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REFRAMING MODERNIST HERITAGE THROUGH PARTICIPATORY CULTURE: SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE ON KAZIMIR OSTROGOVIĆ'S HOUSE IN BANJA LUKA

Abstract:

Modernist architecture in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains marginalised within official heritage frameworks, with only limited institutional recognition. This study explores social media as an extended research environment for examining contemporary perceptions and social constructions of modernist heritage values. Using a case study of Kazimir Ostrogović's 1954 house in Banja Luka, the research employed narrative storytelling to test digital engagement. Results revealed new historical information, activated collective memory, and repositioned neglected architecture within public discourse. The findings highlight the potential of participatory culture in heritage to generate knowledge, foster identity, and support sustainability, while calling for more systematic, long-term research within Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Keywords: modernist architectural heritage, social media, participation, Kazimir Ostrogović.

РЕИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЈА МОДЕРНИСТИЧКОГ НАСЉЕЂА КРОЗ КУЛТУРУ ПАРТИЦИПАЦИЈЕ: ДИСКУРС НА ДРУШТВЕНИМ МРЕЖАМА О КУЋИ КАЗИМИРА ОСТРОГОВИЋА У БАЊОЈ ЛУЦИ

Сажетак:

Модернистичка архитектура у Босни и Херцеговини још увијек је маргинализована у оквиру званичних оквира заштите насљеђа. Ово истраживање разматра друштвене мреже као проширено истраживачко окружење за испитивање савремених перцепција и друштвених конструкција вриједности модернистичког насљеђа. Кроз студију случаја куће архитекте Казимира Остроговића из 1954. године у Бањој Луци, и технику наративног приповједања, тестирала се дигитална ангажованост у контексту насљеђа. Резултати кратког експеримента су показали нова историјска сазнања, активирали колективно памћење и поново позиционирали занемарену архитектуру у јавни дискурс. Резултати указују на потенцијал партиципативне културе у области насљеђа да генерише знање, подстакне идентитет и допринесе одрживости, уз истовремени позив на систематичнија и дугорочнија истраживања у Босни и Херцеговини.

Кључне ријечи: модернистичко насљеђе, друштвене мреже, партиципација, Казимир Остроговић.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. THE TENSIONS OF MODERNIST ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

Twentieth-century architecture remains largely unrecognised as official cultural heritage in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H), despite its significant role in shaping urban identities and landscapes, particularly in the post–Second World War period. Only a negligible number of modernist buildings, neighbourhoods, and landscapes are included in the official registers of protected heritage. The Commission to Preserve National Monuments of B&H has inscribed merely thirteen properties constructed after 1960 as national monuments, while twentieth-century heritage accounts for just over 4% of the total protected sites [1], [2]. This situation is part of broader economic and social processes, most straightforwardly explained by the limited institutional capacities and absence of a consistent official methodology for identifying and conserving modern architectural heritage [1]. Although recent scholarship has proposed integral methodologies, these remain largely at the level of academic initiatives rather than formalised state practice [1], [3], [4].

The consequences on the ground are evident. The twentieth-century architecture faces neglect and imminent risk of demolition. Many modernist structures have already disappeared, either through wartime destruction during the 1990s or subsequent deterioration. These processes have contributed to their perception as unsightly, unsafe, or entirely devoid of social, cultural and aesthetic values when compared with the economic value of potential construction land they occupy. Even where modernist heritage is in relatively good condition, the fast-paced transformation of the surrounding urban landscape often produces discordant and fragmented spatial relations. In such contexts, both heritage and the wider urban fabric lose integrity and authenticity.

However, the situation of modernist heritage in B&H reflects even broader challenges that extend beyond questions of material fabric or expert discourse. It points towards an alternative understanding of heritage, one that foregrounds its *meanings*. From this perspective, modernist heritage could be conceived as *dissonant*—not a neutral cultural asset but a socially negotiated, ideologically charged and often contested resource, as first articulated by Tunbridge and Ashworth [5]. According to these authors, heritage involves a process of selective remembering and forgetting, and therefore always produces tensions between inclusion and exclusion, pride and trauma, or local and national narratives. Global debates on dissonant heritage emphasise how built environments linked to contested pasts—whether colonial legacies, authoritarian regimes, or wartime destruction—are often marginalised, neglected, or demolished rather than integrated into contemporary cultural narratives [6], [7].

In post-Yugoslav societies, the shared socialist and federal past has frequently been marginalised, as the newly established states of the 1990s sought to consolidate distinct national and cultural identities. Within this process, heritage became a selective resource, emphasising national traditions while downplaying or reinterpreting symbols of collective statehood. Modernist architecture of the Yugoslav period, particularly in B&H, exemplifies this dissonance. Once celebrated as embodiments of collective progress, unity, and modernisation, these sites are now often recast as reminders of an unwanted ideology, trauma of war, and political rupture, neglected within heritage institutions and excluded from dominant cultural narratives [8].

Framing B&H's modern architecture within the concept of dissonance makes clear that the challenge lies not only in institutional protection but also in negotiating meanings—finding ways to acknowledge the complexity of these legacies and to foster inclusive cultural narratives that embrace and create, rather than erase, their values. This paper offers a modest contribution to that discussion. It seeks to stimulate reflection and debate on the potential of social media as a platform for engaging the public and fostering participatory cultures around neglected modernist heritage in B&H. The emergence of social media platforms has created new conditions for public engagement with heritage, enabling communities to document, share experience, and collectively interpret the built environment beyond institutional frameworks. Drawing on the concept of *participatory culture* and *heritage as a living practice*, this paper explores how these mechanisms operate in the specific context of modernist architectural heritage in B&H.

