CULTURAL HERITAGE | RESEARCH ARTICLE

The European cultural heritage of the contemporary sacred landscape in Poland and its evaluation based on the example of roadside shrines and crosses

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Abstract: This paper is an attempt at evaluating roadside shrines and crosses as significant elements of the cultural heritage of Poland and Europe. Evaluation was carried out in the context of the role these objects play in the rural landscape. We examined roadside shrines and crosses that are a testimony of piety of the local community. Roadside sacred architecture was studied within the area of a representative rural commune in South-Eastern Poland. Point evaluation was used to assess the role of shrines and crosses in three most important aspects: spatial, social-cultural, and natural. We evaluated the artistic and historical values of these objects, their significance in contemporary rural landscape structure, as well as material evidence of piety left at these objects by the local people.

Subjects: Culture; Social History of Art; Religion, Tourism and Pilgrimage; Religion & the Environment; Heritage

Keywords: roadside shrines and crosses; sacral material culture; European cultural heritage; evaluation; Poland

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1. Introduction

1.1. Sacral symbolism in the landscape

One of human goals is to leave permanent signs of our existence and creativity. These signs are written into every culture and individual. Polish cultural heritage is highly diversified, as a consequence of the history of Poland, as well as the fact that various cultures intertwined within its borders. Roadside shrines and crosses are naturally interlocked with the cultural and geographical landscape of Poland, perpetuated by centuries-old tradition. Poland was baptised and entered Christian Europe in 966. Therefore, roadside sacral objects are material manifestations of sacrum, integral elements of the cultural landscape of the country (Myga-Piątek, 2012; Szoł-Radziszewska and Radziszewska, 2019; Wolk, 2016). These objects are an effect of human activity in the landscape they simultaneously influence. All components of the cultural landscape are interwoven through space, history, and meaning due to long-term relations between man and environment (Moylan et al., 2009; Tilley, 2006). Elements of cultural heritage depend on the surrounding space as its integral components, because of numerous codependencies between society, landscape, and natural environment (Aplin, 2007; Taylor & Lennon, 2011). Therefore, the landscape takes part in forming local cultures and, according to the European Landscape Convention (2000), is a vital component of European cultural and natural heritage. The landscape is perceived as very dynamic and diversified, depending on the historic moment, personal experiences and predispositions of individuals, social memories, and feeling of identity (Tilley, 2006). Therefore, studying spaces allows us to characterise the communities which transform their immediate surroundings. Also because the religious traditions and behaviours are closely related to the local culture (Malec, 2018). Thus, a deeper examination of form, environment, design, decorations, methods of worship, and type of care provided for roadside sacral objects in Poland is so important. The material aspect of these objects is complemented by natural surroundings, with species composition dictated by centuries-old symbolism, sacral-magical meaning that European and Polish cultures assigned to plants (De Cleeene & Lejeune, 1999; Marzell, 1922, 1938). Folk practices, rituals, and prayers related to plants are a fascinating, yet separate, subject of research.

1.2. Roadside crosses and shrines in Europe

Roadside crosses and shrines in the landscape of Europe are noted in the oldest written sources and iconography (Porras 2011; Timmermann, 2012; Zachrisson, 2019). They created a substitute location of sacrum, marked boundaries of settlements, crossroads, protected travellers, welcomed newcomers, sanctified fields, edges of forests, roads, and outskirts of homesteads. Until this day, in modern cities, in squares and marketplaces, there are architectural monuments that form a decorative framework for statues of saints, imitating in microscale gothic churches and chapels (Timmermann, 2012). They are often works of high-class art, but also clearly represent regional artistic form (Hirsch, 1992; Watkins, 1930).

Heritage can be defined and studied in various ways, but the fundamental division into cultural and natural heritage is well established (Liu et al., 2020). Churches, monasteries, or Calvary complexes are primarily considered as sacral cultural heritage of Europe (World Heritage Culture, 2022). However, roadside crosses and shrines constitute an important element of the open landscape in countries dominated by Christianity (Bihunova & Michalica, 2019). Small sacral objects viewed individually have local importance, but considered as collective heritage of a given region, they can have significant importance, even on an international scale (Tóth et al., 2019). After all, small sacral architecture depicts traditional architecture, art, and craftsmanship of a given region (Štěpánková & Feriancová, 2011). However, as shown in research by Nestsch and Gugerell (2019) carried out in the Netherlands, perception of sacral objects in the landscape can change, which is related to the change of their function from sacral to secular.

Small sacral architecture in Central-Eastern Europe influences the character and identity of European cultural landscapes (Tóth et al., 2019). Similarly, such objects are an important,
permanent element of the Polish landscape, and constitute national heritage (Adamowski, 2011; Pluta, 2018). In Poland, there is an unwritten rule not to transfer these objects from primary locations. One of the oldest objects of this type in modern Poland is the roadside shrine in Święta Katarzyna (Świętokrzyskie Mountains), from 1430 (Czerwiński, 2012). For centuries the prevalence of such objects was dictated by church regulations. According to The Cracow Synod from 1621, every parson was obligated to erect crosses or shrines at the roads of his parish (Rylke, 1995). There are numerous Baroque statues (column shrines with a statue of Mary), founded by higher clergy and magnate houses across Silesia, Czech Republic, Moravia, Austria (Gorzelik, 2009). Vital moments leading to erecting crosses and shrines were national uprisings (the November Uprising in 1831, and the January Uprising in 1863–1864), or Poland regaining its independence in 1918. In other parts of Europe there also exist small sacral forms that are material evidence of bygone armed conflicts. A good example is a wooden cross at road A83, between Glasgow and Campbeltown in Scotland, which is a symbolic grave of John Townsley, a bagpiper perished on the front of WWI (Monger, 1997). Therefore, one can assume that the history of people and events from the past, written into roadside crosses and shrines, becomes present and materialised in the modern landscape, continuing to influence subsequent generations. Therefore, such objects are a tangible manifestation of absence, commemorating that, which no longer exists (Hockey et al., 2012; Meyer, 2012). Problematic historic events and politics affect the condition of this material heritage, unfortunately taking part in its destruction, and even elimination, as was the case in Lithuania in the Soviet times, i.e. after 1940 (Urbonienė, 2015). Thus, museums collect invaluable objects and undertake conservation steps to preserve these material forms of folk piety (Kruopaitė, 2017).

