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TO PRESERVE HERITAGE:
EXPIRIENCE

BOSNIA AND
HERZEGOVINA

A PILOT STUDY ON HERITAGE
PRESERVATION EXPERIENCES

*Sinsepe
gratitude to*

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To all volunteers and soldiers who
give themselves for victory and pro-
tection.

VITSCHÉ



Introduction

After legitimately declaring its independence from Yugoslavia through a national referendum in 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) experienced war and the genocide of Bosniaks, one of three main ethnic groups.

Perhaps the most important historical feature of BiH was the compact living in one space of different ethnic groups: Bosniaks (predominantly Muslims), Croats (predominantly Catholics), Serbs (predominantly Orthodox). Typical smaller towns and villages could have a Catholic church, a Muslim mosque, an Orthodox church, and sometimes a Jewish synagogue within meters of each other. Such evidence of the coexistence of religions was being violently eliminated. The independent status of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was supported by Bosniaks and Croats, did not satisfy a part of the Serbian population, which saw its future as part of a large mononational state. The illegitimate declaration of independence of territories, predominantly inhabited by Bosnian Serbs, which were later became known as Republika Srpska and the massive personal arming of the Serbian population in BiH only confirmed the seriousness of the Serbs' intentions.

The war in Bosnia led not only to a huge number of human casualties, but also to large-scale destruction of urban structures and cultural objects. Such events had a significant impact on the global experience of heritage preservation, because they allowed to verify in practice the effectiveness of the existing specialized international institutions and pointed out the shortcomings in the approaches to the protection of culture and rights to it. Today, almost 30 years after the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the process of restoring the destroyed cultural heritage remains one of the important tools for achieving the much-needed justice for Bosniaks and asserting their right to exist.

The experience of Bosnia and Herzegovina in heritage restoration is extremely valuable for Ukraine in the context of preserving culture and national identity. Knowledge about the activities of the international community and the role of local initiatives in the reconstruction of Bosnia and Herzegovina will help to set up the processes of effective cooperation with partners and achieve positive results in the restoration of cultural heritage in Ukraine.

CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The political crisis in Yugoslavia at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s led to a number of secessionist movements, the result of which was the breakup of Yugoslavia and the formation of independent states. The Serbian political elite saw in these processes a chance to create a mono-ethnic "Greater Serbia" and dominate the entire region, neglecting its multiculturalism. In 1991 Bosnia and Herzegovina (43% of Bosniaks, 31% of Serbs, and 17% of Croats)¹ initiated the process of separation from Yugoslavia by holding a legitimate national referendum. In response to this initiation, the territories of BiH which were inhabited mainly by Bosnian Serbs, declared their independence in 1992 and later became known as Republika Srpska. The official referendum finished with 99.7% of participants supporting the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, though turnout was mostly by Bosniaks and Croats, while Serbs largely boycotted the referendum.

However, the interests of the Bosnian Serbs were not limited to the territories of the self-proclaimed Republika Srpska. The proof of that was the mass arming of Serbian separatists and numerous riots in the territories of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1991 and at the beginning of 1992 with the aim of further destabilizing the political situation. The Serbian leadership fully supported the irredentist movement in the republics of the former Yugoslavia, which was presented in public as the defense of the Serbian population.

Lack of thorough understanding of the region only contributed to this narrative. Unfortunately, very little was known about the culture and history of Bosnia and Herzegovina before the war that began the day after the European community recognized the country's independence from Yugoslavia. This lack of knowledge helped the aggressor, the Army of Republika Srpska and Yugoslav People's Army, to justify genocide, ethnic cleansing, and the destruction of cultural, historical, and religious objects. In some places, the world media, covering the events of that time, called them a "civil war", and Bosnia and Herzegovina was referred to as a country that never existed.

Although the first massacre by Serbs on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina took place in Bijeljina on April 1, 1992, the official start of the war is considered to be the attack on Sarajevo on April 6, 1992. The siege of the capital is an important part of the war. It lasted about 3.5 years and is the longest siege of the city in recent history. Traces of urbicide, a deliberate destruction of the city, can be found in the capital even today - many buildings with traces of debris and bullets are a constant reminder of the period that took almost 14,000 lives².

After the signing of the peace treaty known as the Dayton Accords in 1995, the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina was divided into autonomous entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska.

The International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, the third tribunal in the world after Nuremberg and Tokyo, recognized the actions of the Serbs against Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats as planned genocide with the aim of destroying and erasing the historical traces of the existence of the mentioned ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Description and nature

Until recently, the destruction in Bosnia was considered the most extensive in Europe since the Second World War. The destruction of architecture and cultural markers in the fabric of cities worked as a tool of genocide, together with the terror of the population, numerous acts of violence, mass killings, and concentration camps. According to the data on the architectural heritage, it can be seen that religious objects suffered the greatest damage. Most of the buildings in this category belonged to the Muslim tradition and were erected during the Ottoman Empire. The next most damaged group consisted of the objects that demonstrated historical pluralism or bore signs of ancient coexistence of cultures. 70% of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina was occupied by the forces of Bosnian Serbs and the Yugoslav People's Army, a small fraction was occupied by the secessionist forces of Bosnian Croats³. Documenting the destruction and war crimes in these territories was extremely problematic. Due to the forced displacement of the local population, collecting testimonies even after the end of hostilities has become a difficult task both for the representatives of international institutions and for the government agencies and specialists. The highest circulation in the international media achieved the most notorious cases of destruction of heritage in the large multicultural cities: the destruction of the Viečnica library in Sarajevo and Stari Most in Mostar.

SARAJEVO: FABRIC OF THE CITY UNDER THE SIEGE

During the siege of Sarajevo, the Bosnian Serb army and the Yugoslav People's Army were committing uricide. Its goal was to make the life of the population impossible, to destroy the basic functions and infrastructure of the city. On average, Sarajevo was shelled 329 times a day⁴, and the total number of damaged dwellings exceeded 90,000⁵. Cultural institutions located in the city were also systematically targeted.

On May 17, 1992, the Sarajevo Institute of Oriental Studies suffered systematic bombardment with phosphorus munitions, as a result of which it completely burned down. Along with the collection of Islamic and Jewish manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, Hebrew, and Aikhamiado, the Ottoman City Archives and the Cadastral Register were also destroyed.

The National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina was located directly on the "sniper alley" and suffered about 500 shelling⁶, and the Museum of the Revolution located next door (now the National History Museum) was damaged as a result of combat right on the porch of the institution.

