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#the identity of a place
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iconosphere

The symbolic dimension of the city – the presence of a dragon in the urban space of Krakow

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Abstract

The paper deals with the issues of the symbolic dimension of a city created from the urban and social subsystems. The city and its landscape are understood here as a system of signs functioning in two distinct orders of reality, yet still dependent on each other, i.e. the material order and the imaginary one. In the paper, we ask questions about the role of the symbol in the contemporary process of creating the specificity of a place. We also speak about the identity of a place, about endowing a place with features of familiarity, about the social need to recognise the symbol. The presence of a dragon, a creature born in the human imagination, in the urban space of Krakow was chosen as an example of the symbolic dimension of the city. Krakow is a historic city, the former capital of Poland, a city rich in diverse symbolic capitals. The dragon is a symbol of Krakow. It is present in the legend about the city's origins, and is also commonly present in the material space of Krakow. It is part of the city's identity.

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Introduction

The end of the 20th century (the 1980s) brought to the world, as well as to Poland, the development of a new model of social life. This model has many incarnations, however, one can talk about the formation of “post-industrial society” (Bell 1994), or “post-modern society” (Bauman 1994). This society has the features of highly developed urbanised societies, with a growing service sector. One of the features of such a society is the tendency to loosen its bonds with the place, i.e. deterritorialisation, here understood as the loss of the impact of geographical space and the state on a significant number of social phenomena (Burszta 1998). At the same time, in “post-modern society” there are returning actions that aim at rerouting the experience that has been built over centuries in the life space of a city’s given community. Experience is described using symbols specific to the local landscape. In the case of Krakow, an element of the symbolic culture of the place is the dragon. This symbol is so strong that in Poland the word “dragon” is associated with Krakow and the expression ‘Krakow dragon’ is in common usage. It is on this symbol, the dragon symbol, among other things, that Krakow’s citizens build their bond with the city. The present article deals with how widespread and multifaceted the impact of this symbol is.

The articulation of the meaning of the dragon symbol in the urban space of Krakow and its role in building the inhabitants’ bonds with their city, which are the aims of this article, were preceded by theoretical considerations. Their aim was to organise the meaning of concepts and draw attention to the problem of symbolisation processes in a large city of “post-industrial society” in which the functional, modernist and modernising viewpoint prevails. Symbolisation is understood here as assigning meanings, other than utilitarian, to urban private homelands.

The aim of the author of the article was to show how the presence of signs of the dragon symbol in the material and social space of Krakow is a multifaceted issue. In Krakow, the presence of the dragon has a symbolic dimension. Its presence is eternal and ubiquitous. In Krakow, the dragon “lives in a rock cave”, is depicted in sculptures and bas-reliefs on the walls of Krakow’s edifices, tenement houses, palaces and churches, it graces gutters, gargoyles, and portals. Another important aim of the work was to emphasise the importance of cultivating tradition, referring to symbols as a material that builds the identity of both individuals and the community. The work fits into the broader social trend calling for a return to places of residence that have been evolutionarily shaped in cities over the centuries. It calls for the rejection of the post-modern model of society, for the rejection of the idea that in defining human identities the territory

loses its key role. The work joins the set of opinions recognising that it is beneficial for urban communities to commonly look for ways to restore small social-urban or safe neighbourhoods in cities through urban renewal programmes. The presence of symbols in the city space, which is emphasised in this work, makes it easier for inhabitants to shape their world, their little urban homeland. It makes it possible for inhabitants to find a sense of safety and belonging to the city community.

This article is about Krakow – a city whose origin is associated with a legend about the dragon. It is an example of reflections in the humanistic field of cultural geography. Humanistic geography attempts to understand the human world by analysing people’s relations with nature, their geographical behaviour, and their feelings and ideas with regard to space and place (Tuan 1976). It focuses on the description and interpretation of landscape to disclose its symbolic meanings (the iconography of landscape).

Humanistic geography takes an interest in the interpretation of landscape as a carrier and repository of symbolic meanings, rather than in establishing a quantitative correlation between people and place. The methodology is based on hermeneutics (the theory of interpretation and clarification of meanings (Sapkota 2017)). Therefore, the authors applied qualitative research methods, i.e. participant observation, use of documentary sources, and field work (Geography Open Textbook Collective 2014). Data on cultural and social events the motif of which was a dragon were collected over a period of two years. Moreover, buildings in Krakow with the image of a dragon were documented on photos as part of archival research. Among the 77 registered dragon figures, 21 representing the ornamentation of buildings and 5 related to human activity have been presented in this article.

