

# HERITAGE AT RISK REGISTER AS A TOOL FOR MANAGING CULTURAL HERITAGE SITES IN KOSOVO

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## Abstract

Kosovo is a country with an ancient history and wealthy cultural heritage. The Ministry of Culture is responsible to manage a list of over 1500 protected assets. However, cultural heritage sites in Kosovo are in a degraded state, mainly because of lack of maintenance, awareness, and improper management. Significant numbers of heritage sites are at risk of being completely ruined. The fragile institutions are heavily suffering due to the lack of human capacities. They failed to create a monitoring mechanism that would provide data of current condition of heritage sites. The local communities are almost ignored in relation to decision-making process. This situation resulted with investments in the field of cultural heritage not being based on the actual needs. Cultural Heritage without Borders, a local NGO working for the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage since 2001, has recently launched a project aiming to map cultural heritage sites in Kosovo. For nearly one year of work, more than 800 architectural and archaeological monuments were identified and documented. The data was collected by field and desktop study, which included information regarding location, protection status, ownership, category and type, statement of significance, physical access, communication of owners with institutions, potential for development and physical condition of assets surveyed on visual basis. The collected data was put in a digital platform, which can generate various reports based on the field of concern and this whole process represents the interaction of heritage to technology.

As a result of data collected and analyzed through mapping, was developed the Heritage at Risk, an online digital platform, which consists of the list of assets on a poor physical condition. This platform is a new opportunity to inform the public, relevant institutions and stakeholders about the condition of cultural heritage sites, and also intends to include them in its assessment and preservation. Apart from this, the platform also offers the possibility for everyone to report online the heritage at risk.

This paper will give an overview of the condition of cultural heritage sites in Kosovo, its management and legal protection. In addition, it will describe the need and process of mapping of assets, as well as the results of Heritage at Risk register. It is essential for every country to have such a platform, to ease the identification and data collection of heritage assets. In addition, the level of damage of cultural heritage assets should be one of the main criteria of every investment and project related to the cultural heritage field. Furthermore, the results of research analysis will give direct recommendations to owners as well as relevant institutions of cultural heritage. Both these parties are given recommendations on the possible ways of preservation and promotion of cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Cultural Heritage, Assets, Heritage at Risk, Mapping, Digital Platform

## 1. The State of Cultural Heritage in Kosovo

### 1.1 Kosovo- the land of wealth

Kosovo is located inland on the Balkan Peninsula in Southeast Europe. Its fertile highland valleys are separated from the Adriatic Sea by the Prokletije Mountain range yet connected via the Drini River. Kosovo's history is deeply intertwined with neighboring regions. In the 1st century AD the area was known as Dardania and was a part of the Roman province of Moesia. By the Middle Ages the region was part of many empires: Bulgarian, Byzantine, Albania and the Serbian Medieval States. It was conquered by the Ottoman Empire in 1455 and derives its name from the Kosovo Plain, where the famous Battle of Kosovo was fought between Serbia and the Ottoman Empire 70 years earlier. (Haliti, Thaçi & Eppich, 2016, p.426)



Figure 1. Kosovo map (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2017)

Kosovo is a country with ancient history and wealthy heritage, shaped over eight thousand years ago. These heritage assets are important from historical, aesthetic, architectural and social perspective. They play an important and irreplaceable part of Kosovo's memory. (Hoxha & Thaçi, 2012, p. 1) Cultural heritage of Kosovo is an expression and creativity of life developed from prehistory up to today. This treasure is illustrated by the rich diversity of architectural, archaeological, movable and intangible heritage, as well as with rich cultural landscape. (MKRS, 2016, p. 21)

