

ICOA747: RECONSTRUCTION AND RECONCILIATION IN POST-CONFLICT BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: THE EXAMPLE OF THE FERHADIJA MOSQUE

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

Session 3: Recreating Ideas of Memory

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Abstract: The conflict that ravaged Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995 proved to be one of the most devastating to cultural and sacral heritage since the Second World War. The Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka, the capital of the Serb entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was one of 1186 mosques that were damaged or completely destroyed throughout the course of the conflict, and one of sixteen destroyed in Banja Luka. A listed national monument, the mosque and its architectural ensemble were demolished by Bosnian Serb nationalists using explosives on May 7, 1993, and the remaining fabric was disposed of in various locations. The targeted destruction of this and other religious sites in Banja Luka accompanied the forced removal of the majority of the city's Muslim population.

Despite incredible hardships, including years of obstruction by the Bosnian Serb authorities and organized riots at the laying of the cornerstone in 2001, the Ferhadija Mosque was eventually reconstructed (partially with salvaged original materials), and its doors reopened in May 2016. But has this project contributed to reconciliation between the city's ethno-religious groups or to the return and revitalization of its Muslim population? This paper will discuss the post-conflict recovery and current management of the mosque through the lens of ICCROM's Living Heritage approach, looking closely at the concept of continuity and assessing whether the project has led to the continuity (or reinstitution) of the use, associations, and care of the site by the core community, which is defined here as Banja Luka's Muslim community. This encompasses both those who have and have not returned since the conflict ended. It will also look at the evolution of the reception of the project by the city's non-Muslim citizens, namely the Bosnian Serbs, some of whom initially reacted to the reconstruction project with violent protest.

Key words: *conflict, reconciliation, identity*

Introduction

The conflict that ravaged Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter referred to as Bosnia) from 1992-95 was one of the most devastating to cultural and sacral heritage since the Second World War. The sixteenth-century Ferhadija Mosque¹ in Banja Luka was one of 1186 mosques damaged or completely destroyed in Bosnia throughout the course of the conflict, and one of sixteen destroyed in Banja Luka alone (Riedlmayer 2002). A listed national monument, the Ferhadija Mosque was demolished by the Bosnian Serb (Orthodox Christian) authorities using explosives in May 1993, and the remaining fabric was disposed of in various locations. The targeted destruction of this and other religious and cultural sites in Banja Luka accompanied the systematic persecution and ethnic cleansing of the city's Bosnian Muslim, Bosnian Croat (Catholic), and other non-Serb populations (Human Rights Watch 1994).

Despite incredible hardships, the Ferhadija Mosque was eventually rebuilt and reopened in 2016. The event was widely referred to as a sign of reconciliation and hope for the post-war city, but little research has been done on the effects of this highly publicized project. This paper will thus consider how the project contributed to the revitalization of Banja Luka's Muslim community and to reconciliation between the city's ethno-religious groups. It is based on preliminary findings from the first stages of the author's doctoral research on the post-war recovery of Ottoman-era Islamic sacral heritage in Bosnia, which included a review of existing research and an analysis of primary documents and secondary reports related to the reconstruction project.



Fig.1– Ferhadija Mosque, 1983 (By Husref Redžić, courtesy of the Commission to Preserve National Monuments).

¹ The Ferhadija Mosque is also known as the Ferhad-Paša or Ferhad-Pasha Mosque.



Fig.2– Ruins of the Ferhadija Mosque minaret, 1993 (By Aleksandar Ravlić, courtesy of the Commission to Preserve National Monuments).

The Living Heritage Approach and the ‘Thread of Continuity’

The reconstruction of the Ferhadija Mosque will be assessed through the lens of ICCROM’s Living Heritage Approach, which places central importance on the concept of ‘continuity’, specifically the continuity of the use of, association with, and care for a heritage site by a core community (Wijesuriya 2015). This approach attempts to holistically address both the tangible and intangible aspects of a heritage site’s significance by placing as much importance on living dimensions that <<contain and support diverse socio-cultural activities>> as it does on physical fabric (2015:1).

This approach was selected because in addition to being a protected cultural monument, the Ferhadija Mosque was still an active site of worship prior to its destruction. It had served the Muslim community of Banja Luka since 1579, when it was constructed as part of the *vakuf*, or perpetual endowment, of Ferhad-paša Sokolović, the first beylerbey (governor) of the Bosnia Eyalet. For *vakuf* structures of a religious nature, the central focus is their continued functioning and use for worship, while the maintenance of their physical fabric serves to ensure this continuity of use. In the aftermath of the war, when no mosques remained in Banja Luka, the city’s remaining Muslims were left to worship in a small space in the Mufti’s Office (IC v. RS[1999]).

The concept of continuity promoted in the Living Heritage Approach also connects directly with the ‘thread of continuity’ concept discussed by former Director-General of ICCROM Nicholas Stanley-Price (2007:1). Stanley-Price notes the common desire of communities in a post-conflict setting to immediately reconstruct damaged heritage sites and revive practices that may even have been dying out before the war, and he emphasizes the important role that re-establishing this ‘thread of continuity’ can play in <<reaffirming identity in conditions of uncertainty>> (2007:8) and bringing about <<reconciliation between those who have been at war with each other>> (2007:14).

