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CARING FOR SHARED MEMORY ACROSS BORDERS

THE BARLETTA *SPOMEN-KOSTURNICA* AS MEDITERRANEAN HERITAGE

The Barletta *Spomen-Kosturnica* (1970) was conceived as a tangible sign of post-war *détente* between Italy and socialist Yugoslavia, built on land formally granted in 1968 by the Municipality of Barletta to host a Yugoslav ossuary for partisans and civilians who died in Southern Italy during the Second World War. From its very origin, it embodied a transnational act of remembrance, linking a local cemetery to wider Mediterranean and European narratives of war, exile and trans-Adriatic solidarity. Today, however, this monument finds itself as a heritage "without heirs": following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, none of the successor states has so far claimed responsibility for its care, while the original agreement placed long-term maintenance on a state entity that no longer exists.

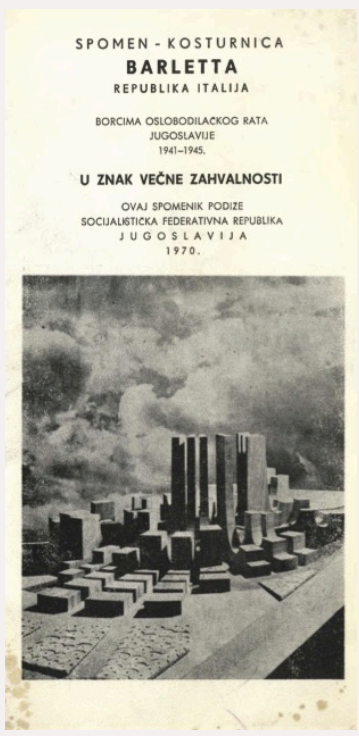
As a result, no institution currently assumes full charge of its conservation – despite the fact that it stands on municipal land – and the combined effects of time, sea-salt exposure and construction flaws are now seriously undermining its structural stability and its chances of surviving into the future.

Barletta *Spomen-Kosturnica* (Dušan Džamonja, 1970)

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In this context of institutional vacuum and physical fragility, the Spomen-Kosturnica can be approached as an open-air museum whose very survival depends on how communities, researchers and transnational networks choose to engage with it. Rather than a fully equipped exhibition space, it functions as a liminal site where meaning is continuously negotiated across different scales, from local memories in Barletta to the broader Adriatic and post-Yugoslav space. Its museological significance lies precisely in its capacity to hold together individual biographies, local experiences and international histories within a shared interpretative framework, even in the absence of clear ownership and formal governance.











All photographs are by the author.

INSTITUTIONAL INDETERMINACY

The monument currently exists in a state of institutional indeterminacy, with no single actor clearly responsible for its care. This condition pushes the site to oscillate between local marginalisation and international significance, challenging conventional models of heritage governance.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

Ongoing research is developing a digital biographical database of the 1,288 individuals commemorated in the ossuary, based on local and international archival sources.
By making their life stories accessible, this tool reinforces the role of the monument as a space where personal and collective memories intersect across different geographical contexts.

PRACTICES OF CARE

Educational initiatives, commemorative visits and activities promoted by associations from Italy and the post-Yugoslav area keep the site alive as a place of encounter and reflection.
In the absence of a single institutional referent, these actors embody emerging forms of shared responsibility and cross-border care for a fragile and contested heritage.

KEY MESSAGES

- Contested transnational sites can function as shared Mediterranean heritage even in the absence of clear governance.
- Digital tools and biographical research strengthen connections between individual stories, local experiences and Adriatic–Ionian histories.
- Community-based and cross-border practices of care turn the Barletta *Spomen-Kosturnica* into a laboratory for cooperation and shared responsibility.

For further information

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