### 1.2 The past and its consequences

Until the second half of the last century, cultural heritage properties of Kosovo were maintained and protected intuitively from locals. In the recent past, these properties have been treated with denigrated and degraded methods, as such the lost is enormous. Especially during the '98/'99 War in Kosovo thousands of traditional buildings were burnt and destroyed from the Serbian forces. Thousands of archaeological and ethnological collections, as well as the cultural heritage documentation of Kosovo are still being held unfairly in Serbia. (Hoxha & Thaçi, 2012, p. 1)

Four well-preserved historic urban centers in Gjakova, Vushtrri and Peja had suffered severe devastation. (Herscher & Reidelmayer, 2000) Art objects and important collections of material culture also perished in the flames as Serbian forces burned down an estimated 70,000 homes, including more than 90 percent of Kosovo's 500 *kullas*- traditional vernacular houses. In addition to that, Islamic sacral art in Kosovo, including art objects as well as illuminated manuscripts, suffered large-scale devastation during the war. A major part of the heritage of Kosovo's 600-year-old Islamic tradition was burned, vandalized or looted as more than 200 mosques were destroyed or seriously damaged by Serbian forces. Furthermore, museum collections in Kosovo have also been despoiled, not by acts of deliberate destruction but by appropriation. By order of the Serbian Ministry of Culture, hundreds of the most valuable archaeological artefacts from three important museum collections in Kosovo - the Museum of Kosovo, the Municipal Museum in Mitrovica and the Regional Archaeological Museum in Prizren - were removed to Belgrade at the beginning of 1999, ostensibly for an exhibition. (Riedlmayer, 2000)



Figure 2. Mosque in Deçan burnt during the '98-99 War (Riedlmayer, 2014)



Figure 3. The market mosque in Peja during the '98-99 War (Riedlmayer, 2014)

Unfortunately, the destruction of cultural heritage sites did not end although the war ended in June 1999. During ethnic riots in March 2004, 34 religious and cultural heritage sites, such as Orthodox churches, monasteries, cemeteries, funerary chapels and some traditional houses were destroyed. (CoE, 2004)

### 1.3 Legal protection of Cultural Heritage

It was not until after the Second World War that cultural heritage management as a state-organized activity was established in Kosovo. (Riza, 2005) In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when Kosovo was part of the Yugoslavian state, cultural heritage was re-defined and managed according to the standards set by the political regimes. (Herscher, 2010) As in many South-East European countries, the protection system of cultural heritage of Kosovo is not at the level of modern requirements and trends. This is a result of over half a century history of political instrumentation and its subjective treatment by the former communist regime. Despite the efforts to improve the situation during the transition period, cultural heritage sector remains quite complex and fragile against the new general developments. According to the National Strategy for Cultural Heritage 2017-2027, Cultural Heritage is one of the priority sectors of the Government of the Republic of Kosovo. It includes monuments, sites, artefacts as well as their intangible attributes created by all peoples who have lived in Kosovo throughout the centuries. Above all, the Republic of Kosovo ensures the preservation and protection of cultural and religious heritage. Furthermore, the government is obliged to promote the preservation of religious and cultural heritage assets of all communities. (MKRS, 2016, p.21)

There are 1534 cultural heritage assets protected by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. These assets are part of the List of Cultural Heritage under Temporary Protection, and includes Monuments/ Ensembles of Archaeological and Architectural Heritage, Architectural Conservation Areas, Movable Objects, Cultural

Landscapes and Spiritual Heritage. This List is updated every year by the Ministry of Culture. In 2017, the Ministry has started to include modern buildings in this list as well as put some of cultural heritage sites under permanent protection.

The conservation and management framework for the preservation of cultural heritage assets is progressing. The basic legal acts have been approved according to the international principles. The Kosovo's authorities have started to pay attention on preservation through application of the preventive conservation, reinforcement of laws, establishment of the proper inventory system, modernization of administration and education system. (Hoxha & Thaçi, 2012, p. 19) However, a lot of effort and immediate steps need to be taken as far as cultural heritage protection and preservation is concerned.

