

Article

Historical Sacral Objects as Places of Prayer—But Not Only: Towards Multifunctionality

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Abstract: Under conditions of rises in the maintenance costs of religious objects, declining numbers of visitors to most of them, and greater public awareness of their potential, the following is becoming important: (1) the pressure to increase the ways in which their space is used and (2) to take advantage of the “added value” that these objects bring to the localities in which they are located. The owners of religious objects are increasing the functionality of these objects; therefore, they can expect more financial support for their maintenance, including from public resources. Local entrepreneurs undertake and develop types of economic activities that are directly or indirectly related to the existence of the designated objects in the area, and the local government, thanks to the tax revenue raised from them, improves the standard of living of the people in the area. The purpose of this article is to collect, organize, and systematize the knowledge of the functions of Christian historic religious objects and the possibility of their influence on the external environment. This study fills a research gap in this area, for the information on this topic in the literature is scattered and unstructured. The method used in this study is a critical analysis of legal acts and literature. From the analysis, it is clear that Christian religious buildings today perform multiple functions. In addition, the strength of their impact on the external environment creates the economic development of an area and results in an increase in the income level of its inhabitants.

Keywords: historical sacral objects; functions; multifunctionality; entrepreneurship; local development



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1. Introduction

Each building object has individual physical characteristics (area, volume, room proportions, etc.). During its design, all these features are adapted to the function that the facility is to perform in the future (Adamska 2014, p. 11).

The functions of an edifice define its designation and the means for its utilization, and these describe its usefulness in more detail, constituting an individual and constantly evolving element, even though its current designation has been established for many years or centuries (Barełkowski 2014, pp. 57–58, 61). This is a non-material factor linked to the material structure of buildings subjected to the strong pressure of change—civilizational, technological, economic, cultural, and even fashion-oriented change. This applies equally to buildings and sites serving religious purposes.

A sacral object is a place for continual and regular meetings among believers or followers of a given religion (denomination) for the purposes of participating in a religious service and/or other organized forms of religious worship (Judgment of the Supreme Administrative Court 1991). It is a building designated for practicing religious observances and participating in religious services (Polish Classification of Building Objects 1999, class 1272). Therefore, religious sites comprise churches, chapels, Orthodox churches, mosques, synagogues, lapidaries, etc., as well as cemeteries and places related to burials. At the same time, a historical sacral site is a place that documents a past era and/or event, whose preservation is in the public interest due to its historical, artistic, or scientific importance (Act 2003, art. 3 pkt 1).

While it is sometimes difficult to talk about the stability of functions in relation to various buildings due to changes in the way they are used, we observe such stability in relation to temples that are still used by the religious communities that built them (Stepień 2014, p. 273).

This study was devoted to collecting, organizing, and systematizing the knowledge of the functions of historic religious objects and the possibility of their influence on the external environment (many publications mention this, but each author describes these issues through the prism of the problem he analyzes). This study hypothesizes that, currently, the primary function of such objects—the function of Christian religious worship, including prayer—is supplemented by many other, no less important functions, thanks to which it is possible to increase the attractiveness of these objects for visitors and increase the pool of potential sources of funding for the existence of these objects. At the same time, historic religious objects are a factor in local development, they determine the types of economic activities carried out in the area in which they are located, and they affect the finances of business entities and households. The method used in this study is a critical analysis of legal acts and literature. Due to the author's primary familiarity with Polish settings, the examples presented in this study regarding ways to use the space of historic religious objects mostly concern those located in Poland.

2. The Fundamental Function of Sacral Objects

The fundamental function of sacral objects, including those of a historical character, can be distinguished according to the criterion of the reason for their construction, and this is the function of religious worship (Figure 1).