1.2. RESEARCH OUTLINE AND OBJECTIVES

This research is conceived as both preliminary and experimental, exposing modernist architectural heritage to the engagement of actors beyond institutional circles. By shifting the focus from expert-driven assessment to more inclusive modes of engagement, the study explores the potential of social media networks to reframe the understanding and experience of modernist architectural heritage. The research contributes to the growing body of work on how communities, individuals, and diverse

stakeholders can co-create meanings, reinterpret values, and sustain heritage as part of everyday social practice [9], [10], [11].

This study proceeds from the assumption that social media platforms may operate as research environments for interrogating contemporary modalities of perception, interpretation, and the social construction of architectural heritage. Central attention is directed towards the potential of storytelling tactics and participatory mechanisms in the production of values and socially mediated qualities attributed to architectural legacy. Such an approach foregrounds the capacity of participatory culture to reposition modern heritage within the broader landscape of cultural heritage in B&H—extending beyond the domains of popular culture and everyday life to encompass institutional and professional frameworks alike.

Methodologically, the study combines a review of literature on modernist heritage in B&H with theoretical insights from critical heritage studies. It employs a case study approach, focusing on a small-scale residential building in Banja Luka designed by Kazimir Ostrogović in 1954. This house serves as the sole example through which the challenges of modern heritage perception are examined. Despite its authentic state, the building remains absent from academic discourse and local history, has not been assessed as heritage, and is scheduled for demolition [12]. To interrogate these dynamics, the case study was experimentally narrated and disseminated across major social media platforms. The results were analysed first to assess the usefulness and potential of social media, and subsequently to explore how modern architectural heritage is understood and experienced in digital environments.

This paper makes three contributions to the field of heritage studies. First, it offers an empirically grounded test of social media as an extended research environment for heritage in a post-Yugoslav, post-conflict context—a region that remains significantly underrepresented in international digital heritage scholarship. Second, it operationalises the theoretical three-domain framework (communication practice, social formation, sense of place) through a concrete experimental case, demonstrating its utility as an analytical tool for evaluating participatory heritage experiments [9]. Third, it introduces the narrative triptych as a structured, temporally sequenced storytelling format for heritage engagement on social media — a methodology applicable beyond this case study and this geographic context.

2. NOTIONS OF HERITAGE AND PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

2.1. HERITAGE AS PROCESS AND PRACTICE

The academic conception of urban and architectural heritage as merely a material and historical artefact requiring institutional preservation has long been superseded. Conservation theory, which historically privileged claims to objectivity in the assessment and preservation of artefacts, buildings, and settlements, has—under recent socio-economic and environmental pressures—shifted towards approaches that are also subjective, value-laden, and contextually contingent [13]. The shift enabled a gradual redefinition of heritage-related practices—from a focus on objects to an emphasis on processes, specifically the continuous negotiation and reinterpretation of meaning. The transformation of perspective has been supported by broader theoretical examinations of the function of heritage in late modern societies, particularly through the emergence of critical heritage studies as an interdisciplinary field of academic inquiry [14], [15], [16], [17], [18].

The paradigm of socially constructed heritage values, subject to continual social negotiation, gained broader institutional recognition with the adoption of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention) in 2005 [19]. The Convention institutionalised a critical perspective on cultural heritage whose intellectual foundations can be traced to David Lowenthal's seminal study *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (1985) [14]. Lowenthal argued that heritage is not a neutral preservation of the past but an active process of selection, reinterpretation, and imagination. His work opened questions that remain relevant today, particularly concerning the relationship between heritage and the plurality of perceptions and interpretations of the past.

A key theoretical reference within the critical heritage paradigm is Laurajane Smith's now-classic *Uses of Heritage* (2006) [15]. In contrast to the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD), which Smith identifies as the dominant, institutionalised mode of interpreting heritage, she advances the notion of *heritage as a social practice*. More specifically, Smith challenges the traditional emphasis on material heritage—monuments, buildings, and artefacts—whose value is typically defined by aesthetics, monumentality, and age, and regulated by experts, institutions, and the state. Instead, she argues that heritage status is not inherent in objects but is constituted through shared memories, rituals, and narratives. Heritage, therefore, emerges from social practices in which communities

negotiate the meaning of the past and its role in the present. In this way, heritage becomes closely connected to identity, belonging, and collectivity, and is actively shaped, reinterpreted, and sustained by communities rather than merely preserved by experts or governments [15].

Smith articulates the thesis of interpretive dissonance as a constitutive feature of heritage, deriving from its relational character, mutability, and plurality of meanings [15]. Dissonance arises when a single heritage asset carries multiple, often conflicting meanings for different groups. For Smith, dissonance is not a problem to be eliminated but a natural consequence of heritage's emergence through social practices. Different groups, therefore, produce divergent interpretations, and dissonance opens space for dialogue, negotiation, and reinterpretation—what Višnja Kisić terms an inclusive heritage discourse—making heritage dynamic and democratically contested [6], [7], [15], [20].

The contemporary spirit of critical approaches to understanding and defining heritage is eloquently articulated by Elisa Giaccardi, who advances the paradigm of *heritage as a living practice* [9], [21]. In her arguments, heritage is positioned more fluidly within the context of everyday life, stripped of its monumental exclusivity and revealed as part of ordinary experiences: family photo albums, memorabilia from school excursions, stories passed down through generations, or simply the house encountered on a daily walk. Such a perspective underscores the idea that heritage is not solely the outcome of preservation practices, but is embedded in the social practices through which we experience, feel, and communicate its significance [18], [21].

