Importance of Intangible Values in the Post-War Rehabilitation of Architectural Heritage

Ida Hodžić Adrović

Faculty of Architecture, University of Montenegro, Bulevar Džordža Vašingtona b.b., 81000 Podgorica, Montenegro;
E-mail: ida.hodzic.adrovic@gmail.com, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8113-1639

https://doi.org/10.29227/IM-2025-02-02-068

Submission date: *2025-03-20* | Review date: *2025-04-26*

Abstract

The destruction of architectural heritage in war conflicts is devastating for the entire civilization and this is precisely the reason for a large number of discussions even today in the 21st century. A society affected by the war destruction identifies itself with a destroyed heritage. Rehabilitation seeks to restore heritage and compensate for losses by giving importance to the process of creating and implementing renewal projects. In these processes, community involvement is of great importance. During wartime events, heritage and society suffer the most. The aim of the work is to present the post-war rehabilitation project as a complex process that includes not only the treated heritage building but also the community to which it belongs, taking into account physical and equally important metaphysical values. Traditional craft skills and historic building materials can restore lost physical structures. The primary concept of rehabilitation is expanding due to the changes caused by different degrees of violent degradation and but also due to inadequate interventions which, in most cases, were unintentionally committed in order to normalize life after the war as quickly as possible. Arguments for the rehabilitation of architectural heritage must also be found in the local community. The places where the heritage complexes were located are of great importance to the community and most of the time, even though there is nothing left, they are still perceived as a space and a place of great importance. Community participation in the rehabilitation process is also a process of reconciliation within the community. The degradation of metaphysical values leaves far greater consequences for the community than the degradation of physical characteristics due to which community loses the sense of belonging, the sense of security, but also its identity. Ultimately, we can say that the rehabilitation of the metaphysical aspect of architectural heritage is a far more complex and uncertain process than any other. With a well-established methodology for the restoration and protection of architectural heritage, we know in advance the results that will follow when it comes to the physical structure. The return of metaphysical values is uncertain, even after the end of the rehabilitation project. Reactions to the object, interaction with it and its understanding by the community take a lot longer, and more serious analyses and final results require the passage of time. The relationship between metaphysical and physical renewal is inherent, and their connection is cause-and-effect, and metaphysical experience arises through the interaction of the body and mind with the objects of architectural heritage.

Keywords: *intangible values, post-war rehabilitation, architectural heritage, collective memory, topophilia, topophobia.*

1. Introduction

Rehabilitation as a term is used as a synonym for the post-war reconstruction of the architectural heritage, and it means the return to the state before the degradation and demolition caused by war destruction. This term is defined in Article 2 of the Law on the Protection of Heritage, which receives its status as a national monument based on a decision of the Commission to Preserve National Monuments **[1]**. In cases where we have a completely demolished object, the protection method is reconstruction based on valid arguments and research. Depending on the amount of preserved original material, we can say that there is a possibility of anastylosis. Anastylosis, in such specific cases, cannot be the only method, because it actually refers to individual, more and/or less preserved fragments of the object. Architectural heritage that has been completely demolished, most often using explosives, and then deposited as waste on secondary locations, cannot be restored using original materials and returned to its original form through anastylosis.

The significance and role of the tangible and intangible values of the object are equated, and arguments for restoration are found in them. The reason for the increasing number of supporters of reconstruction as a method lies in the fact that since the end of the 90s until today, due to large-scale degradations, whether natural or caused by conscious human action, there have been large losses of architectural heritage around the world. A document of particular importance is the ICOMOS Guidance on Post Trauma Recovery and Reconstruction for World Heritage Cultural Properties. The preamble of this document highlights the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Yugoslavia, which presented challenges for reconstruction [2]. Unlike natural disasters, which, once they end, bring communities together in an effort and desire to help overcome the crisis and begin rebuilding physical structures, in armed conflicts, intangible heritage is lost along with material ones. The loss of intangible heritage is a consequence of the destruction of a community in the form of displacement of the population, and in extreme cases, their forced displacement and killing. Rehabilitation does not only refer to the post-war reconstruction of the built heritage, but should also address the recovery of social, economic, environmental and other factors. The driving force of development in communities that have survived the war should be cultural heritage. That is why the latest ICOMOS–ICCROM guidance from 2024 considers reconstruction to be an essential element of post-war recovery. [3]