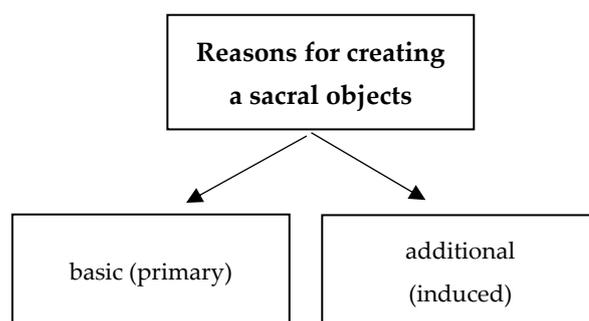


Figure 1. Functions of sacral objects according to the reasons for their creation (own elaboration).

The function of religious worship in historical sacral objects (Nowiński 2011, p. 269) determines its form and constitutes the point of departure for creating the site's (historical monument) narrative, which is understood as the continuity of events from the time of its creation up to the point of contact with a given recipient (Doroz-Turek 2014, p. 92). It is associated with individual and collective religious practices. The kinds of religious practices and the related way of using the historical sacral objects analyzed allow for the distinguishing of a few detailed aspects within this function (Figure 2).

For the members of a given denomination, a sacral object constitutes, above all, the place of conducting religious observances, including Holy Mass and various other religious services of a unifying, thanksgiving, or supplicating character. Frequently, during such religious observances, sacraments particular to a given denomination are performed (in the Catholic Church, e.g., baptism, the first communion, confirmation, marriage, or priesthood). Some of these objects, owing to their special significance to members of a particular denomination (related to phenomena such as revelations and miracles officially recognized by the Church), carry out the role of a pilgrimage destination, and this function can have both a national and international character. In Poland, the historical sacral sites for Catholic pilgrimages are mainly related to the worship of the Virgin Mary, among which there are the following: the Sanctuary of Jasna Góra in Częstochowa (4 to 5 million pilgrims received annually), the Sanctuary of Kalwaria Zebrzydowska (around 2 million),

the Basilica of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Święta Lipka near Kętrzyn (around 2 million), and the Sanctuary of Our Lady in Gietrzwałd. Other popular destinations for pilgrimages include Pałacowska Calvary near Przemyśl, the Sanctuary of the Holy Cross Wood Relic near Sandomierz, and St Anna Sanctuary near Opole. For the Orthodox Church, such sites and locations in Poland are the Orthodox Monastery Complex in Grabarka near Siemiatycze, the Supraśl Orthodox Monastery, and the Monastery of St Onufry in Jabłeczna.

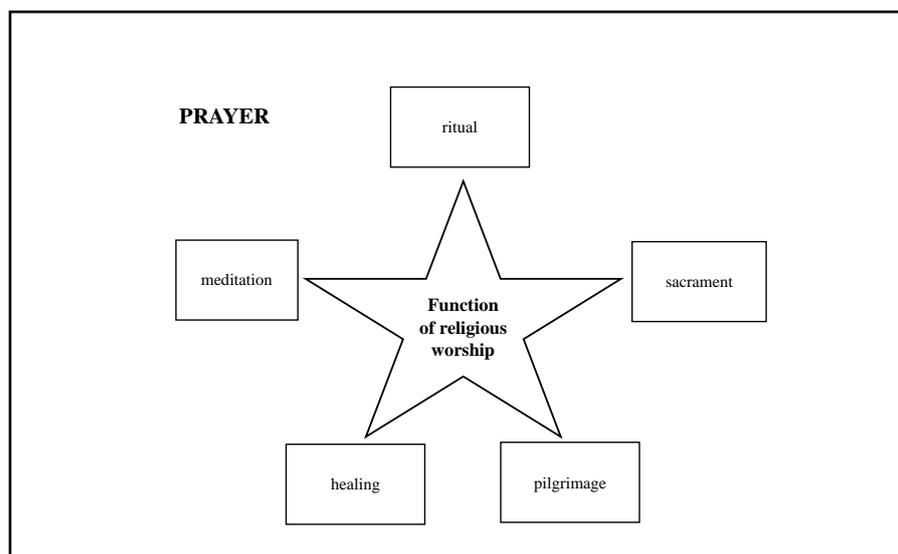


Figure 2. Detailed functions of sacral objects distinguished by their fundamental function (own elaboration).

