Divided Cities/Contested States


Post-conflict reconstruction in Mostar:
Cart before the Horse

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Divided Cities/Contested States Working Paper Series
www.conflictincities.org/workingpapers.html

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Editorial note

Biographical note
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ABSTRACT

Thanks to its duration and boldness, the post-war reconstruction of Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina, will ultimately assume a prominent place in the professional literature alongside Beirut’s Solidere project and Warsaw’s historic core replication - but whether or not the final assessment of its success will be flattering is difficult to surmise. Though extraordinary for its scope, complexity, and symbolism, the efforts that revitalised Mostar’s 16th century district in architectural terms were rarely synchronised with parallel rehabilitation programs in the political and social domains. The result is a lop-sided recovery in which a city regained its landmarks - most notably a facsimile reconstruction of the renowned Old Bridge - without regaining the public institutions that would provide income and reduce communal vulnerability. Making matters worse, only 30% of today’s Mostarians lived in the city prior to the conflict. How might the foreign funds that poured into Mostar have been better spent? According to which priorities were the funds expended? Though large flows of free foreign capital entered the city in the decade following the end of hostilities (1995-2004), lack of coordination and control resulted in reconstruction marred by arbitrariness, superficiality, and minimal capacity upgrade.

Key words: Mostar, post-partition, reconstruction, Stari Most, divided city

Overview

In a situation where coincident symptoms appear to be causes, a person acts to dispel the symptoms. But the underlying causes remain.

In the minds and imaginations of foreign interveners, it was widely believed that a facsimile reconstruction of Mostar’s fallen Old Bridge would heal social wounds by physically reuniting former antagonists and literally stitching together a divided city: Croats on the western side and Bosniaks on the eastern side. Unfortunately, few local citizens found much solace in the realisation of this project, underwritten with a special World Bank loan and monitored by UNESCO, since the front line, and the true fault line separating Muslim and Catholic communities, was the Austro-Hungarian Bulevar Narodne Revolucije lying 200 yards west of and parallel to the Neretva River. Fixation on the Old Bridge as an emblem of recovery proved to be irresistible for foreign investors, but that project proved to be relatively unimportant in relation to the ongoing process of long-term social reconciliation in Mostar.

This paper will critique two basic assumptions guiding foreign NGOs in post-war Mostar: that the repair of metaphorical bridges leads inexorably to the repair of real ones, and that the satisfaction of emotional needs should take precedence over practical needs in the wake of war trauma. It will also look at the challenges facing Mostar now that foreign
funding has dried up. It will take for granted that physical reconstruction should, from the outset, propel community development rather merely signify it. The authors will rely heavily on their own experiences in the city between 1994 and 2005 in addition to the writings of Fred Cuny, which emphasised post-conflict rehabilitation as a potential liability when divorced from a social development context.

By way of a disclaimer, this article does not intend to take a scholarly approach to its subject matter. It contains reflections from two professional practitioners who have watched the reconstruction process unfold in Mostar for a number of years. These observations are grounded in personal experience with physical rehabilitation work in the city and in no way represent a complete assessment of what has happened or not happened in Mostar. They are intended to raise questions about who scripted the reconstruction process, according to which motives, how successfully they collaborated with local actors, and whom the work benefited.

**Framing the argument**

In many ways it feels wrong to criticise the reconstruction efforts that have unfolded in Mostar since 1994. Under conditions so bleak, and in response to violent harassment so undeserved, there is almost no constructive response that should not be applauded - especially by outside observers. Going further, it seems unfair to hold Mostarians accountable for observing professional standards in their post conflict period when many relatively healthy cities in wealthier, less troubled political climates fail to meet the same standards. About the time the Mostar Bridge was destroyed, Fred Cuny wrote of Africa:

…there is still a widespread lack of understanding about how to solve many recurring problems…we've known for years that famines are economic problems and that food aid has very little impact -- yet most relief agencies are totally unaware of the vast body of research on the topic and continue to repeat the same mistakes…

