

ICOR179: CONSERVATION OF THE ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE AFTER THE 1992-95 BOSNIA WAR

Subtheme 02: The Role of Cultural Heritage in Building Peace and Reconciliation

Session 1: Heritage as Peace Builder, Tying and Benefitting Community

Location: Silver Oak Hall 1, India Habitat Centre

Time: December 13, 2017, 11:15 – 11:30

Author: Elena Cattarini Leger

Elena Cattarini Léger. Born in Italy; Italian and French Nationalities. Studies: Art History, History of religions. Trieste University Teheran University and France Paris EHESS. UNESCO civil servant: 1971-2001: Cultural Heritage Specialist, Responsible of UNESCO programmes: Management; of Cultural Heritage; responsible of Latin America: UNESCO cultural heritage; Museum education and Cultural identity; UNESCO WHC, ICH, Baroque World Project; Atlas of Baroque World.

Abstract: ICOR 179; “Conservation and enhancement of the architectural and monumental heritage after the 1992-95 Bosnia war.” Bosnia and Herzegovina have been part of Ottoman Empire for some ten centuries, and the countries are covered with monuments and objects of Islamic inheritance. During the 1992-95 terrible war, some 1185 mosques, 335 Islamic monuments, and thousands of private houses have been damaged or destroyed, and populations suffered enormously.

The project carried out in autumn 2002, after Bosnia war, in Italy, by Trieste University: Faculty of Architecture in the framework of the "UNESCO Chair in Cultural Heritage" with the objective of developing a more friendly relationship between populations of Bosnia, Serbia and Kossowo through practical and theoretical workshops aiming to restore religious monuments, damaged in the war.

During the project Italian teachers organized: three training seminars in Trieste University and workshops in Bosnia, with the collaboration of the University of Sarajevo. With the objective of repairing some mosques and religious monuments, they also made some visits in Italian towns, to study restored monuments, namely in IV century Basilica in Aquileia. The objective was to make students attend to a technical and scientific programme in order to overcome political feelings.

After theoretical Seminars organised in Trieste and Sarajevo Universities a practical workshops was carried out in a Bosnia village. In Prusac where a mosque was studied in depth and restored, Italian professors pointed out that the most important questions was to respect pre-existing buildings in rehabilitation and adapt them to nowadays situation.

Considering that the most important problem was not technical but ethical, therefore the workshop focused the study of old structure of mosques and other religious buildings; this method of pointing out the traditional building methods of Islam buildings and of sharing modern restoration techniques together, helped to overcome the severe pains and problems they suffered during the Bosnia war and to create a constructive atmosphere between the participants.

Keywords: Religions, War, Ethics, Heritage; Reconstruction.

The project: “Conservation and enhancement of the architectural and monumental heritage of the great cultures that have crossed the Balkan Peninsula, with particular reference to Bosnia-Herzegovina”.

In the autumn 2002 the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Trieste in Italy, in framework of the “UNESCO Chair in Cultural Heritage” has carried out a restoration project in Bosnia, with a twofold objective: first an explicit objective of restoring some religious monuments in Bosnia and a second, less evident one, of developing a more friendly, or a less tight relationship between populations living in Bosnia, Serbia and Bosnia Herzegovina after the Bosnia war of 1992-95.

The project: “Conservation and enhancement of the architectural and monumental heritage of the great cultures that have crossed the Balkan Peninsula, with particular reference to Bosnia-Herzegovina” was carried out by a group of professors of the Faculties of Architecture of the University of Trieste in collaboration with the University of Sarajevo, in autumn 2002.

Two training seminars and one workshops have been organised with the purpose of restoring some damaged mosques and some religious monuments of the region and to create, a working situation which could be neutral between the three populations which have been fighting the ones against the others.

The Geopolitical Situation

I will recall briefly the Geo-Political situation of Bosnia before the 1992-95 war. In the IX century, after consistent persecutions and invasions coming from east and west, the Bosnia and Herzegovina populations accepted the new religion of Islam, as a salvation, and become part of Ottoman Empire. For some ten centuries, the country was covered with monuments and objects of Islamic inheritance, such as: Mausoleums, Madrasa, Caravanserai's, Hamams. Until 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina, a former Ottoman province, have been a multi-ethnic state that, according to the 1991 census, was inhabited by mainly Muslim Bosnians (44 percent), as well as Orthodox Serbs (32.5 percent) and Catholic Croats (17 percent).

1992-95 Bosnia War

The war was partly a consequence of the breakup of Yugoslavia. Following the Slovenian and Croatian secessions from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Bosnia passed a referendum for independence on 29 February 1992; but increased tensions between Croats and Bosnians throughout all 1992, endangered in early 1993 in the Croat-Bosnian war. This terrible Croat-Bosnian war was characterised by bitter fighting, indiscriminate shelling of villages and towns, ethnic cleansing and systematic mass rapes mainly perpetrated by Serbs, and also by Croato-Bosniak forces. Events such as the Siege of Sarajevo and the Srebrenica massacre became iconic of the conflict.

The war was brought to an end with the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, signed in Paris on 14 December 1995. Peace negotiations were finalised on 21 November 1995 in Dayton, Ohio. The Central Intelligence Agency claimed, in a 1995 report, that Bosnian Serb forces were responsible for 90 percent of the ethnic cleansing committed during the conflict; the judges ruled that the criteria for genocide with the specific intent to destroy Bosnian Muslims were met only in Srebrenica in the region of Eastern Bosnia, in 1995.

International Criminal Tribunal Conclusions

By early 2008, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia had convicted 45 Serbs, 12 Croats and 4 Bosnians of war crimes, in connection with the war in Bosnia. The most recent estimates suggest that around 100,000 people were killed during the war. Over 2.2 million people were displaced,

making it the most devastating conflict in Europe since the end of World War II. In addition an estimated 12,000–20,000 women were raped, most of them Bosnian.