According to Giaccardi, heritage practice extends beyond safeguarding material traces of the past; it involves caring for those elements deemed important and ensuring their relevance for the future. Through collective experiences and repeated encounters with architectural heritage, communities strive to establish a connection with the past, to comprehend it, to lend meaning to collective memory, and to strengthen—or indeed challenge—their sense of belonging to the landscape and the community [21]. In this sense, heritage exists through modes of experience and communication that are directly linked to notions of identity, culture, and social sustainability.

We may conclude that the paradigm of heritage as a social practice emphasises several defining characteristics. First, heritage acquires value through the network of meanings that people attribute to it. Artefacts, buildings, or traditions do not possess inherent significance; they become heritage only through the interpretations of communities, shaped by repeated and ongoing interactions in the lived world of ordinary people. Second, heritage is characterised by changeability—values shift over time, and what was once marginal or considered insignificant may become central within the framework of societal priorities. Heritage values are not frozen in time but evolve alongside cultural and social transformations. Finally, heritage is marked by plurality, as different groups may ascribe diverse and even conflicting meanings to the same object, reflecting the multiplicity of identities, perspectives, and cultural narratives within society.

2.2. HERITAGE AS SOCIAL PRACTICE IN THE DIGITAL REALM

Giaccardi extends the discourse on heritage as a social practice by introducing the dimension of technological transformation, particularly the role of social media. The relationship between heritage and technology is not new. Digital engagement with cultural heritage has been evolving for approximately three decades, beginning with large-scale digitisation projects that converted manuscripts, photographs, and museum records into searchable digital formats. This initial phase enhanced accessibility across geographical and socio-economic divides and established the technical infrastructures for online catalogues and digital archives [22].

Building on these early digitisation initiatives, the 2000s witnessed the emergence of digital humanities and digital heritage studies, which expanded the scope of technology from preservation to analysis and interpretation. The past decade has witnessed acceleration driven by three interrelated technological developments: affordable and accurate 3D modelling and virtual reality; the application of artificial intelligence; and the ubiquity of social media as platforms for public engagement [23], [24].

However, the rapid technological advances of the past decade also revealed a critical challenge: access and innovation alone do not guarantee meaningful engagement. The effective deployment of digital tools requires the cultivation of skills, cultural literacies, and institutional reflexivity. Henry Jenkins' concept of *participatory culture* is instructive here. Expanding technological access must be accompanied by support for relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement; opportunities to create and share work with others; informal mentorship, whereby knowledge held by the most experienced is passed to novices; and, crucially, the belief that contributions matter. Without these social and cultural conditions, technological affordances remain underutilised [25]. As Jenkins notes: "Participatory culture shifts the focus of literacy from one of individual expression

to community involvement” [25, p. 7]. It is precisely in this context that Giaccardi’s work becomes pivotal, as she focuses the research on how social media reframes heritage by fostering participatory modes of interaction and collective meaning-making. “Yet little emphasis is given to people’s autonomous engagement with cultural heritage in the context of their own lives and in association with the unique character of the places and communities in which heritage comes to matter. In other words, there is little understanding of how emerging technologies are powerfully connecting heritage experience to people’s lives and settings [9, p. 2].”

Through her editorial collection, Giaccardi invites us to take a pioneering step towards understanding “how social media reframe our understanding and experience of heritage by opening up more participatory ways of interacting with heritage objects and concerns” [9, p. 1]. She structures her discussion across three domains, each of which demonstrates the relevance of the relationship between heritage and social media and clarifies their purpose. For the case study analysis in this research, their basic characteristics are outlined below.

Within the domain of *social practice*, or better communication, attention is directed towards the novel ways in which individuals encounter, document, and circulate heritage in digital environments. These practices encompass user-generated photography, tagging, storytelling, crowdsourced transcription, and the construction of multimodal narratives that weave together text, image, and audio. Analysing communication practices entails an engagement with routines, conventions, and the micro-ethics of sharing—considering who documents, how documentation is framed, and which practices acquire normative status within the ecology of a given platform [26].

Within the domain of *social formation*, the focus lies on the emergent communities and publics that crystallise around heritage content in online environments. Peer-to-peer interactions, hashtag collectives, and platform-mediated networks generate new collective actors whose authority and interpretive labour may both rival and complement institutional voices. This field of inquiry interrogates power relations and the ways in which digital networks reconfigure membership, expertise, and legitimacy [27], [28].

Within the domain of *sense of place*, attention is directed towards the ways in which digital practices and social formations shape attachments to locations and the meanings ascribed to them. Social media platforms can amplify local narratives, connect diasporic communities to specific sites, and generate layered—often contested—place-identities. Crucially, digital mediation not only augments physical experience through practices such as geotagging, augmented-reality overlays, or shared storytelling, but also produces virtual senses of place that persist independently of physical visitation [9, p. 2]. Taken together, these three domains allow a holistic reading of any heritage experiment on social media: practice reveals the how, formation reveals the who, and sense of place reveals the why of engagement.

3. METHODS AND MATERIALS

This research is positioned as an exploratory digital heritage experiment—a methodological form that combines structured case study analysis with an experimental social media intervention. As an exploratory study, it does not seek to produce statistically generalisable findings, but to test the feasibility of participatory digital methods in the context of underrepresented modernist heritage, and to generate hypotheses for future systematic research.