The destruction of the archive of the National and University Library in the City Hall (Vijećnica) became a special symbolic moment for the city and its citizens under siege. The library has been burning down for about 15 hours, approximately 1.5 million rare publications were destroyed⁷. The forces of the Bosnian Serbs, stationed on the slopes of the city, have been densely shelling the area around, so that the firefighters did not have the opportunity to extinguish the burning building. Then, in order to save at least something, rescuers together with librarians and other citizens formed a human chain and started passing each other books and archival materials to load the trucks. Reporter John Pomfret who was at the scene, asked the fire chief at the time, why he was risking his life so much, and was told, "Because I was born here, and they're burning a part of me." Subsequently, in 1993, Nihad Tsengik (art conservator and member of the Sarajevo office of the Preservation of Cultural Heritage) noted: "How to destroy people if you can't kill them all? You will destroy all material evidence of their existence. That is why mosques are destroyed. That is why the Institute of Oriental Studies was burned."



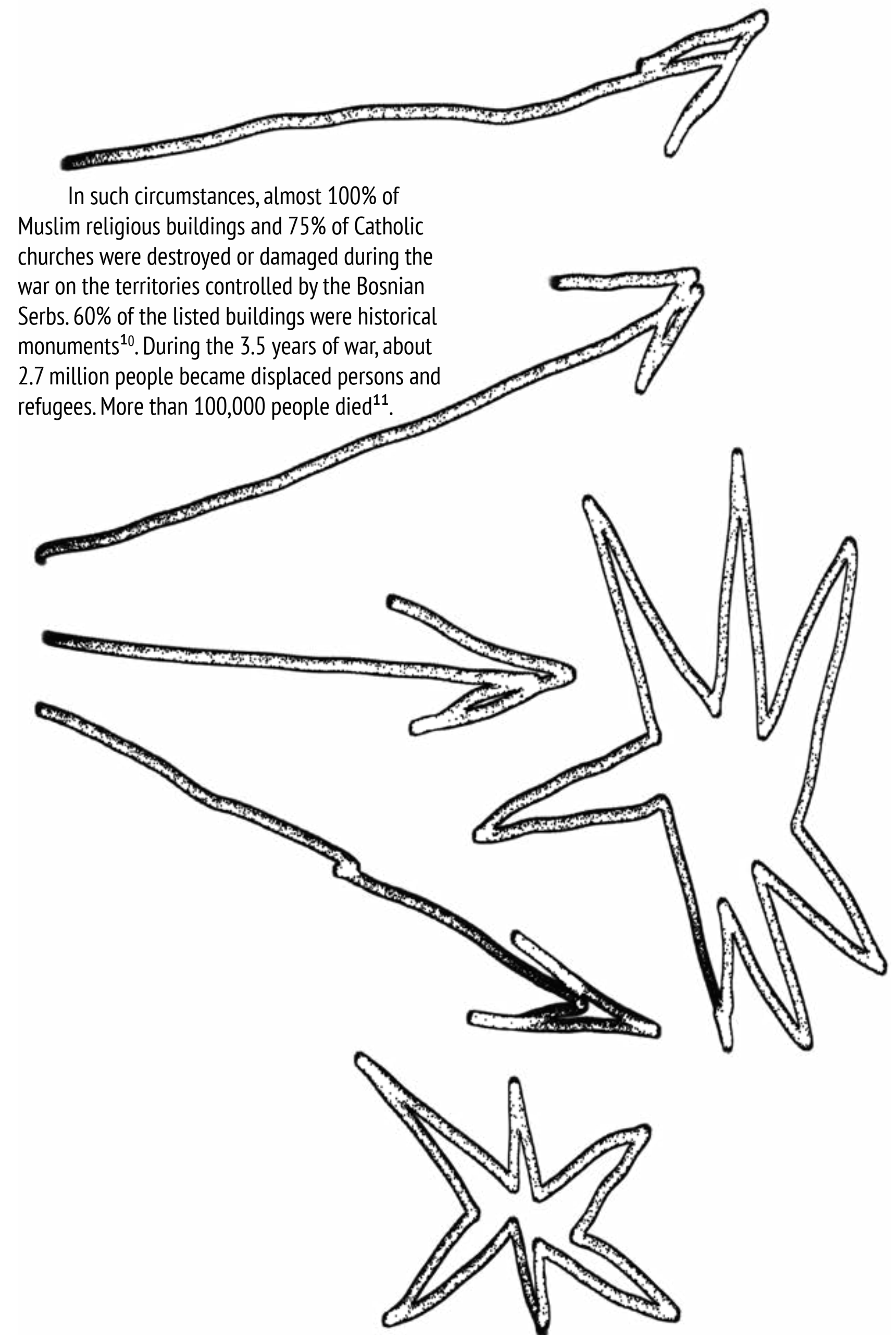
METHODS OF CULTUROCID

The methods of destruction of cultural objects varied. In Bosnian Serb-controlled regions, fragments of destroyed buildings were methodically removed to remote locations and hidden to complicate the process of finding, restoring, and proving that buildings existed. For example, the remains of the Aladža mosque, built in the 16th century in the city of Foča (before the occupation, about 40% of the city's population were Bosniaks), were found in 2000 on one of the mass graves of the murdered Bosniaks. This was not the only case when the remains of the destroyed heritage were buried after mass murders of Bosniaks in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

First of all, the army of Bosnian Serbs, together with the Yugoslav People's Army, destroyed the indicators of the presence of Muslim culture in captured settlements, simultaneously killing and deporting local population. Thus, their aim was to prevent Bosniaks from returning to their homes; because if the traces of culture are erased, the survivors have nowhere to return to. Such cases became particularly striking in pro-Serbian towns and villages occupied without military resistance. Today, there are settlements in which no Bosniaks live, although before the war Bosniaks made up a significant part of the population there.

Banja Luka, now the capital of the Republika Srpska, is a vivid example of the destruction of the architectural heritage of the Bosnian Muslims. The city's historical and cultural space was disrupted due to the dynamite blasting of the two largest mosques: Ferhadija and Arnaudija. The Banja Luka city radio broadcasted that Islamic fundamentalists who threw explosive devices into the mosque were responsible for the events. Accusations of Bosnian Muslims for destroying their own sacred architecture⁸ and other similar narratives were broadcasted everywhere. Similar attempts to accuse Bosniaks were also made by the military of unrecognized Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia - after the explosion of the famous Stari Most in the city of Mostar⁹ (the accusations were officially denied during a detailed investigation by the International Tribunal).

Further disruption of the historical and cultural space by Serbian forces during the war was the so-called "linguistic cleansing of toponyms" to resemble more Serbian names. Sometimes, after the destruction of sacred buildings, Orthodox buildings were built in their place; they also renamed the cities in their own way. For example, the previously mentioned "Foča" became "Srbinje" (Serbian city). Very often, the sites of destroyed monuments were used as parking lots, garbage dumps, or simply remained neglected.



In such circumstances, almost 100% of Muslim religious buildings and 75% of Catholic churches were destroyed or damaged during the war on the territories controlled by the Bosnian Serbs. 60% of the listed buildings were historical monuments¹⁰. During the 3.5 years of war, about 2.7 million people became displaced persons and refugees. More than 100,000 people died¹¹.