The theoretical considerations were divided into three parts. The first one deals with the symbolic dimension of the city. It is about the role of a symbol in the life of a contemporary city and its importance in building the inhabitants’ bonds with the city. The second one presents considerations of “identity” and the “identity of a place”. These are short reminders of the results of sociological research organising these concepts and pointing out that when talking about the identity of a place one should distinguish a “personal identity of a place” from an “identity of a place of a social nature”, which is explained in the text. At the end, in the third part, the need to see the symbol as a carrier of tradition was emphasised because tradition is not chosen, tradition is found, as M. Porębski (1972) believed.

About the symbolic dimension of the city

Since its inception in the history of civilisation, the city has always meant and means both the material sphere

(including its geographical features such as location and topography) and its population. Using the words of a sociologist (Wallis 1990), the city has been, and will be, a system composed of two organically linked, autonomous subsystems interacting on the principle of feedback, i.e. the urban and social ones. At the same time, the city and its landscape, understood as a *system of signs*, function in two separate orders of reality which are still dependent on each other. These are the material order and the imaginary one. However, it is not the matter of the city, but its perception and use (also the use of architecture) that makes them cultural facts. A city, its districts, streets, buildings, or architectural details become signs and symbols when they are perceived socially. A socially perceived city becomes a carrier of values, a source of historical and cultural content. We live in the era of post-modernism where the processes of deterritorialisation dominate, and most of us perceive the world through the prism of functionality, modernism, and modernisation. Every action triggers a reaction. Some of the city's inhabitants recognise the role of symbols, as do, which is nice, the people who determine their condition and development. For them, they are carriers of values. Through their activities and actions, they launch and implement in social life the processes of symbolisation, i.e. assigning supra-utilitarian meanings to urban private homelands.

The subject discussed in the article is the symbolic dimension of the city. It is an attempt to widen the response to the questions about the role of symbols in the contemporary process of creating the specificity of a place. We also talk here about the identity of a place, about assigning features of homeland to a place, and about the ways of creating relations/bonds with the recipient and influencing the actions/behaviour of the inhabitants.

Dragons, creatures/monsters/animals born in the human imagination and never actually existent, which have played a significant role in the mythology of numerous cultures, were chosen as the symbol.

Krakow, the former capital of Poland, a European city located in Malopolska, a historical district in southern Poland, was chosen as the city. Krakow, a city full of spiritual and material history, can boast a unique and rich symbolic capital. In its present form, the city is a realisation of various urban utopias, epochs, and interests, and its community today (formed after World War II and over the last twenty years) is heterogeneous. It is built by "long-standing" communities living here for generations, new communities (with the second or third generation living in this city), or those that arrived here just "a while ago". Developed in the Middle Ages and founded under German town law in the middle of the 13th century, from the very beginning Krakow's downtown had an important

symbolic and representative function in the duchy/state of Poland, always of a supra-regional nature and, for many centuries, also as a capital. Why do we link Krakow with the dragon? Well, there is a legend about a dragon that is connected with the foundation of Krakow. It is a legend known to all Poles, young and old, one that is long-lasting and popular in the social consciousness not only of Krakow. No wonder that the dragon/dragons have become and are one of the symbols of Krakow's *iconosphere*, a symbol recognisable and close to the inhabitants and tourists who come here to get to know and admire the city.

About identity and the identity of a place

Do "space" and "place" mean the same thing? On the basis of quantitative research, *space* is treated in two ways, i.e. as a dependent variable, or as an independent one. Its symbolic presentation, where space is to be regarded as a system of signs reflecting extra spatial systems of values, is not included in this perspective of quantitative research. Space can exist in the physical sense and also, which is important, in the social one. The latter exists when elements of space (including the space of the city) are perceived and interpreted socially.

Space is a universal symbol of freedom in the Western world. Space is wide open, suggests the future, and encourages action. Closed and humanised space becomes a *place*. Compared to space, a place is a quiet centre of established values. The symbolic distinction between a place and space was defined in this way by the famous American geographer Y.-F. Tuan (1987).

We adopt his point of view as our own. Thinking about a *place*, we see it as a *quiet centre of established values*.

