

THE FORMER GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL IN MOSTAR

ADAPTIVE RE-USE PROPOSAL FOR A MAJOR PUBLIC BUILDING IN THE OLD CITY

1. INTRODUCTION

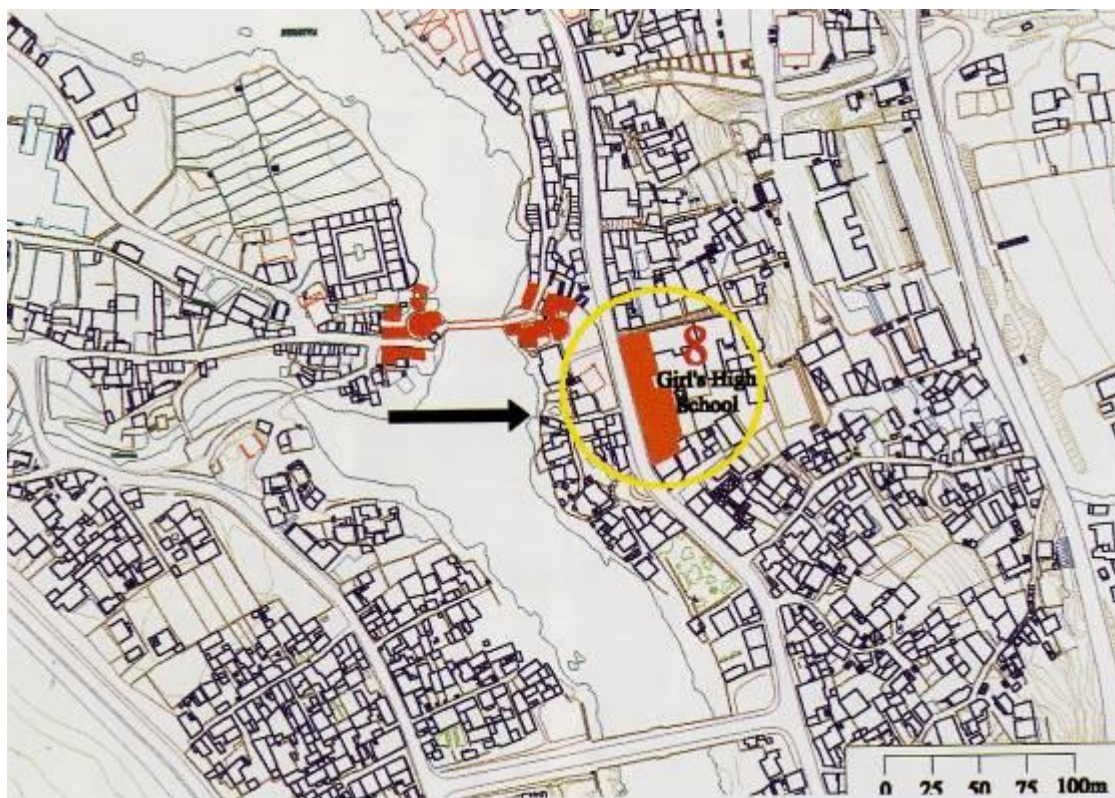
Dr. Stefano Bianca, Director, Historic Cities Support Programme, Geneva

Since 1998, when it first became active in Mostar, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), in cooperation with the World Monuments Fund (WMF), has made a major contribution to the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the Old City of Mostar. A variety of projects have been pursued in parallel, including 1) a comprehensive conservation and development plan for the old city, with corresponding building regulations and specific action area plans; 2) the reconstruction and upgrading of significant buildings and public open spaces in the historic neighborhoods on both sides of the old bridge, and 3) plans for the restoration of around twenty historic landmark periods in various locations of Mostar, representing different periods and ethnic traditions. The restoration projects for landmark buildings have been published in a separate brochure submitted to various donors. Some of these projects have been, or are now being executed by AKTC and WMF with their own funding.

