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Living Heritage Approach to the Conservation of Historical Wooden Churches in Ukraine

ウクライナ歴史的木造教会の保存におけるリヴィングヘリテージアプローチ

（2015年度本審査論文）

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ABSTRACT

At the heart of this study – historical wooden churches, unique representatives of Orthodox ecclesiastic architecture built in log-house construction technique, still preserved in big numbers across the territory of Ukraine.

Problem. Due to resource constraints, heritage protection system in Ukraine can provide protection to only a few wooden churches of high historical or artistic importance. Meanwhile, as a legal successor of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialistic Republic (USSR), Ukraine had endorsed the designation records of more than 400 historical wooden churches, listed as Heritage of National Importance by the Soviet Union. However, the conditions of conservation practice in Sovereign Ukraine had changed drastically following the proclamation of religious freedom and the separation of religion and state. Previously nationalized and mostly non-functioning churches were officially returned to the property of religious communities, who’s new legal status placed them on margins of governmental control. Driven by the desire to reconnect with the faith of their ancestors, recouping for the decades of religious stagnation, the new owners enthusiastically engaged in the church building and reconstruction activities, either illegally changing the appearance of heritage churches, or abandoning them for the newer and bigger venues of worshiping.

The problems of modernized or neglected heritage wooden churches are not strictly conservational, they also have profound social connotations. Currently, Ukraine is experiencing a stage of identity formation that provokes strong
nationalistic sentiments. Heritage wooden churches, being a distinct and pronounced Ukrainian phenomenon, turn a lot of public attention and trigger antagonism among the stakeholder groups. Controversial maintenance practices evoke public concern with the fate of the national heritage, calling for a strategic change to more efficient conservation practices.

**Perspective.** Any strategic change needs a change of perspective. In this study, the conservation problems of historical wooden churches in Ukraine are viewed from a perspective of the latest theoretical developments in heritage studies, particularly, a Living Heritage Approach (LHA). LHA was initially introduced by ICCROM on the basis of its previous conceptual framework of Integrated Territorial and Urban Conservation (ITUC) and was further developed by such theorists as Poulios and Wijesuria. In brief, LHA is applied to heritage sites that are continuously used in their original function and have strong connections to local communities. Its primary strategy is to prioritize core communities’ values and concentrate on intangible, living aspects of heritage. Taking this approach defines the focus of this study on communities’ interaction with heritage, in order to view the community-based practices of wooden church maintenance and use from the perspective of Living Heritage paradigm and contemplate the ways to apply the Living Heritage concept for a more efficient conservation of historical wooden churches in Ukraine.

**Literature Gap.** The architectural, art-historian and conservational aspects of this type of heritage are well investigated and reported by national and international researchers, who addressed the problem of their preservation from
the expert’s point of view. Little is known about the current practices of community-based maintenance and use of historical wooden churches, and it is not clear what factors are influencing those practices. This research offers a different perspective with a focus on the motives and needs of the communities rather than on state policies and heritage protection objectives.

Additionally, this study aims to contribute to the growing area of Living Heritage research and current theoretical discourse on Living Heritage Approach. Since this approach is new, its empirical base is still underdeveloped, and much uncertainty still exists about the application spheres and possible limitations of this concept. By exploring the living dimensions of historical wooden churches in Ukraine, this contribution will expand the theoretical boundaries of LHA and create more evidence to inform global practice.

**Research Questions.** In order to address the described literature gap, in my research I ask the following questions:

1) What are the current practices of maintenance and use of heritage wooden churches in property of religious communities?

2) Why the community-based practices vary across the population?

3) How the existing heritage policies influence the current practices of maintenance and use of heritage wooden churches in property of religious communities

4) What are the living dimensions of heritage wooden churches (continuity of function, community connection, expressions and care)?

5) How and to what extent the Living Heritage Approach could be applied to the conservation of historical wooden churches in Ukraine?
Structure and Findings. The character of the research questions posed in this study and the need of in-depth and in-context description of the cultural and social phenomena in question motivated the choice of a mixed method, funneling case study approach that unravels from the analysis of the socio-cultural background, through the quantitative survey of the visual and documentary data, to the single ethnographic case studies.