The research adopts a hybrid methodology that bridges traditional heritage studies with experimental digital practices to critically examine how the social media environment enables the experience and communication of heritage. The approach underscores the potential of social networks and storytelling tactics to expand modernist heritage discourse and enhance its cultural relevance. The research employed a combination of qualitative and experimental methods, structured around three complementary strategies: the literature review, the case study, and the social networks experiment. A critical survey of literature on modernist architectural heritage in B&H, situated within the broader field of heritage studies, established the conceptual foundation for approaching heritage as a dynamic, socially negotiated construct rather than a static cultural asset. This body of work also provided the analytical scaffolding for a critical review of the social network experiment, examined through the domains of communication practice, social formation, and sense of place.

The study of the residential building designed by architect Kazimir Ostrogović in Banja Luka integrated archival research, secondary literature review, and fieldwork to construct a comprehensive account of its significance within official assessment practices. Original documentation and historical records traced the building’s conception, while scholarly sources positioned it within broader discourses of modernism and heritage. Its contemporary resonance was investigated through mapping, photographic documentation, and interviews with residents, which

illuminated perceptions and lived experiences of the house. In order to safeguard and reinterpret its architectural legacy, archival drawings were digitised, thereby ensuring both preservation and future accessibility (Figure 4).

In the final phase of research, narrative and visual representations of the case study were disseminated across Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Audience engagement was measured, analysed and discussed in relation to the key themes identified in the theoretical discourse of heritage as living practice. Audience responses — including comments, shared content, and direct messages — were analysed qualitatively through a process of thematic coding organised around Giaccardi's three domains: communication practice (how did users engage?), social formation (who engaged, and what networks emerged?), and sense of place (what place-related meanings were expressed or produced?). Quantitative metrics (reach, likes, saves, shares, comments) served as secondary indicators of engagement intensity, while qualitative content provided the basis for interpretive analysis.

It should be noted that the *arhi.student* profile constitutes a pre-existing socio-digital environment with an established community of architecture students, educators, and design enthusiasts. This context introduces an inherent selection bias: early engagement was disproportionately shaped by a visually literate, professionally oriented audience. While this limits claims to broad representativeness, it also represents a methodological choice: by operating within an established communicative environment, the experiment could leverage existing trust, aesthetic conventions, and narrative expectations to test whether specialist content could generate genuine public resonance beyond that primary community.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. THE DOPPELGÄNGER HOUSE IN BANJA LUKA BY KAZIMIR OSTROGOVIĆ

Kazimir Ostrogović (1907–1965) was a prominent Croatian and Yugoslav modernist architect, a prolific practitioner noted for a refined sense of functional precision and restraint in architectural expression. The residential building on Kralja Petra I Karađorđevića Street in Banja Luka (formerly Titova Street) is, to the authors' knowledge, his only realised work in B&H. Its particular significance stems from the fact that it is essentially a “copy” of a house built in Zagreb in 1955. The original blueprint was prepared by Ostrogović's studio in Zagreb in 1953 for an exclusive site on the slopes of Mount Sljeme, in Weber Street, but, under circumstances that remain unexplored, the same design brief was also used in Banja Luka (Figure 1) [29].



Figure 1. Residential houses by Kazimir Ostrogović, representing an identical design realised in both Banja Luka (left) and Zagreb (right). © A.Marić

In the first decade following the Second World War, the use of a single blueprint replicated into ensembles of identical buildings or deployed across multiple sites was far from uncommon. Indeed, in Banja Luka we argue that intended standardised housing solutions constituted the dominant architectural strategy for addressing an acute housing shortage under conditions of limited technology, scarce materials, minimal mechanisation, and constrained professional capacity. By contrast, Ostrogović's Zagreb house was conceived exclusively for a specific parcel within a

metropolitan setting. Its design emerged from the author's skilful composition of an architectural vocabulary previously developed and applied in residential villas—as evidenced in Idis Turato's research [30]—and was further shaped by the particular conditions of the Zagreb site: a steeply sloping plot, an urban morphology characterised by single-family houses, and a programme comprising a flat for a scientist alongside two studio apartments [31].



Figure 2. Residential house in Banja Luka designed by Kazimir Ostrogović, around 1960. Courtesy of the Archives of the Republic of Srpska (archival numbers 0205–0178 and 0205–0152) [29].

The authors suggest that this unusual “twin case” of Ostrogović’s house emerged from solidarity and cooperation between Yugoslav cities during a period of acute need and limited resources—particularly in smaller towns such as Banja Luka, which at the time lacked a sufficient number of architects and engineers. At the same time, we contend that the role of the Zagreb house—as living space for a new elite of the Yugoslav state, as Turato observes [32]—was effectively reproduced in Banja Luka. In Zagreb, the house was constructed to serve the Ruđer Bošković Institute (founded in

1950), the largest Croatian research institute in the natural sciences and technology, providing accommodation for a scientific worker. In Banja Luka, according to archival records, the house was associated with the needs of a newly established industrial concern (founded in 1954) that would later grow into one of the largest and most modern Yugoslav industrial complexes—the Incel cellulose factory [29]. While it may be assumed that its spatial luxury was intended for the factory's management, the first occupants were in fact Milorad Popović's family, then mayor of Banja Luka. The Popović family even claim that the house was originally intended for Banja Luka native Niko Jurinčić, a prominent wartime antifascist and later socio-political figure in Yugoslavia [33]. Construction in Banja Luka was undertaken by the local building company Krajina (founded in 1945) between 1954 and 1956.