Nonetheless, anthropologists of religion notice secularisation of consciousness, and the fact that new objects are not noticed by passers-by, becoming “invisible”, even though their scale makes them distinctive in the surrounding space (Kaell, 2016). Also noticeable is the impact of various legal and geopolitical conditions favourable to erecting roadside crosses. In 16th-century France, plagued with religious wars, Francis de Sales recommended putting up crosses at crossroads as symbols of citizens belonging to the Roman-Catholic Church (Stacpoole-Kenny, 1909). In the 20th century such an event were the decrees of the Second Vatican Council (Kaell, 2015, 2021). The other side of cultural and political events is dictated by legal acts and political-sociological tendencies, proclaiming the need to eliminate material manifestations of piety in public spaces—a problem present in scientific debates (Kaell, 2016). For researchers, it is important to recreate relations that used to connect the local people with testimonies of their faith, to study their present meaning and influence over perception of the sacram of a location (Kaell, 2016, 2017).

Shrines and crosses preserve traces of past events, old forms of cult, sacral rites written over ancient pagan traditions (Colwell-Chanthaphonh & De Salle-Essoo, 2014). These objects are often the only material evidence of abandoned settlements or former traffic routes (Meyer, 2012).

The tradition of erecting roadside crosses and shrines in Poland is connected predominantly with the need to express piety by local communities. Moreover, such objects used to be burial places, especially during raging epidemics. Situated far from human settlements, they became unofficial cemeteries, mass graves. Although modern roadside crosses are no longer burial grounds, they retain a connection with death. They commemorate those killed during armed conflicts. From the 6th to the 8th century penitential crosses and shrines were erected across Europe. Built in locations of murders, suicides, or presumed graves, they expressed expiation for committed crimes (Timmermann, 2012). Many roadside sacral objects are lasting expressions of mourning and sympathy for the family. A good example is a roadside cross near Newmarket in Suffolk county, present in local consciousness as the grave of a Gypsy peasant named Joseph. Surprisingly, this object is still given care, as evidenced by decorations made from live and artificial flowers. In many parts of the world, there are roadside memorials commemorating tragic traffic accidents (Clark & Cheshire, 2004; Cohen, 2012; Everett, 2002; Mchunu, 2020; Przybylska 2021). Such a custom is also present in Greece and Iran. Roadside shrines have a special meaning to the Greeks, who treat
them as sanctuaries, calling them Proskynitari. The name is derived from the fact that for the families of the deceased they are the destination of yearly individual pilgrimages expressing memory, love, and an act of internal catharsis. Nevertheless, these objects are visible telltale signs for all users of the road, cautioning and provoking thought (Monger, 1997).

The meaning of roadside sacral objects in Polish consciousness is documented in studies, which confirm that they are erected in other parts of the world, where Poles are present (Koliński, 1994). Significant social meaning of roadside sacral objects in Poland is evidenced by an increase of their number since the 1990s (Przybylska & Czepczyński, 2016). It is due to the fact that after WWII Polish Christian churches (especially Roman-Catholic) operated despite repressions from the contemporary government. After 1989—the first democratic election in Poland—a new political situation made it possible to freely erect small sacral objects. Pilgrimages of John Paul II to Poland, were another event to commemorate in the form of crosses and statues. These historic-cultural factors set Poland apart from other countries in the region, for instance, the Czech Republic (Havlíček, 2014). However, recently interest in this type of forms has been increasing in Poland and other countries (Bíhůrová & Michalica, 2019; Fusková & Fuxa, 2019; Halajová et al., 2019; Koliński, 1994; Lubiarz et al., 2019; Tóth, 2017; Tóth et al., 2019).

Roadside crosses and shrines are extraordinarily important due to religious, social, and spatial aspects (Antolak & Szyszkowski, 2013; Seweryn, 1958). They have a symbolic, compositional, and functional connection with their surroundings, creating local identity and individual genius loci (Tóth, 2017). Thus, they were erected at the boundaries of settlements and villages, exit roads, and crossroads. It is vital to stress their role in building social relations in small village communities (Elwart, 2016; Gawel, 2011; Pelcowa, 2011; Pytka, 2014). It is linked to significant piety of the villagers, and the fact that roadside sacral objects are their place for meetings, common prayers, and conversations. Care provided to these objects takes the form of designing flower decorations, maintaining existing vegetation, new plantings, renovations of elevations, replacing old crosses with new ones, restoring old statues, introducing new devotional items, especially paintings and statues. According to Seweryn (1958), for a long time in Polish lands various rituals were connected to roadside shrines and crosses. Among those, the most noteworthy are everyday processions from a shrine to the church, prayers during May services, Easter food blessing, or symbolic farewell to a deceased villager at the border cross (Seweryn, 1958). In rural Poland, many of these rituals are still cultivated, however, in urban areas they are nearly nonexistent (Wolk, 2016). Roadside sacral objects undoubtedly brought local communities together, they were also an important element of the rural landscape as landmarks and guideposts. Their presence in such archival cartographic material as historic maps from the 19th century, and the beginning of the 20th century is also a perfect source of information regarding their spatial distribution near old traffic routes, confirming their location, which has not changed for decades. Therefore, roadside crosses and shrines as elements of cultural heritage of Polish countryside were, and still are, its valuable material components.

Cultural meaning of shrines and crosses is also linked with their significant diversification. In the Polish landscape there are various types of construction of crosses and shrines made from wood, stone, metal, brick, containing carved or painted images of the divine persons, and saints. Unfortunately, to this day, there is no complex study of construction forms, or iconography of saints. Since the 1930s there have emerged monographs of selected regions, including small sacral objects. Since 1945, when The Polish Ethnographic Atlas was created, Polish ethnographers have documented and added such objects as shrines, statues, and crosses as components co-creating Polish folk cultural heritage (Polish Etnographic Atlas, 2014).

1.3. State of research on roadside sacred architecture
The cultural landscape can be defined in many ways, nonetheless, the World Heritage Committee declared it a commodity worth protecting (Aplin, 2007). In various regions of Poland, roadside crosses and shrines are an integral element of the cultural landscape. However, only a few studies
examine their role and meaning in landscape (Bialczak, 2002; Fortuna-Antoszkiewicz & Kimic, 2007; Kijowska, 2015; Kozaczynska 2007). Certain works are inventories, however, they lack multi-faceted evaluation of individual objects (Hernik et al., 2013; Radziszewski, 2008). Pudelska (2011) Lubiaz and Kulesza (2013) presented an inventory of vegetation accompanying small sacral forms. Rydzewska and Wilkaniec (2013) prepared a characterisation of selected shrines and crosses in Greater Poland, however, without explicit assessment. Pukowiec and Pytel (2013) presented a three-degree typology of small forms of sacral architecture, where the main premise in point evaluation is the register of historic monuments. Based on six criteria, using a three-degree scale, Kulesza and Lubiaz (2013) evaluated roadside sacral objects in Melgiew Commune, allotting 3 points to objects with high spatial-landscape value, and 1 point to those with low value. Halajová et al. (2019), and Bihuňová and Michalica (2019) also described methods of inventorying roadside sacral objects, and accompanying dendroflora. However, by using only these methods, they evaluate only individual criteria, without a holistic evaluation. All aforementioned attempts at evaluation are very different, which inspired us to create a point based method of evaluation encompassing three most vital aspects: spatial, social-cultural, and natural (Kulesza et al., 2019). Only such a broad spectrum of analysis will allow us to assess the value of cultural material heritage regarding these objects. Criteria used for the selected region are universal, and can be used in studies in other regions of Europe.