Every year, over 220 million believers worldwide take part in pilgrimages, among whom the most numerous group are Christians (around 150 million), with approximately 7 million Poles (according to the estimates by the Department of Geography of Religion at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków). The most popular pilgrimage destinations in the world are the historical sanctuaries dedicated to the Virgin Mary, out of which the most frequented site is the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City—with around 20 million pilgrims annually—whilst in Europe, the most popular sites are the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fatima (Portugal) and the Sanctuary of Our Lady in Lourdes (France), which are visited annually by over 5 million believers. Other historical sacral sites popular among pilgrims from all over the world include the Basilica of Our Lady of Aparecida (Brazil), the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth (Israel), Santa Casa Sanctuary in Loreto (Italy), the Saint James Church in Medjugorje (Bosnia and Herzegovina), the Basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi (Italy), the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC (the USA), the Cathedral of St James in Santiago de Compostela (Spain), and, obviously, Saint Peter’s Basilica in Vatican (Italy), with, on average, 12 million pilgrims every year. It is worth noting that the flow of pilgrims was greatly reduced and then completely ceased during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is now returning to pre-2020 levels.

People participate in pilgrimages for a variety of reasons; for some of them, these are the healing properties of such sites, which can be of a spiritual or physical nature, as well as an individual or communal dimension (Böhme 2006). Undoubtedly, in Poland, the therapeutic healing function is primarily performed, such as in the following: the Sanctuary of the Divine Mercy in Lagiewniki near Krakow (the world center of the cult of Divine Mercy preached by St. Faustina Kowalska) due to the Image of the Merciful Jesus in it, the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Sorrows, due to the miraculous spring and image of Our Lady of Licheń in Licheń Stary in Wielkopolska, and the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Jasna Gora due to the miraculous image of Our Lady of Jasna Gora. Sacral sites are

considered sacred places (Jackowski and Sołjan 2001) due to the fact that they contain relics of the saints and of the blessed. Relics in Poland are to be found in many religious objects, including those of a historic nature. At the same time, these are not only relics of Polish saints (the number of Polish saints and the blessed is more than three hundred, of which as many as 170 have been elevated to the altars in the 20th and 21st centuries) but also others. These special locations favor meditation and concentration; thus, the realization of another function of these historical sacral sites is analyzed, given that meditation does not have to be of a purely religious nature.

All the detailed functions listed within the function of religious worship are united by one function that is present in all of them—namely, the function of prayer. Prayer accompanies all religious rituals, sacraments, pilgrimages, healing, and meditation, and the fundamental space for its expression is a sacral object, including that of a historical character.

Prayer is one of the most significant aspects of spiritual/religious life (Zarzycka et al. 2022) and the most widespread means of religious observance (Bartczuk and Zarzycka 2020). As part of common religious life, it is included into liturgies with appropriate formulas and times (Pinkas 2023), and it constitutes a rich and very diverse field of internal human experiences. Prayer accompanies thoughts and sheds light on relationships with other people and the outside world (cf. Walesa and Tatala 2020; Wojciechowska 2017), and it also brings about positive reinforcement, thus causing an increase in the subjective meaning assigned to it (Tatala and Wojtasiński 2021).

Prayer is a spiritual method of dealing with stress that can be effective both in extraordinary, life-threatening circumstances, such as in the case of cancer patients (Roh et al. 2018) and people with post-traumatic stress disorder (Exline et al. 2005; Tait et al. 2016) and in typical everyday situations for people who confront stressful situations¹ (Pargament 1997). In order to be beneficial, it requires a relationship with God based on trust and faith (Wnuk 2023).

The meaning of prayer is the believer's hope that what he is unable to achieve by the strength of his moral consciousness will be achieved with God's help. Research shows that this becomes highly popular during times of illness (Wachholtz and Sambamoorthi 2011), as was seen in particular during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the study by Boguszewski et al. (2020), 21.3% of the Poles questioned declared that they spent far more time on prayers and other religious practices than ever before.

