

The 7 Most Endangered 2014

Project Fact Sheet

<u>Project Title</u>	Wooden Churches in Southern Transylvania and Northern Oltenia, ROMANIA
<u>Location</u>	Transylvania, Oltenia, Romania
<u>Initial input date</u>	10.2017
<u>Current status</u>	Post appraisal follow-up
<u>Latest up-date</u>	08.2018

Summary, status, prognosis

An extensive programme in a remote rural setting with over 60 selected churches in very different conditions lacking active owner or Governmental support.
Much depends on voluntary work and funding coordinated by an active NGO.
Progress very slow but positive signs ahead of possible external financial support.
EIB Institute (EIB-I) seed funds allocated in 2016 helped to develop schemes.

Classification: **C Slow progress**

Basic data

Nominator:

Architect Serban Sturdza, vice President Pro Patrimonio Foundation (PPF).

Brief description:

Saving and restoration of numerous historical places of worship.

Owner:

Numerous owners being the local Orthodox Church parishes, and in exceptional cases the local authorities. Variable and lukewarm endorsement of the projects.

Administrators:

The Owner generally the local Orthodox Church is formally responsible.
The Ministry of Culture may also have a role.
Planning and implementation is practically by PPF, a private NGO.

Context, description

The project areas in Transylvania and Oltenia are remote and rural where traditions still persist but are under threat. The Romanian Orthodox Church built small wooden churches in most villages and those that remain date from the 18th century. These churches were traditionally built from local timber and materials and painted often both inside and outside. Over the years the well-known changes in regime and in society have had their effect and now many wooden churches are virtually abandoned and in poor condition. Where more active church communities exist modern churches have often eclipsed the old wooden ones. The project's objective is to save these wooden churches from decay and possible destruction, and then to preserve and restore them to relevance and use.

Some 74 churches were identified initially with various defects to the roofs (50%), the foundations and structure (66%), and the decorations (30%). The level of data was variable with many gaps and unreliable information.

A small number (8-10) were already well known to PPF and some were being worked on, notably at Ursi and Boz.

Issues, problems, threats

The main threat is that these churches will be abandoned and fall into ruin. The region is rural, remote and thus is poor with a declining active population. The small communities used to gather around the focus of the church but this has declined over the years notably under the Communist regime. In those villages where the church has been active often modern churches have been built perhaps assisted financially by the Government, thus effectively replacing the old wooden ones. Lack of funds is a key issue, as for the region and the country as a whole. The Church at the higher levels seems to have other priorities and limited finance. Tourism has potential for the future but this needs enhancing and developing.

Action is needed urgently to save these churches, especially those which still have potential for the community and as heritage destinations for visitors.

Status pre-mission

The PPF, with the help of the local clergy, had identified some 60+ churches which needed serious attention. It had already been active with the support of the local Churches on 3-4 sites with satisfactory but hard-won results. This was by mobilising traditional craftsmen and local support often on a voluntary basis with some professional support on key issues such as the restoration of icons and murals. The potential and enthusiasm to advance was evident at a local level but many difficulties remained, particularly on mobilising funds and obtaining full support and recognition from the Orthodox Church and the Government.

Summary EN/EIB-I mission recommendations, action programme

The Technical report was issued in January 2015 (also on EN website).

It underlined the need and justification of the project and generally supported the approach adopted, notably by PPF. The large number of churches presented a practical implementation and financial problem needing rationalisation and appropriate phasing. A framework was proposed to review the essential elements of each church to allow selection and prioritisation. Three phases were outlined (to be refined with time) comprising a priority "Action" phase to restore eight churches, followed by two phases covering most of the other churches with data collection and technical review. Information was generally lacking on many churches.

The implementation processes needed strengthening with PPF's excellent voluntary activities requiring proper support from the Owners (the Romanian Orthodox Church) and the responsible Government agencies, notably for funding. A Steering Committee of all parties was proposed to improve coordination.