Residing and living actively in Krakow, we observe its social life and the city's matter changing over time. In Krakow, consciously and unconsciously, we always return to historically established places and to those that anchor us culturally, to places where we feel the presence of the material remnants of the past. We are not alone in this, because one of man's basic needs is the sense of identity and integration of personality. A similar situation occurs in the case of another equally important human need (though we are often unaware of it), i.e. the need to preserve the cultural environment, which is no less important than the preservation of the natural environment. The key word *identity* was spoken, key to the understanding of symbolic reality. We recognise identity as a more or less permanent sense of unity with someone, but also with what is socially produced: with places which man experiences sensually, in which he meets others, works, rests, with places where he experiences important, good and bad, moments in his life. So, the case is that, defining his own identity, man defines himself by selecting (more or less consciously)

and valuing various relationships connecting him with the world. He creates self-images, and refers to what is external. In traditional cultures, the identity of people, things and places were strongly dependent on one another; identity blurring is a result of increased mobility and the ubiquitous exchange of goods (Lash 1979). We arrive at the notion of *cultural identity*, which A. Jawłowska (2001) defines as the process of self-determination facing some *components* of symbolic reality, of a world of culture. The city and its associated social imagery can constitute this group of components. In social perception, material objects and specific places are usually the most important carriers of culture. This is because these objects or places last outside human consciousness and may be a permanent reference point for it.

Speaking about the *identity of a place*, we can see that the dimensions of this identity appear to be diverse. On the one hand, we have a unique *social identity* that is associated with the sense of similarity and community with others, and a *personal identity* based on the sense of uniqueness and difference from others (Bossak-Herbst 2009). Both of them (as well as those extending between the two poles) are interesting, desirable and should not be subject to valuation, since they both serve to get to know the city and establish dialogue with Krakow. On the other hand, we can consider the identity of a place as a description of the power of affection for the place of residence/living, from a very strong one to its complete lack. The *strong identity of a place* is expressed in phrases such as: “a beloved place”, “oh, great! – How typically Krakovian” or “I am from here”. The *anti-identity of a place* stems, above all, from the feeling of weakening, or even breaking the traditional attitudes of identification with the private homeland. When identification with a place is weak or negative, then the social or personal dimension is blurred (or unconscious), and the city is not considered significant in any of them.

The *personal identity of a place* requires a person's openness, it is unstable and unspecified, just like the power of influence of architectural codes is unclear. The individual demands of themselves commitment, chooses and interprets their “being in the world”, looks for what is unique, different, unnamed, and new in the space of the city. A person who is able to perceive, get to know, and appreciate the cultural or aesthetic diversity of Krakow's architecture developed before World War II usually stands in opposition to the city's urban environment created today. This identity is essentially created independently by the individual who is actively searching in the city's landscape for something to denote the imaginings of their own city, by a person who is trying to understand the code of Krakow's old landscapes.

The *identity of a place of social nature* is a description of the city's landscape, its history and architecture in order to build experience shared with others, and to create an image of important or significant areas of Krakow. Such an identity of a place treats the city's space as the public good, and participants in the discussion about Krakow wish to actively participate in the shaping of Krakow's space. The individual does not discover the meaning of the *iconosphere* alone. This is done by the community, and the individual is given a ready recipe for the understanding of signs, although he or she co-participates in its construction. In the social understanding of the identity of a place, the social memory associated with the landscape of Krakow is an evaluating memory and one focused on emotions.

About the need to discern a symbol

Tradition is not chosen, tradition is found. What can be chosen is only one or other attitude to tradition, thus choosing at the same time all the closer and additional consequences of such a choice, takeover or abandonment (Porębski 1972).

The cognitive and spiritual experience of a place, creating bonds with a place, “getting used” to the surrounding space, and endowing it with the features of familiarity, is the subject, topic or, more broadly, content of interdisciplinary research. Archaeologists, anthropologists, sociologists, urban planners, architects, engineer-builders, geographers, historians, art historians and many others deal with the city, its past, its life and development. For each of the researchers into these professions, the city is a living, changeable and changing organism, both in time and in space. It seems that a good metaphor for the process of continuous transformations of the city is to give it the name of *palimpsest*. One can say that the palimpsest city sets the values and contributions of our time among the monuments of the past (Kroessler 2015). Historic districts of cities, the history of which is counted in hundreds of years, grew on the remains of urban matter, on the ruins of demolished buildings, planted fortifications, the waste and garbage left on the spot; the city “grew upwards” preserving its cultural past in the form of layers (and Krakow is such a city). It sometimes happens that these layers are built from the ruins and debris after dramatic events in the history of cities. For example, the wartime and post WW2 fate of Warsaw, Dresden and Gdańsk can be recalled here. There are also cities whose lifetime, continuity of lasting, can be measured not in hundreds but in thousands of years (Jerusalem was founded 3000 years BC, Damascus is over 7000 years old, Rome was founded in 753 BC, Yerevan in 782 BC). In these cities, traces of their origins should be sought deep underground. An example would be English

London, where the traces of Roman settlement were discovered 12 metres below the surface of the present-day city (*‘Entire streets’ of Roman London...* 2013).

