



Effective Partnerships May Save Cultural Heritage in a Rural Ukrainian Town: A Case Study

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Abstract:

This case study explores the founding and growth of an NGO in the historic Ukrainian town of Zhovkva. Located in the Western part of the country, its cultural monuments and history have been subject to neglect, the ravages of weather and war. One man's vision in the late 1980s resulted in the creation of NGO Culture of Light. How this NGO grew, adapted and maintained its focus through major economic and political changes shows the enduring power of partnerships.

Key Words: NGO, Ukraine, Cultural Heritage, Cultural Preservation, Zhovkva

1.1 Introduction:

The Marshutka from the city of Lviv to the town of Zhovkva can comfortably seat 26 people. But since the town has grown and started to become a place where businesses seek employees, the mini bus has 38 people standing in every available space. About 10 minutes from the central bus stop, the city ends where new construction stops. At this point, open fields expand to the horizon with small towns and villages every few kilometers until you reach Zhovkva. A centuries old town with a complex history, the town is trying to find its personality, balancing tradition and modern realities, history and economic development.

This case study focuses on the work of one NGO that bridges these often opposing forces. The NGO Light of Culture's mission is to preserve, protect, and redevelop the buildings that define the town's important cultural heritage. Success in these efforts can achieve both goals: respecting the past and helping develop the Zhovkva's economic future. Your job as the new Director is to lead the organization into its next stage of development. You are succeeding the well and widely respected founding director whose industry, energy, enthusiasm and commitment often fueled the system through darker times.

2.1 Ukraine and the Oblast of Lviv:

Ukraine today is a country torn apart by war, conflict, ideology, economics, and generational differences. With borders on Belarus, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Slovakia (Figure 1), its 43 million people have lived in a free, independent Ukraine since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. But, that change in government has not been smooth, with notable two major revolutions: the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Revolution for Dignity (Euro Maidan) in 2013-2014. Since then, an emerging stability seems to be calming the fears generated by Russia's armed annexation of Crimea and support for the rebels in the eastern zones. This war has resulted in over 10,000 deaths and has created approximately 2,000,000 internally displaced persons.



Figure 1: Map of Ukraine with Lviv and Zhovkva

The capital of Kiev, with its decidedly European feel, lies in the central region of the country. The Oblast (state) of Lviv in the western section of Ukraine is home to 2.6 million people. Lviv is its major city and has historical roots dating back centuries. Outside of the city limits, the oblast has 20 districts and nine cities. Over 95% of the population identifies itself as Ukrainian, with approximately 3% Russian, 2% Polish. There are numerous towns and villages scattered over its 8,430 square miles. The Carpathian Mountains are a major geological and geographical landmark of the oblast. Cattle, oil and gas production, milk, meat, flax, vegetables, honey, poultry and wood products are major items of commerce.

2.2 The Town of Zhovkva:

This town of 14,000 people dates back to the 14th and 15th century. Founded by Stanislaw Zolkiewski in 1594, it shares a common architectural approach with the Polish town of Zamosc. Its military past includes being run by Polish conquerors for 4 centuries, Austrian rulers for 150 years followed by Soviets and Nazis, and now being a self-governing nation since 1991.

The 16th century castle fell into disrepair over the centuries. Russian troops set it ablaze during World War I. After World War II, it was used as a barracks, and then as a horse stable. I once had four main gates, but one had to be razed because it was too small for the Soviet army's tanks. The Society for the Cultural



Figure 2: Market Square



Figure 3: Zhovkva Synagogue



Figure 4: Zhovkva Synagogue

Monuments Preservation of Monuments supported its reconstruction. For generations Zhovkva was home to one of the largest Jewish communities in Ukraine until the Second World War. Today, the major synagogue stands as a reminder of the ferocity of the Nazi invasion and the ravages of history. Zhovkva's 4,500 Jews

represented about half the town's population at the start of WWII. Just two blocks off Market Square is the fenced in and boarded up synagogue, the center of Jewish life in Zhovkva (Figures 3 and 4). This Renaissance-style temple was constructed at the turn of the 17th century; at some point, it could have been used as a fortress, but it was totally destroyed by the Nazis. Several small projects have prevented the walls from totally collapsing. The World Monument Fund in New York has given three grants of \$25,000, \$20,000 and \$4000 to help maintain the temple as a memorial to the Jewish community that once existed in Zhovkva. (www.wmf.org/project/zhovkva-synagogue, accessed January 27, 2017)

Between 2001 and 2005, these included "a new copper roof replaced reconstructions over the main hall. Accumulated debris around the surviving walls was removed, improving drainage and reducing moisture in the structure. Masonry was stabilized to avoid any further collapse of walls." Unfortunately, more needs to be done which explains why the synagogue remains on the Fund's "World Monuments Watch a call to action for cultural heritage sites facing imminent threats and challenges." There are aspirations to renovate the building into a Museum of Jewish History in Galician Life.