Designed for a metropolitan fabric and an upscale residential area, Ostrogović's house was transposed into a markedly different environment in Banja Luka: a small-town landscape and a heterogeneous spatial structure in the midst of transformation. It occupies a parcel in a representative and historically central part of the city, situated on flat terrain and embedded within a long, regular geometric sequence of narrow plots along one of Banja Luka's most historically and morphologically significant streets (Figure 2). This orderly street pattern originated in the rational use of agricultural land, later reinforced by double tree-lines and a series of ornate villas constructed during the Austro-Hungarian period in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Over time, however, this elongated proto-urban structure was gradually eroded. With the development of a modern street network and the construction of larger monumental buildings, several individual houses—including Ostrogović's—became detached from their original row-organised urban fabric (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Situational diagram based on the map from 1942 produced by the Geographical Institute of the Croatian Home Guard. Map key: light grey transparent — currently existing buildings, a — National Theatre (1930); b— Archive of the Republic of Srpska (formerly the Austro-Hungarian military command, 1880); c — Assembly of the Republic of Srpska (originally the House of the Yugoslav People's Army, 1973). © Authors

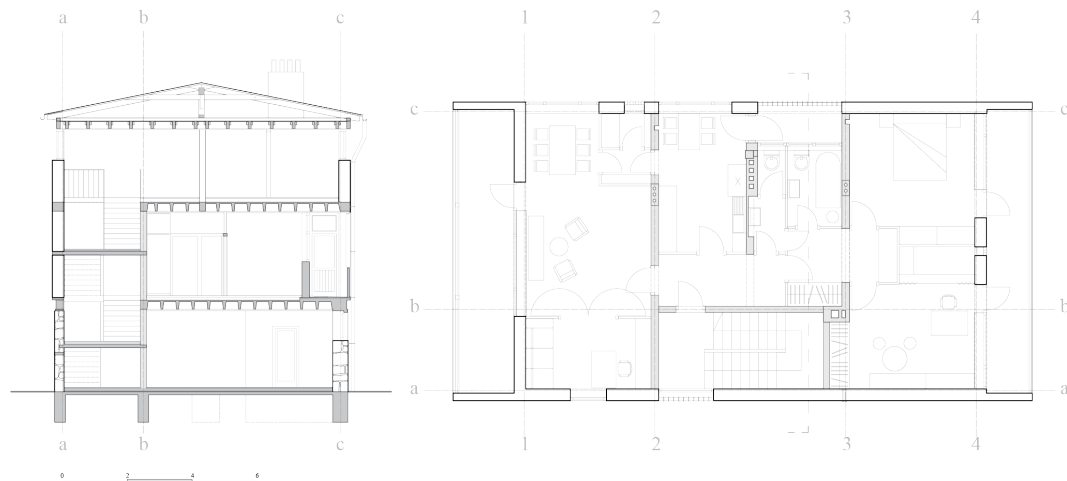


Figure 4. Section and plan drawings based on archival documents, furniture arranged after a drawing by architect Idis Turato [32]. © A. Marić

Nevertheless, processes of urbanisation ultimately repositioned the house within a new modern context: an urban square framed by representative historical buildings erected over the past century and a half, such as the Archive of the Republic of Srpska (formerly the Austro-Hungarian military command, 1880), the National Theatre (1930), and the Assembly of the Republic of Srpska (originally the House of the Yugoslav People's Army, 1973) (Figure 3).

While its Zagreb twin is currently undergoing restoration to its original state in line with the corresponding architectural brief, the Banja Luka building is, according to planning documentation, slated for demolition, with the associated green structure on the plot facing complete devastation. An initiative submitted by the authors to the Republic Institute for the Protection of Cultural, Historical and Natural Heritage of Republika Srpska, proposing an official assessment, has been placed on hold due to institutional incapacity. The anonymity of the house within both academic and local communities, together with its specific historical and contextual circumstances and values, rendered this building an exemplary case study for the social network experiment.

4.2. THE HOUSE IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERIMENT

1.1.1. Narrative triptych as a presentation strategy

The social media experiment was initiated within an already existing digital context – the Instagram profile *arhi.student*, created and sustained by one of the authors of this research. Over the past seven years, this profile has developed into a regionally recognised platform for presenting student work, architectural design, and reflections on architecture and urbanism. Through sustained content production and attentive monitoring of audience responses, a distinctive communicative environment has been established, with the principal aim of engaging architecture and urbanism issues with a wider public beyond the professional sphere.

In this respect, *arhi.student* was not regarded as a neutral medium, but as a socio-digital environment with a defined community, established reception patterns, and expectations concerning the content and artistic presentation. Previous social media curatorial and production experience directly informed the design of the research experiment and the choice of presentation strategy for the house of Kazimir Ostrogović. A presentation framework was devised with the aim of making complex research material intelligible and communicative to a wider audience, while carefully preserving the integrity of the archival material and the tangible presence of the house.

The presentation was conceived as a *narrative triptych*, divided into three interconnected yet thematically distinct story-parts, released at specific intervals. The story structure facilitated a gradual deepening of engagement: first, introducing the audience to the theme – uncovering and problematising overlooked architectural heritage; second, cultivating interest – incorporating personal experience and collective memory; and third, advancing understanding – synthesising the architectural, temporal, and symbolic values of the house. The final part functioned both as the conclusion of the narrative and as an opening towards the question of the future of the house, thereby reframing heritage as an active rather than static category. The three story parts were defined by the following titles: Light in Shadow – A house we admired yet knew nothing about [33]; The Feeling of Home – The memory of Ostrogović's house, through an interview with Sanja Popović [34]; Architecture – The light of the past, the home of the present, the dream of the future [35].



