

# Mythical Vision of the City: Kraków as the 'Pope's City'<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

In April 2005, John Paul II, the pope of the Catholic Church passed away. Immediately after broadcasting the news from the Vatican, all the important international news agencies sent live broadcasts from streets and squares of the city of Kraków, Poland. Despite the late night hour, hundreds of inhabitants of the 'pope's city' - as it was called - were gathering in front of the local Bishops' Palace and in other places, lighting candles, praying and singing, many of them with tears in their eyes. With the death of the late pope a new dimension of the urban space of the city of Kraków was born. The legend of the 'pope's city' magnetized crowds who gathered there to pay tribute to the deceased pope 'in the city of his life'.

In this article I will sketch the broad context which led toward the creation of the myth of Kraków as the 'pope's city'. I argue that the appearance of this new layer within the urban space of the city of Kraków expresses a "mythological dimension of tradition", which: "...is related to the fact that tradition is shaped by emotions. Tradition is always close, direct, does not need rational explanations. Tradition at the same time contextualizes the past and the space" (Robotycki 1992: 43). Following Robotycki's thought in my analysis, I will emphasize the role of emotions shared by the community, as well as popular visions of the past (Kraków's history, the pope's biography) and the space (urban space of the city of Kraków), and will show how these three elements mingled together, thereby creating a new symbolic landscape of the city.

I argue that long-lasting mythological constructions attached to the popular vision of the city of Kraków in Polish culture combined with the popular image of John Paul II as a national hero and contemporary Christian saint brought about a specific development of the city's symbolic landscape, which manifested itself during a ground-breaking moment immediately after the death of the late pope. To illustrate these contexts I will summarize the mythical discourse about the city of Kraków as the old Polish capital and a cradle of sainthood. I will then point out how John Paul II himself recalled and revived the mythological dimensions of Kraków. Finally, I will present how the figure of the pope became incorporated into the urban space of the city and its tradition. I will focus especially on the events that took place in Kraków right after the death of John Paul II.

It should be stressed that space is treated here not only as one of the "everyday elements of a human existence" but first and foremost as "a matter of imagination, a constituent of human consciousness, which is inhabited by images produced by a human being. It is ordered and named" (Karpńska 2000: 9). The urban space in that sense will be understood as a symbolic landscape and 'lived space', which includes "living space (territory, activity areas), social space, and the values attached to both" (Rodman 2003: 206). It will be treated as a structure mirroring

and expressing feelings, emotions, values and stereotypes shared by inhabitants and presented to visitors. Space which is 'lived' is dynamic: it adopts new symbols which merge with the old ones adding new layers to a symbolic landscape.

Stories about Kraków as the 'pope's city', already present in Kraków during the pontiff reign of John Paul II (1978-2005), developed rapidly at the moment of the pope's death, spectacularly transforming the city into the 'place of remembrance' and the 'pope's place'. The liminal experience of 'communitas', intensely shared by the city's inhabitants during the so-called 'white week' after the death of John Paul II, freed the emotions that were attached to certain places within the urban space. A mythological dimension of tradition confirmed a common conviction that Kraków's space is 'gifted with a spirit'. This idea follows the pattern described by Jerzy Mikułowski Pomorski, who stated that:

*Genius loci* is a cultural phenomenon. The conviction that a place can evoke unusual acts and events is deposited in the social structure of beliefs. Strong widespread emotion is necessary for such a conviction to exist and preserve its vitality. People not only take into account such a possibility, but strongly believe it is true. They expect it to happen, and, as this is usually a self-fulfilling prophecy, they see it happen. (Mikułowski-Pomorski 1996: 30-31)

In my analysis I will show how the most mythologized urban space in Poland, associated with national and sacral dimensions, was elevated to the status of a symbolic landscape intertwined with the myth of the most popular Polish contemporary national hero.

