

Yew trees saved in Croatia 2012

This account by Anton Papić shows how effort and determination saved three yew trees threatened with felling to make way for a new shopping development.

For quite some time there have been plans to extend the wing of an old building in the centre of my town of Vinkovci in Croatia. This was to enable the construction of a shopping centre for the clothing brand New Yorker. I had known of the building plans for a few months, but had not been aware of one very important fact, and that was the exact location of the proposed building. In the first instance I understood that the shopping centre was meant to be located in a completely different part of the town, and was surprised and shocked by the new information - that the site selected for the construction was already the habitat for three beautiful, old yew trees. Three trees that were going to be cut down!



What shocked me even more was that the construction works were planned to begin in just a few days. So, I realised that if wanted to react, I had to do so immediately. And so I did.

First thing I did was making a call to the Croatian Ministry of Environmental and Nature Protection. After a long conversation, the only thing they could tell me was that they were not in a position to do anything, since they could react only if the concerned yew trees were under the protection of the government.

They suggested that it would be for the best to contact the media. Since I was very aware that the media would not take me or this problem seriously enough, my next step was to contact the "Green Activists". To my sadness, there are no green branches in Vinkovci, so my next best thing was to contact the Green Activists in city Osijek (a city just a forty kilometers away from Vinkovci). I talked with a lady who was keen and willing to help me, but she made me aware of the fact that there was almost nothing that they could do. She promised that she would make a few phone calls, and I sent her all of the necessary information and continued my fight to find a resolution.

The Green Party was in a way my last resort and it turned out that they were able to help me. They told me that I needed to make a petition and collect 20 signatures which I was then to take to our mayor. Over the weekend I collected not 20, but 120 signatures (with help from my dad's good friend Mr. Slavko Vuković), which I then took to our Mayor, before contacting the Green Party again. In the mean time, via email, I contacted English and German yew friends and the Croatian branch of the New Yorker group. They told me that in fact, they were not the ones carrying out the construction works and that it was the Poseidon Group from the UK (www.poseidon-gp.com) who were to carry out the work.

They gave me the phone number of the authorised representative of the Poseidon Group in Croatia and I gave him a call. He told me that he was not aware of any trees located at the construction work place and that in any case they had a valid location permit. The important issue here is the fact that a location permit was released in the first place, when it meant the destruction of these trees.

But he told me that he would talk with his superiors and find out what would be the cost of the tree transplant. He was kind enough to call me the next day and let me know that unfortunately they would not be able to carry out the work of moving the tree.

In the mean time I got an email from Tim Hills, one of the English yew friends and he informed me that he had contacted the Poseidon Group in London on behalf of the Ancient Yew Group.

Since I was not contacted by representatives of our media or the city Hall, I decided to go by myself to the city Hall and see what could be done, because the construction works were due to start in the next day or two. It was a rather hard job to do, because every single person I talked to would send me to the next one telling me that they were not in a position to deal with the yew problem. I was stubborn as a mule and I knew I had to stick to my story - the yew trees needed to be saved!

They needed to be transplanted and it was the only thing that mattered to me at that point. No buts about it. Fortunately enough, I found one sensible head that was willing to help. Where there's a will there's a way, and that was what I had told him. After he had talked with his superior and completed a few more phone calls, the only thing left to be done was sorting out the logistics. We went to the tree location where I found out the construction works had already started.



After talking to the construction work leader and the authorised representative from Poseidon Group, we came to an agreement that there were no problems concerning the yew tree transplantation. It was that day when we had a few problems solved and those were the pruning of trees and their transportation.



To be honest, I was uncertain of the final outcome of the situation. I was aware of the Croatian mentality and all the obstacles I had to overcome, so until the trees were safe and sound on their new location, I was not about to celebrate. After work, I went to the place where the yews were supposed to be transplanted. I was anxious and to begin with and was not able to find them at the planned transplantation location. I dialled a couple of numbers, and was finally put at my ease when I found out that the Yew trees had been transplanted in a new location, next to an elementary school.



The transplantation was performed well, you could say correctly. Of course there were some inevitable damage to the bark of the tree and their crowns were heavily cropped, because of lack of equipment for this kind of work, and also because I was unable to be there and offer advice on protecting the bark at least, but in the end, I've could not have asked for more involmtn from the city itself.



I was happy enough to at least give those yews a second chance. All we have now in the end, is to pray that they successfully continue to grow at their new home.

Anton Papić 2012