The psychological literature distinguishes various types of prayer and several methods of measuring it. One of the most common typologies of prayer is the one based on its manifestations. Another is conducted due to the content of the prayer. This criterion allows us to distinguish prayers of praise, thanksgiving, propitiation, or request (Kulpaczyński and Tatala 2000). Prayer can be collective and individual (Wiśniewski 2018). Individual prayer is a spontaneous prayer that characterizes the course of revelation, because it is man's response to God's love. Public prayer is a continuation of individual prayer, but conducted in a community (Rosenzweig 2005, p. 312). While individual prayer can take place basically anywhere, places for collective prayer are primarily sacred buildings. It is there that fuller integration occurs and spiritual bonds with God and mutual bonds between people are established (Kulpaczyński and Tatala 2000; Ladd and McIntosh 2008).

Prayers can be assessed using single-point measures (e.g., Braam et al. 2007; Bradshaw et al. 2008) and multiple-point measures (e.g., Prayer Functions Scale—Bade and Cook 2008; Types of Prayer Scale—Poloma and Pendleton 1989, 1991). These measures show that prayer and their meaning as an expression of religious observance are conditioned by the religiosity, gender, and age of the praying person (Walesa and Tatala 2020). Moreover, one can also observe the existence of multigenerational changes; from one generation to another, the level of religious faith and regularity of religious practice is decreasing, with the latter mainly reduced when people enter into adulthood. The observed trends indicate that it is necessary to undertake steps aimed at "retaining" young people in the Church. A first step in this direction could be to encourage young people to visit religious sites by pointing out the many functions they serve. In the case of historical sacral monuments, this

could be easier due to their exceptional properties, allowing for a relatively much wider range of possibilities for using their space.

This study is devoted to identifying additional functions of historic religious objects and the manner of their impact on the external environment. This study posed the hypothesis that, at present, the fundamental function of such objects—the function of religious worship, including prayer—is complemented by many other no less important functions. Their number is growing, resulting from the wish to increase the accessibility and attractiveness of historical sacral monuments to visitors. In this study, the author presents additional functions of historic religious objects, as well as the directions of impact of these objects on the environment, and indicates a change in the contemporary perception of the functions of historical Christian sacral objects. The methods used in this study are critical analyses of legal acts and literature.

3. Additional Functions of Historic Religious Objects

Fairly often, religious motives are neither the only nor the most fundamental aspects determining the purpose for visiting particular sacral historical monuments. Often, these objects are visited for other reasons, which include the additional functions of these objects (Figure 3).

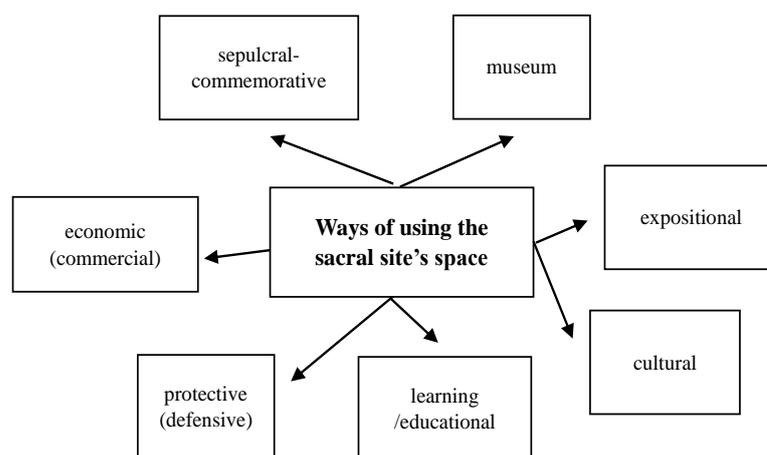


Figure 3. Additional functions of historical sacral objects distinguished according to the usage of their space (own elaboration).

