

Research Paper**Received: 21 September 2023, Accepted: 30 October 2023, Published online: 5 November 2023****DOI: 10.21625/archive.v7i3.1026**

Endangered Religious Cultural Heritage Spatial Distribution, Tourism Design, and Heritage Narratives from a Protection and Enhancement Perspective in The Carpathian Region

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Abstract

In the Carpathian region, there are numerous churches of different denominations built in different architectural styles, including masterpieces of wooden architecture, which are of particular interest from both a cognitive and pilgrimage perspective. The churches of wooden architecture in the Carpathian region are the subject of excursions and cognitive religious tourism, and some of them are included in the UNESCO heritage list. The paper aims to represent and interpret this religious heritage through the narration of places, understood as "topoi" endowed with distinctive identities. The religious heritage of wooden churches is in fact the identity expression of ethnic minorities; identity is substantiated in architecture through the use of particular construction techniques.

Starting from the analysis of the heritage of wooden churches in the Carpathian region, the paper intends to propose innovative ways of multiple immersive narratives where the built religious heritage assumes the function of a tool capable of restoring the narrated reality and acting as a support for a hermeneutics of places. Constructing narratives of these places is very important for the preservation of the heritage of wooden churches, which today is experiencing many threats. In addition to bearing witness to local identity processes and conflicts and cooperation between different religions, they are able to increase the attractiveness of their territory and invite and guide visitors to come into contact with these places and establish an empathetic and reciprocal relationship with them.

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Keywords*Wooden architecture; Cultural heritage; Carpathian region; Sustainability; Churches.*

1. Introduction

The Carpathian wooden churches are more than 2,000 and represent an important church heritage for the Christian communities in these regions, which have used them as places of worship and prayer for centuries. They also have a wider value, as they represent a cultural and historical heritage for the whole of humanity. They are all very different in terms of form and construction and are objects of great architectural, artistic, and conservation value. Despite the considerable importance of their architecture and construction, these magnificent wooden buildings are not mentioned much in the relevant literature and are little known even in the professional circles of architects and art historians.

A total of 16 wooden churches (tserkvas) entered the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2013. Together they form a centuries-old cultural heritage of this rural border region between the Western and Eastern Slavs, between Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Judaism. These churches are more than 300 years old, the oldest of which dates back to 1502-1600 (Shevtsova, 2021).

According to UNESCO, this heritage embodies the cultural expression of four ethnographic groups, but also the formal, decorative, and technical changes adopted over time. The tserkvas bear witness to a distinct building tradition, rooted in the ecclesiastical tradition of the Orthodox Church, interwoven with elements of the local architectural language and tradition, and with symbolic references to the cosmogony of their communities. The architectural structures, designs, and decorative motifs are characteristic of the cultural traditions of the local communities in the Carpathian region and illustrate a multiplicity of symbolic references and sacred meanings related to traditions. The architectural forms of the tserkvas, with their three-part plan, pyramidal domes, chapels opening onto a quadrilateral or octagonal space, wooden bell towers, iconostasis, polychromatic interior decorations, as well as parish precincts, loggias, and tombs, respect the requirements of the Eastern liturgy while reflecting the cultural traditions of the local communities.

2. State of Art

The use of wood for the architecture of these churches is dictated by the ample availability of this material in the Carpathian Mountains area due to the presence of large areas of woodland and forest. Wooden churches have shaped the landscape of western Ukraine and south-eastern Poland for centuries (Potichnyj,1980). Unfortunately, today they are in various stages of decay, with minimal intervention in their state of preservation. In most cases, restoration was carried out as an emergency measure, as there are no national programs dedicated to the restoration of monuments in critical situations that require immediate restoration. This is why these objects have been gradually disappearing since 1990. Not infrequently, they are destroyed due to a lack of safety precautions; sometimes even the communities in the villages where they stand are dismantled and destroyed. Since the beginning of the 20th century, old wooden buildings have increasingly been replaced by stone churches. Only in individual cases were new sacred buildings still constructed in wood. In many villages where churches are located, new stone churches were built to better withstand the specific climatic and geographic conditions of the area (e.g. low temperatures in cold seasons and high humidity, which create favorable conditions for severe damage to wood and the development of various species of fungi, both outside and inside). Inside these often simple-looking churches, more often than not, are iconostases and surprisingly magnificent and colorful wall paintings. The 16 churches recognized in the UNESCO heritage list as part of the object 'The Wooden Churches of the Carpathian Region in Poland and Ukraine' escape this inauspicious fate under the new protection regime.

