

Research paper

ERASING MEMORY: THE DESTRUCTION OF GENERALŠTAB AND THE LOSS OF ARCHITECTURAL IDENTITY

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Abstract

The ongoing destruction of the Generalštab complex in Belgrade, designed by Nikola Dobrović, represents a critical loss to modernist architecture, urban identity, and collective memory. Built between 1955 and 1965, the complex is a masterpiece of Yugoslav modernism, integrating symbolic topography, tectonic expression, and spatial dynamism, as well as technological advancements. Its partial destruction during the 1999 NATO bombings and subsequent neglect led to its present deteriorating state, underscoring the vulnerability of architectural and cultural heritage in the face of political and economic pressures. This paper investigates the architectural, historical, and cultural ramifications of the Generalštab's disappearance. Using a multidisciplinary methodology that integrates archival research, spatial analysis, and comparative studies of modernist heritage preservation, the research explores how the building's erasure alters the perception of urban continuity and reconfigures historical discourse. The findings suggest that the loss extends beyond the physical structure: it fractures the city's architectural fabric, diminishes opportunities for historical reflection, and weakens the dialogue between present and past through the erosion of urban identity. By contextualizing these outcomes within global paradigms of adaptive reuse and contested heritage, this analysis underscores the importance of preserving architectural narratives as constitutive elements of collective memory. It emphasizes the need for a critical reimagining of heritage preservation strategies, proposing a nuanced and proactive approach that recognizes modernist landmarks as both cultural repositories and agents of urban continuity in shaping future landscapes.

Key words: *generalštab, adaptive reuse, heritage, memory, modernism*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The remains of the Generalštab complex—once home to the Ministry of Defense and the former Yugoslav General Staff—stand as a solemn reminder of the 1999 NATO bombing in the heart of Belgrade. Designed by modernist architect Nikola Dobrović and completed in the 1960s, the Generalštab marked a pinnacle of Serbian and Yugoslav modernist architecture. With its bold architectural language and monumental scale it became a distinctive element of Belgrade's skyline, embodying the post-war modernization of both the city and the state.

The complex suffered extensive damage during the 1999 conflict, and has stood in partial ruin for over two decades, suspended between calls for preservation and redevelopment pressures. In the early 2024 the Serbian government approved a preliminary 99-year lease with an investment consortium—led by a US corporation—aiming to transform the site into a luxury hotel and residential complex. This proposal reignited a wave of professional dissent: Europa Nostra, ICOMOS Serbia, Baza- Spatial Praxis Platform, and a broad coalition of Serbian architects warned that the project threatens to efface a seminal artefact of Yugoslav modernism from Belgrade's architectural palimpsest, all while bypassing international heritage procedures..

The destruction and the possible erasure of the Generalštab has precipitated far-reaching architectural, spatial, and cultural consequences. These consequences extend beyond the loss of a single building – they touch on collective memory, urban identity, and the ideological narratives that shape how post-conflict societies deal with their heritage.



Figure 1. Generalštab (Army Headquarters), before 1999., City Assembly of Belgrade.

2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO ARCHITECTURAL LOSS AND URBAN MEMORY

2.1. Research Philosophy and Approach

The research on the Generalštab complex requires a framework that addresses not only its materiality, but also its symbolic and cultural resonance. Architecture is not only considered as a physical construct, but as a site of memory, identity, and ideological tension. A critically reflective, interdisciplinary approach was adopted, drawing from architectural history, memory studies, heritage conservation theory, and urban studies. To support this approach, a wide range of sources was utilized, including academic literature, archival documents, visual media, and official reports, enabling a multifaceted understanding of the complex's historical trajectory, present condition, and possible futures.

The choice of an interdisciplinary methodology stems from the recognition that no single disciplinary perspective can fully capture the architectural, spatial, and cultural layers involved. Through the integration of empirical investigation and theoretical reflection, the research aims to illuminate not just the apparent outcomes of destruction but also the tacit transformations in collective memory, urban continuity, and public discourse.