Figure 5. Visual presentation of the narrative triptych [33],[34],[35].

Beyond the authors' formal education in design, the visual aesthetics of the story-telling drew upon long-standing experience in publishing visual essays on social media and observing audience responses within algorithmic frameworks. The adopted approach relied on the aesthetics of contemporary digital editorials, familiar to the public, where information is conveyed not solely through text but through a carefully composed interplay of photography, graphics, typography, and blank space. The visual aesthetics and hierarchy of information were shaped so that the entire narrative functions as a kind of "magazine of knowledge": rich in content, yet simultaneously easy to read and visually engaging (Figure 5).

1.1.2. Establishing the social media environment

The initial phase of the research involved engaging a digital audience by posing the question, accompanied by photography – What do you know about this house? – across several social media platforms linked to the *arhi.student* profile (15 March 2024): Instagram, X (Twitter), and Facebook. It is important to emphasise that these platforms were employed on the premise that they attract distinct user groups, differentiated by their interests, modes of engagement, and cultural orientations. Instagram, for instance, tends to draw visually oriented users with a preference for image-based narratives, while X often gathers participants inclined towards concise commentary and rapid information exchange. Facebook, by contrast, brings together a broader demographic, frequently oriented towards community interaction and longer-form discussion. This diversity of user profiles was considered integral to the research strategy, as it allowed the question to resonate across varied audiences and communicative registers.

In the second phase, the narrative triptych on Ostrogović's house was realised through three posts distributed within a clearly defined timeframe of almost seven weeks. This ensured a balance between continuity of presence and sufficient intervals for the accumulation and processing of information (Post 1: 20 April 2024, 09:04; Post 2: 29 May 2024, 09:00; Post 3: 9 June 2024, 09:00). The publishing dynamic was based on abandoning the logic of rapid, continuous content "feed" and adopting a slower, research-oriented rhythm. All three posts were published in the morning, around 09:00, thereby eliminating the factor of timing as a variable that might significantly influence reach and interaction. A methodologically consistent approach to publishing enabled clearer comparison of other parameters (reach, interactions, audience structure) and allowed the analysis to focus on content, narrative, and context.

1.1.3. Social media engagement

The first post within the narrative triptych achieved the highest overall reach and audience engagement (Table 1). With a total reach of 2800 users, the post predominantly extended beyond the existing follower base (66.6% non-followers), indicating a strong potential for content dissemination through the algorithmic mechanisms of the platform. The high number of saves and shares suggests that the content was perceived as informative and relevant, suitable for later revisiting or redistribution. In addition, the post generated a notable number of profile visits (308) and new followers (39), confirming its role as an "entry point" into the broader narrative and the platform as a whole. From a heritage studies perspective, this supports Smith's argument that heritage value is not inherent in objects but is constituted through communicative acts: the act of narrating and framing the house as significant — through storytelling rather than institutional designation — was itself sufficient to trigger recognition and sharing behaviour.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of posts engagement

Comparative analysis of posts engagement											
Posts	0			I		II		III		Summary:	
Post titles	Digital audience activation – preliminary information inquiry			Light in the Shadow – A house we admired, yet knew nothing about...		A Sense of Home – The spatial memory of the Ostrogović house, through an interview with Sanja Popović		Architecture – Light of the past, home of the present, dream of the future			
Social media platforms	FB	IG	X	IG	FB	IG	FB	IG	FB	0 Total	I,II,III Total
Date	15.04.2024.			20.04.2024.		29.05.2024.		09.06.2024.			
Time	17:01	13:16	13:35	09:04		09:00		09:00			
Reach	2272	533	2349	2800	/	1818	/	2301	/	5154	6919
Followers	36%	93.70%	/	33.4%	/	42.70%	/	34.5%	/	/	/
Non-followers	64%	6.30%	/	66.6%	/	57.3%	/	65.5%	/	/	/
Total interactions	50	27	11	583	/	150	/	174	/	88	907
Likes	26	18	9	406	/	125	/	142	/	53	673
Saves	/	/	2	79	/	8	/	8	/	2	95
Shares	3	2	2	68	/	8	/	23	/	7	99
Comments	24	7	4	30	0	9	0	1	1	35	40
Profile visits	/	4	24	308	/	26	/	47	/	/	381
New followers	/	/	/	39	/	0	/	4	/	/	43
Profile activity	/	4	/	353	/	26	/	51	/	4	430
Link clicks	/	/	/	6	/	0	/	0	/	/	6
Impressions	/	/	/	/	151	/	48	/	90	/	289
Reactions	/	/	/	/	17	/	4	/	3	/	24

The second post recorded markedly lower quantitative indicators compared to the first. Non-followers continued to dominate the audience structure (57.3%), yet the overall intensity of engagement decreased. The absence of new followers and the smaller number of profile visits (26) suggest that this post had a more intimate and narrower communicative scope. However, from a qualitative perspective, this phase of the narrative holds particular value as it introduced dimensions of personal experience, memory, and emotional connection to the space. These results imply that narratives centred on spatial memory require either an expanded contextual framework or an already established audience attention. Rather than signalling audience disinterest, this pattern may reflect a different mode of engagement — one more suited to private reflection than public performance. Saves and comments carry stronger interpretive weight in this context than raw reach, suggesting that memory-based content activates a qualitatively different layer of heritage engagement: intimate, internal, and resistant to algorithmic amplification. This nuances Jenkins' participatory culture model, which assumes symmetrical public participation, by revealing that some forms of heritage engagement are inherently non-spectacular.