Reconstruction and Revitalization of the Bosnian Muslim Community

The reconstruction of the Ferhadija Mosque was based on a detailed study of available documentation and accounts from members of the Ferhadija's congregation. More than sixty percent of the original materials were recovered and used in the project, which began in 2005, and local masons trained in traditional building techniques were employed to place the stones (Riedlmayer 2008). When the project was finally completed in 2016, the result was a precise recreation of the pre-war structure with few traces of the destruction that befell it during the war other than the discoloration of the original stones (Figure 3).



Fig.3– Ferhadija Mosque, 2016
(Saša Knežić [CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons]).

While the reconstruction arguably falls in line with the standards of international conservation practice², the Living Heritage Approach requires a shift in focus from the physical fabric to the core community and their continued association with and use of a site. Of course, this community changed dramatically during the war, when Banja Luka's Muslim community was ethnically cleansed by the Bosnian Serb authorities

² Although reconstructing the building as it was before the war does disconnect it from a traumatic part of its history, its value as an active place of worship arguably meets the standards of the widely used *Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance (The Burra Charter)* (2013). Furthermore, the project meets the requirement that a reconstruction be done <<only where there is sufficient evidence to reproduce an earlier state of the *fabric*>> (Australia ICOMOS 2013:7, italics in original).

through measures that included persecution, intimidation, and violence. In 1991, about 30,000 Muslims lived in Banja Luka; by the end of the war, about 3,000-4,000 remained (IC v. RS [1999]).

The reconstruction of war-destroyed sites is often linked with encouraging the return and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons. However, it is difficult to determine at this early stage if the Ferhadija reconstruction will have a significant effect on the number of Bosnian Muslims who return to Banja Luka. According to the results of the most recent census, which was conducted in 2013 when the reconstruction project was well underway, 7,526 people in Banja Luka declared themselves to be Muslim (Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2016:70). While an increase from the immediate post-war population, this is still significantly less than before the war.

However, for many of those who remain in the diaspora (or elsewhere in Bosnia), the Ferhadija Mosque has held continued importance. This was reflected through petitions for its reconstruction as well as a fundraising campaign organized by the Youth Association “Banja Luka in the Heart” (*Asocijacija mladih “Banja Luka u srcu”*), which received 304 voluntary contributions from Bosnian Muslims in Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and elsewhere that amounted to twenty-thousand KM (approximately 10,332 Euro) (blusrcu.ba 2009). Furthermore, the official reopening ceremony was attended by up to ten-thousand people, with Muslims coming from all over the country.

Since reopening, the Ferhadija Mosque has regularly been used for community prayer and gatherings on religious holidays, and it continues to attract visitors from abroad and elsewhere in Bosnia. According to the current Mufti of Banja Luka, Osman ef. Kozlić, thousands of people have visited since it reopened and its return has helped Banja Luka’s Muslim community feel more comfortable in their city (klix.ba 2017). The information gathered thus far indicates that this reconstruction project has begun to revitalize the core community’s use of and connection with the site.

Reconstruction and Reconciliation

The reconstruction of the Ferhadija Mosque has been often been referred to as a sign of hope and a symbol of reconciliation for post-war Banja Luka and the wider region. This section will address these claims by looking at the evolution of the city’s official treatment of the site and the reconstruction project, as well as the responses of the city’s Bosnian Serb citizens.

Prior to its destruction, the Ferhadija Mosque was a highly recognizable landmark of the city and a point of pride for both its Muslim and non-Muslim citizens. There are countless historic postcards that feature the Ferhadija Mosque as the architectural centrepiece of the urban landscape, and it was listed in the Regional Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina as a Category I protected building. By contrast, following its destruction, the mosque was removed from the municipality’s official property map, and the 1996 <<Handbook of Banja Luka>>, created to attract visitors to the city, neglected to mention the Ferhadija or any of the city’s former mosques (Kemeziz 2012:74).

Requests from the Islamic Community for the necessary permits to begin reconstruction went unanswered by the Banja Luka authorities for years (IC v. RS [1999]). Even after the Human Rights Chamber ordered the city to issue the permits as soon as possible following a 1999 case brought by the Islamic Community (IC v. RS [1999]), it took another two years for them to do so. After the permit was granted, the project still faced resistance from some members of the Bosnian Serb community. At the ceremonial laying of the cornerstone in 2001, more than a thousand people rallied against the reconstruction, with

many yelling insults, damaging vehicles, and throwing stones at the ceremony guests, injuring several and ultimately killing one (Office of the High Representative 2001).

The project pushed forward nonetheless, and it eventually gained public approval and some financial contributions from the Bosnian Serb authorities (Riedlmayer 2008). This does not mean, however, that it had the support of all Banja Luka's citizens, some of whom continued to publicly express anti-Muslim sentiment. For instance, even after the Ferhadija was reopened on May 7, 2016 in a peaceful ceremony attended by officials from all of the city's religious communities, there were reports the next day of a group of people chanting the Bosnian Serb nationalist slogan, 'The Knife, The Barbed Wire, Srebrenica', outside the mosque during prayer times (Karčić 2017:97).