The first step towards post-war rehabilitation is the assessment of damage, followed by the assessment of rehabilitation possibilities. Attribute identification is the most important step, and it involves different groups of attributes: previously identified attributes, preserved and lost attributes, possible discovery of new attributes, restoration of old and establishment of new attributes, and finally assessment of the vulnerability of attributes for the future. The priority of rehabilitation must be the restoration and preservation of tangible and intangible heritage attributes. Before we start a restoration project, we must clearly define its purpose, reasons and expected outcomes. This includes a description of the planned interventions, adopted restoration methods and methodology. The rehabilitation of the architectural heritage aims

to prevent loss and oblivion, because huge wartime destruction often ends with the complete demolition of the building. At the same time, rehabilitation must avoid degradation during the reconstruction project.

2. Between tangible and intangible values

The Burra Charter for sites of cultural importance, adopted by ICOMOS Australia in 1981, is a response to the Venice Charter, which mentions cultural significance but does not define it as a concept [4]. According to the Burra Charter, the main argument for heritage restoration is cultural significance and its importance for future generations. Cultural significance is contained in architectural heritage, and is made up of a series of intangible values such as: historical, scientific, social, religious, etc. The connection between the built heritage and the community is achieved due to cultural significance. "Cultural significance is embodied in the place itself, its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects" [5]. Also, according to the Charter, cultural significance is subject to change, so it can be said that values are defined in the present, but rely on those from the past. As time passes, it is necessary to review and compare past and present values. Although the Western approach and perception of authenticity is primarily based on the physical (material, tangible) values of heritage, the first session of the symposium in Zimbabwe emphasizes the metaphysical (non-material, intangible) dimension of the architectural heritage and puts the memory of events in the foreground [6]. The Venice Charter also emphasizes the necessity of looking at the history and development of a place over time, and the only valid way is to take into account both material and non-material values. The first session was dedicated to the intangible heritage of places, and five out of a total of seven scientific papers on this topic were dedicated to religious buildings. Of particular importance is the conclusion that the degradation of a property can be caused by the degradation of its intangible values. Although the above may seem confusing, the explanation is actually very simple. Therefore, misinterpretations of history, changes in the way rituals and ceremonies are performed can lead to changes in architectural heritage.

The reason for intangible changes, such as new interpretations, arise as a result of the interference of new communities and cultures, an increased number of tourists, etc., which leads to the marginalization and withdrawal of the local population. Such changes are initially of an intangible nature, and their emergence and development ultimately result in physical changes. Talking about religious buildings, even the smallest change in the way religion is practiced is enough to lead to physical changes in the building in order to adapt to the new way of performing rituals.

The Fifteenth General Assembly of ICOMOS, held in 2005 in Xi'an (China) also emphasizes the significance and importance of the intangible values of built heritage, and the final result of the gathering is the adoption of the Xi'an Declaration on the Conservation of the Setting of Heritage Structures, Sites and Areas. The Declaration emphasizes the preservation of the context that has a physical (material) and metaphysical (immaterial) form [7]. The greatest contribution to the promotion of the spirit of place was made by the Québec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place from 2008, which was adopted at the 16th General Assembly of ICOMOS. The Declaration also identifies threats to the spirit of place such as urban development, mass tourism, armed conflicts, etc., which can lead to large-scale degradation. It is necessary to establish preventive measures and sustainable solutions with the aim of protecting the spirit of place. At the same time, it appeals for the promotion of the spirit of place, where the government should play a major role in organizing with the local community. However, it is local communities that are best able to understand the spirit of place and at the same time preserve, transmit and promote it further [8].

2.1 Between the past and the future – The phenomenon of individual and collective memory

The phenomenon of memory is difficult to relate only to an individual and at the same time it is incorrect to say that it is related to a group. Most theorists and philosophers attribute memory primarily to the individual. For Aristotle, memories are what is in the depths of a person's soul, what depicts everything that a person has seen, felt or thought in the past [9]. According to the above, memory is a subjective experience and primarily belongs to the individual. However, it is also true that memory depends on the community in which an individual lives and acts, because collective memory is created by the interaction of several individual memories forming a representation of the past. At the same time, as an integral part of a certain group, the individual adapts to the group and is under its direct and/or indirect influence, which means that he adapts to a kind of framework.

