

SERBIA

Current Risks in Heritage Protection

The important political and social changes in Serbia in the early 21st century started a process of democratisation, establishing closer ties with Europe, which contributed to intensified efforts for ratifying international conventions in the field of heritage protection and management from 2007 onwards.¹ However, despite positive efforts, the protection and preservation of the cultural heritage in Serbia still show signs of a transitional phase with many of the general problems well-known in the former Eastern European countries, as well as specific conditions which are the result of recent political conflicts in the region, presenting a risk to the preservation of heritage. In addition, the cultural heritage in Serbia is also exposed to quite specific risks connected with an extremely acute economic crisis, which marked all activities of the heritage protection service during the 1990s. This is reflected in the problems of collaboration between official institutions and civil organisations. A crucial problem is non-compliance of the current *Law on Cultural Properties* from 1994² with international recommendations, and there is an urgent need to revise this act.

The conditions under which official protection institutions operate are unfavourable. For a long period of time, there has been a permanent problem of lack of funding, which is caused by both a lack of official responsibility and by insufficient knowledge about alternative funding methods (financing is largely treated as an exclusive responsibility of the national government and its budget). To a great extent, the problem of financing the planned conservation activities hinders or disables timely expert preventative and operative engagement and the determination of adequate

protective measures, including conditions of maintenance and utilisation of recognised heritage.

The present practice of including citizens' participation in the processes of decision-making in planning and reconstructions has not produced satisfactory results. The established practice of spatial planning in Serbia allows citizens to gain insight only in almost finalised plans. However, this practice bypasses the role of citizens in creating solutions at the stage of defining a vision of development and a programme for future development.

In Serbia, cooperation between the public and private sector regarding investments in integrated rehabilitation and conservation of cultural heritage is not developed. The cultural heritage is primarily protected with scarce budget resources and the national authorities are considered to be the only ones responsible for providing the resources. Such a situation has resulted in a passive attitude and a lack of interest of the local communities in the rehabilitation of heritage. In certain cases there have been conflicts between the authorities and NGO organisations regarding the reconstruction and use of architectural heritage. This applies especially to urban zones: in Belgrade there are projects for new high-rise buildings at the waterfronts of the Sava and Danube Rivers. These would dominate and threaten the authenticity and values of the protected areas, Belgrade Fortress and the city's old centre.

Among the major problems are the quality and professional capacities of the staff involved, while the available support varies on the different levels and in the departments of heritage management. There is a lack of knowledge and experience in new technologies and a generation gap within the personnel. Young employees would be able to overcome the existing deficiencies in the system, if they were given funding and training. Such train-



The old miners' houses in Senje Coal Mine near Despotovac, listed in 1975 (photo M. Roter)



House of the architect Jovan Ilkić, 1898 (photo M. Vukotić-Lazar)



The Old Belgrade Fair Ground, 1937, design R. Tatić, M. Tričković, Đ. Lukić (photo M. Vukotić-Lazar)



The Printing Company in Belgrade, design D. Brašovan (photo M. Roter)

ing would need to embrace the whole multidisciplinary spectrum: specialist heritage knowledge, documentation techniques and general management skills. There are particular deficiencies in professional training opportunities; for instance, a lack of post-graduate courses in conservation.

In actual conservation, the focus on medieval architecture, monasteries and fortified towns as well as on prehistoric and ancient Roman sites is still dominant, while heritage from other historic periods, traditional residential architecture from the 19th and 20th centuries, heritage in historical rural and urban areas is not sufficiently covered in current research and protection activities. However, the importance of preserving historic buildings and spaces for future generations, as well as their rehabilitation and inclusion in modern social and economic development have been acknowledged so far. Also, treating heritage as an integral part of the development process and aiming to prevent its degradation and disappearance are officially accepted, but have not yet been applied in practice.

Protection of traditional rural architecture

In recent times, some attention has been devoted to the protection of the rural areas and some actions in recording, investigating

and publishing of listed traditional houses have been realised. Furthermore, efforts have been made to incorporate the latest international recommendations into the heritage protection methodology. In accordance with modern principles of conservation, some attention is given to rehabilitation of rural areas with traditional architecture, as part of the overall economic and social development based on the integration of rural areas into regional and urban planning processes. In practice, however, there is not enough understanding of the importance of preserving traditional settlements and old rural houses, neither of the ability to adapt to modern needs and standards.

Treatment of 19th and early 20th century architecture

Many residential buildings built in the 19th and early 20th centuries as part of the main commercial streets and districts in Serbian towns are listed cultural properties recognised as evidence of modernisation and adoption of European styles. Today, with many of those listed buildings there are problems of ownership, maintenance and use. Some structures are abandoned, have been left to decay for years and have only recently been recognised as cultural properties, like the house of the architect Jovan Ilkić from 1898 (Miloša Pocerca St. N° 32, Belgrade). Some listed buildings



The complex of the Ministry of Defence and the Military Headquarter in Belgrade, 1955–1965, design arch. N. Dobrović (photo M. Vukotić-Lazar)

