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## **FROM DESTRUCTION TO URBAN RECONSTRUCTION OF MITROVICA: A CASE STUDY AFTER THE WAR IN KOSOVO**

**Abstract:** *This paper examines the complex process of urban reconstruction in Mitrovica, Kosovo, following the devastation caused by the Kosovo War (1998–1999). Mitrovica, a city deeply affected by ethnic cleansing and systemic violence during the war, experienced widespread destruction of its urban, cultural, and social infrastructure. The research underscores the importance of addressing the physical rebuilding, psychological scars, and demographic shifts left by the war.*

*Mitrovica was profoundly affected by the war, with the ethnic cleansing of its main population and atrocities; the destruction of urban infrastructure and public buildings; the burning and destruction of houses, schools, libraries, religious and cultural heritage sites; looting, burning, and destruction of archival and museum documentation. These war damages and crimes against humanity in Mitrovica and Kosovo orchestrated by Milosevic's Serbia in the years 1998-1999 have left numerous scars on the population and material damages that needed to be restored and healed. The 78-day NATO bombings in 1999 to stop the humanitarian catastrophe and atrocities of Milosevic's forces against the Albanian majority population in Kosovo resulted in the cessation of the war in Kosovo and the return of the population to their homes, including Mitrovica, but with burned houses and settlements that needed to be rebuilt.*

*The main argument of the paper posits that urban reconstruction in post-war Mitrovica extends far beyond physical rebuilding; it necessitates a holistic approach that addresses social cohesion, economic revitalization, and cultural restoration. The extensive damage to religious and cultural heritage sites, as well as public institutions, represents not only a loss of infrastructure but also a profound disruption of the community's collective memory and identity. The study argues that successful reconstruction hinges on the integration of physical*

*rebuilding with initiatives that promote social reconciliation and economic reintegration.*

*The research employs an empirical approach, using qualitative and quantitative data to document the extent of war damages and post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Archival research, interviews with local stakeholders, and data on international investments are analyzed to provide a comprehensive overview of Mitrovica's post-war recovery. The methodology emphasizes the role of international humanitarian organizations foreign aid and Kosovo governance in facilitating the rebuilding of the city's housing, public services, and educational institutions. Furthermore, the study adopts a multidisciplinary lens, analyzing reconstruction efforts across five key sectors: urban infrastructure, social integration, economic recovery, cultural heritage restoration, and educational rebuilding.*

*The results of the research reveal the substantial progress made in rebuilding Mitrovica's physical infrastructure. International aid was instrumental in the initial phases of rebuilding homes, schools, and hospitals, but the paper also highlights gaps in long-term social and economic reintegration. Housing reconstruction enabled the return of displaced populations, but many of those returning faced disrupted livelihoods, requiring sustained economic support. In the cultural sector, the destruction of mosques, churches, and museums was addressed through international collaborations, helping to restore a sense of cultural continuity and identity.*

*The paper identifies that despite the reconstruction of educational and cultural institutions, social divisions along ethnic lines continue to pose significant barriers to long-term reconciliation. The fragmentation of communities due to the war's ethnic cleansing campaigns still affects social cohesion and limits the success of many reconstruction efforts.*

*The paper concludes that post-war urban reconstruction in Mitrovica is a complex, ongoing process that requires material investments and a sustained commitment to social healing and cultural preservation. The research emphasizes that physical rebuilding alone is insufficient for post-war recovery; the restoration of social cohesion, economic stability, and cultural identity must be addressed in correlation. The Mitrovica case underscores the importance of international support, but it also highlights the need for local involvement and leadership in ensuring a sustainable and inclusive recovery.*

*The empirical data presented in the study provides valuable insights into the broader dynamics of post-war urban reconstruction, with specific reference to the Kosovo context. The findings contribute to the understanding of how international aid, local governance, and community resilience intersect in the aftermath of conflict. The paper calls for a more integrated approach to post-war reconstruction that goes beyond rebuilding structures to fostering social and cultural reintegration, ensuring that cities like Mitrovica can move toward a more stable and cohesive future.*

**Key words:** *Kosovo war, Mitrovica, destruction, International aid, reconstruction.*

## **OD RAZARANJA DO URBANE REKONSTRUKCIJE MITROVICE: STUDIJA SLUČAJA NAKON RATA NA KOSOVU**

**Apstrakt:** *Ovaj rad istražuje složen proces urbane rekonstrukcije u Mitrovici na Kosovu, nakon razaranja uzrokovanih ratom na Kosovu (1998–1999). Mitrovica, grad duboko pogođen etničkim čišćenjem i sistemskim nasiljem tokom rata, doživjela je široko rasprostranjeno uništenje svoje urbane, kulturne i socijalne infrastrukture. Istraživanje naglašava važnost rješavanja fizičke obnove, psiholoških ožiljaka i demografskih promjena koje je rat ostavio za sobom.*

*Mitrovica je bila duboko pogođena ratom, etničkim čišćenjem glavnog stanovništva i zločinima; uništenjem urbane infrastrukture i javnih zgrada; spaljivanjem i uništavanjem kuća, škola, biblioteka, vjerskih i kulturnih objekata; pljačkom, spaljivanjem i uništavanjem arhivske i muzejske dokumentacije. Ove ratne štete i zločini protiv čovječnosti u Mitrovici i na Kosovu, orkestrirani od strane Miloševićeve Srbije u godinama 1998-1999, ostavili su brojne ožiljke na stanovništvu i materijalne štete koje je trebalo sanirati i izliječiti. 78-dnevno NATO bombardovanje 1999. godine, s ciljem zaustavljanja humanitarne katastrofe i zvjerstava Miloševićevih snaga protiv albanskog većinskog stanovništva na Kosovu, rezultiralo je prestankom rata na Kosovu i povratkom stanovništva svojim domovima, uključujući Mitrovicu, ali sa spaljenim kućama i naseljima koja su trebala biti obnovljena.*

*Glavni argument rada postavlja da urbana rekonstrukcija u poslijeratnoj Mitrovici nadilazi fizičku obnovu; ona zahtijeva holistički pristup koji se bavi socijalnom kohezijom, ekonomskom revitalizacijom i kulturnom obnovom. Opsežna oštećenja vjerskih i kulturnih objekata, kao i javnih institucija, predstavljaju ne samo gubitak infrastrukture, već i duboko narušavanje kolektivnog pamćenja i identiteta zajednice. Studija tvrdi da uspješna rekonstrukcija ovisi o integraciji fizičke obnove s inicijativama koje promiču socijalno pomirenje i ekonomsku reintegraciju.*

*Istraživanje primjenjuje empirijski pristup, koristeći kvalitativne i kvantitativne podatke za dokumentovanje obima ratnih šteta i napora u poslijeratnoj rekonstrukciji. Arhivsko istraživanje, intervjui sa lokalnim akterima i podaci o međunarodnim investicijama analiziraju se kako bi se pružio sveobuhvatan pregled poslijeratnog oporavka Mitrovice. Metodologija naglašava ulogu međunarodnih humanitarnih organizacija, strane pomoći i kosovske vlade u olakšavanju obnove gradskog stanovanja, javnih usluga i obrazovnih institucija. Nadalje, studija usvaja multidisciplinarni pristup, analizirajući napore u rekonstrukciji u pet ključnih sektora: urbana*

*infrastruktura, socijalna integracija, ekonomski oporavak, obnova kulturnog naslijeđa i obnova obrazovanja.*

*Rezultati istraživanja otkrivaju značajan napredak postignut u obnovi fizičke infrastrukture Mitrovice. Međunarodna pomoć bila je ključna u početnim fazama obnove domova, škola i bolnica, ali rad također ističe praznine u dugoročnoj socijalnoj i ekonomskoj reintegraciji. Rekonstrukcija stanova omogućila je povratak raseljenog stanovništva, ali mnogi povratnici suočili su se s poremećenim životom, što je zahtijevalo stalnu ekonomsku podršku. U kulturnom sektoru, uništenje džamija, crkava i muzeja riješeno je kroz međunarodnu saradnju, pomažući u obnavljanju osjećaja kulturnog kontinuiteta i identiteta.*