Action of the communities and Criminal Responsibility DURING THE WAR:

On May 25, 1993, having sufficient amount of evidence regarding the commission of war crimes by the Serbs, the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was established at the initiative of France. The ICTY played an important role in the development of the international humanitarian law, in particular in regards to its connection with cultural heritage. The Tribunal demonstrated how closely related the preservation of cultural and religious heritage is to human rights to use it, and how cultural heritage is inextricably linked to national identity. In 1994, the Council of Europe sent the European Community Monitor Mission (ECMM), and the deeply concerned United Nations sent a special UNPROFOR (UN Protection Forces) peacekeeping mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Often the workers of UNPROFOR and the International Red Cross became the only witnesses of the committed crimes, including the destruction of cultural heritage. However, in the future, UNESCO which is subordinate to the UN, and the Council of Europe became the objects of deserved criticism due to their inability to participate in the preservation of the heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

One of the key points was that no special missions were sent to the country during the war; employees of other UN-related missions were not engaged in collecting the evidence base of crimes committed against cultural heritage. The lack of material assistance for the conservation or preventive preservation of exhibits of movable and immovable heritage from attacks, as well as the lack of support for museums also came under criticism. And although the scale of destruction and loss in Bosnia gained worldwide publicity, the international institutions responsible for the preservation of heritage were not actively involved on the territory of the country until about 1994, and, therefore, were not recording war crimes against culture in sufficient volume.

Meanwhile, discussions arose in the international community around the following dilemma: "Is it appropriate to work on the preservation of cultural heritage at the time when people are suffering and need help?". It is paradoxical that this question was also heard from specialized organizations, whose mission should be aimed precisely at the preservation of heritage. Thus, Mevlida Serdarevich, the state adviser of the Institute for Heritage Preservation, repeatedly appealed to UNESCO to send a special security mission to protect heritage sites, but got a refusal every time due to the dangerous situation in the country. In her next address from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serdarević reprimanded: 'What could have happened if the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other similar organizations [which were already present and active in the country] behaved in the same way?'

The British NGO "Bosnia-Herzegovina Heritage Rescue" became one of the first foreign organizations, if not the only foreign organization, that came to the scene of events to protect heritage in 1993. Afterwards, non-governmental organizations "Heritage without Borders" from France (founded in 1992) and "Cultural Heritage without Borders" from Sweden (founded in 1995) undertook projects for BiH. Apart from the aforementioned organizations, until 1994 the direct preservation of heritage in Bosnia was handled mainly by local professionals and caring individuals.

POST-WAR REGULATION:

A turning point in the domain of preservation of cultural heritage was the development of Annex 8 to the Dayton Agreements, the signing of which in December 1995 marked the end of the war. According to the Annex, a Commission to Preserve National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina was established, and heritage itself was recognized as being as important as 10 other factors in building sustainable peace. The annex also obliged local authorities to protect cultural properties recognized as national monuments, as well as those provisionally listed and awaiting a decision on designation. However, the systematical implementation of Annex 8 was delayed for almost 7 years.

Post-war Regulation

SARAJEVO

In the period 1994-1996, the international community actively participated in the restoration of the city. A UN Special Coordinator for Sarajevo (SCS) was created to work on the damage assessment and reconstruction plan together with the BiH government. Also, working groups in 14 directions with representatives of various countries and international organizations were created. However, the coordination was not perfect. Those responsible for the restoration directed the available budget for basic needs, and the recovery of cultural heritage was identified as having a low priority.

Positive characteristics of the 1992-1996 recovery:

- registration of destruction, planning of post-war reconstruction and reformatting of the city for defense had a positive psychological effect on the city's residents;
- the preservation of cultural monuments, works of art, and musical instruments became a kind of protest against the aggressor;
- the Plan of Action "Restoring Life to Sarajevo" (1994-1996), created with the support of the Office of the SCS, addressed high priority needs and demonstrated support from the international community to the citizens;
- the participation of international representatives made it possible to reach a compromise in the reconstruction discussions between the conflicting parties;
- The Office of the SCS was engaged in coordination, which made it possible to regulate the unsuccessful implementation of projects, to create control over financial expenditures and, as a result, to promote institutional changes and reforms.

The international community failed to fully grasp the vision of city's residents regarding recovery priorities and did not want to change the chosen approach to prioritization. For them, it was a solution to the obvious problem "what is more important - human lives or the preservation of heritage?", although for the residents of the city, the problem, its solutions and priorities were somewhat different.

Since the adoption of Resolution 900 of the UN Security Council in 1994 on the restoration of life in Sarajevo, another 7 years have passed before the city began to implement a holistic approach to the restoration of cultural heritage.

Negative characteristics of the 1992-1996 recovery:

- not all of the promised funds allocated for recovery, actually ended up in the recovery charities;
- projects were implemented by many organizations for which there were no clear tender criteria, so it was difficult to coordinate their actions and carry out financial monitoring;
- the Office of the SCS, the BiH government, and local organizations could not establish effective cooperation from the very beginning. The work of the Office of the SCS was considered
 - non-transparent and ineffective, and the priorities were irrational and inappropriate. Local organizations insisted that the role of the Office of the SCS should go to the Directorate for Reconstruction and Development of Sarajevo - the local counterpart to the Office of the SCS. On the other hand, city experts were deprived of participation in planning and prioritization;
 - the Office of the SCS explained the exclusion of Bosnian experts from the projects by the risk of the emergence of corruption schemes and the lack of transparency of centralized management. In addition, the office workers had to comply with the resolution that Sarajevo should remain a multicultural city. Also, according to the
- office, due to the long war and the siege, Sarajevo experts could not keep up with the latest technological advances, and therefore were unsuitable to participate in project planning.

Reconstruction in 1996-2002 was characterized by complete dependence on the international aid. In 1996, the functions of the Office of the SCS were taken over by the World Bank (WB), the European Union (EU) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). A document on the restoration of Sarajevo was created, which contained 1,353 projects: 63 of them cultural, as well as the Action Plan for the Revitalization of Sarajevo City Greenery, because most of the trees were used as fuel during the siege of the city.