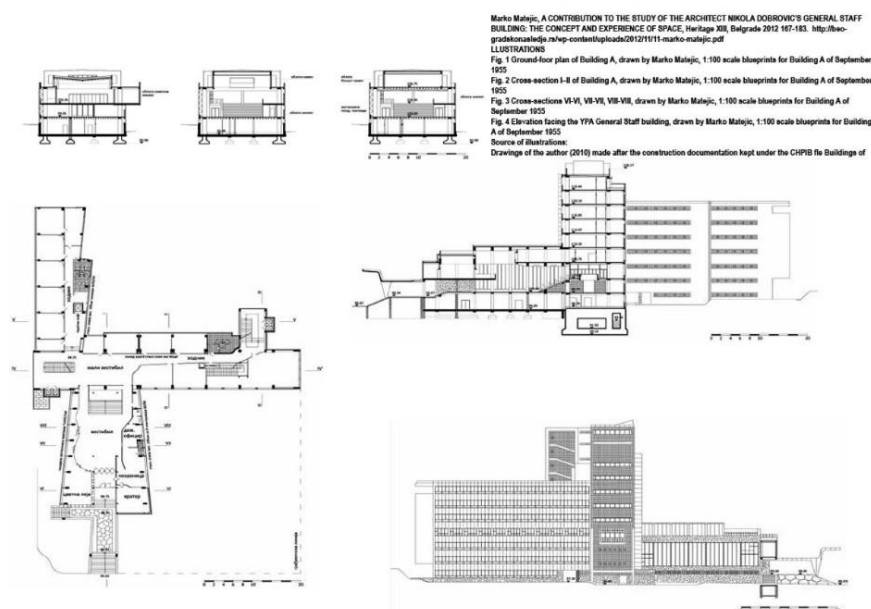


Figure 2. Technical drawings according to 1955. documentation, Docomomo Srbija

2.2. Methodological design

The research is structured as a qualitative case study, positioning the Generalštab complex as a focal point for analyzing broader patterns in the treatment of modernist heritage within post-conflict urban contexts. The case study approach was selected to enable depth of analysis, welcoming the complexity and contextual particularity of the Generalštab's circumstance, more than flattening it to generalized trends.

A composite methodology was employed, combining archival research, site observation, discourse and literature analysis, and international case study comparison. Each method contributes to a deeper understanding of both the material damage and the evolving cultural significance of the site.

2.3. Sources and Data collection

2.3.1. Archival research

Primary sources—including original blueprints, architectural drawings, construction photographs, official reports, and writings by Nikola Dobrović—were extensively examined. These materials were crucial for reconstructing the building's original intent, symbolic structure, and urban significance. Secondary sources, such as Kovačević's 2001 monograph and Docomomo's 2003 documentation [1], provided further insight into the project's tectonic, spatial, and technological ambitions.

2.3.2. Field observation and Spatial Analysis

Site visits were conducted to document the current condition of the complex and its urban surroundings. These empirical observations recorded the existing material state, cycles of degradation, spatial (dis)continuity or disconnection from the urban context, and uncontrolled public uses in the area. A comparison of historical maps and maps of the contemporary period assisted in gaining an understanding of how the site evolved in the overall urban evolution of Belgrade. This grounded the research in the tangible realities of the ruin.