Nonetheless, this paper will briefly attempt to point out some of the weaknesses in the reconstruction effort that unfolded in Mostar since 1995. The thrust of this criticism is certainly not directed at the citizens and local professionals in Mostar, whose ability to shape the reconstruction programme were severely constrained by a lack of bargaining power and relevant experience. Rather, it is intended to highlight strategic errors and false assumptions imposed by representatives of the “international community” self-appointed to administer cultural heritage rehabilitation projects in a war zone - white collar gypsies arriving in Land Rover caravans.
The title of this paper encapsulates its central argument: many of the underwriters and strategists for post-conflict reconstruction in Mostar mistook symptoms for causes, and symbols for substance. As a result, the city remains far less prepared to deal with its ongoing post-conflict redevelopment than it might have been if a different approach had been implemented with the same time, money, and human resources. The title’s “horse” might be associated with the social and political forces that propel long-term, positive forms of local development. The “cart” might signify the physical manifestations of such development: new and rebuilt structures, new and revitalised businesses, refugee returns, integrated institutions, freedom from physical intimidation, etc. It hardly needs to be mentioned that these things are created and then pulled along - perhaps with assistance from the whips and harnesses of government - by vigorous, lasting, harmonised growth.

In the ten years following Mostar’s wartime traumas, probably the most glaring and problematic instance of addressing symptoms in advance of causes was reconstruction of the Old Bridge. A facsimile of the Old Bridge appeared over the Neretva River long before the re-emergence of social conditions that might re-affirm its pre-war meanings. This reconstructed Old Bridge must be cold comfort to the residents of Mostar. Many of them are aware that their city is far from achieving the tolerance it possessed before the outbreak of hostilities. If that piece of architecture ever stood for social harmony and solidarity across ethnic lines - and this may be easily debated - it does not stand for them now. Rather, it seems to represent a wish, or at best an opportunity, for these conditions to recur.

By the autumn of 2004, after the glow of the new Old Bridge dedication ceremony, Mostarians were left with a new problem compounding the struggles they inherited from the war. They must work backwards from symbols to actualities. No speculation will be made here about how such a trick might be accomplished by the newly unified municipal government in Mostar, since this subject is beyond the purview of the authors and dependent upon unknown circumstances. Instead, this article will examine a few of the decisions that punctuated the recovery process in Mostar over last decade, leading the city to its current conundrum. Again, it is important to note that many sound and sustainable projects undertaken during this period have contributed to the city’s long-term prospects for healthy development. These will be consciously overlooked in order to draw attention to the errors that might have been avoided in Mostar and should be avoided elsewhere in the future.

Context

In order to provide some context for this argument, the impacts of conflict and professional responses to its devastations in Mostar will be briefly noted below.
Several thousand residents of Mostar died as a result of interethnic hostilities between 1992 and 1995, including combatants and non-combatants. During the same period, as many as 40,000 prewar residents left the city altogether in order to avoid the violence, about 10,000 male residents were forcibly detained in local prisoner camps and more than 30,000 remained in the city but were compelled to leave their homes. In eastern Mostar between 1992 and 1995, supplies of food, heating fuels and medicine were consistently low and irregular, leading to a predictable set of health problems. Citizens collecting drinking water along the eastern bank of the river attracted sniper fire from the surrounding hills, and they were also likewise threatened crossing bridges or traversing open spaces on essential errands. Though the number of Mostarians physically injured or severely traumatised by the violence is not known, it can be assumed that few local families emerged from the war unscathed and residing in their pre-war homes.

The costs of violence and separation between rival ethnic groups in Mostar are more neatly calculated in material terms. The physical destruction or inaccessibility of many schools, offices, homes, factories, and public infrastructure in Mostar during the course of hostilities left its citizens in the eastern sector struggling for bare survival and economic life in the western sector dominated by illicit trade. Thousands of immigrants forced to abandon surrounding villages arrived in the city, occupying empty apartments and straining the already overburdened infrastructure.