3.1 NGO Light of Culture:

NGO Light of Culture was established in 1990, a year before the Soviet Union collapsed. Its founder, Mykhailo Kubai, had a vision to maintain the monuments and the architecture especially in the Market Square center of town. In the late 1980s, this religious and spiritual man then in mid-30s strongly believed that the town of Zhovkva needed to reclaim its cultural history. So, he started this nonprofit organization.

Several principles guided his initial efforts. First, it should avoid conflict; he preferred to cooperate rather than criticize those in power. The name itself is an adaptation of Martin Luther King's famous saying: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that." In this case, the 'light' comes from partnership rather than provocation. The second value was to design and implement projects in common, public spaces, specifically Market Square and the castle. His third belief centered on involving young people as volunteers so that they could understand the importance of history and to continue this (his?) work. Initially Mr. Kubai approached local businesses to help fund these efforts, but they offered little support. As a result, he still spends perhaps 20% of his time fundraising, which includes successfully writing a number of project grants.



Figure 5: Temple of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

An electrical engineer by education and profession, Mr. Kubai realized he needed special training both in Ukraine and other countries to learn the art and science of historic restoration. He found a number of local architects who were willing to help and insisted that renovation and reclamation efforts continue the styles of architecture that made the town of Zhovkva an international heritage site. Their collaboration has proven successful.

While NGO Light of Culture does not have any formal connection with the magnificent, continually renovated churches in town, its main partner is the Town Council. Elected officials over several decades have seen the importance of (re-) development for tourism and the city's economy. Therefore, they are willing to support these projects.

3.2 Cultural Tourism and Economic Development in Zhovkva:

The Town Council and Mr. Kubai believe it is important to protect the community as a whole by protecting its historic monuments and buildings from age and from unplanned commercial development. This NGO Light of Culture has been successful in lobbying the Town Council as well as the national Ministry of Construction of Ukraine to write rules and regulations stressing the importance of this town's monuments. In 1994 NGO Light of Culture advocated for rules that created the Market Square as a State Historical District. This designation gives the area a special status and makes inappropriate commercial development more difficult.

Another town asset is the Holy Trinity Church (Figure 6) which "bears testimony to a distinct building tradition rooted in Orthodox ecclesiastic design interwoven with elements of local tradition, and symbolic references to their communities' cosmogony" (UNESCO, 2013). Built in 1720, the Church of the Holy Trinity was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2013 by UNESCO, the internationally recognized arbiter of such important (and often endangered) sites, monuments, churches, structures and other reminders of historical significance (www.wmf.org/project/zhovkva-synagogue).



Figure 6: Holy Trinity Church

The past three decades have been met with project and grant success which help offset setbacks in infrastructure and more planned development. The Herych (2014) Report on Cross Border Cooperation from 2007-2013 acknowledges the historical and cultural interdependence between Poland and Ukraine and the almost sister city feelings between Zhovkva and Zamosc. Additionally, Zhovkva's cultural heritage is mentioned at least twice in a review of Polish Ukrainian tourism opportunities in the oblast of Lviv (Miszczuk, 2015); Zhovkva is only 30-minute trip from the city. An historic town with wonderfully restored churches and Market Square could form the foundation for more cultural tourism; however, it has not happened because of the continuing "ineffective usage of the potential of the tourist products, i.e., the Jesuit monastery and the Zhovkva Castle" (Herych, 2014, p. 89). It is also reflective of the lack of local will.

A 2017 report from the European Commission provides the same message as other reviews over the past several decades since independence it reveals mixed success in developing cultural tourism in Zhovkva. Economic opportunity and development certainly formed a part of the Town Council's agenda. Most local governmental officials and public administrator's value planned and controlled growth as a way to maintain and improve the quality of life in the community.