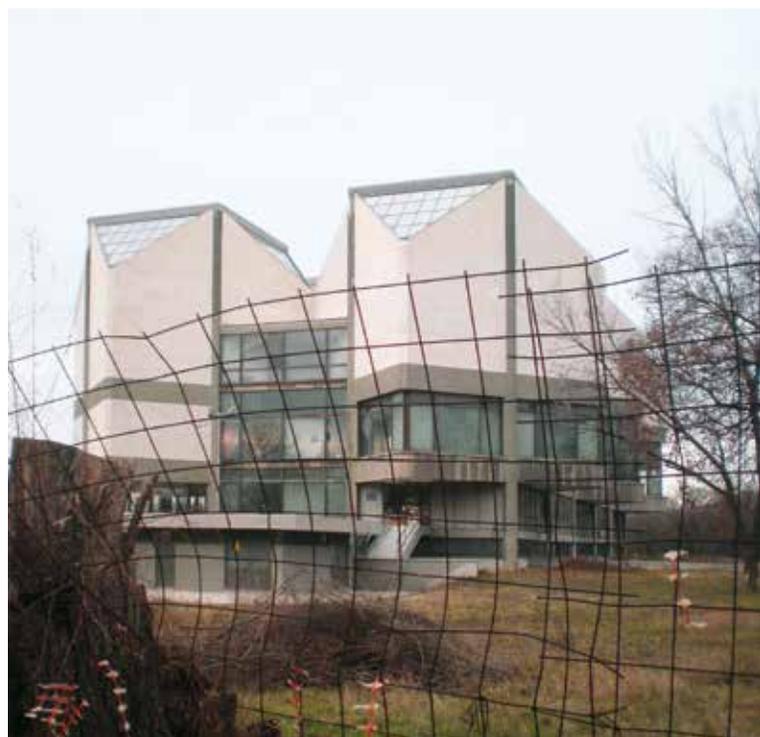
have been inadequately reconstructed and adapted to a new purpose, like the house of the sculptor Đorđe Jovanović from 1926 (Skerlićeva St. N° 6, Belgrade).

Lack of modernist architecture conservation

A small number of buildings related to the Modernism movement between the two World Wars are listed as cultural monuments, along with just a few buildings erected after World War II. The problem is insufficient knowledge and understanding of the scientific, historic and artistic values of this cultural heritage.

Today a number of listed buildings and complexes of contemporary architecture are in very poor condition. Inadequate conservation methods, use and maintenance of buildings can lead to a loss of their characteristics and values. Lack of monitoring and of controlling the projects and the conservation process, also failure to provide proper management and prevent invalid initiatives regarding the recovery, restoration and reuse of the monuments are the risks of modern architecture conservation in Serbia.

One of the listed sites is the modern complex of the Belgrade Fair Grounds built in 1937, with the central tower and the pavilions of Turkey, Italy, Czechoslovakia and Hungary as nucleus of



The Museum of Modern Arts in Belgrade, 1962–1965, design arch. I. Raspopović and I. Antić (photo M. Roter)

New Belgrade. After 1941, during World War II, the site became a concentration camp where more than 10,000 Jews and 13,000 Serbs and people of other nationalities were imprisoned and sent to death.³

Although only a small part of the initial complex of the Old Fair Grounds have remained, this cultural property listed in 1987 is of great significance as avant-garde and modern architecture in Serbia, as well as a memorial place. The complex is greatly deteriorated and inadequately used (restaurants, clubs, gyms, workshops and dwellings). There have been numerous designs for the reconstruction of the destroyed buildings and the memorial complex, but none has been realised.

During the transition period, the State Printing Shop built in 1936–1940 as one of the largest industrial buildings in the Balkans was sold to a private company and used for offices, warehouses, independent cultural activities of young artists, etc. The building was listed as cultural property in 1992, but in a ruined and devastated state. The problem is finding an adequate and profitable use with good management and proper maintenance.

During the NATO bombardment of Belgrade in 1999 the Complex of the Military Headquarter and the Ministry of Defence was heavily damaged and mostly devastated. The buildings have been in ruins for more than ten years and were listed as cultural property in 2005. The state as the owner has neither had the resources nor an interest to renew the structure for 15 years. Unfortunately, there is no consensus between professional and official institutions about the future of the complex. Some individuals have even tried to undermine its significance, identifying it with the ideology and politics of post-war Yugoslavia and regarding the buildings as a symbol of the post-war Communist regime – unworthy of being renewed. Recently, the owner started removing the damaged parts of the buildings without any expertise and su-

pervision by the official conservation institutions. This has put the complex under risk of losing its authenticity and original values. The public has not been informed about the future reconstruction and purpose of the buildings.

The Museum of Modern Arts, one of the greatest monuments of contemporary architecture in Serbia, built in 1962–1965 and listed as cultural property in 1987, has been closed and will be in a process of reconstruction for years.

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Footnotes

- ¹ Important conventions in the field of cultural heritage have already been ratified: The Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada, 1985); The European Archaeological Convention (Valetta, 1992); The Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro, 2005); also UNESCO conventions: The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (Paris, 1972); Convention on Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage (Paris, 2003); and Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (Paris, 2005). See the official site of the Ministry of Culture: <http://www.kultura.gov.rs/lat/medjunarodna-saradnja/medjunarodna-dokumenta> (accessed March 19, 2016).
- ² Zakon o kulturnim dobrima (The Law on Cultural Properties), Službeni glasnik RS, br. 71/94. See: <http://www.kultura.gov.rs/lat/dokumenti/propisi-iz-oblasti-kulture/zakon-o-kulturnim-dobrima> (accessed March 19, 2016).
- ³ Roter-Blagojević, M., Vukotić-Lazar, M. (2013): Renewal of a Destroyed Authenticity? The Significance of the Old Fair Grounds and the New Military Headquarters for the Preservation of the Cultural and Architectural Identity of Belgrade, in: Aleksandar Kadijević, Milan Popadić (eds.): *Prostori pamćenja: zbornik radova/Spaces of Memory: collection of works*, vol. 1, Arhitektura/Architecture, Filozofski fakultet, Beograd/Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade., pp. 309–323. ISBN 978-86-88803-33-5.