



United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural Organization

Cultural Heritage  
in South-East Europe:  
**KOSOVO**



This publication<sup>1</sup> is the first of a series of studies that UNESCO is carrying out within its Strategy for Strengthening Cooperation in South-East Europe (please refer to <http://erc.unesco.org/seeconference>).

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United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural Organization

## CULTURAL HERITAGE IN KOSOVO

### PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION OF A MULTI-ETHNIC HERITAGE IN DANGER

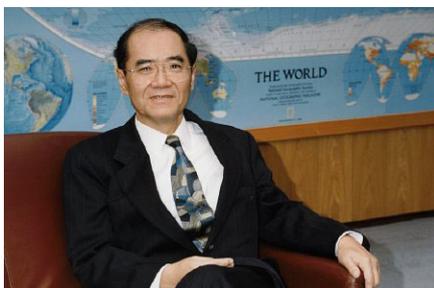
*Mission report*

UNESCO 2004

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## Foreword by the Director-General of UNESCO



In the final years of the 20th century, terrible news came from the centre of South-East Europe and spread rapidly around the world: a humanitarian catastrophe was causing the loss of thousands of lives, large-scale population displacement, deep human suffering and widespread material destruction throughout the territory of Kosovo.

During and after the armed conflict, cultural monuments of outstanding historical significance in Kosovo were the focus of hatred and revenge. While some were destroyed or seriously damaged, others were under threat and required protective intervention by the international military forces.

It is against this background that I decided to have this document prepared. In July 2003, I submitted this report (“Cultural heritage in Kosovo – Protection and conservation of a multi-ethnic heritage in danger”) to the Government of Serbia and Montenegro, to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and to the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). The written observations received from all parties will, to the extent possible, be taken into account by UNESCO when called upon to implement the projects described in Annex I (pages 14-121).

For UNESCO, the protection of cultural heritage is a value in itself but it also can serve other positive purposes. In particular, having once been the focus of intense bitterness, cultural heritage may play a useful role in the re-establishment and maintenance of peaceful relations between different communities. Indeed, the protection of cultural heritage is a domain where increased trust and understanding between communities may be constructed and where different parties may exchange signals of respect and responsibility that can help to build a sense of mutual confidence. The present document has been prepared to highlight how a focus on the protection of cultural heritage may help to overcome the painful divisions caused by past events, and may create openings for local, regional and international cooperation through UNESCO.

I hereby appeal to Governments, international organizations and donors from the private sector to lend their help and join forces with UNESCO in order to restore and protect the invaluable cultural treasures of Kosovo which many generations of inspired artists and craftsmen have left as a legacy to humankind.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. Matsuura".

Koïchiro Matsuura

# Introduction

The rich plains of Kosovo with their surrounding mountain ranges the peaks of which reach an altitude of 2,500m belong to the most beautiful areas of Europe and figure among the most fertile parts of the Balkans. A watershed divides the rivers that flow into the Black, Aegean and Adriatic Seas. Its central position in the Balkan Peninsula has determined the importance of Kosovo, which covers an area of about 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> and is situated at the intersection of major roads heading seaward. In its long history, most of the traffic between the interior of the Balkans and the Adriatic coast ran along the valley of the Drim River towards Shkodër, the shortest connection, via Prizren. In terms of geography and communication, Kosovo has a central position in the Balkans.

The soil of Kosovo is rich in lead and silver ore mingled with gold. The Romans worked silver mines there. In the Middle Ages, the Serbian kings developed the mines, and the city of Novo Brdo flourished as a trade centre with an important mint and mining business. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it had more than 10,000 inhabitants and was an economic centre of great importance in the central Balkans.

Kosovo has been inhabited since prehistoric times. Recent archaeological finds date back to the early Neolithic period, i.e. the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium B.C., and include various anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines of fertility and painted ceramics. In the Antiquity, there were highly urbanized centres of refined culture in the area of present Kosovo.

The agricultural fertility and the rich mineral resources are thus matched by a cultural heritage of immense historic significance.

Outstanding architectural monuments built during the Middle Ages and the Ottoman period, have remained intact until today: 14<sup>th</sup> century churches and monasteries of a unique aesthetic accomplishment and mosques of great stylistic perfection, but also non-religious buildings like fortresses, urban centres and bridges, highlight the dense artistic creativity that is characteristic of the region and that now forms the impressive built cultural heritage in Kosovo. The Monastery of Dečani has been proposed for inscription on UNESCO's World Heritage List, and the Monastery Church of Gračanica figures on the tentative list. Completely different in style, these monuments with their refined frescoes date back to the early 14<sup>th</sup> century and are universally recognized as outstanding examples of medieval religious architecture in Europe, just as the Monastery of Peć, which is also the seat of the Serbian Orthodox Patriarchs. Historians and scholars consider these sites, along with hundreds of others, as belonging to the cradle of Serbian Culture, and for many Serbs they represent the very heart of Serbian spiritual and national identity.