The third post represented the synthetic phase of the narrative. Non-followers again dominated the audience structure (65.5%), confirming a stable potential for reach beyond the primary community. Although the number of comments declined, the increased number of shares compared to the second post indicates that the content was perceived as a “concluded story” suitable for further distribution. These findings suggest that social media does not operate solely as an immediate, fleeting medium, but rather as a platform with memory, where audience interest can be sustained and rekindled

through posts shared at different intervals. Notably, the first post generates the highest level of interaction, highlighting the power of an initial question and an open invitation to participate. The second post, shared after a longer pause, receives fewer responses in quantitative terms, yet introduces a richer, more qualitative layer of narrative through personal experience. The third post, published within a shorter span after the second, shows renewed reach and stabilised attention, indicating that the audience had already been “primed” by the earlier stages of the narrative. We would argue that a multi-chapter narrative pattern enables a transformation in the type of audience engagement: from initial curiosity towards more reflective and sustained attention. The sequence of posts, combined with the temporal distance between them, allows the narrative to evolve gradually, encouraging the audience not only to react in the moment but to follow the unfolding story with deeper involvement.

The empirical analysis of audience engagement across all three platforms yielded a total of 40 user-generated comments, supplemented by a significant volume of emoji-based reactions. A qualitative content and thematic analysis, structured around six recurring categories, revealed that social media functions not merely as a dissemination tool but as an active environment for the production, negotiation, and reinterpretation of heritage knowledge.

The largest share of engagement — approximately 35% of comments — consisted of emotional and aesthetic valuation, predominantly on Instagram, where users responded to both the architectural object and the narrative framing with affective expressions of appreciation. Collective memory and personal testimony accounted for a further 20% of comments, concentrated almost exclusively on Facebook, where multiple users contributed sequential fragments of recollection in dialogic exchanges, indicating that collective memory emerges not as isolated testimony but as a collaborative reconstruction process. Historical information and knowledge production represented 17% of contributions, distributed across Facebook and X, with several comments functioning as corrections or refinements of previous statements and demonstrating iterative knowledge production. The remaining categories — conflict and socio-political interpretation (12%), participatory contributions and research suggestions (10%), and urban legends and uncertain knowledge (6%) — were numerically smaller but generated disproportionately high engagement, suggesting their particular discursive intensity.

5. DISCUSSION

What was the communication practice? Social media was employed as a public platform for curatorial communication of modernist heritage. The narrative, prepared in advance and informed by prior research and personal experience, was presented within the framework of the medium’s established modes of response—likes, shares, comments, and saves. The communication strategy combined visual and textual storytelling, organised through deliberate temporal sequencing.

Storytelling proved effective in several respects. It enhanced accessibility by translating specialist knowledge into comprehensible content, thereby broadening recognition while also inviting critical reflection on the social and cultural relevance of modern architecture. Visualisation was used not only to document archival material and current conditions but also as an active means of mediating between historical artefacts and contemporary audience perception. In this way, modernist heritage was contextualised within the social, cultural, and historical circumstances of both its origin and present use, reinforcing its position as part of community history. Unlike descriptive approaches that reduce architecture to formal attributes, the narrative method incorporated dimensions of lived experience, personal memory, and subjective accounts, eliciting comparable responses from the audience. Architecture thus operated as a medium through which identity, values, and continuity of the community were articulated.

Audience engagement was strong and consistent: the narrative was shared and saved, and comments appeared quickly, indicating topical interest. Yet interaction largely took the form of short-term, platform-specific reactions, with a relatively small number of extended contributions. Two directions for further development emerge from this appraisal. First, greater emphasis could be placed on reciprocal communication, for example through shared curatorial practice in which participants contribute material and sustain dialogue over longer periods, thereby enriching the body of resources. Second, stronger integration of curatorial practice with architectural education and creative student work would be valuable, particularly in the visual presentation of heritage and in imaginative approaches to contemporary reuse.

The results resonate with Giaccardi’s claim that social media reframes heritage by enabling new communicative relationships between artefacts, their histories, and dispersed publics. At the same time, they nuance Jenkins’ model of participatory culture by revealing an asymmetry: while the

barrier to passive engagement (liking, sharing) was indeed low, active co-creation of heritage knowledge — the hallmark of genuinely participatory culture — remained limited to a small subset of commenters. This suggests that participatory culture in heritage contexts requires not only platform access, but also a sense of personal connection to the specific site or narrative.

Who did social media engage? Communication through social media brought together a diverse range of participants and generated a network of interest around modernist heritage. On Instagram, architects provided initial professional insights, while Facebook facilitated narratives rooted in collective memory and local stories. This parallel stream of professional and non-professional voices demonstrated the capacity of social media to extend engagement beyond established audiences, with notable interaction from non-followers.

The narrative also connected researchers with residents of the house under study, who contributed through interviews and became part of the story. Further links were established with architects in Zagreb engaged in the reconstruction of Kazimir Ostrogović's house, for whom archival documentation discovered in Banja Luka proved valuable. The professional association Docomomo Bosnia and Herzegovina disseminated the story through its own channels, and coverage by a local news outlet extended its reach beyond social media.

