

## Restoring war damaged built cultural heritage in Bosnia- Herzegovina - an International Perspective

Tina Wik

*Tina Wik, is a practicing architect within her own studio and professor in Architectural Conservation at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, Sweden. She has been involved with restoration of war-damaged monuments in Bosnia-Herzegovina for many years as well as a member of the Commission to Preserve National Monuments. In this paper, the author shares her experience as a part of the architectural conservation team of Cultural Heritage without Borders (CHwB) for eight years in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In a country recovering from a recent war, heritage conservation becomes a crucial means of rebuilding the society itself. At the same time, in an atmosphere rife with ethnic tensions, cultural heritage also takes on cultural and religious symbolic value, susceptible to political manipulations. Any effort at restoring the identity and dignity of the people by restoring their heritage also faces the challenge of overcoming conflicts and opposed agendas.*

After four years of the armed conflicts that accompanied the disintegration of Yugoslavia ten years after the death of Tito, the horror of the war suddenly gained wider international attention when the Stari Most, or Old Bridge, in Mostar was destroyed by the Croatian Army in November 1993. This happened at the same time as shocking reports from concentration camps, including those in Herzegovina, reached the international media. Thus the destruction of the Stari Most became emblematic of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a war which aimed to eliminate the 'Other' not only by mass killings and the notorious practice of ethnic cleansing, but also by eliminating the symbols of the unwanted groups. Cultural Heritage became a part of the warfare!

A group of prominent Swedish Heritage experts reacted against how the destruction of cultural heritage was being used to humiliate the people to whom it belonged and established a non-government organization, Cultural Heritage without Borders (CHwB) in 1995. CHwB received support and financing from Sida, the Swedish government's department for Cooperation and Development Aid. The objective of CHwB was, in the beginning, to conserve war-damaged monuments as well as to strengthen state institutions



6.20



6.21

concerned with the protection of cultural heritage.

The situation in any post-war country is chaotic; and Bosnia Herzegovina struggled not only with the difficulties of postwar reconstruction, but also with a complete change of its economic and political structures. The changes required were enormous and would be difficult enough to succeed in under normal conditions, but nothing was or is normal in Bosnia. Peace had finally come with the Dayton Peace Agreement of December 1995, enforced by the international community. But the agreement only served to reinforce the ethnic divisions created by the war and gave nationalist politicians on all sides opportunities to obstruct the progress of Bosnia-Herzegovina towards restoring and rebuilding its society. The Dayton Peace Agreement constructed an artificial state that divided the country into two entities: Republika Srpska, dominated almost entirely by one ethnic group, the Serbs, and the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (sometimes called the Muslim-Croat Federation) which is divided into ten cantons dominated either by Croats or by Bosniaks (Muslims). Each entity and canton as well as the central State has its own set of ministers, giving the impoverished country a significant number of ministers. This top-heavy structure has become almost impossible to change. Instead politicians continue to fuel the conflicts, frequently supported by the religious institutions of the dominant ethnic groups, and there is still no real hope for change fifteen years after the end of the war. The Dayton Peace Agreement has become an obstruction to a re-structuring of the nation. Inquiries at some schools showed that more than half of the students would like to move from Bosnia-Herzegovina. The three ethnic groups have not been able to agree upon a common study plan for subjects like history, mother tongue and so on. So, there are three different study plans, one for each group. This creates problems not only for children in mixed marriages but also for the state. There is no common story that unifies the country but three stories that keep the groups apart. Myths and stories play a great role in the Bosnian society, as in most Balkan countries. The truth is not what is relevant, but the image and the message of the story. Monuments and archaeological sites have been used as important documents to support these stories. This is why some have even been changed to match the story, or reconstructed or had parts removed that were considered not to fit in. This situation is still reflected

in the re-building of the country and especially its monuments. Many monuments had disappeared completely after the 1992-95 war and even more were badly damaged, giving an opportunity to the ethnic groups to keep mobilizing through the conservation projects.

I came to Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2000, five years after the end of the war, as the project leader for CHwB. The country was still badly damaged; no institutions were working as they had before the war and there was no central state institute for heritage protection, as the former state institute had not been permitted to maintain its role by nationalist politicians under the new political structures. Both the Serbs, as well as the greater part of the Croats opposed the existence of a state of Bosnia-Herzegovina which prevented the establishing of a strong central state authority and the existence of central state institutions. Instead, the local heritage institutes fought between themselves, even hiding information from each other.

My assignment was to support a state heritage institute that did not exist in legal terms, and to support the re-building of war-damaged monuments. My first contract was for one year, after which it was extended yearly until I had worked in Bosnia for 8 years carrying out practical architectural conservation. During my second year in Bosnia I was appointed as one of the two international members of the Commission to Preserve National Monuments, established under Annex 8 of the Dayton Peace Agreement, a post I continued in until 2009. The Commission to Preserve National Monuments is now the state heritage institute, although its position is constantly threatened.