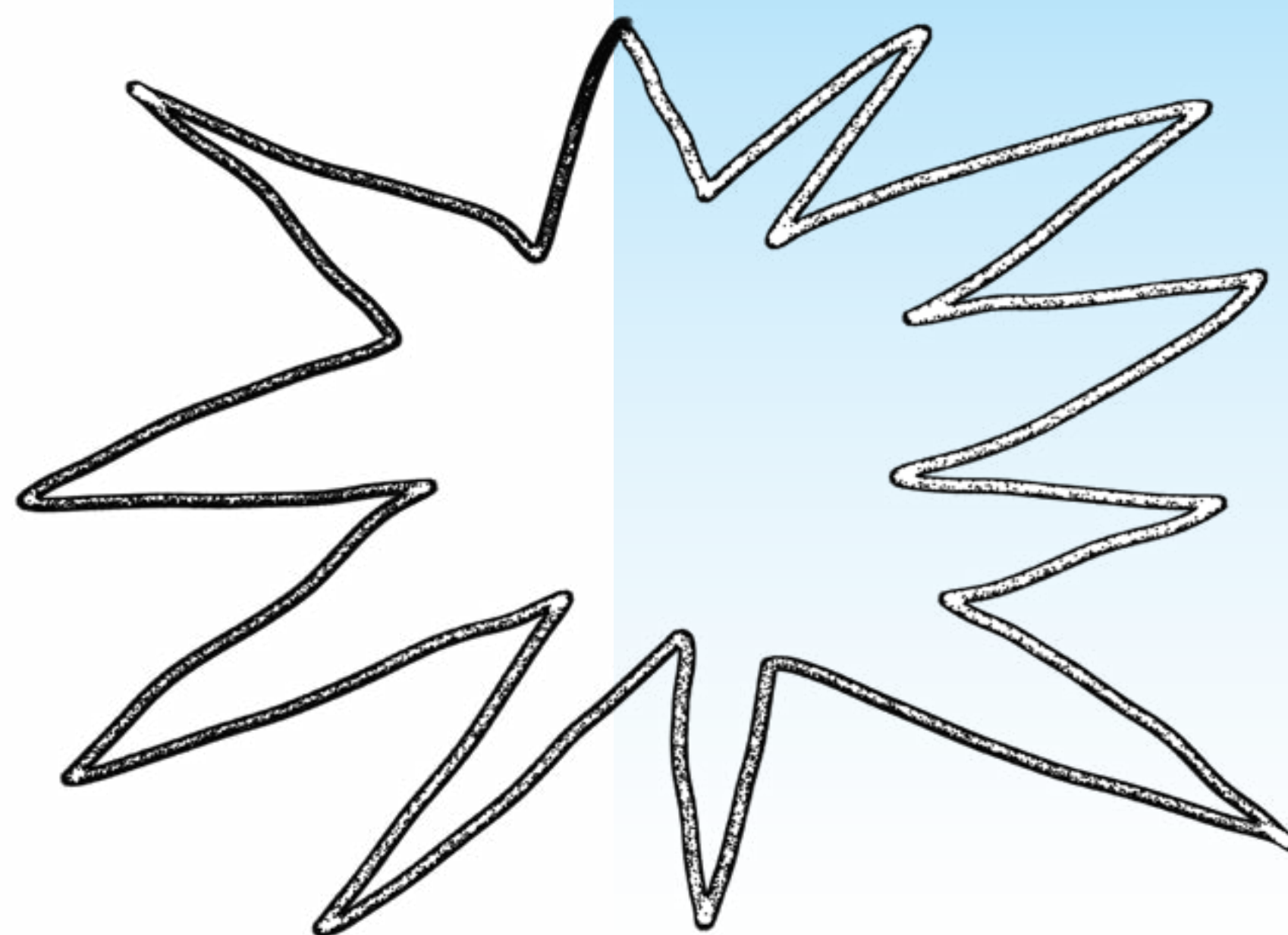
The Sarajevo Canton Development Strategy until 2015 was published and the Sarajevo City Plan until 2015 was revised and adapted to new circumstances. From the point of view of the private ownership, three strategic goals were noted: (1) restitution of the ownership and the tenancy rights of pre-war owners, which was the responsibility of the Commission for Real Property Claims of Displaced Persons and Refugees (CRPC) established as part of the Dayton Agreements; (2) privatization of property, within which concession procedures were defined (obviously, it was much more difficult to obtain private ownership of a cultural object due to restrictions on use and stricter conditions for obtaining permits); (3) denationalization.

The WB and EBRD managed the city's recovery in 1996-2002 and achieved better results than the Office of the SCS in the previous years. More than one billion dollars was allocated for 45 projects. The WB engaged local experts to determine priorities and effectively coordinated their work through the creation of Project Implementation Units (PIUs). The latter managed the implementation of projects and the financing of local institutions that were under the audit of the World Bank. Local bodies responsible for the project planning and implementation were also created in close cooperation with the World Bank (Mostar) and the European Commission (Sarajevo).

Local contractors were hired through tenders, so implementation chaos was mostly avoided; although due to the lack of anti-corruption mechanisms, the allocation of funds was still characterized by a high level of corruption.

In the reconstruction of 2002-2014, the World Bank transferred its responsibilities to the European Commission. The restoration took place within the framework of the European Union's Instrument of the Pre-accession Assistance (IPA). The Commission that monitored the implementation of Annex 8 of the Dayton Treaty on cultural heritage began its systematic work in 2002. The Federal Ministry of Physical Planning and the Institute for the Protection of Cultural-Historical and Natural Heritage of Sarajevo Canton were responsible for issuing permits for the conservation, restoration, reconstruction and adaptation of cultural objects. The Spatial Plan of Sarajevo Canton 2003-2023 was issued, which emphasized the need to restore the traditions and cultural identity of the city, as well as the need to preserve them. The budget of Sarajevo Canton was constantly allocating funds for the restoration of heritage in urban planning; individual projects were financed by the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

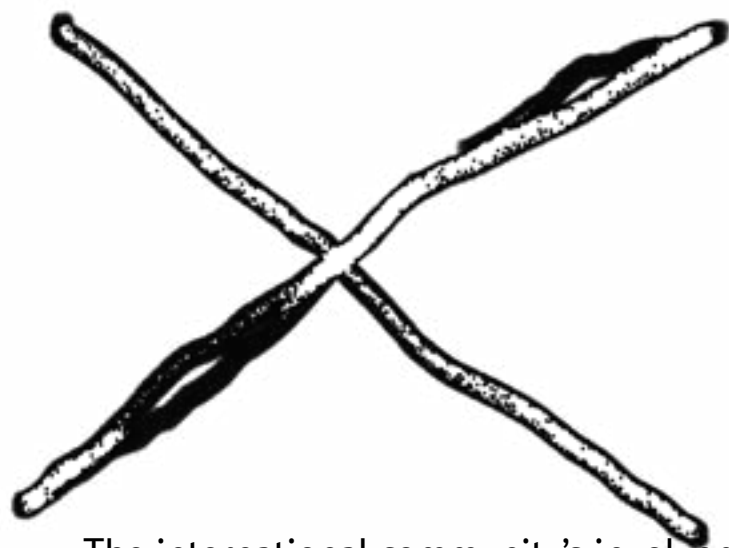
The development of Sarajevo after 2014 can be called a stage of development. There were ruins of cultural monuments in the city, for which no restoration projects or construction of new objects were planned. International investments enhanced the construction of modern shopping complexes and residential buildings, but new buildings were not always created in harmony with the city's urban continuity. Because of this, there was a certain tension between those who wanted to build up the destroyed areas with modern objects and those who wanted to preserve the ruins in memory of the wartime. Also, during this period, a structured relationship between donors and institutions were established, and standards for the protection of cultural heritage in Bosnia and Herzegovina were established. The role of society also increased, an active part of which increasingly advocated the preservation of cultural monuments.