The Girls' High School, dating from the Austro-Hungarian period and occupying a total surface of 15'000 m², is perhaps the most monumental of these historic landmark buildings. It dominates the eastern riverbank of the Neretva – just above the famous Old Bridge, which is now being reconstructed with assistance from UNESCO and the World Bank. But perhaps most important of all, the interior volumes and rear courtyard of the building provide an enormous potential for adaptive re-use and rehabilitation. From the beginning, the Girls' High School was conceived as a multi-functional structure, accommodating shops, offices, teaching rooms, social meeting places and sports facilities in one single complex. Its prime location, combined with its architectural significance and flexible inner structure therefore predestines it to become again a focal point of the reborn inner city of Mostar.

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture and the World Monuments Fund have sponsored the restoration and reconstruction project for the Girls' High School presented in this brochure (including an economic feasibility study), in order to demonstrate that the reconstruction of this historic building has the potential of being implemented through a public-private partnership, without need for large external donations. In case of success, this may become a model for the rehabilitation of a number of other important public buildings from the Austro-Hungarian period.

We will continue to assist both the city and potential private investors in the attempt to materialize this project as soon as possible – as a symbol of the local initiative and the belief in the future of this city, shared by national and international investors.



Map of the historic city centre of Mostar around the Old Bridge, showing location of former Girls' High School



Bird's eye view of the historic city centre of Mostar with the building of the Girls' High School on the right

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILDING

Dr. Amir Pašić, Project Manager, Mostar/Istanbul

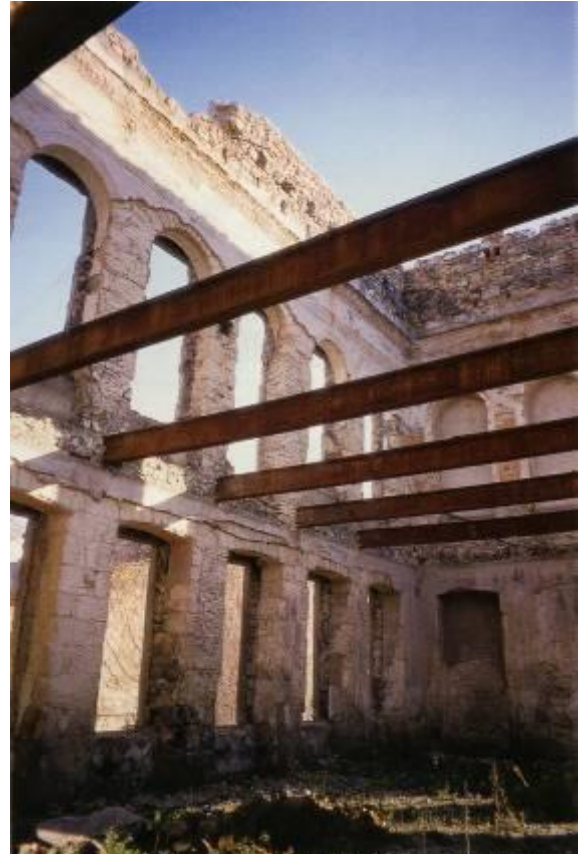
The Girls' High School is one of the best examples of Neo-Classical Architecture from the Austro-Hungarian period in Mostar. Like a Renaissance Palace, it presents a massive, opaque façade to the Main Street (western elevation), but the second wing of its L-shaped configuration northern elevation follows a perpendicular, ascending alleyway Kalhanska Street, enclosing a courtyard between the two wings.

An ashlar ground floor with arched openings and large cut stones distinguishes the commercial spaces of the street level from the classrooms of the upper levels with their painted stucco walls. The classicising ornament in the corbel volutes and deep cornices over the second story windows continue the Neo-classical theme, so that the dignity, historical authority, and official nature of the building are maintained.