When I arrived in Bosnia in 2000, my task was initially confusing since there was no clear local institutional collaborator. Which already existing institute would eventually attain the status of the State Institute for Protection of Monuments, if any? We identified the former central state institute, now the Institute for Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which became our main collaborator. 60% of the population lives in the Federation and almost all active warfare occurred on its territory, meaning that most of the war-damaged monuments were there. In the other entity of Republika Srpska, almost all non-Serb/ Orthodox historic monuments had been completely destroyed due to intentional elimination. Almost all mosques and important Ottoman structures had been



blown up and in many cases their remnants removed in order to wipe away all traces of the Muslim existence in this part of the country.

How would we, in a situation like this, choose objects to work with? How should we work to make our input supportive and avoid fuelling existing conflicts? We had no experience in this part of Europe and the culture. Ways of working and the needs of society here were very different to those in the Nordic countries. I realized that while we in Northern Europe have almost lost a consciousness of the meaning of our symbolic or heritage buildings, the collapse of the state of Yugoslavia had resulted in a re-introduction of religious and symbolic values, suppressed under the earlier socialist system, that were to gain an unimaginable tension. Many who had been secular before the conflict became religious. Muslim women started wearing the hijab to a large extent immediately after the war; previously empty religious buildings became too small for increased congregations, and religious and cultural ceremonies as well as rites from pre-WW2 Yugoslavia re-appeared. This meant that we were often requested to support the conservation of religious monuments.

As an international organization we had to justify our work by following international conventions and conservation principles. These gave a basic structure to our work. At the same time, it was necessary to adjust to the prevailing postwar situation, its intentional destruction, the lack of materials and expertise, the lack of historic evidence since much archival material had been lost during the war or even earlier, as some types of historic documentation were not considered important during the socialist era. One example was the lack of knowledge of historic or traditional treatments of different materials. To investigate and seek knowledge was sometimes obstructed by professionals in conflict. This made conservation work difficult for everybody at times.

As it received financing from the Swedish State, Cultural Heritage without Borders had to follow the Swedish policy for development aid. We could not generally support a private person or company; we had to choose public buildings and, if possible, projects needed to support some other program Sida was supporting in Bosnia-Herzegovina. One such was the largest project in Sida's history, its Integrated Area Programmes (IAP), a Returnee Program supporting more than 50,000 families with the reconstruction of

their homes to enable them to move back to the towns and villages from which they had been expelled during the war. This project was not a heritage project at all, but a humanitarian project.

We were able to collaborate with an NGO called CrossRoads, working within this Returnee framework in a city called Jajce in central Bosnia. Initially it was the head of the Federation Institute who made us aware of the war destruction in this historically important city with its traces from many historic periods. Both Dutch and Swedish standard humanitarian NGOs were active in the returnee projects. The nature of these projects was to give limited but sufficient support to families to enable them to rebuild their house on their own. The conditions for receiving aid under this program were very strict: only low income families were chosen, and they had to sign a contract that they would move back into the house which they were forbidden to sell for a certain number of years. However, we realized that this program, in spite of its deserving nature, was actually allowing the destruction of the Muslim domestic architectural heritage which had been a target in the war to continue in historic areas.



6.22



6.23

In this historic town, its domestic architecture was its most important feature and had even influenced the form of public buildings. The town was one of the best preserved in Bosnia, still being a living town within its medieval walls with the same entrance and exit gates as during the last 600 years. All the historic buildings formed a unity on the southern slope of a steep hill, crowned by a medieval fort. The dramatic natural location, the hill, its slopes and a waterfall, along with its dominant medieval parts embracing the typical Jajce House, with its hipped roofs influenced by Ottoman culture, made the town one of ex-Yugoslavia's main tourist attractions. One of the best evidence of Roman presence in Bosnia was found here, when an almost complete Mithraic Temple was discovered in the 1931 and it was in Jajce that Tito formed his first government during World War II.

I want to return to the question of which objects we should choose to conserve and re-build and how to choose these objects. Besides fitting Sida's objectives they had also to fit the aims of CHwB. This was, among other things, to be a support particularly to young professionals in this field, but also to builders, decision-makers and the users of the buildings. We had to consider the meaning and identity of the place, how the restored public buildings contributed to the dignity of the people that identified themselves with these buildings, and for whom these were an important symbol and contribution to the evidence of belonging and their historic presence in a locality. Bringing back such symbolic buildings gave a security to returnees, who had been brutally expelled, which enabled them to dare to move back to their homes. In many places it took many years before the situation was stable enough for the returnees to move back. And even if many families have moved back, the pre-war relationship with the other religious groups has been disrupted.