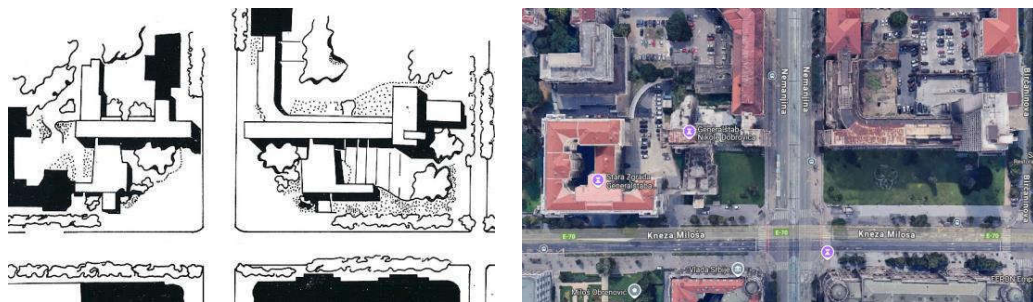


Figure 3. Comparative analysis of maps, Google Images

2.3.3. Literature Review and Theoretical Engagement/Discourse Analysis

A thematic literature review engaged foundational and contemporary works on collective memory (Halbwachs [2], Assmann [3]), difficult heritage (Macdonald [4], Bădescu [5]), heritage value theory, and urban continuity. Studies on the Generalštab complex itself (Kovačević [6], Weiss [7]) were analyzed to understand its architectural reception. These concepts framed the Generalštab's ruin functions not merely as physical residue, but as a mnemonic device, a site of cultural negotiation, and a node in urban symbolic networks. As Bădescu puts it, these ruins serve as "*mnemonic objects*" that embody the trauma of the 1999 bombings, preserving public consciousness through their material presence.

Additionally, media reports, public petitions, policy documents, and professional commentaries spanning two decades were systematically reviewed. This corpus enabled an analysis of shifting societal attitudes and highlighted recurring tensions between calls for memorialization, commercial redevelopment, and adaptive reuse.

2.3.4. Comparative Case Study Analysis

Selected international cases were examined to situate the Generalštab within an international framework of contentious modernist heritage management. The Palast der Republik in Berlin, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Dome [8], and the adaptive reuse of the Stiftung Exilmuseum Berlin [9] were used as comparative benchmarks. These cases provided important lessons for framing and understanding the political, ethical, and design challenges involved in decision-making regarding the future of modernist buildings impacted by conflict.

2.3. Analytical Strategies and Considerations

The analysis followed a thematic logic, identifying patterns, contradictions, and shifting narratives. Archival findings were cross-referenced with field data to assess disparities between intended meaning and contemporary perception. Discourse and spatial analyses were integrated to explore the link between form and symbolism, while comparative cases served as mirrors for critical reflection.

Given the traumatic history of the site, the research was conducted with ethical sensitivity. Topics of memory politics, cultural loss, and wartime destruction were handled with care to avoid bias or spectacle. Whenever possible, the views of affected communities, architects, planners, and heritage advocates were prioritized. Rather than simplifying collective memory, the project sought to acknowledge its complexity—honoring the symbolic, emotional, and cultural dimensions embedded in the ruin.

3. RESULT: IMPACTS OF THE GENERALŠTAB'S DESTRUCTION



Figure 4. Generalštab complex before the bombing, Bojan Kovačević

3.1. Architectural Consequences

The destruction of the Generalštab complex constitutes a profound architectural loss for the modernist heritage of Belgrade and the country as a whole. As the only realized building by Nikola Dobrović in the city—and widely regarded as his magnum opus—the complex encapsulated a post-war vision of Yugoslavia that merged tectonic dynamism with symbolic

topography. Completed in 1963 on the remnants of wartime devastation, its twin interlocking wings—divided by a widening central void—were interpreted as an abstraction of the Sutjeska canyon or as a spatial metaphor of Bergsonian movement and continuity. Although Dobrović never explicitly endorsed these interpretations, their symbolic resonance persists.

Architecturally, the Generalštab represents a unique synthesis of modernity and tradition. Composed of two asymmetrically oriented wings (Building A and Building B) the complex evoked both tectonic force and symbolic memory. Reaching up to 20m in height, the reinforced concrete structure was covered with red granite and white marble, sourced from Kosjerić and Brač respectfully —materials that created a stark and evocative contrast on the façade. Its sculptural voids, exposed concrete façades, and layered composition, exemplified Belgrade's post-war architectural renaissance. Some critics perceived this stylistic approach as "*anachronistic*" as compared to the 1960s modernism, which only amplified the building's timeless character.

This synthesis was halted by the bombing in 1999: the balance of solid volumes and voids was brutally broken, volumes and spatial arrangements were destroyed. Its southern wing collapsed, and the remaining structures have since been degraded through exposure to the elements. Intricate details of craft, material expression, and internal flow have been lost.



