

SERBIA

Heritage at Risk

The risks that threaten the preservation of cultural and natural heritage on the territory of Serbia are still marked by the recent transitional changes in society. Besides the existing grave economic situation the global economic crisis has worsened the circumstances under which the institutions in charge of the preservation and conservation of cultural properties operate. Preserving the authenticity of the national heritage becomes a more difficult and demanding challenge for the professionals in the field. Insufficient financial means still rule out the realization of the planned conservation interventions, hinder professional activities as well as prompt expert, preventive and operative engagement on the tasks of preservation and conservation of cultural properties. On the other hand, increasing pressure of urbanization, migration as a result of prior ethnic conflicts, the great social differences, the demands of modern life, unresolved problems of traffic – increased by different pressures and conflicts of interest – have inevitably led to the specific degradation process in the historic urban areas that are seriously endangering the values of this type of heritage. As another major risk that affects all types of cultural properties could be mentioned the lack of a clearly defined conservation policy that could improve the decision-making in the conservation field, advocate long-term conservation programs and determine the priority of intervention according to type, significance and degree of threat to the cultural properties.

Case Study 1: Belgrade Fortress

The complex of Belgrade Fortress, commonly called Kalemegdan (divided into the lower and upper towns) is located on the point where the river Sava flows into the Danube. Today this position offers an amazing panorama but once was the main cause for repeated invasion and war over this strategic point. Because of this, Kalemegdan today bears witness to many centuries of various conquering cultures and arts.

Belgrade fortress is the historical heart of Belgrade, a place that in the best way represents its history. First, it was a Roman castrum (2nd century), then a Byzantine castle (6th and 12th centuries), medieval fortified capital of the Serbian state (13th and 15th centuries) and in the end Austrian and Turkish military fortress (17th and 18th centuries).

The lower town of Belgrade Fortress is located on a terrain that is easily flooded when the levels of the rivers Sava and Danube rise. The last flood was in 2010, and before that in 2006, 1981 and in 1929. The lower town of Belgrade Fortress encompasses several significant buildings: Nebojsa's Tower (1460), the Gate of Carlo the VI (1736), Vidin Gate (18th century) as well as many archeological remains.

Electrometrical research of the lower town showed that there were underground water collectors in this part of Belgrade Fortress. It has been assessed that the flooding was caused by the old drainage system, the small capacity of the current drainage system, the lack of automatic measuring stations on the rivers, as well as a lack of investments in measuring stations. At the moment there is an urgent need for a disaster management

plan, but also for educated staff and volunteers. A permanent lack of funds for the overall conservation works in Serbia is another problem that affects the protection of the lower town of Belgrade Fortress.

Case Study 2: Monastery of Sopoćani

Sopoćani Monastery is part of the historic area of "Old Ras with Sopoćani" that was inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1979.

The configuration of the hilly terrain, an exceptional landscape, determined the specific location of the monastery. In order to protect all the elements which contribute to the artistic values of the ensemble, construction in the immediate surroundings of the monastery has been limited to the functioning of the presentation and regulation of the cultural monument. An integrative approach to the protection of natural and cultural heritage as an inherent whole was supposed to exclude any occurrence of landscape degradation as well as degradation of the monastery views.

Sopoćani's hitherto traffic accessibility was completely satisfactory for the needs of the monastery fraternity and for tourist demands. On the other hand, the road that runs along near the monastery also connects the city of Novi Pazar with the southern region of the Pešter plateau and is of great importance for the local population and their economy. Because of that, the local communities have asked for more than ten years to have the existing road broadened. Thus the road would be upgraded to become a road of regional character, with a denser flow of traffic and other accompanying structures (as gas stations, commercial and catering facilities, etc.). This would directly endanger Sopoćani Monastery, not only from the visual point of view, but also in a physical way. Apart from the destructive effect of the exhaust gases on the murals of the Holy Trinity Church in Sopoćani (belonging to the most beautiful and most impressive achievements of Christian art in the 13th century), the greater risk factor would be increased vibrations caused by the augmentation of lorry traffic, vibrations that have a destructive effect on the building's statics and the physical persistence of the frescoes.

