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Subject: Nomination of the reconstruction project of the immovable cultural asset SLAVIC READING ROOM for the Jean-Paul L'Allier Award of the Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC)

Executive Summary

Through the project of reconstruction of the Slavic Reading Room within the investment activities program in the municipality of Kotor for the year 2023, the local government demonstrates responsibility towards preserving the cultural and historical heritage in this area by preserving the authenticity of the architecture and historical significance in collaboration with relevant institutions, ensuring that the project complies with legal requirements and conservation principles, contributing to the integrity and long-term sustainability of this cultural asset.

Works began on October 23 and is in the final stages. The building has remained within its existing dimensions. The building enjoys legal protection as an individual cultural asset. The project task proposed a space for various uses, with one part intended for commercial purposes to ensure the building's self-sustainability. Next to the main architectural project, a conservation project was required (annex 1) to ensure that all interventions on the building comply with the law. For this reason, alongside urban-technical conditions, there are also conservation conditions issued by the Administration for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Montenegro. Guided by the conservation conditions (annex 2), interventions on the building were planned, including: roof replacement due to prolonged leaking, ensuring adequate protection against weather conditions and extending the lifespan of the building; renovation of the carpentry which was in poor condition to improve the energy efficiency and aesthetics of the building; facade repair for damage restoration and restoration of the original appearance, contributing to the preservation of the authenticity of the architecture; restoration of chandeliers, carpentry elements, portals, and rosettes to restore the original beauty and details of the building. The only change is at the entrance to the central hall, in the central part of the balcony, which will enhance the functionality or aesthetics of the space.

History

Slavic Reading Room in Dobrota was formed on May 4, 1862, as a cultural and educational society that brought together advocates of Slavic ideas and the preservation of the national language. In addition to cultural and political activities, this society in Dobrota also had economic activities because its members, mostly maritime captains and ship owners, dealt with contemporary maritime and trade issues. In its first decade of existence, Slavic Reading Room operated in premises located near the Church of St. Eustace (destroyed in the earthquake of 1979). In 1870, it was relocated to a larger space, the ground floor of the Dobrota municipality building, located near the Church of St. Matthew. The rich and varied activities of this association required appropriate dedicated space, which the enterprising and traditional Dobrota residents achieved through donations. The land, necessary building materials, and construction work for the building intended for the Slavic Reading Room were provided by prominent Dobrota residents. A purposefully and contentfully designed space for housing a library - reading room, theater hall, and other facilities was the center of cultural, social, and political gatherings of Dobrota residents until 1941. After World War II, the Slavic Reading Room building was transformed into a cultural center, maintaining its public cultural and social purpose in the new historical circumstances.

Description of the cultural asset

The building is located within the natural and cultural-historical area of Kotor, in the well-preserved built environment of the Dobrota settlement and to a considerable extent in the preserved urbanized immediate surroundings. It is located in the southern part of Dobrota, above the coastal road, in the immediate vicinity of the Church of St. Matthew (photo 1). In front of the reading room, along the coastal road, there is a row of palm trees, and to the north, there is a park-like area with plane trees and benches. A carriage access is provided at the rear. The building has a rectangular, elongated base, oriented approximately north-south (photo 2). It has a plinth, a high ground floor, and a four-sloped roof. The building is axially symmetrical with a centrally positioned entrance section and lateral wings. In front of the main entrance,