The city can be considered on a historical and spatial scale. We can perceive it as a whole, or focus on selected places, and characteristic or typical buildings of the city. And finally, we can eventually recognise the symbols of the city clearly inscribed in its history.

Dragons – imaginary creatures

It is a curious fact that creatures created in the imagination of man have accompanied him in his life for centuries. Today, they are present in all civilizations regardless of latitude. In China, they are called *lung*, in the Hawaii *kele-kona* or *mo’o*, in India *makara*, in Serbia and Croatia *zmaj*, in Finland *lohikaarme*, the Cherokee Indians named them *unkltena*, the Sioux – *unhcegila*, the Turks – *ujderha*, the Māori of New Zealand – *tarakona*, the Hungarians – *srkana*, the Japanese – *tatsu*, the Welsh – *draig*, the Germans – *Lindwurm*, the Danish – *draak*, and the English – *dragon*. In the cultures of the Aztecs, Arabs, Danes, Estonians, Finns, Greeks, Hebrews, Romanians, Russians, and Turks, the dragon was called a *creature* (Jones 2000).

The supposed power of these creatures has grown to become a symbol of strength and cruelty. The word *dragon* is derived from the Latin *draconem* (*draco* in the nominative case), which means a “great snake, dragon”, and from the Greek word δράκων, *drakon* (*drakontos*, δράκοντος in the genitive case), which can be translated as a “snake, gigantic sea fish”. And although dragons have never existed, they became objects arousing fear and commanding respect, they were challenged to duels and, owing to legends, they “took part” in the founding of cities. For example, in the British Isles the dragon figure appears in the founding legends of 23 cities that were established between the 11th and the 13th centuries (Jones 2000).

The placing of a dragon’s image in the coat of arms of a city is an illustration of the dragon becoming a permanent feature of the history of cities. Ever since the early Middle Ages, the dragon has been depicted as a winged monster, a scaly amphibian, with a crocodile’s or wolf’s head (Szetelnicki 2004). It is pictured in the coat of arms as a creature staving off the city’s misfortune, or portrayed as evil. And that is why it is fought. Dragons are killed by Christian saints such as St. George, St. Margaret, St. Michael, and such scenes can be seen in the coats of arms of European cities, including Polish ones. Coats of arms displaying a saint fighting with a dragon are owned by both large cities, capital cities (Moscow), and medium and small towns (in Poland e.g. Milicz, Nowy Sącz, Sanok, Biała Podlaska, Brzeg Dolny, Dolsk, Dzierżoniów, Łańcut, Ostróda). The dragon depicted in coats of arms of cities

as a creature staving off misfortune, as a tamed beast, can be found in the coats of arms of Welsh Cardiff, Austrian Klagenfurt, Slovenian Ljubljana, and Russian Kazan. Also the coat of arms of English London is supported by two dragons; in Poland such an image of the dragon can be found in the coats of arms of Żmigród and Ornetka.

The dragon in the urban space of Krakow

Sociologists consider reading signs and symbols as the basis for effective interpersonal communication (Szczepański, Ślęzak-Tazbir & Świątkiewicz-Mośny 2006). Krakow’s inhabitants easily associate the Wawel Royal Castle, St. Mary’s Basilica, Lajkonik, and Kościuszkowski Mound with Krakow; images of these places are the icons of Krakow in our minds.

A special place among the symbolic objects of Krakow is occupied by the Wawel Dragon, which, as the legend has it, contributed significantly to the founding of the city. This legend was written as early as in the 12th century and is included in the manuscript of the anonymous chronicler (Gallus Anonymus) in the *Polish Chronicle*. The legend of the Wawel Dragon was accepted by the city community as an element contributing to the history of Krakow. What is more, it was turned into a symbol which marked the city. Thus, the Wawel Dragon became a symbol of the city, and figures of dragons populated Krakow, hiding in the ornaments of gargoyles, in free-standing sculptures (made of limestone and dolomite), as well as in the bas-reliefs gracing façades of buildings and tenement houses and in the details and ornaments of door and window portals. Dragons also became known as an element ubiquitous in the cultural landscape of the city. They are present in its cultural life.

In the material space of Krakow, the dragon is commonly present. And it has been so for centuries. It should be noted that in Poland the habit of placing apotropaic creatures, including dragons, was mainly practised during the Gothic and Renaissance periods, and its revival took place in Krakow at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries (Rajchel 2014).