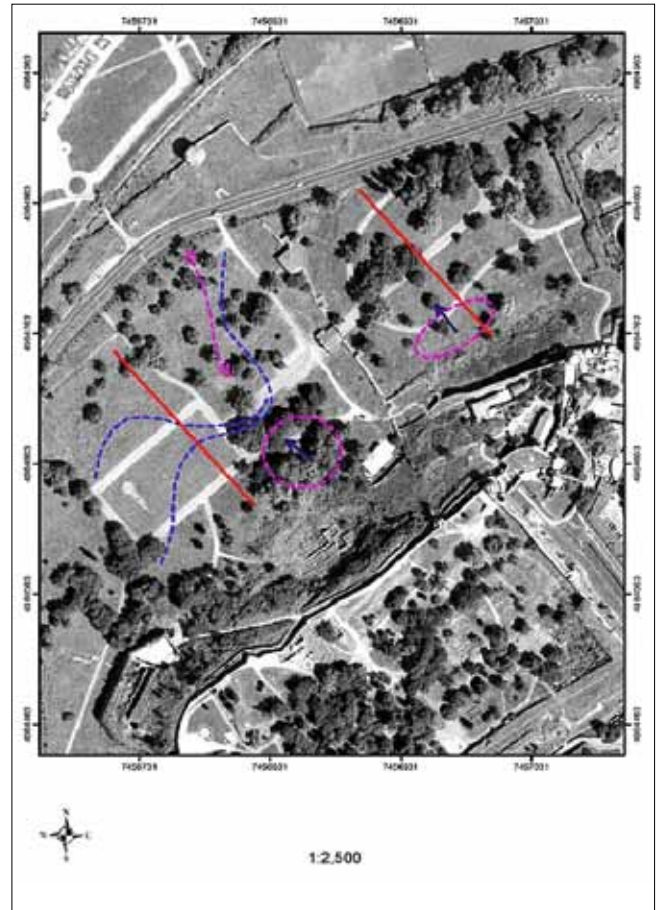
For this reason, as early as in 1998 the Traffic Institute CIP from Belgrade elaborated a project for a bypass of the Sopoćani Monastery area. In 2002, the Expert Council of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia decided to forbid the broadening of the existing road for a length of 2 km near the monastery and recommended the construction of the above-mentioned bypass of 2400 meters length. That bypass would accept the majority of traffic while the existing road would exclusively be used by the monastery fraternity and by tourists.

In urban territorial plans that were elaborated in the past few years (Territorial Plan of the Novi Pazar Municipality, Territorial Plan of the Historic Area of Old Ras and Sopoćani) the bypass was regularly accepted and three years ago the foundation stone was laid, but the construction never started.

In spring 2002, the groundwork for the broadening of the existing route began, and at the moment the asphalt coating is being carried out. It is very difficult to deduce who is responsible. No one disputes that the population of the region really needs the road to Novi Pazar. On the other hand, although the bypass would cost more it would solve both problems: Sopoćani Monastery would preserve its integrity and the local population would finally have the road it had asked for for a long time.



Belgrade Fortress, plan



Belgrade Fortress, underground water collectors

Belgrade Fortress, the walls during the flood



Belgrade Fortress, Nebojsa's Tower during the flood





Sopoćani Monastery, road near the monastery



Sopoćani Monastery, road near the monastery

Case Study 3: Stone Votive Crosses

Stone votive crosses are a cultural-historic characteristic of Eastern and Southern Serbia, although some can also be found, though rarely, in Western Serbia. They served as places of worship during the votive days. Along with the monogram of Jesus Christ and the name of its founder, the cross was dedicated to the saint whose name was inscribed. On the day when a saint was commemorated, in every village this was also celebrated as a votive day. Like the consecrated trees in Western Serbia, stone crosses were supposed to maintain the well-being of the village and to protect it from diseases or climate disasters. Usually, there were several ancestral crosses and one main cross belonging to the village. There was a ritual to slaughter a lamb next to the cross in order to sprinkle the blood over the cross. Afterwards, the lamb was cooked and the whole community dined at a table situated alongside the cross. It is the reflection of the ancient way of sacrificing to the idol representing the deity, which was here replaced by the cross. Votive crosses that can be dated thanks to the inscribed years were raised from the beginning of the 18th century until the first half of the 20th century, when their role began to weaken.

