

# The 7 Most Endangered 2014

## Project Fact Sheet

<b><u>Project Title</u></b>	<b>Synagogue in Subotica, SERBIA</b>
<b><u>Location</u></b>	<b>Subotica, Serbia</b>
<b><u>Initial input date</u></b>	<b>11.09.2017</b>
<b><u>Current status</u></b>	
<b><u>Latest update</u></b>	<b>01.08. 2018</b>
<b><u>Summary, status, prognosis</u></b> <p>The synagogue itself is a superb example of Hungarian Art Nouveau architecture standing in a central position in the city of Subotica, Serbia. It was built between 1900 and 1902 for a thriving Jewish community, but subsequent to WW2 the Jewish community was much reduced. Owing to a lack of funds the synagogue has since been allowed to fall into a state of disrepair. Apart from refurbishment of the external facades and the interior finishes, the main problem is water infiltration relating mainly to the main cupola which has dropped 70 cm on one side and needs structural repairs before the infiltration can be dealt with. Alleviation of water infiltration in the area of the cupolas<sup>1</sup> and a solution to the problem of the interior rusting rabbit<sup>2</sup> finishes should, without doubt, have been given the first priority over two other studies which were under way, namely (i) installation of a low temperature heating system to counter the humidity adversely affecting the interior of the building and (ii) laying out and planting the garden area surrounding the synagogue. In the light of the above, it was impossible to define the full project works or to develop a related finance plan. From the outset the Mayor of Subotica had expressed reservations with regard to the EN/EIBI mission which translated into basically polite but minimal cooperation. Little can be achieved to conserve this magnificent building for the long term before the Municipality adapts proper professional standards of management and priorities for this project. Subsequent to the EN /EIBI mission, EN Serbia supported by the Headley Trust has acted as a catalyst initiating a series of meetings of stakeholders and local and international experts to first overcome distrust and scepticism, second to make a proper assessment of the restoration needs, then to train people in the required restoration works and lastly how to manage such a valuable heritage site as the Subotica Synagogue. Initial priority was given to the cupolas and water infiltration before the other works. All is now complete and the restored Synagogue was officially opened in March 2018 by Presidents of Serbia and Hungary</p> <b><u>Classification:</u> <b>Good Progress</b></b> thanks to the excellent follow up activities of EN Serbia.	

<sup>1</sup> The subsequent expert consultants' report states that the main cupola had deflected vertically some 700mm due to wet rot in parts of the timber supporting structure and required substantial repairs before water infiltration could be arrested.

<sup>2</sup> Rabbit is a form of construction based on wire netting to which a gypsum plaster is then applied to form it into complex shapes for cornices and arches. The disadvantage is that the mild steel netting used in the original construction of the synagogue rusts in humid conditions, causing pieces of plaster to break off.

## **Basic data**

### **Nominator:**

Irina Subotic - Vice President – Europa Nostra  
Viktorija Aladžić - Civil Engineering Faculty, Subotica

### **Brief description:**

Historical building, place of worship, historical heritage site.

### **Owner:**

Synagogue Building is owned by the Municipality of Subotica and is managed by the Subotica Synagogue Foundation.

### **Administrator:**

Municipality of Subotica

*N.B. Prior to the mission the Mayor of Subotica had expressed reserves with regard to the proposed EN/EIBI mission to the Synagogue. The Executive President of EN wrote a letter to the Mayor explaining the role of EN/EIBI in the restoration and protection of Heritage Sites in Europe and that the Synagogue had been selected as one of the 7 Most Endangered Heritage Sites in 2013. As a result the mission went ahead, but during the mission it became apparent that the Mayor remained less than enthusiastic towards the EN/EIBI visit.*

## **Context, description**

The synagogue itself is a superb example of Hungarian Art Nouveau architecture standing in a central position in the city of Subotica, Serbia. It was designed in the late 1890s by two Hungarian architects Marcell Komor – the early concrete structure and Dezsö Jakab – the decorative elements from Hungarian folk art. It was built within two years from 1900 to 1902.

Prior to the second world war the Jewish community of Subotica was thriving and counted several thousand souls, but latterly comprises only several hundred people – too few to maintain the synagogue on their own. As a result, the Synagogue building was given to the Municipality for safe keeping as it is one of Subotica’s most outstanding heritage sites. The land on which it stands remains the property of the Jewish community.