Chapter 2 corresponds to the national level of inquiry and presents the historical, social and cultural background information necessary for the holistic comprehension of the phenomena. In this chapter, I am approaching the whole entity of Ukrainian wooden churches as a single case study. It contains the analysis of the geographical and historical setting together with the contemporary social circumstances, followed by the architectural characteristics and typology of the objects of study, and the overview of the current managerial system and problems of conservation.

The background analysis can be summed up to the allocation of the two distinct socio-cultural processes in modern Ukraine that impact the fate of historical wooden churches. One is the movement of religious believers to return to their roots and re-connect with the faith of their ancestors after the decades of religion prohibition in Soviet Union. Another is the process of the identity search of the young nation and identity affirmation through various nationalistic ideas that boost up public attention to national heritage and create somewhat romantic expectations towards conservation practice.

Probably, the most essential outcome of this chapter derives from the overview of the current Ukrainian legislation on heritage and the legal
organization of religion-state relationships. It showed that the two legislative themes are not fully compatible. The modern Ukraine’s separation of religion from the state, and liberal policies towards the organization and administration of religious communities inevitably imperil the enforcement of the top-down heritage legislation.

Chapter 3 corresponds to the regional level of inquiry and provides a descriptive quantitative survey of historical wooden churches in Lviv Oblast’ of Ukraine, where the biggest number of historical wooden churches is concentrated.

In this chapter, I approach some of the proposed research questions from a quantitative perspective. The purpose of this phase of research is to uncover general tendencies and patterns in community-based maintenance and use of heritage wooden churches, to explore the possible influencing factors, and to test the effects of the present heritage protection policies. To achieve these goals, I employed a range of statistical tools provided by the SPSS software, such as crosstabulation analysis with chi-square test of statistical significance, correlation analysis with Piersons r and phi tests of statistical significance, and principal component factor analysis.

First of all, through the visual analysis of the current state of the 140 heritage wooden churches of Lviv Oblast’ and the data about the most recent repairs collected through the secondary research sources, I identified the following maintenance patterns performed by the corresponding religious communities:

• disrepair (no repair action with visible signs of decay);
• maintenance in a good state (no repair action with no visible signs of decay);
modernizing repairs (structural additions, reshaping of cupolas, renewal of the external cladding with the use of modern materials);

• conservative repairs (renewal of the external cladding with the use of historically appropriate materials, or full-fledged scientific restorations).

Also, it was established that the uses of heritage wooden churches differ between the regular usage as the main venue for religious services, and secondary usage, of more commemorative character, when church is used for rare occasions or just persists as a landmark while the community moves out to a new church. This distinction was later conceptualized as primary and secondary functions of historical wooden churches. The maintenance practices differed significantly between these two types of church usage: buildings of the primary use are more likely to be extensively repaired with modern materials, while the secondary churches tend to be passively maintained or left to decay. However, the growing trend to scientifically restore the latter was also observed.

Next, the correlation analysis with a range of external factors helped to identify the dependency of the church maintenance practices with the size and the type of settlements where they were located. Religious communities in the more populous or urban settlements showed the higher rates of adherence to the conservative repairs and treatments. This correlation was interpreted as the influence of the public control over the actions of the communities and greater legal visibility of their actions.

Combining the factors of church function and public control, I divided the sample of heritage wooden churches into three conceptual groups and defined the odds ratio of different maintenance practices occurring in each of the groups, thus creating a reference point for the future managerial decisions:
Group I – churches of high public control;
Group II – churches of low public control but high user value;
Group III – churches of low public control and low user value;

Final stage of the quantitative analysis involved the comparison of the two samples of wooden churches in Lviv Oblast’, built before 20th century – non-designated churches and those, designated as the heritage of National importance. Only insignificant difference was observed in the patterns of modernizing and conservative repairs, which proved little to no effect of the current heritage protection policies. Moreover, designated wooden churches displayed higher rates of abandonment and more severe signs of decay, which can be interpreted as the discouraging effect of heritage policies on the community-based custodianship.