*Rad identifikuje da, uprkos rekonstrukciji obrazovnih i kulturnih institucija, socijalne podjele duž etničkih linija i dalje predstavljaju značajne prepreke dugoročnom pomirenju. Fragmentacija zajednica zbog kampanja etničkog čišćenja tokom rata i dalje utiče na socijalnu koheziju i ograničava uspjeh mnogih napora u rekonstrukciji.*

*Rad zaključuje da je poslijeratna urbana rekonstrukcija u Mitrovici složen, tekući proces koji zahtijeva materijalna ulaganja i trajnu posvećenost socijalnom iscjeljenju i kulturnom očuvanju. Istraživanje naglašava da sama fizička obnova nije dovoljna za poslijeratni oporavak; obnova socijalne kohezije, ekonomske stabilnosti i kulturnog identiteta mora se rješavati u korelaciji. Slučaj Mitrovice naglašava važnost međunarodne podrške, ali također ističe potrebu za lokalnim učešćem i vodstvom u osiguravanju održivog i inkluzivnog oporavka.*

*Empirijski podaci predstavljeni u studiji pružaju vrijedne uvide u širu dinamiku poslijeratne urbane rekonstrukcije, s posebnim osvrtom na kosovski kontekst. Nalazi doprinose razumijevanju kako se međunarodna pomoć, lokalna uprava i otpornost zajednice prepliću nakon sukoba. Rad poziva na integriraniji pristup poslijeratnoj rekonstrukciji koji nadilazi obnovu struktura ka poticanju socijalne i kulturne reintegracije, osiguravajući da gradovi poput Mitrovice mogu krenuti ka stabilnijoj i kohezivnijoj budućnosti.*

**Ključne riječi:** *Rat na Kosovu, Mitrovica, razaranje, međunarodna pomoć, rekonstrukcija.*

## Introduction

The Republic of Kosovo<sup>1</sup> has 38 municipalities<sup>2</sup>. One of its large municipalities, located in the northern part, is Mitrovica. It is situated on the north edge of the Kosovo Plain, encompassing parts of the mountainous region of Kopaonik, the slopes of Rogozna, Mokna, and Çiçavica. The surface area of the municipality is 336.2 km<sup>2</sup>. To the north, it borders the municipality of Zvečan, to the northeast with the municipality of Podujevo, to the south with the municipality of Vushtrri, and towards the west with the municipality of Zubin Potok. Important roads cross and intersect through the municipality's territory, leading into the interior of the Balkan Peninsula, towards the Adriatic Sea, the Aegean Sea, and the Black Sea. The terrain is predominantly mountainous, which determines the physiognomy of this area. The climate is moderately continental, with an average annual temperature of 10.4°C. Within the territory of Mitrovica municipality, there are 48 settlements. According to the 1991 population census (estimate), the municipality of Mitrovica had 110,310 inhabitants<sup>3</sup>. According to data from the 2011 population census and estimate, the municipality of Mitrovica had 82,235 inhabitants<sup>4</sup>.

## Consequences of the War: Ethnic Cleansing, Destruction of Urban Infrastructure, Public and Educational Facilities, and Cultural Heritage

During the Kosovo War of 1998-1999, the ethnic cleansing<sup>5</sup> of the majority Albanian population, mass killings, and widespread destruction were carried out by the Milosevic regime in Mitrovica and across Kosovo. The atrocities included the burning and destruction of urban infrastructure, homes,

<sup>1</sup> Kosovo is located in the southeastern part of Europe, on the Balkan Peninsula. Its capital is Prishtina. It has an area of 10,887 km<sup>2</sup>. In the western part this country borders with Albania, in the south with Macedonia, in the east with Serbia, and in the northwest with Montenegro. According to the 2011 census, Kosovo has 1.780021 resident inhabitants. Kosovo's population is also quite young: 28% of it is younger than 15 years old, while half of the population is younger than 28.2 years old, the average age of the population is 30.2 years. The average life expectancy for both sexes is estimated to be 76.7 years. For five centuries (1359-1912) it was under the occupation of the Ottoman Empire. At the Conference of Ambassadors in London (December 1912-July 1913) in Kosovo, the five-century Ottoman rule ended, but it was immediately replaced by an even heavier occupation, the Serbian rule that lasted until 1999. (Krasniqi, Rizaj 2018: 859-860; Islami, Ejupi 2018: 1305).

<sup>2</sup> Komunat e Kosovës – Republika e Kosovës. (<https://kk.rks-gov.net/>, access on 5.5.2024).

<sup>3</sup> Akademia e Shkencave dhe Arteve të Kosovës, *Fjalori Enciklopedik i Kosovës*, ASHAK, Prishtinë 2018, 1116, 1117. (Gashi, Nazif 2018:1116-1117).

<sup>4</sup> Bektesh Vidishiqi, *Mitrovica në mijëvjeçarë*, Prishtinë 2021, 66-77; Jusuf Osmani, *Vendbanimet e Kosovës*, *Vëllimi 8*, Prishtinë 2003; Fazli Hajrizi, *Mitrovica dhe Shalla e Bajgorës në fokusin e historisë*, Libri shkollor, Prishtinë 2011, 512-513.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Ethnic Cleansing in Kosovo: An Accounting*, access on 30.9.2023, [https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/human\\_rights/kosovoii/pdf/kosovii.pdf](https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/human_rights/kosovoii/pdf/kosovii.pdf).

schools, libraries, and religious and cultural heritage sites, along with the looting and obliteration of archival and museum documentation. These actions are recognized as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

According to international organizations like Human Rights Watch<sup>6</sup>, various forces including the Yugoslav Army, Serbian police anti-terror units, special military forces, paramilitary groups, secret police units, international mercenaries, and armed militias were active in Kosovo during this period, executing these atrocities under the coordination of Slobodan Milosevic<sup>7</sup>.

The “International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia” has documented testimonies about these crimes in the Mitrovica region. The terror led to a mass exodus, with the majority of Mitrovica’s residents forced to flee on March 28, 1999. Data from the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms (CDHRF) indicate that over 80,000 Albanians were forcibly expelled from the Municipality of Mitrovica during the war<sup>8</sup>.

During the Kosovo War of 1998-1999, extensive destruction was inflicted on educational infrastructure across several municipalities. A total of 132 school buildings<sup>9</sup> were burned and destroyed, while 689 primary schools were damaged, with the overall damage estimated at 29,105,000 euros<sup>10</sup> according to the International Damage Assessment Group. UNICEF reports that

<sup>6</sup> Fred Abrahams - Human Rights Watch, *Under Orders: War Crimes in Kosovo - Nën pushtetin e urdhrave – Krimet e luftës në Kosovë*, New York, Washington, London, Brussels 2002, 65; link: <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/kosovo/HRW2.pdf>, access on 7.4.2020.

<sup>7</sup> Dosijsje: 125. *motorizovana brigada Vojske Jugoslavije*, Fond za humanitarno prava; link: <http://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Dosijsje-125.pdf>, access on 7.4.2020.

<sup>8</sup> Halit Barani, *Tmerri i dokumentuar*, VipRint, Mitrovicë 2009, 284; Tribunali Ndërkombëtar për Ndjekjen Penale të Personave Përgjegjës për Shkelje të Rënda të së Drejtës Humanitare Ndërkombëtare të Kryera në Territorin e ish-Jugosllavisë që prej vitit 1991, Lënda Nr. IT-05 87-T, Data: 26 shkurt 2009, Aktgjykimi 2 prej 4, 26, 264. [http://www.icty.org/x/cases/milutinovic/tjug/sq/090226\\_vol3.pdf](http://www.icty.org/x/cases/milutinovic/tjug/sq/090226_vol3.pdf), access on, 7.5.2020; Fondi për të Drejtën Humanitare, *Libër Kujtimi i Kosovës*, <http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?cat=218&lang=zh>, access on 1.05.2020; Fondi për të Drejtën Humanitare, *Libër Kujtimi i Kosovës*, <http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?cat=218&lang=zh>, access on 1.5.2020; H. Barani, *Tmerri i dokumentuar*, 250-255; Analyzing by gender, 459 Albanian males and 70 females were killed and disappeared, with ages ranging from 0-7 years (4 individuals) to over 70 years (59 individuals). In total, in the Municipality of Mitrovica, from January 1, 1998, to June 14, 1999, 452 were executed and killed, and 77. Another element of genocide is the disappearance without trace of hundreds of Albanians from the Mitrovica region. A total of 129 remain missing: 110 males and 19 females, including 7 pupils, 10 students, 1 professor, and 2 doctors; U.S. Department of State, *Ethnic Cleansing in Kosovo: An Accounting*, access on më 30.9.2023, [https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/human\\_rights/kosovoii/pdf/kosoviii.pdf](https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/human_rights/kosovoii/pdf/kosoviii.pdf); H. Barani, *Tmerri i dokumentuar*, 379-382.