Yet, the potential is not being realized. Why have these efforts not produced more positive results? This European Commission (2017) report gives Zhovkva's public leaders valid reasons for some optimism. Among the opportunities noted in the report include "outstanding natural and landscape values, numerous sites of historical interest and tourism potential." Offsetting this are the challenges caused by the "low standard of tourism facilities, underdevelopment of a tourism information system, poor condition of monuments and historical areas."

This dichotomy is likely to continue. In an optimistic, encouraging investment prospectus, In West Ukraine (2017) details the reasons for a positive outlook. Its assessment of Zhovkva in the Lviv region includes the following: "The town is one of the best economically and geographically located small towns in the region (because it is) close to Lviv, the big economic, cultural and tourist center in Western Ukraine, close to the border with the European Union and close to wholesale trading networks and business centers in Lviv and boundary regions in Poland." The report further explores the geographic tourist magnets of the Bug River, the Carpathian Mountains and the Roztochya highlands. Unfortunately, there is no mention of culturally based tourism, development or investment that could benefit Zhovkva or other areas outside Lviv.

4.1 Planning For 2020:

There are ambitious dreams for investment opportunities in this town ([Investing in Zhovkva](#)). These include specifics from transportation to infrastructure, tourism to trade. Regarding the future, Mykhailo Kubai believes that that the next four years' work of this NGO should be focused on three major projects: (1) finishing the renovation of the castle (Figures 7 and 8), (2) "helping develop regulations to formalize the town planning process, and (3) involving Zhovkva's young residents and transfer the NGO's operation to this new generation" (personal correspondence with Mr. Kubai (February 18, 2017). Since Mr. Kubai is now in his mid-60s, he looks forward to retirement.



Figure 7: Zhovkva Castle



Figure 8: Zhovkva Castle

The original Light of Culture board "consisted of 5 people representing our departments including restoration department, Philosophy Club, musical groups, (administration and technology)." In 2016 the NGO was re-organized and renamed as the Zhovkva Development Center with a paid executive director (when funds are available) and volunteers (who are able to draw a salary during the period of a grant). "Now, after the reorganization, we chose a Board of 3 persons for greater efficiency of its work. It is composed of the Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Secretary of the Board." (Personal correspondence with M. Kubai, January 29, 2017).

Part of this NGO's success lies in the development of effective partnerships. These include selected international foundations, the Town Council, national ministries and local friendships. An emerging role centers on the collaboration with the Ukrainian Ministry of Regional Development which has appointed Mr. Kubai as Zhovkva's 'Deputy-director for Research and Restoration of the State Historical and Architecture Reserve. He also serves as project manager for a Council of Europe grant which seeks to maintain the

"unique Renaissance town planning complex (dating to the) end of the XVI century, 24 architecture ensembles, 100 monuments of world significance, national and regional importance. The historical town core still has its original Renaissance planning and functions of the town centre" as well as the town's importance as a "famous centre of Jewish culture in Eastern Europe."(<http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/comus/zhovkva-ukraine>, accessed January 28, 2017)

5.1 Closing Thought:

This is the situation that awaits you as you step off the mini bus ready for your first day on the job. Zhovkva's Mayor Petro Vykhopen realistically assessed the town's past and articulated hopes for the future: "We have accumulated a bulk of social problems including preservation and use of the cultural heritage. As a result of changes, we expect to increase the number of tourists, as well as to encourage direct income from improved services, renewed local economy and active small businesses" (Council of Europe, 2017). The clear connection between cultural heritage, tourism and economic development stresses the town's potential. Reflecting on the town's past, Mr. Kubai notes that, when Zhovkva was developed, "it was a grandiose time; Stanislaw Zolkiewski had dreams" (Gruber, 2009). In 2017, so does Mr. Kubai.

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Discussion Questions:

1. What are three of the more important short-term and long-range benefits from the work of this NGO?

2. Who are three major stakeholders who should/could/might be consulted as you settle into this role position?
3. What can each of these stakeholders bring to the table? What are their needs and priorities?
4. What are two possible impacts of the renaming NGO Light of Culture?
5. How can the NGO build on its history without the energy, charisma and vision of its founder and only leader for the past three decades?
6. How would you propose to gauge and engage the local town residents in this conversation?

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