1.4. Purpose of the study
The goal of this article was to evaluate roadside sacral objects as material manifestations of social-cultural activity in the commune in three aspects: spatial meaning of objects, their cultural uniqueness, and the value of accompanying vegetation. The aim was also to stress the uniqueness and spatial role of small roadside architecture in the Polish countryside. It is important to highlight the mutual connection of small sacral architecture and the surrounding dendroflora, bringing together the values of cultural, historic, and natural heritage (Tóth & Feriancová, 2015). All of these components create the material structure of the rural landscape.

2. Area and methods of research
Trzydnik Duży Commune is situated in Eastern Poland, Kraśnik District, in the southern section of Lublin Province, and borders Podkarpackie Province. It is a typical rural Polish commune, where settlement and social structures are representative to our country, and agriculture is the dominant activity. Therefore, it is important to ascertain the number of small sacral forms in this area, determine their specificity and visual-spatial value.

Studies of roadside sacral objects in the Trzydnik Duży Commune took place from 2015 to 2016. All roadside crosses, shrines, and statues in the commune were inventoried. A separate group—roadside crosses commemorating victims of traffic accidents—was not included because their social role and spatial meaning have a completely different influence (Everett, 2000, 2002; Przybylska 2021).

As part of conducted studies of small sacral architecture the authors attempted to estimate the strength of spatial and compositional connections between a studied object of small roadside sacral architecture, and its surroundings. Does the surrounding space (cultural and natural elements) influence the studied object, and to what extent? Historic and artistic value of objects was also investigated. Is the object given care by the local people? Does it present any meaning to the local community? Are there trees and shrubs near the object? Does the vegetation accompanying a cross or shrine influence the role of the object in the landscape (is it a landscape dominant element)? In order to answer the aforementioned questions, a study form was created, adopting a three-point scale of assessment (Kulesza et al., 2019). Data was collected based on an evaluation form consisting of 4 sections, and its template can be found in Supplemental Information and Data.

The first section contains basic information regarding the object. (I). Apart from the name of the village or town in which the object was situated, its date of origin, and stylistic type, it also includes
three pieces of information, vital in terms of landscape and spatial analyses, namely: spatial location, type of landscape neighbouring the object, as well as type of accompanying vegetation. The assessment itself comprises sections II to IV (Kulesza et al., 2019).

The second section (II. 1–5) describes visual-spatial values of the objects, as well as their role in the cultural landscape. This section of the form assesses the spatial and compositional connection between small sacral architecture, and historic objects, such as: old erstwhile palaces, manors, churches, cemeteries, settlements, and road systems, i.e. with elements of a cultural landscape (II.1). The clearer, and based on purposefully planned compositional settings (e.g. view corridors) such connections are, the higher landscape and cultural value is attributed to roadside sacral objects. The degree of their exposition in the landscape (II.2), connection with natural (II. 3), and cultural (II.4) components are assessed consecutively. It is especially important in terms of evaluating their visual reception. It is vital to note, that in many cases spatial perception of roadside crosses and shrines is very clearly influenced by their immediate natural surroundings, increasing the value of sacral objects (e.g. crosses or shrines surrounded by significantly old trees). Presence of such natural elements as fields, river valleys, forests or old growth forests increase the aesthetic value of these objects and their spatial role in the landscape. They make the objects become characteristic points, or even dominant in the landscape, gaining the role of landmarks. On the other hand, the presence of dissonant cultural elements in the form of advertisement billboards, elements of road infrastructure, and buildings limits their visibility, thus decreasing their visual value. A very important point of this section of the form is also the issue of care, and evaluation of its amount given to roadside sacral objects (II.5). This particular criterion shows the functioning of contemporary roadside crosses or shrines in the consciousness of the local community. Visible signs of care, performed restorations and renovations, as well as maintaining floral decorations enable the assessment of the role these objects play in the spiritual life of the local people. High level of maintenance, and fresh decorations at crosses and shrines, as well as numerous witness accounts confirm that they are in the centre of religious practices, and that their cultural value is deeply rooted in the consciousness of the local community. Lack of such signs of care is evidence to the fact that they are merely useless, forgotten signs of the religious cult of previous generations, and manifestations of bygone piety.

The third section (III. 1–4) concerns cultural uniqueness of the object, which demands an expert opinion regarding artistic value of roadside sacral objects. It was estimated on the basis of the formal and iconographic structure of the object. Construction technique, utilised material, artistic skill, iconographic accuracy of visual depictions of paintings and sculptures, stylistic consistency typical to the region, stylistic discriminants, form of the object, and types of ornamentation were assessed. Historic value was assessed on the basis of the age of a given object. The oldest crosses and shrines, constructed before 1939, i.e. the beginning of the Second World War, were considered the most valuable. The second group consists of objects dated between 1939 and 2000, whereas the third is comprised of the newest ones, built after 2000. What is more, communal records of monuments, containing the most precious crosses and shrines that demand the care of a conservator, were quite helpful in determining the historic value of sacral objects. This section of the form also enabled the evaluation of social-cultural and religious meaning (III. 3) and physical condition of roadside crosses and shrines (III.4). The first parameter was assessed according to the degree of intensity of use of sacral objects by the local people in religious practices, based on interviews and writing down oral accounts from the local community. The parameter was established on the basis of the technical condition of the object and percentage of damage to its physical structure (construction and material).

As can be seen, sections (II. 5) and (III.4 and III.5) pertain to social aspects, especially the role of the sacral object in the lives of the local community and maintenance it is provided. The condition of maintenance of the object presented in the form is an indicator of its cultural and culture-forming meaning (e.g. upholding old and creating new local customs and religious practices).
The fourth section (IV. 1–6) evaluates high vegetation accompanying the studied subjects (trees and shrubs). Here a high mark is a result of the landscaping role of plant life, and care of the local community given to the trees and shrubs surrounding crosses and shrines. A low mark is the effect of traditional plants being replaced with foreign species and synthetic decorations. Therefore, the condition of the vegetation is also an indicator of whether the local community recognises the role and connection between a cultural element (cross), and nature (trees surrounding the cross). It was also assumed that the cultural landscape always possesses certain value, since valueless landscapes do not exist. Therefore, in the form answers to all questions are assigned between 1 and 3 points (Kulesza et al., 2019).