The extraordinary concentration of cultural monuments from prehistoric to modern times attests to the historic continuity of life in Kosovo and to the artistic creativity of its inhabitants.

Historical and demographic developments of the last centuries have led to a situation that is characterized by an overwhelming majority of the Albanian population and a dwindling Serb minority. This process has been dramatically accelerated after the armed conflict of 1999: whereas in the early 1990s, the Kosovo Serb population represented about 10% to 11%, it may now be only half of that figure, i.e. some 110,000 out of an estimated 2.2M population of Kosovo.

On account of the multi-ethnic composition of its population, its central geographic position, the dramatic acceleration of its recent history, as well as the rich and diverse origins of its cultural heritage, Kosovo has been described as a reduced-scale model of the Balkans. Indeed, it has all the significant features that make up today's complexity of South-East Europe, and hence presents a challenge for the international community to help bring about the conditions for a sustainable stability.

During the period that preceded the armed conflict and during the conflict itself, but especially in the weeks and months that followed it, violent acts of intentional destruction of cultural property took place throughout Kosovo: mosques and churches were burnt and blown up with dynamite, religious and cultural symbols were destroyed or disfigured, and cemeteries desecrated. Immense damage had been caused to the invaluable cultural heritage in Kosovo.

Immediately following the NATO intervention, the Security Council of the United Nations adopted a resolution (cf. Annex V, p. 146), which makes of Kosovo a *de facto* protectorate of the United Nations, putting it under an international interim administration and providing a security presence of international armed forces under a unified command. The resolution authorizes the Secretary-General “*to establish an international civil presence in Kosovo in order to provide an interim administration for Kosovo under which the people of Kosovo can enjoy substantial autonomy within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and which will provide transitional administration while establishing and overseeing the development of provisional democratic self-governing institutions to ensure conditions for a peaceful and normal life for all inhabitants of Kosovo*” (sic). The resolution further specifies that the main responsibilities of the international civil presence include the “*development of political institutions for democratic and autonomous self-government pending a political settlement*”. In its annex 2 (paragraph 6), the resolution states that “*an agreed number of Yugoslav and Serbian personnel will be permitted to return (to Kosovo) to perform the following functions: (...) maintaining a presence at Serb patrimonial sites (...)*”.

Subsequently, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the Kosovo Stabilization Force (KFOR) were established in order to implement the provisions of the UNSC Resolution 1244, with the assistance of the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other relevant international organizations.

The issue of cultural heritage has so far not been addressed in a systematic manner by UNMIK, which had to concentrate on vital priorities such as security, economy and civil administration. In Priština, a Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports has been set up as part of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG), and operates with the support of international civil servants. In Belgrade, the protection of cultural heritage is under the responsibility of the *Coordination Centre of Serbia and Montenegro and of the Republic of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija* (formerly *Coordination Centre of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and of the Republic of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija*).

Considering the developments described above, it is not amazing that it has not been possible so far to ensure the long-term protection and preservation of cultural heritage in Kosovo.

# Background of the UNESCO mission

In his letter of 20 March 2002 addressed to the Director-General of UNESCO, Dr. Nebojsa Cović, President of the *Coordination Centre of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and of the Republic of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija*, recalled that a document he had signed on 5 November 2001 jointly with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, “confirmed the will to apply the relevant provisions of the Hague Convention (1954) regarding the protection of cultural sites and property in Kosovo”. In the same letter, he requested the dispatch of qualified experts for the purpose of

- “establishing the facts on the state of cultural heritage in Kosovo;
- proposing measures for the rehabilitation and renewal of destroyed or damaged monuments, primarily of medieval cultural heritage;
- proposing measures for the protection, preservation and full security of the cultural heritage in the territory of Kosovo.”

In response to that request, the Director-General of UNESCO, by letter of 13 May 2002, assured the Permanent Delegate of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to UNESCO of his decision to dispatch a mission “to study the state of conservation of the heritage of major cultural sites and to make technical proposals for their possible rehabilitation and for their protection.” He added, “UNESCO welcomes your country’s commitment to the Hague Convention of 1954, all of whose provisions apply to the whole territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including Kosovo (...).” In a subsequent letter dated 18 June, UNESCO’s Assistant Director-General for Culture informed the Permanent Delegate that three experts specialized in the fields of Serbian Orthodox, Ottoman and vernacular heritage respectively, would carry out the mission in October 2002 with the objective “to evaluate the condition of important and representative built heritage, including monuments and ensembles, and to propose measures for protection and restoration with a view to raising funds from UNESCO Member States.” The mission had to be postponed for technical reasons.