The oldest sculptures depicting a dragon, or creatures which could be associated with a dragon, include winged griffins placed at the entrance to Romanesque St. Leonard’s crypt in the Wawel Castle dating back to the 12th century, as well as the dragon in the 14th-century portal of the Holy Trinity Basilica, the creatures placed in the portal of the 14th-century Gothic “Pod Jaszczurami” tenement house in Rynek Główny [the Main Market Square], the dragon placed on the keystone of the vault in the Gothic hall of the 14th-century Hetmańska tenement house in Rynek Główny, the dragon on the corbel of a rib of the vault of the Garden of Gethsemane from the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries at St. Barbara’s church, two pairs

of dragons gracing the Renaissance portal of the 15th-century Nagocińska tenement house in Floriańska street, in the heart of the Old Town (Dobrowolski 1978; Rożek 1993; Rajchel 2014) (Fig. 1).

In the Krakow urban area, we also find images of dragons gracing elegant places. An example here is the edifice of Collegium Witkowskiego of the Jagiellonian University, erected at the beginning of the 20th century. The dragon was brought here by the Krakow architect Teodor Talowski, who revived the custom of placing apotropaic beings at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries by doing so in the buildings he designed (Rajchel 2014). Many tenement houses and secular buildings have apotropaic sculptures placed in exposed places, out of concern for the safety of their users. Examples include the four dragons on the façade of the Brothers Hospitallers of St. John of God Hospital, or the dragon guarding the former city power substation (Fig. 2, Fig. 3).

The tradition of rich architectural detail, a mandatory element of which was an emblem (including one very often depicting a dragon in various forms), found its particularly fruitful application during the inter-war period of the 20th century. At that time (thanks to the extending of Krakow's borders and new housing development in formerly rural areas), Krakow was enriched with a strip of modernist districts, where tenement houses and buildings were decorated with emblems, and portals with bas-reliefs (*Krakowski Szlak Modernizmu...*) (Fig. 2, Fig. 3).

In Krakow, as in many European cities, gargoyles, i.e. decorative, ornamental outlets of roof gutters, started appearing everywhere from the Middle Ages onwards, and especially in the Renaissance era. Made of stone, and later from sheet metal plate, they took on fancy forms of human faces, animal jaws, and fancy creatures. In Krakow, these were the images of dragons. Gargoyles were usually placed on the roofs of temples, but also on the roofs of tenement houses and palaces. They warned against evil but, at the same time, protected one from it since it was believed that demons must escape when they see their own image (Fig. 3).

References to the legend of the dragon can be seen today in street furniture, advertisements for catering facilities, and as a symbol of the campaign for clean air in Krakow (the words *smog* and *dragon* [*smok* in Polish] are phonetically similar) (Fig. 4).

The dragon which is most often visited in Krakow is the dragon from Smocza Jama (the Dragon's Den). It is a fire-belching, several-metre-tall sculpture of the dangerous creature from the legend; it was sculpted by Bronisław Chromy, a Krakow artist (Fig. 4). The den named Smocza Jama (the Dragon's Den) is located (in limestone rock) at the foot of the Wawel Hill, the top of which houses the

historic residence of the princes and kings of Poland as well as the cathedral which is the resting place of the majority of Poland's rulers. The den opens towards the River Vistula, and access to it is guarded by the legendary dragon. Krakow guides bring crowds of tourists here. It should be remembered that Krakow is the most important and most visited tourist city in Poland. In 2015 alone, Krakow was visited by more than 10 million tourists (7.43 million domestic, 2.62 million foreign). In the first three places on the list of Krakow's attractions, tourists mentioned the Rynek Główny (Main Market Square), Wawel Castle (including the chambers of the Royal Castle, the Cathedral, Sigismund Bell, and – please note! – the Wawel Dragon), as well as the former Jewish district – Kazimierz (Borkowski et al. 2015). The dragon from the Dragon's Den not only has its artistic value, it does not only materialise a living legend in Krakow, but it also supports the treatment of children and the medical care of senior citizens. An aluminium replica of the sculpture was auctioned during the 23rd final of the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity – a nationwide annual charity event (*Allegro Charytatywni website*).

The Wawel Dragon has also found its place in science. Namely, after the discovery in Lisowice, a village 150 km northwest of Krakow, of a predatory archosaur, it was given the species name of Smok Wawelski (the Wawel Dragon) (the length of the reconstructed skeleton is 5–6 m, the age is about 205–200 Ma) (Nazar 2009). Animal bones hanging at the door of the Wawel Cathedral are a curiosity verging on science and fairy tales. Owing to their size, these bones had been regarded as remains of a dragon for centuries (!), and later, from the mid-16th century, as bones of animals from before the biblical flood. In reality, they are fragments of the skull of a hairy rhinoceros, and bones of a whale and mammoth (Fig. 1).

