

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA – HERITAGE @ RISK!

After the disastrous war between 1991 and 1996, during which a considerable number of cultural heritage places were either damaged or destroyed, for instance the world-famous bridge in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina is now facing two major new threats: the continuing deterioration of damaged monuments and inadequate post-war reconstruction. In detail, cultural heritage is at risk due to the deterioration of damaged monuments caused by weathering, an improper approach to the conservation of monuments, inappropriate materials and methods for conservation, the erection of inadequate new buildings at the sites where the destroyed monuments were, and the construction of new housing estates for which old and small buildings are being demolished.

The process of post-war reconstruction has been marked by an enormous number of uprooted and homeless people who urgently need basic shelter. This need has frequently been used as a justification for neglecting the seemingly less important cultural heritage. The misguided wish of donors to have rapid and visible results (as seen in the number of shelters) is connected with a lack of interest in supporting the restoration of heritage places which are of historic, cultural or architectural value. Thus during the reconstruction of war-damaged and destroyed settlements neither architectural nor urban traditions have been respected. The results are entirely new and strange townscapes, alienated from their natural and cultural environment.

Dramatic examples of such destruction are the villages in the Jahorina and Bjelasnica mountains, belonging to the municipality of Trnovo. They had been listed as examples of outstanding historic and cultural value, using traditional materials such as

stone and timber. During the war the population was expelled and all houses were destroyed. In the reconstruction process new materials and forms were introduced, totally differing from what was there before. The same situation was repeated in several other villages, eg Prusac, Teocak, Sapna.

(Information based on A. & F. Hadzimuhamedovic's report for the UNESCO conference "Cultural Heritage at Risk", Paris September 1999)



The destroyed centre of Mostar



The famous bridge of Mostar (1566) after its destruction in 1993



Mostar's Koski Mehmed Pasha Mosque before and after the war. Most of Bosnia's mosques were destroyed or damaged.



Temporary suspension bridge in Mostar (in the meantime replaced by a reconstruction of the old bridge)