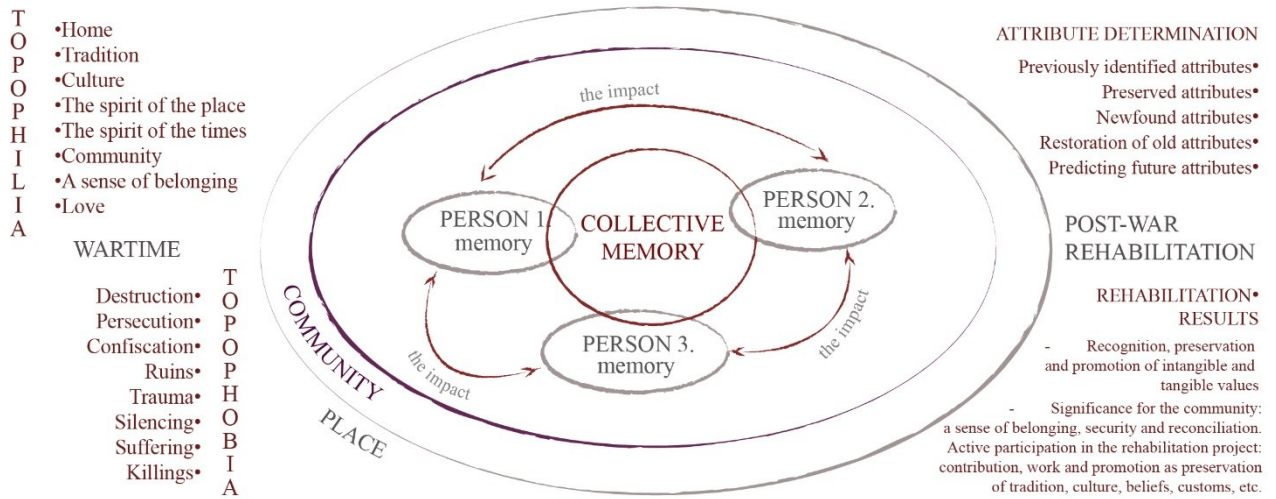

Fig. 1. The connection between individual and collective memory, pre-war and post-war times

Individual memories are influenced by the group to which the individual belongs, whether it is religious, professional, national, etc. groups. The identity of a group is closely connected to a place, to its history and as such participates in creating the spirit of a place. According to Connerton (2004), the renewal and creation of a community identity that needs to be passed on to younger generations can be achieved through commemorative ceremonies. A commemorative ceremony is a type of social event that brings

together members of a community to respect and remember losses and suffering. In this way, individual memories are united into a single public memory. In this way, the community commits itself to remembering. The universal assumption is that remembering is a virtue and forgetting is a failure. Thus, remembering becomes imperative, as a moral duty of the community, and its ultimate goal is to prevent repetition [10]. Heritage, whether tangible or intangible, is at the core of collective memory [11]. The post-war period brings us into a framework in which former parts of heritage and history become just a memory. The rehabilitation of the architectural heritage must not aim at returning to an idealized past. It must also not aim for unconditional renewal. Both Zeitgeist and nostalgia concern the past, but they treat it from different angles. Zeitgeist – the spirit of the times resists time, with constant efforts to recover and/or restore what has been lost, damaged, and degraded by the passage of time. The spirit of the times refers to the cultural and intellectual specificities of a particular time period in the past, and seeks to resist the transience of time and never become the past. Nostalgia, on the other hand, yearns for the past and what has been lost.