However, although some ethno-religious tensions remain in the city, this type of incident does not appear to be the norm. The 2016 International Religious Freedom Report prepared by the U.S. Department of State did not note any incidents occurring in Banja Luka since the Ferhadija's reopening (2016), and Mufti Kozlić indicated that safety is improving for his followers (Stegic 2017). It should also be noted that the Ferhadija Mosque is once again being treated as one of the city's architectural highlights, as can be seen from its prominent placement on Banja Luka's official tourism website (banjaluka-tourism.com 2017).

Conclusion

Just over a year after the reopening of the Ferhadija Mosque, work has begun on the reconstruction of the last of Banja Luka's destroyed mosques, the sixteenth-century Arnaudija Mosque. The initial phases of research yielded hopeful results that after a long and arduous process, these structures are once again becoming a valued part of the city's landscape. Although the city's Muslim population remains a fraction of what it was before the war and some tensions remain, the call to prayer can now be heard from several mosques throughout the city, and the Ferhadija has regained its role as both a place of worship and a highly visited and celebrated landmark of Bosnia's second largest city.

Biography

Katelyn Williams is a Ph.D. candidate in Heritage Studies at Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg (BTU) in Germany. Her doctoral research is focused on the post-conflict recovery of Ottoman-era Islamic sacral heritage in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She holds an M. A. in World Heritage Studies from BTU, and she gained several years of professional museum experience working in public programming and communications at Brooklyn Historical Society and New-York Historical Society.

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ICOA747: RECONSTRUCTION ET RÉCONCILIATION POST CONFLIT EN BOSNIE-HERZÉGOVINE: L'EXEMPLE DE LA MOSQUÉE DE FERHADIJA

Sous-thème 02: Le rôle du patrimoine culturel dans la construction de la paix et de la réconciliation

Session 3: Recréer des idées de mémoire

Lieu: Silver Oak Hall 1, India Habitat Centre

Date et heure: 14 Décembre, 2017, 09:55 – 10:10

Auteur: Katelyn Williams

Doctorante, diplôme prévu en 2019. Brandenburgische Technische Universität, Cottbus-Senftenberg- Titre provisoire: Prendre du recul sur notre patrimoine : leçons de la reconstruction du patrimoine islamique dans l'après guerre en Bosnie-Herzégovine. M. A sur le patrimoine mondial obtenu en 2014. Thèse de master : Le site historique de Teufelsberg : un plan d'interprétation préliminaire Coordinateur du programme et de la communication, Brooklyn Historical society, Brooklyn, NY Juillet 2014 – décembre 2017. Conservateur: Welt. Krieg. Erbe./ Patrimoine Guerre mondiale. Exposition. Cottbus/Peenemünde, Allemagne, 2013.

Résumé: Le conflit qui a ravagé la Bosnie-Herzégovine entre 1992 et 1995 a été l'un des plus dévastateurs pour le patrimoine culturel et sacré depuis la seconde guerre mondiale. La mosquée de Ferhadija, à Banja Luka, capitale de l'entité serbe de Bosnie-Herzégovine, faisait partie des 1186 mosquées endommagées ou complètement détruites lors du conflit et l'une des 16 mosquées détruites à Banja Luka. Inscrite sur la liste des monuments historiques, la mosquée et son ensemble architectural ont été démolis à l'explosif par les nationalistes serbes de Bosnie le 7 mai 1993 et les décombres déposés dans plusieurs endroits. Ces destructions ciblées ainsi que celles d'autres sites de Banja Luka ont accompagné l'exode forcé de la majorité de la population musulmane de la ville.

En dépit de difficultés incroyables, notamment d'années d'obstructions de la part des autorités serbes de Bosnie et d'émeutes organisées lors de la pose de la première pierre en 2001, la mosquée de Ferhadija a finalement pu être reconstruite (partiellement avec les matériaux d'origine) et ses portes rouvertes en mai 2016. Mais ce projet a-t-il permis la réconciliation entre les différents groupes ethniques ou le retour et la revitalisation de sa population musulmane?

Cette contribution traitera de la reconstruction post conflit et de la gestion de la mosquée à travers l'approche du patrimoine vivant de l'ICROM en se penchant plus précisément sur le concept de continuité et en évaluant si le projet a conduit à la continuité (ou à la ré-institution) de l'usage, associations et soins du site par sa communauté, qui est définie ici comme étant la communauté musulmane de Banja Luka.

Cela comprend à la fois ceux qui y sont retournés depuis la fin du conflit et ceux qui n'y sont pas retournés. Il se penchera également sur l'évolution de l'accueil du projet par les habitants, non musulmans

principalement serbes de Bosnie, dont certains avaient au début de la reconstruction réagi de manière très violente.

Mots clés: *Conflit – Réconciliation - Identité*