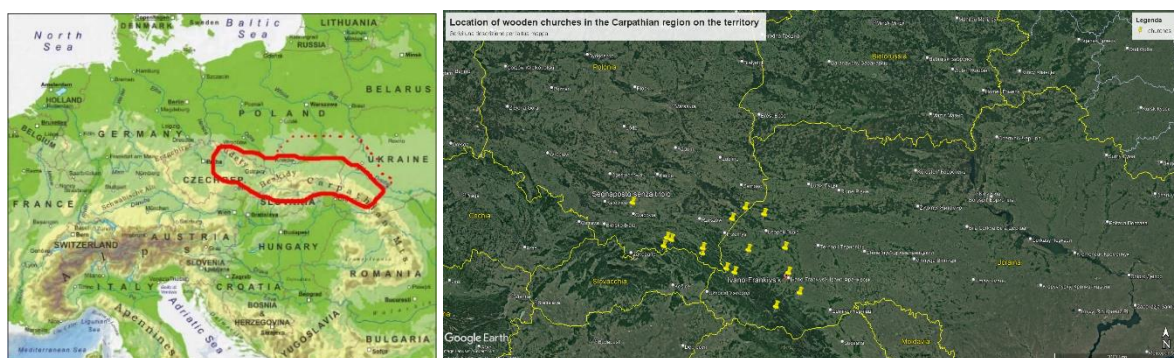


Figure 1: Location area of wooden churches in the Carpathian region on the territory and details of the location of each church

(Source: author's elaboration with Google Earth software)

The possibility of including these wooden monuments in the UNESCO World Heritage list places them among the most important structures created by humanity. It is just a pity that despite the prospects in the respective villages in this case, instead of causing the restoration of the old church, or the renovation of its roof, communities often endeavour to build new stone churches nearby.

The problem is probably due to the fact that no one has ever explained to people what an architectural monument is and what should be related to it. Theological institutions pay no attention to the history and culture of art, so priests have no idea of the value of the churches in which they work. This hypothesis has been confirmed by surveys of the church-going population and/or by contacting local cultural and religious groups to discuss and evaluate priorities regarding the preservation/conservation/restoration of these buildings. Most priests dream of a big new temple and

are easily ready to destroy the existing small old church, ignoring the fact that a better temple cannot be built with modern bricks or metal-plastic, so it is important to preserve what our forefathers left us.

All Ukrainian churches included in the Unesco list are protected at the highest level by inclusion in the State Register of Historical Property Monuments of Ukraine and are classified as national monuments under the Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage (2000). The properties and buffer zones are recognized and protected in the relevant local and district development/land-use plans. All wooden churches nominated for inclusion in Poland's UNESCO list are also protected at the highest level by inclusion in the Polish National Heritage Register under the Law on the Preservation and Protection of Historical Monuments (2003). In addition, all eight orthodox or catholic wooden churches in south-eastern Poland are also stations of the 'Szlak Architektury Drewnianej', i.e., they are included in a tourist route of wooden architecture that runs through a total of four voivodships. This route, covering more than 3,000 kilometers in the voivodships of Podkarpackie, Malopolskie, Swietokrzyskie, and Slaskie (Silesia), combines several hundred monuments of wooden architecture, such as churches, mills, residential and manor houses. Of the 16 wooden churches on the UNESCO list, the churches in Smolnik, Turzansk, and Chotyńiec are included in the Podkarpackie Trail, and the church in Owczary is included in the Malopolskie Trail (Michniewscy, Duda 2003).

The management of the serial property is coordinated by a steering committee that acts on behalf of the ministers of culture of both countries and works with the administrators of the tserkvas to ensure their preservation and organize training courses. Experts in various fields are invited to meetings with the Steering Committee, which is also required to invite property owners and curators as well as church and secular authorities to participate in this cooperation. The steering committee monitors the land use/development plans in cooperation with the local authorities. Instead of individual management plans, the Steering Committee is also responsible for overseeing all issues related to maintaining the value of the properties; the maintenance of their physical condition, and the elimination of potential threats, including the restriction in development plans of land use in the immediate vicinity of the properties and their buffer zone. Such restrictions are essential in some cases, and States Parties have committed to establishing appropriate protection mechanisms in all relevant development and land-use plans.

Furthermore, various conservation processes have been followed in Poland for these buildings, starting with scientific studies that allow the development and implementation of predictive models to simulate structural or climatic modifications of these buildings in the event of restoration or relocation. The processes and studies already started in Poland could be the basis for accelerating the restoration of similar buildings in Ukraine.