2.2 Between topophilia and topophobia - Annex 7 and Annex 8 of the Dayton Peace Agreement

Rehabilitation of architectural heritage plays a major role when it comes to normalizing life after war conflicts, especially when we talk about the return of refugees to their homes and homelands. Restoration of architectural heritage and the return of refugees are closely linked, they are an indispensable part of the activities undertaken immediately after war events. Restoration and recovery aim to reduce the vulnerability of the population. For instance, wartime in BiH in the 1990s was a time of great destruction, demolition, looting and other atrocities. After the end of the war, heroic and persistent efforts were made to enable the restoration, reconstruction and some kind of the reuse of damaged and completely destroyed values and qualities. In order to heal their wounds, whether they are physical and/or psychological, people want to heal their environment as well - the space in which their social customs and their values were contained. This means that in order to unify the almost destroyed society, the cultural identity of the urban space must be restored. The ability of society to recover from the consequences of conflict is reflected in the restoration of the most important buildings of architectural heritage, because they are the best representatives of tradition and place. Tuan (1990) love of place calls topophilia and uses it to describe the connection between people and places. Topophilia is the love of place and the active connection of an individual and/or group with a place. This connection varies from one person to another, from group to group, from culture to culture. The author believes that the connection is based on memories, a sense of pride and belonging and at the same time does not represent only a reaction to a place, but also actively participates in the creation of a place. The opposite of topophilia is topophobia which represents the aversion or fear of places [12]. These are the places of fear, places where something terrible happened.

War events and conflicts are accompanied by the destruction and devastation of both material and immaterial values that primarily represent society. The reconstruction that follows the end of the conflict is primarily focused on the political and economic aspects of reconstruction, while non-material damage, in the most common case the damage caused to culture, is often put on the back burner, neglected. Places where large-scale war conflicts took place are witnesses of destruction and death, and as such are carriers of a series of meanings that have an impact on the individual, group, and community that lives there. Such places have a meaning that changes over time. So, it's very simple, the place as well as its meaning change due to the passage of time, those meanings become the memories of those who witnessed the events, and then those stories are passed on to family, friends and the community. Stories are passed down from generation to generation, only to pass down history at a certain moment. We must see the importance of restoration and protection of cultural heritage at the very end of the war. In the Dayton Peace Agreement, we can see how strong the connection between heritage and cultural identity is. In the Dayton Peace Agreement from 1995, we can see how strong the connection between heritage and cultural identity is. In this important document, the Agreement on the Commission to Preserve National Monuments (Annex 8) follows the Agreement on Refugees and Displaced Persons (Annex 7) [13]. In this document that ended the long-standing war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Annex 8 is dedicated exclusively to the establishment of the Commission to Preserve National Monuments. Although in charge of declaring and preserving national monuments, after the end of the war the Commission made great efforts to protect endangered heritage from further degradation and decay. We can conclude that heritage in the post-war period represents one of the most important instruments for reconciliation. Refugees cannot heal their wounds as long as the place they return to is wounded. Although people want and try to survive and forget, the place reminds them. The place evokes memories for both sides that were in conflict. The restoration of the place, especially the restoration of the monumental buildings of architectural heritage that are extremely important for the return, must leave the impression of respect for the past and be part of the process of reconciliation.

The most important meaning of a place is carried by an individual or a community that observes that same place every day. This means that in a way heritage should do the work of reconciliation for us [14]. Conflicts are directly linked to places, because they took place in them and left a large number of consequences. Many evidences of conflicts are found in the place, and in addition, they are etched in individual and/or collective memory. Destroyed and damaged buildings do not only testify to what happened in the past, but their condition, for returnees and victims, is a symbolic threat and indicator of what could happen again in the future. The role that heritage plays in the identity and memory of an individual and/or group can be an obstacle when making decisions about post-war reconstruction. The reason is the specific situation in post-conflict areas, as the conflicting parties manage the heritage by pursuing parallel policies, building memory and identity within their previous beliefs, some of which led to the conflict in the first place. This way of functioning and making decisions is contrary to the desire to maintain peace. Therefore, cooperation between the entities is of primary importance for the common rehabilitation process. Full post-war rehabilitation is possible through a shared history, accepted by both conflicting parties, and joint restoration and protection of heritage. The joint reconstruction of identity can be a constructive force that will improve the area and society, rather than the destructive ones that are usually present [15]. Damaged architectural heritage should not be seen as a legacy of war, but as active participants in the recovery and redevelopment of the community.