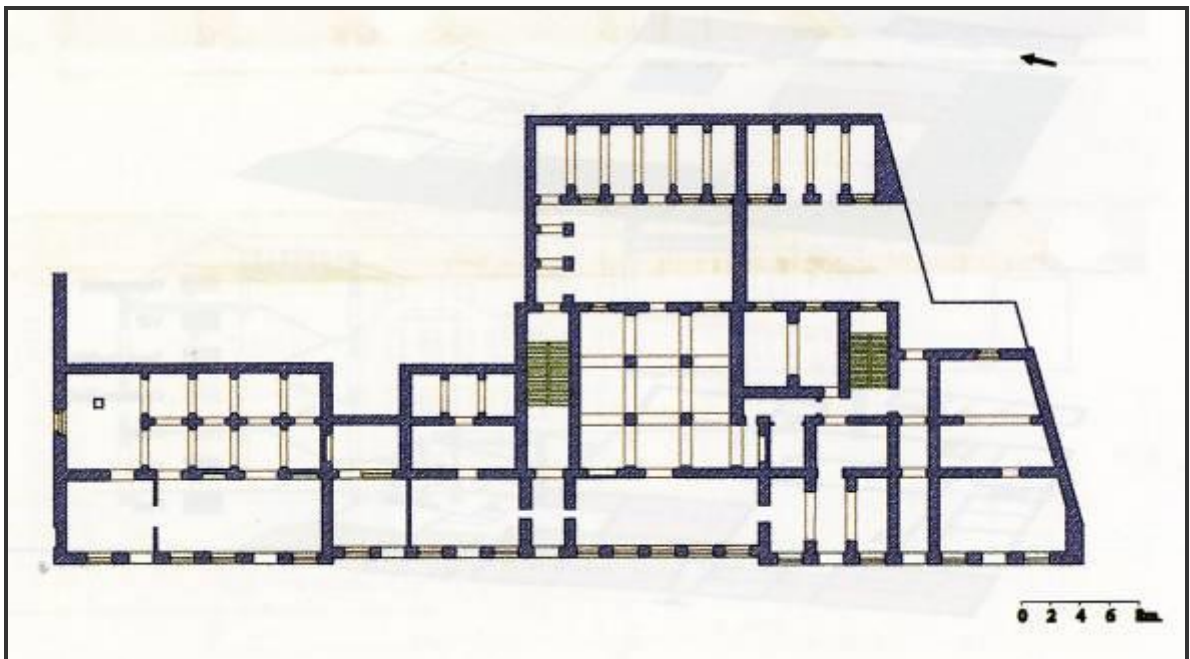
Mujaga Komadina, a rich Mostarian citizen, undertook the construction of the complex between 1893 and 1901 and later city mayor, who bought one of the largest plots available in the centre of Mostar from the prominent Hadjiselimovic family. The site contained a partly ruined former Ottoman caravanserai, which was removed. The construction of the building occurred in four stages: first, the initial Girls' High School on the corner of Main Street with Kalhanska Street; second, a linear extension along the Main Street; third, a perpendicular wing along Kalhanska Street, and finally a sport facility that connected with the school's upper courtyard. Eventually, the complex accommodated the girls' high school and several other schools, as well as municipal and different private offices. The ground floor, on the Main Street level, always featured commercial spaces. Since 1920, when some alterations in the structure and use of the building were made, all characteristics of the building have remained unchanged.

In May and June 1992, the Serbian Army burned the building during its occupation of the East side of Mostar. It was shelled by the Croatian Army in the Second Battle of Mostar later. Its roof is totally destroyed and the interiors are gutted. Temporary shoring has been installed in some areas for stabilization. The force of the explosions and the heat of the fire may have damaged the composition of some of the stone material.

The Girls' High School was identified in the Old Town Conservation and Development plan, formally adopted by the Old City Municipality of Mostar in May 2001 as a monument of the highest importance. Its present condition has been carefully surveyed and recorded in 1999/2000. Significant parts of the building ought to be retained because of their architectural and historical importance such as the façades on Marsal Tito and Kalhanska Street; the entrances on each of the different levels; the general building configuration around and interior courtyard; the well-preserved elements of the interior spaces and the vaulted ground floor spaces. All these historical elements can be seen as major assets for an adaptive re-use project, which will conserve a significant component of Mostar's urban townscape.