<sup>9</sup> Raporti i IFLA-s/FAIFE-së, prill 2000: *Bibliotekat në Kosovë* (<https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/faife/korepalb.pdf>, access on 22.2.2024).

<sup>10</sup> Jusuf Osmani, *Krimet e Serbisë në Kosovë 1998-1999*, Agjencia Shtetërore e Arkivave të Kosovës, Prishtinë, gusht 2010, 105; Hajrullah Koliqi, *Sistemi i arsimit në Kosovë*, SHB “Libri shkollor”, Prishtinë 2004, 51.

along with the schools, school libraries<sup>11</sup> were also destroyed. In Mitrovica alone, archival materials from 27 primary schools<sup>12</sup>, spanning the period from 1945 to 1999, were burned, destroyed, or damaged<sup>13</sup>.

The conflict also resulted in the burning and destruction of 22 schools in Mitrovica, 10 of which were completely razed. Thousands of residential buildings, along with dozens of cultural and religious structures, including mosques, libraries, ancient towers, and health facilities, were also targeted. Industrial factories<sup>14</sup> and private wood processing plants were burned as well. The Old Bazaar complex, along with many historic houses, towers, tekkes, graves, and monuments, was destroyed. The Albanian Catholic church was among the religious structures that suffered damage<sup>15</sup>.

In Mitrovica, the core of the city, including its cultural and architectural heritage, was extensively burned and destroyed. The first neighborhood built by Gazi Isa Bey, home to significant monuments like the “Old Bazaar,” was bulldozed, including the historic Zaimi family house, which had stood for 400 years. The entire “Kerveshi Neighborhood,” along with other historic areas along the left bank of the Lushta River and parts of the city center, was also destroyed. Serbian forces systematically burned and demolished buildings, including those with cultural significance, throughout the “Center” neighborhood and surrounding areas. Notable destruction occurred in the Muhaxhir neighborhood, where all houses along “Muhaxhir Road” and surrounding streets were reduced to ruins. On March 29, 1999, the destruction extended to the “Ilirida” and “Bair” neighborhoods, where buildings along “Queen Teuta” Road and “Zhabar Road” were burned, including the historic “Haxhi Veseli” Mosque and a 200-year-old tower<sup>16</sup>.

Overall, 7,399 buildings in Mitrovica were damaged during the conflict, with 5,610 rendered uninhabitable. Damage occurred across urban, suburban, and rural areas, with 3,103 buildings destroyed in urban areas, 814 in suburban areas, and 3,482 in rural areas<sup>17</sup>. In the Shala region of Mitrovica, nearly all villages were burned, with 24 villages completely destroyed, leaving over 90% of the houses in ruins. Villages on the western side of Mitrovica faced similar levels of devastation<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Raporti i IFLA-s/FAIFE-së, prill 2000: *Bibliotekat në Kosovë* (<https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/faiife/korepalb.pdf>, access on 22.2.2024).

<sup>12</sup> Agjencia e Arkivave Shtetërore të Kosovës, Fondi: *Qeveria e Kosovës-Komisioni për Vlerësimin e Dëmeve*, Dosja: Shkatërrimi i lëndës arkivore 1989-1999.

<sup>13</sup> Jusuf Osmani, *Krimet serbe në Kosovë 1998-1999*, Libri 1, Prishtinë 2010, 547-550.

<sup>14</sup> Fazli Hajrizi, *Mitrovica dhe Shala e Bajgorës në fokusin e historisë*, SHB “Libri shkollor”, Prishtinë 2011, 513.

<sup>15</sup> Mitrovica me rrethinë-Mozaik informative, Mitrovicë 2000, 73.

<sup>16</sup> Bektesh Vidishiçi, *Mitrovica në mijëvjeçarë*, Prishtinë 2021, 686, 687, 688, 689, 699, 705.

<sup>17</sup> Kuvendi Komunal Mitrovicë, *Plani Zhvillimor Komunal (PZH) Mitrovica 2009 - 2025+*, maj 2009, 65-73.

<sup>18</sup> B. Vidishiçi, *Mitrovica në mijëvjeçarë*, 686, 687, 688, 689, 699, 705.

Damage to objects of religious and cultural significance during the war (1998-1999) in the municipality of Mitrovica is numerous, and the damages were inflicted not only in urban but also in rural areas. Furthermore, in Mitrovica, Serbian forces during the war also burned religious buildings (mosques). The *Gazi Isa Beg Mosque* (1725) was not only burned but also shelled. Shelling damage is visible on the minaret of the mosque. In this manner, in the spring of 1999, the *Haxhi Veseli Mosque* (1777) was also burned<sup>19</sup>. The Teqe of the *Rufai Sufi Order* was burned and completely destroyed. The Hamidije Mosque of Bair was also burned and destroyed entirely, while the *Zalli Mosque (Gazi Isa Beg)* was burned from the inside, desecrating religious symbols, and the building and minaret suffered severe damage from burning, demolition, cracking, and splitting<sup>20</sup>. On May 2, 1999, the *Ibri Mosque* in Mitrovica was completely burned down and leveled to the ground, leaving no trace. The “Bajri Mosque”, “Shipoli Mosque” was demolished, the “Lower Zhabar Mosque” was partially burned from the inside, the “Bara Mosque” was burned from the inside, the “Koshtova Mosque of Bobi” was completely burned, the “Vllahi Mosque” was demolished, and the “Dedisa Mosque” was completely burned<sup>21</sup>. In the city of Mitrovica, among other significant Albanian heritage sites, was the four-story “Kulla” tower of the Gashi family. This tower was built in the last decade of the 19th century entirely of stone. The tower was burned and destroyed by Serbian army forces in the spring of 1999<sup>22</sup>.

During the Kosovo War, numerous archival materials were forcibly taken from Mitrovica and sent to unknown locations in Serbia. These actions, along with extensive damage and destruction, affected various institutions. At the Mitrovica City Museum, essential items such as registration books, seals, and exhibits of significant cultural value were stolen, and the entire facility was left in ruins. Display cases and entry doors were damaged, and valuable archaeological, ethnographic, and historical inventory books were systematically removed during the violent measures from 1990 to 1999<sup>23</sup>. There is evidence that some of these books are currently located in the northern part of Mitrovica.

The inter-communal archive of Mitrovica has reported significant losses, including key documents such as the Register Inventory Book, the Fund Register, the Workers' File, and other valuable records. Similarly, the Municipal Archive

<sup>19</sup> Fejaz Drançolli, *Monumentet e shkatërruara në Kosovë 1998-1999*, Instituti për hulumtimin e krimeve të luftës-Institute for war crimes research, Prishtinë, 2015, p. 56, 72.

<sup>20</sup> B. Vidishiqi, *Mitrovica në mijëvjeçarë*, 686, 687, 688, 689, 699, 705.

<sup>21</sup> Bashkësia Islami e Kosovës, *Barbaria serbe ndaj monumenteve islame në Kosovë* (shkurt 1998-qershor 1999), Prishtinë 2000, 53-64; F. Drançolli, *Monumentet e shkatërruara në Kosovë 1998-1999*, 102, 104.