The result of a given evaluation is the sum of points from three sections of the form. Each object can obtain between 45 and 15 points. For the purpose of a final mark, a three-point scale was established. Low spatial-landscape value was assigned to objects, if their sum of points was between 15 and 24, average—those, which obtained 25 to 34 points, and high—35 to 45 points. Such scale allows us to indicate the most valuable small sacral forms.

3. Role of roadside crosses and shrines in studied space

In the studied area, 73 small sacral forms were inventoried, including 54 crosses, 17 shrines, and 2 statues. Detailed characteristic of the objects in historic and cultural aspects was prepared by Kulesza, Lubiarz, and Żak-Kulesza (2017a), as was the dendrologic inventory (Kulesza, Lubiarz, and Żak-Kulesza 2017b).

The results of the evaluation of roadside crosses and shrines are presented in Table 1. Table 2 presents the short characteristics of the highest-rated objects. The first element of evaluation is the assessment of meaning of roadside sacral objects in space as elements of material culture. The highest-rated were a brick roadside shrine in Owczarnia (Figure 2ABC), and a column shrine in Dębowiec. Both objects are significantly connected with the historic cultural landscape. The 19th century shrine in Owczarnia is situated at a defunct traffic route from Kraśnik through Rzeczyca Ziemiańska, and Rzeczyca Księża, to Łychów Gościeradowski and Łychów Szlachecki. All these places are listed in sources as early as the first half of the 15th century. It is one of the oldest southbound communication routes already marked on maps in the 18th century (Zugaj, 2018, fig. p. 10). It is also confirmed by the analysis of the specialistic map of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy from 1899 (Spezialkarte der österreichisch-ungarischen Monarchie 1:75 000, 1899; Figure 1C). The column shrine in Dębowiec is spatially connected with a palace-park complex in Olbićin, although presently it is not within its grounds. This object was also marked on the 1899 map (Figure 1A). Both shrines are perfectly displayed in the landscape, and natural components compound their values. The shrine in Owczarnia (Figure 2ABC) is located on a small hill with a vast panoramic view. The shrine in Dębowiec (Figure 2D) is also situated on a hill, its background consisting of farm buildings, fields, and picturesque views of the former park. However, the degree of maintenance of these objects is average since signs of care are only partial. Herein, it is useful to provide the figures, which show that an average mark in terms of degree of maintenance and care provided to the object was given to 35 inventoried roadside crosses and shrines, i.e 48%. There were 25, that is 34%, very well-maintained objects, and only 13 (18%) devoid of any signs of care. As can be seen, the majority—82% of roadside sacral objects presents visible evidence of use, and their presence in space is not without meaning to the inhabitants of the studied region of Poland. As evident from the conducted interviews, roadside crosses and shrines are an important cultural element to the local community, since 17 of them, i.e. 23%, are frequently visited places of worship, and 34 (47%) are used occasionally. What is concerning, is the fact that as many as 22 roadside crosses and shrines (30%) do not present any signs of use, or are utilised only incidentally. What is interesting, the majority—as many as 38 objects, that is 52% of small sacral architecture—are in very good technical condition, with damage equal to less than 30%. The average condition, with damage between 30 and 60%, is presented by 26 objects (36%), and only 9 (12%) show damage over 60%. This indicates that the objects are not only decorated and used in occasional religious practices, but also preserved, renovated, and even modernised or replaced.
| Place                  | Object type         | Visual and spatial evaluation (5-15 points) | Cultural uniqueness evaluation (4-12 points) | Visual and spatial evaluation of accompanying vegetation (6-18 points) | Total valorisation (15-45 points) |
|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Agatówka              | Wooden cross        | 10                                         | 6                                           | 6                                                                 | 22                               |
|                        | Metal cross         | 9                                          | 8                                           | 11                                                                | 28                               |
|                        | Wooden cross        | 10                                         | 7                                           | 8                                                                 | 25                               |
|                        | Wooden cross        | 9                                          | 8                                           | 13                                                                | 30                               |
|                        | Cabinet shrine      | 12                                         | 9                                           | 15                                                                | 36                               |
|                        | Wooden cross        | 11                                         | 9                                           | 12                                                                | 32                               |
| Budki Górne            | Metal cross         | 9                                          | 8                                           | 10                                                                | 27                               |
|                        | Metal cross         | 9                                          | 9                                           | 12                                                                | 30                               |
|                        | Metal cross         | 11                                         | 7                                           | 13                                                                | 31                               |
|                        | Metal cross         | 12                                         | 9                                           | 16                                                                | 37                               |
|                        | Metal cross         | 7                                          | 8                                           | 6                                                                 | 21                               |
|                        | Chapel shrine       | 11                                         | 12                                          | 13                                                                | 36                               |
| Dąbrowa Chłony         | Brick cross         | 10                                         | 11                                          | 10                                                                | 31                               |
| Dębowiec               | Column shrine       | 14                                         | 11                                          | 10                                                                | 35                               |
| Dębączynka             | Metal cross         | 10                                         | 9                                           | 11                                                                | 30                               |
| Dolne                  | Metal cross         | 13                                         | 8                                           | 14                                                                | 35                               |
| Górne                  | Metal cross         | 9                                          | 9                                           | 10                                                                | 28                               |
| Kolonia Agatówka       | Metal cross         | 12                                         | 8                                           | 6                                                                 | 26                               |
|                        | Metal cross         | 12                                         | 11                                          | 12                                                                | 35                               |
|                        | Chapel shrine       | 9                                          | 9                                           | 14                                                                | 32                               |
|                        | Metal cross         | 8                                          | 8                                           | 9                                                                 | 25                               |