The majority of cultures, including European cultures, have a rooted respect for the dead (Rytel 2014, p. 265), which is demonstrated in sacral historical monuments with a special room (a crypt) dedicated to them. In Poland, there are crypts under many historic churches. Some of them are open to the public. Example of the latter include, for example, the Crypt of the Deserved at Skalka, located in the basement of the Basilica of St. Michael the Archangel and St. Stanislaus the Bishop in Krakow; the crypt under the Chapel of Our Lady on Jasna Góra in Czestochowa; and the crypt in the Wawel Cathedral, with Polish kings buried there (e.g., Jan III Sobieski, Stefan Batory), as well as poets (e.g., Juliusz Slowacki, Adam Mickiewicz) and notable leaders (e.g., Prince Józef Poniatowski, Tadeusz Kościuszko). Both the members of a given denomination and tourists are interested in visiting places of burial containing tombs of lay and religious personages, which are often accompanied by special plaques commemorating individuals and events important to national history. In Poland, the presence of patriotic symbols in historical sacral sites is very frequent, and these are based on historical settings and also connected to very strong links between religious worship and Polish national identity, particularly in the period following the Partitions (from 1795 to 1918), when Poland vanished from the map of Europe.

In these historical sacral sites, one can also view special expositions of art collections (Kaczmarek et al. 2002) (e.g., paintings in Sandomierz Cathedral and Świdnica Cathedral),

liturgical vessels, robes, and volumes (Doroz-Turek 2014, pp. 103–8) (e.g., the Treasury in the Archcathedral in Lublin). Moreover, their main space is often used to stage lectures and concerts (classical music, choral music, organ concerts—e.g., The International Festival of Organ and Chamber Music at the Cathedral in Kamień Pomorski, on the occasion of Christmas—at St. Mary’s Church in Krakow, etc.); thus, in view of the above, it can be stated that contact with such a multifunctional space has an educational dimension (Kulik et al. 2022). It should also be added that their construction and architectural structure meant that, especially in the past, they were used for defense purposes (e.g., the Jasna Gora Monastery complex in Czestochowa during the Swedish Deluge in late 1655), during periods of military hostility (Akin 2016), and for protection from natural cataclysms. Nowadays, they often provide shelter from high and low temperatures outdoors.

Historic religious buildings also enable the implementation of an economic function. Some of them are used for commercial purposes, including trade. There are points (shops) on the premises where you can buy religious press, devotional items, and souvenirs closely related to the monument (such points are in cathedrals, basilicas, or sanctuaries in Poland). This function, like other additional functions of the analyzed objects, correspond to that of satisfying lower-level needs (according to Maslov’s pyramid of needs), as opposed to the basic function of the object, which satisfies higher-level needs (Stepień 2014, p. 274).

Nowadays, historical sacral objects perform many different functions at the same time, which emerge and evolve in strict conjunction with their fundamental functions. Hence, it should be noted that they complement this fundamental function, creating an attractive, comprehensive, and spiritual, yet commercial, “product” both for the members of a given denomination as well as for tourists. These additional functions are, on the one hand, a response to the reported needs of visitors (to be able to purchase souvenirs, light a candle with certain intentions, go sightseeing in the edifice, and examine the attractive artefacts collected there) and also of the owners and administrators of these objects (enabling the collection of fees, as well as the accessing of public funds for the renovation of the space of these facilities, as well as the artifacts collected in them—possible due to the fact that they are cultural assets that have built Polish national identity). This also applies to the originally single-function historical sacral sites belonging to the Catholic Church. Such sites, similar to the places of worship of other denominations (e.g., La Mezquita mosque in Cordoba in Spain or Hagia Sophia in Istanbul in Turkey), whose spaces were used from the very beginning for a variety of purposes (Robson 2009, p. 44), are today becoming multi-functional sites (e.g., the Sanctuary in Stary Licheń in Poland—see Klekot 2008). Importantly, these functions are developing as a result of the changes taking place in society—cultural, demographic, and economic.