#### **1.4 The challenges of today**

In general terms, cultural heritage assets of Kosovo are in a precarious and vulnerable situation arising from the dire consequences of armed conflicts of 1998/1999, natural processes of age and decay greatly exacerbated by environmental pollution, significant long-term neglect and a chronic lack of policy, strategies, proper inventory, conservation plans and funds for preservation and rehabilitation according to the international principles and standards.

The crucial problems to be addressed are:

- Delay in heritage inventory compilation (the Cultural Heritage List), nomination and identification of conservation areas (perimeter, protective zones, protected areas) in spatial plans of architectural and archaeological heritage;
- Unclear approaches in principles and practices in cultural heritage conservation;
- Uncontrolled (both legal and illegal) building boom in urban, peri-urban and rural areas, affecting heritage sites and in general the landscapes;
- New architectural developments affecting the setting and context of cultural heritage sites;
- Limited institutional capacities and power of concerned authorities;
- Limited coordination of activities and stakeholders;
- Limited institutional cooperation, both horizontal and vertical;
- Delay in laws' implementation, lack of professional standards on conservation and licensing system, inspection and supervision;
- Insufficient education offered in managerial, professional and technical trainings in various fields regarding cultural heritage and landscape preservation and management, sustainable tourism development, restoration techniques, promotion, etc. (Hoxha & Thaçi, 2012, p. 16)

## **2. Mapping of Cultural Heritage Sites in Kosovo**

### **2.1 The mission of the organization Cultural Heritage without Borders, CHwB Kosovo**

The foundation Cultural Heritage without Borders, CHwB Kosovo, has started the contribution in cultural heritage field since 2001, primarily as an international based organization and then as a local NGO, dedicated to rescuing and preserving tangible and intangible cultural heritage affected by conflict, neglect or human and natural disasters. The mission of the organization is to promote cultural heritage as both a right in itself and a resource. CHwB Kosovo works with cultural heritage as an active force in reconciliation, peace building and social and economic development by increasing the awareness, capacities and opportunities of the society for preserving and rescuing cultural heritage. In our country, as in many developing countries, cultural policies and strategies need yet to be integrated into wider political, economic and social agendas. Therefore, our key objective is to strengthen the accountability of institutions and to increase the vibrancy of civil society in the cultural heritage sector. We see our work as a vital contribution to building democracy and supporting human rights. (CHwB, 2013)

Lack of basic information for cultural heritage assets with legal protection status, is a crucial problem, which also points out the need for each monument to be identified and monitored. Mapping cultural assets strengthens the base of information that can be used to inform local and central authorities in future planning and decision-making. Regarding this, we consider cultural heritage mapping as an important part of a successful completion of our mission. Therefore, the project "Mapping of Cultural Heritage Sites in Kosovo", which is one of our three main pillars of the strategy, started to put on the map 870 cultural heritage monuments of architectural and archeological categories, by gathering all the information needed based on the form presented below.

## 2.2 The methodology of mapping and monitoring cultural heritage assets

### 2.2.1 The standard form for data gathering

The mapping process comprised of two main phases, based on which the next steps were developed. The first phase was a research based study, aiming to create the most appropriate form for monitoring monuments and the second one, to gather data on site. The form was created by consulting three internationally agreed standards for documentation of cultural heritage: the Core Data Index to Historic Buildings and Monuments of the Architectural Heritage, the International Core Data Standard for Archaeological Sites and Monuments, and the recently agreed core data standard for identifying cultural objects — Object ID. By taking features from all these standards and adopting them on the circumstances of our country, we came up with a form, which included ten categories as listed and elaborated below.

#### **Name and references**

Shows a free-text field, which records the official name of the monument and number of characters which uniquely identifies each related record.

#### **Location**

Represents the geographical position of the monument expressed in latitude and longitude.

#### **Protection status**

Monitored monuments belong to two types of protection: under temporary and permanent protection.

#### **Category and type**

The types and categories of monuments vary, from auxiliary buildings up to industrial buildings. Building type is defined by its function.