| Kolonia Trzydnik       | Two metal crosses and a tombstone | 11                                         | 6                                           | 17                                                                | 34                               |
| Korea                  | Chapel shrine       | 9                                          | 8                                           | 13                                                                | 30                               |
|                        | Wooden cross        | 7                                          | 5                                           | 12                                                                | 24                               |
|                        | Chapel shrine       | 10                                         | 8                                           | 14                                                                | 32                               |
| Liśnik Mały            | Chapel shrine       | 8                                          | 9                                           | 12                                                                | 29                               |
|                        | Metal cross         | 7                                          | 8                                           | 7                                                                 | 22                               |
|                        | Chapel shrine       | 13                                         | 11                                          | 14                                                                | 38                               |
| Lychów Gościernowski   | Brick cross         | 7                                          | 12                                          | 11                                                                | 30                               |
|                        | Metal cross         | 11                                         | 6                                           | 7                                                                 | 24                               |
|                        | Metal cross         | 13                                         | 9                                           | 6                                                                 | 28                               |
|                        | Brick cross         | 7                                          | 8                                           | 10                                                                | 25                               |
| Lychów Szlachecki      | Metal cross         | 10                                         | 9                                           | 11                                                                | 30                               |
|                        | Metal cross         | 8                                          | 8                                           | 6                                                                 | 22                               |
|                        | Chapel shrine       | 11                                         | 12                                          | 13                                                                | 36                               |
| Olbićcin               | Metal cross         | 6                                          | 10                                          | 8                                                                 | 24                               |
|                        | Metal cross         | 8                                          | 7                                           | 7                                                                 | 22                               |
|                        | Chapel shrine       | 14                                         | 9                                           | 13                                                                | 36                               |
| Owczarnia              | Metal cross         | 10                                         | 7                                           | 11                                                                | 28                               |
|                        | Cabinet shrine      | 10                                         | 7                                           | 13                                                                | 30                               |
|                        | Chapel shrine       | 12                                         | 7                                           | 12                                                                | 31                               |
|                        | Metal cross         | 9                                          | 9                                           | 13                                                                | 31                               |
| Rzeczyca Księża         | Metal cross         | 9                                          | 8                                           | 8                                                                 | 25                               |
|                        | Brick cross         | 11                                         | 12                                          | 6                                                                 | 29                               |
|                        | Chapel shrine       | 10                                         | 12                                          | 15                                                                | 36                               |
|                        | Wooden cross        | 11                                         | 5                                           | 8                                                                 | 24                               |
|                        | Cabinet shrine      | 9                                          | 7                                           | 9                                                                 | 25                               |
|                        | Metal cross         | 11                                         | 5                                           | 13                                                                | 29                               |
|                        | Wooden cross        | 10                                         | 8                                           | 13                                                                | 31                               |
| Location          | Metal cross | Brick | Chapel cross | Wooden cross | Total Mark |
|------------------|-------------|-------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Rzeczyca Księża | 10          | 8     | 11           | 29           |            |
|                  | 9           | 6     | 9            | 24           |            |
|                  | 8           | 9     | 11           | 28           |            |
|                  | 8           | 11    | 10           | 29           |            |
|                  | 8           | 10    | 9            | 27           |            |
|                  | 8           | 7     | 12           | 27           |            |
|                  | 9           | 5     | 12           | 26           |            |
|                  | 9           | 10    | 13           | 32           |            |
|                  | 11          | 10    | 12           | 33           |            |
| Rzeczyca Ziemiańska | Metal cross | 7 | 6          | 8            | 21         |
|                  | Brick cross | 12 | 12         | 11           | 35         |
|                  | Metal cross | 11 | 8          | 11           | 30         |
|                  | Metal cross | 13 | 9          | 6            | 28         |
|                  | Chapel shrine | 11 | 11         | 10           | 32         |
| Trzydnik Duży    | Brick cross | 12 | 12         | 11           | 35         |
|                  | Metal cross | 11 | 8          | 11           | 30         |
|                  | Metal cross | 10 | 9          | 14           | 33         |
|                  | Chapel cross | 11 | 11         | 10           | 32         |
| Trzydnik Mały    | Brick cross | 10 | 11         | 12           | 33         |
|                  | Metal cross | 10 | 9          | 14           | 33         |
|                  | Chapel cross | 11 | 11         | 10           | 32         |
| Węglin           | Metal cross | 12 | 8          | 14           | 34         |
|                  | Wooden cross | 9 | 7          | 13           | 29         |
| Węglinek         | Metal cross | 11 | 9          | 7            | 27         |
| Wola Trzydnicka  | Wooden cross | 10 | 6          | 8            | 24         |
|                  | Wooden cross | 11 | 9          | 12           | 32         |
| Wólka Olbięcka   | Metal cross | 10 | 7          | 13           | 30         |
| Zielonka         | Metal cross | 8  | 8          | 11           | 27         |
|                  | Metal cross | 11 | 8          | 13           | 32         |