### **Myth of the city**

Kraków, today the second largest city in Poland, is known among Poles as their old, historic capital. Important monuments, historical mementos, and symbolic buildings are located here, as are the graves of Polish kings, queens and national heroes. Warsaw, on the other hand, was completely destroyed during the Second World War and then rebuilt as a new, socialist capital for a new, socialist state (Crowley 1997). Obligatory school excursions, as well as large numbers of private tourists visit Kraków every year, paying homage to the glorious past of the Polish nation and learning about its history by way of the historic monuments. In contemporary Polish public opinion, Kraków holds a unique position among the Polish cities and towns. It is seen as a special place, a 'magical city'<sup>2</sup> gifted with its *genius loci*.

Today's popular opinion is based on long-standing historic roots. Kraków has been described as a special and unique city since at least the fifteenth century, when it gained unquestionable international recognition as a thriving financial and political center. However, even in later periods, when the city started to decay, and the official seat of the Royal Court moved to Warsaw (1609), the importance of the symbolic dimension of the city of Kraków within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth remained stable. Officially, until the end of the

First Polish Republic the most important symbolic state events, like royal coronations and funerals, were associated with Kraków Cathedral on Wawel Hill and the royal and state insignia were stored here. As Jacek Purchla points out, those facts reveal that from the formal and legal point of view, Kraków held many features of a capital city even after the Royal Court moved to the city of Warsaw (Purchla 1996: 27-38). Even today, this symbolic and metaphorical capital-city status of Kraków is present in popular discourse, and names like the 'historic capital of Poland' and 'cultural capital' are still broadly associated with Kraków. The contemporary official name of the city, 'Royal Capital City of Kraków,' also recalls its glorious past.

The collapse of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth brought partitions and the disappearance of the Polish state for an extensive period (1795-1918). Paradoxically, that time re-enforced the symbolic dimension of Kraków as a special historic place of importance for the Polish people and nation. During the period that official Polish statehood did not exist, Poles perceived the space of the city of Kraków as a condensed symbolic manifestation of Polish history and national ideology. Recalling a tradition of royal burials at Wawel Cathedral, a new National Polish Pantheon was created. Public funerals of national heroes, soldiers fighting for Polish independence, as well as burials of famous Polish artists and poets were performed within Kraków's urban space. Even relics of those who died in remote places were supposed to be transported to Kraków and buried there after vast, pompous public celebrations recalling the schema of historic royal funeral processions through the whole city. The city started to be recognized under symbolic nicknames like 'national temple', 'heart of Poland', 'a bastion of Polishness', 'Slavic Rome', and 'treasury of relics and mementos' (Grodziska 2003: 67-80). Growing mythologization of the urban space brought an appearance of 'national pilgrimages' performed by Poles living in different parts of partitioned Poland who started to visit the city of Kraków searching for the monuments and symbols of the old, glorious past of the bygone Polish state. Local politician and patriotic activist, Jakub Bojko, very passionately expressed his love to the city in 1897:

The walls of Kraków's churches and houses are witnesses of the great past of our nation, as well as witnesses of our national defeats and misfortunes....Who does not love Kraków and its monuments, who has not visited Kraków at least once in his life, for whom it does not matter what is the fate of its monuments, he cannot be a member of the Polish nation. (as cited in Ziejka 1994: 27)

The city began to be perceived in a sacral-mythological context. Kraków and its buildings and churches, streets and markets were described as an 'open book' which could be 'read'. Stones, pavements, towers, bells, smells, sounds, and landscapes were recalled not only as mementos but also as relics and witnesses of the national past. This emotional discourse described the city space as a whole. Particular city buildings, as well, were attributed subjective features, as in this description of Wawel Cathedral from the mid-nineteenth century by a famous local archivist and bookseller:

Wawel Cathedral with its towers climbs into the sky... I enter its doors and can recognize the forgotten histories which are alive here in old, cold marble stones... I can see an immense book made out of stone, here each stone speaks about ancient times... The walls - grayed with the oldness - are like the sheets of this old antique book about our history... Altars, pictures, treasures are a joy for the eyes... and those who walk in are reminded by the stone statues about the old fame and glory of our forefathers and ancestors. (Grabowski 1852: 17)

There are countless examples of texts written in the nineteenth century that describe Kraków in a similar manner: as a symbolic landscape where space, past and emotions mingle together in a mythological discourse of the city.