Chapter 4 perspective narrows down to the community level, where the selected case studies were investigated with ethnographic methods of inquiry. The choice of the case studies was based on the purposeful sampling so that each case study could develop the findings of the quantitative phase. Thus, Matkiv case study depicted a transition of a rural, small community wooden church into a high public profile World heritage site. Vidniv case explored the Group II wooden church in the process of undergoing modernizing repairs. Klits’ko study gives an insight into the life of a small rural community with one of the few scientifically restored wooden churches classified into Group II. Finally, the Loni case study follows the pursuit of a small rural community to restore a Group III wooden church in an emergency state of disrepair.

Previously, in the statistical analysis, the obtained results were only able to explain up to 60% of the observed variance. The subsequent case studies showed
that human factor played a decisive role in the maintenance practices, and might account for the remaining 40% of the variance. Both Loni and Klits’ko cases were shaped by the actions of individual activists while the different leadership roles of the priests had a significant impact on Matkiv and Vidniv cases.

By means of ethnographic inquiry, open-ended interviews with village residents, guided church visits and participant observation techniques, I was able to supplement the factual findings with the insight into cultural meanings of historical wooden church maintenance practices. Among them:

- religious perception of authenticity through the accumulation of continuous prayers at a given location, or within a constructed space (namolenist’);
- social and religious importance of the continuous improvement of the church appearance that corresponds to the concept of Dynamic Integrity: the evolvement of cultural expressions with persistence of their cultural meaning;
- two ways in which core heritage church communities manifest their connection to the past: through rituals and other social actions, in functioning churches; and through visual integrity — in abandoned or secondary wooden churches, which explains community-based initiatives for scientific restorations in the latter;
- in small and aging rural communities, residents may hold strong emotional connection to an abandoned and decaying church with the sense of symbolic self-identification; such communities often seek respectful treatment of their heritage church with a lot of expert and tourist attention from outside.

Chapter 5. In the last chapter, I discuss the possible spheres of application of the Living Heritage Approach to the conservation of historical wooden
churches in Ukraine, drawing from latest theoretical developments in heritage studies and literature reviews, and formulate the objects of protection relevant to this approach, - living dimensions of heritage.

The most essential finding to emerge from this study is that the Living Heritage Approach, cautiously applied, will not only contribute to the holistic composition of heritage policies, but it can, rather paradoxically, improve the state of conservation of material heritage by encouraging active maintenance and more effective use of private funding.

Proposals. My proposal to the conservation of historical wooden churches in Ukraine is to apply Living Heritage Approach to the churches classified into Group II in this thesis, - those located in the areas with low level of public control and used as primary venues for worshiping. Strategies should include the lifting of restrictions on material change and treatments of wooden churches with the provision of free scientific-based consultations and educational activities among the community members. The findings of this study suggest that not only such approach will support the living dimensions of heritage, but it will also be beneficial to material preservation, as it has potential to reduce the occurrence of the most damaging practices – unprofessional treatments and withholding of repairs.

As to the rest of the churches, for the Group I wooden churches I advocate the application of the classical Value-Based Approach to conservation with transparently defined mutual responsibilities of the government and property owners. Lastly, for the Group III – special programs on capacity building among the local communities are advised, with the strategy to stimulate
community-based initiatives, develop touristic activity and gradually include them into Group I on voluntarily basis.

**Significance.** The findings are significant for the theory and practice of historical wooden church preservation in Ukraine, since for the first time the problem was approached from the core communities’ point of view. Furthermore, this study contributes to the theoretical base of the Living Heritage Approach by expanding empirical evidence, and introducing the culturally-relevant concept of religious authenticity and different modes of use of heritage within the core communities. My hope is that this research will serve as a base for future studies in both, Living Heritage theory and Ukrainian wooden churches. Methodology developed in this study can be applied to other living religious sites around the globe.

Lack of funding for the cultural sphere, weak institutional capacity, corruptness of legal system, - all this extremely complicates the heritage protection practice, that rests on the shoulders of a few specialists with low governmental salaries, and mostly relies on volunteer movement and external funding. With due regard to this hardships, present work does not intend to solve all the problems of historical wooden church conservation in Ukraine, but I hope it will change the way we think about them.