<sup>22</sup> Fejaz Drançolli, *Trashëgimia e shkatërruar në Kosovë 1998/99-Destroyed heritage in Kosova 1998/99*, Prishtinë 2017, 193

<sup>23</sup> Agjencia e Arkivave të Kosovës, Dosja: Qeveria e Kosovës-Komisioni për vlerësimin e dëmeve 1989-1999, *Dëmet e shkaktuara gjatë administrimit të dhunshëm serb në institucionet e Kulturës në Kosovë gjatë viteve 1989-1999*, nr. 373/04, datë 12.3.2004.

of Mitrovica is missing important documentation from the Municipal Assembly for the period 1997-1999, with numerous files and documents unaccounted for<sup>24</sup>.

An audit by the Archive Commission revealed severe deficiencies in various registries, including the Mitrovica Registrar's Office, where birth, coronation, and citizenship registers from 1900-1999 are missing. Specifically, 452 books, 558 archival boxes, and numerous master registers and books for births, coronations, and deaths are unaccounted for. Additionally, local offices in several municipalities, such as Bare, Vllahi, Stantërg, Tuneli i Parë, Shipol, Shupkocv, and Vinarc, reported that all birth, coronation, and citizenship books were taken by Serbian forces<sup>25</sup>.

In the Municipality of Mitrovica, efforts to erase the region's history and identity led to the destruction and looting of civil data and registries. Civil documentation was systematically collected from local offices, initially transferred to the Civil Status Office in Mitrovica, and then sent to the cities of Kralevo and Krushevac in Serbia. The looted materials included Master Birth Registers (MBRs) dating from 1900 to 1997, religious birth registers for Muslims, Orthodox Christians, and Catholics, Master Marriage Registers (MMRs) from 1914 to 1999, and Master Death Registers (MDRs) from 1913 to 1999. Citizenship books, alphabetical registries of new residents, protocol books, and other civil documentation dating from 1900 to 1999 were also taken. Significant gaps were left in vehicle registration records, firearms licensing, passport files, identification papers, and driver's licenses. In total, all Master Birth Registers and 558 archival boxes, along with related documentation, were confirmed to have been looted from Mitrovica's civil registry offices<sup>26</sup>.

The educational system in Kosovo suffered extensive destruction and looting of archival materials during the conflict, particularly at the University of Prishtina and its affiliated faculties in Mitrovica, as well as in primary and secondary schools. At the University of Prishtina, essential documents such as master books, graduation records, financial documentation, and academic protocols were lost. Similar losses occurred at various high schools and faculties, including the Faculty of Mechanical-Metallurgical Engineering in Mitrovica, where 1,700 files were taken<sup>27</sup>.

In primary and secondary education, numerous schools in the Mitrovica area experienced significant losses. Documents, including master books, teaching diaries, employee files, and financial records from several schools, were either destroyed or taken. This widespread destruction included the burning of archival materials at many schools, such as the "Frang Bardhi" Gymnasium,

<sup>24</sup> Baki Svirca, *Plaçkitja dhe shkatërrimi i fondit arkivor të Kosovës nga Serbia*, para dhe gjatë luftës 1998-1999, Instituto i krimeve të luftës, Prishtinë 2016, 106, 107.

<sup>25</sup> Agjencia e Arkivave të Kosovës, *Dosja: Dëmet e luftës; Raport i Arkivit historik rajonal në Mitrovicë mbi gjendjen e dokumentacionit në arkiv dhe në regjistratura 1989-1999, shtator 2003*.

<sup>26</sup> Baki Svirca, *Plaçkitja dhe shkatërrimi i fondit arkivor të Kosovës nga Serbia*, para dhe gjatë luftës 1998-1999, Instituto i krimeve të luftës, Prishtinë 2016, 151-153.

<sup>27</sup> B. Svirca, *Plaçkitja dhe shkatërrimi i fondit arkivor*, 215, 220, 221-229.

“Hasan Prishtina” Secondary School, and “Migjeni” School, among others. Serbian forces also targeted educational archives, leading to the loss of employee files, registers, and various other important documents<sup>28</sup>.

The damage extended to the broader educational administration in Mitrovica, where archival records of primary and secondary education, including employee files and financial documentation, were systematically destroyed or confiscated. Similar destruction and looting affected other sectors in Kosovo, including justice, health, security, cadastral and geodetic documentation, religious communities, and economic enterprises<sup>29</sup>.

In many major cities, public libraries were often integrated into Local Culture Houses, while in numerous villages, libraries served both the public and schools. School libraries fell under the oversight of educational authorities, and it was mandated that each primary and secondary school maintain a library. According to official records, by 1989 in Kosovo, there were 967 primary schools and 69 secondary schools, but only 328 of these had functioning libraries. Some specialized libraries operated within industrial, social, scientific, and cultural institutions, such as the mining companies in northern Mitrovica. Examples include the library at the Faculty of Mining and the Xehetari Enterprise Library in Zvečan, “Trepça.” Since 1945, the municipal library of Mitrovica, located south of the Ibar River, has served as both a municipal and regional hub for library services, encompassing a central library and six branch libraries or departments<sup>30</sup>.

During the 1998-1999 Kosovo war, significant losses were incurred, including the destruction of six public libraries in Mitrovica, which housed a combined total of 100,000 books<sup>31</sup>. The entire collection of the Inter-Municipal Library “Latif Berisha” in Mitrovica was confiscated and relocated to the northern part of the city. Additionally, approximately 175,000 books from the personal collections of prominent Albanian scholars and cultural figures were burned. Beyond the destruction of school buildings, 18 school libraries were also set ablaze, resulting in the loss of 63,000 books. Furthermore, branch libraries in the villages of Vllahi and Bare lost 18,389 books, and the branch library in the First Tunnel was looted of 500 books, along with furniture including two tables and ten chairs. At the Inter-Municipal Library “Latif Berisha,” 230 dictionaries, encyclopedias, 150 medical books, and other equipment were seized. Serbian forces in Mitrovica also targeted and destroyed numerous libraries containing a wealth of literary works, manuscripts, and ethnographic items such as traditional

<sup>28</sup> AAK, Dosja: Dëmet e luftës; *Raport i Arkivit historik rajonal në Mitrovicë mbi gjendjen e dokumentacionit në arkiv dhe në regjistratura 1989-1999, shtator 2003.*

<sup>29</sup> B. Svirca, *Plaçkitja dhe shkatërrimi i fondit arkivor të Kosovës*, 231-264.

<sup>30</sup> Raporti i IFLA-s/FAIFE-së, prill 2000: *Bibliotekat në Kosovë* (<https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/faiife/korepalb.pdf>, access on 22.2.2024), 18.

<sup>31</sup> J. Osmani, *Krimet serbe në Kosovë 1998-1999*, 547-550

costumes, musical instruments, crafts, ancient artifacts, and archival documents<sup>32</sup>.

Sport in Kosovo also suffered significant damage during the war, including extensive damage in the Municipality of Mitrovica. Experts categorized these damages as direct and indirect. Indirect damages included human resources and poor management. Consequently, the sports gym in Mitrovica, small sports fields, the new football stadium, the auxiliary stadium, and the old “Liria” stadium all suffered. Direct damages were related to the destruction of infrastructure<sup>33</sup>.

### **Revitalization of Urban, Educational, Social, and Cultural Infrastructure in Mitrovica**

To halt the humanitarian catastrophe and ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the totalitarian regime of Milosevic’s Serbia, as well as to find a political solution to the Kosovo issue, NATO launched a 78-day air campaign against Yugoslavia under “Operation Allied Force” from March 24 to June 9, 1999<sup>34</sup>.

“Operation Allied Force,” led by the United States, was the largest and most sustained military operation undertaken in Europe since World War II. It marked NATO's first extensive use of military force and a major military battle operation for humanitarian objectives against a totalitarian state perpetrating atrocities within its occupied territory. Additionally, this operation was one of the longest and most expensive military operations used, involving approximately 28,000 explosive munitions over 78 days. NATO's air campaign<sup>35</sup> in Kosovo aimed to halt the atrocities of Milosevic's Serbian forces against the Albanian population in Kosovo, resulting in the conclusion of the conflict in Kosovo and the return of persecuted populations to their homelands, including Mitrovica, but with homes and settlements needing reconstruction.