### **The cradle of sainthood**

Parallel to the growing mythologization of the urban space and the development of the city's symbolic landscape, a mythological discourse recalling famous and great figures connected with Kraków emerged. In this discourse not only kings, knights, poets and scholars appeared but also an impressive group of Christian saints. Popularization of these saints' cults inspired yet another nickname to be attached to the city: 'the cradle of sainthood'.

The first, and probably the most significant local Christian saint, was the eleventh-century bishop of Kraków named Stanislaus, who was killed by the Polish king. Stanislaus' cult has been connected with Kraków for centuries and the liveliness of his legend confirms a 'mythological dimension of tradition' attaching a vision of the past to Kraków's symbolic landscape. Even though the historic and political context of Stanislaus' death and his conflict with the king is not clear (Kleszczowa 1997, Labuda 1996, Plezia 1999), the legend describes the bishop as a victim of a cruel ruler. The canonization of Stanislaus in 1253 made him a patron saint of the city of Kraków and all Polish lands, merging his legend with a mythological vision of Poland and its history. Relics, exhibited in a central hall of Wawel Cathedral, as well as a shrine connected with the place of the bishop's martyrdom, were involved in the most important political events. Each Polish king whose coronation was celebrated in the city of Kraków was supposed to perform an expiatory peregrination to the Skalka Church – the legendary place of Stanislaus' martyrdom.

Bishop Stanislaus appears to be the first 'original Krakowian' saint opening the row of other local saints. The following centuries brought numerous saint figures living there and usually buried in the city. Kraków, with its stories about saints and their relics, and with other memorabilia connected with exemplars of Catholicism, became an attractive pilgrimage center offering various *loca sacra*. The relics displayed in churches were shown to the faithful as visible, touchable signs of the presence of sacred figures, as well as a means to sanctify the space.

The growing popularity of Kraków as a pilgrimage center was mirrored in the publication of the first city guidebook in 1603, describing Krakowian pilgrimages routes and religious shrines. Its original title, *Guidebook, or a short description of Kraków's churches*, was soon replaced by a new metaphorical one: *The Jewels of the Capital City of Kraków*, recalling the idea of the city as a sacred treasury for relic jewels. Interestingly, at the time of political and economical decay of the city, this popular, oft reprinted publication appeared, recalling in its title the capital status of Kraków in the context of its religious significance.

The discourse on the urban space of the city of Kraków continued to develop. It was described as a sacred space touched and shaped by the presence of pious men and women, and as a space generating sacredness. In the nineteenth century, with a growing national mythology attached to the symbolic landscape of the city, the tradition incorporated new national heroes into the vision of Kraków's sacredness. In the city known as a 'reliquary on the bust of Poland', relics of national heroes - 'new jewels' - found their final resting place next to Kraków's saints, enforcing the religious-national dimension of the city.

### **Kraków's myth in John Paul II speeches**

Karol Wojtyła – Kraków's archbishop – was elected pope in October 1978 taking the name of John Paul II. During his pontiff reign (1978-2005) he visited the city of Kraków several times. Probably the most significant was his first visit in 1979 which illustrated a very deep and lively relationship between the mythological past of the urban space of the city of Kraków, and the new pope, his image and his biography. The main celebrations in Kraków were connected with the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the martyrdom of Bishop Stanislaus. Despite its religious dimension, the celebration performed in communist Poland turned into a political protest confronting the communist government, with the Catholic Church and its enthusiastic followers gathering in crowds during open-air 'Pope's Masses'. The visit of the pope, who celebrated a Mass at the spot of the martyrdom of a former Kraków bishop, immediately revived associations with the political and social situation of Poles and the conflict between secular power and the ecclesiastical authorities, seen by the society as spokesmen of freedom. The mythology of Kraków's space, Kraków's legends, Kraków's saints was very strongly recalled in a vision revealed by the pope himself in his pastoral letter written before his pilgrimage to Poland:

In this year in which the Church in Poland celebrates the nine-hundredth anniversary of the martyrdom and death of Saint Stanislaus, Kraków's bishop, the bishop of Rome, Saint Peter's successor cannot be absent. Too significant is this Jubilee, too much related to the history of the Church and the Polish Nation, which for more than one thousand years of its history united with this Church in a particular deep way. This voice [the pope's] cannot be missing, particularly at this moment, when to Saint Peter's capital, by the mysterious working of Divine

Providence, the pope was called, who until recently had been Saint Stanislaus's successor in the bishop's capital in Kraków. (as cited in Kubik 1994: 136)

Beginning with that meaningful first visit by John Paul II to his 'home city', all subsequent visits evoked an immense public reaction. Open-air masses on Kraków's Błonia Meadow drew millions of people, including inhabitants of Kraków and pilgrims from around Poland who came to meet with the pope. During the communist and post-communist periods, the texts of the pope's official and non-official speeches, as well as the texts of sermons and prayers preached by John Paul II during his visits to Kraków, recalled the mythical vision of the city. In this vision, the medieval, baroque and romantic traditions mingle together with the emotional and private attitude of the pope and the Krakowian part of his biography. The urban space of Kraków was seen as a synonym for anything that was 'truly Polish' and a synthesis of anything national:

I am looking at Kraków. My Kraków, the city of my life. The history of our nation. (Kraków-Błonia, June 10 1987)<sup>3</sup>

Kraków appears to be a symbolic space, a lens through which the whole of Polish history and the whole of Poland might be seen:

Before I leave, I want to look from this spot, once more toward Kraków - this Kraków, the city in which each stone, each brick is precious to me - and from this city, from this place I want to see the whole of Poland... (Kraków-Błonia, June 9, 1979)

It is also a subject with a voice, a place where stones and bricks are not mute but are able to speak:

Kraków, since I was a very young boy, since I was a child, meant for me a special synthesis of everything Polish and everything Christian. Kraków always represented the great history of my Fatherland. It always has been expressing its history in the most complete way. (Kraków-Błonia, June 6, 1979)

This subjective relation 'to' and 'with' the city was confirmed in many other statements:

We are united by Kraków, by its great history, its royal history, its burgher history. Wawel Cathedral and Wawel Castle, the Market Square, the St. Mary's Basilica, the Cloth Halls - all those buildings we can see here are witnesses of this history. All this was given to me in this city, I took it all from this city, and I am

thankful for that to you my brothers and sisters, my compatriots - you who are heirs to this big millennium.

(Kraków-Market Square, August 13, 1991)

Kraków in the pope's speeches, similar to the nineteenth century writings, appears to be a text, a city-book, which can be read and interpreted by a visitor or a pilgrim. It also receives human features and is treated as a human subject to whom emotionally loaded dedications are directed: "My dear Kraków! I am saying Good Bye to You!", or "I am recalling you - Kraków", and "I hate to leave you". Characteristic buildings (e.g. Wawel Cathedral) and places (e.g. Market Square) symbolize mythological dimension of Kraków. They are witnesses of the past, witnesses who are not only objects, but also subjects possessing their own life and their own soul. The city – as depicted by the pope - is filled with spirits, symbols and myths.

### **"City of my life"**

Pope John Paul II, the past archbishop of the city of Kraków, a former student at Jagiellonian University, a worker in a quarry and a chemical plant and a cleric in an underground seminary in the city during the Second World War, emphasized his emotional attachment to Krakow every time he visited. "My beloved Kraków", "Kraków – my home city", "My Kraków – the city of my life" – these quotations are eagerly and proudly recalled by many inhabitants. However, it must be remembered that Karol Wojtyła was born not in Kraków but in the town of Wadowice<sup>4</sup>, around 50 km southwest from Kraków, and moved to the city at the age of 18. Still, the constant manifestation of a very emotional relationship to the city, as well as the mutual response of the city's inhabitants as proud of 'our pope', created the image of Kraków as the 'pope's city', recalling the long-lasting tradition of the mythologization of Kraków urban space. This stereotypical image was present during all of John Paul II's visits to Kraków, but was popularized especially at the moment of his death. Since that time, countless guidebooks, leaflets, tourist-pilgrim information materials, popular movies and documentaries have been produced depicting Kraków unquestionably as the 'pope's city'. A typical introduction to one of the guidebooks published in 2006 informs the reader:

There are three cities in the world which could have been called by Karol Wojtyła – John Paul II - as 'his city': Wadowice, Kraków, Rome. But it was only Kraków among them which was called by him 'the city of my life'. This is the most beautiful name which Kraków could have received after a thousand year history. (Jakubczyk and Tekieli 2006: 4)

'The pope' and 'his places' started to be promoted as a special Krakowian tourist attraction. The fame and mythology of the city "that captured the heart of Pope John Paul II" (CNN.com 2005, April 6) – usually not known and not easily understandable for non-Polish

visitors – is revealed through the popularized biography of Wojtyła. Short descriptions often simplify and mythologize historic events, mixing places and times, as happened in a short Internet advertisement of an ‘Eastern European trip’ published by an American tour-operator:

**Krakow – The Pope’s City**

The two greatest figures in the modern Polish pantheon are Lech Walesa and the late Pope John Paul II. And while Walesa is forever associated with the Gdansk shipyard where he sparked the Solidarity movement, the Pope is inseparably linked with Krakow. Here, the young Karol Wojtyla labored as a priest during the Nazis’ brutal occupation. When he donned the red hat of the cardinal, he administered his sermon from the hilltop complex of Wawel Castle. Following his elections as the first non-Italian Pope in four centuries, an estimated one-third of still-Communist Poland congregated for his sermon from the ramparts of Wawel Castle. Here, among Gothic masterpieces, churches beyond count, and medieval Rynek Square, you’ll feel the impact of faith and history once embodied in the late Polish Pope. (Eastern Europe Trip 2006)

Discourse about the ‘pope’s city’ is based on long-lasting myths and powerful symbols. Kraków, the most mythologized of all Polish cities, is connected with legendary stories like no other urban space in Poland, possessing centuries-old mythologizing structures enriched during the nineteenth century by nationalism. Kraków is thus seen in popular discourse as a place ‘naturally’ connected with the most famous, contemporary popular national hero, whose biography is seen by the Polish people as a fulfillment of Romantic prophecies about the savior of the nation (Łozińska 1992).<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the urban space - seen as sacred and interpreted as the ‘cradle of sainthood’, ‘center of Christianity’, ‘Polish Rome’, ‘treasury of relics’ - is strongly attached to the vision of John Paul II as a popular saint.<sup>6</sup> As previously mentioned, the *genius loci* of the urban space – which is a cultural phenomenon – once more has worked following the pattern of a self-fulfilling prophecy. The connection between symbolic urban space and a popular biography of contemporary national hero as well as popular saint revealed the mythological dimension of tradition.

**Construction of tradition**

From the very moment of John Paul II’s death in April 2005 a spontaneous mythologization of Kraków’s urban landscape developed. The whole week between the public death<sup>7</sup> of the pope on April 2<sup>nd</sup> and his public funeral in the Vatican on April 8<sup>th</sup> revealed the symbolic meanings of Kraków as the ‘pope’s city’.<sup>8</sup> The spontaneous public reaction of people, who gathered in specific places, brought flowers, candles, images of the pope, and flags of the Vatican, Poland and Kraków, prayed, cried, sang and meditated, and created ‘places of remembrance’. This period, spontaneously called the ‘white week’,<sup>9</sup> opened locals and visitors to



a liminal phenomenon and an unexpected experience of ‘*communitas*’ (Turner 1977:96). Even fans of two opposing soccer teams – usually infamous for their animosities – gathered united in front of the Bishops’ Palace and took part in an open-air Mass celebrated at the stadium of one of the teams.

During the ‘white week’, emotions, myths and symbols mingled together. Rumors about a funeral for the pope at Wawel Cathedral, instead of the Vatican, reflected the tradition of burying national heroes in Kraków. When Church officials denied such rumors, new gossip about the possible donation of parts of the body to Wawel Cathedral immediately spread. One person interviewed in April 2005 said:

The heart of the pope should be brought to Poland, to Kraków. Here we can find so many relics of famous Poles, for instance at Wawel. John Paul II was so much connected with Kraków and its vicinity. His heart would suit this place...<sup>10</sup>

The idea of receiving ‘relics’ of the body of John Paul II has constantly reappeared in local rumors, which significantly increase whenever any news connected with the beatification and canonization process led by the Vatican are discussed.