Figure 5. Generalštab in 2012., 13 years after the bombing, Bojan Kovačević

Today, the Generalštab embodies what might be described as an "architecture of ruin"—a spatial condition in which material decay, structural incompleteness, and historical memory fuse into a new architectural entity. Neither a functioning building nor a designated memorial, the site occupies a liminal space between presence and absence, past and potential. Its broken masses, stripped layers, and suspended decay disclose violent processes of erosion, time, and force, making of the site a living palimpsest of devastation and endurance. As such, the ruin challenges conventional heritage frameworks and demands a more nuanced engagement than simple restoration or symbolic preservation.

The destruction also initiated a lasting debate between proponents of reconstruction and those who prefer maintaining the ruin as an authentic war relic. While architects and critics such as Mihajlo Mitrović and Bojan Kovačević called for its complete restoration as an exhibition of cultural resilience, others dismissed the modernist aesthetic as dated, thus

allowing the site to crumble. Caught between these opposing views, the Generalštab has assumed a suspended identity—neither erased nor maintained. As a "spomenik pamćenju" (monument of memory), a tangible witness to collective trauma, and a contested object in Belgrade's ongoing urban narrative, the building has acquired new meanings within this suspended tension.

3.2. Spatial and Urban Consequences



Figure 6. The site of Generalštab in 2024., www.blic.rs

The demolition of the Generalštab complex deeply disrupted central Belgrade's spatial logic and urban continuity. Strategically positioned on Nemanjina Street, one of the city's most prominent civic axes, the complex previously served as a powerful institutional anchor in the administrative district. Its monumental façade and volumetric arrangement contributed to the rhythm and cohesion of the urban streetscape, reinforcing post-war ideals of authority, order, and progress.

In its ruined state, however, the Generalštab constitutes a spatial void and urban rupture. The damaged structure, now fenced off for safety, interrupts pedestrian movement and disrupts public space functionality. Beyond its physical footprint, the site represents a psychological scar—an unresolved trauma etched into the city's collective spatial memory, one which tears the built environment and architectural heritage of the place.

Unlike other post-war cities that have incorporated ruins into memorial parks or civic landscapes, the Generalštab remains fenced and empty, preserving an aura of voidness in the city center.

It is both a landmark and a symbol of violence. For many residents, the site evokes a complicated blend of mourning, defiance, and frustration; for younger generations, it is a commonplace feature of the environment, subtly influencing urban awareness. The physical displacement of governmental functions has also disrupted the long-standing symbolic alignment between Nemanjina Street and the Ministry of Defense, weakening the site's institutional identity.

This spatial discontinuity extends to the narrative level. The removal—or non-removal of the Generalštab not only fractures the morphological and spatial characteristics of the site but also results in drastic changes in cultural identity and collective memory, redefining the site as a contentious place of trauma, memory, and symbolic negotiation in the changing urban narrative on the urban and national level.

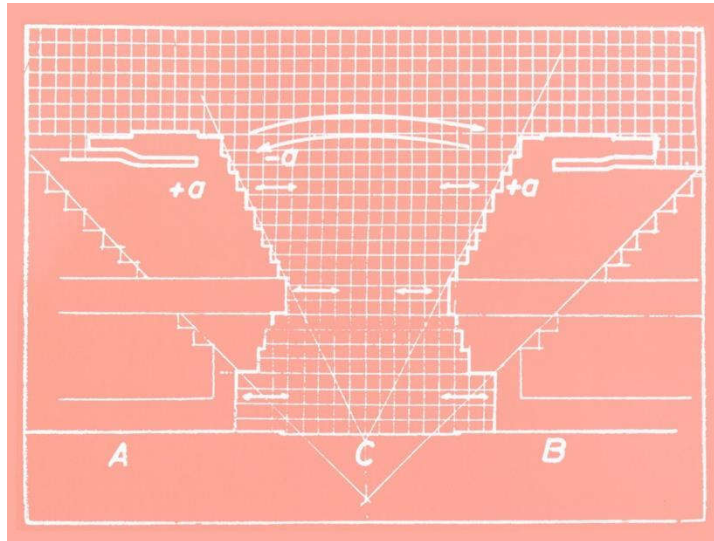


Figure 7. Dobrovic's Bergsonian drawing for the Army Headquarters, *Cabinet Magazine*

3.3. Cultural and Memory Consequences

The cultural impact of the Generalštab's destruction extends far beyond architectural loss—it pierces deeply into questions of identity, memory, and national narrative. The complex has become a locus of contested meaning, with divergent interpretations across social, political, and generational lines.