2.3 Between reversibility and revalorization through authenticity and integrity

Reversibility is an essential step when it comes to reconstruction and we use it when creating a project. The approach in research, which allows us to look in the opposite direction, from the found state, which in these exceptional cases are ruins or a completely empty space, through history to the moment of the creation of the object, leads us to information about the authenticity and, finally, the originality of the object. Reversibility in the research allows to look in the opposite direction, from the found state, which in these exceptional cases are ruins or completely empty space, through history to the moment of creation of the object. In this way, we can obtain information about the authenticity and originality of the object. The building ceases to exist at a certain point, and this is, for reversibility,

the starting point A from which we move backwards, through authenticity, towards point B – the original state of the object (Figure 2). Contrary to reversibility, for the path of authenticity the starting point A is the original object and the end point B is the current state. This path of authenticity is determined on the basis of written material. Only in this way, through detailed study and analysis of historical and architectural documentation, can we detect changes that have occurred to the object during its lifetime, which is of crucial importance for the development of a rehabilitation project, especially when reconstruction is the chosen method of protection. Further, we gain insight into the (in)adequacy of interventions, their (un)justification and the possibility of avoiding the need for them in the future. This is an opportunity to observe unfounded interventions on the building, often of a degrading nature, which does not mean that it represented the best solution at a given moment, considering the set of circumstances. Any other treatment might not be adequate and would pose a danger to the object. Re-examination of authenticity is also an option as suggested by Nara+20 Initiative, where five key points have been established that we consider to be relevant principles regarding heritage destroyed in wars. Reconstruction after war degradation can be considered part of the heritage process, as the first point of the Nara+20 document states [16].

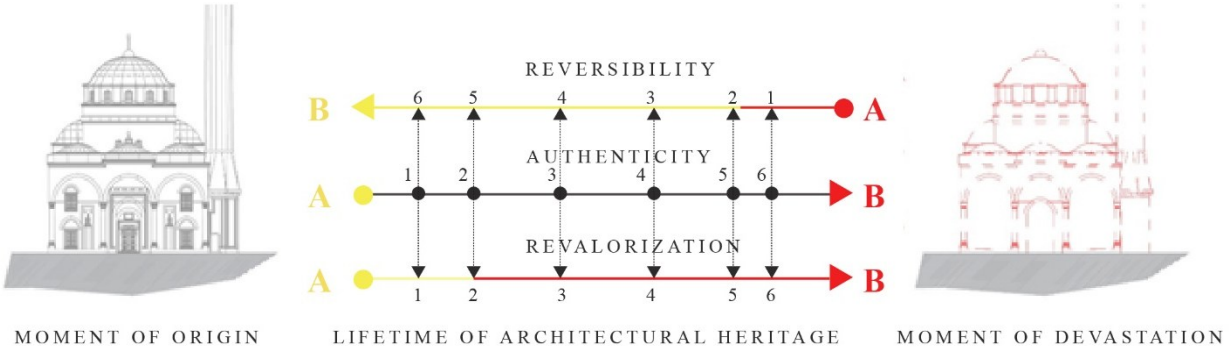

Fig. 2. The relationship between revaluation, authenticity and reversibility in the revitalization process

Important criteria in assessing a treatment are whether it provides the necessary care and stability for the element, and ultimately for the entire object. This, of course, depends on each case. If it is not completely destroyed, each treated fragment will, at some point in the future, be subjected to treatment for which we must provide some guidelines. These guidelines mean the preparation of detailed documentation. This is especially important when new and complex procedures are proposed and performed, because we have an obligation to provide detailed information for the future guardians about the products of our activities so that they can adequately consider their decisions. In the desire to restore the architectural heritage, destroyed by the conscious action of man, without jeopardizing its values and significance, measures must be taken to ensure the protection of the property in every sense of the word. In a methodological sense, reversibility is what achieves consensus. However, in reality, most of today's interventions are ultimately irreversible. The problem is particularly pronounced during the restoration and/or reconstruction of the entire building. At the theoretical level, it is necessary to consider problems, their causes and ways of eliminating them through interventions of different degrees. In a practical sense, our goal is to determine a series of criteria that should be followed during the intervention, bearing in mind the authenticity of the building. During the rehabilitation project, the treated asset should be viewed as a multi-layered document where the preservation of its authenticity is of utmost importance to us. Since we are focusing on architectural heritage that was completely destroyed at a certain point, we faced a very complex problem of interpretation. Because of the above, documents and knowledge about earlier interventions are of great importance for the approach to reconstruction. Regardless of the degree of intervention, it is necessary to determine the nature of the degradation and the reasons for its occurrence, and only then examine the regularity and results of the interventions. In addition, it is important to determine the original materials on the building: type of material and method of processing, composition and quality of binding materials, method of masonry, layering and texture of walls, position and interrelationship of elements, etc.

