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# CATASTROPHE AND CHALLENGE

## CULTURAL HERITAGE IN POST-CONFLICT RECOVERY

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# METHODS AND TOOLS

Milica Božić Marojević

# Questioning the Impact of Contemporary Post-War Reconstruction Ideas on World Heritage Sites

## Abstract

When we look at the current situation in the field of heritage protection and care, we can easily conclude that the adoption of numerous conventions, laws and orders concerning its safekeeping, value for the society and rules of conduct in the event of armed conflicts and hostilities did not provide significant results. The deliberate destruction of heritage, as well as collateral damages, in the former Yugoslavia, East Timor, Darfur, Cambodia, Peru, South African Republic, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen and Iran have shown us that it is not enough to make a decision and give expert recommendations, but it is necessary to expand our front of operation.

This paper attempts to take a step towards sketching the scope and the depth of the problems of World Heritage Sites at war and criteria for their recovery. In addition, through thorough analysis of the legal data, recent reports from international organizations in charge of heritage, and the political implications of their recommendations and decisions, we will provide insights into approaches to cope with these problems. Is it enough to assure the existence of heritage when something is declared a World Heritage site? What does that mean for the site itself? Is there any guarantee that the monument from the List of Heritage in Danger is going to have special, additional treatment? Why is it important that heritage becomes one of the priorities of post-conflict reconstruction? How can it contribute to the quality of co-existence and development of intercultural dialogue? These are just some of the questions that we will try to give answers to. As a case study, we will examine four World Heritage Sites in Kosovo\*,<sup>1</sup> monuments that have been part of the Heritage in Danger List for several years.

### Keywords:

heritage in danger, post-war reconstruction, World Heritage Sites, Kosovo\*.

*"The idea that anything is going to be protected by putting it on the List of the world heritage sites is completely senseless, since - despite all the bureaucratic effort - life can not be stopped."*  
(Gavrilović 2010: 45)

A few years ago, when I read this sentence in an article written by a very respected Serbian anthropologist and professor Ljiljana Gavrilović (PhD), I was stunned. In the scientific world she is well known for her sharp tongue and my first thought was that she wanted to raise awareness of this issue. But, in a way, since then, this statement has always been on my mind. Could she be right? Since,

we can easily conclude that until now, the World Heritage List (WHS)<sup>2</sup> has not helped to stop, for example, the intentional destruction of heritage? Perhaps "[...] too much is asked of heritage. In the same breath, we commend national patrimony, regional and ethnic legacies and a shared global heritage and sheltered in common?" (Loewenthal 1997: 227) And if this List does not have any concrete impact on the future life of our legacies, what is its purpose? Are we as guardians of heritage and museum professionals wasting our time and energy? Can our concerns about the inheritance of the past and present life somehow meet and reconcile?

Since 1972, when the World Heritage Convention was adopted, the World Heritage List has been continually growing and evolving. With this expansion, a critical need has emerged regarding the implementation of the Convention. Numerous meetings and reports have shown that World Heritage Site managers need greater support, which involves more focused training and capacity development in specific areas. Heritage disasters are combinations of various factors, and some of them are within human control. Therefore, it is possible to prevent them, or at least considerably reduce their effects.<sup>3</sup> Also, there are numerous benefits from the admission to the World Heritage List. In addition to greater media attention and increased number of tourists, listed places are able to receive cash from the UNESCO's preservation fund. Though only developing countries can apply for the grants, listing can also attract other donors.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in general public, a site's status of being on the List can not be regarded as something that guarantees better for its preservation. For example, most of the monuments on the List of World Heritage in Danger<sup>5</sup> are those that have been damaged during war. With this in mind, the recognition of their value to society by an international body, in this case UNESCO, clearly does not automatically mean their protection from harm. In such circumstances, they stand shoulder to shoulder with other monuments that are not special enough to be on the list, even though they were also ruined with premeditation. For the nations whose heritage the sites represent, being on the list or not does not diminish their value or their right to be reconstructed.

