

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Devastation of the Setting – New Hotel Ruza in Mostar

Very soon after “The Old Bridge Area of the Old City of Mostar” was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2005, the construction of a new hotel in the buffer zone of the World Heritage property began, not in conformity with the provisions of the master plan, which was part of the management plan included in the nomination file.

Hotel Ruza had already existed on that spot (built in 1979, architect Zlatko Ugljen). It was built in the contemporary architectural style, which corresponded very well with the cultural and historic setting (Figs. 1, 2, 3). In the war of 1992–95, the hotel was badly damaged. Bearing in mind that it was an exceptional and valuable contemporary piece of architecture, it should have been restored and returned to its original condition and function (Fig. 4). However, after the war no one in charge actually cared about this structure. The restoration of the existing damaged hotel was not acceptable for the potential investor, so he obtained a building permit from the local authorities, the town-planning institute and the institute for heritage protection, to build a much higher and larger hotel on the same spot. The demolition of the old Hotel Ruza and the construction of the new hotel caused an immeasurable degradation of the World Heritage property and numerous debates, not only at the national, but also at the international expert level (Figs. 5, 6). The World Heritage Committee reacted with good reason and undertook several international missions in order to solve the problem in an adequate way – in compliance with the propositions of the World Heritage Convention (2006: ICOMOS mission; 2007: UNESCO/ICOMOS mission; 2008: ICCROM/ICOMOS expert mission).

The ICOMOS National Committee in Bosnia and Herzegovina would like to call to mind the conclusions and recommendations of those previous missions:

ICOMOS mission to Mostar, 21–24 June 2006, by Werner Desimpelaere and Adam Arnoth

Conclusions and recommendations

Although the expert mission wanted to be prepared to propose some concrete alternatives and reasonable solutions to the current problem of the hotel construction, the mission was concerned that at present no other advice can be given than to reconsider the new project and design taking into account the already constructed volume while fully respecting the management plan of the World Heritage property.

The mission concludes:

(1) *That the current hotel construction project is not in compliance with the 1972 World Heritage Convention and the integrity and authenticity of the World Heritage property;*



Aerial view of Mostar with original Hotel Ruza at top left

Hotel Ruza, Mostar, in the contemporary architectural style (architect Zlatko Ugljen, 1979)



- (2) *To encourage the Federal Minister of Physical Planning and the Mayor of Mostar to find a feasible solution for this complex situation, in particular to (a) halt the current project, (b) review the plans and (c) find alternative solutions in line with the principles indicated by Prof. Zlatko Ugljen.*
- (3) *To fully respect the Master Plan and the Management Plan, adopted for the World Heritage property of the Old Bridge area of the Old City of Mostar.*

The mission specifically recommends:

1. *To the State Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina to fully respect its obligations under the World Heritage Convention of 1972;*
2. *To the State Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its national and local authorities to find appropriate solutions in order to*



Disharmony was caused in the buffer zone of the World Heritage property by the inadequate construction of the new Hotel Ruza

The height and size of the new Hotel Ruza visibly degrade the cultural and historic setting



reduce the unacceptable visual impact of the new structure of the Hotel Ruza;

ICOMOS mission to Mostar, 11–13 June 2007, by Luigi Milano and Prof. Umberto Siola

Conclusions and recommendations

- *We fully concur with the conclusions presented in the mission report of Mr Werner Desimpelaere and Mr. Adam Arnoth to Mostar in the period of 21–24 June 2006.*
- *On the basis of the comparison with the skyline of the city of Mostar, the construction of the new building presents an important visual impact in relation to the adjacent structures. The strength of this impact is due, above all, to the building's height and compactness of the volumetric masses, which appear as a barrier to the depth of the visual field as well as catching the observers' attention.*
- *Having a strong visual impact, it may be necessary to reduce the height of the body of the building for at least one floor (even partially) to obtain a building with volumetric masses not vertically aligned, in particular case and in order to fully*

respect the criteria set in Master Plan of 2001 and Management Plan of 2004 reduction of the entire floor of the north wing is strongly recommended.

ICOMOS mission to Mostar, 26–28 May 2008, by Werner Desimpelaere and Luigi Milano (with Umberto Siola)
Accordingly, the mission concluded the following:

- *The mission has not noted any change in the existing structure of the new hotel. In order to result in a building with a mass closer to that of the hotel damaged during the war, it is necessary to reduce the height, the compactness and, as a consequence, the volumetric impact of the new building through demolition. It is necessary to underline that the hotel designed by Zlatko Ugljen was composed of several "pavilions" wisely set together, in order to obtain a building perfectly integrated and interpolated with the existing historic context without having negative impacts on the perspectives of the typical streets of the Old City;*
- *The great visual impact of the new building, compared both with the surrounding buildings and with the skyline of the Old City of Mostar (taking into consideration volumetric masses and height of the new structure), remains unchanged;*
- *The new hotel building in no case could be interpolated and integrated with the urban-historical part of City of Mostar, inscribed on the World Heritage List, neither from an environmental point of view nor from the proposed aesthetic characteristics which, despite the attempt to use different materials, remain out of the historic context;*
- *Although we deplore the total destruction of the original hotel, it makes no sense to ask to reconstruct it (because of new hotel norms as well).*
- *Improving the quality of the new Hotel Ruza to a high level of architectural design seems to be an almost impossible mission.*
- *The negative image and impact of this heavy mortgage for the national and international society should be turned into positive action.*
- *The part of the building with a curved shape (even if it is only one floor; between the two orthogonal wings of the new hotel), being practically tangent to the pedestrian route Rade Bitange overhangs it with its height of about 7 meters. Furthermore the facade of this part of the designed building is composed of very large surfaces of glass that are not having any relation to the typology and ancient characteristics of this part of the city.*