When treating destroyed architectural heritage we must take advantage of the given situation and study the preserved fragments from the very beginning, because they are actually a material document - the oldest reflection of architectural heritage. In doing so, we must respect all knowledge and historic layering. The lack of commitment to the rehabilitation project and insufficient research of the remains result in new design solutions that go against the principles of the authenticity preservation. The same applies to interventions that primarily have the task to ensure the stability and functionality of all materials and objects, and are essentially in conflict with the principles of preservation and protection of architectural heritage. Therefore, the concept of reversibility plays an important role in the restoration project, which aims to preserve the monument as a document and testimony of history.

The ruins of the architectural heritage that need to be rehabilitated are usually part of a larger context: they are part of a larger complex on the site, and their restoration is related to the preservation and/or restoration of the entire area. What should be avoided are unfounded, inadequate, false and invasive interventions. Such interventions are not uncommon in the post-war period, which is characterized by rapid construction without systematic research. A rehabilitation project must under no circumstances become a reinterpretation of a ruin, but should be a scientifically based reconstruction.

The rehabilitation process takes a long time and should be transparent. It is necessary to document each step in the rehabilitation process so that future generations have a way to make decisions and act. In this way, all considered options are documented, which may or may not be chosen as the most suitable, and further we conclude which values were successfully retained and which values were created. We must be aware that new research can change the current perception of the monument, but also that it can and should lead to a revision of restoration and protection projects. Ultimately, developments in the field of construction technology and the application of new materials, together with dedicated research, can lead to new solutions when it comes to earlier interventions.

The most important questions that arise concern the point at which rehabilitation begins and the possibility of creating degradation during the restoration process. We should not see the rehabilitation of heritage as a repetition, but as a continuation of the heritage process. The starting point - the present is a demolished architectural heritage, an object that does not exist at a given moment, in a word, emptiness. Remembrance (memory) and continuation (rehabilitation) are located on the same path but in different directions. In fact, both directions are in one hand repetition: memories are abstract repetitions that lead back, while the idea of renewal at a given moment is abstract with a tendency to turn it into something tangible and real.

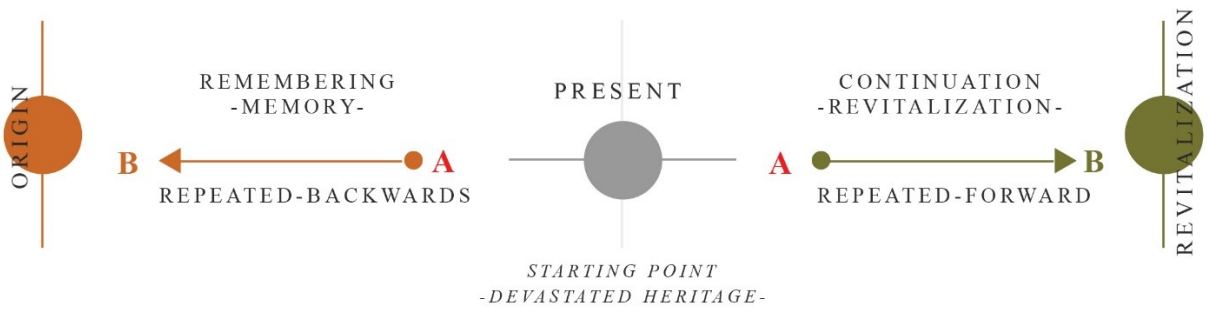

Fig. 3. Memory and revitalization as two-way directions whose starting point is the destroyed heritage