Following the conclusion of the Kosovo war (June 1999) with the deployment of NATO forces, the KFOR mission, and Kosovo's placement under international civil administration by the UN (UNMIK) under Resolution 1244, various states, organizations, and different donors began the reconstruction and revitalization of homes, educational, cultural, sports, and religious buildings. The forcibly displaced population from Kosovo to Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro,

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<sup>32</sup> *Mitrovica me rrethinë-Mozaik informative*, 73; AAK, Dosja: Dëmet e luftës; *Raport i Arkivit historik rajonal në Mitrovicë mbi gjendjen e dokumentacionit në arkiv dhe në regjistratura 1989-1999*, shtator 2003.

<sup>33</sup> AAK, Dosja: UNMIK-Institucionet e Përkohshme të Qeverisjes-Departamenti i sportit, *Raport i vlerësimit të dëmeve para dhe gjatë luftës*, Prishtinë, 17.3.2003.

<sup>34</sup> Benjamin S. Lambeth, *NATO's Air War for Kosovo: A Strategic and Operational Assessment*, RAND, Pittsburgh 2001, xiii-xxiv.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

and other Western countries, including the United States, returned in record time to their territories.

The European Union (EU), through the European Agency for Reconstruction, initiated the Kosovo Reconstruction Program on July 23, 1999<sup>36</sup>. The European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR) announced new programs for Kosovo's reconstruction in May 2000. EAR undertook the work of the Kosovo Task Force Reconstruction (TAFKO) of the European Commission. The European Commission and the World Bank conducted a comprehensive assessment of the post-conflict situation in Kosovo and assessed an external financing request of \$1.1 billion in 2000. Priorities for interventions were discussed with the international community at the Second Donors' Conference on November 17, 1999, where the EU confirmed its intention to continue playing a significant role in Kosovo's reconstruction. Funds available from the EU for Kosovo in 2000 were at least 360 million euros at that time<sup>37</sup>.

The initial activities of international humanitarian agencies, under the umbrella of the United Nations, substantially supported by the US budget for Kosovo, including USAID, provided emergency food, medical supplies, and temporary shelter in war-torn Kosovo. The main challenge was the lack of suitable housing for returnees, exacerbated by the onset of winter, as more than 80,000 homes were destroyed and uninhabitable. The United Nations, as a leader in the reconstruction process and humanitarian assistance within its agency nomenclature, spent approximately \$939 million on humanitarian aid for the Balkans until the calendar year 1999, including \$689 million for Kosovo and related programs, excluding significant assistance for refugee return, land clearance, humanitarian aid, camp construction, and security issues managed by NATO and its member states. The contribution of the United States to humanitarian programs in Kosovo from March 1998 to July 1999, with its agencies USAID \$147,360,393, state programs for refugees \$149,618,322, State Department \$45,281,000, totaling \$342,259,715. The responsibilities for post-war reconstruction in Kosovo were defined by UN Security Council Resolution 1244. The United Nations assumed responsibility for civil administration and the organization of humanitarian aid in Kosovo under its established organization, UNMIK. The High Commissioner for Refugees was appointed to provide humanitarian aid. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe was appointed responsible for institution-building and reconstruction of Kosovo as its largest initial challenge was entrusted to a special institution established by the European Union, the Kosovo Reconstruction Agency, with a projected

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<sup>36</sup> *EU Launches reconstruction programme for Kosovo*, Source: UNMIK, Posted, 23 Jul 1999, Originally published, 23 Jul 1999, <https://reliefweb.int/report/serbia/eu-launches-reconstruction-programme-kosovo> (access on 3.5.2024).

<sup>37</sup> *European Agency announces new Reconstruction Programmes*, Source: EU, Posted 3 May 2000, Originally published, 3 May 2000, <https://reliefweb.int/report/serbia/european-agency-announces-new-reconstruction-programmes>. (access on 3.5.2024).

budget of 1.5-5 billion euros. This approach is the Balkans as a whole, evolving concept of reconstruction<sup>38</sup>.

The urban reconstruction in Mitrovica, in its initial phase, began in the second half of 1999 and continued until 2002. Organizations active during this phase in the municipality of Mitrovica were: DRC, KOUCHNER, CHF, ICS, ACTED, CARE, NRC, and WorldVision in 1999; IRC, DRC, KOUCHNER, ACT, ACT - UMCOR, ACTED, and World Vision in 2000; LËF, DRC, ACT - UMCOR, UFORK, SDC in 2001; and DRC and GOAL in 2002. These organizations assisted in the reconstruction/repair of approximately 3,500 homes in Mitrovica (Category II - IV: 2,480 homes, Category V: 946 homes). Of the 70 Category I homes, only 19 were rebuilt (27.14%); Category II: out of 385 homes, 97 were rebuilt (25.19%); Category III: out of 652 homes, 198 were rebuilt (30.37%); Category IV: out of 2,646 homes, 1,348 were rebuilt (50.94%); Category V: out of 2,964 homes, 946 were rebuilt (31.92%); Uncategorized: out of 680 homes, 605 were rebuilt (89.00%). The number of reconstructed objects by geographical zones: Urban area: 895 objects (27.83%); Suburban area (districts): 434 objects (13.50%); Rural area (villages): 1,887 objects (58.67%). Total: 3,216 objects (100.00%)<sup>39</sup>.

During the war of 1998-1999 in Kosovo, in the region of Mitrovica, 25 schools were burned and damaged, 10 of which were completely leveled<sup>40</sup>. By the school year 2004/5, Mitrovica had reached 33 primary schools and 14 separate parallel schools, in 2005/6 it was 34 with 12, and in the school year 2006/7, it was 34 with 11. The number of schools according to the language of instruction in Mitrovica during these years was in the school year 2004/5 a total of 48, 4 of which were mixed. In 2005/6, there were 43 Albanian-language schools and 3 mixed ones, while in the school year 2006/7, there were 42 Albanian-language schools and 3 mixed ones. Despite these significant changes between 1999 and 2004, by 2007/08 there was still a shortage of school space, with educational processes taking place in more than two buildings. 6.8% of schools, or 7.93% of primary-secondary education schools, conducted classes in three or four buildings. This phenomenon was more pronounced in urban areas, particularly in Mitrovica<sup>41</sup>. Secondary schools in the Municipality of Mitrovica also operated with two shifts, such as: Gymnasium "Frank Bardhi"; Economic High School "Hasan Prishtina"; Medical High School "Dr. Xheladin Deda"; Technical High School "Architect Sinani" - Mitrovica. During the UNMIK

<sup>38</sup> Arbër Hadri, Përkrahja e SHBA në rimëkëmbjen e Kosovës së pasluftës: Qëndrimi amerikan ndaj çështjes së Kosovës 1999-2004, *Gjurmimi albanologjike-seria e shkencave historike*, 48/2028, Instituti Albanologjik, Prishtinë, 230, 232, 233, 234.

<sup>39</sup> Kuvendi Komunal Mitrovicë, *Plani Zhvillimor Komunal (PZH) Mitrovica 2009 - 2025+*, maj 2009, 98, 99.

<sup>40</sup> J. Osmani, *Krimet serbe në Kosovë 1998-1999*, 547-550.

<sup>41</sup> Republika e Kosovës, Ministria e Arsimit, Shkencës dhe e Teknologjisë, Ministria e Arsimit, Shkencës dhe e Teknologjisë, *Arsimi parauniversitar tregues dhe të dhëna statistikore për vitet 2004/05, 2005/06, 2006/07, Prishtinë 2008*, 38-40.

administration from 1999 to 2007, Serbian community schools in the north of Mitrovica organized their education system outside the legal structures of Kosovo, but funding and all logistics were provided from the budget of the Municipality of Mitrovica. With the formation of the Municipality of North Mitrovica on February 20, 2008, schools in the northern part remained outside the borders and administration of South Mitrovica<sup>42</sup>. Mitrovica had the Faculty of Metallurgy and Technical School. These faculties (until 2013) operated within the University of Prishtina framework. In South Mitrovica, in 2013, the “Isa Boletini” University was established and a modern university campus was built<sup>43</sup>.