Influence of local communities. In the project "Mjesne Zajednice" ("Local Communities") from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the implementation of which started in 2015 in various cities of the Sarajevo Canton, there were significant shortcomings: "Javne rasprave" ("public discussions"), as an official mechanism for the participation of local communities to discuss important issues, has been reduced to a formality. Citizens were often presented with pre-approved documents. Local communities lacked the legal, economic and political power to challenge decisions supported by municipal or cantonal authorities and influential investors who controlled the media and had political connections.

RESTORATION OF HERITAGE

The Internet and Heritage. The Internet became a widely used tool precisely during the times of ethnic cleansing and forced deportation. Thus, the surviving population created numerous platforms and sites where they conducted researched, archived data, and collected information about the lost objects of culture and history. Such resources have become digital sites of memory, heritage and identity, an attempt to keep alive all that was lost and taken away by war. This phenomenon demonstrates the need for reconstructions and restorations simultaneously for those who will return and those who will not. As mentioned earlier, the restoration of cultural and religious heritage has been recognized as one of the main tools for achieving justice and the return of refugees home.



The international community's involvement in heritage restoration in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the critical first ten years after the war was characterized by a narrow focus and a small number of large-scale projects. Attention was focused primarily on the main symbols of the destruction of culture in Bosnia: the Old Bridge in the city of Mostar, destroyed by the forces of the Bosnian Croats in 1993, and the Building of the National Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo (Vijećnica), destroyed by the forces of the Bosnian Serbs in 1992.

The restoration took place under the leadership of the World Bank with the coordination of UNESCO. The reconstruction of the Old Bridge was one of the first projects involving UNESCO in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the beginning of the war. It is noted that the process of restoration of these objects was under systematic pressure to prioritize speed over quality or maintaining an authentic look. Despite this, the public still felt involved in the process and respect for its own culture.

Among disadvantages - due to the aforementioned narrow focus of the international community, the historical cores of cities remained neglected, so residents were forced to repair their homes on their own, which negatively affected their characteristics and preservation of historical value.

In addition to several high-profile projects, the reconstruction of historical buildings was carried out (and financed) mostly by returnees, victims of ethnic cleansing, refugees, the Bosnian diaspora and other supporters. Their activities were hampered by the lack of control and support in matters of heritage recovery, prescribed in Annex 8 to the Dayton Agreements.

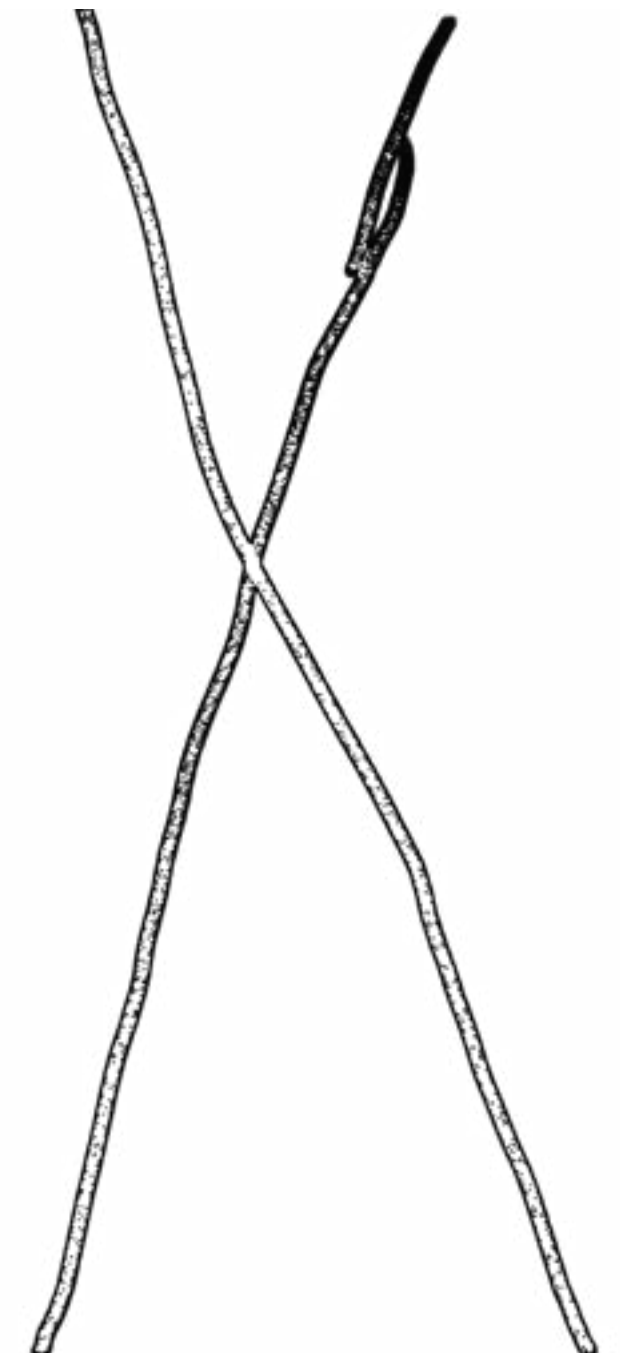
OPPOSITION TO THE RECOVERY

Despite the fact that the right to restore the cultural and religious heritage of ethnic groups was stated in the Annex 8, and compliance with this clause was to be monitored, until 2001 the actual implementation of the principles described in the agreement was unbalanced.

During this period, representatives of the Serbian and Croatian national groups actively tried to prevent the implementation of projects to rebuild the Bosniak's heritage. Preventing the restoration of historical and culturally significant sites was the main method of keeping the Muslim part of the population from returning home. At the sites of destroyed Muslim monuments, cases with the demand for archaeological excavations have become widespread - to prove the pre-existence of another ethnic and religious group and to encourage the restoration of its historical context. This significantly slowed down the work on the restoration of the monument. In particular, such cases are known in the cities of Banja Luka, Foča, Trebinje, Stolac, and Bijeljina. In addition, local authorities revoked permits for work and technical equipment from restoration companies. Attempts to change the topography of places, their landscape and symbolic meaning continued. Buildings of another religion with massive crosses were built on the sites of former mosques and minarets.