In Poland, as in many other countries, the state had a significant influence on the emergence of some of the new functions of historical sacral objects. During the Second World War, in Poland—and especially in its capital, Warsaw—many historical monuments were destroyed; among those that survived, there were numerous sacral sites. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that they have become part of the national cultural heritage as enclaves of the domain of art and architecture, which, apart from their function of religious worship, have also been opened to the performing of many other additional functions. Today, these sites have been adapted to the needs of their environment. Changing their functions is a way to increase their attractiveness, as well as their wider and often more interesting usage as parts of the common national heritage (Włodarczyk 2014, p. 318). Actions aimed at obstructing this process would be unnatural and contradictory to the concept of the conservation of historical monuments, as well as contrary to their key role as active objects in a cultural space (Barełkowski 2014, p. 60).

In summary, it should be noted that the indicated ways of using the space of historic religious buildings in Poland are still additional functions, although they have been permanently incorporated into their space. It is unlikely for sacred spaces in Poland to not have religious functions at all, only providing museum-like functions, as is the case, for example,

in the complex of Buddhist temples of Angkor in Cambodia and in the churches carved in volcanic tuff in Cappadocia in Turkey (Durydiwka 2015, p. 437).

4. The Spheres and Type of Impact of Historic Sacral Objects

Historic sacral objects influence the external environment. Taking the character of this impact into consideration, as well as the related interactions between these sites and persons who visit them and/or live in their neighborhood, the following spheres of impact and its kinds can be indicated (Figure 4).

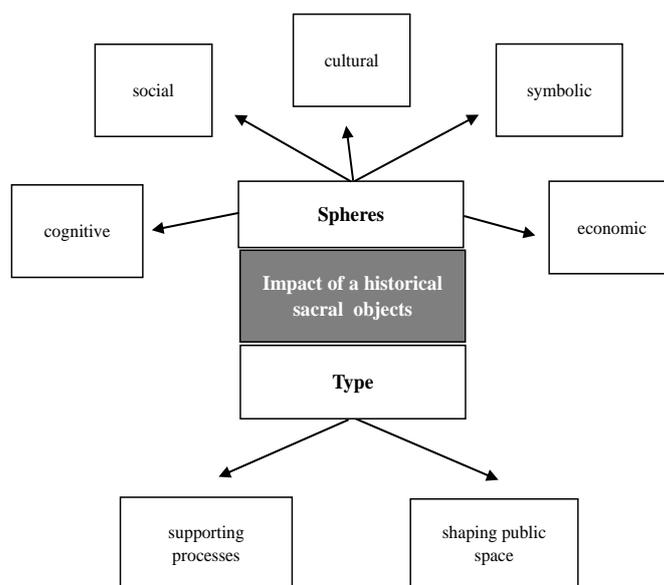


Figure 4. Spheres and type of impact of historical sacral objects (own elaboration).

Historical sacral objects have a strong impact on the cognitive sphere, and they therefore enable the following: exploring the rudiments of religious beliefs (Kulik et al. 2022), obtaining information about them, as well as the times and circumstances in which they emerged, and allowing for the shaping and building of knowledge resources by those who visit these objects (Roth 2008, p. 476).

By impacting on the social sphere, historical sacral objects build the identity of a given religious denomination (de Wildt et al. 2019), integrate its believers (Halemba 2023), and facilitate the internal development of these persons (Paris 2019; Kulik et al. 2022). Taking into consideration the fact that these sites can also house events of a non-religious nature, they provide a place for socializing (Placci 2022) and entertainment (concerts and even fashion shows—see Durydiwka 2015, p. 431), which can take on a cyclical character.

The impact of historical sacral sites on the sphere of culture is linked with building a cultural memory (de Wildt et al. 2019) and cultivating folk traditions, thanks to them. The latter type of impact is so strongly rooted in the tradition of certain localities that the analyzed objects are imbued with a ludic function (Durydiwka 2015, p. 438). This function is exemplified in Poland by open-air fairs and dances taking place during the ceremonies of traditional religious celebrations (giving thanks for a good harvest, feasts for the site's Patron Saint/s, etc.), which are organized in selected sites in a highly ceremonial way (such as a procession of the congregation dressed in traditional folk costumes). In Spain (Sanctuary of Our Lady in El Rocío in Andalusia), an example of this can be the Pentecostal indulgence feast called Romería del Rocío, where the atmosphere of silence and concentration is interspersed with elements typical of an Andalusian fiesta.