UNMIK in 1999 established a Consortium for School Books for Kosovo, involving major donors: the Austrian Government/Federal Office, the Canadian Government/CIDA, the Danish Government/DANIDA, the International Development Department, DFID/United Kingdom, Kosovo Foundation for Civil Society/KFOS, Plataforma for Kosovo/Spain, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation/SDC, UNICEF, and the United States Department of State - Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration/BPRM. The project was coordinated by KFOS and OSI Budapest, with books distributed through the School Book Network covering every school in Kosovo. The Consortium successfully raised funds (approximately 5 million German marks) for printing 192 school books in Albanian, with a circulation of 3.2 million copies, as well as school books in Serbian, Bosnian, and Turkish. By 2003, 131 titles had been printed and distributed, totaling about 2 million separate copies. UNICEF in Pristina also supported the publishing and dispatch of school books from Sarajevo to Kosovo for immediate distribution among Bosniak students in Kosovo. The EU (International Education) assisted in the reconstruction of school facilities in Kosovo. UNICEF assessed the condition of 1,058 out of a total of 1,200 primary and secondary schools in Kosovo. 873 were earmarked for repairs, while 132 schools were destroyed and needed full reconstruction. Alongside these schools, school libraries were also destroyed. The repair process began in 271 schools and was completed in 379 schools. UNICEF funded work in 35 schools, whose repairs were completed, UNHCR in 96, and ECHO in 111. The Red Cross and bilateral donations through NGOs and international organizations funded the remainder of the school’s rebuilding efforts<sup>44</sup>.

In addition to school libraries, Mitrovica also had the Municipal Library “Latif Berisha” located south of the Ibar River (South Mitrovica). Since 1945, the library has functioned as a municipal and regional library. The municipal library system consists of the main library and six branch libraries. In April 2000, the main library held 117,206 books: 62,995 in Albanian, 51,819 in Serbian, and 2,392 in Turkish. Currently, the library is housed in a temporary facility.

<sup>42</sup> K. Komunal Mitrovicë, *Plani Zhvillimor Komunal (PZHK) Mitrovica 2009 - 2025+*, 65-73.

<sup>43</sup> Ahmet Jashari, *Jeta akademike në Mitrovicë (1961-2023)*, Universiteti “Isa Boletini” në Mitrovicë, Mitrovicë 2013, 40, 59, 64, 134-136.

<sup>44</sup> Raporti i IFLA-s/FAIFE-së, prill 2000: *Bibliotekat në Kosovë*, 22 (<https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/faife/korepalb.pdf>). (access on 22.2.2024).

Construction of a new library building began last year (2023). The library provides services for children, youth, students, and researchers of various professions. Interest in reading has increased, and the library now has more users than before the war. The library's collection includes books in Albanian, English, German, Turkish, Serbian, and other European languages. After the war, a librarian project was established with the assistance of the American Friends Service Committee, enabling the acquisition of 18,300 new books<sup>45</sup>. The initial branches of the library operated with great difficulty, as its library was not built despite being promised by UNMIK in December 1999. The Bare Library branch was destroyed and burned by Serbian forces in May 1999 but now operates normally after the Culture, Youth, and Sports Directorate rebuilt the Bare Cultural Center, which houses the library branch<sup>46</sup>. Before the war, there was a library branch in Vllahi, but it no longer exists due to the conflict. In 2014, the library branch in the village of Kçiq i Madh opened for the first time. Established in March 2013, the "Isa Boletini" University in Mitrovica has a university library spanning 800 square meters with 124 seats. In addition to a library collection of 3,000 titles, students also have access to computers with internet connectivity and online libraries linked through the university's website, such as UebSCO and the Francophone University Library. The library is open to the community outside the university<sup>47</sup>. Mitrovica also has the "Rexhep Mitrovica" Cultural Center, which includes a performance hall, managed by the Directorate for Youth, Culture, and Sports. The city also hosts the City Museum and generally has a small number of cultural institutions in the southern part of the city<sup>48</sup>.

Mitrovica has nine permanent protected cultural monuments: the City Public bath building *Hamam*, the *Catholic Church of St. Peter*, the *Mosque with Graves*, the *Medieval City Ruins of Trepça*, *Trepça Town*, the *Roots of the Medieval Complex* on the surface of Old Trepça, the House on Ilia Bircani Street, the House of Bllagoje Gjorgjeviqi, and the House on Zelengora Street<sup>49</sup>. In December 2003, the Center for Cultural Heritage in Mitrovica was established, operating under the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports. In the current political situation, cultivating and further developing cultural heritage presents a significant challenge for Mitrovica. However, cultural diversity is an integral part of its identity, making Mitrovica and Kosovo unique. According to the Mitrovica Communal Development Plan (2009-2025+), Mitrovica has had its list of inventoried objects since 2009<sup>50</sup>. According to the Regional Center for Cultural Heritage in Mitrovica, this city has five permanently protected monuments: the Former Jadran Hotel in Mitrovica (19th century), the Trepça Mosque (16th

<sup>45</sup> Raporti i IFLA-s/FAIFE-së, prill 2000: *Bibliotekat në Kosovë* <https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/faife/korepalb.pdf>. (access on 22.2.2024).

<sup>46</sup> *Declaration of former director of DKRS-së*, Artan Osmani, 24.4.2024.

<sup>47</sup> Ahmet Jashari, *Jeta akademike në Mitrovicë (1961-2023)*, UIBM, Mitrovicë 2023, 137

<sup>48</sup> K. Komunal Mitrovicë, *Plani Zhvillimor Komunal (PZH) Mitrovica 2009 - 2025+*, 79

<sup>49</sup> IKS, *Analiza të Politikave Mitrovica: Një qytet, dy realitete*, 17 dhjetor 2009, 56.

<sup>50</sup> K. Komunal Mitrovicë, *Plani Zhvillimor Komunal (PZH) Mitrovica 2009 - 2025+*, 83-86.

century) in the village of Mazhiq, the Old Ambulance - Xhafer Deve's House (1930) in Mitrovica, the Old Bathhouse (18th century) in Mitrovica, and the Basilica of St. Peter (13th century) in Stantërg (Mitrovica). Mitrovica also has 32 temporarily protected monuments. These include various historical buildings and structures significant to the local culture and history. They are: Korogli Family House (19th century), Tupelle Tower (20th century), Islam Shipoli's House (20th century), Old Post Office (1920), Xhafer Deve's House (19th century), Employment Agency (20th century), Hunters' Association House (20th century), Old City Gate - Mitrovica (18th – 20th century), Reshat Ferati's House (20th century), Army House (1959), Ymer Ymeri's Tower (19th century, Rahove village), Nehbi Sahit Peci's Barn (20th century), Catholic Church (Upper Vinarc, Mitrovica), Hafuz Halil Mripa's Tekke (1967, Lower Suhodoll, Mitrovica), Jonuz Efendi's Tekke (1905, Lower Suhodoll, Mitrovica), Kamer Jahir Tahiri's Tower (20th century, Stantërg, Mitrovica), Mehmet Sylani's Tower (20th century, Rekë, Mitrovica), Haxhi Osmani's Mill (19th century, Rekë, Mitrovica), Sali Kajtazi's Tower (20th century, Kçiq i Vogël, Mitrovica), Asllan Tupella's Tower (20th century, Kçiq i Vogël, Mitrovica), Mehmet Peci's Mausoleum (20th century, Upper Zhabar, Mitrovica), Shaban Lushtaku's Tower (20th century, Mitrovica), Isha Bankosi's Building (20th century, Mitrovica), Rrahim Igrishta's Mill (20th century, Selac), Reka Church (14th century, Koprivë, Mitrovica). In Mitrovica, three assets are on the temporary protection list but need to be reassessed. They are: Shemsi Ahmeti's Tower (19th century, Zasellë, Mitrovica), Banimi House – Florim Zeneli – Kumrije Rama (Fehmi Ibishi) 19th century, Mitrovica, and Sefedin Zasellë's Tower (20th century, Zasellë, Mitrovica)<sup>51</sup>.