Source: Own research

Unfortunately, many such actions consist in replacing old, damaged, historic wooden crosses, with new forms—made from more durable materials. Therefore, the Polish rural landscape is increasingly often filled with metal crosses made from metal pipes of poor quality, flat bars and T-beams. These objects are sometimes devoid of local stylistic characteristics, and do not correspond in any way to the form represented by the old objects. Meanwhile, the old, wooden, rotted roadside crucifixes—often with broken arms—deteriorate, placed against trees, or discarded in nearby undergrowth (Czerwiński, 2012). This sad image of change in the Polish sacral landscape does not apply to the studied commune, since there were no such occurrences noted. A similar, negative change pertains to cabinet shrines and chapel shrines, where old architectonic forms, often with high stylistic and iconographic level, are replaced with objects lacking artistic value. What is more, old shrines neighbouring the new ones lose their religious importance and fall even deeper into oblivion, which results in inevitable destruction and irreversible removal from the Polish landscape. A good example is the beautiful and rare cabinet shrine in Owczarnia (Figure 3K). Built next to it is a new, brick shrine, where the majority of objects from the old shrine are now situated.

4. Cultural uniqueness of sacral objects and their social role

Cultural uniqueness of the studied objects was assessed according to four criteria: historic value, artistic value, social-cultural and religious significance, and condition. 6 objects gained the maximal number of points: brick cross and chapel shrine in Rzeczyca Księża, cross in a pole form in Łychów Gościeradowski (Figure 2E), chapel shrine in Łychów Szlachecki (1856 Figure 2F), chapel shrine in Dąbrowa (1918 Figure 2G), brick cross in Trzydnik Duży (Figure 2H). All these objects present high artistic and historic value since they were erected before 1939. Their architectonic and artistic form, and devotional objects (sculptures, cult paintings and polychromies) were also assessed. Their condition is very good. These objects play a vital role in the lives of the local
| Object | Valorisation results | Visual-spatial evaluation of the sacral object | Evaluation of cultural uniqueness of the sacral object | Visual-spatial evaluation of the accompanying vegetation |
|--------|----------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Chapel shrine in Łychów Gościeradowski | 38 | The shrine is situated in the centre of the village, at its main and oldest road; it is displayed very well; situated behind the shrine are picturesque meadows and the valley of Karasiówka River; it is very well maintained and given care by the local community, with visible effects of renovations and maintenance, as well as new flower decorations. | Built in 1847; it has high and unique artistic value; rectangular layout, one-storey, covered with a gabled tin roof, brick construction, plastered. The main painting inside is a copy of a 14th century image of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa; polychromies inside indicate a deliberately planned iconographic program and show a connection with the founders—among others—St. Andrew and Dorothy (Figure). | In the vicinity of the shrine there are only shrubs: two Fortune’s spindles (Euonymus fortunei Turcz.) Hand.-Mazz.) in very good condition; visible evidence of removed horse chestnuts (Aesculus hippocastanum L.; Pytlak, |
| Chapel shrine in Rzezycza Książa | 37 | The shrine is situated at the main road of the village; it is not very visible, due to being surrounded by dense vegetation; behind the shrine one can see tall trees and dense shrubbery; it is very well maintained, renovated, surrounded by a new concrete-tile splash apron and a decorative fence. | According to some accounts, it was built before 1939; it is of high artistic value; rectangular layout, one-storey, covered with a gabled roof made from terracotta tiles; brick construction, plastered. Inside is a painted and gilded oleograph—a copy of a painting of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa; it has significant socio-cultural and religious meaning, since it is present in the Corpus Christi processions, consecration of fields, and May services. | Near the shrine there are two northern white-cedars (Thuja occidentalis L.) “Globosum”, two Pfitzer junipers (Juniperus x pfitzeriana (L. Spath) P.A. Schmidt), three rowans (Sorbus aucuparia L.), and three European spruces (Picea abies (L.) H.Karst); all plants are in very good condition; the trees and shrubs are distributed symmetrically in relation to the sacral object; the shrine with its plants is an average focal point in space; the object has sparse flower decorations made from synthetic materials. |
| Object                          | Valorisation results | Visual-spatial evaluation of the sacral object | Evaluation of cultural uniqueness of the sacral object | Visual-spatial evaluation of the accompanying vegetation |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Metal cross in Dąbrowa         | 37                   | The cross is situated at the beginning of the village, at the main road; it is very visible, with a picturesque view of crop fields and buffer strips in the background; provided with care, but demands renovation (painting). | Erected in the 1980s in the place of an old wooden cross; has average artistic value; made from a steel flat bar; with tricircular ornamentations at the ends of its arms; occasional socio-cultural and religious value, since it is sometimes used in the Corpus Christi processions, consecration of fields, Mass services, processions commemorating Marian apparitions in Fatima. | Near the cross there are two more than 110-year-old European ashes (Fraxinus excelsior L.) in very good condition; distributed symmetrically in relation to the sacral object; the cross has sparse flower decorations made from synthetic materials and ribbons. |
| Chapel shrine in Dąbrowa       | 36                   | The shrine is situated in the centre of the village, at the main road; it is quite visible; built upon a slope, with stairs leading to it; behind the shrine there are orchards and crop fields; it is very well maintained, with live flower decorations, a new roof and fence, as well as fresh paint on the walls. | Built in 1918 as votive offering for one of the villagers’ return from WWI; with high artistic value; rectangular layout, one-storey, covered with a gabled tin roof, plastered. Inside is a stone statue of Virgin Mary from the middle of the 20th century; significant socio-cultural and religious meaning, since it is used in the Corpus Christi processions, consecration of fields, Mass services. | Near the shrine there are two approximately 60-year-old horse chestnuts (Aesculus hippocastanum L.) in very good condition; distributed symmetrically in relation to the sacral object; the shrine with its plants is a clear focal point in space; the object has sparse flower decorations made from synthetic materials. |
| Chapel shrine in Owczarnia     | 36                   | The shrine is situated in an open landscape, near an old communication route; it is very well displayed; built on a hill; behind the shrine there are crop fields and a picturesque panoramic view; the level of maintenance is average. | Built at the beginning of the 19th century, brick construction, square layout, covered with a pavilion hip tin roof; crowned with a metal cross with rays. Inside is a valuable, historic, wooden statue of Christ being led to Crucifixion—a rare example of imagery in shrine statues; little socio-cultural and religious meaning, visible evidence of old plants and cemetery candles, and old decorations made from artificial flowers. | Near the shrine there are two approximately 120-year-old horse chestnuts (Aesculus hippocastanum L.) and 10 common lilacs (Syringa vulgaris L.); all plants are in good health condition; the shrine with its plants is a clear focal point in space; sparse flower decorations made from synthetic materials. |

Source: Own research
communities, being the focus of religious ceremonies and services. Moreover, the local community attributes significant historic meaning to them (Kulesza, Lubiarz, and Żak-Kulesza 2017a). Similarly to shrines from Mauritius, the interiors of Polish shrines are constantly filled with new artefacts, paintings, statues of saints and angels, crucifixes, oleoprints, and flowers (Colwell-Chanthaphonh & De Salle-Essoo, 2014). These material objects of cult manifest simple piety of those who believe that multiplication of devotional objects influences sanctification of a place. However, this phenomenon is also generated by a profound need to externalise images of God. The multitude of items in a way expresses the growing faith of the local people (Belting, 2001). Such accumulation of devotional objects is characteristic of chapel shrines. In the studied commune the phenomenon was found, among others, in shrines in Korea (Figure 2I), Łychów Gościeradowski (Figure 2J), Łychów Szlachecki (Figure 2K), and Trzydnik Mały (Figure 2L).
Figure 2. Sacral objects in the research area: A. Chapel shrine in Owczarnia, B. Shrine in Dębowiec, C. Cross in Łychów Gościeradowski, D. Chapel shrine in Łychów Szlachecki, E. Shrine in Dąbrowa, F. Cross in Trzydnik Duży, G. Religious artifacts in a chapel shrine in Korea, H. Religious artifacts in a chapel shrine in Łychów Gościeradowski, J. Religious artifacts in a chapel shrine in Łychów Szlachecki, I. Religious artifacts in a chapel shrine in Trzydnik Mały (Photo A D E F G H I J L by M. Lubiarz Photo B C K by M. Żak-Kulesza).
In the context of characterisation of European cultural heritage it is important to include the fact that 8 sacral objects within the commune are located at the Camino de Santiago, Lublin St. James stage leading from Lublin to Sandomierz (Mróz, 2015). The meaning of Camino for European cultural heritage was determined by the Council of Europe, which in 1987 declared the Way of St. James the first European Cultural Route, and since 1993 Camino is on the World Heritage List. Marking out and considering the value of cultural routes is built upon equal treatment of cultural, natural, and historical values of these places, as common heritage upon which the European identity is built. Tourism, including pilgrimages, contributes to discovering local cultural, and natural heritage. The course of a route should encompass objects that are important, artistically and historically unique, but also meaningful to the local communities; objects that are worth introducing into common consciousness, highlighting their rank and meaning. Moreover, their localisation may contribute to accentuating landscape values of a given region. Shrines in the course of Lublin St. James in the studied area, situated in a highly picturesque landscape, are located along the lines of historic communication routes leading from Krasniki, a city established in the 14th century. The oldest object is a stone cross dated back to 1905 in the field of Kolonia Trzydnik (Figure 3A), also present on the historical Austro-Hungarian map from 1899 (Figure 1B). In the inventoried area, the Way of St. James also includes the cross in Trzydnik Duży commemorating the pilgrimage of John Paul II to Poland in 1999 (Figure 2B). It constitutes an important guidepost providing a clear message regarding the religiousness of the local community (Roszak, 2020). The last stop on the route in the studied area consists of two wooden crosses at the edge of a forest, the older dating back to WWII (Figure 3B). Unfortunately, as researchers indicate, routes established after 2005 are underestimated, not properly marked, and often unnoticed by the local community (Mróz, 2015). Shrines and crosses have their local history and could become vital landmarks and introduce pilgrims to the history and heritage of the region.