Greater attention to preventive maintenance was stressed.

Progress on recommendations and latest status

The report, its conclusions and recommendations were generally well received by the Nominator (PPF) and noted by the other parties.

PPF continues actively with progress on 5 of the 8 “Action” phase projects. Two funded to near completion (Ursi – World Monument Fund, but 15 k € still required for frescos, Boz – EU funds, structural work should be finished by end 2018) and three with design phases completed (Valari, Sirieasa - EIB Institute seed funds, Tarnavita - Government funds). Valari has urgent basic roof repairs in hand. Sirieasa now approved on heritage list . It also requires emergency roof repairs and this may be funded by the Prince of Wales Foundation.

So far, some 25% of the Action phase has been achieved. Three other churches have decoration/painting works or investigations in hand. Site investigation into church at Almasu Mic by Norwegian specialists.

The “Wooden Church Maintenance Manual” was published (financed by EIB Institute seed funds) and was well received and distributed widely.

However, coordination of the parties has not greatly advanced, despite contacts with the Patriarch. The recommended Steering Committee has not been set up and PPF continues to operate much as before with limited funds and support but some progress has been made under these difficult circumstances.

A notable achievement has been to attract interest from the Prince of Wales Foundation and World Monument Fund as well as the EU and others.

The EIB-I through its Seed Fund has assisted this process with two detailed project studies and the Maintenance Manual which have been well received. The studies started in 2015 and after some delays were completed in 2017 to a good standard. Total seed funding provided by EIB-I was 20 K €.

Impact of EIBI/EN intervention

Nominator’s Comments:

The nomination to the “7 most endangered” programme has drawn attention to the project and the situation of the wooden churches, especially in society but less so at the level of the authorities. PPF have started to receive more requests for assistance for wooden churches outside the project region.

Local priests are encouraged to be more active with our support notably at Boz and recently at Almasu Mic and Sirieasa. Citizens at Pojogeni requested PPF support to preserve the church and to avoid the Bishop’s plans to re-erect it elsewhere.

The technical documentation funded by the EIB-I Seed fund has allowed research and studies for two important churches giving valuable information on structure, history and artistic components. This documentation will facilitate the search for funds, after some local legal issues are resolved. A secondary benefit of preparing this documentation was the active involvement of a young specialist in wooden heritage conservation. The Maintenance Manual will be very useful and is being widely distributed but the benefits will only be seen in the years ahead.

Appraisal Team’s Comments:

This was always recognised as a difficult project with problems of coordination between the main parties (the Church and Government and PPF), effecting progress and funding. Despite this some limited progress has been made due largely to the continual good efforts of PPF.

Lessons learned

A complex and multiple project. The approach to rationalise and simplify was considered essential and some limited results have accrued.

The key role of the continuously active and reliable partner PPF is absolutely essential and support is needed to ensure that it continues.

A regret that better coordination between parties has not yet been achieved.

It will be a long and difficult progress but the positive signs of interest from new funding agents is encouraging.

Some continued monitoring could be helpful and is recommended.

<u>Data on inputs and timing</u>	<u>Dates, Participants</u>
Nomination form submitted	November 2013
Project selected as 7 ME:	June 2014
Questionnaire from EIB Institute	May 2014
Response to questionnaire	July 2014
Appraisal mission	6 th – 8 th October 2014
Participants:- EN - EIB Institute	Hermann Fabini. EN Scientific Council Member Jan Kurek. IPW. Warsaw Peter Bond
Feedback letter post mission	10 October 2014
Response to further questions	November/December 2014
Technical report issued	January 2015
Request for progress report	1) March 2015: 2) April 2017 3) July 18
Response on progress	1) March 2015: 2) September 2017 3) August 18
Follow-up visit	11.06.18 PB contact with PFF in Bucharest.
Participants: EN EIBI	Na Peter Bond
Report on follow-up visit	Summary e-mail dated 18.06.18
Fact sheet prepared by	Peter Bond, updated August 2018