will become more and more clear in the landscape. Over the years, the composition will become more and more expressive. The process of merging into the landscape will be gradual. It will remain in relation to the change of grave areas. As the size of the greenery increases, it will better complement the structure.

### c) Plant symbolism

In addition to compositional issues, the selection of greenery was inspired by symbolism. Both trees and shrubs have a rich meaning associated with burial and the afterlife.

In the funeral home, in the wall for the background of the ceremony, a large window was designed to open onto a miniature garden. In this garden, the alder is omnipresent and is a symbol of despair. After the service, outside, the alder is dominated by a row of sycamore trees. The sycamore is believed to be a divine tree of blessings, and the maple is believed to be a protective tree. Traditionally, cradles and coffins were made of maple wood, as the maple was credited with the power to drive out evil spirits; the proverbial “tomb board” could only be made of maple wood. A walk among tall trees which symbolize harmony and order is designed to bring solace.

Once we pass by the main alley, the way to the burial site will lead along a footpath in the vicinity of comforting trees: hazel, which is considered a tree with strong protective powers and sound judgment; willow, which symbolizes sadness and longing but, at the same time, soothes the body and soul; rowan, which protects against evil powers; hawthorn, which separates the real world from the world of the dead; and the apple tree, which symbolizes immortality [6].

## 7. Conclusions

Designing this cemetery was an extraordinary experience. It required determination of the project team, which – despite much formal and economic turbulence – worked extremely hard in order to achieve their goal. The goal was unusual as it presented an opportunity to give a worthy setting to funerals and a place of burial. This ceremony, which is accompanied by the strongest feelings and emotions and in which everyone participates sooner or later, rarely has an adequate spatial context.

In Poland, new cemeteries are hardly ever designed. The design usually only concerns equipping the area with the necessary road system and a fence. The arrangement of burial fields, communication, greenery composition, and architectural cemetery facilities is not considered a necessity. For unknown reasons, cemeteries have lost their status, and existing patterns are no longer continued in new buildings. One could look for justification in the current law, which mainly regulates sanitary issues, but it also clearly states that a cemetery should be built and maintained as a park-like area [14]. It appears that this is not sufficient.

The way new cemetery facilities are implemented and the changes to greenery compositions in old cemeteries are changing the image of cemeteries as elements of the landscape. The idea of the cemetery as a park is no longer continued and is supported neither by visitors to cemeteries nor managers.

The presented project is an attempt to break the trend which categorises the cemetery as an infrastructure object. This cemetery has been designed as a park that blends into the surrounding landscape and creates an interior space, while creating a setting for the ceremony and those who visit their deceased loved ones.

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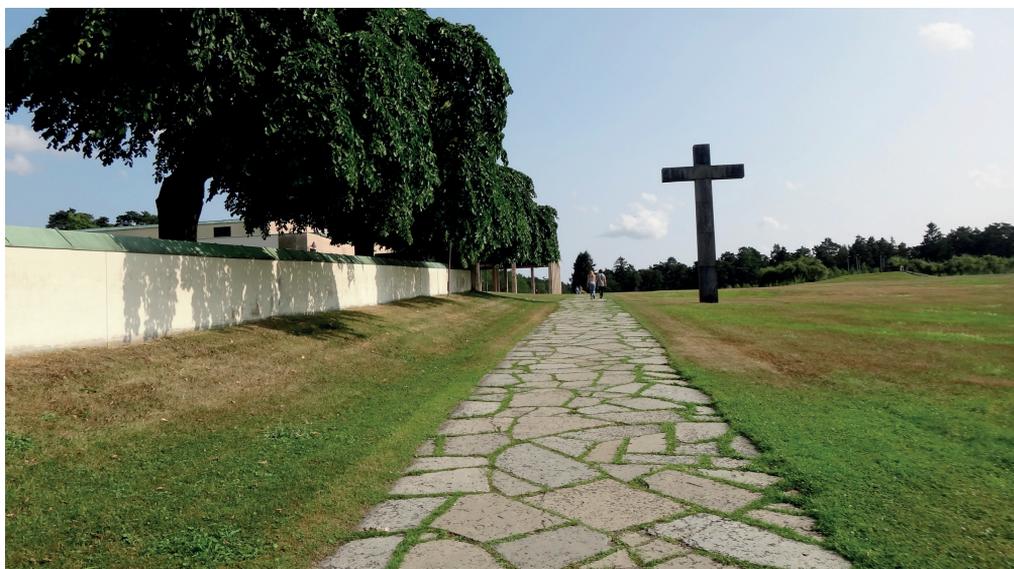