According to numerous verdicts and indictments of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia Serb and Croat forces performed ethnic cleansing of their territories planned by their political leadership to create ethnically pure states: Republic Srpska (Serb) and Hercegovina (Bosnia Herzegovina). Serb forces carried out the atrocities known as the “Srebrenica Genocide” at the end of the war. The court concluded the crimes committed during the 1992–1995 war, may amount to "crimes against humanity" according to the international law, but that these acts did not, in themselves, constitute genocide per se. Only on 6 December 2004, Serbian president Boris Tadic made an apology in Bosnia and Herzegovina to all those who suffered crimes committed in the name of the Serb people.

War destructions

During this terrible Bosnia war some 1185 mosques and 335 Islamic monuments have been damaged or destroyed, and all the populations in the region suffered enormously. Many years of work will be needed, as well a considerable financial support, to recover a small part of heritage which is an irreplaceable component of the Europeans culture. Islamic architecture monuments in Bosnia mainly belong to classical Ottoman style and they were mostly preserved for some ten centuries, until the War 1992-95; Serb orthodox churches have suffered much less damages. In this horrible after war situation, was fundamental the training of young experts in restoration of cultural properties, conservation, and in order to create a more constructive atmosphere was also essential the international cooperation.

Restoration training Programme

In the framework UNESCO Chair programme, the University of Trieste, a town situated on the North east border between Italy and Slovenia, which suffered enormously during the second world war, decided to cooperate in the process of the Bosnia reconstruction. Therefore with the support of UNESCO, and of Italian government, professors of Trieste University organised some training seminar covering theoretical and practical aspects of restoration techniques. The project in three phases, was covering theoretical and practical activities and was carried out in different locations: university rooms, open spaces, rooms in the damaged religious building,

Seminars participants were ten young architects: Slav orthodox, from Bosnia; five Muslims architects from Bosnia Herzegovina; and three Christian students from Italy. The teachers were professors of the Trieste and of Sarajevo faculties of Architecture, of different religious faiths, Three series of seminars have been organised in the autumn of 2002 in Bosnia and in Italy.

Sarajevo University Seminar

In September 2002 the first seminar took place in the University of Trieste; where five Italian professors developed technical subjects such as: theory and methodology of restoration; basic methods for measuring the historical buildings; urban planning techniques; examples of building restoration and conservation of cultural heritage in Italy, wood restoration techniques. Bosnian professors illustrated current problems in heritage restoration in Bosnia Herzegovina, such as: constructive techniques in preserving damaged and ruined buildings in Bosnia; paintings restoration in historical buildings, recalling mainly the ICOMOS international Charters of: Venice, Athens, and Florence. First seminar objective was to create a pacific teaching atmosphere in which discussion would be focused mainly on techniques and practical applications of general restoration practices. The second point was to identify a destroyed religious site where an operational workshop could be carried out. Considering the great number of destroyed Muslim buildings and mosques, all participants, convened in establishing that the first monument to be restored in the workshop had to be a Bosnian mosque.

Prusac Workshop

In October 2002, during the second project phase, in the little town of Prusac, in Bosnia, a training workshop was organised, with the purpose of restoring the Hadanija mosque, built in 1617. In this site, the old archaeological rests: from ancient Greece and Roman Empire, proved the continuity of human and religious settings. The mosque, mainly made with stones and wood, was very much damaged by grenade shelling during the war and also post-war destructions. Students and teachers have been divided in four groups dealing with: “Vertical structures: the minaret”. “Orizontal structures and other wooden elements”, “Decorative elements” such as: the portal, the mihrab and the “minbaer”. First step was to recognise the current state of minaret, its authenticity, its constructive stability, the stage of destruction and analyse its constructive system. In the workshop each group of students was responsible of a part of the mosque to be restored. A professor from Bosnia, dealing with structural stability in conservation of historic buildings, pointed out that: it was typical of architects of the past years to understand intuitively the mechanical properties and behaviour of the masonry structures. Empirical knowledge, collected for centuries, was communicated mostly orally. His continuity was broken by architectural revolution as follow up of new materials and new technologies in building techniques. Two days were dedicated to examine small injuries in a Greco orthodox church and in a Christian church in the region.

Trieste University Seminar

The third seminar took place between: 25 November and 18 December, in Trieste University; conferences and training courses were focused on: wood buildings: preservation and restoration, basic principles of mosques buildings, painting restoration: principles and techniques, static design proposal for the Handanija mosque; regulations for building in seismic areas. Theoretical courses were followed by some visits in Italian town which suffered from the Second World War. With the support of photographic documentation of destroyed or damaged building, students could better appreciate the restoration work and the renovated use of old buildings. Mainly an in-deep seminar the Aquileia basilica, restored in recent years, and managed at present as a magnificent World heritage site, very well conserved, offered the opportunity to analyse in detail restoration techniques, carried out in an IVth century basilica.

Conclusion

In each different case teachers dealt first with: “how to approach the object”. The most important questions was: “how one has to respect the pre-existing buildings and how, in their rehabilitation, has to adapt them to nowadays situation”. The seriousness of the war problem was experienced directly, as they were able to see the great damages all round Bosnia. Italian architects noted that the situation of destroyed civil and religious buildings in Bosnia was similar to the one suffered in Italy fifty years before, and taking in mind Italian reconstruction experience, workshop participants studied in depth damages occurred during the war and how problems, related to the reconstruction, could be solved in the present situation. Students realised that the most important problem is not technical but ethical. After such a terrible war, studying and restoring Islamic mosques, some serbo-ortodox temples and Croatian Christian churches, Islamic architecture became much more appreciated and the respect for people, having built them, has increased.

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