However, some segments of the public and political establishment hold a more ambivalent or even disdainful view of the Generalštab. In Serbia's complex memory landscape, modernist architecture—especially that of the Yugoslav socialist era—is often marginalized as either less beautiful or ideologically problematic. Therefore, the Generalštab holds a difficult place in the national narrative as a representation of Tito-era aspirations, caught between adoration and disavowal. This ideological ambivalence has led to a long-term deadlock over the site's future; neither complete restoration nor complete demolition have been agreed upon politically or culturally.

Public discourse surrounding the site oscillates between two paradigms: *memorialization* and *erasure*. Advocates for preservation argue for stabilizing the structure as a war memorial, akin to the preservation of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Dome, as a material testimony to the trauma of the 1999 bombings. Stabilizing the structure as a war memorial would embed a narrative of resilience and loss into the city's urban fabric, offering future generations a tangible connection to a contested history. In contrast, proponents of redevelopment envision the removal of the ruin as a pathway to healing and economic revitalization. Some proposals even sought to overwrite the site's memory with monuments from more distant, pre-socialist epochs, reflecting a desire to anchor national identity in older, less politically fraught heritage. This drive toward erasure, while framed as practical

urban development, risks a form of collective amnesia—substituting reconciliation with forgetting in the public realm.

The two opposing paradigms of memorialization and erasure are frequently discussed in public discussions about the Generalštab. In a similar vein to the preservation of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Dome, preservationists also see the building as a site for moral contemplation—a physical reminder of the pain caused by the bombings in 1999. Memorializing the building as a war memorial would provide future generations with a physical reference to a contested history, while inscribing a history of grief and resilience into Belgrade's cityscape. However, redevelopment proponents rebut that the demolition of the deteriorating structures will resurrect the city's economy. Perhaps, the most viable solution to the current *status quo* is somewhere in the middle of this spectrum.



Figure 8. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/775>

Yet the Generalštab also embodies the potential for reinterpretation. As a *spatial palimpsest*, it contains overlapping layers of ideology, trauma, and historical narrative—each partially erased but still legible. Like medieval manuscripts that were written and rewritten over scraped pages, the building invites a multiplicity of meanings: a scar of violence, a remnant of lost utopia, a symbol of endurance.

Its ruinous incompleteness enhances this interpretive openness. Far from being a limitation, the unfinished state allows future generations to project new significance onto its surfaces. This dynamic potential positions the Generalštab as not just a relic of the past, but a platform for a more complex and inclusive cultural memory.

3.3.1. Spatial Palimpsest: The Layering of Memory and Absence

A dense, multi-layered architectural narrative is created by the intersection of layers of history, material void, and collective memory at the Generalštab complex, which can be

considered as a spatial palimpsest. The fragmented condition of the Generalštab bears the imprint of multiple temporal and ideological layers—much like a medieval manuscript that has been erased and overwritten, yet still retains traces of its earlier text. Despite its fractured and at times contradictory form, one can still discern the building's early modernist ambitions, the scars of wartime destruction, decades of abandonment, and the ongoing debate over its cultural significance.

As a spatial artifact, the ruin is difficult to understand. As a silent witness to collective mourning, a scar of violence, a remnant of a deposed political regime, or a symbol of tenacity, it invites a variety of interpretations, many of which are contradictory. Its narrative flexibility is fueled by its material incompleteness, in order for future generations to impose new meanings on its worn surfaces. The Generalštab is a case of the phenomenon by which architecture moves beyond its inherent function to be incorporated into the work of cultural memory.

This palimpsestic state questions traditional heritage processes aimed at either complete restoration or replacement. It instead demands a developed process that recognizes the superimposed accumulation of history within material forms. To preserve the ruin—or to modify it with restrained judgment—would be to sustain the visible tensions between making and decay, aspiration and vulnerability, and remembering and forgetting. Thus, the Generalštab presents an opportunity to become involved with architectural heritage not simply as a form of static preservation, but as a dynamic, ongoing arena of memorialization.