As already mentioned earlier, the legend of the dragon has become integral to the history of the city, and is present and cultivated in Krakow. It is part of the city's identity. The city (as an institution) and its inhabitants refer to the traditions that have grown based on the legend of the dragon. Many cultural events, occasional and periodical, are associated with the symbol of the dragon. Significant outdoor events include the Great Dragon Parade, which has been organized since 2000 by the Grotesque Theatre in Krakow. Co-financed by European funds, the project "The Great Dragon Parade – Myths and Legends of Europe" was implemented in the years 2006–2007 in collaboration with St. Patrick's Festival in Ireland (Dublin), Divadlo Maskaron in the Czech Republic (Prague), Heart of the Dragon Festival in Great Britain (Newcastle), and Teatro do Elefante in Portugal (Setubal). Its aim was to preserve and show the common cultural heritage contained in European myths, legends and stories depicting

the origins of cities, countries, European lands, and to spread knowledge about the common roots and cultural values of European nations (*Wielka Parada Smoków website*). Every year, the Great Dragon Parade is both a show of the kind of “light and sound” taking place on the River Vistula near the Wawel Royal Castle, a family picnic on the Vistula Boulevards, and a street parade in the Old Town (Fig. 4). More than 1000 children design and make several-metre-tall dragons (there were 40 of them in 2017) to compete for the title of the most beautiful and ingenious dragon. In 2017, the slogan of the parade was “Mediterranean Dragons”. The dragon parade is one of the most recognisable cultural events in Krakow (*Raport końcowy badania... 2016*).

Dragons may not only be seen in Krakow; they appear as funny creatures during festivals, and as sculptures or bas-reliefs decorating the city, but they can also be won as a trophy. At the Krakow Film Festival, organised in the city since 1961, the Dragon Award (Individual Achievement Award), the Golden Dragon, and the Silver Dragon are awarded in three competitions (in the international documentary film festival as well as in the international and Polish short film festivals) (*Krakow Film Festival website*). Bronisław Chromy is the author of the statuette of the dragon.

Other cultural events in Krakow where “the dragon is present” include competitions, reading events, and theatre performances for children, or historical-tourist walks organized by the city also for children and young people. The literary and artistic contest organised in 2017 under the slogan “Krakow on the Vistula” for primary school pupils from Krakow clearly demonstrated that the dragon is a symbol of this city (Fig. 4). And it inextricably links the city with the Vistula (*Małopolska Biblioteka Publiczna w Krakowie website*).

Summary

Broadly understood, the term *human iconosphere* is the whole of the images and views characteristic of a place, period, or culture. We can also understand *iconosphere* as facts, i.e. the facts of appearance of images or those that are created in front of our eyes, or those that have been created before. The *iconosphere* develops and alters along with the changes of the geographical environment, changes in human settlement and economy, changes in culture or in the ways of interpersonal contacts. When observing landscapes of cities, their layouts and development, discerning the architectural details filling them up, knowing and observing the traditions and customs cultivated in them, let us reflect on the extent to which they determine the contemporary way of thinking and acting, and on what impact they have on human behaviour. We

ask ourselves the following questions. Do they, and how do they shape our system of values? Do they affect the care of inhabitants about the functionality of the city, its aesthetic qualities, the bonds between tradition and new architectural solutions? Do they, and how do they affect behaviour patterns and cultural continuity?

Krakow’s *iconosphere* has a symbolic dimension. The presence of the dragon in the history and space of Krakow also has a symbolic dimension. This presence is immemorial, and the dragon in this city “lives in a rocky den”, appears in sculptures and bas-reliefs on the walls of its edifices, tenement houses, palaces and churches, it graces gutters and gargoyles, and peeks from above portals. As we look at the presence of material symbols in the space of the city from a wider perspective, we discover the meaning (material, spiritual) of different places in the city, we learn about the condition of the city space, and we also recognise the meaning and importance of local (here: urban) tradition. The presence of symbols in the space of the city helps to find the meaning necessary for the inhabitants to find a sense of security and belonging, as well as the ability to shape their world, their urban homeland. According to the idea of familiarity, the one propagated by the architect K. Pawłowska (1996), there may be a particular emotional connection between man and his place of living which provides a sense of familiarity, an awareness of being at home, and gives this place a host who cares for it. The author also introduces the notion of familiarity with the city’s architecture by defining it as a feature, or a set of features, which lead to situations in which relationships of belonging and attachment may develop and exist between cities and their inhabitants. One has to agree that such humanistic thinking about the city and its architecture is the right way to proceed.