The other local idea that spontaneously appeared during the ‘white week’ recalled Kraków’s tradition of memorial mounds. Kraków is a city where two prehistoric soil mounds are preserved, as well as two mounds built in memory of national heroes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Due to that local tradition, Kraków is known among Poles as the ‘city of mounds’. The idea of a new mound construction, dedicated to the memory of the deceased pope, appeared after his death and was regarded as ‘the most Krakowian monument’ which could be constructed within the urban space of the ‘pope’s city.’<sup>11</sup>

Even though the image of Kraków as the ‘pope’s city’ had been promoted years earlier, it was certainly the liminal time of the ‘white week’ when the urban space of the city of Kraków gained its new dimension. The tourist route of John Paul II, signed by the City Council in year 2002, started to be visible only after April 2005. Initially, people did not pay much attention to the route’s signs. After the events connected with the ‘white week’, when the community needed symbolic places that recalled its mythological hero, spots connected with the ‘pope’s route’ received special significance.

Probably the most meaningful ‘place of remembrance’, which evoked strong emotions and led toward the creation of a new significant place on a mythological map of urban space of the city of Kraków, was the ‘pope’s window’, known now as “the most famous window in Kraków” (Skowrońska 2008: 5).<sup>12</sup> This is a window on the second floor of the Bishops’ Palace, the building where Wojtyła was living when he was an archbishop of Kraków’s archdiocese. However, the fame of the window is connected with his visits to Kraków during his pontiff reign. Whenever John Paul II was visiting Kraków, he stayed overnight in the Bishops’ Palace. In the evenings, after the official part of his visit, when people were still gathered in front of the Bishops’ Palace waiting for his blessing, he used to appear in one of the windows on the second

floor, talking, singing, joking and finally praying with the crowd, which applauded his appearance. Those unofficial meetings became a local, Krakowian tradition. After the end of the pope's visit, the window in the Bishops' Palace would return to normal. And except for a monument to the pope, which appeared in the courtyard of the Bishops' Palace, and was not visible from the street, nothing special appeared in that city space.

The place changed dramatically in April 2005: a few days before the death of John Paul II people spontaneously started to gather and pray together in the evenings in front of the Palace window. During the night of the death of John Paul II, crowds gathered for hours-long vigils. The 'pope's window', as it started to be called commonly, was decorated with white and yellow flowers (Vatican colors) and with a crucifix with a red stole – the symbol of the death and resurrection of Christ. What happened to the window during that time was significant. Crowds literally occupied the vicinity of the Palace, and brought so many flowers and candles that city officials were forced to close off the entire street. Private traffic, as well as public transportation, including a very popular tram line, were prohibited on the street for a week and special detours were signposted. The walls of the Bishops' Palace were covered with posters, stickers, and banners expressing love, gratitude, and remembrance of the deceased pope. Candles put on the windows of the first floor of the Palace started to burn the walls and candle wax stuck to the nearby pavement. Soon a special fence appeared to keep the crowd a few meters away from the walls of the building. But still people brought candles and lit them in a nearby park.

After the funeral of John Paul II, the area by the Bishops' Palace was finally cleared and traffic and trams returned to their regular routes. But the 'pope's window' remained the central 'place of remembrance' connected with John Paul II. The window, seen as something very human and familiar, recalled the idea of 'home', which perfectly suited the popular concept of John Paul II and his presence within the urban space of Kraków. The window now possesses a life of its own: there is a portrait of John Paul II in the middle of the window's frame, and fresh flowers often appear next to it. But the most important part of its 'life' appears on the street and pavement in front of the window. Every day, individuals, as well as tourist groups, turn from the main route, leading from the Market Square to Wawel Hill, and stop in front of the Bishops' Palace, taking pictures of the 'pope's window'. Almost every day new candles and fresh flowers appear on the other side of the busy street, where one can best view the window. Various 'pope's anniversaries', like Wojtyła's birthday and name-day, the anniversary of his papal election, the anniversaries of the pope's parents' deaths, as well as the anniversary of the pope's death are celebrated in front of the window. During Christmas, Easter, All Saints and All Souls days, the number of candles, flowers and handmade greeting cards deposited in front of the window significantly grows. The window has begun to be treated as a sacred relic. During the 2006 restoration of the windows in the Bishops' Palace, many people were concerned about the restoration or possible replacement of the 'original pope's window'. Church officials publicly assured Krakowians that after the restoration the original frame would be put back at the 'pope's window', only covered with additional glass protection, as "no-one in Kraków would dare to replace the old frame" (Skowrońska 2008: 5).