Fig. 1. Forest cemetery Skogskyrkogården in Stockholm, by G. Asplund and S. Lewerentz  
(photo by U. Forczek-Brataniec)

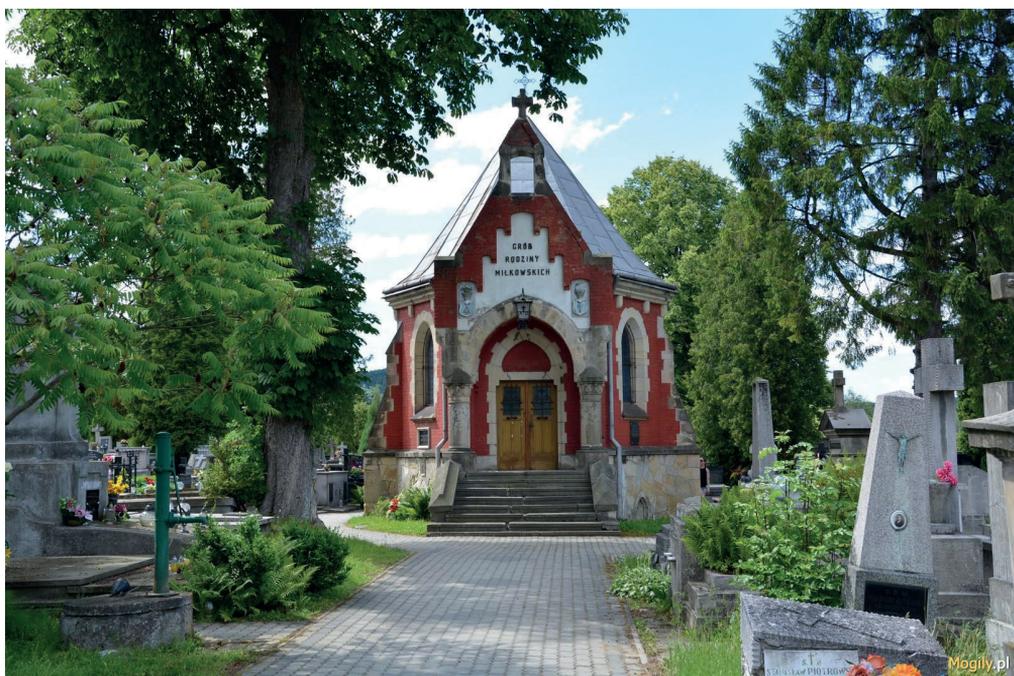


Fig. 2. 19th-century Parish cemetery in Gorlice. The Milkowscy chapel Kaplica Milkowskich project:  
J. Sas Zubrzycki (source: [15])



Fig. 3. The Skrzyńscy Mausoleum, by T. Talowski (source: [16])



Fig. 4. 1st World War cemetery No.80 in Sękowa. A partially implemented project of a representative cemetery for the 3rd district of Gorlice (source: [17])



Fig. 5. Location of the new parish cemetery in Golice (photo by M. Brataniec)



Fig. 6. Competition concept, a bird-eye's view, ©eM4

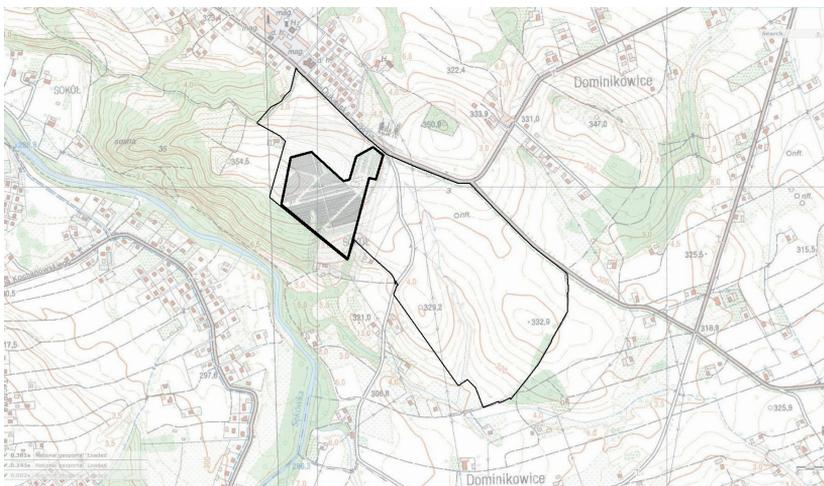


Fig. 7. The scope of the building project in combination with the scope of the competition work, © eM4





Fig. 9. Entrance area with a set of buildings, © eM4



Fig. 10. Funeral house, © eM4