2.1. Wooden churches as an expression of a strong historical settlement identity

These churches should be protected because they are an expression of a strong local identity. The Carpathians are home to Eastern Slavic peoples who have written their names in the tradition of wooden architecture. These are the Ruthenians, an ethnic minority who have managed to preserve their faith, identity, and language and have created their own strong and distinctive culture. The Ruthenians, or Rusini, are an Eastern Slavic ethnic group that is often referred to as Ukrainian, but historically, and according to the Ruthenians themselves, they are a separate Slavic people, dispersed in various countries by the will of fate. After World War II, almost all of them had to leave their homeland, as the new rulers saw them as supporters of separatist aspirations. During the 'Aktion Weichsel', most of the inhabitants were resettled in the former East German territories or the former Soviet Union. Only a few managed to remain in their old homeland or to return after a few years. More than three-quarters of European Ruthenians live in Ukraine, i.e., in the region of Transcarpathia. In Slovakia, Ruthenians inhabit the Pryaszewski region, and in Poland, the southeastern part of the country is called Lemkowszczyzna. There are 12 Ruthenian villages in Maramorosha in central Romania. There are also Ruthenian villages in eastern Hungary. Despite this territorial dispersion, the Ruthenian settlements are all united by the Orthodox faith, a common Ruthenian language with a number of dialects related to history and place of residence, and a common secular culture. The Ruthenian people are divided into three ethnic subgroups: Lemky, Boyky, and Hutsul (Djakonov, 2015). These Ruthenian minorities created the masterpieces of Carpathian wooden temple architecture that are now included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. In detail they include Hutsul styles in the south-eastern Ukrainian Carpathians at Nyzhniy Verbizh and Yasyunia; Halych styles in the northern Carpathians on both sides of the Polish-Ukrainian border at Rohatyn, Drohobych, Zhovkva, Potelych, Radruż, and Chotyńiec; Boyko styles on both sides of the Polish-Ukrainian border, near the

Slovak border, in Smolnik, Uzhok and Matkiv, and Western Lemko styles in the Polish Western Carpathians in Powroźnik, Brunary Wyżne, Owczary, Kwiaton and Turzańsk (Taras, 2019).

The wooden churches of the Carpathian region are of great historical heritage and cultural significance for the inhabitants of the small villages in this area. They are artifacts that bear witness to the history of denationalization and religious persecution. Even though religious rites are only performed in some of them today, they represent a marked identity factor for the small Orthodox communities in the area (Rudnytsky, 1987; Gheorghe et al., 2020). From an architectural compositional point of view, the tserkvas present similar characteristics to the traditional houses of the area, in terms of size (very small), materials used (wood), construction techniques (the arrangement of logs horizontally on stone foundations with angular assemblies by interlocking and the wooden roofing tiles) and decoration. Usually, the plan of these externally austere churches is very simple and compact and includes the narthex, the nave, and the altar arranged on a longitudinal axis (Kutnyi, 2009; Gheorghe et al., 2020). Very often associated cemeteries or free-standing bell towers stand next to these structures; all are enclosed with perimeter walls and surrounded by trees (Shevtsova, 2018; Gheorghe et al., 2020).

3. Material and Methods

The methodology with which the research was carried out aims to explore the topic of how the heritage of wooden churches can be adequately preserved and valorized in order to bring benefits throughout the Carpathian region and to offer a cognitive approach based on case studies. The aim is to describe contextual situations through a descriptive-correlational empirical investigation and to suggest strategies for valorization.

After examining the existing literature, a more detailed study was carried out for each church in order to take a census of the heritage of the existing churches and to identify the elements useful to set up a correct conservation and valorization policy within the reference contexts. In particular, the following were considered: architectural characteristics, the photographic survey, the internal iconography, the presence of particularly valuable artistic works, the identity style of the building, the year of construction and historical information, past restoration work, and the current state of conservation.

The purpose of the case study is to describe the historical-religious identity importance of this architectural heritage and to understand the complex structure of relationships that identify and characterize each artifact in itself, in its unique and unrepeatable specificity, and in relation to the context of reference in which it is located, and only secondarily to use the empirical evidence gathered to shed light on the effectiveness of adopting appropriate solutions for the enhancement of this heritage.

The data collection techniques used in case studies are manifold and are both qualitative and quantitative in nature.