Following the Banja Luka incident in 2001, in which about 1,000 radical Serbs attacked 300 Bosniaks attending a groundbreaking ceremony for the reconstruction of the Ferhadija Mosque, the methods of implementing Annex 8 were revised. It was found that there had been an almost complete absence of its implementation up to this point. Later, the Commission to Preserve National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina was relaunched, which from now on included mainly Bosnian experts. The task of the Commission was to review the objects and nominate them for the status of a national monument. The categories included natural, historical, architectural, urban planning ensembles and objects of movable and immovable heritage.

A very important aspect of the work of the Commission and missions for the preservation and restoration of heritage was the formation of the most complete register of destroyed and damaged monuments. It was needed not only for the restoration, but also for the prosecution under the article of intentional destruction of cultural heritage (as a component of genocide and encroachment on national identity). But in a state of war, especially on the territories under the control of the Republika Srpska, the collection and processing of this data in its entirety was a too difficult task, which often couldn't be performed by anyone. Collecting data on the destroyed objects after the fact also became a difficult challenge - the local population, which could have offered information, were often deported during the war and not always returned home. But local and religious communities, cultural organizations and institutions still tried to make reports regarding the scale of destroyed and damaged heritage.



It should be noted that the collected information about the volume of destruction still remains approximate; in particular because the terms “damaged” and “destroyed” were interpreted differently by each organization. Consolidating these data into one register is a voluminous, scrupulous, and resource-intensive task.

The report of the specialized Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage, presented in 1995, is typically regarded as the most complete. Official registers of damaged monuments and the sacred architecture of Bosnian Muslims from the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) became helpful for collecting data for the reconstruction and recording of damage. This organization has also made a significant contribution in drawing attention to the problem of wartime heritage destruction, organizing many international exhibitions and other events on the subject. Non-governmental projects also played an important role. Here it is worth mentioning the printed materials (which later survived many reprints, distributions and presentations in the world) like “Mostar’92 - urbicide”, published in the city of Mostar in 1992, and “Warchitecture - urbicide Sarajevo”, issued in Sarajevo in 1993.



Damaged building in Mostar
in 2023
Photo: Kseniia Paltsun

The role of local initiatives and citizens

DURING THE WAR

A quote from Roger Shrimplin, then chairman of the East European Committee of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), after his personal visit as part of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Heritage Rescue (BiHHR) mission to Sarajevo in June 1993, is emblematic: "...resentment in Bosnia about the rest of the world not taking any interest in what happens to their ruined monuments is really very deep ... Our view is that people suffering is of first priority, never mind the monuments. But that is not their view. They take global destruction of their monuments very seriously indeed. It is time that their attitude about what is happening to their cultural heritage should be taken seriously by us."

Local heritage professionals have made it a priority to prove that the destruction is not an accidental result of military action, but is a specific target of this war, and have pushed for humanitarian aid for heritage sites, an example being support for historical residential complexes.

The employees of the museums were especially recognized by the fact that they united for the purpose of preserving the objects of movable heritage and the buildings of their organizations. Some museums and institutions were prepared in advance for possible wars or armed conflicts: materials for the preservation of exhibits, containers and underground storage became very useful. It is worth noting the employees of the National Historical Museum, who did not stop working during the siege, while being on the red line of the front (the so-called "sniper alley"). As an institution, they were also communicating with international organizations and were systematically compiling reports on the state of the movable heritage under their jurisdiction.

Using the example of Sarajevo, it can be argued that the preservation of heritage in wartime, and even more so during the siege, should be owed to local professionals, experts and caring citizens. Actions aimed at suppressing people's morale and their will to resist only strengthened the drive for struggle and cohesion around the heritage - cultural life flourished in courtyards, warehouses, on the fragments of ruins, in the interventions of abandoned places. Young people joined newly created local organizations for the preservation of heritage, formed independent registers of damaged objects and tried to prevent their further destruction. The thesis "Culture against war" became the main leitmotif.

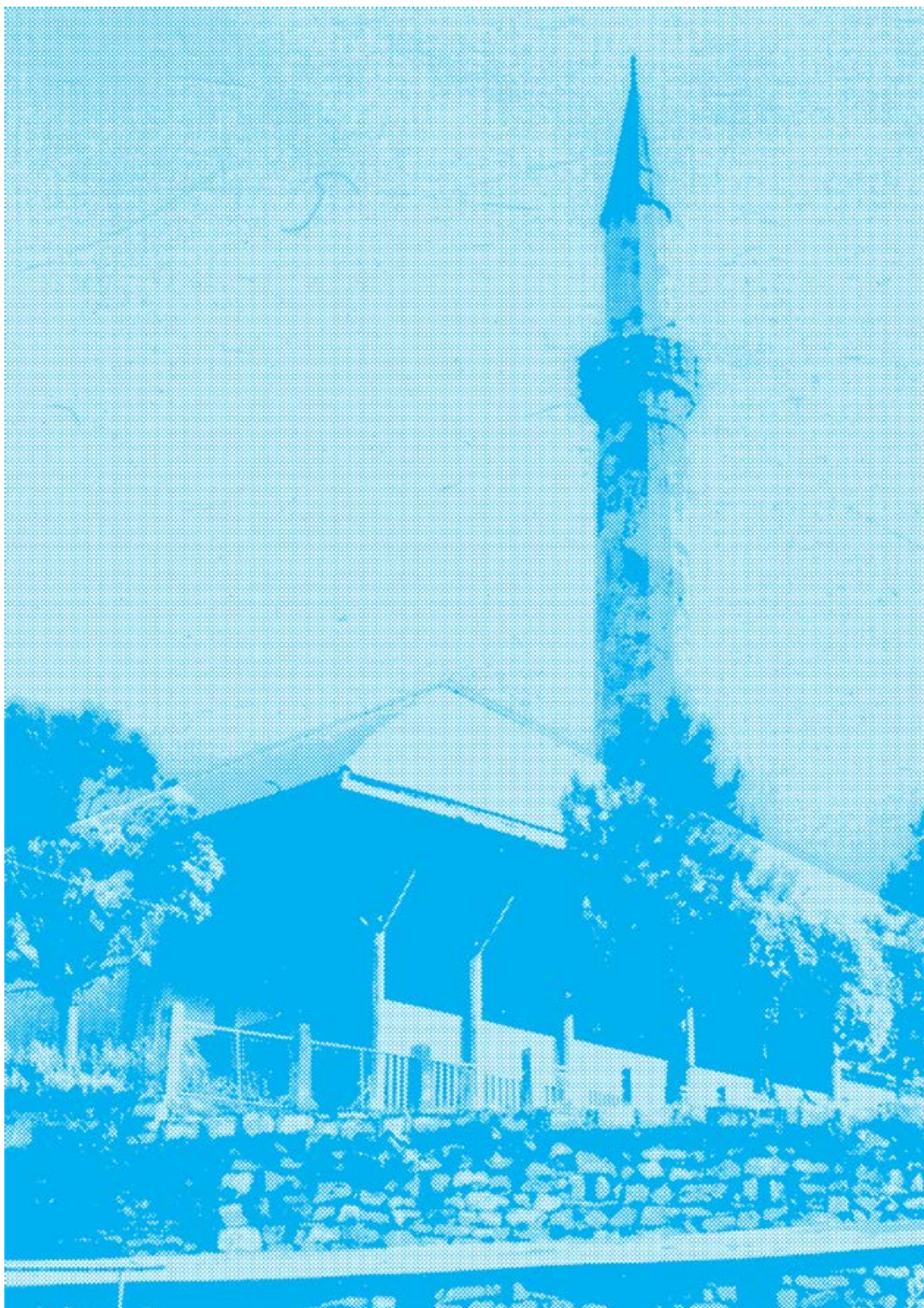
The cohesion around heritage and culture did not disappear even after the siege of the city. For example, in 2017, city residents organized an act of public resistance and signed a petition against the construction of a commercial building on the site of the archaeological finds of Tashli-Khan - a caravanserai built in the 16th century and destroyed by fire in the 19th.

IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD AND IN RE- CONSTRUCTION

It is striking that those who survived ethnic cleansing and genocide, upon their return focus first of all on the restoration of the destroyed symbols of their cultural and religious identity, rather than any other objects.

Even today, in some regions of the Republika Srpska there are towns and villages where the forcibly deported Bosnian Muslims have not returned due to personal safety concerns and the resistance of the local authorities and population. In the cities of Foča and Banja Luka, where Bosnian Serbs are the major ethnic group today, the restoration of historic mosques was delayed by the authorities and due to opposition from the local population. Sometimes the conflicts became aggressive in nature - the aforementioned case from 2001, in which a group of radical Bosnian Serbs encircled and assaulted a group of Bosnian Muslims and international officials to stop the restoration of the historic Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka, was a catalyst for the beginning of the proper implementation of Annex 8 to the Dayton Agreement, which was written specifically for the purpose of restoring the right to heritage of forcibly deported persons and victims of repression.

Private collections and foundations are currently restoring sacred buildings in cities where large communities of Bosniaks once lived (who today still cannot return to their native homes due to fear for their lives or other reasons). Such monuments are not used for prayers, but are important for people - to declare the right to their history, as well as to be buried at home in the future. Such objects were named "Memorial mosques".



The Careva Mosque in Foca before its destruction in the 1992-1995 Bosnian War
Photo: Gazi Husrev-beg Library



Careva Mosque in Foca in 2023
Photo: Kseniia Paltsun




The rubbish strewn site of the
Careva Mosque in Foca in 2000
Photo: Richard Carlton



The reconstructed Careva Mosque
in Foca in 2015
Photo: Richard Carlton

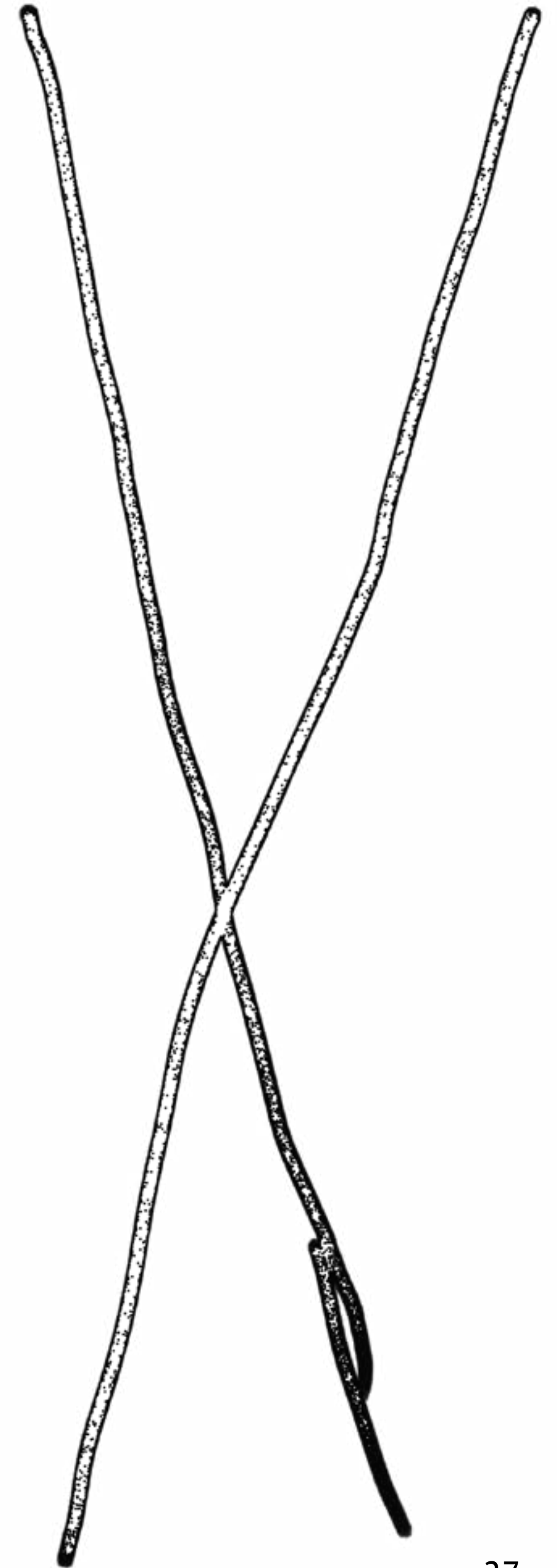
Restoration and effective solutions



The most effective solution in the domain of the recovery of Bosnia and Herzegovina was Annex 8 to the Dayton Agreements and the creation of the Commission to Preserve National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a result, the restoration was aimed at the search for justice and respect for human rights. Returnee communities sought help and appealed to the provisions of Annexes 6, 7 and 8 of the Dayton Accords to ensure that their destroyed and damaged cultural and religious property would be restored.

One of the first resolutions of the Commission was to determine the following: are there not yet restored monuments? Can non-existent property be evaluated? In a war-torn environment, next to destroyed historical landscapes and monuments, communities live in a state of virtual reality, which at the same time provides them with an alternative structure of reality. They talk about the lost sights as if they still remain untouched for them. This is why the Commission has introduced a new heritage category of 'sites and remains'.

Anyone can start the procedure of nominating the object for the status of a national monument. The response of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina to this opportunity demonstrated their awareness of the topic of cultural heritage and the importance of its preservation. It is also crucial that all discussions shall be open to interested parties, and any decisions shall be made public. The governments of the two Bosnian entities and the Brcko district are responsible for ensuring the technical, financial, legal and administrative conditions for the implementation of the adopted decisions.