In recent years, the international and regional human rights mechanisms have strengthened the link between cultural heritage, cultural diversity and cultural rights.<sup>6</sup> The right to cultural heritage, as well as the right to participate in cultural life and cultivate your own way of life, are internationally recognized and regulated in the various documents.<sup>7</sup> However, all this remains a dead letter if citizens have no awareness of the importance of heritage to (global) society and that is something that requires intensive work in the future.

#### **Time Present and Time Past**

What happens, though, with the restoration of the WHS in danger? How can post-war reconstruction ideas help? Post-war reconstruction usually has different meanings. Its first objective is to allow the community to function normally. In the minds of people, that usually means that everything is organized in the same way as it was before the catastrophe. Every disaster, particularly one caused by war, involves not only the physical damage, but, moreover, a serious social impact that includes psychological, demographic, economic and political components (Lindell 2013). For this reason, conflicts destroy two types of identities, which are

often intertwined. With the disruption of daily life, people lose their sense of belonging to a certain group. In addition, that kind of situation undermines collective identity formed around high art that constitutes national heritage (Ascherson 2005).

While this may not seem realistic at first glance, nor vital to human survival, cultural heritage restoration must be recognized as a key element in the process of reconstruction after armed conflicts. When there is death and suffering, it is obvious that human lives have priority, followed by a need for shelter and food. However, experience has shown that all these basic needs have a better chance to be established if they are in an appropriate cultural context and in this sense the "impulse to preserve the thread of continuity is thus a crucial instinct of survival" (Stanley-Price 2005: p. 1). So, we can conclude that, since the re-establishment of continuity in everyday life is also priority, and given that it includes restructuring the elements of cultural identity, the restoration of national monuments can not be considered a luxury. Moreover, the active involvement of heritage has positive effects not only on social reconstruction, but also with reconciliation.

So far, the post-war reconstruction was largely followed by data on how many buildings were destroyed during the war (Memory of the World project, UNESCO). What could be the future direction of its development is changing the approach. To be exact, detailed description of the destruction or the scale of destruction of cultural heritage is useless, if not followed by the reconstruction of the society as a whole. In addition, next to the values that we recognize and reconstruct in the museums or other important buildings and monuments, restoration should be directed towards perhaps globally less significant places and objects, but very important for individuals, as they hide their personal and family histories and they can help in establishing a daily routine.

On the other hand, many experts think that heritage is dividing instead of connecting societies, and that it is much better when we have a situation which is actually a 'tabula rasa'. David Rieff 's recently published book *In Praise of Forgetting* stands for this position and this is in stark contrast with the memory boom phenomenon. However, even though it is very difficult to measure effects of the post-war reconstruction in short terms, certain impacts are clearly seen only after several years. Still, some important figures remain problems: there are not enough experts, there is no money, there is no universal solution and each situation requires an individual approach (Stanley-Price 2005). But, all of this should be seen as a challenge rather than an obstacle.

The Council of Europe often emphasizes 'rehabilitation' rather than 'reconstruction' as a method and key condition for reconciliation:



*"The purpose is to preserve a certain lifestyle that could help convince inhabitants to remain in (or return to) their villages, making sure that affected regions do not face post-conflict trauma with progressive impoverishment or even abandonment. Reconstruction and development is therefore a priority in conflict areas, not only for accommodating the inhabitants and ensuring the right conditions for the return of displaced persons, but also for preserving the spirit of the communities. This must include restoring the social cohesion that prevailed before the conflict in order to re-establish and maintain the living and development potential of the communities. The reconstruction process means resuming development processes on the basis of the past reference framework and its ensuring continuity. In line with human rights, the restoration of the social and cultural environment is the key condition for sustaining the objectives of the reconstruction process."*

(Council of Europe 2013)

In other words, public participation in restoration projects improves the chances of achieving sustainable heritage development by strengthening reconciliation between and within communities through the management of conflicting interpretations.