As a regional capital and one of Bosnia's major manufacturing cities, Mostar was harshly affected by general lapses in national productivity during the war. Economic growth rates were halved with the outbreak of interethnic hostilities, dipping towards -27% by the end of 1993, while the adjusted gross domestic product fell precipitously from $13.1 billion in 1990 to $6.2 billion in 1993. Theft, expulsion, and bombardment generated massive property losses. Hundreds of Bosniak families from western Mostar were obliged to abandon their homes with what they could carry, or less, leaving the bulk of their possession behind for looters or black market profiteers.

For purposes of defence, the Bosniak residents protecting the historic eastern portion of the city against attacks by the Croatian paramilitary forces established a front-line along the Austro-Hungarian Boulevard approximately 100 meters west of the river. This line divided the city the physically and functionally from May 1993 until the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords in late 1995. It can be easily argued that the city remains somewhat segregated along this line up to the present, though diplomats are quick to point out that full legal and administrative integration was achieved several years ago through the sustained efforts of
the High Representative.
Mostar after bombardment (top to bottom): map of divided Mostar 193-95, Old Bridge falling
1993, aerial of historic core showing extent of destruction, front line apartments still in ruin, front line graffito. (credits: authors’ archive).

Mostar’s residents relied almost exclusively on foreign donations and expertise to jump-start the process of post-conflict recovery. As in Belfast, concepts of even-handedness, balance, and neutrality remained inapplicable for years following the end of hostilities. Because municipal authorities on both sides of the city generally refused to cooperate, political consensus long remained an imaginary concept feebly maintained for public-relations purposes. The burden of post-war revitalisation lay most heavily on eastern Mostar, where grossly disproportionate physical and psychological punishment had been meted out to Muslim residents living within the historic Ottoman core centred on the Old Bridge. Bifurcated since the city’s physical division in 1993, the two halves of Mostar functioned as separate, autonomous and redundant cities throughout the first decade of post conflict rehabilitation.

Physical reconstruction activities would have proceeded in a similarly bifurcated manner if municipal authorities in the eastern sector had possessed the human and material resources required to complete such an undertaking alone. These resources were lacking. This fact forced the city to solicit foreign support and led directly to a dilemma. On one hand, lingering resentments between rival ethnic communities made even superficial acts of cooperation across the city’s ethnic boundary very unlikely. Up until late 2005 and beyond, many urgently needed legal reforms were postponed in the city due to a chronic - and quite purposeful - lack of coordination. The odds of implementing a collaborative physical revitalisation agenda grew worse in light of the fact that a majority of buildings in urgent need of attention were on the eastern side of the city.

On the other hand, external funding agencies and foreign experts insisted that all projects relying on foreign subsidy should be undertaken in a balanced manner and with shared responsibilities. Because they were obliged to demonstrate impartiality in their local political relationships, they found it difficult to accept the fact that relatively strict functional and administrative divisions persisted long after the regional conflict was ended by the Dayton Accords.

Pleased by the prospect of contributing to a lasting peace, foreign donors expected their contributions to simultaneously provide material support for physical rehabilitation and catalyse vital processes of social and political reconciliation in Mostar. Accordingly, almost every foreign agency to invest in the city’s physical reconstruction conditioned its involvement on the demonstration of interethnic cooperation within the municipal
government. Mostar’s politicians obliged, side-stepping high priority projects that upset foreign donor’s sense of inter-ethnic equilibrium.

These manoeuvres grew increasingly sophisticated. Local protocols were developed to provide assurances to foreign donor agencies, and as Mostar’s rival politicians learned to shake hands and assert their commitment to partnership with increasing persuasiveness, purses in Europe and the United States opened. For example, the European Union was quick to channel more than $100m into post-war recovery, with roughly equal investments on both ‘sides’ of the city. While the resulting reconstruction projects brought substantial relief and improvements, the disbursements were undertaken within a weak and imbalanced planning context. Did the EU recognise these weaknesses? Probably, but the need to balance its ethnic balance sheets may have outweighed such reservations.