there is a small terrace accessed by a two-flight staircase (photo 3). The terrace is paved with Đurđić stone made of reddish and white slabs arranged in a checkerboard pattern, and fenced with wrought iron fence (photo 4). The main facade, west-facing - oriented towards the sea, is designed in the spirit of pseudo-classical stylistic preferences, with a high plinth, ground floor, and prominent cornice. The facade is divided into three sections, with prominent central and side projections articulated with shallow pilasters (photo 5). The central projection houses the entrance and two windows, while each side has four windows. Window frames are only present in the upper parts of the windows and are simply profiled. The upper zone of the facade is crowned with a cornice with a simple architrave and frieze. The main facade is made of finely chiseled stone from Korčula, and the plinth is executed in a rustic style, with carefully arranged irregularly shaped stone blocks with narrow joints. The rear and side facades are executed using architectural elements characteristic of the architecture of the Bay of Kotor. A semi-circular baroque entrance portal leads to the southern part of the building, made alternately of narrower and wider stone blocks, while the central and northern entrances are also semi-circular but with profiled frames. Windows on the side and rear facades are fitted with simple stone frames. The main hall is located in the central part of the building. The main entrance on the west facade leads directly to the hall, while the entrance on the rear facade leads to the hall through a small vestibule. The hall has a raised stage area and a gallery on the east side. The stage and gallery are made of wood, and the floor in the hall is parquet. The vestibule is paved with diagonally laid slabs of Đurđić stone arranged in a checkerboard pattern. In the northern wing of the building are the premises of the local community, while in the southern wing is a cafe. On the west facade, to the side of the main entrance, there are two plaques. The plaque on the northern side bears an inscription related to the celebration of the centenary of the founding of the Slavic Reading Room, installed in 1962 (photo 6), while the plaque on the southern side commemorates the fighters who died in the People's Liberation Struggle during World War II, installed in 1954.

Qualities of the cultural asset

The preserved location, original architecture, and ceremonial hall give authenticity to this cultural asset. The function of the local community and occasional use of the ceremonial hall maintain the public purpose of the building constructed for the needs of the residents of Dobrota and largely preserved in its original form, giving it the *quality of integrity*. Despite its poor condition and the general neglect of the surrounding area, the most significant elements of the architecture of the building have been preserved, which led to its designation as a cultural monument and make it recognizable, thus fulfilling the criterion of the degree of preservation. This building is the only one in the Bay of Kotor purposefully and entirely built for the needs of a reading room and the implementation of its cultural and educational program, giving this cultural asset the *quality of uniqueness*. This building also represents a rarity for Dobrota with its classicist architecture. Another rarity is the dual treatment, most likely for economic reasons, of the main facade in a classicist spirit and the rear in a traditional style, with elements typical of the baroque architecture of the Bay of Kotor. The Slavic Reading Room building is recognizable for its *ambient, architectural, technical, historical, and memorial* characteristics. The elongated, one-story building, with its long, calm, and simple facade, made of finely hewn Korčula stone, in a classicist spirit, constitutes the *architectural uniqueness* of the cultural asset, also manifested in the rustic plinth of the facade, shell-shaped pilaster supports, profiled stone cornice, as well as the finely proportioned ceremonial hall with a stage and side gallery in the interior. The *technical uniqueness* of the Slavic Reading Room building lies in the use of different materials and their different processing depending on their position on the building. Thus, the main facade is made of finely hewn and carefully arranged Korčula stone, with a plinth made of locally sourced stone with a properly processed surface, but irregular in shape, arranged in a style with uniform narrow joints. It also lies in the construction of the side and rear facades in a customary, traditional manner, probably using existing stone door frames characteristic of residential baroque architecture. The historical and memorial characteristics are reflected in the fact that this building was purposefully constructed for the public good, aiming to preserve the national identity of the people of the Bay of Kotor, preserved to perpetuate the memory of its founders, the sailors of Dobrota. The *historical significance* is expressed in the memorial character of this building, intended for the accommodation of the Slavic Reading Room, which during the Austrian rule, with a very clear inclination in the spirit of the Revival, where the written word in the national language was nurtured, played an exceptional role in promoting cultural, educational, political, and national ideas. The activity from 1903 to 1941 in this space of one of the most active associations, which existed under the same name in other places of the Bay of Kotor, gives this cultural asset historical significance not only for Dobrota but for the entire Bay of Kotor. The fact that honorary members of the Slavic Reading Room were Prince Nikola and Bishop Štrosmajer demonstrates the connection of the residents of Dobrota with significant historical figures. The *artistic significance* of the Slavic Reading Room building is reflected in its architectural design, with the main facade in the spirit of classicism and the side with baroque elements. The cultural asset expresses a historicist approach, a combination of styles characteristic of the architecture of the Bay of Kotor in the second half of the 19th