In Mitrovica, instead of the ruins and remnants left by the Milosevic regime, state investments improved and rebuilt the road infrastructure. Furthermore, thanks to assistance from the Albanian diaspora and international organizations, institutions, and agencies, the rise of companies and enterprises in the construction sector began. All of this was reflected in the construction of numerous apartment buildings along all the main thoroughfares, now transformed into modern boulevards, as well as in neighborhoods and other streets of the city such as those in the old city center, downtown, and in Bair, Ilirida, and elsewhere, fundamentally changing the city's appearance. Along Queen Teuta Boulevard on both sides, from the beginning of Isa Boletini Square to the market circle, and from there along Shemsi Ahmeti Boulevard, on one side, and on the other, the continuation of Queen Teuta Boulevard to the “Bridge of Blood,” high-rise residential buildings and modern premises for various purposes were built: commercial, industrial, hotels and restaurants, and other premises for the tertiary economic sector. Reconstruction and the construction of new buildings, and the improvement of road infrastructure also included other neighborhoods, such as Shemsi Ahmeti Boulevard along its entire length, the old

<sup>51</sup> Qendra Rajonale për Trashëgimi Kulturore në Mitrovicë, *Lista e trashëgimisë kulturore për mbrojtje të përhershme, të përkohshme dhe ato që duhet të vlerësohen*.

city center, including the first neighborhoods, such as the neighborhood of Gazi Isa Beut, Hosh Kadem neighborhood, the current Agim Ramadani - Katana Street, the Bajr neighborhood, the Street of Muhaxhirët, Martyrs of the Nation, etc<sup>52</sup>. The total number of residential units that currently exist is unknown. Thanks to large contributions from foreign organizations, including the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (DEZA), many damaged buildings have been reconstructed in recent years. It is evident that in the entire southern part of the city, especially in the suburbs of Shipol and Zhabar, there is a noticeable activity in new constructions. Particularly in the quarters of the city center (such as near Queen Teuta Street), a lot of construction is underway. Additionally, the project to rebuild the Roma neighborhood should be mentioned. Currently, about 100-150 permits are issued annually for new constructions<sup>53</sup>. In addition to residential buildings, all school buildings burned down and destroyed by Serbian forces in towns and villages have been rebuilt from the ground up. Dozens of Islamic religious buildings in the southern part of the city have been rebuilt or renovated: Haxhi Veseli Mosque, Isa Beg Mosque, Hamidije Mosque in Bair. In this regard, special attention was paid to the reconstruction of the "Çarshi," one of the architectural cultural heritage monuments of oriental style, which Serbian vandals had bulldozed to the ground. However, it should be emphasized that the current revitalized appearance of Çarshi does not resemble the old market, neither in appearance nor in construction.

In addition, the central part of the city was also renovated (where the first city objects and the first bazaar were once built), specifically Adem Jashari Square and Mehë Uka Square, and further down the center of the city towards the former bazaar leading to the main bridge; Agim Hajrizi Boulevard, which connects this part of the city to the redesigned Isa Boletini Square, is distinguished by the statue of Isa Boletini<sup>54</sup> placed there. Around it, impressive residential buildings were also erected, high-rise apartment buildings, and commercial properties such as the center of commerce, and the renovated sports complex (Minatori Sports Hall). Additionally, (some from the foundation and some renovated) in addition to the school buildings mentioned above, dozens of other cultural and health facilities were built. In this way, in Bair, in the complex of the military barracks, a hospital complex was built and put into function with all the necessary departments. In "Fidanishte" a higher education building was built where the University was established, making Mitrovica a university town for the first time. In addition to the processes of rebuilding the road infrastructure and urban expansion of Mitrovica, the rebuilding and urbanization of other settlements were developed both in the suburban area of Mitrovica and throughout the rural area - as in Shala of Bajgora and those on the western side.

<sup>52</sup> Bektesh Vidishiqi, *Mitrovica në mijëvjeçarë*, Prishtinë 2021, 717-724.

<sup>53</sup> K. Komunal Mitrovicë, *Plani Zhvillimor Komunal (PZH) Mitrovica 2009 - 2025+*, 100, 102.

<sup>54</sup> One of the features in Mitrovica is the construction of the statue of Mother Teresa and the statues of heroes: Isa Boletini, Adem Jashari, Mehë Uka, Shemsi Ahmeti, Harun Beka, Safet Boletini and Avni Shabani.

Thus, all the villages, which were in ruins and ruins from the war, without leaving any houses or objects on foot for a relatively short time, were rebuilt into new, much more beautiful houses than they had had before. Most of the houses were built on two or more floors. Also built (most of them from the foundation and some renovated) and other objects such as schools, libraries, clinics, and places of worship. All the villages were connected with new asphalted roads. Thanks to this, the rural area of Mitrovica appears with an almost idyllic view. In some of the mountain villages (and those in the plain), which are distinguished by breathtaking mountain landscapes such as the villages of Bajgora, Bare, Vllahi, Trepça, Kodër (former Zasella), etc, hotel objects were built, thus becoming centers of recreation and rural tourism visited by the citizens of Mitrovica and other cities in Kosovo and other states. In the overall urban development and expansion of the city of Mitrovica, mention should be made of the regulation of the bed and banks of the Iber River and the creation of the reservoir lake. The reservoir lake has a length of about 2 km, a width of up to 150 meters, and a depth reaching up to 4 meters in some places. As part of the recreational sports complex, near the lake in its lower part, one of the most attractive facilities has also been built and put into use, the complex of swimming pools with accompanying facilities, namely "Water Park" - "Aqua Park," which aims to be the largest complex of its kind in the region. The construction of the area's relaxation, recreation, and sports complex as well as the regulation of the riverbed and banks, return Mitrovica to its glory that it had for centuries as the most beautiful city in Kosovo and the broader city of the four rivers<sup>55</sup>.

## Summary

In conclusion, the war had a devastating impact on Mitrovica, resulting in the widespread ethnic cleansing of the Albanian population, atrocities, and the systematic destruction of urban infrastructure and cultural heritage. The city's public buildings, homes, schools, libraries, and religious sites were decimated, while valuable archival and museum documentation was looted or destroyed. These acts, orchestrated by Serbian Milosevic's regime during the 1998-1999 war, left deep scars on the population and caused severe material damage that required extensive restoration.

The 78-day NATO intervention in 1999, aimed at halting the humanitarian crisis and the atrocities committed by Milosevic's forces against Kosovo's Albanian majority, ultimately ended the war. This allowed the displaced population to return, including residents of Mitrovica. However, they returned to a city scarred by war, with burned homes and devastated

<sup>55</sup> B. Vidishiqi, *Mitrovica në mijëvjeçarë*, Prishtinë 2021, 717-724.

neighborhoods, marking the beginning of a long and challenging process of rebuilding and recovery. The post-war reconstruction of Mitrovica presents a complex and multifaceted process of urban, social, cultural, and educational rebuilding. Following the devastation wrought by the Kosovo War, which severely damaged the city's infrastructure and cultural heritage, the efforts to revive Mitrovica have been significant, though many challenges remain.

One of the major tasks after the war was to reconstruct the city's physical infrastructure. Mitrovica experienced massive destruction, with over 7,000 buildings damaged, including homes, schools, and cultural institutions. Historical landmarks such as mosques, churches, libraries, and archival materials were also targeted, with the intent to erase the region's ethnic and cultural identity. The damage went beyond physical structures, as educational institutions lost important documentation, school libraries, and collections, hindering the city's academic capacity.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, the international community, led by organizations such as NATO, the European Union, and the United Nations, played a key role in Mitrovica's recovery. Through initiatives like the Kosovo Reconstruction Program, these organizations provided financial aid and technical support. The city saw the development of modern urban infrastructure, including new boulevards and high-rise residential buildings, alongside the rebuilding of essential public services such as schools, hospitals, and religious institutions. These developments not only restored functionality to the city but also symbolized hope and recovery for its inhabitants.