During his meeting of 26 November 2002 with the Director-General of UNESCO, the Secretary-General of the United Nations raised the question of preserving monasteries in Kosovo, and of protecting religious sites from inter-community violence and neglect. The Director-General assured him of UNESCO’s specific attention to this issue and briefed him on the preparations for the mission. Following another postponement of the mission, the Yugoslav authorities proposed that the mission take place in March 2003.

In his letter of 19 February 2003 the Director-General informed the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo of the purpose, composition, proposed programme and dates of the mission, i.e. 12 to 18 March 2003, requesting also logistic support and security arrangements. Welcoming these proposals, the Head of UNMIK proposed that two additional experts be included in the team and that the programme be slightly amended. The programme and team thus agreed upon are shown in annexes III (page 141) and IV (page 145) respectively.

# Findings of the mission

The members of the UNESCO mission stayed in Kosovo from 12 to 18 March and carried out extensive field visits outside Priština from 13 to 17 March. They visited more than forty selected sites on the basis of a programme elaborated in cooperation with the *Coordination Centre of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and of the Republic of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija* and UNMIK, and were given briefings on each of the sites by relevant cultural and municipal authorities as well as senior representatives of religious authorities. The members of the mission were received by the heads of the Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic communities in Kosovo. Valuable information was also provided by senior officials of UNMIK and KFOR throughout the stay in Kosovo, as well as by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports of the PISG. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Kosovo and his Principal Deputy received the mission for special briefing and debriefing sessions. Very substantial information was received from the Coordination Centre in Belgrade both before and after the stay in Kosovo. Members of the mission also met with representatives of various national and international NGOs with specialized knowledge of the cultural heritage in Kosovo.

On the basis of these contacts and its site visits, the mission has been able to obtain a fairly balanced overall view of the present state of the built cultural heritage in Kosovo, while recognizing that the limited time available has prevented this view from being complete. The following observations have been made:

Generally speaking, architectural monuments that make up the built cultural heritage in Kosovo have been found to be in a precarious and most vulnerable situation. This applies to its three major categories, i.e. Islamic architecture such as mosques, Byzantine/Orthodox architecture such as churches and monasteries, and vernacular architecture such as traditional residential buildings like tower houses (kullas) and lodgings (konaks), but also bridges, fortresses and urban centres.

Three different factors account for the present sad state of the cultural heritage sites

- intentional destruction by dynamite, shelling and fire
- vandalism and looting
- the process of normal ageing and decaying of all monuments, aggravated by environmental pollution and significant neglect of protection and preservation.

In many cases, the combination of two factors has worsened the situation. At almost all sites, the third factor, and especially the neglect of maintenance and protection from further vandalism, has played an important role. Indeed, during the periods preceding and following the armed hostilities, countless acts of excessive violence have been directed at places of worship. Spiritual centres of a religious or ethnic community have a highly symbolic value, and often have acquired an additional dimension through forms or elements of intangible heritage attached to them. Therefore, such sites lend themselves as targets of a particularly cruel form of aggression.

The desecration of cemeteries, churches and mosques and the subsequent destruction of the built cultural heritage also aim at wiping out traces of a past shared by the different communities. Clear evidence has been found of systematic abuse, vandalism and outright eradication. In a region well

known for its richness and diversity of cultural and artistic creativity, many sites formerly famous for their outstanding beauty now carry the stigma of profanation and intentional destruction and thereby convey an idea of the formidable explosion of recent violence and hatred.

In some cases, a place of worship was blown up after the NATO intervention, and in a subsequent phase of violence, the cemetery around that place was vandalized, its tombstones broken and turned over. Such separate acts of destruction were made possible during the situation of chaos that followed the armed conflict.

UNMIK and KFOR have pointed out to statistical evidence of a slow but marked regression of violence in Kosovo in recent months. This trend encouraged KFOR to dismantle a certain number of fixed checkpoints, which includes the withdrawal of permanent guards posted to protect various cultural heritage sites. The Serbian community does not consider this move as reassuring and takes a sceptical view of the medium-term and long-term perspectives.