3.4. Adaptive Reuse Precedent: Stiftung Exilmuseum Berlin

A particularly relevant example of reimagining contested heritage through adaptive reuse—one that parallels the case of the Generalštab—is Berlin's Anhalter Bahnhof. Severely damaged during World War II by Allied bombings, the structure was largely dismantled in the post-war period, leaving only its monumental entrance façade. For decades, the site remained an incomplete void within Berlin's urban fabric, serving as a fragmented testament to destruction and historical discontinuity.

Current plans call for incorporating the ruin into the Exilmuseum Berlin, a new cultural organization that will be located behind the remaining façade, rather than completely destroying or rebuilding it. The museum, which was designed by Dorte Mandrup Arkitekter [6], is devoted to chronicling the history of exile, with a particular emphasis on those who escaped Nazi Germany. This story is closely linked to the station's history because many people used it as a departure point during the 1930s. Instead of hiding the ruin's remains, the building's design highlights and maintains the façade as a tangible witness, using the new structure to produce a spatial tension between reconstruction and absence.

This approach has several characteristics which could resonate with the Generalštab. First, it identifies the ruins not merely as remnants to be preserved, but instead as a generative component in building a new urban mythology. The physical incompleteness of the Anhalter Bahnhof is consciously incorporated into the museum experience, guiding spatial movement and informing collective memory. Second, it demonstrates a highly evolved integration of historical heritage and modern functionality—situating the ruin as a place and also as an active partner in an innovative public program. The project neither idealizes the historical context nor deletes it, but uses history in the daily life of the city fabric.

For the Generalštab, this precedent in history argues for the feasibility of keeping damaged architectural fragments in a hybrid typology—a thing that invokes loss but accommodates eventual use. In the way that the ruin of the Anhalter Bahnhof prefigures the experience of exile, the fractured forms of the Generalštab could accommodate a program that addresses the narratives regarding war, resilience, and architectural heritage within the post-Yugoslav environment. In this kind of case, adaptive reuse transcends mere utility and is a cultural endeavor that enables architecture to hold memory while giving new meaning to a building that could otherwise languish in limbo.

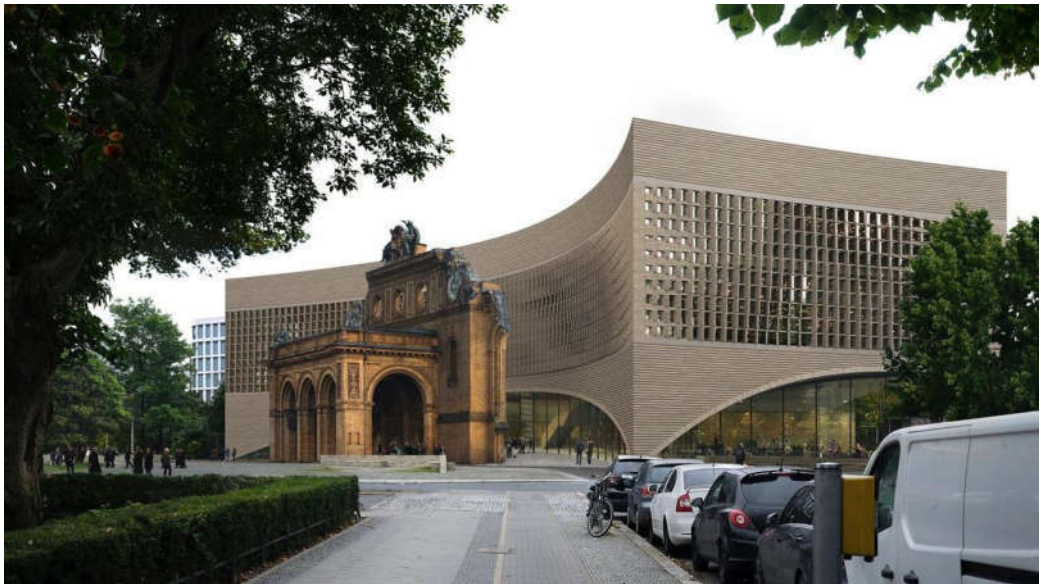


Figure 9. Stiftung Exilmuseum Berlin, <https://www.dortemandrup.dk/work/stiftung-exilmuseum-berlin>