Support also materialised from quasi-governmental and non-profit organisations like the European Union, UNESCO, War Child, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, the World Monuments Fund, The World Bank, and others. Encouraged by the ease of initial progress, many of these agencies went on to focus their efforts on a highly emblematic and historic architectural landmarks located within the Ottoman core. A number of rehabilitation projects undertaken in the historic core addressed structures of secondary historical importance and primary functional value - schools, libraries, banks and office buildings. An excellent example from 1995 is the Pavarotti Centre music school, established by War Child in the heart of the historic core for the benefit of young Mostarians of all ethnicities. This project achieved three key objectives: local institution building, local capacity building, and restoration of a severely damaged historic structure.

Meanwhile, the majority of foreign investments were poured into highly emblematic and monumental structures. The funding appeared in relatively large quantities: in Mostar the annual per capita investment for reconstruction in the decade following the war averaged $2,500, twice the average for Bosnia-Herzegovina as a whole and about nine times what was provided by the Marshall Plan fifty years prior. The natural centrepiece for these efforts was a facsimile reconstruction of the Old Bridge, completed in the early part of 2004 and formally dedicated in July of that year. This was a motivational rehabilitation strategy that resulted in a kind of virtual rather than actual recovery, in part because the Old Bridge could not signify what many onlookers wanted it to.
The nature and history of this dividing line in Mostar is well known to anyone who has studied the conflict or lived in the city. Still, the temptation to misinterpret the symbolic meaning of the reconstructed Old Bridge proved irresistible to many foreign diplomats and bureaucrats who found themselves in a position to determine how the reconstruction effort would proceed with respect to objectives and priorities on the ground. Making matters worse, many journalists, even as late as 2000, failed to check the most fundamental facts; one described the Old Bridge as “once a military front...now a dividing line between the two ethnic groups” – erroneous on several counts.

Donors, decision-makers, and local politicians faced challenges of terrible difficulty. How to integrate school system when parents will not allow their children to share a classroom with peers from the “other side”? (It is probably easier to rebuild separately.) How to rejuvenate an industrial sector when foreign investors could not stomach the risk and the banking system was shattered? (It is probably easier to bank on tourism.) How to stitch together the front line and provide housing for former residents scattered across the globe? (It is probably easier to rejoin the banks of the River with a perfect copy of one of the world’s most inspired bridges and hope that the rest...materialises.) Most foreign investors left Mostar immediately following the gala dedication of the reconstructed Old Bridge, and even the outlines of an ongoing plan are blurry.
Triumph of emblems, and the alternatives

Behind the scenes of Mostar's postwar recovery, distinct schools of thought were at work. The more powerful and political actors, including the European Union, UNESCO, and the World Bank, tended to believe that emblematic projects would be the most feasible and immediately beneficial to the residents of Mostar. This strategy was grounded in the notion that a semblance of normality could generate reforms to actually make it so. Some of the less powerful actors in the city, including representatives of foreign non-governmental organisations, regional universities, and municipal agencies related to reconstruction activities, advocated for incremental investments designed to address the needs of typical residents. Many small projects focused on education, health, and improved dialogue between ethnic rivals. These reflected an assumption that emblematic reforms should crown a series of less visible, more ordinary ones.

The emblematic approach to reconstruction prevailed between 1994 and 2004. One of the first important decisions that was made, almost implicitly, among external donors was to focus their efforts and resources on the physical fabric of a broken city - as a prerequisite for all forms of social rehabilitation, it might have been argued at the time. The trickle-down model of confidence-building and revitalisation was put to a severe test. It proved disappointing for a number of reasons - most notably: stubbornly oversimplified interpretations of the reasons for conflict, rigid dichotomisation of political actors and cynicism regarding the capacity of local professional actors to assume responsibility for the implementation of major programme components.

This last observation is especially telling. Given their decision to emphasise large-scale architectural projects, foreign donors faced a fundamental choice between strengthening existing local agencies - a process that would often have required integration of two or more offices in the city, east and west, that had resulted from the general bifurcation of Mostar - or creating new ones. No doubt the prospect of forcing unwilling or even hostile local actors to collaborate appeared untenable to many outsiders. New offices, appearing redundant with respect to existing ones, came into existence on a project-by-project basis beginning in 1995. Each was staffed with capable local professionals supported and often supervised by foreign professionals whose neutrality and competence were presumably beyond question.