5. Visual-spatial meaning of the natural surroundings of crosses and shrines

Determining the significance of vegetation accompanying sacral objects was based on the premise that trees are the most valuable. Especially old specimens with significant landscape-forming roles. Within the studied area as many as 31 roadside crosses and shrines (42%) are in the immediate vicinity of old tree specimens. Only at 16 objects (22%) no trees or shrubs were found. The remaining 26 (36%) roadside sacral objects are accompanied by shrubs or young plantings. In most cases trees or shrubs present an ambiguous compositional setting, although sometimes one can discern evidence of old symmetric settings. There were 27 objects with such distribution of plants, which equals 37% of all studied sacral locations. An unambiguous setting of floral composition, in which trees or shrubs are distributed in a clearly symmetrical or doubly-symmetrical manner, is a characteristic of 25 roadside crosses and shrines (34%). The remaining 21 (29%) sacral objects lack floral settings or existing settings do not present the features of a clear spatial composition. While analysing the spatial importance of sacral objects in the landscape, one can state that the majority of them—as many as 37 (51%)—play the role of a discriminant or a landscape subdominant. At the same time, 13 roadside crosses and shrines with floral settings form view frames or are unambiguous landscape dominants. The remaining 23 (32%) small forms of sacral architecture do not present any clear landscape functions. It is vital to note, that in the context of floral surroundings, the highest mark was given to a complex of two metal crosses in Kolonia Trzydnik, with two aged common oaks (Quercus robur L.). A slightly lower mark was given to the metal cross in Dąbrowa, described in detail in Table 2.

The aforementioned crosses are also important for the local community, since they are abundantly embellished with decorations made from artificial materials which, however, decrease the value of the described objects. Among all 73 inventoried roadside sacral objects such unfavourable decorations can be found at 60 objects, which equals 82%. This includes 27, i.e. 37%, crosses and shrines characterised by lush artificial decorations, and 33 objects (45%) with relatively limited ones. Only 13 sacral objects were not decorated by the local community using artificial flowers and other decorations made from synthetic materials.
Figure 3. Sacral objects in the research area: A. Cross in Kolonia Trzydnik, B. Cross in Agatówka, C. Chapel shrine in Łychów Gościeradowski in 1992, DEF. Chapel shrine in Łychów Gościeradowski, G. Cross in Dąbrowa H. Chapel shrine in Rzeczyca Księży, I. Cross in Trzydnik Duży, J. Cross in Olbięcin, K. Old cabinet shrine and new chapel shrine in Owczarnia (Photo A E F G I J K by M. Lubiarz, Photo B D H by M. Żak-Kulesza, Photo C by J. Pytlak).
6. Spatial significance of small sacral architecture as cultural heritage

The majority—50 out of 73 roadside sacral forms (69%) in the studied area were classified as objects of average value in the cultural landscape. 12 sacral forms (16.4%) were given a high mark (Table 1).

The highest mark was given to the roadside chapel shrine in Łychów Gościeradowski (Figure 3CDFE). Cultural uniqueness of this shrine is very high, as it is one of the oldest objects of this type in the commune. A high mark was also given to the brick shrine in Rzeczyca Księża (Figure 3H), and the cross in Dąbrowa (Figure 3G). Detailed information regarding these objects is presented in Table 2.

Plants growing near shrines and crosses in Poland are based on fashionable solutions inspired by homestead gardens, therefore old trees are replaced with cedars (Thuja sp.), and the immediate vicinity of the object of worship is often paved with concrete or decorative stone. Therefore, it is difficult for researchers of cultural material heritage to accept the lack of understanding and devastation of natural and artistic heritage of these special places. Trees used to be highly important in Polish culture, for centuries creating the image of Polish countryside, and were naturally an integral element of the surroundings of human settlements, as well as associated with both pagan and Christian symbolism. Unfortunately, they are becoming scarce elements of the landscape. Their protection for natural, ecological, and cultural reasons—as material proof of permanence of holy places in landscape space—should become a part of the social education program (Garner, 2004). Local people often appreciate the value of trees in national parks or monumental specimens (marked with plaques), while treating old specimens in their everyday surroundings as foreign, unnecessary, and threatening the structure of a “new” shrine, or a renovated cross. Thus, nature ceases to be a factor equal to the sacral object, co-creating the feeling of sacrum, instead becoming a problematic element, denuded of its primary symbolism perpetuated in culture. To the modern spectator, a cedar becomes a more appropriate companion of a cross or shrine, than a majestic lime tree (Tilia sp.), oak (Quercus sp.), ash (Fraxinus sp.), or horse chestnut (Aesculus sp.). New objects and modern garden arrangement of accompanying vegetation diverge from historic continuity, heritage, memory, and feeling of identity of a given place. Tilley (2006) stresses the need of conservation projects, protection of heritage related to the location, its uniqueness and individuality of space, elements important to particular communities in order for them to identify with a place. Elements that connect people and places are both material, and natural objects.

The lowest mark was given to two roadside sacral objects: metal cross in Trzydnik Duży (Figure 3I), and in Olbićin (Figure 3J). Unfavourable assessment of these objects resulted from the lack of accompanying vegetation to enrich them with a perceptible element of sacrum. Unfortunately, these objects have no significant historic or artistic value. Their condition is poor, with considerable damage, and numerous dissonant elements in their direct vicinity. The cross in Trzydnik Duży is near a busy intersection, and advertisement banners. This cross, marked on historical maps, used to be an important landmark. Its present condition and surroundings constitute disgraceful testimony to the loss of its superior character and vital role in the consciousness of the local community. The cross in Olbićin neighbours a busy road, which leads to it being dominated by technical infrastructure, and becoming lost in the spatial setting. Neither of the crosses bears any signs of care. While conducting the inventory of roadside sacral objects, we found places falling into oblivion, visible lack of human presence. Signs of bygone care become concealed by a natural blanket of plants. Nature obscures material traces left by man (Hockey et al., 2012). This phenomenon becomes a material symptom of change in attitude, loosening of ties between people and sacral objects.