### **The Case of Kosovo\* – World Heritage Sites at War**

*"The entanglement of the cultural and the political that led to the widescale destruction of historic architecture in Kosovo\*, then, was less an avoidable anomaly of the conflict than one of the conflict's constituent elements. As such, the war in Kosovo\* is characteristic of a new form of conflict that is produced not out of geopolitical or ideological disputes, but out of the politics of particularistic identities."* (Herscher & Riedlmayer 2000: 109)

#### *Understanding the Context*

Throughout its long history, thanks previous wars and their subsequent population migrations, Kosovo and Metohija have always been multi-ethnic environments. Favourable geostrategic position, as well as mineral resources, made this territory interesting for different invaders. Kosovo and Metohija were part of the Serbian state in the 13th century. After the fall of despotism in 1459, the area was included into the Ottoman Empire until 1912. In 1918, this territory became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Between 1941 and 1945, Kosovo and Metohija were added to the Kingdom of Albania under the Italian protectorate. At the same time, smaller parts of Kosovo were occupied by Germans and Bulgarians. After Italy capitulated in 1943, the Germans occupied Albania and Kosovo as a whole. When the war ended, Kosovo and Metohija were returned to Yugoslavia and became part of the People's (later Socialist Federal) Republic of Yugoslavia.

In the spring of 1981, massive riots took place in Priština, less than a year after the death of Josip Broz Tito, when protesters carried Tito's pictures and chanted 'Kosovo-Republic'. Conflicts with students erupted in late March / early April 1981 in Priština and it was expected to be solved through negotiations. However, when the demonstrations spread to other parts of the country, the army was sent to put an end to the rebellion.<sup>8</sup> The consequences of the violent quelling were very serious and reinforced ethnic differences among citizens. Eight years later, changes in the Constitution of Serbia were announced and that provoked a general strike by Kosovan Albanian miners in Stari trg mine (Trepča) near Priština. Police forces raided the mines and crushed the strike. After that, the Serbian Parliament adopted constitutional amendments. Kosovo lost its former autonomy and the name Metohija was added to the title. The first declaration of independence happened in 1990 when Albanian political representatives declared the independence of the self-proclaimed Republic of Kosovo, which was recognized only by Albania. Four years later, the Albanian terrorist organization 'Kosovo Liberation Army' (KLA) was founded. Clashes with Serbian police started in 1996, and by 1998 the situation turned into a full blown war. This led to strong reactions from the Serbian police and military involvement in the conflict (Bombardovanje n.d. a). Intense fighting between the police forces of Serbia and KLA lasted from February to October 1998. In this armed conflict, both sides committed major atrocities. In October 1998, Yugoslav President Slobodan Milošević and US envoy Richard Holbrooke reached an agreement on the deployment of the observing OSCE Mission in Kosovo and the withdrawal of part of the military and police forces. This agreement was regrettably short-termed. After the Račak case in February 1999, a peace conference known as The Negotiations in Rambouillet was held, but after three weeks no agreement was reached. This was the last attempt to resolve the Kosovo crisis by peaceful means and its participants sent an open ultimatum to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) authorities. After the FRY refused their proposal, on 24 March NATO bombing started (without the consent of the UN Security Council). The bombing ended after 78 days when the Kumanovo Agreement and the Resolution 1244 of the UN Security Council were signed (Bombardovanje n.d. b). After the NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999, Kosovo and Metohija came under UN administration. According to resolution 1244, the territory is part of the FRY, or under the control of the UN. However, in 2008 the Kosovo Parliament unilaterally declared the independence of Kosovo from the Republic of Serbia.

This paper does not analyze the condition of the heritage destroyed during 1998–1999, when

Islamic heritage was mostly ruined. Concerning this topic there are detailed reports by Andrew Herscher and András Riedlmayer (2000) as well as the Sence Agency Dossier. The focus of this research is on the monuments that were damaged in 2004 and later, at the end of hostilities and despite the presence of international forces. Since the monuments were added to the List of World Heritage in Danger much later, the aim is to determine whether they are privileged or made more secure by that action.

