

YUGOSLAVIA

The threats to cultural heritage in Yugoslavia remain overshadowed by the belated transitional changes in society. The institutions tasked with protection of cultural heritage during the past decade reflect the economic crisis and poor conditions. Despite the visible improvements in the organisation of the conservation service and significant efforts to define a strategy of development and policy of conservation – which would promote conservation plans and identification of priorities for intervention based on type and degree of threat – insufficient funds continue to thwart or slow down the implementation of the majority of planned conservation activities. In this situation professional action is significantly challenged, as is a timely, preventive, expert and operational engagement with the protection and preservation of cultural heritage. Some progress has been achieved in the re-establishment of professional contacts and co-operation with international institutions and agencies engaged in conservation, with the aim of improving methodology and exchanging experiences in this field. There has been similar progress with opening possibilities for expert consultation in complex professional problems.

Cultural Heritage in Kosovo and Metohija

Due to the political situation, most of the monuments in Kosovo and Metohija are out of reach of experts from the Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments of the Republic of Serbia. Still, efforts are being made to solve certain conservation problems with the assistance of international agencies and other foreign institutions engaged in the protection of cultural heritage. The Monasteries of Dečani and the Patriarchate of Peć have been listed in the World Monuments Watch 2002 List of 100 Most Endangered Sites. Thanks to the understanding and interest of the Italian Government – whose units of KFOR are in charge of this part of Metohija – there is discussion on the possible engagement of a mixed team of painters-conservators to participate in the Project of Conservation of Mural Paintings of the Patriarchate of Peć, as well as the restoration of the 19th-century dormitory in the Monastery of Dečani. Last year, in order to create conditions for conservation works and activities on planning and managing cultural heritage, experts of the conservation service were included in State institutions whose task is to normalise the situation and establish regular functioning in Kosovo and Metohija.

Historic Towns and Urban Areas

The building heritage of historic towns and urban complexes dating to the 18th–20th centuries has been exposed to permanent risks and destruction. On the one hand, due to the neglect of this kind of heritage in an environment that more easily and readily attaches monumental value to the heritage of bygone ages, the conservation service has marginalised protection work on this more recent heritage. On the other hand, throughout the past decade and still in the transitional period, this type of heritage has been exposed to specific degradation processes – as a result, many building values have been devastated or even irrevocably lost. The pressures of urbanisation, migration, alteration of buildings' function, unresolved traffic problems, and effects of environmental pollution are the same risks noted in developed western countries.



Belgrade, inappropriate addition in the historic centre

Belgrade, illegal construction in the historic centre



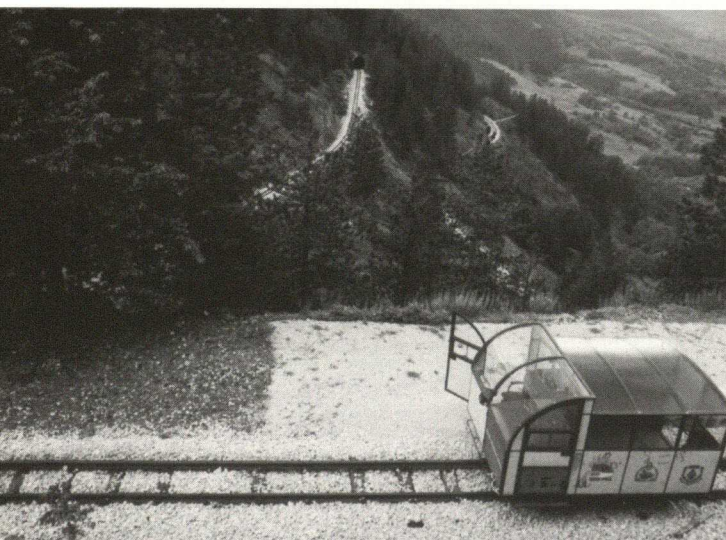


Sremski Karlovci, new construction in the historic centre – detail



Kruševac, house from the 19th century surrounded by new constructions

Šargan 8, view with the recent dolly



They are even more pronounced in our milieu, highlighted by political instability, economic crisis, increase of the poverty rate on the one hand, and various forms of pressure, conflict of interests and concentration of funds and capital on the other.

The ongoing lack of resources for the actions planned, a decade-long stagnation of the conservation service, as well as insufficient affirmation of urban conservation have imposed significant consequences on the building heritage of our cities. Numerous examples are witness to the endangering of heritage in the cities. Illegal construction, extensions, additions to low-storey houses, destruction, demolition, change of function, inadequate use, unsuccessful interpolations in the historic urban tissue, development projects that do not correspond to the inherited urban pattern, destruction of historic stratigraphy, disruption of views, visual integrity of space – are but some of the problems and most frequent risks facing this type of heritage. Although lately efforts are being made to find more adequate conservation approaches, innovate the legal and administrative system, control planning and intensify co-operation of the conservation service and urban-planning, the overall image of endangered urban heritage is still very poor and the preservation of the authenticity of our cities presents ever greater and harder professional challenges.

Vernacular Built Heritage

Massive social and historical changes, emphasised by industrialisation and accompanied by de-agriculturalisation of the country – especially notable in passive and undeveloped areas – have resulted in the migration of younger populations from the villages, resulting in vast ruination and disappearance of the vernacular built heritage. Urbanisation and the urban influence on the architectural appearance of villages, stimulated by transition from a rural to an urban way of life (entailing more industrialised agricultural production) marked a break with the vernacular building tradition. A house is no longer built using the traditional processing of natural materials, but from industrial elements and materials, sending the old crafts into oblivion. New houses are built with a total lack of harmony with the architectural tradition of a certain area.

