

PICTURE STORY

A future for Pristina's past

March 2006

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Destroy the Old – Build the New



The story of old Pristina since 1945 is a story of destruction and wasted opportunities.

In the early communist era, this destruction of the past was the result of deliberate policy. The slogan of "urban development" in the 1950s was "destroy the old, build the new". As one book from 1959 noted proudly:

"Until the end of World War II, Pristina was a typical *Oriental town*. After the Liberation following the Second World War, Pristina experienced rapid development in every respect, and it is now day-by-day developing into a modern town. Old shop fronts and other shaky old structures are quickly disappearing to make room for fine, tall, modern-style buildings."

The "shaky old structures" which were demolished included the covered bazaar, one of the largest in the region; the spiritual centre of the town, comprising a mosque, the main Catholic Church and the Synagogue; an old Ottoman Hamam and a large number of Ottoman town houses.

But unlike elsewhere in Europe (including, for instance, Sarajevo or Skopje) no attempt was made to preserve the historic centre of what had for centuries been one of the most important towns in the region

'In this city without a river
I stand as a stranger,
I take revenge on time with a glass of raki
I'm thinking of you'

'Hero of a city without a river', song by Migjen Kelmendi

Even the natural geography of the old town was hidden. In the 1950s, Vellusha River, flowing down from the Germia hills in the East, was covered up. In the late 1970s also the Pristina River was covered, flowing West of the old town centre. The two rivers were simply turned into a sewage system. By the late 1980s Pristina had become a town without rivers and a town without a visible past.

A legacy of destruction



Communism was responsible for a programme of planned destruction of cultural heritage in Kosovo. A policy of neglect under Milosevic was followed - in 1998/1999 - by a campaign of physical destruction of cultural monuments across Kosovo. In Pristina town, the Llapi mosque was set on fire and the collection of manuscripts of the Islamic Community perished in flames.

On 9 June 1999, the Serbian authorities took the archive of the Kosovo Institute for the Protection of Monuments to Belgrade. No records have been returned since. The Kosovo Museum is also waiting for the return of 1,247 archaeological and ethnological exhibit pieces taken to Belgrade for an exhibition.

The period *since* 1999, however, did not reverse this negative trend. Negligence and the legacy of destruction continued. In August 2000, the Association of Architects of Kosovo published a letter urging action:

'As a result of the destruction as well as illegal construction the historical heart of the city and objects of architectural and urban value, which reflect our entire cultural heritage, are being badly affected.'

In March 2004, a 19th century Iconostasis and the roof of the Serb Orthodox Saint Nicolas church were burned by a mob.

Kosovo Law on Protection



In 1977 the Assembly of the Autonomous Socialist Province of Kosovo passed a 'Law on the Protection of Cultural Monuments.'

The law stresses the importance of protecting cultural heritage. It makes clear that the primary responsibility lies with the Institute for the Protection of Monuments (article 4). The Institute is to 'take measures for the protection of cultural monuments', including maintaining a registry (article 27). The law notes that for any action concerning cultural monuments or their immediate surrounding permission from the Institute is required (article 11).

There are clearly defined sanctions included in the law. Article 32 notes that 'the Institute will be abolished if it does not implement the activities for which it is established'. Article 97 states that 'anyone who damages or destroys a cultural monument is going to be punished with a penalty or one year in prison.'

The 1977 law is not discriminatory. It is not a law from the Milosevic era. No new law on the protection of cultural heritage has been passed until now to replace it. This means that for the last six years this was and remains the applicable legislation.

Kosovo List of Monuments



On the basis of the 1977 law, a list of 426 'protected' cultural monuments across Kosovo was drawn up. This 'Kosovo List' is not a fair representation of *all* of Kosovo's heritage. It includes 106 Orthodox Churches but only 42 residencies in the whole of Kosovo. There is only one architectural ensemble that is protected. The list ignores all architectural heritage of the past century.

Orthodox churches and church ruins	106
Archeological monuments	96
Residences	42
Kullas (traditional stone houses)	28
Orthodox monasteries and ruins	23
Mosques and mosque ruins	23
Historical monuments	22*
Clothes, books, other objects	19
Cemetaries	16
Tekkes and Muslim mausoleums	10
Icons/orthodox iconostasis	7
Bridges	7
Hammams	6
Fountains	4
Catholic churches	3
Bazaars	3
Clock towers	2
Mills	2
Ensembles	1
Others	6
TOTAL	426

*In 2003, the last historical building was added to the list.

Pristina List of Monuments



In the town of Pristina there are 21 protected cultural monuments.

For a European capital this is a *very* short list; but if one takes a closer look at the list of 21 'protected cultural monuments' in Pristina town, the picture gets even worse: one building under protection has been destroyed to make room for an office building of PTK (UCK St. 66). Two archeological sites are covered up and cannot be visited. The Orthodox Iconostasis and the Islamic Collection of Manuscripts have been burned.

In the last months, ESI and IKS tried to locate all 21 protected cultural monuments in Pristina town and assess their condition. This was not easy. There are different lists used by the Kosovo Institute for the Protection of Monuments and the Pristina Institute, the two main institutions responsible for protecting cultural heritage. Addresses on the lists no longer correspond with street names. Several monuments have disappeared altogether.