Pictures showing present conditions of the building after war damages



First floor plan along the Main Street

3. DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR ADAPTIVE RE-USE

Professor Boris Podrecca, Project Architect, Vienna

Adapting a historic building for contemporary uses is a challenging and sensitive task, because the new intervention should not copy a historic style, but enter into a harmonious dialogue with it. In developing this project we have made an attempt to conserve the most significant architectural and historic aspect of the building, particularly the elevation dominating Marshall Tito Street, while at the same time introducing contemporary architectural elements in these parts of the building, which had to be adapted and improved for contemporary use.

The major opportunities for integrating a contemporary design language stem from the fact that the rear courtyard and the inner elevations facing the courtyard were somewhat neglected in the old building, since the representative functions were all projected to the main street. The new concept now focuses on the courtyard as the centre of the whole complex and enhances it by turning it into a protected "plaza" covered by a glass roof.

This new emphasis on the development of a central interior space is also expressed by providing new contemporary elevations to the core of the complex. The building thus gains in architectural complexity and richness, presenting a "hard" historic shell to the outside and opening a "soft" contemporary face to the courtyard, which can only be experienced from within. The "softness" of the interior is expressed by the translucent atrium and by movable shading elements on the façade, which will provide ever-changing aspects during different times of the day.

The allocation of functions to the various levels of the building was chosen in conformity with its historic structure and aims at maximizing the public use of this important landmark. A first row of shops and a main entry hall are located at the level of the main street. Escalators lead up to the courtyard or atrium level, which accommodates further shops, a cafeteria/restaurant and the hotel reception. The upper floors are occupied partly by hotel rooms, partly by office rooms, which have a separate entry and staircase directly accessible from the main street. Further facilities include conference rooms and a fitness centre above the restaurant, as well as serviced roof terraces overlooking the historic city of Mostar and its landscape. Below the central atrium, it was possible to introduce a three-level underground car park serving the whole complex.

Once this prestigious building will be completed and opened to the public, the combination of different functions, together with the added attractions of the atrium and the roof terraces, should make it a most vibrant meeting point in the heart of the old city.



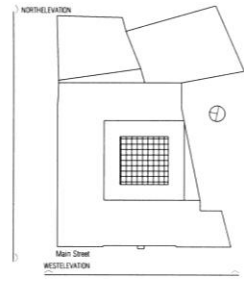
Photo-montage of the restored and converted complex in its existing surroundings



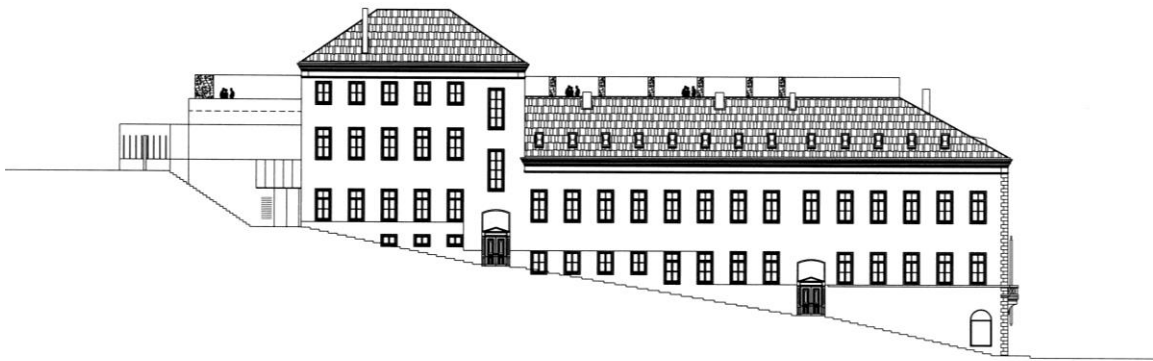
Bird's eye view of the core of the converted building with the added interior elevations and the glass roof of the new covered atrium



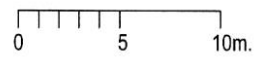
Overall perspective view of the covered central atrium space