Lessons

The primary steps during wartime are the preservation and control of objects of movable and immovable heritage. Humanitarian aid for heritage, which should be effectively distributed and directed by relevant institutions and bodies, is critically needed.

It is important to record and describe the destruction caused to heritage sites in the most universal form, which can then be used as a sufficiently reliable source to create a complete register, which should be used in future proceedings on war crimes.

To the previous one, it is also important to clearly define the terms “reconstruction” and “restoration” and differentiate between them in the legislation of the country, as well as establish effective mechanisms for the implementation of laws in the field of cultural heritage preservation. It is also necessary to define clear categories of damage - such as “destroyed” and “damaged” in order to prevent speculation on the concepts and their meaning for the benefit of individuals who are not interested in the reconstruction of heritage sites.

As it turned out, the expectations of practical help from specialized international organizations - such as UNESCO - are somewhat naive and futile. Their actions are limited to keeping registers, organizing training, inspecting and documenting damages for further restoration and the possibility of punishment for war crimes against culture.

Incremental and small-scale changes to the ruined urban landscape, supported by the restoration of key heritage sites, create a sense of security and belonging to a place. Large-scale development projects aimed at changing pre-war urban structures can heighten the sense of loss; especially in the context of such destruction, when culture and urban structure were a separate war target. It is important to develop objective methods and reflexive community planning to help a war-torn society.

Establishing effective coordination between local experts, local contractors and international donors is crucial and is the key to the success of recovery. International donors should monitor funding and tenders for contractors, but not select or prioritize specific recovery projects. Prioritization is the task of local experts and the public only. It is necessary to create a mechanism that allocates funds efficiently, one that does not slow down recovery, but also prevents the emergence of corruption schemes.

Since the recovery of heritage in Republika Srpska was not strongly supported by the international donors, the local population returning home could only rely on themselves and the Dayton Accords, which guaranteed their right to heritage restoration. Thus, thanks to successful reconstruction projects in the territory of Republika Srpska Annex 8 has shown its effectiveness.

The invaluable experience of Bosnia and Herzegovina primarily tells about the search for justice and its instruments. The experience gained with a terrible price demonstrates to the whole world the necessity of protection of human rights and the need of society for the practical preservation of cultural heritage, and also demonstrates its strong connection with national identity.

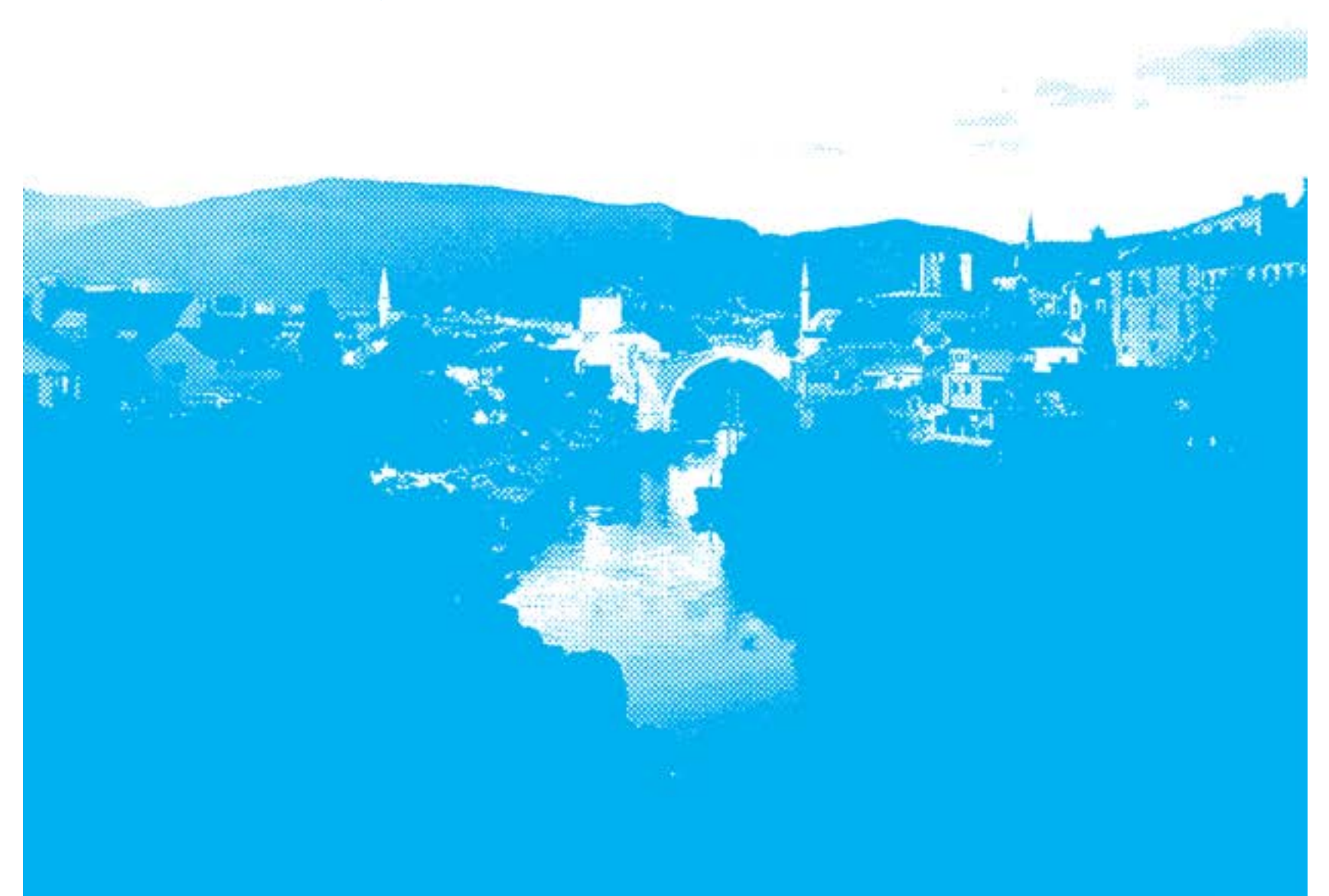
Destroyed Old Bridge in Mostar in 1993

Photo:Nigel Chandler/Sygma/Corbis



Landscape of Mostar in 2023

Photo:Illia Martyniuk



Links

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The Bosnian Book of Dead: Assessment of the Database (Full Report)

- * FROM THE ASHES: THE PAST AND FUTURE OF BOSNIA'S CULTURAL HERITAGE by **András J. Riedlmayer** (Harvard University)
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Useful materials and projects

- * [Cities after the war
Targeting history and memory](#)
- * [Bosnian Atlas of War Crimes by
the Research Documentation Center
\(RDC\)](#)
- * [Bosnian book of the dead by
the Research Documentation Center
\(RDC\)](#)
- * [Website of the Comission for
preservation of national monuments
in Bosnia end Herzegovina](#)

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