The network that crystallised around the narrative confirmed Giaccardi's observation that digital platforms generate new collective actors whose interpretive labour may both rival and complement institutional voices. The contribution of residents' memories, the engagement of Zagreb-based architects involved in the reconstruction of Ostrogović's Zagreb house, and the dissemination by Docomomo Bosnia and Herzegovina constitute three distinct categories of such actors — lay communities, professional peers, and heritage initiatives — whose convergence in a shared digital space is itself a significant social formation outcome.

The experiment confirmed the feasibility of convening diverse stakeholders through digital platforms. The heterogeneity of participants added value to the process, as online encounters opened possibilities for new collaborations and insights that may enhance the preservation of specific heritage sites. Such digital communities function as networks of shared interest, where knowledge of architectural heritage is exchanged, expanded, and reinterpreted through interaction among different actors. In this way, modernist heritage is positioned as a subject of collective dialogue rather than confined to professional discourse. In B&H, where modernist architecture is often under-recognised and insufficiently assessed, these digital communities may play a crucial role in raising awareness, strengthening social recognition, and establishing a symbolic foundation for its long-term preservation.

Despite strong momentum, the social engagement generated was not translated into concrete action for heritage preservation. Future initiatives could build on this momentum by directing collective energy towards specific domains: gathering information and documentation, advocating for preservation with institutions, or organising live cultural events aimed at promoting and empowering the community.

What did the experiment reveal about the place? The house designed by Kazimir Ostrogović emerged from relative anonymity and entered public discourse, becoming part of the everyday urban narrative and acquiring visibility within the city's image. Social media engagement was central to this process: new historical information about the house was uncovered through interactions, while comments revealed personal memories and recollections that constitute a living layer of heritage often absent from official records. The experiment demonstrated that digital storytelling can reposition a single architectural object within the collective memory of the community, transforming it from an isolated artefact into a recognised element of local identity and urban history.

While the experiment successfully highlighted the house as a locus of shared memory and identity, the sense of place captured through social media remained largely discursive and symbolic. Engagement revealed valuable mnemonic layers, yet these were not systematically integrated into broader heritage practices or concrete preservation initiatives. This underscores both the potential and the limitation of digital storytelling: it can activate collective memory and visibility, but requires translation into sustained action if the sense of place is to be consolidated beyond the digital sphere. Smith's concept of heritage as constituted through social practice rather than inherent in objects was directly illustrated by the experiment: a building absent from institutional records became, through storytelling and audience interaction, a locus of collective identity and urban narrative. However, the sense of place generated remained predominantly discursive and symbolic. The experiment activated recognition without producing territorial commitment, raising a critical question for digital heritage study: under what conditions does digital sense-of-place translate into material preservation action?

6. CONCLUSION

This research has approached heritage as a living social practice, showing how social media can operate as an extended research environment for examining contemporary perceptions and social constructions of modernist architectural heritage. The experimental component confirmed that digital platforms are capable of convening diverse actors and establishing exchanges between informal, participatory sources and formal, professional knowledge. The findings pointed to particular potential in the B&H context, where institutional sources of knowledge and assessment often remain inaccessible or insufficiently interpreted in the public sphere. Social media engagement revealed its capacity to serve as a platform for cultural dialogue, for the circulation of information, and for the creation of value around neglected or marginalised heritage. It enabled connections between professional assessment and community-based perspectives, thereby strengthening a culture of participation. In this sense, participation in heritage involves a shift from preservation for people to preservation with people, recognising heritage as a dynamic resource shaped by collective voices.

The study examined whether social media can play a role in repositioning modernist architecture, frequently marginalised and endangered, as a resource for social and cultural sustainability. By embedding heritage within collective dialogue, digital practices can strengthen recognition, generate new knowledge, and lay symbolic foundations for its long-term preservation. The experiment was based on several assumptions that require more sustained and strategic investigation through multiple case studies. It tentatively suggested that engaged communities may be more likely to protect and maintain heritage sites and traditions, thereby contributing to their sustainability — though this relationship remains to be systematically tested. It further raised the possibility that participation could negotiate cultural identity and foster social cohesion, reinforcing belonging, a hypothesis that warrants deeper empirical grounding. It also pointed towards the potential of citizens to contribute new interpretations and provide inspiration for creative practices that might revitalise heritage and support innovation, without, however, being able to confirm this as an outcome of the present experiment alone.

As an initial exploration, this research was intended to open the theme within the B&H context. Future work should be pursued in a more deliberate and systematic manner, deepening the integration of participatory digital practices with local heritage initiatives. Such research could focus on sustained collaboration between communities, institutions, and professionals, ensuring that the momentum generated online is translated into concrete actions for preservation, education, and creative reuse. In this way, the participatory model may evolve into a durable framework for safeguarding and reinterpreting modernist heritage in B&H.

In sum, the experiment has shown that social media can uncover collective memory and activate participation, repositioning modernist heritage in B&H as a living resource whose preservation depends on being sustained not only by institutions but by communities themselves. Beyond the specifics of this case, the experiment yields a transferable methodological template: a three-part, temporally sequenced digital narrative — anchored in archival research, enriched by personal testimony, and concluded with a synthetic architectural and cultural assessment — offers a replicable format for engaging diverse publics around endangered or underrecognised architectural heritage. This format is adaptable to other contexts where institutional heritage assessment is slow, inaccessible, or contested, and where social media platforms offer an alternative route to public recognition and knowledge co-production. On the other hand, the study's findings are necessarily bounded by the scale of the experiment: a single case, a pre-existing audience, and a short timeframe of seven weeks. These conditions limit the generalisability of conclusions and call for future research with a broader empirical base, multiple cases, and more systematic documentation of audience engagement.

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