Finally, a research database based on multiple data sources is constructed, which allows for the possibility of inter-subjective control of the research procedures. The database contains all the data and materials collected and the annotations, descriptions, and interpretations that are deemed relevant (i.e. documents, observation reports, interviews, questionnaires, field notes, photographs or audio-visual materials, etc.) appropriately annotated, organized in a form that is as comprehensible as possible and structured in such a way that they can be easily consulted to assess the empirical evidence of the research.

3.1. Study areas

The churches considered are located in various villages that are very different from each other in terms of size, socio-economic and geographical context: these are 8 wooden churches (tserkvas) from the Carpathian region located in Ukraine (4 are located in the Lviv region, 2 in Transcarpathia and 2 in the Ivano-Frankivsk region) and 8 churches a few kilometers away across the border in Ukraine located in the Polish Carpathians (in the hill country of Roztocze and the Pre-Carpathian Mountains in the far south-east of Poland).

More details on the location of the Ukrainian churches:

The Church of the Holy Trinity is located in the suburb of Zhovkva. The Church of the Holy Spirit is located on a small rise in the western part of Rohatyn. The Church of St. George is located in the town of Drohobych, in the south of the Lviv Oblast. The Church of the Ascension is located in the village of Yasinya, situated in the district of Rakhiv, Transcarpathia. The Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary is located in the village of Nizhny Verbizh, in the Kolomyia district of the Ivano-Frankivsk region. The Church of the Holy Spirit is located in the village of Potelich, in the Lviv region. The Cathedral Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary is located in the central part of the village of Matkiv, in the valley of the Stryi River. The Church of the Archangel Michael is located in the village of Uzhok in the Velykoberezhniansky district of the Transcarpathian region (Красовский, 2002).

As for the location of Polish churches:

The Church of the Apostle James the Younger, in the village of Powróznik, is located in the Malopolska Voivodeship, on the border with the Slovak Republic. The Church of St. Paraskevi is located in the village of Kwiaton. The Church of the Archangel Michael is located in the village of Brunary Wyzne. The Church of the Protection of the Mother of God is located in the village of Owczary. The Church of St Michael the Archangel is located in the village of Turzansk and belongs to the Sanok Deanery of the Przemysl-Gorlice Diocese of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church. The Church of St Michael the Archangel is located in the village of Smolnik, in the Bieszczady Mountains. The Orthodox Church of the Nativity of the Holy Theotokos is located in the village of Chotyniec. The Church of St. Paraskevi is located in the village of Radru on a small hill above the Radrużka stream in the far south-east of Poland (Malinowscy, Marciniszyn, 2009).

The study involved a detailed analysis of the compositional and structural characteristics of all the churches mentioned above. For reasons of brevity, it is impossible to present in this paper. However, the following is a brief description of 2 churches (one Polish and the other Ukrainian) because they are expressions of 2 different styles (Lemko and Boyko) and for similarities and/or differences in their plans or specific features and symbols.

- 1) The Church of the Protection of the Mother of God in the village of Owczary is a Greek Catholic parish church, built in 1653. Currently, it serves as a branch of the Roman Catholic parish in Sękowa. It is one of the oldest churches in Lemko. The church is tripartite, with a strut-frame tower above the vestibule. It is surrounded by a low fieldstone wall, into which the stone gate tower is incorporated. In 1701, the presbytery of the church was completely rebuilt, in 1783 a tower was added by the masters Dimitr Dekowekin and Teodor Rusinka, and in 1870 the vestibule was enlarged to reach a width equal to the nave. The shingled roofs over the three parts of the temple are crowned with helmets with pseudo-lanterns and crosses. The presbytery and the nave, after the reconstruction, are of equal width. Inside there is an eighteenth-century baroque iconostasis painted in shades of blue, red, and gold, richly decorated with openwork columns with a vine leaf motif. The icons in the iconostasis were created by the artist Jan Medycki. In addition to the iconostasis, the church also features side altars of St. Nicholas, the Mother of God, and Christ which are of particular value. The icon in the latter dates to 1664 and was originally located in an older iconostasis in the same temple. In the years 1983-1985, a profound renovation of the entire church was carried out, including the restoration of the roof covered with shingles. The Ministry of Culture and Arts has awarded this renovation a special distinction. In 1995, the church received the Prix Europa Nostra for the best-maintained historic building. Since 1998, the temple has been the joint seat of the Roman Catholic and Greek parishes.
- 2) The Cathedral Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the village of Matkiv was built in 1838 by masters Ivan Melnikovich and Vasily Ivanikovich. The church is located on a low hill in the central part of the village of Matkiv, not far from the highway, in the valley of the Stryi River. The church which has three trunks and three domes, belongs to the Boyko-type temples. The architectural composition of the church consists of square log cabins (wider naves) located along the west-east axis. On both sides of the altar, there are small rectangular sacristies. The main volumes are completed with eight-sided floors, above the nave they are with five-folds, and above the altar and the Babiniecs are with four folds, topped with domes with crowns and crosses. The church has a clear rectangular shape and is very tall; it is surrounded by an attic on stepped ledges of log cabins, under which a glazed porch is arranged in the western facade. The wooden walls and