The symbolic influence of historical sacral sites is shown via their contribution to creating a common heritage for the followers of a given religion (Schroer 2015), as well as in recording their role of a “witness of its time”, serving as a link among the past, the present, and the future. Historical sacral sites placed in a certain space (Aulet and Vidal 2018)

witness important political events (e.g., in Poland, in the Church of St. Stanislaus Kostka in Warsaw's Żoliborz district, where, before martial law was imposed in Poland in 1981, "Masses for the Homeland" were celebrated by the chaplain of the Solidarity Trade Union—Blessed Father Jerzy Popiełuszko; St. Brigid's Church in Gdansk—the center of pastoral care for striking workers, after 13 December 1981—thanks to then-pastor Father Henryk Jankowski—an important point of resistance against the communist regime) (Durydiwka 2015, p. 431) and armed conflicts whose traces are still visible on their facades (many such monuments still have cannon balls embedded in them and bullet holes left on their surfaces). Such sites do not solely "belong" to one generation or era but, being part of their local history at a given time, belong to their contemporary inhabitants; hence, they are a reflection of past eras and are of a timeless nature.

Historical sacral objects affect the economic sphere; they are a tourist product (Behrens 2014) that "sells well" but also stimulates the development of enterprises in their environment, creating an impact on the revenue of local businesses.

Tourists/pilgrims significantly influence the types and structures of economic entities operating in a given area, determining the types of economic activity of the local population. Entrepreneurs produce goods and provide services directly addressed to people visiting the facilities analyzed. This includes the production of souvenir products, the supply of accommodation, the provision of catering, transport, and other services for which there is a reported demand.

Historic religious buildings are an important factor in economic recovery (Durydiwka 2015, pp. 431–35). Thanks to them, the income of entrepreneurs, individual residents, and their families increases, as well as that of local government units through the system of taxes and fees paid by them and whose authorities are therefore willing to implement investment projects—the effects of which benefit both residents and visitors. Improvement in the economic situation thanks to them is visible not only in the areas surrounding them (Vukonić 1998) but also in areas located along the roads leading to them (Beinhauer-Köhler and Leggewie 2009). A separate but very important issue is the improvement of the condition of historic religious buildings thanks to donations directly made by visitors for these objects, as well as paid to the account of the parish to which the object belongs. A lack of pilgrims/tourists has a negative impact on entire communities operating in these areas, individual families, people, and the historic religious buildings themselves. A pertinent example is the abandonment of historical sacral sites located in Bethlehem during the armed conflict between Israel and the Palestinian organization Hamas.

Historical sacral objects induce a variety of processes in their visitors; hence, considering aesthetic values and their embodiment in the sites described, it can be said that they constitute an important educational tool, aiding didactic and pedagogical processes in terms of education concerning both religious values and socio-ethical values (Kulik et al. 2022). The Church has long combined educational and religious activities (e.g., Zürcher 1989) (in Poland, kindergartens, primary schools, and high schools run by, among others, the Ursuline Sisters operate in these objects or next to them). This approach is very close to the idea of psychodidactics, which uses the knowledge of psychology and its methods to support didactic and scientific (Molski 2014, p. 193) as well as educational processes (Steć et al. 2021). For religious minorities, historical sacral monuments are often associated with their emancipation efforts (de Wildt et al. 2019) and provide a place to hold public debate (Halemba 2022).