#### *Analysis of the Current Situation*

At the moment, Kosovo\* has four Serbian Orthodox Christian churches and monasteries inscribed on the List of World Heritage Sites (in Danger) as Medieval Monuments in Kosovo\*. These monuments represent the fusion of the eastern Orthodox Byzantine and the western Romanesque ecclesiastical architecture. The first one recognized by UNESCO for its outstanding universal value was the Dečani monastery in 2004. Two years later, the site of patrimony was extended as a serial nomination to include three other religious monuments: the Patriarchate of Peć, Our Lady of Ljeviša and the Gračanica monastery. In 2006 the property was inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger due to difficulties with its management and conservation which were a result of the region's political instability. Even though cultural heritage is defined as one of the priority sectors of the Government of the Republic of Kosovo\*, as determined by the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Kosovo\* (2015–2018) and the Medium Term Expenditure Framework 2015–2018, putting it on the List looked like the only way to preserve the monuments.<sup>9</sup>

However, this legal procedure apparently did not have the expected results. Despite the fact that more than 5 million dollars were invested, the situation is still not enviable.

Although Kosovo\*'s legal framework is in line with global standards, international reports highlight certain difficulties. As the main problem, OSCE Mission noted the lack of a clear division of responsibilities between the different institutions. The trouble is also that there is no comprehensive inventory for the protection of cultural heritage and that cultural heritage sites are not included in local spatial plans. Due to the rapid urban development of Kosovo\*, it is important to ensure that any proposed regional plan takes into account the need to protect cultural heritage sites. This is especially important for the cultural sites of non-Albanian communities and those displaced people who can not participate in the public consultation process (OSCE 2014). Also, contrary to the legal framework there was no inspection of cultural heritage sites, particularly of Serbian Orthodox Church monuments, which led to the failure to prevent illegal construction. Co-

operation between local and central institutions was minimal, as well as between various line ministries. Furthermore, there were only a few joint institutional initiatives to promote the conservation of immovable cultural properties, particularly of non-Albanian communities (OSCE 2014).

There are currently three decisive factors that affect the condition of the mentioned monuments. The first concerns the deliberate destruction caused by explosive devices and fire, followed by vandalism and looting as second. The third one implies the passage of time and the current inadequate maintenance. In most cases, the act is the work of several factors simultaneously.

#### **Concluding Remarks**

*"Heritage can both stimulate and act as a symbol of political struggle, and how ownership of heritage objects, places and practices might be considered to give their possessors political power. It shows what happens when the World Heritage List and the ideas it perpetuates about heritage come into conflict with alternative views of heritage and its role in the production of national histories and local religious and cultural practices."*  
(Harrison 2009: 154)

Is the World Heritage Convention (WHC), dating from 1972, sufficiently well equipped to deal with the recent conflicts that may arise between local communities and national authorities when it comes to the safeguarding of the WHS in Danger? Regrettably, the WHC and different listings and conventions are not sufficiently strong and effective international tools to assure a better preservation of the world's most impressive heritage sites during and after war. Moreover, heritage is rarely taken into account by adequate post-war reconstruction policies and strategies. Its historic, cultural and identity values are usually neglected and its social and economic principles are not recognized or even understood. Keeping this in mind, we would dare to say that WHS listing is primarily for informational purposes. It actually represents just the first step that can help in further raising awareness of the international community and experts regarding the situation on the ground. Listing can be of assistance in securing funds for its reconstruction, too. That scheme is especially important in cases of heritage damaged during war as well as for the post-war reconstruction. That said, we do not mean solely the physical restoration of monuments and buildings, but also the development of a culture of remembrance, and the use of heritage for the reconciliation processes. When it comes to the monuments that are part of the world heritage, their renovation should be one more motive to be considered for the conflict resolution within local communities. By managing the crisis and by implementing post-conflict strategies, monument reconstruction can normalize

societies through social and economic activities, which define the principle of sustainable development. Moreover, the contribution of past legacies to the local development can be measured not only by the immediate impact on the economy and on employment in several sectors (restoration of buildings, urban regeneration, rural development, cultural activities and tourism), but it can also be measured by the various benefits for the community, such as improvement of image, well-being, a feeling of identity as well as social cohesion.

