

Cultural Heritage & Museums Architecture Organisations and initiatives Serbia Heritage

Will Belgrade's architectural monuments be sacrificed for hotel development?

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ICOMOS has issued an alert for two of Belgrade's important 20th-century cultural heritage sites, highlighting "the lack of understanding of their potential and disregard for their significance as cultural heritage for the citizens of Belgrade and Serbia".

Under threat are the Dobrovicev Generalštab buildings and the Belgrade Fair complex, important 20th century heritage sites in the Serbian capital. ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, has issued a heritage alert and the organisation's president has sent a second letter to the Serbian president and relevant ministers asking for the monuments to be protected.

ICOMOS has been following the issue since last summer, when the Serbian press reported the de-listing of Dobrovicev Generalštab from the list of 20th century monuments and its demolition to make way for a hotel complex. At the time, ICOMOS President Teresa Patricio sent a letter expressing the organisation's opposition to these plans and urging the Serbian authorities to preserve, maintain and reuse the buildings. Since then, the Serbian authorities' plans for de-listing and demolition seem to have included the Belgrade Exhibition Complex, of which Building 1 is a protected site.

With the new letter, ICOMOS calls on the authorities of Belgrade and Serbia to maintain the listed status of the Generalštab buildings as Serbian cultural heritage, to ensure their appropriate conservation and adaptation, to maintain the listed status of Hall 1 of the Belgrade Fair Complex and to extend protection to the entire Fair Complex. Also to establish clear parameters for the conservation of both heritage sites and to develop a strategic process for understanding, recognising and protecting Belgrade's modern 20th century heritage. According

to ICOMOS, this process should include public engagement to promote wider recognition of the cultural significance of Belgrade's modern heritage within Serbian society.

As noted in an ICOMOS statement, it is important to stress that both sites are recognised as part of Serbia's national cultural heritage and valued as important local assets. "Despite this fact, recent developments show a lack of understanding of their potential and a disregard for their significance as cultural heritage for the citizens of Belgrade and Serbia," the statement concludes.

Belgrade Fair complex

The Belgrade Fair complex is a cultural monument comprising a group of buildings and the surrounding designed fairground, situated along the banks of the Sava River and Vojvode Mišića Boulevard in Belgrade.

The innovative urban and architectural solutions applied—particularly the impressive construction methods—contributed significantly to Yugoslavia's international recognition in the 1950s and 60s.

The Belgrade Fairground stands as one of the most valuable works of Serbian Modernist architecture and as a testament to the technical, technological, scientific, and creative advancements of society during this period.

Despite the generally satisfactory state of conservation of the hall buildings, an almost complete lack of maintenance has been noted over the past two years.

Dobrovićev Generalštab

The Dobrovićev Generalštab complex, consisting of the General Staff Headquarters and the Ministry of Defence (originally DSNO – State Secretariat of National Defence), is an architectural and urban ensemble designed by academician and architect Nikola Dobrović. It is located on Kneza Miloša Street in Belgrade.

Completed between 1956 and 1965, this complex represents a significant achievement in Serbian and Yugoslav late-modernist architecture. It is the only work in Belgrade by Dobrović, one of the most prominent Yugoslav architects, theorists, and

educators of the 20th century.

Set on a prominent urban site, the complex consists of two twin buildings, popularly nicknamed Sutjeska I and II after the Sutjeska River—a reference to a decisive World War II battle against the Nazis.

Serving as military headquarters until 1999, the buildings were well-maintained until the NATO bombing that year caused significant structural damage to Building Sutjeska I (General Staff Headquarters). Building Sutjeska II (Ministry of Defence) sustained only minor damage.
Vacant since 1999, the Generalštab was listed as a cultural monument by the Government of the Republic of Serbia in 2005.
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