It must be emphasized that few other places gained similar public attention during the 'white week'. Certainly Błonia Meadow and Wawel Cathedral attracted crowds and have been seen as the 'pope's places'. However, the example of the window reveals the most spontaneous creation of a 'place of remembrance' and a new local tradition.<sup>13</sup>

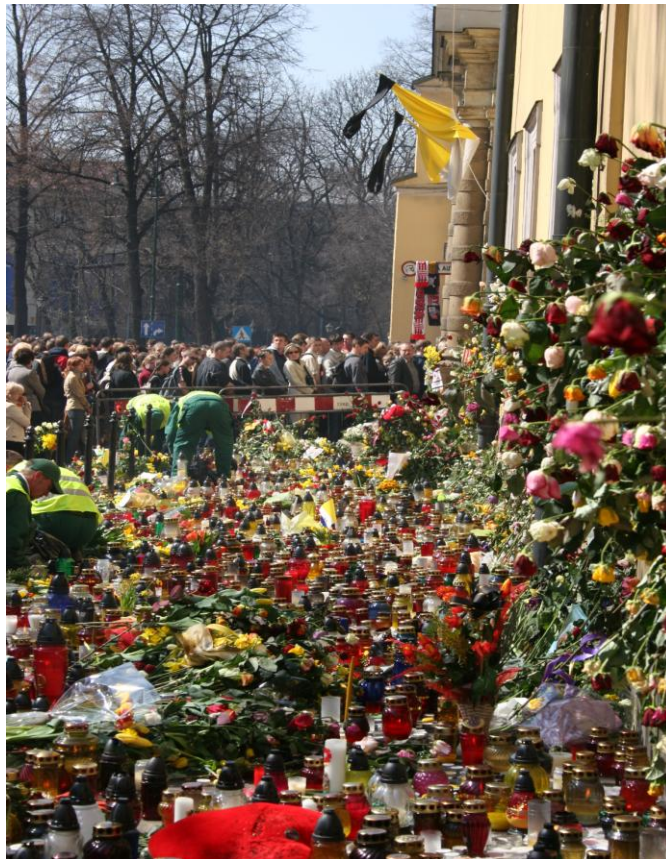
## **Conclusion**

The story of Kraków as the 'pope's city' is still open, still alive and still being written. A few elements are already enshrined, like the meaningful space in front of the 'pope's window', while a few are still under debate. After the liminal experience of the 'white week', emotions calmed down and the city went back to its normal life, in the same way as the fans of two competing soccer teams returned to their brutal fights. On the one hand, the image of the pope and his myth has been used in official marketing city strategy. On the other hand it often appears in the political discourse of the Catholic Church in post-communist Poland. Last but not least, it is present in popular imagery and religiosity, involving new places within the city and popularizing parts of the Krakowian biography of Karol Wojtyła – John Paul II.<sup>14</sup>