4. DISCUSSION: CONTESTED HERITAGE

4.1. Contested Heritage and the Architectural Ethics of Intervention

The Generalštab complex exemplifies the challenges of engaging with contested modernist heritage in a post-conflict society. Its ruin is not merely the result of wartime destruction, but an active site of cultural negotiation—shifting between symbol, scar, and speculative real estate. Its unresolved condition reflects deeper tensions within Serbia's collective memory and post-socialist identity, shaped as much by ideological discord as by architectural decay.

As a case of *difficult heritage*, the Generalštab challenges dominant narratives and evokes discomfort. Unlike traditional monuments that affirm national cohesion, it invites discomfort and conflicting interpretations—particularly regarding Yugoslav modernism and the trauma of the 1999 NATO bombings. Its fragmentary state resists conventional typologies, becoming a dynamic participant in Belgrade's evolving urban and commemorative landscape.

International precedents such as Berlin's Anhalter Bahnhof [10] — soon to house the Exilmuseum—offer models for spatializing trauma without effacing it. By embedding new civic functions within historic remnants, these projects reframe ruins as witnesses and vessels of memory. A similar approach in Belgrade could position the Generalštab as both cultural artifact and civic resource, bridging past and future. Yet current redevelopment proposals—including private luxury investment—highlight the risks of erasure through commercialization. The site has become a flashpoint for debates over neoliberal urbanism, revealing the urgent need for heritage impact assessments, public consultation, and ethically grounded design competitions.

Adaptive reuse, as used in this study, offers a proactive way—not as a compromise gesture, but as a responsible design ethic. It circumvents the reconstruction-versus-erasure state, and recharacterizes architecture as a space of negotiation: balancing permanence with change, loss with renewal, and memory with utility. By the reinforcement of the existing buildings, incorporating commemorative and community-oriented functions, and emphasizing the storytelling potential of the ruins, Belgrade could be able to develop a model for ethically and spatially accountable reutilization of disputed cultural heritage.

The Generalštab thereby exceeds the status of mere remainder of a failed modernist utopia; it is a spatial inquiry relevant to contemporary debate. How can cities metabolize trauma? Who has the authority to shape architectural memory? And what kinds of futures can be envisioned from unresolved pasts? The answer lies not in erasure, but in the challenging and imaginative process of designing to incorporate and negotiate the existing ruin.

4.2. Memory, Reconstruction, and Urban Continuity



Figure 10. Student led protest in front of Generalštab, 2025. www.bbc.com

Despite its partial destruction, the Generalštab remains a symbolic presence in Belgrade—a fractured landmark that embodies suspended memory and interrupted spatial logic. Once a prominent institutional anchor along Nemanjina Street, its current dilapidated state marks not just a physical gap, but a symbolic pause in the city's architectural and civic dialogue.

Reconstruction is not a neutral act from the point of view of memory studies; it dictates what will be remembered, what will be legitimized, and what will be left behind. The Generalštab's present limbo—neither preserved, obliterated, nor repurposed—leaves it hanging between forgetting and commemoration, disrupting both historical legibility and spatial coherence.

Reconstruction, when thoughtfully undertaken, should not seek to replicate a lost past, but instead to embed memory within contemporary spatial practice. Stabilizing the existing structure and introducing new, meaningful functions provides a constructive alternative to both nostalgic imitation and complete erasure. Rather than simply restoring absent forms or suppressing painful histories, this approach inscribes memory into space—aligning with evolving conservation principles that prioritize cultural meaning over the reproduction of physical material.

To serve both memory and the city, any intervention at the site must be participatory, context-sensitive, and symbolically attuned. The future of the Generalštab is not only an architectural problem, but a civic one [11]. It challenges Belgrade to consider how architecture can facilitate remembrance without denying rupture, and how cities can mend the spatial scars of war while embracing plural historical narratives [12].