Historical sacral sites contribute to the surrounding space due to their architectural and aesthetic attributes (some of them are monuments inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, e.g., the Mannerist architectural and landscape complex and pilgrimage park in Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, the Churches of Peace in Jawor and Świdnica, and the wooden churches of southern Małopolska—Binarowa, Blizne, Dębno, Haczów, Lipnica Murowana, and Sękowa), and they affect their visitors as well as persons who live in the neighborhood. An architectural space strongly impacts individual development (Keel 1969; Mesquida et al. 2016) and is connected with one's sense of beauty in a natural

way. These monuments usually represent objective beauty associated with objects and artefacts (Ossowski 1958). Such beauty is a testimony of deity; hence, in sacral architecture, it escapes particular interpretations and refers to a higher, more objective order, at the same time corresponding with the value of truth (Battaino 2020). Feelings aroused by the architectural form of a historical sacral monument can trigger the process of the spiritual development of an individual and becomes an important aspect of their psychological wellbeing (Kosiński 2011).

The sites examined in this study build the identity of the place in which they are located and often provide a point of orientation in a local space (cathedrals and churches tower over buildings in towns and villages) (Halemba 2023). Whether located in urban centers (both large-city agglomerations and in small towns) or in rural areas, they often become a central point due to the usually large size of the edifice, becoming the key element of that space (Cerasi 1999). These sites are of a particular character (Böhme 2014) and actively participate in the shaping of the public space and the movement within it because they determine the layout of roads and the location of other places relevant to the local community. Interestingly, these sites shape the local landscape even when there is no significant representation of the religious community that would regularly use these sites and even when the given religious denomination has been long absent in that locality (such as in the case of historical synagogues). Their continued existence means that although they no longer serve purposes of religious worship, they are still “remembered” in the public space (Halemba 2023).

In summary, it can be said that historic religious buildings not only allow visitors to benefit from the value of a place and what is collected there but also open themselves to other possibilities created by their spaces. They influence a number of processes that occur in visitors and have a strong impact on the spaces surrounding them. Historic religious buildings “inform” about events, allow for the gathering of knowledge, and enrich visitors. They help cultivate and develop local traditions, as well as integrate the local community. Moreover, they “create an atmosphere” for these communities to undertake joint activities, which in turn makes these objects “live” (there is something occurring there all the time, even outside the hours of typical religious practice). These activities are especially valuable in the era of self-alienation (“closing people in on themselves”). In smaller towns, this function of historic religious buildings—in addition to the function of religious worship—may even become a modern “mission” of these objects.

5. Conclusions

Based on the analyses carried out, it should be concluded that the objective of this study has been achieved, and the hypothesis set in it has been verified. This study collected, organized, and systematized the functions of Christian historic religious objects that occur today, pointing to their primary function, i.e., religious worship, which is internally bound by the ubiquitous function of prayer, as well as additional functions, which are realized through the different uses of these objects, which was supported by specific examples. In addition, the “added value” that historic religious objects generate for the external environment was pointed out. The influence of historic religious objects on the external environment, i.e., on the local development of the areas where these buildings are located by stimulating entrepreneurship directly or indirectly related to them, cannot be overestimated. This refers to creating jobs, encouraging economic activity, and consequently—through the actions of local government authorities—raising additional budget revenues, thus improving the standard of living of residents in a given area.

According to the author, the functions of historic sacral objects require further in-depth empirical research, which would provide, among other things, important information about the perception of the functions performed by these objects and on the changes to these functions by people of different ages, as well as different ways of performing religious practices, or the religion practiced in general. It would also be inspiring to study the type and extent of the impact of historic religious sites on local development, local

entrepreneurship, and the finances of the households of those living in the area where these sites are located. Such studies can be carried out in any country (they may be supranational or supra-religious), and their results can be used to prepare generalized, cross-cutting analyses in this field. The author hopes that this study is part of the current of this type of research, indicating the functions of historic religious buildings and the spheres and directions of their impact on the environment, which can be the subject of potential research areas.

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Data Availability Statement: The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

¹ For 84.4% of a sample of pharmacy students at the University of Khartoum, prayer was the most common strategy for coping with academic stress (Yousif et al. 2022).

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