the folds are leveled vertically with boards and platbands. To the southwest of the church is a square, three-tiered, wooden bell tower, with a balcony on the second tier, facing a small square in front of the southern facade of the church. The bell tower which was built in 1924 by master Mikhail Veklich, is covered with a tent roof with a grid gallery above it.

4. Tourist enhancement of the heritage of wooden churches

The research on the 16 Carpathian Unesco churches produced a summary database from which the most suitable policies for the conservation and enhancement of the Carpathian wooden church heritage were identified.

Tab. 1 Historical Artistic Architectural Conservation Status of the Carpathian Unesco Churches - Author's elaboration

Church	Location	Year of construction	Style	Professed liturgical rite	Architectural features	Iconography	Notable artistic elements	Restoration and renovation date	State of preservation	Photo Exterior	Photo Interior
Church of the Holy Trinity	Zhovkva (UKR)	1720			Three-nave floor plan	Early 18th-century iconostasis.		1978/79			
Church of the Descent of the Holy Spirit	Rohatyn (UKR)	1598	Galician style	Used as a museum	Quadruple-nave floor plan with hexagonal huts	Renaissance Baroque iconostasis from 1650	Archangel Michael and Melchizedek Doors Icons of Christ and Mary	1885 1895 1980/82	Good		
Church of St. George	Dro+hobych (UKR)	1656	Galician style		Tripartite plan	Valuable iconostasis	Passion of Christ		Excellent		
Church of Ascension	Yasinya (UKR)	1824	Hutsul style	Greek/Catholic	Cross-ribbed tripartite ground plan with 1 peak and 5 cornices and small domes	18th-century iconostasis.		1971 2006	Excellent		
Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary	Nizhny Verbizh(UKR)	From 1756 to 1808	Podillyano style		Large church Cross-shaped plan with 5 huts and with 5 domes and 3 levels	Gilded Baroque 3-tier iconostasis	Latin-style Baroque altars with gilded Corinthian columns				
Church of the Holy Spirit	Potelich (UKR)	1502	Galician style		Tripartite plan. 2-storey church with 3 cornices	Murals created from 1620 to 1640	Diussus Icon from 1683	1718 1736 1753 1831 1903 1923 1970/72	Discreet		
Church Cathedral of the Blessed Virgin Mary	Matkiv (UKR)	1838	Boyko style		Tripartite plan with 3 domes						
Church of the Archangel Michael	Uzhok (UKR)	1745	Boyko style		Tripartite square plan.	18th-century gilded sculpted iconostasis.	Royal doors with the Annunciation and the 4 Evangelists		Very damaged interior		
Church of St. James the Younger	Powróznik (PL)	1600	Lemko style	Catholic	Tripartite plan	Baroque iconostasis	Sacristy painting from 1637	No	Good		
Church of Saint Paraskevi	Kwiaton (PL)	Mid-17th cent.		Catholic	Tripartite floor plan - pagoda form with onion tower	Iconostasis 1900	No	No	Good		
Church of Archangel Michael	Brunary Wyzne (PL)	1797	Lemko style	Catholic	Tripartite plan, 2 onion towers	Baroque iconostasis 18th century.	No	No	Good		
Church of Protection of the Mother of God	Owezary (PL)	1653	Lemko style	Greek/Catholic	Tripartite plan with 1 tower	Eighteenth-century Baroque iconostasis	No	1701 1783 1870 1983 1985	In 1995 it was awarded the prize for best preserved building		
Church of St. Michael the Archangel	Turzansk (PL)	1803	Lemko style	Orthodox	Tripartite plan, onion turrets	Iconostasis from the first half of the 19th century.	No	1896 1913 1980 1990 2000	Good		
Church of St. Michael the Archangel	Smolnik (PL)	1791	Boyko-style	Greek/Catholic	Tripartite plan, onion domes	Iconostasis destroyed after 1951	Dormition Icons of the Theotokos and Theotokos Hodigistria from 1547 now in the Lviv Museum	1921 1969/70- 2004/07 2009	Good		
Church of the Nativity of the Holy Theotokos	Chotyniec (PL)	1615		Greek/Catholic	Quadrupartite nave plan, domes on octagonal drums	Iconostasis of 1671	18th-century Last Judgement painting	1733 1858 1925 1991/94	Good		
Church of Saint Paraskevi	Radru (PL)	1583	Late Gothic style	Greek/Catholic	Tripartite plan with multi-level roofs	17th-century iconostasis.	Side altars from the 17th century	1963/65	In 2012 it was included in the list of endangered buildings of the World Monuments Fund		