4.3. Adaptive Reuse as a Method for Conserving and Reimagining

Adaptive reuse provides a robust and contextually nuanced alternative, one that resists the either/or of demolition or complete reconstruction. As a design strategy and philosophical position, adaptive reuse allows buildings of cultural and historical significance to continue to be meaningful—not by returning them to a fixed past, but by projecting them into the present. For sites like the Generalštab, which occupy a conflicted position between trauma, memory, and architectural heritage, adaptive reuse can serve as a redemptive gesture without erasing historical rupture.

Rather than proposing nostalgic reconstruction or allowing ongoing decay, adaptive reuse allows the ruin to be an agency in the formulation of new spatial stories. In the context of the Generalštab, this may include stabilizing the existing structures, restoring functional interiors, and introducing new architectural elements that engage in both visual and symbolic dialogue with Dobrović's initial design. Importantly, this is not done to "complete" the building or cover its deficiencies; rather, it renders the history of destruction comprehensible while providing contemporary public function.

As a method of conservation, adaptive reuse recontextualizes preservation not as the preservation of stasis but as a negotiated process of transformation. It acknowledges the different layers of identity of a site—from its modernist origin and wartime devastation to its long-term abandonment and contemporary controversy. In doing so, it follows progressive heritage practice, including the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994) [13], in promoting interpretations of heritage value led by cultural and contextual factors. Adaptive reuse allows for the preservation of both the architectural and symbolic significance of the Generalštab and to reintegrate the site into Belgrade's urban fabric.

Additionally, the idea of reuse offers possibilities for inventive programmatic development. A hybrid civic-cultural complex can incorporate commemorative elements—exhibitions on 20th-century modernism and the bombings of 1999, for instance—within dynamic public utilities: cultural centers, community centers, archival centers, or even

shared workspaces. Such a multilateral approach would ensure that memory is not only a stagnant monument but is alive through daily spatial interaction.

At a strategic level, adaptive reuse is essential to building urban resilience. In an urban context like Belgrade, where there is a constantly growing need for central space, the redevelopment of a historic but underutilized site responds to both symbolic and spatial needs. It is a model for reconciling heritage and development—not by denying the site's importance, but by reaffirming its position as a site of collective memory. In this framework, the Generalštab becomes not just a ruin to preserve or a parcel to develop, but a public architecture of reflection and renewal.

5. CONCLUSION

The destruction of Nikola Dobrović's Generalštab complex fundamentally marks a rupture in the architectural, spatial, and cultural continuity of Belgrade and Serbia. It transcends the erasure of a modernist icon and symbolizes the nation's inability to face its past and define its future. In terms of architecture, the ruin represents a gap in Serbia's modernist legacy; in terms of space, it creates a wound in the urban fabric of the city; and in terms of culture, it serves as a mirror of disputed memories and ideological conflicts over which historical periods should be remembered or ignored.

The Generalštab embodies the complexities of post-conflict heritage: it is at once a physical remnant, a political symbol, and a site of cultural trauma. Public responses—ranging from reverence to rejection—attest to the contested nature of its legacy and to the ongoing negotiation between remembrance and erasure. This study believes that *adaptive reuse*, if approached with care and sensitivity, offers a constructive path forward. Rather than erasing the ruin or restoring it nostalgically, adaptive reuse allows it to evolve—transforming it into a site of active reflection and contemporary relevance.

A central element of the Generalštab's uncertain future regards recent plans for the privatization and redevelopment of the site for commercial purposes, in particular including proposals linked with luxury hotel projects. Such developments threaten the fragile relationship between the site's architectural value, memorial value, and collective memory that it sustains. Privatization in the absence of a heritage-sensitive policy thus endangers not just the physical remnants of Dobrović's vision but also forecloses on a public, critically engaged re-reading of the site. By allowing a site so steeped in the city's trauma and modernist heritage to be commodified, Belgrade stands to lose not just a building, but the dissolution of its own historical consciousness.

Ultimately, the decision regarding the Generalštab will set a precedent for how Serbia confronts its architectural and political past. Through participatory processes, reflective design, and courageous architectural thinking, the site has the potential to become more than a ruin—it can serve as a model for how cities metabolize difficult history and foster inclusive urban memory. Even in its brokenness, the Generalštab offers an opportunity to shape a more thoughtful and resilient future.

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