Many of these new offices bore little or none of the legal authority held by their counterparts in the municipal government. Still, superior funding and staffing often made them resources of first resort as work on the ground progressed and the need for reliable information intensified. Good examples of this phenomenon include the Project coordination...
unit created by the World Bank to oversee its reconstruction projects in the historic core, and the joint office created by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and the World Monuments Fund to coordinate their field projects. Both of these parallel administrative structures proved fairly efficient and effective in reaching their clients’ goals, yet both may have had unintentional negative impacts on local counterpart agencies by undermining their authority - real and perceived - in the eyes of Mostarians.

This pattern might have been avoided. Cuny was perfectly articulate on this important subject in 1983:

…until aid is provided in a culturally sensitive manner, its benefit will continue to be limited… the true danger is that aid programs that ignore local coping mechanisms often disrupt the latter’s ability to function properly and in some cases damage them by undermining their credibility within the community.\textsuperscript{vi}

A few simple examples of how things might have turned out differently in Mostar may prove useful. As previously mentioned, the dividing line that split Mostar into eastern and western sections was clearly demarcated: the Austro-Hungarian Boulevard and Santic Street, lined with unremarkable apartment complexes and institutional buildings. This was Mostar’s major traffic artery since the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and served as an informal threshold between old and new sectors of the city. Though few architectural landmarks of any artistic significance could be found along its length, thousands of Mostar’s prewar residents - of all ethnicities - lived in the buildings along the Boulevard, drove its length through town, and routinely crossed it on their way to work, home and entertainment.

Despite the self-evident functional, metaphorical and political significance of the Boulevard, it was consistently passed over as a project site by foreign donors more attracted to the tragic aura of the historic core.

Certainly emblematic architecture and inter-ethnic conflict are linked in many important ways. Morale is shaken and territory claimed through erasure of traditional places. Social stability relies on familiarity and continuity in the physical environment. Systematic destruction calls for systematic, cooperative strategies for revitalisation. Still, prioritising an iconic reconstruction project in the early stages of Mostar’s post-conflict recovery process was regrettable.

Though social rehabilitation is often contingent on repair of targeted structures, their recovery is not sufficient to insure successful long-term revitalisation. The complex and
often counter-intuitive nature of these relationships was frequently overlooked by foreign project managers active in Mostar’s post-war recovery. Many vital historic structures, including the Old Bridge, needed to be restored before Mostar’s recovery could be considered complete. But did they need to be addressed first by foreign investors? Probably not. Were there higher priority physical reconstruction projects that might have been chosen during the early phases of decision making? Probably so.

While mosques, fortifications, and typical commercial structures were restored without immediate prospects of occupancy following their completion, apartment buildings and schools with willing tenants remained ruined elsewhere in the city. Former residents who wished to return were unable to do so for lack of a suitable place to live, adequate classrooms for their children, and access to health care comparable to the resources provided to them as refugees by foreign governments. As the months and years progressed, these potential returnees gave up hope for rekindling their livelihoods in Mostar. Meanwhile, work on highly emblematic historic structures continued at a healthy pace. In particular, it was interesting to note that picturesque cafés and discotheques came back to life along the banks of the Neretva while the apartment buildings along the Boulevard—the city’s real partition line and political fulcrum—remained dark.

Local cynics speculated that these investments only served the international tourist trade and soothed the troubled consciences of foreign nationals whose governments declined to intervene in a lop-sided war. Others embraced the notion, perhaps with some regret, that tourism would be the only reliable economic generator for Mostar so that emphasis on the historic core was affirmed. Still others simply noted that, had they been forced to choose, a factory on the outskirts of town would have been preferable to the restored Old Bridge at its centre:

Not until some firms or some factories are rebuilt where those people could work will we need the Old City...if only the eyes are full and the pockets empty, then there is nothing. vii