Education and cultural revival were central to Mitrovica's reconstruction process. The establishment of institutions such as "Isa Boletini" University and the modern university library signaled a new era for education and research in the region. However, despite the rebuilding of schools and public facilities, educational institutions faced overcrowding and shortages in space and resources, reflecting the broader challenges of post-war recovery.

Culturally, the restoration of Mitrovica's heritage sites was a vital part of the reconstruction process. Efforts were made to rehabilitate historically significant buildings, including mosques and churches, as well as other cultural monuments that represent the city's rich historical identity. While many cultural landmarks were restored, some irreplaceable artifacts remain lost, and some cultural items are still held in Serbia, highlighting the long-term impact of the war on the city's cultural memory.

Mitrovica's rural surroundings also benefited from the reconstruction efforts, with new roads and infrastructure fostering economic growth and regional development. The revitalization of both the urban and rural areas has been essential in restoring the region's vibrancy and supporting the reintegration of displaced populations. The rebuilding of infrastructure in rural areas has also contributed to the overall economic recovery, helping to establish Mitrovica as a thriving regional hub once again.

Despite the significant progress made in the physical reconstruction of Mitrovica, deep ethnic divisions remain in the city. The scars of war are still visible in the social fabric, as communities continue to grapple with the legacies of conflict. Ethnic tensions, particularly between the Albanian and Serbian populations, complicate efforts to achieve full social and political integration within the Republic of Kosovo. Addressing these divisions will require not only ongoing material investment but also sustained efforts to promote reconciliation, dialogue, and unity among the city's diverse populations.

The reconstruction of Mitrovica reflects the resilience of its community and the commitment of both local and international actors to rebuilding the city's physical, social, and cultural environment. The process has transformed Mitrovica into a more modern urban center, with renewed infrastructure and a revitalized cultural identity. However, the challenges of overcoming ethnic divisions, restoring lost cultural heritage, and addressing educational and social needs underscore the complexity of post-war recovery. Recovery of Mitrovica implies continued investment in economic, social, and cultural development, as well as efforts to foster greater integration and unity across its divided communities.

## Zaključak

Zaključno, rat je imao razoran uticaj na Mitrovicu, rezultirajući široko rasprostranjenim etničkim čišćenjem albanskog stanovništva, zločinima i sistematskim uništavanjem urbane infrastrukture i kulturnog nasljeđa. Javne zgrade, domovi, škole, biblioteke i vjerski objekti u gradu su uništeni, dok je vrijedna arhivska i muzejska dokumentacija opljačkana ili uništena. Ovi činovi, orkestrirani od strane režima srpskog Miloševića tokom rata 1998-1999, ostavili su duboke ožiljke na stanovništvu i prouzrokovali ozbiljnu materijalnu štetu koja je zahtijevala opsežnu restauraciju.

NATO intervencija 1999. godine, koja je trajala 78 dana i imala za cilj zaustavljanje humanitarne krize i zločina koje su počinile Miloševićeve snage protiv albanske većine na Kosovu, konačno je okončala rat. To je omogućilo raseljenom stanovništvu da se vrati, uključujući i stanovnike Mitrovice. Međutim, vratili su se u grad unakažen ratom, sa spaljenim domovima i razorenim naseljima, označavajući početak dugog i izazovnog procesa obnove i oporavka. Poslijeratna rekonstrukcija Mitrovice predstavlja kompleksan i višestruki proces urbane, socijalne, kulturne i obrazovne obnove. Nakon razaranja uzrokovanog Kosovskim ratom, koji je ozbiljno oštetio gradsku infrastrukturu i kulturno nasljeđe, naponi za oživljavanje Mitrovice bili su značajni, iako mnogi izazovi ostaju.

Jedan od glavnih zadataka nakon rata bila je rekonstrukcija fizičke infrastrukture grada. Mitrovica je pretrpjela masivno razaranje, sa preko 7.000 oštećenih zgrada, uključujući domove, škole i kulturne institucije. Historijske

znamenitosti poput džamija, crkava, biblioteka i arhivskih materijala također su bile meta, s namjerom brisanja etničkog i kulturnog identiteta regije. Šteta je prevazišla fizičke strukture, jer su obrazovne institucije izgubile važnu dokumentaciju, školske biblioteke i zbirke, ometajući akademski kapacitet grada. Neposredno nakon rata, međunarodna zajednica, predvođena organizacijama poput NATO-a, Evropske unije i Ujedinjenih nacija, odigrala je ključnu ulogu u oporavku Mitrovice. Kroz inicijative poput Programa rekonstrukcije Kosova, ove organizacije su pružile finansijsku pomoć i tehničku podršku. Grad je doživio razvoj moderne urbane infrastrukture, uključujući nove bulevare i visoke stambene zgrade, uz obnovu osnovnih javnih usluga kao što su škole, bolnice i vjerske institucije. Ovi razvoji ne samo da su vratili funkcionalnost gradu, već su i simbolizirali nadu i oporavak za njegove stanovnike.

Obrazovanje i kulturni preporod bili su centralni za proces rekonstrukcije Mitrovice. Osnivanje institucija poput Univerziteta „Isa Boletini“ i moderne univerzitetske biblioteke signaliziralo je novu eru za obrazovanje i istraživanje u regiji. Međutim, uprkos obnovi škola i javnih objekata, obrazovne institucije su se suočavale s prenatrpanošću i nedostatkom prostora i resursa, odražavajući šire izazove poslijeratnog oporavka.

Kulturno, restauracija kulturnih mjesta Mitrovice bila je vitalni dio procesa rekonstrukcije. Uloženi su naponi da se rehabilituju historijski značajne zgrade, uključujući džamije i crkve, kao i druge kulturne spomenike koji predstavljaju bogat historijski identitet grada. Iako su mnoge kulturne znamenitosti restaurirane, neki nezamjenjivi artefakti ostaju izgubljeni, a neki kulturni predmeti se i dalje nalaze u Srbiji, naglašavajući dugoročni uticaj rata na kulturnu memoriju grada.

Mitrovička ruralna okolina također je imala koristi od napora rekonstrukcije, s novim putevima i infrastrukturom koja je podsticala ekonomski rast i regionalni razvoj. Revitalizacija urbanih i ruralnih područja bila je ključna za vraćanje živosti regije i podršku reintegraciji raseljenog stanovništva. Obnova infrastrukture u ruralnim područjima također je doprinijela ukupnom ekonomskom oporavku, pomažući da se Mitrovica ponovo uspostavi kao uspješno regionalno središte.

Uprkos značajnom napretku u fizičkoj rekonstrukciji Mitrovice, duboke etničke podjele i dalje postoje u gradu. Ožiljci rata su i dalje vidljivi u društvenom tkivu, jer se zajednice nastavljaju boriti s nasljeđem sukoba. Etničke tenzije, posebno između albanskog i srpskog stanovništva, kompliciraju napore za postizanje pune socijalne i političke integracije unutar Republike Kosovo. Rješavanje ovih podjela zahtijevat će ne samo tekuća materijalna ulaganja već i stalne napore za promoviranje pomirenja, dijaloga i jedinstva među raznolikim stanovništvom grada.

Rekonstrukcija Mitrovice odražava otpornost njene zajednice i posvećenost lokalnih i međunarodnih aktera obnovi fizičkog, socijalnog i kulturnog okruženja grada. Proces je transformisao Mitrovicu u moderniji urbani centar, sa obnovljenom infrastrukturom i revitaliziranim kulturnim identitetom.

Međutim, izazovi prevazilaženja etničkih podjela, obnove izgubljenog kulturnog nasljeđa i rješavanja obrazovnih i socijalnih potreba naglašavaju složenost poslijeratnog oporavka. Oporavak Mitrovice podrazumijeva kontinuirana ulaganja u ekonomski, socijalni i kulturni razvoj, kao i napore za podsticanje veće integracije i jedinstva među njenim podijeljenim zajednicama.

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