Despite all the efforts, hopes and aspirations of those groups working towards peace in Kosovo\* through cultural understanding and dialogue, the political situation in the region is still complex and Kosovo\* remains in an extremely weak state. The lack of political commitment, continuous neglect, vandalism, theft, adverse decisions of municipal bodies, unplanned urban development, limited professional staff, and paying attention to the issue of inter-ethnic balancing of the cultural and religious heritage protection are the main reasons for the current situation. When we talk about monuments on the World Heritage List, it would be expected that they are (due to their great economic potential) in the focus of reconstruction, but this is generally not the case. The Government in Priština did very little in that direction. Non-governmental organizations in the region working on the protection and promotion of cultural heritage have not been dealing with the monuments on the List. Conservation and restoration, as well as other works on the sites are mainly implemented by the Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments of the Republic of Serbia, and the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) is also taking care of them. However, due to the specific situation on the ground, perhaps the Church's and the Community of Serbian Municipalities' fear of destruction is justified. With the exception of the Dečani monastery, there are no plans for post-war reconstruction and extensive use. Taking care of the heritage of all communities is in the public interest of all citizens in Kosovo\*. Preserving cultural heritage is not just about maintaining and increasing its value it is also necessary to make it available to everybody. That is the only proper way for heritage to become a living part of the community. In the case of Kosovo\*, protection and restoration of cultural goods can and needs to play a key role in strengthening inter-ethnic relations, reconciliation and dialogue. By basing social, economic and cultural policies on the human rights and entitlements of all stakeholders, we are empowering the actors involved and contributing to building more peaceful environment. Therefore, the UNESCO's six-year strategy (Strategy for Reinforcing UNESCO's Action for the Protection of Culture and the Promotion of Cultural Pluralism in the Event of Armed Conflict, 2021) provides two main objectives – to strengthen the ability of Member States to prevent, mitigate, and re-