7. Discussion and conclusion

Based on the study carried out in the studied area only 12 forms of small sacral architecture were given high marks (16%) as objects of high historic value, with well-preserved old tree specimens. Similar results were obtained by Kulesza and Lubiarz (2013) in the Melgiew Commune, where also 16% of objects presented high spatial value. Congruent conclusions arise from the work by
Halajová et al. (2019). Tóth and Verešová (2018) also stress the important role of trees in spatial influence of small sacral architecture. Low percentage of objects with high marks also allows us to state that small historic sacral architecture is disappearing from the Polish countryside. Fortuna-Antoszkiewicz and Kimic (2007) made similar observations in Mazovia. Objects with the lowest mark are in poor technical condition, with no historic or artistic value. It is due to the practice of replacing old, wooden crosses with new, metal objects devoid of regional features. This phenomenon can be observed throughout Poland (Kozłowski, 2011) and other countries (Kaell, 2015). Unfavourable evaluation is also due to the fact that without trees and shrubs objects significantly lose spatial value. Rydzewska and Wilkaniec (2013) stated that in the Greater Poland Region vegetation accompanying sacral objects is sparse and does not follow traditional models. Pudelska (2011) highlights the disappearance of old traditions regarding roadside crosses and shrines, as well as a lack of deliberation while incorporating plants into the surroundings of roadside sacral objects. It is also important to note a significant change in selection of decorations by local communities. Seweryn (1958) reports that after WWII, the main elements decorating roadside crosses and shrines in Poland were live flowers, and small branches of coniferous trees. In recent years, there is a trend of substituting them with flowers, garlands, and other decorations made from artificial materials (Lubiarz & Kulesza, 2013; Pudelska, 2011; Rydzewska & Wilkaniec, 2013). Such decorations affect maintaining local traditions related to particular, sometimes symbolic, plant species.

This assessment indicated the most valuable objects, which in the landscape of the studied commune play the role of dominants or distinct accents. Value of these small, often underestimated forms comes from their religious or historical significance, but also encompasses their spatial and natural aspects. Researchers recognise the vital role of the character of natural surroundings, their material forms, as well as immense influence on perception of the network of co-dependencies between history, topography of a place, ecology, and presence of man in a given space (Garner, 2004). Low marks given to crosses and shrines were influenced by neglect from the local communities. The technical condition of these objects is poor, often significantly so. It indicates that they are no longer treated as cultural objects, thus, their presence in the life and awareness of the local community is marginal.

A worrying phenomenon can be observed in the form of modern design tendencies for erecting new or restoring old shrines and crosses, without respect for their historic value. Replacing an object with a new one is often easier, less expensive, and the local community may view it as more worthwhile. Moreover, there are significant changes in arrangements of vegetation surrounding sacral objects, elimination of forest stand, replacing trees with species foreign to the European landscape with no symbolic reasoning for being placed in sacred locations. Another rightfully unsettling phenomenon is progressing destruction resulting from neglect by the local community. Explanation can be found in several factors, among which the most common phenomenon is population decline of the countryside, outflow of younger generations, ageing of the local community, and thus, lack of people to provide care. Other reasons include lack of awareness and tradition of providing care to these objects, a result of nearly nonexistent identification with the place, lack of knowledge regarding this type of objects in the local history. On the other hand, one can observe a parallel tendency of erecting new sacral objects, replacing old ones with modern works, as in the case of the old cabinet shrine near the lime tree in Owczarnia (Figure 3K), or solicitous restoration of old shrines, unfortunately without professional consultations or heritage conservator supervision. This problem, however, constitutes a separate subject of study.

Evaluation is a multi-dimensional issue. The goal of a properly performed evaluation is to present as complete, multi-faceted cultural value of the assessed object as possible. Therefore, this paper highlights how different conditions and elements should be considered during an
evaluation of roadside crosses and shrines. Unfortunately, much content and many criteria regarding these small sacral forms are omitted in the current schemes of preparing conservational documentation in Poland. It especially pertains to the lack of properly detailed annotations regarding the character of the surroundings of sacral objects and higher vegetation that complements them. In numerous cases, it is old trees that dictate the aesthetic, landscape, and spatial values of an object. It is sadly so, since the necessity of a holistic approach to protection and preserving natural heritage, including natural values of a given area, has been stressed for a long time (Ihse & Norderhaug, 1995). It is also noteworthy that, due to EU funding, intensive modernisation of road infrastructure has been taking place in recent years in Poland. It causes cutting down old roadside trees, including those that accompany small sacral architecture, while crosses and shrines are being relocated, which changes their historic and cultural context.

Presented results can enable taking protective action, in order to preserve the most valuable shrines and crosses as elements of material cultural heritage of Europe. It is even more important due to the fact that many objects that deserve protection remain unprotected. As proposed by Kozłowski (2011), protection of these objects could be linked to development of tourism based on cultural and natural values. These objects could be visited not only by parishioners, but also tourists admiring this vital component of cultural heritage of the region, as is the case in the north-western part of Spain (Calaza-Martínez et al., 2019). However, one should begin by recognising their value, and then take protective action that could preserve small sacral architecture for future generations (Tóth, 2017). To conclude the above considerations, it is important to highlight the most important conclusions that result from the conducted analyses regarding the status of small sacral roadside architecture in Poland:

- roadside sacral objects with historic value are disappearing from the rural landscape of Poland, since they are not given proper care by the local conservational services or local people;
- historic objects, especially old wooden crosses, are replaced with new metal forms, without regard towards traditional, regional forms and styles;
- renovations and modernisations of crosses and shrines are most often performed without expert supervision, which contributes to the loss of their artistic and historic value;
- certain roadside sacral objects are of no value to the local community, as evidenced by their poor technical condition and lack of any signs of care;
- the landscape role of roadside crosses and shrines is influenced not only by their form, but, most importantly, the accompanying vegetation, especially old trees;
- deciduous tree species such as: lindens, oaks, maples, and ashes which most often grew in the vicinity of roadside sacral objects, are presently replaced with coniferous plants, usually arborvitae. What is more, since the 1990s, roadside sacral objects are decorated with ornaments made from synthetic materials;
- scientific publications, preparing inventories, collecting witness accounts, preserving inscriptions included in the objects, preparing photographic documentation, etc. all serve the purpose of preserving the cultural heritage of Poland, since roadside crosses and shrines, as traditional forms, are a part of the Polish cultural landscape;
- promotional and educational actions should stress not only the religious value of these objects, but also their landscape and social roles, as well as provide these objects with proper legal protection.

Funding
The authors received no direct funding for this research.

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