These factories would have provided jobs for demoralised residents while the reconstructed Old Bridge merely reminds them of a past that seems irretrievable. The Bridge cannot adequately inspire hope and unity for two reasons: it is not the product of functional integration and it does not join the divided portions of the city. Perhaps fixation on the Old Bridge reconstruction project stemmed from a desire to view Mostar as a broken object in need of mending - a desperate gamble for a desperate place. Some critics
suggest that this approach, having failed in Jerusalem and Belfast, is futile:

The partisan seeks to eliminate conflict by winning it; the professional, by improving real environment; and the resolver, by a compromise. The endemic and organic nature of the conflict renders all their efforts futile, because communal conflicts have no ultimate solution…only an endless process of coping. vii

While all this was going on, a better project lay dormant nearby. It might have fulfilled the ambitious promise that the reconstructed Old Bridge will presumably break. For about 20 percent of what it cost to reconstruct the Old Bridge, the former high school - located along the Boulevard exactly in the centre of the city and formerly attended by residents of every ethnicity - could be renovated, equipped and staffed. Besides the basic necessity of a functioning secondary school in a recovering city, this physical project could demonstrate the potential for positive exchange between former rivals. A living, ordinary institution of this kind could infuse the former dividing line with evidence that ethnic cleansing is distasteful to ordinary Bosnians. ix

Similarly, the headquarters of the former Land Bank might have been chosen by outside investors as an optimal reconstruction project. This was a highly respected institution throughout the socialist period of Yugoslavia, and the building it occupied is an elegant art nouveau structure, worthy of conservation in its own right. It would have made a better project than many of the structures actually restored in the historic part of the city because it formerly housed, like the high school, an essential institution. In the post-war period and still to this day, affordable loans are not readily available to ordinary Mostarians attempting to return to their homes in the postwar period. The banking sector in Bosnia is weak. Where so many historic structures were restored only to stand empty, the Land Bank might have assisted with the ongoing process of recuperation in very direct, empowering ways. This too is an opportunity that remains unrealised.

Why were such obvious, relevant, and sustainable projects overlooked by foreign donors and implementing organisations? Fixation on the new Old Bridge, as posited above, is part of the answer. Another obstacle was a habit of passing over rigorous needs assessment in the process of selecting and prioritising investments on the part of external agencies, especially non-governmental organisations. One observer noted that these are chronically “limited by the fact that they depend for funding on institutions and organisations that themselves have specific interests and perceptions unrelated to the realities on the ground
or the interest of BH society”x and accordingly undertake many low-impact, high-visibility projects.

The local guidance and data that might have been provided by a professional agency -- like the much anticipated Stari Grad Agency which finally became operational years after the new Old Bridge was completed -- was not forthcoming due to the same kinds of political infighting that crippled the city as a whole. Not in the habit of extensive local consultations, largely left to their own devices, and lacking reliable data about their constituents, external actors contributing rehabilitation work in Mostar often made decisions in a predictably haphazard, ill-coordinated, and capricious fashion.

At the concluding session of the final “Mostar 2004” symposium in 2004 - the annual summer workshop and conference sponsored by the International Research Centre for Islamic Culture and Art that focused on post-war urban planning from 1994 until 2004 - local participants identified a handful of lessons and revised expectations that they hoped will shape the next decade of reconstruction. Local experts looked forward to autonomy and non-partisan professional exchange after an era of development driven by foreign capital and models, noting that external interventions since the war were often accompanied by paternalistic behavior, aggravation of local rivalries, and failed projects. Local professionals underscored the need for an integrated public school system as the “other bridge” and pointed to the High School rehabilitation project - designed to provide basic opportunities while attacking prejudice and mutual suspicion at the root - as a complement for the symbolism of the reconstructed Old Bridge.