cover the loss of cultural heritage and diversity as a result of the conflict, the development of institutional and professional capacities for enhanced protection; and to include the protection of culture in humanitarian action, strategy and security of peace-building process by engaging with relevant stakeholders outside the domain of culture. This also means that we have to claim and ensure severe penalties for those who have arrogant attitude towards heritage and that we should become the partners of local decision-makers. With this in mind, even our role in post-war reconstruction needs to be more proactive. Documenting the situation on the ground and making a list of damages with further recommendations is necessary, but it is not nearly enough. We have to be certain that proposed ideas will be taken into account and implemented at the right moment. Moreover, we need to be present there and be dynamically involved in educating, raising consciousness and advocating the importance of heritage to humanity and each of its individuals. If admission to the World Heritage List means just that – a dead letter – and if it does not encourage professionals and the community as a whole to preserve our inheritance, to develop it and use it in accordance with modern trends in society and current ideas about the protection of heritage, then professor Gavrilović was right. However, we want to believe that the inscription on the List is a (necessary) first step towards raising awareness of the existence of our common heritage. With the proper care, use and presentation, its importance for the development of mankind becomes even greater. In that sense, even the influence of the contemporary post-war reconstruction ideas is possible and helps us to create the heritage that we proudly guard, develop and live with.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> This label does not prejudge the status of Kosovo and is in accordance with Resolution 1244 and the opinion of the ICJ on Kosovo's declaration of independence.
- <sup>2</sup> The term 'World Heritage' refers to the specific places (such as a forest, mountain ranges, lakes, deserts, buildings, architectural complexes or cities) which are inscribed on the World Heritage List and managed by the World Heritage Committee. The idea of the program is to make a list in one place, to collect, protect and preserve the sites of exceptional cultural or natural importance as a unique heritage of humanity. The program was established by the Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO on 16 November 1972. This Convention is just one of the several UNESCO conventions that deal with cultural heritage. There are also The Hague Convention, adopted in 1954, followed by the Convention on the means of prohibiting and preventing the illicit import, export and transfer of ownership of cultural property in 1970. The recent are Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) and the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005). Among the ratified international conventions are also the Council of Europe's European Cultural Convention (1954), the Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (1985), the European Convention on the protection of the archaeological heritage (1992), the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the value of cultural heritage for society (2005) etc.
- <sup>3</sup> More on this issue in: UNESCO 2010.
- <sup>4</sup> More on this issue: Hambrey Consulting 2007. Also see: PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP 2007.
- <sup>5</sup> From the huge number of monuments that suffer every year from the consequences of negligence, lack of money, natural disasters etc. there are 55 properties which the World Heritage Committee has decided to include on the List of World Heritage in Danger, in accordance with Article 11 (4) of the Convention. This article says: *"The Committee shall establish, keep up to date and publish, whenever circumstances shall so require, under the title of 'List of World Heritage in Danger', a list of the property appearing in the World Heritage List for the conservation of which major operations are necessary and for which assistance has been requested under this Convention. This list shall contain an estimate of the cost of such operations. The list may include only such property forming part of the cultural and natural heritage as is threatened by serious and specific dangers, such as the threat of disappearance caused by accelerated deterioration, large-scale public or private projects or rapid urban or tourist development projects; destruction caused by changes in the use or ownership of the land; major alterations due to unknown causes; abandonment for any reason whatsoever; the outbreak or the threat of an armed conflict; calamities and cataclysms; serious fires, earthquakes, landslides; volcanic eruptions; changes in water level, floods and tidal waves. The Committee may at any time, in case of urgent need, make a new entry in the List of World Heritage in Danger and publicize such entry immediately."* More on the issue: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/#Article11.4> (accessed 11. Aug. 2016).
- <sup>6</sup> E.g., through the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity, 2 November 2001.
- <sup>7</sup> See: Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), UN General Assembly of the United Nations 217 A (III), 10 December 1948. See also: Article 15, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), UN General Assembly United Nations 2200A (XXI), 16 December 1966, entry into force 3 January 1976.
- <sup>8</sup> More information from: Mamula (n.d.).
- <sup>9</sup> More information available from the official Website of the Kosovo Government: <http://www.mkrs-ks.org/?page=3,10> (accessed 10 Nov. 2016).

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# CATASTROPHE AND CHALLENGE

## CULTURAL HERITAGE IN POST-CONFLICT RECOVERY

**The destructive effects of war**, and particularly the deliberate targeting of cultural sites, constitute an exceptional challenge for Heritage Conservation. The general principles of retaining cultural significance by continuous care and by minimal intervention may seem of little use when one is faced with catastrophic and wide-spread damage to culturally significant places – be they individual monuments, urban structures or archaeological sites. Post-conflict recovery encompasses a wide range of topics, many of which have not yet been studied in depth.

**This publication presents** papers presented during the conference on »Cultural Heritage in Post-Conflict Recovery«. The conference, held in December 2016 was the fourth out of the series »Heritage Conservation and Site Management«, initiated both by BTU Cottbus–Senftenberg and Helwan University Cairo. The conference series is linked to their Joint Master Programme »Heritage Conservation and Site Management«. Addressing the subject of Post-Conflict Recovery, BTU Cottbus–Senftenberg and Helwan University Cairo are taking a first step towards sketching the scope and the depth of the problems of Heritage and War. Speakers from many countries are providing insights into approaches to cope with these problems.

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