Zavala Monastery Church project is an example of how a totally destroyed village, full of mines, with a historic and sacral complex, slowly re-gained its life and infrastructure and was even de-mined as the church was being conserved and restored.

So we aimed at choosing objects that would contribute to the restoration of the dignity of people by listening to what they wanted. This did not always coincide with Sida's policies so sometimes we had to make an effort to convince them.

The 17th century Handanija Mosque in Prusac is one such case. It was severely damaged during the war



6.24



6.25

and in urgent need of repair not to lose its remaining authentic parts. We were asked by the local imams to undertake this project. The village is celebrated as birthplace of the noted Ottoman Islamic scholar Hasan Kafi Prusćak and here he established new institutions, with new public and religious buildings. Thus at the end of the 16th – early 17th century the village flourished as a major administrative, legal, scholarly and religious centre. Today Prusac still holds an important place in

6.22 Famous panorama of Jajce before our interventions, 2001

6.23 Jajce panorama after interventions in 2005

6.24 Zavala repair of vault and frescoes, 2002

6.25 Zavala interior after intervention, 2004



Bosnia's religious and cultural life due to the famous pilgrimage to Ajvatovica which takes place here every summer, starting from the Handanija mosque. This is the largest Islamic pilgrimage in Europe, and was banned under communist rule and revived in 1990. Pilgrims come in thousands from all across Bosnia.



6.26



6.27

6.26 Handanija mosque before intervention with a protective temporary roof 2004

6.27 Handanija mosque after intervention, October 2005

We were able to convince Sida to finance the project with the input from two noted British scholars, Machiel Kiel and Harry T Norris, that this was important heritage at risk with contemporary social relevance where urgent intervention was needed.

### Conclusion

Besides restoring peoples' identity, restoring monuments in Bosnia-Herzegovina was also about restoring historic memory. This was not always unquestioned, since cultural heritage had been a significant aspect of the warfare and thus was, even more than before, a very political issue. As an international organization working in the country, it was our outmost aim not to participate in this game. We had to listen carefully and long enough to be convinced that there were no hidden agendas behind the restoration proposals. I received many requests to contribute to conservation projects where I soon realized that corruption or local power struggles would lead ultimately to the misuse of the monument. These types of requests were raised not only by architects or heritage experts but also by politicians.

When CHwB's presence in Bosnia Herzegovina was well established due to years of active work recognized by the local communities and the state alike, through distinctions awarded by the Federal Cultural Ministry as well as the local inhabitants of the areas in which we had worked, CHwB enhanced the argument that our work would result in promoting reconciliation between the formerly warring parties due to the presence of the restored monuments. I have unfortunately not yet seen evidence of this wishful thinking.

Conflicts continue in spite of the need for collaboration in this small country, during the transition period that is about to form a new nation and its symbols. In Europe the built heritage has for the past two hundred years been used as symbols of national identity. This process is now taking place in Bosnia-Herzegovina but on a local level where every party still hopes to win! From an outsider's perspective, I am still waiting for signs of a collaboration working towards a common future. Signs of this are rare but some efforts can be seen such as in the Zemaljski Muzej, the National Museum of Bosnia-Herzegovina in Sarajevo where the multi-ethnic staff struggles together, in spite of the lack of support from the central authority, the State of Bosnia Herzegovina that still does not accept them as a state institution.

## The critical importance of monitoring in heritage management- Exclusion and Efficiency Process Algorihm

Saptarshi Sanyal

*Saptarishi Sanyal is a practicing Conservation architect at the Archaeological Society of India. Having graduated from the School of Planning and Architecture, he also completed his post graduation in Heritage Conservation there. From his experience in the practice of heritage conservation, the author shares his observations and shortcomings in the conventional practice of heritage monitoring and management. The paper calls for a critical re-examination of heritage evaluation and proposes a new heritage management model.*

### Utopia- the practitioner's dilemma and need for efficiency

The industrial remains at the Carbide plant are not only vestiges of indiscriminate industrialization, but also a poignant reflection on the directions to take in the future; regarding humanity, development and environment. In these respects, we need to engage with the site as a unique cultural resource- at physical, spiritual and even emotional levels. Yet, viewing the site as a formally recognized heritage resource needs to account for the fact that there are key operational challenges related to its conservation and subsequent monitoring to preserve the significant social and historical values that qualify it as heritage in the first place.

In broad terms, in this article, monitoring is understood as the process of objectively assessing and evaluating the continuing protection of heritage value of the site. It is required to continuously keep the sites under observation and develop requisite strategies to remove factors undermining their value.<sup>1</sup> Largely, monitoring approaches advocate collection of a comprehensive body of information related to the cultural resource being managed. The perceived and recorded value of heritage resources through pre-determined monitoring indicators is the key yardstick for measuring conservation performance. It is also generally accepted that value is not a fixed