#### **Ownership**

In general the ownership is public or private, but there are also a considerable number of monuments owned by religious entities. Ownership is important especially in the orientation of potential investments.

#### **Statement of significance**

Since every asset has the legal protection status, it should also have the statement of significance. This part of description was taken from the responsible bodies- MCYS, with a special request to this institution and as such is written in the form.

#### **Physical access**

The information about access to the monument and the level of accessibility of people with special needs are included and treated in this category.

#### **Physical condition of assets**

The level of physical damage of monuments was evaluated on visual basis. The Heritage at Risk register was developed based on this category.

#### **Communication of owners with institutions**

The responsibilities of the institutions and owners of cultural heritage sites are divided. But, alongside this, there is a point where these responsibilities and benefits meet together. Therefore, the cooperation is crucial. This category treats the communication of institutions towards the owners/users of monuments.

#### **Potential for development**

The physical integrity of a monument is not enough for it to be considered as a site with potential for development. The other information like: location, setting, natural tourist attractions etc. play a key role on this, thus they are elaborated in this category.

### 2.2.2 Challenges of the process

The form initially was created with Microsoft Excel software, printed in hard copy and ready to be filled with information. With all the above-mentioned categories and answer options, the adopted form came up to be four full pages (A4 size). A usual day of fieldwork resulted in monitoring about five monuments. Gathered data were entered in PC on the next day, in Excel file. All these procedures were time consuming whereas the amount of information which was augmented day by day became very difficult to be managed (e.g. one monument had at least 5 photos). Besides this, the number of the equipment needed during fieldwork was another difficulty faced.



Figure 4. Equipment used during the fieldwork (By author, 2017)

### 2.3 Technology meets culture heritage

A meeting held with the Information Technology team of the office, presenting the needs and stumbles on the way, changed radically the whole working process. From that period, we started building an online platform (database system), where the gathered data would be automatically imported in it. This platform would offer access when connected to internet. Each working group would be able to add, delete and make changes in the assets entered in the system. Most importantly, it would offer enough space to cope with all the entered information. Besides this, project coordinators would have the possibility to create other standards of forms and generate reports automatically, which can be used for internal needs of the organization or future planning related to culture heritage sector. But, how would these data enter into the online platform?

#### 2.3.1 Productivity on the go just got easier

To produce faster and better results, we started using tablets. We created an application, which interconnected very well with the online platform database. The tablet reduced the need for all the equipment used before. There was no need to carry the four pages form, because it was integrated in the application, neither was the need to have GPS tools because when the new form opened, the application generated the geographical coordinates automatically. In addition, no camera was needed because buildings were photographed by tablets. The most useful feature of the application was that it could be used in offline mode as well. It was possible to fill forms for five or more assets during the day and whenever connected to internet, all the data was uploaded in the online database system.



Figure 5. Tablet- the tool which replaced the equipment of the traditional method (By author, 2017)

At this stage of development, the process took another direction, which turned out to be simpler than planned beforehand. The initial planning for the time-frame of the project was reduced in half and the result turned out to be more sustainable. With all this systematic approach of information, by classifying and analyzing it, we could draft local and/or central development plans for economic development, based on cultural heritage. Furthermore, we could generate reports for each category we had integrated in our form. Therefore, we considered we had a weapon in our hand for the opportunities of which we were not aware. In the end of 2016 we have published a small range of this information and its impact was exceptional!



*Figure 6. One of the staff members, using the tablet / mapping and monitoring the cultural heritage assets (By author, 2016)*

### **3. Heritage at Risk Register**

#### **3.1 What is Heritage at Risk Register and how it was developed?**

During the field research we conducted, among other collected information, a special attention was paid towards the condition assessment of monuments. The physical condition of assets has been classified into six categories, including: Good, Fair, Poor, Very Bad, Partially Ruined and Completely Ruined.