In a modern city, in a city founded in the recent past, we are surrounded by the functional, modernist and modernisation perspective, which even attempts to dominate us. In front of the eyes of inhabitants, there is an ongoing struggle for the aesthetics of public space and, what is even worse, for the ideological content that will dominate in it (Kubera & Rogowski 2015).

The situation is different in old-established cities, in cities where the varied architecture, which came into existence at different times and in different styles, coexists. Here, observing the space of the city, we involve ourselves in getting to know the signs of the city’s identity. The city conveys these signs to us by affecting our consciousness and subconsciousness. We discover the symbolism of the city. We get to know its *view* when we perceive the aesthetic and material qualities of a place or object, or we turn ourselves into the *denotator* when we appreciate the importance and value of a place or object. Krakow is a city filled with symbols.

FIGURE 1
 Krakow dragons – a decorative element of the urban space
 Source: photos by Małgorzata Pietrzak; graphic design by Marek Angiel



PHOTO 1
 Hetmanska tenement house, Rynek Główny 17

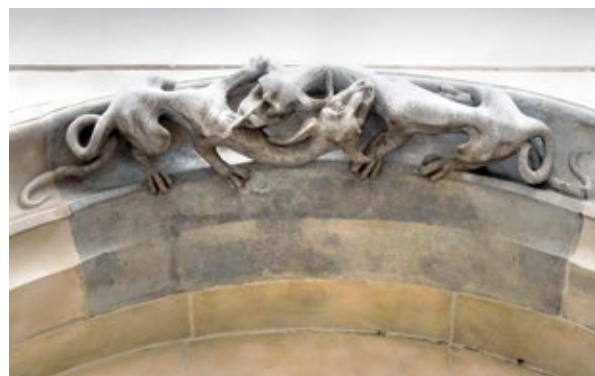


PHOTO 2
 Pod Jaszczurami tenement house, Rynek Główny 5



PHOTO 3
 St. Barbara's church, Mały Rynek 8



PHOTO 4
 Holy Trinity church, 12 Stolarska St.



PHOTO 5
 "Dragon bones", archicathedral basilica of Saints Stanislaus and Wenceslaus, Wawel Hill

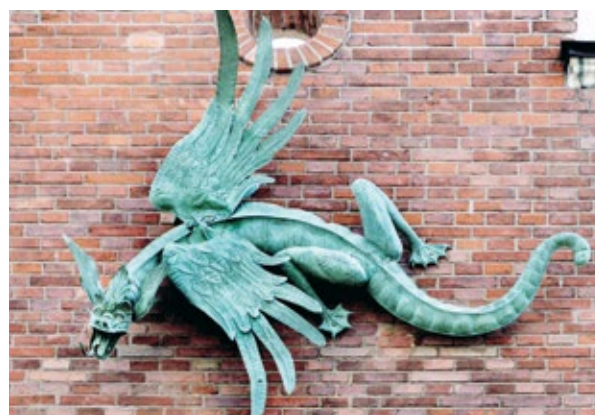


PHOTO 6
 18 Smolensk St.

FIGURE 2

Krakow dragons – a decorative element of the urban space

Source: photos by Małgorzata Pietrzak; graphic design by Marek Angiel



PHOTO 1

35 Karmelicka St.



PHOTO 2

59 Kazimierza Wielkiego St.



PHOTO 3

Brothers Hospitallers hospital,
11 Trynitaraska St.



PHOTO 4

31b Saint Wawrzyniec St.