This article has pointed out the mechanisms of the mythologization of a contemporary urban space in the specific case of Kraków. The successful creation of myth involved long-lasting mythological structures and traditional discourses attached to the city space (including the idea of *genius loci* and the cradle of sainthood), the mythical biography of a significant contemporary public figure, as well as spontaneous and emotional actions generated by the city's community. The example of Kraków's story shows that urban space is socially and culturally important and loaded with meanings. It is seen by the community as granted with *genius loci* and is a dynamic structure generating mythological dimensions of tradition. The symbolic landscape of the city adopts new stories, new figures, new events and emotions, mingling them with old discourses and adding more layers to the city's meanings. Tradition, which is strongly shaped by emotions, is perceived as obvious and an objective part of reality that is quickly adopted by the community. It seems that Kraków's new name - the 'pope's city', received acceptance as part of a local tradition and symbolic landscape. When asked in 2008 about the feelings he associates with the term 'pope's city', one young Krakowian answered, "There is nothing to be emphasized in any special way [...] It is something being felt, simply it is the way it is".<sup>15</sup>



In front of the 'pope's window' at the Bishops' Palace, April 2005



In front of the Bishops' Palace, April 2005



A closed amusement park and national and city flags decorated with black ribbons, April 2005



“You always have been and you always will stay in our hearts, Your Krakowians”, poster at the Market Square, April 2005



The badge with an emblem of Royal Capital City of Kraków with a black ribbon. The badges were worn by the people of Kraków during the ‘white week’



Tourist and pilgrims at the Pope’s window, June 2006



Candles left in front of the Pope's window, June 2006



Kosciuszko Mound decorated with national and papal flags, people gathering there are observing Błonia meadow where the Mass dedicated to the pope is celebrated April 2005



In front of the Bishops' Palace, October 2007

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> One of the most popular Internet websites about Kraków is titled 'Magical Kraków'.

<sup>3</sup> All quotations from John Paul II speeches are quoted after: Jan Paweł II (1999).

<sup>4</sup> The Town of Wadowice has built its own mythology as a 'pope's place' and 'pope's hometown'. See Pochłódka (2008). It is also worth adding that in 2006 a special 'papal train' line was opened connecting Kraków and Wadowice.

<sup>5</sup> John Paul II has been seen by the Poles first and foremost as the "Polish Pope," and this national context is one of the most characteristic features shaping the popular image of the pope in Poland.



<sup>6</sup> In popular religiosity John Paul II has been seen and described – even during his life – as a saint. His popular hagiography mingled together with stories about him as a Polish national hero. See Zowczak (1987) and Owczarek (2006).

<sup>7</sup> In Poland and in Kraków the news from the Vatican during the last days of John Paul II was followed by people very carefully. Crowds gathered for vigils and prayers, literally assisting the dying pope ‘publicly’.

<sup>8</sup> The mourning for John Paul II was publicly manifested not only in Kraków but also in other Polish cities and towns. An anthropological analysis of the mourning of the pope in the streets of Warsaw is given by Ewa Klekot (2007).

<sup>9</sup> The name ‘white week’ recalls the traditional name known in Christian liturgy and attached to the week following Easter (John Paul II died on the Saturday after Easter). However, in popular discourse, the name ‘white week’ was recognized by people as recalling the white color of the pope’s robe and his popularly accepted sanctity.

<sup>10</sup> Interview conducted as part of a research project on popular Polish religiosity conducted by the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Jagiellonian University.

<sup>11</sup> Currently, the idea of constructing the pope’s mound is under discussion and it is unclear if it will be realized.

<sup>12</sup> The source I use here (Skowrońska 2008) was a special supplement edited by a daily newspaper in Kraków on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2008 (20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the pope’s election). The supplement was dedicated to “Kraków of John Paul II”. The cover of the supplement featured an archival picture of John Paul II appearing in the ‘pope’s window’.

<sup>13</sup> It is worth mentioning that in 2009 an interactive Internet web site and portal was created under the address: [www.franciszkanska3.pl](http://www.franciszkanska3.pl) recalling the address of Bishops’ Palace in Kraków (Franciszkańska Street 3).

<sup>14</sup> An interesting example of ‘a new Krakowian tradition’ is a pilgrimage ‘In the footsteps of Karol Wojtyła – the worker’ initiated in October 2005 and since then repeated yearly. This on-foot, one-day pilgrimage follows the places connected with the period of the Second World War when Karol Wojtyła was a worker in a Krakowian quarry and a chemical plant.

<sup>15</sup> Interview conducted as part of a research project on popular Polish religiosity conducted by Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Jagiellonian University.

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