The most frequent reason for the disappearance of old rural houses is thought to be the inability to fulfil the conditions imposed by modern living standards. Very often this reason is justified; however, there are numerous cases where, with certain modifications in the interior (primarily in the kitchen and sanitary block), the house could conform to contemporary requirements. Still, the owners resort to this solution unwillingly as construction of a new house is an issue of prestige. The older generations tended to keep the old house alongside the new one and use it as a storage space, as a standing proof of the indigenous origin of the family. Younger generations do not have the same attitude to the past. Furthermore, the owner is not interested in preserving an old house as there is no incentive to do so. The legislative support for preservation of this type of cultural heritage, as well as the recognition of the need to preserve it, is at a very low level.

Case Study 1: The programme of research and protection of vernacular built heritage of Serbia

In the course of 2001 a program of revitalisation and development of a village as a strategic orientation of the State was drawn, giving the vernacular built heritage a significant role in the preservation of the cultural identity of the region. The programme was to entail:

1. establishment of a Network of Protected Rural and Environmental Complexes or Open-air Museums of Serbia, supported by the republican government, which would be included in the international network of protected complexes of this type of heritage;
2. creation of an Atlas of Vernacular Built Heritage in Serbia as the authoritative handbook for information, protection and study of this cultural heritage and a register of resources of building forms representing an intrinsic part of European cultural heritage;
3. inclusion of vernacular built heritage into rural and cultural tourism – further to their functional significance, many buildings are also memorials with links to important persons and events from history;
4. continuous work on education and popularisation of vernacular built heritage through the media.

Industrial Heritage

The systematic protection of industrial heritage in Serbia is in its initial stages. Still, the fact that the country underwent delayed industrialisation and that many buildings of industrial heritage are still being used, opens up a possibility to alter their use and include them in the corps of cultural heritage. As a result, many monuments and localities would be potential benchmarks for the development of cultural tourism in certain regions.

This process may be especially important as it ensures sustainable development of particular areas and the social integration of inhabitants in those regions that have lost their original economic relevance. However, this is both a challenge and a problem for institutions from the conservation field, which at the moment are still not in a position to fully face the problems of the protection and management of these monuments and are sometimes late to respond.

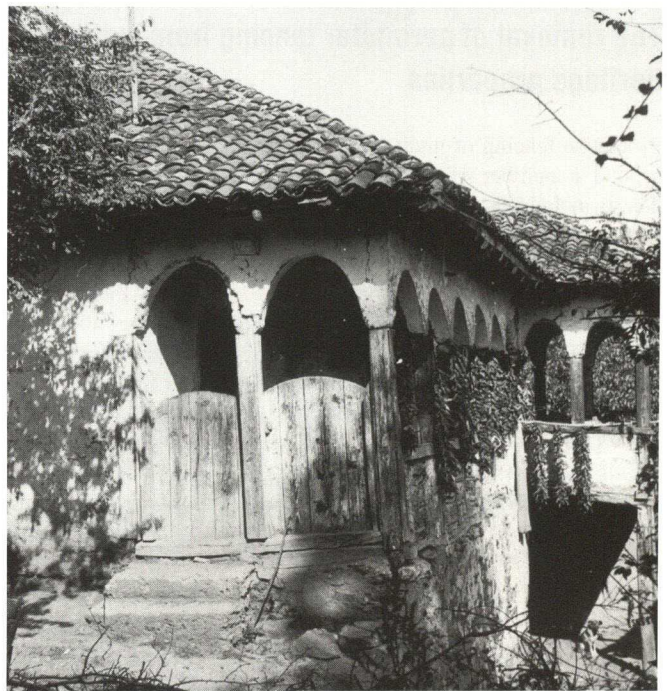
Case Study 2: Project 'Šargan 8'

The project 'Šargan 8' in the region of Mokra Gora, western Serbia, is one example of a faster and more positive response of the local community than that of the official institutions. From 1925 to 1974 one of the most attractive narrow-gauge track railroads in Europe used to run through this valley, linking Belgrade with Dubrovnik. Crossing a vivid region between three mountains that are natural parks in Serbia today, the builders resolved a very complex problem of altitude differences and railroad configuration by a track loop in the shape of a number 8. This solution made the Šargan railroad different from all similar railroads in Europe.

Following its closure, the railroad was forgotten, and with it the whole region lost over a half of its inhabitants to economic migration in some 20 years. Since 1997 to date, thanks to the action of the local population and extensive voluntary work, much of the railroad and associated facilities have been reconstructed and several engines and carriages restored. Also, in a very significant development, comprehensive documentation was collected: several thousand written documents, photographs and drawings, as well as oral testimonies about the railroad, life and tradition of the local community that at present has no more than 1800 members. The main aim of this action was reconstruction of the railroad and cultural revitalisation of the entire valley, with a view to the development of cultural tourism. The conditions have been created for the establishment of a spacious ecological museum that should present a project and synthesis of the preservation of the tradition, environment and industrial culture of Mokra Gora. Pursuant to an

appropriate business plan, the reconstruction of the railroad and establishment of the ecological museum shall be completed by the end of this decade at the latest.

This project to conserve the entire valley will be based on expert work and the advice of the Institute for Protection of Nature, Institute for Protection for Cultural Monuments, Museum of Science and Engineering in Belgrade, the Railroad Museum and the Belgrade Institute of Traffic. However, the operation of these institutions shall be founded on a synergy with the local community, whose lack of inclusion would render the entire project impossible, even preposterous.



Village of Grkinja (Southeastern Serbia), abandoned house from the 19th century

Village of Sičevo (Eastern Serbia), roof construction of the granary, detail