Recommendations

It is required to prepare a new design for the hotel fully respecting the norms and conditions set in the Management Plan of 2005, taking into account the Guidelines set out in the Vienna Memorandum (2005) and to ensure full protection of the World Heritage property and implementation of the decisions of the World Heritage Committee. That design should take into account the following:

- *It is necessary to review the relationship of the hotel with its external areas, with the surrounding streets and buildings;*
- *The facades should be characterized by articulation of mass and concavity, windows and loggias to create the depth and the impression of chiaroscuro just like the hotel destroyed during the war;*
- *It should establish a clear relationship between the built areas of the lot and the green ones. It is also necessary to identify and*

describe the materials that will be used for the external areas of the lot, for the facades, for the interiors, and the types and characteristics of the lighting of the external areas;

- *It seems out of place to create a pool on the terrace floor that is the roof of part of the building;*
- *It is necessary to avoid large surfaces of glass, especially on the ground floor, because they are not connected to the characteristics of this part of the city.*

Reports and recommendations of the aforementioned international experts clearly bear witness to the inadequacy of the new Hotel Ruza and to necessary interventions in order to achieve an acceptable condition.

Considering that the investor obtained a building permit, he does not want to give up the planned capacity and size of the hotel. The local authorities take responsibility for that condition as well, because they issued the building permit. That is why attempts to reduce the disharmony with the valuable setting – to reduce the number of storeys and thus the hotel's entire height – and to redesign its appearance, still has not produced any results. It is important to mention that we do not speak here about the entire number of storeys, but about the fact that all storey heights were considerably raised (in comparison to the previous hotel), resulting in an increase of the entire height and a disharmony with the setting. The dimensions of the new Hotel are three times larger than the old one.

Since there was no progress concerning this problem the World Heritage Committee at its 33rd session (Seville, 2009) requested the State Party to submit drawings of the proposed reconstruction of the New Hotel Ruza. A report was submitted by the State Party on 2 February 2010, and was based on an ICCROM-ICOMOS mission to Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 11–18 October 2008 and a mission report by C. Cesari, L. Baratin and J. Jokilehto (Rome, 22 January 2009).

The newly submitted proposal for the hotel remains five storeys (ground floor plus four upper floors) as allowed in the building permit granted by the City of Mostar in 2004 (but one storey higher than allowed in the 2001 master plan and 2005 management plan). Following the recommendations of the 2008 expert mission, however, the facades of the hotel have been redesigned taking into account the need to better articulate it by breaking it into discrete sections, thereby diminishing the overall massing. The drawings do indicate, however, some additional rooftop constructions, which include the roof of a bar and sitting area,

and the enclosures of stairways and other services, despite assurances by the developer that there would be no roof constructions for the pool level.

The World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies have examined the new designs and consider that while not the preferred solution, these designs do address a number of the previously expressed concerns. They do, however, remain extremely concerned about the constructions found above the fifth storey to house a bar, seating area, stairways, and other services. These additional elements effectively constitute a sixth storey to the building, even if their surface area is small in relation to the overall footprint of the hotel, and should be avoided.

Taking these considerations into account, the World Heritage Centre and Advisory Bodies are of the opinion that the newly articulated facades will not have an overall negative impact. (WH 34 COM, C 946 rev, Brasilia, Brasil, 25 July–3 August 2010)

The ICOMOS National Committee in Bosnia and Herzegovina was unpleasantly surprised that in the report of 22 January 2009 to the ICCROM-ICOMOS Mission to Mostar, there is a considerable departure from the previous ICOMOS mission reports and their decisions (WHC 31, 32, 33). The suggestions and conclusions evidently show that the mission members (C. Cesari, L. Baratin and J. Jokilehto) primarily took the investor's demands into consideration and closely cooperated with politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina, not with the expert bodies and the ICOMOS National Committee. It is clear that the achieved compromise will heavily degrade the World Heritage status of Old Mostar. The integral impact of the volume of the new Hotel Ruza cannot be justified. Also, it is hard to expect that the architectural solution of the structure's exterior will reduce the huge volume of the hotel.

Our resigned conclusion is that the suggested compromise bears witness to the mission's lack of professionalism, while it damages the mission's reputation as well as that of the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies.

Although the aforementioned recommendations and conclusions were adopted at the WH 34 COM 2010 in Brazil, there is no progress at the new Hotel Ruza construction site to this day (January 2013). Instead, there is still status quo.

ICOMOS National Committee in
Bosnia and Herzegovina