Tourism related to wooden churches can therefore represent a source of economic development for local communities and can help to promote the preservation and enhancement of this unique cultural heritage, as well as become an opportunity to promote integration and dialogue between different cultures and communities in the region. This is why the preservation and enhancement of these churches are of paramount importance both for local communities and for humanity as a whole.

Moreover, tourism can be an important source of income for local communities and for the Carpathian regions where the wooden churches are located. However, it is important that tourism is sustainable and respects the needs of local communities and the environment. In this sense, it is crucial that tourism related to Carpathian wooden churches is managed in a responsible manner, promoting the integration of local communities into tourism activities. The optimization of tourist accessibility, particularly through the construction of structures and parking facilities, must be carefully planned so as not to compromise the integrity of the property's constituent elements and important views to and from them, and risk prevention, including against fire and flooding, must be robust at all times in order to prevent adverse effects in the event of a disaster.

The Carpathian wooden churches were severely affected by the war in Ukraine, which involved several Carpathian regions. The war interrupted the conservation and cultural heritage activities of the Carpathian wooden churches, making their preservation and tourist development difficult. Moreover, many of these buildings were severely damaged or destroyed during the fighting, and local communities lost access to these places of worship and meeting places as well as their identity base.

Despite the difficulties, some organizations and associations are working for the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Carpathian wooden churches by promoting projects for their reconstruction and sustainable tourism development. In addition, UNESCO is supporting efforts to preserve this heritage.

These projects will have to be supported by adequate funding and will have to involve all local stakeholders. Obviously, financial investments will be needed to save and support the restoration of these buildings; the economic resources may come from soft loans from international financial organizations or from private sector investments and the domestic budget of the two states trying to overcome all political and regulatory obstacles. After the war in Ukraine, it will be necessary to undertake a series of actions to restore church heritage, especially the Carpathian wooden churches, which were severely damaged during the conflicts. This will entail several challenges and will require the intervention of various entities, including government authorities, non-governmental organizations, local communities, and religious institutions.

The priority actions could include:

1. **Damage assessment:** an accurate assessment of the damage sustained by wooden churches during the war will be necessary in order to identify the most appropriate recovery actions. This will involve the collection of data and information on the current situation of the heritage, and the definition of an action plan for the recovery and conservation of the heritage.
2. **Reconstruction:** it will be necessary to reconstruct wooden churches that were severely damaged or destroyed during the war. This may require the involvement of experts in vernacular architecture and wood restoration.
3. **Conservation:** it will be necessary to conserve the wooden churches that were partially damaged during the war, repairing the damage and protecting the buildings from future damage.
4. **Valorization:** it will be necessary to promote the valorization of the cultural heritage of wooden churches, promoting knowledge and understanding of their historical and cultural significance and sustainable tourism.

5. Conclusion

All The Carpathian wooden churches represent an ecclesiastical and cultural heritage of great importance, and they also represent an opportunity for the development of tourism in the various regions of the Carpathians on which they stand, since they can attract tourists from all over the world who are interested in their history, architecture, and cultural importance. In order to describe the case studies, a holistic approach was adopted, which aims to consider the

case in its unique and unrepeatable complexity, i.e., considering the case as a system whose behavior is determined by the behavior of individual subsystems. In this sense, for example, social effects on local actors, the inhabitants, and local political action are assessed. After the war in Ukraine, it will be necessary to undertake a series of actions to restore church heritage, in particular the Carpathian wooden churches, which were severely damaged during the conflicts. This will entail several challenges and will require the intervention of different entities, including government authorities, non-governmental organizations, local communities, and religious institutions.

Acknowledgments:

Not applicable.

Funding declaration:

This research did not receive any specific grants from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors/individuals.

Ethics approval:

Not applicable.

Conflict of interest:

The author declares that there is no competing interest.

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