In 1566, Ottoman architect Mimar Hajrudin built a stone bridge that spanned the waters of the Neretva River and came to be known as “Stari Most,” or Old Bridge. Initially a small Turkish outpost, this city continued to grow, and was eventually named Mostar, or “keeper of the bridge.” The bridge became a symbol of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s tolerance in a region known for its ethnic and religious diversity—until war overwhelmed the former Yugoslavia. On November 9, 1993, artillery and tanks destroyed this cultural treasure. Following the conclusion of the war, the Government tried for several years to rebuild the bridge. However, due to lack of financing and technical capacity, as well as prevailing political and ethnic sensitivities, all efforts were unsuccessful.

The IDA-financed Cultural Heritage Pilot Project launched in 1999. The Government had approached IDA, hoping that its technical expertise, reputation as an honest broker, and capacity to assemble diverse stakeholders, could accelerate reconstruction of the bridge and its towers. This was not a typical IDA infrastructure-reconstruction or economic development project. Because of the symbolism inherent in the reconstruction of the Old Bridge, the project was meant to promote a climate of reconciliation—the main pre-requisite for economic revitalization and social cohesion.

The re-opening of the Old Bridge has contributed to the reconciliation of war-divided people living on the banks of the Neretva River.

Highlights:
- **Widespread reconstruction.** In addition to rebuilding the graceful arch of the bridge and its towers, the project restored other damaged monuments, which helped preserve the character of Mostar’s historic cobbled-stoned Old Town.
- **Reconciliation achieved.** Mostar residents from both banks now meet again in the Old Town to attend concerts, exhibitions, and other cultural events.
- **Skyrocketing tourism brought income.** Tourism picked up, boosting the local economy. Even before the bridge’s reconstruction, the war-shattered and ethnically divided town of Mostar was visited by up to 25,000 tourists every year. But that skyrocketed. Approximately 300,000 tourist visits were registered in 2004; 450,000 in 2005; 750,000 in 2006; and more than 1 million in
- **Business perked up.** Tourism has triggered new construction, the opening of new hotels, restaurants, and pubs, and other businesses in Mostar and its surroundings.
- **Historical recognition achieved.** In July 2005, Mostar’s Old Bridge and surrounding Old Town were registered on UNESCO’s list of historic monuments.

### IDA CONTRIBUTION
The total project cost was US$12.5 million, of which IDA provided US$4 million. IDA also assembled a unique partnership to carry out the project, which included local communities, as well as national and regional Governments, and multiple donors. IDA's convening power was as valuable as its direct financial and technical support.

### PARTNERS
The Government provided US$2 million, with other donors, including Italy, the Netherlands, Croatia, and the Council of Europe Development Bank, providing the rest. Also contributing were UNESCO, the World Monuments Fund, and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture.

### NEXT STEPS
Although IDA financing ended several years ago, project activities go on, since local authorities are continuing to work on the restoration and maintenance of the Old Town. The project implementation unit has been transformed into an agency responsible for managing and maintaining the restored Old Town, and further developing Mostar’s tourism potential.

### LEARN MORE
Cultural Heritage Pilot Project, 1999-2004
[Project documents](#)