In this regard, the expectations of the Kosovo Serbians and the Kosovo Albanians concerning cultural protection differ significantly. Whereas the large majority of the former feel concerned with the fate of the sites belonging to the Serbian Orthodox Church, the latter are relatively little prepared to identify themselves with monuments and sites of the Ottoman period. Thus e.g. the overriding significance of Peć, the traditional See of the Serbian Orthodox Church, is not nearly matched by any unifying symbol for the Kosovo Albanians.

Therefore, a certain asymmetry of expectations and commitment cannot be overlooked when comparing the two communities in general terms.

On the other hand, both communities and their respective supporting parties share a certain number of negative features that include the following symptoms:

Based on misgivings about cruelties and destruction committed by “the other”, a marked indifference towards the cultural heritage of “the other” is a dominant phenomenon. During the long period of fear and mutual mistrust that preceded the armed conflict, followed by a time of hardship and chaos, attitudes of indifference and even contempt of the spiritual values of the other have grown to become hard features of daily life.

Such attitudes are unfortunately enhanced by the media, which in many cases indulge in pursuing narrow-minded interests and provide heavily biased information. The result is an almost systematic mistrust of any information coming from “the other side”. Indeed, wild exaggerations, partisan views and reflexes of rejection found especially in the printed media, generate little credibility. Moreover, they are utterly detrimental to any efforts towards creating among citizens of the two communities, attitudes of respect or at least tolerance of cultural identity and heritage of “the other”.

What is lacking most, therefore, is awareness among the citizens of both communities that preserving the important cultural monuments and sites inherited from previous generations within a given space, is the common responsibility vis-à-vis future generations. This awareness is not found at the local and municipal level, where it is most necessary, and it hardly exists in the major political parties and academic milieux.

The political climate is characterized by rampant nationalistic extremisms of an alarming kind. These find their expression in the media, but also in universities and academic circles. In this context, present trends of revisionism among historians are of particular concern. Their re-writing

of history to suit political objectives could soon reach the level of secondary school textbooks and contaminate the minds of the future generation by planting the seed of prejudice and hatred of the neighbour.

At the administrative and political level, lack of confidence and mistrust hampers progress in the dialogue between the communities on cultural heritage issues. These issues are not high on any agenda in Kosovo, as hardly any overall effort of restoring, protecting and preserving major cultural sites has been undertaken. Therefore, immobility has prevailed so far, interrupted by short fevers of violent destruction at local levels.

The restitution by the Belgrade authorities of the artefacts and objects belonging to the Museum of Kosovo is anxiously awaited by Priština, and so is the documentation of the Provincial Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Priština, which was carried away on 10 June 1999. It would appear that without these restitutions no progress in the negotiations is possible and positions will continue to harden. While it is recognized that various other important aspects may be linked to the issue of restitution, there is a real blockage, which is harmful to any perspective of constructive dialogue.

If little progress has been made in the field of cooperation on cultural heritage issues, this may be due to the need of tackling more burning and vital problems at the political level immediately after the armed conflict. However, it is encouraging that at the highest levels of UNMIK keen interest has been shown in upgrading the priority of cultural heritage. This has been confirmed to the members of the mission by both the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General as well as by his Principal Deputy. It also appears that the Belgrade authorities are genuinely interested in progressing through negotiations on concrete issues.

It is against this background that the following recommendations are made, in the expectation that UNESCO can contribute to post-conflict peace-building through cultural cooperation in conformity with universally recognized standards.

## Recommendations of the mission

By its constitutional mandate, UNESCO is bound to promote the protection and preservation of cultural heritage. Article 1 (2)(c) of its constitution has been followed by a series of standard-setting instruments such as the 1972 *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, the 1954 *Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict with its two Protocols of 1954 and 1999*, the 1977 *Additional Protocol I* to the four 1949 *Geneva Conventions for the protection of war victims* and the Statutes of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and those of the International Criminal Court.

In pursuance of 31 C/Resolution 26 (*Acts constituting a “crime against the common heritage of humanity”*) adopted by its General Conference, UNESCO adopted in 2003 an important new text on the intentional destruction of cultural heritage. Reiterating one of the fundamental principles of the Preamble of the 1954 Hague Convention that “damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind, since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the world”, the Declaration Concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage invites each Member State of UNESCO to provide a higher standard of protection of cultural heritage and, to that end, take all the necessary measures to prevent, avoid and suppress acts of intentional destruction of cultural heritage located in its territory. By the terms of the Declaration, Member States will be held responsible for intentional failure to protect cultural heritage of great importance for humanity and will call on them to “take all necessary steps, in accordance with international law, to establish jurisdiction over, and provide effective penal sanctions for those persons who commit or order to be committed acts of intentional destructions of cultural heritage of great importance for humanity”. In unusually strong terms, the Declaration makes Member States aware that they have a duty to co-operate with each other and with UNESCO to protect cultural heritage from intentional destruction. Finally, the text also makes provision for assistance to Member States in the promotion of educational programmes, awareness raising and capacity building for the prevention and repression of any intentional destruction of cultural heritage.