and early 20th centuries. The scientific significance of this cultural asset is reflected in its importance for researching the historical, social, and cultural circumstances in Dobrota in the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. The Slavic Reading Room building represents one of the few examples of early 20th-century architecture in Dobrota. Its architectural significance lies in the skillfully designed program of the reading room. The most significant architectural element of the building is the finely proportioned ceremonial hall with a stage and side gallery. Architectural significance is also reflected in the architect's ability to make good use of materials and architectural elements that were already procured before construction (Korčula stone, door frames). In addition to the Dobrota church buildings and complexes, the Slavic Reading Room is a witness to the common spirit and common engagement of Dobrota brotherhoods in the construction of the most significant buildings for the cultural, religious, and economic life of Dobrota, giving it *anthropological significance*. The way the Slavic Reading Room gradually changed its headquarters, from small rooms within the St. Eustachius complex to a separately purpose-built building, through the engagement and donations of prominent individuals, testifies to the perseverance of the people of Dobrota and the significance this institution had for the residents of Dobrota. The technical significance of the Slavic Reading Room lies in the use of different materials and different processing methods depending on their position on the building. Thus, the most representative elements were used on the main facade, since the quantity of Korčula stone was limited. Existing elements, most likely taken from older demolished buildings, were used on the rear facade. In this way, the available material was skillfully used to create a harmonious architectural whole. The Slavic Reading Room building was built in 1902 as a result of a forty-year effort to construct such a building. With its public purpose and preservation of architecture, the building has the significance of a heritage site. The excellent location of the Slavic Reading Room building in an isolated place but close to the old urban core of Kotor, as well as the exceptionally well-designed ceremonial hall, provides opportunities for various cultural events and manifestations, giving this cultural asset *socio-economic significance*. Together with the Church of St. Matthew, the Slavic Reading Room creates a special ambiance of buildings of spiritual and public purpose surrounded by greenery, giving this cultural asset ambient significance. Within the garden, a park-like space with benches and plane trees creates a special ambiance. The Slavic Reading Room building contributes to the formation of a specific ambiance of contemporary Dobrota, characterized by modernization and the new spirit of the early twentieth century. *The landscape significance* of the asset is expressed in the vista of the city or landscape, expressed by the degree of attractiveness of the atmosphere and the visual unity of the whole. The very name reflects the significance of the cultural asset. It testifies to the nurturing of the national language, culture, and customs, and the Slavic spirit in Dobrota, through the existence of the Slavic Reading Room. Learning about the history of the reading room, its activities, and goals contributes to forming a positive attitude toward the cultural heritage, giving this cultural asset *educational significance*.

Conclusion

The reconstruction of the Slavic Reading Room building contributes to the preservation of the cultural heritage and identity of historic Dobrota, the pearl of Kotor. Reconstruction not only restores the physical structure of the building but also supports the spirit of the community and its identity characteristics. The next phase as part of the revitalization of the entire space of this cultural asset (figure 7) is the landscaping of the area above the Slavic Reading Room building - the reconstruction of Stefa's house with bocce courts and a grandstand (figure 8), for which the project is nearing completion. We believe that the Slavic Reading Room reconstruction project deserves recognition and support from the Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC) through the Jean-Paul L'Allier Award, as it represents best practices in heritage preservation and management.

Attachments:

- Annex 1 Conservation conditions with English translation
- Annex 2 Conservation project
- Photo 1 General view of the Slavic Reading Room building
- Photo 2 Floor plan of the reading room
- Photo 3 View of the main entrance
- Photo 4 View of the terrace in front of the main entrance
- Photo 5 Facade detail - pilasters
- Photo 6 Plaque on the facade
- Photo 7 Cadastral map of the cultural asset
- Photo 8 Reconstruction of Stefin's house 3D rendering

MAYOR

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