PHOTO 5

37 Urzednicza St.



PHOTO 6

19 Batorego St.

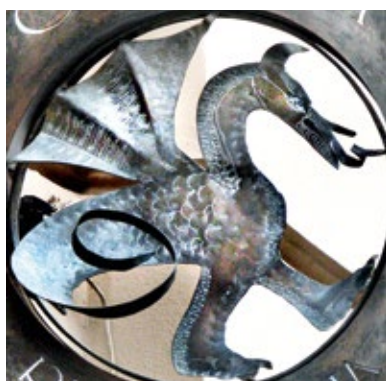


PHOTO 7

3 Saint Anna St.

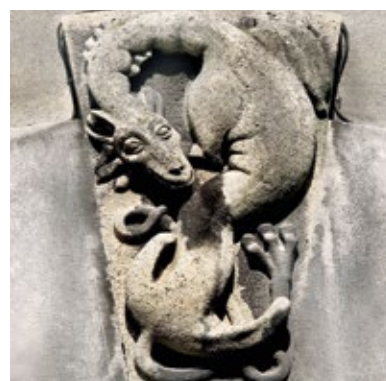


PHOTO 8

17 Lea St.

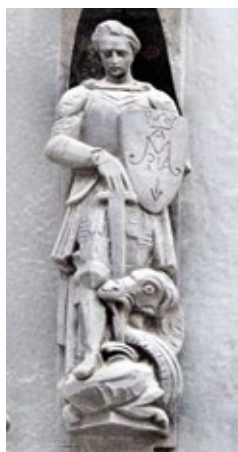
FIGURE 3

Krakow dragons – a decorative element of the urban space

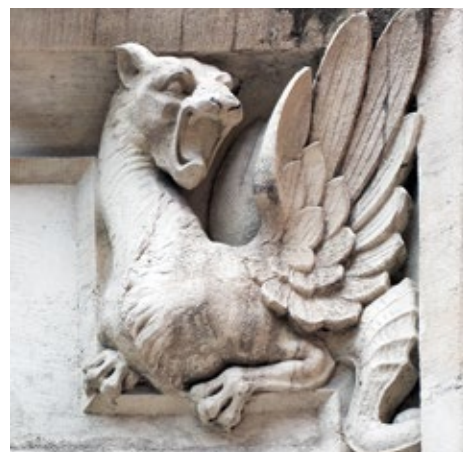
Source: photos by Małgorzata Pietrzak; graphic design by Marek Angiel

**PHOTO 1**

16 Żulawskiego St.

**PHOTO 2**

Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, Rynek Główny

**PHOTO 3**

Witkowski Collegium, Jagiellonian University, 13 Golebia St.

**PHOTO 4**

archicathedral basilica of Saints Stanislaus and Wenceslaus, the Wawel Hill

**PHOTO 5**

Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, Rynek Główny

**PHOTO 6**

45a Karmelicka St.

**PHOTO 7**

St. Catherine's church, 7 Augustyńska St.

FIGURE 4

Krakow dragons – an ubiquitous element in the cultural landscape of the city

Source: photos by Małgorzata Pietrzak; graphic design by Marek Angiel



PHOTO 1

A dragon – a promotional element of Krakow, the Dragons' Parade (festival in Rynek Główny)



PHOTO 2

A dragon – a children's toy (element in a Krakow playground)



PHOTO 3

A dragon – the motif of an art competition (poster in Voivodeship Public Library)



PHOTO 4

A dragon – a logo on a city information poster (billboard in Rynek Główny)

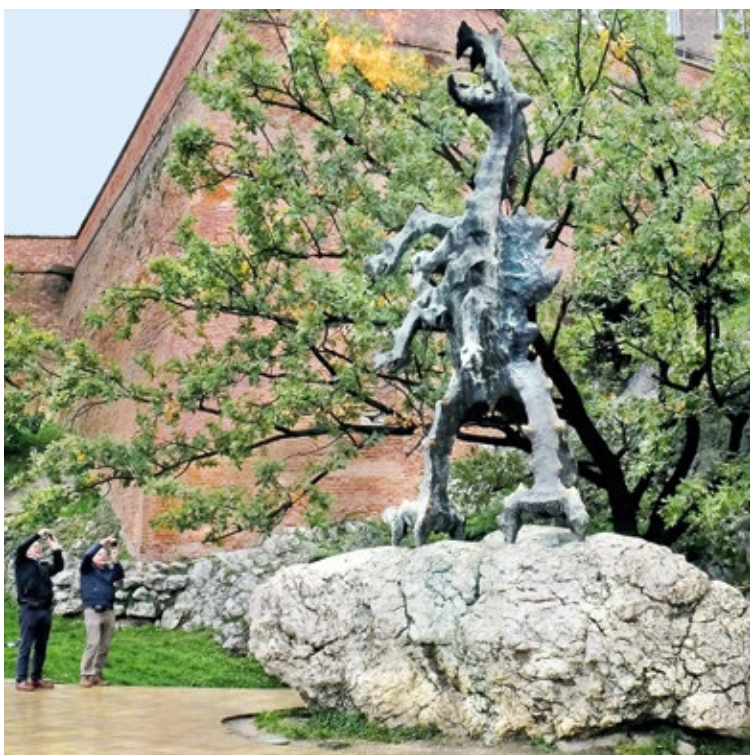


PHOTO 5

Wawel dragon – a symbol of Krakow (sculpture in Wislane Bulwary)

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