The very first priority is to prevent further violence and destruction of cultural heritage in Kosovo. All parties should be made to understand that the cultural heritage of each is the cultural heritage of all, and that the respect for cultural diversity demands acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the cultural values of all parties, as stated in the Document on Authenticity, adopted in Nara (Japan) in November 1994.

This basic message needs to be conveyed to all citizens in a vast programme aiming at awareness raising of cultural heritage protection and preservation. It will require the active cooperation of municipalities so as to ensure that it reaches the local population. There is no doubt that educating all levels of that population as to the value and significance of cultural heritage in general is a slow and painstaking process. In certain communities it will be difficult to persuade people even to preserve monuments that belong to “their own” building heritage. This task, however, should become one of the top priority objectives on the municipal but also on the highest political levels.

The educational campaign should include exhibitions, publications and public debates at local, municipal and political levels, joined by academic circles and the medias. As the media support is of critical importance, special efforts may have to be directed towards the medias.

An updated and coherent policy on the protection and preservation of built cultural heritage in Kosovo should be formulated by UNMIK, in accordance with the relevant international conventions and standards, in cooperation with the Government of Serbia and Montenegro as well as the PISG Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, in consultation with the religious communities. The assistance of UNESCO and ICOMOS should be sought for this enterprise.

Pending the formulation of that policy, it is recommended to the political authorities that the PISG Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports open the doors for joint ventures with donor countries and relevant international organizations in order to undertake

- a definition of priorities of the sites to be restored and protected
- the reconstruction of destroyed monuments of exceptional historic value
- a comprehensive capacity building scheme for Ministry officials and administrative personnel in charge of cultural heritage protection work
- the establishment of a specialized centre for the restoration of cultural heritage sites, which would also train artisans and workers specialized in traditional arts and crafts

For its part, UNESCO will contribute to the efforts undertaken locally by lending its support for attracting international attention to the problems identified. In particular, UNESCO may consider

- raising international awareness of the rich and varied cultural heritage of Kosovo by means of publications (or sponsorship of publications), exhibitions and cultural events. The purpose of these initiatives is to highlight the extraordinary treasures and to present a realistic image of the marvels of artistic creation achieved in Kosovo over the past seven millennia
- hosting an expert meeting on Kosovo's cultural heritage at its Office in Venice, in order to attract high-level international attention to the present situation and to define an overall strategy for future action by UNESCO in this field
- launching an appeal to donors both governmental (especially targeting Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, the Russian Federation, Slovenia, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States of America) and from the private sector, with a view to mobilizing funds and generating joint projects for the restoration and rehabilitation of cultural heritage sites of universal value as contained in annex I (description of projects);
- taking special measures for the preservation and restoration of cultural heritage sites qualifying for the tentative World Heritage List
- playing a role of an active "cultural observatory", denouncing systematically each case of violence perpetrated against a cultural heritage site in Kosovo, in a targeted media approach.

In order to carry out the above recommendations, UNESCO would prepare a special programme for the rehabilitation, protection and preservation of cultural heritage in Kosovo, comprising the projects described in Annex I and taking into account the recommendations spelt out in Annex II concerning principles of reconstruction, restoration, authenticity, protection, structural and material decay assessment, creation of public awareness, provision of training, preventive maintenance etc. That special programme could be integrated into UNESCO's strategy for strengthening cooperation in South-East Europe and be brought to the attention of the general public.

UNMIK would have a central role to play in the implementation of the above recommendations. It could take the initiative of signaling a new priority to cultural heritage protection by arranging for a simultaneous start of restoration work at three or four sites in Prizren. That city appears to be well suited for such an initiative because of its rich and diversified cultural heritage. The following projects, which are described in detail in Annex I, are recommended for that purpose:

- Church of Bogorodica (Mother of God) Ljeviska
- Sinan Pasha Mosque
- Hammām Mehmet Pasha (The Great Hammām)
- The Fort

Although only slightly damaged, the Con-cathedral of the Lady Helper could possibly be added to the above sites. Thus cultural monuments of Byzantine/Orthodox, Islamic/Ottoman and vernacular architecture as well as a Catholic church would benefit from a joint effort to preserve cultural heritage in Kosovo in a visible way.

If carried out successfully, this pilot project could serve as a model for projects described elsewhere in Annex I.