WEST ELEVATION



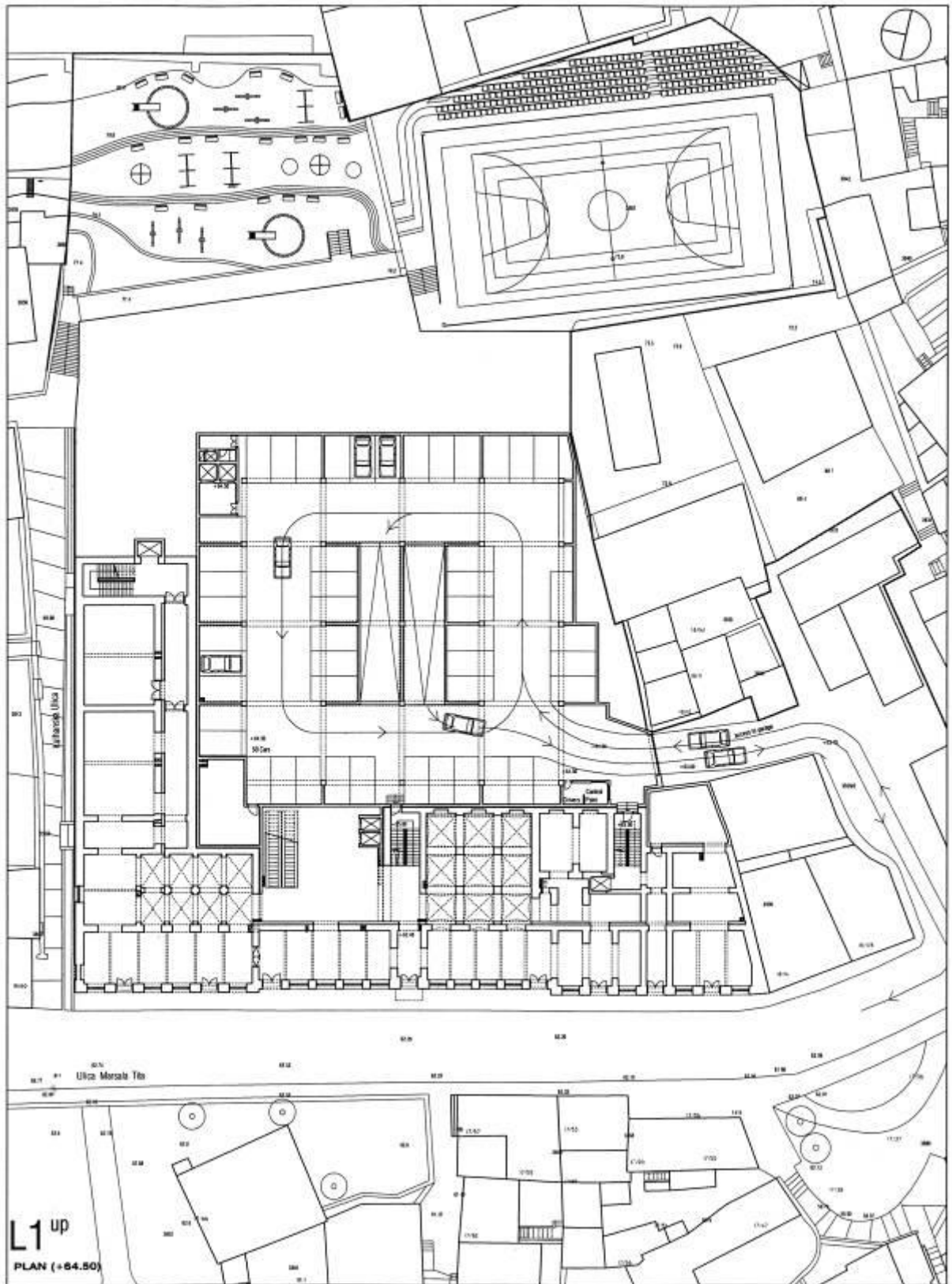
NORTH ELEVATION



Facade on Main Street and Kalhanska Street



Ground Floor Plan



0 5 10m.

Entrance to Underground Parking Level