1. Sultan Mehmet al-Fatih Mosque
2. Pirinaz Mosque
3. Bazaar Mosque
4. Jashar Pasha Mosque
5. St. Nicolas Iconostasis
6. Archbishopric Houses
7. Clock Tower
8. Fountain
9. Jewish Cemetary
10. Foundations of the Old Hamam
11. Great Hamam
12. 'Tjerrtorja' Archeological Site
13. Kosovo Museum
14. Kosovo Institute for the Protection of Monuments
15. Private residence/ UCK St.
16. Emin Gjik Museum
17. Hynlyer House
18. Private residence/Tanasko Raisic St.

19. 'Hivzi Sylejmani' City Library/UCK St.
20. Private residence/M. Popovic St.
21. Collection of Manuscripts of the Islamic Community

Starting in 2000 there have been many calls by international and Kosovar experts to put together a new inventory of Kosovo's cultural heritage. Substantial funds have been spent on identifying close to 3,000 monuments and sites, developing a database and training staff in the responsible institutions. Preparing an inventory of heritage sites was also one of the standards to be met.

However, until today there is no published inventory. No institution appears to be following up what is actually happening to the monuments that are legally protected. While looking for 76 buildings listed on Pristina's post-war inventory, IKS analysts found that 19 had disappeared since 2001.

European Standards



'Architectural heritage constitutes an irreplaceable expression of the richness and diversity of Europe's cultural heritage'

Granada Convention (1985)

In October 1985 European Ministers gathered in the Andalusian town of Granada and passed a resolution calling for "a process of active conservation" of European cultural heritage. They underlined:

"that each country is responsible for the protection of the architectural heritage *within its own territory*, whatever its historical, cultural or national origin, and that the conservation of this heritage is *a matter of general European importance*."

The signatories to the Granada Convention undertook to protect their cultural heritage; to maintain inventories of what is to be protected; and to ensure that the revitalisation of historic towns and neighbourhoods would be a priority for urban planning.

The Granada conclusions stress the importance of 'extending the categories of assets due for protection to cover examples of vernacular, rural, technical and industrial architecture and nineteenth and twentieth century architecture'. They stress that the 'conservation and enhancement of the cultural heritage should be based on active citizen participation'. Cultural heritage can only survive if it is appreciated by the public at large.

Over the years, a set of European conventions and resolutions – including the 1975 European Charter of Architectural Heritage, the Granada Convention (1985), the European Convention on the Protection of Archeological Heritage (1992) and the Convention on Landscape (2000) - added up to a coherent and detailed body of commitments and standards.

These should be the standards by which the outside world and Kosovo citizens measure the performance of Kosovo institutions.

A Future for Kosovo's Past



There is an urgent need to change course and reverse decades of destructive policy towards the past. It is urgent for three main reasons:

1. Unless the destruction of Pristina's (and Kosovo's) cultural heritage is halted now, there will be little to preserve for future generations;
2. Unless the Serbian government returns the archive of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, its position of being concerned for cultural heritage in Kosovo is not credible;
3. Unless the Kosovo government and civil society demonstrate that the commitment to European standards is backed up by the will to **enforce** these standards, Kosovo's position for status talks on cultural heritage is not credible.

Recommendations



Based on our ongoing research, and the recommendations already made by numerous national and international experts in this field, ESI and IKS recommend the following:

1. **For the Kosovo Assembly** to declare its full support to European standards in the area of protection of heritage, and to officially embrace the acquis of the Council of Europe in this field;
2. **For the Kosovo Assembly** to hold hearings with all relevant institutions (the Ministry of Culture, the Kosovo Institute, the Pristina Institute, the Kosovo Museum, Pristina Municipality and others) to establish clearly what would need to be done to effectively enforce European standards;
3. **For the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Spatial Planning** to hold a high-level seminar in Pristina soon to underline the importance given to this issue across Kosovo, to discuss concrete ways forward to implement a National Integrated Conservation Strategy for Kosovo, and to give strong political backing to all institutions to enforce the laws;
4. **For the Kosovo Institute for the Protection of Monuments** to complete and publish its existing inventory of protected monuments; to initiate court cases in all instances in which the applicable law on the protection of monuments is violated; and to work closely with the municipality in the field of urban planning to ensure effective protection;
5. **For the UN** to lend its full support to Kosovo initiatives in this area, including the passing of a new and modern law on cultural heritage; and to ensure that the KTA and its privatisation strategy is also respectful of Council of Europe standards and the conservation strategies of relevant Kosovo institutions;
6. **For Kosovo civil society** to raise the profile of this issue, and explain to the broader public the economic and social significance of effective national heritage conservation;
7. **For the international community** to put pressure on Belgrade to return the archives of the Kosovo Institute for the Protection of Monuments as a preliminary step to the opening of the status talks on this issue.

About the Pristina Project



DIE ERSTE österreichische Spar-Casse
Privatstiftung

For the past months, ESI together with IKS, a newly founded Kosovo think tank, has been doing research on the socio-economic fabric of Pristina. As part of this project, IKS and ESI analysts have met with policymakers, businessmen, civil society and municipal officials to explore development trends and look at issues ranging from Pristina's cultural heritage to economic development and urban planning.

The Pristina project is part of a wider *New Economic Geography of the Balkans* project in partnership with the Austrian Erste Bank Privatstiftung. As a result of this work, two reports will be published shortly.

The first report will take a close look at Pristina's identity and cultural heritage protection in Kosovo. In light of the final status negotiations in Vienna, the issue of cultural heritage will be of great importance in the near future.