Conclusions

Mostar received much more than its fair share of post-war foreign capital. Its reconstructed monuments, while perhaps “insufficient”, are still valuable psychological assets in support of future reconstruction activities. Strategic errors and lost opportunities may be little more than water under the Bridge. Yet, other war-torn cities and projects lie downstream from Mostar. As long as the key decisions that shaped reconstruction efforts in Mostar are valorised, others will imitate them and, in doing so, repeat mistakes that should be avoided. Here are a few more reasons why the mistakes in Mostar matter:

✓ Poorly conceived reconstruction priorities lead to vast amounts of wasted time and money. Some of this money takes the form of debt that will be carried by Bosnian tax payers for years. In a country with such limited resources, these errors are
difficult to afford. More importantly, the awareness of squandered funds leads quickly to cynicism and resentment within constituent communities.

✓ Concentration on the wrong projects leads to wasted opportunity. Some of the preferable physical projects in Mostar were mentioned above. A society emerging from severe trauma and deprivation is served well by adhering to a steep, active learning curve with respect to local decision making and capacity building. This curve is unfortunately flattened by the imposition of lengthy, expensive, and faulty projects by foreign actors - with or without kind intentions.

✓ Informed and thoughtful observers of Mostar’s recovery were left with the feeling that scarce resources were wasted. That feeling breeds cynicism in relation to foreign intentions and priorities and makes future interventions - even ones that attempt to recognise and compensate for prior mistakes - increasingly difficult to undertake.

✓ Mostar is not out of the woods, even now. Many observers over the past several years have noted a resurgence of ethnonationalist politics and have voiced anxiety about unfinished business in the region, like one writer who noted that “the foundation for a stable, independent Bosnian state has not been laid. Contradictions in the peace agreement and poorly conceived involvement have undermined the goals the international community hopes to achieve. Thus, six years after the [Dayton] agreement was signed, some of its key principles have yet to be implemented, nationalists remain in power, and peace may ultimately be undermined.”

Mostar does not have to stumble forward, but a re-ordering of priorities may be to the city’s advantage. Ivo Banac articulated the problem and associated challenges well in 2004 when he lectured foreign and local urban professionals in Mostar:

…in many respects, the mission that I think we ought to concern ourselves with is not ‘what is real?’ within a particular monument, what is its ‘inner essence’, whether or not it presents a certain ‘universal truth’, but whether the effects of the presence of everything that humanises our interconnections with the site can contribute to the growth of the type of understanding which I think is still enormously deficient, not only in the environment of Bosnia-Herzegovina, but really throughout the whole world.”

The upcoming phases of reconstruction must let “everything that humanises” be the horse
that pulls the broader revitalisation effort forward. This would be a shift, and a most beneficial one, for Mostar’s policy makers and urban planners alike.
Notes:

The authors would like to acknowledge the contributions of many colleagues whose work and insights have given shape to the ideas presented here. They include, but are not limited to: Esther Charlesworth, Jerrilyn Dodds, Stefano Bianca, Ivo Banac, Larry Hannah, and Meron Benvenisti. Mr. Calame's work in Mostar and research regarding divided cities (conducted jointly with Esther Charlesworth, along with the manuscript that resulted) was generously supported by a Global Security and Sustainability research grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and by a series of travel grants from the Trust for Mutual Understanding. Much of the work undertaken by the authors in Mostar over the last ten years was supported by funding from IRCICA, The Aga Khan Trust for Culture, and the World Monuments Fund.


ii Personal correspondence to Mort Abramowitz from Fred Cuny dated November 22, 1993.

iii CIA factbook, Bosnia-Herzegovina country profile, 1993.


vii Personal interview with Sead Djulic in Mostar, 7/12/00.


ix Similarly, the headquarters of the former Land Bank might have been chosen by outside investors as an optimal reconstruction project. This was a highly respected institution throughout the socialist period of Yugoslavia, and the building it occupied is an elegant art nouveau structure, worthy of conservation in its own right. It would have made a better project than many of the structures actually restored in the historic part of the city because it formerly housed, like the high school, an essential institution. In the post-war period and still to this day, affordable loans are not readily available to ordinary Mostarians attempting to return to their homes in the postwar period. The banking sector in Bosnia is weak. Where so many historic structure were restored only to stand empty, the Land Bank might have assisted with the ongoing process of recuperation in very direct, empowering ways. This too is an opportunity that remains unrealised.


xi McMahon, p. 28.