It is understood that there is an agreement for the use of the synagogue to be given to the Hungarian National Council of Vojvodina, as the Hungarian Government is the key donor for the interior restoration of the synagogue. The intention was to research, design and install a permanent exhibition within the Synagogue on the history of Subotica’s Jewish community and the history of the Synagogue to be presented in English, Hungarian and Serbian.

## **Status pre-mission**

For the previous ten years the work of restoring the synagogue in Subotica had been piecemeal, occurring as and when interest was shown, and relatively small amounts of money became available. As a result the works carried out had not always been satisfactory and, for example, work on guttering around the cupolas had not eliminated the occurrence of water infiltration.

## **Summary EN/EIBI mission recommendations, action programme:**

The Technical report was issued in January 2016 (available on the EN and EIBI websites) and made the following recommendations:

- The potential use should be agreed as this is essential as the basis of the works.
- The full definition and programme of all outstanding works should be defined, even if the works are to be phased in execution.

- A realistic estimate of the cost of all the outstanding works should be established, preferably by independent professionals.  
A realistic programme, maybe in phases, should also be established. For example, completion of outstanding structural works and waterproofing should occur before internal rabbit and decorative works start.

Europa Nostra Serbia and Cultural Heritage without Borders invited four experts including an architect conservator, a structural/design engineer, a hands-on construction engineer and a restorer of artworks to report on the external fabric repair, internal finishes (but not decorative work) and the problems of water infiltration through the roof. They inspected the site from 19<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2015 and submitted a report dated Bologna 2015.

Following the experts' inspection and report, it is absolutely clear and urgent that the dome supports and water proofing take priority before all other works.

### **Impact of EIBI/EN intervention**

#### **Nominator's Comments:**

Subsequent to the EN /EIBI mission, EN Serbia supported by the Headley Trust promoted a series of meetings of stakeholders and local and international experts to first overcome distrust and scepticism, second to make a proper assessment of the restoration needs, then to train people in the required restoration works and lastly how to manage such a valuable heritage site as the Subotica Synagogue. The final training took place in June 2017 and focused on the future management and use of the Synagogue and included interested local stakeholders. Priority in the restoration process was given to the cupolas and water infiltration, which are now complete. The internal restoration was completed in January 2018 and the Synagogue officially opened in March 2018. The operation, management and programme of the synagogue still remain to be finalised.

#### **Appraisal Team's Comments:**

The initial determination of the Municipality was to repair the interior of the synagogue and install a low temperature heating system without having defined the needs of its future use and before curing the problem of water infiltration. Subsequently the Municipality joined other stakeholders and invested in the repair of the cupolas and roofs to eliminate water infiltration, as advised by the experts who came to provide the necessary training. Also, the process of restoration of interior took place in full collaboration between the company executing the works, the funder, the city and the Serbian and Hungarian professional institutions for conservation.

EN Serbia is to be congratulated for their success in overcoming distrust and scepticism and leading the way to saving this beautiful synagogue.

### **Lessons learned:**

- A lot can be achieved with a long term engagement of the stakeholders with the site.
- Behind this is a real "gem" of a project which would make soundly based professional efforts worthwhile. The definition of a potentially sound course of action is essential.
- The EN/EIBI mission's conclusions with regard to priorities were confirmed by the subsequent expert assessment. (See comment above).
- Involving all the stakeholders and providing appropriate training has turned what looked like a lost cause into a success on many levels.

<b>Data on inputs &amp; timing</b>	<b>Dates, Participants</b>
<b>Appraisal:</b>	
Nomination form submitted	October 2013
Project selected as 7 ME:	June 2013
Questionnaire from EIBI	August 2013
Response to questionnaire	September 2013
Appraisal mission	14 -19 October 2013
Participants:- EN EIB Institute	Irina Subotic, Visnja Kistic, Patrizia Valle, Alessandra Peruzetto, Graham Bell Richard Deeley
Feedback letter post mission	
Response to further questions	
<b>Technical report issued</b>	November 2013

**Follow-up:**

Request for <b>progress report</b>	
Response on progress	
Follow-up visit	
Participants: EN EIB Institute	
Report on follow-up visit	
Fact sheet prepared by	