As part of a ritual these crosses were of great importance for the social and cult life of the rural community, but today with the loss of this ritual they are almost completely ignored and forgotten. This is not merely due to the fact that the population in these villages consists mostly of old and weak people. Instead, social changes in the villages are the main cause. A feeling of community that existed from the 19th to the middle of the 20th century has been replaced by individual privacy, and this is the reason why communal celebrations have increasingly been neglected. Although there are individual cases of renewal of customs, after many decades when these customs were not practiced or even prohibited stone votive crosses are still disappearing, either because they fall into oblivion or because they are overgrown by plants and trees.

Concerning the votive or “taboo” trees that played a similar role as the stone crosses, the situation is slightly better. Those that survived the lumbering after the Second World War, which was organized in order to restrain old beliefs and to foster a new ideology instead, have often been protected as natural properties. Striking treetops serve as landmarks dominating the surrounding area, but at the same time they are still worshipped as votive trees.

Case Study 4: Rural Economic Facilities

Water mills as well as buildings for textile refining belong to the group of economic facilities and in the past they were a part of everyday rural life. Water mills were used for grinding corn, by frictioning it between two stones powered by a water wheel. They were built on the river with a vertical water wheel, and on the stream, where the waterwheel was set in a horizontal position. Water mills were made of natural materials: wood, stone, clay. They were two-part buildings; one room served for the grinding and the smaller one was for the miller.

Usually, close to the water mills buildings for textile refining were also erected. In those buildings, the textile was rolled to become compact by the pressure of water. Due to industrial textile production this traditional way of processing textiles and the specially constructed objects have disappeared. The same has happened with water mills as they lost the battle against electric mills.

As a result of industrial modernisation and massive migration from the villages to the towns, today in Serbia it is almost impossible to find any of these facilities still in operation; often they have disappeared altogether. Since they haven’t been in use for many years, an interest in preserving them has also been lost. The situation of the water mills is slightly better thanks to a few individuals who have succeeded in keeping them in operation.

The building materials are disappearing, but also the intangible heritage which was connected to those facilities. As the renewal of water mills and buildings for textile refining has been halted, the skills for building their complex mechanism and the knowledge of using it, which has been transmitted from generation to generation, is in the process of disappearing. The relevant parts of the common law regulating the use of these facilities are ignored. Furthermore, legends about imaginary creatures living in those buildings and other popular beliefs that made these places mystical are slowly being forgotten.

Case Study 5: Memorials Dedicated to the Second World War

After the fall of Communism and the disintegration of Yugoslavia, people changed their attitude towards the Second World War and



Stone votive cross between two sacred "taboo" trees



Watermill

associated it mostly with Communist rule. One of the consequences in the past two decades has been the destruction and damage of memorials dedicated to the Second World War. Sometimes, bronze sculptures, some of them even the work of eminent artists, have been stolen in order to sell them. The community's lack of interest and vandalism have been the biggest threats.

Another aspect of risk is related to the communication antennas, because in some cases they are situated in the closest surroundings of the monuments. They are not a threat because of the radiation, but because they obstruct the views of the monuments.

A memorial complex dedicated to Boško Buha is located in the village of Jabuka, near the city of Prijepolje in Southern Serbia. Boško Buha was a young partisan, almost a boy, who was killed during the Second World War. Probably the most significant part of this memorial complex is a statue of Boško Buha, which is situated at the top of a hill and overlooks the rest of the complex. Today, the statue looks directly at the communication antenna which was built without any knowledge of the institutes for the protection of cultural monuments.

Near the city of Užice, there is a hill called Kadinjača. This hill was a battlefield in 1941 when the German army defeated Yugoslav partisans and ceased the existence of the only free territory in Serbia at that time, later called the Republic of Užice. At the top of the hill, immediately after the war a graveyard for the killed partisans was laid out. Later, their remains were buried in the collective ossuary and in 1979 a new memorial complex was built there. During the past few years, this complex has been endangered by antennas. The first one was built without any knowledge of the institutes for the protection of cultural monuments. For the other one, the company



Kadinjača, memorial complex

planning to build it sought for a permission from the Institute for the Protection of the Cultural Monuments of Serbia. After receiving a negative answer, it was built anyway. Furthermore, during the construction the Institute for the Protection of the Cultural Monuments of Serbia banned the continuation of the works, but this was ignored.

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