3. Conclusion

Every architectural heritage is placed in a context that is a combination of physical and metaphysical features. Although the physical environment is more obvious, metaphysical influences of social, political, religious, cultural and/or economic factors are equally important. Crucial for the decision to approach reconstruction is the community and life that takes place in the community. The goal of rehabilitation is not only to reduce trauma in society but to create values for the future. One should be aware that in the conflicts, not only the architectural heritage suffered, but also the community. Specifically, when it comes to monumental religious buildings, rehabilitation is focused not only on the physical construction of the property, but also on the intangible heritage that is reflected in the ceremonies and rituals performed in those buildings. Any post-war rehabilitation strategy should have society at its core. Informing the community about rehabilitation plans is the first step in the process. They must be involved from the very beginning. The local community is the one most connected to the heritage. They are the ones whose ancestors built it and they are the ones who consumed it daily in the most diverse ways. Rehabilitation has the task of re-establishing both physical and metaphysical values, but also establishing a new beginning for the community. This is why we do not call post-war projects reconstruction, but rather rehabilitation. Rehabilitation of architectural heritage does not only mean the restoration of a building recognized as a cultural monument, but also the renewal of social relations, the protection of the history, culture and tradition of a society. This is a way to preserve the past for the future and it is also the most important challenge of post-war projects.

References

1. "Zakon o zaštiti dobara koja su odlukama Komisije za zaštitu nacionalnih spomenika proglašena kao nacionalni spomenik Bosne i Hercegovine," 2002. [Online]. Available: https://www.fbihvlada.gov.ba/bosanski/zakoni/2002/zakoni/zakon%20o%20nacionalnim%20spomenicima_bos.htm. [Accessed 22 01 2025].
2. ICOMOS, "ICOMOS Guidance on Post Trauma Recovery and Reconstruction for World Heritage Cultural Properties," 2017. [Online]. Available: https://www.icomos.org/en/178-english-categories/news/8756-icomos-guidance-on-post-trauma-recovery-and-reconstruction-for-world-heritage-cultural-properties-document. [Accessed 8 April 2019].
3. ICOMOS, "ICOMOS-ICCROM guidance on post-disaster and post-conflict recovery and reconstruction for heritage places of cultural significance and World Heritage cultural properties," 2024. [Online]. Available: https://www.icomos.org/en/89-english-categories/home/137854-new-icomos-iccrom-guidance-on-post-disaster-and-post-conflict-recovery-and-reconstruction. [Accessed 26 01 2025].
4. ICOMOS, "The Venice Charter - International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites," in 2nd International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, Venice, 1964, 1965.
5. ICOMOS/Australia, "The Burra Charter - The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance," Australia ICOMOS, Burra, 2013.
6. A. Gonçalves and J. Deacon, "General report of the scientific symposium on “Place – Memory – Meaning: preserving intangible values in monuments and sites”, ICOMOS 14th General Assembly and Scientific Symposium," ICOMOS, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, 2003.
7. ICOMOS, "Xi’an declaration on the conservation of the setting of heritage structures, sites and areas," ICOMOS, Xi’an, China, 2005.
8. ICOMOS, "Québec declaration on the preservation of the spirit of place," ICOMOS, Québec, Canada, 2008.
9. R. Sorabji, Aristotle on Memory, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004.
10. P. Connerton, Kako se društva sjećaju, Zagreb: Antibarbarus, 2004.
11. D. Viejo-Rose, "Conflict and the Deliberate Destruction of Cultural Heritage," Cultures and globalization: conflicts and tensions, pp. 102-116, 2007.
12. Y. F. Tuan, Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
13. "Dayton Peace Agreement," United States - Central Intelligence Agency, Washington, D.C., 1995.
14. D. Uzzell, "Postscript 1: The Time of Place," in War and Cultural Heritage, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 251-260.
15. H. C. Kelman, "Negotiating national identity and self-determination in ethnic conflicts: The choice between pluralism and ethnic cleansing," Negotiation Journal, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 327-340, 1997.
16. ICOMOS, "NARA + 20: On Heritage Practices, Cultural Values, and the Concept of Authenticity," in Meeting on the 20th Anniversary of the Nara Document on Authenticity (22-24 October 2014), Nara City, 2014.