**Good:** Structurally sound; no significant repairs needed.

**Fair:** Structurally sound; in need of minor repair; showing signs of lack of general maintenance.

**Poor:** Deteriorating masonry; leaking roof; defective rainwater goods, usually accompanied by rot outbreaks; general deterioration of most elements of the building fabric, including external joinery; or where there has been a fire or other disaster which has affected part of the building.

**Very bad:** Structural failure or clear signs of structural instability; loss of significant areas of the roof covering, leading to major deterioration of the interior; or where there has been a major fire or other disaster affecting most of the building.

**Partially ruined:** When not all structural parts of the building are visible, formed and remain on the ground.

**Completely ruined:** The structure of the building does not exist, or parts of the structure are scattered on site.

This classification was based on the condition assessment of cultural heritage assets from Historic England. (Historic England, 2017)

In order to list an asset in one of the above-mentioned categories, an assessment was conducted to evaluate the type of damage on the elements of the asset/structure, including: wall structure, roofs (covering, chimney, gutters and downpipes), doors and windows, and the interior, where the access was possible. As a result, when different damage aspects of an asset were combined, it was enabled to obtain a clear view on the physical condition of the monument and consequently list it under one of the above-mentioned categories.

**HERITAGE AT RISK** is an online digital platform, developed as a result of collected data and analyzed through mapping which consists of a list of assets that are classified in the three last assessment categories, meaning their physical condition is very bad, partially ruined or completely ruined.



Figure 7. Print screen of Heritage at Risk Online Platform /www.trashegimianerrezik.com/ (By author, 2017)

This platform is a new opportunity to inform the public, relevant institutions and stakeholders about the condition of cultural heritage sites, and also intends to include these relevant bodies in their assessment and preservation. Apart from this, the platform also offers the possibility for everyone to report online the heritage at risk.



Among 870 assets, which have undergone assessment of their physical condition as part of the wider project Mapping of Cultural Heritage Sites in Kosovo, in total 139 assets are listed in Heritage at Risk Register. Therefore, this means that 17.2% of designated assets in Kosovo are endangered to be demolished, due to their bad physical condition.

Figure 8. The graph showing the condition of all assets evaluated during the process (By author, 2017)



### 3.2 Updating and monitoring of Heritage at Risk Platform

Since the launching of the online platform Heritage at Risk Register, CHwB Kosovo has been closely following the reports submitted by the community. Furthermore, together with its team, CHwB Kosovo goes on field to assess the condition of the reported assets. After having evaluated them, the assets are listed on the platform, on the reporting part, submitted by the public. So far, 16 assets have been reported by the community. On the other hand, these reported assets are being collected, and then forwarded to the responsible institutions. Besides the reporting aspect, the existing Heritage at Risk Register has been monitored so that competent bodies can prioritize the intervention projects based on the condition of these assets.

In the meantime, we have started to witness some positive results, given that five of the assets categorized as on a very bad physical condition have been already included on the Emergency Intervention Program of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport of Kosovo, and as a result they were saved from demolition.



Figure 9. Kulla of Asllan Tupella in Kqiq Village, Kosovo, listed on Heritage at Risk Register (Left: in a very bad physical condition, right: improvement of the condition by the Ministry of Culture) (By author, 2016)

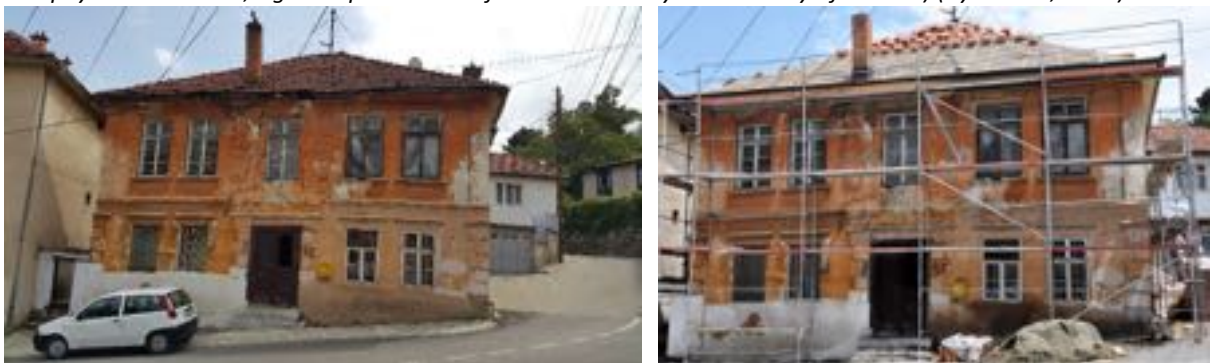


Figure 10. First Post Office in Prizren, listed on Heritage at Risk Register (Left: in a very bad physical condition, right: ongoing improvement of the condition by the Ministry of Culture) (By author, 2016 and 2017)



Figure 11. Kulla of Sali Kajtazi in Kqiq Village, Kosovo, listed on Heritage at Risk Register (Left: in a very bad physical condition, right: improvement of the condition by the Ministry of Culture) (By author, 2016 and 2017)

These results motivate us to continue with our work and we are committed to keep on investing our time, research and resources with the aim of finding a solution which would enhance the condition of cultural heritage at risk, through prioritizing the most urgent cases, which need immediate interventions.

#### 4. Recommendations and conclusions

The following recommendations were drafted based on the recent research conducted by CHwB Kosovo, divided into two groups, directed towards relevant state institutions and to the owners of the heritage assets, emphasizing the role of each party in better management of cultural heritage in Kosovo.

Institutions and organization:

- To review the current list of the protected heritage assets. Based on the recent findings there are listed buildings that unfortunately don't exist anymore;
- To establish monitoring departments that will assess buildings consistently, and identify the risk factors that may endanger heritage assets;
- To increase the professional capacities in Disaster and Risk Management (DRM), respectively in monitoring and implementing preventive measurements;
- To establish a Task Force of trained architects and craftsmen that would intervene with the temporary preventive measures in order to prevent the loss of heritage assets;
- To increase the cooperation between central and local level institutions in order to increase efficiency in managing possible risks;
- To prioritize funds for emergency interventions based on the assessment of needs;
- To establish connections with owners of heritage assets, to inform them about their role, train them on monitoring their properties, on where and how to report the damage and risk they notice, and to possibly intervene with simple measures;
- To subsidize or reward owners who regularly maintain their cultural heritage assets;
- To work closely with local and national NGO's, to increase the knowledge about the risk on cultural heritage, to raise awareness of each stakeholders' role by organizing campaigns, debates and public lectures.

Owners:

- To report to institutions/departments about every risk they notice;
- To maintain their properties and on periodical basis to check the structures or possible failures;
- To raise knowledge of owners through trainings on usage of traditional skills, in order to properly maintain their property;
- To learn more about the possibilities of re-usage of properties for possible economic or social benefit;
- Not deliberately ruin buildings for other development of their properties.

Today, with the rapid development of technology, the management of information is being developed and affordable to everyone. By utilizing technology, it is possible to create applications and databases where information can be systematized and accessible to the public and decision-makers.

From this database, the information is filtered and can generate reports of sites that are at risk as a result of their physical condition, lack of maintenance or other threats.

This list is named *Trashegimia ne rrezik* (Heritage at Risk) and is a collection of all sites that are endangered for the above-mentioned reasons. The list [trashegimianerrezik.com](http://trashegimianerrezik.com), is open to everyone and is updated constantly with new data collected periodically. The list will serve to evaluate the efforts of decision-makers to protect cultural heritage as well as to create a public information platform about the state of cultural heritage in the country. This list is the first of its kind in Kosovo and probably in the Western Balkans

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