

Timeline of the Ongoing Journey to Preserve and Revitalize the Buzludzha Monument. An Updated Summary Report by the Buzludzha Project Foundation

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1. Taking responsibility – making a choice to take action (Figs. 1 and 2)

In 2013, Dora Ivanova, a Bulgarian student of Architecture at the Technical University of Berlin, discovered the Buzludzha Monument. Instead of an abandoned ruin from the past, she saw an outstanding architectural heritage site with tremendous potential for future reuse. Following some initial research, she realized that no one was taking care of the building nor were there any plans for its future. Ivanova decided to start a campaign for the monument's preservation. As a first step, in 2014 she defended her Master thesis entitled *Buzludzha – Between Past, Present and Future*, which focused on research of the Buzludzha's multi-layered aspects. Following her graduation in 2015, she founded the Buzludzha Project Foundation with the aim to preserve the monument and to turn it into a functioning heritage site.

The local grassroots initiative has since grown into an international project and become an example of a successful conservation practice of dissonant cultural heritage. Since the very beginning, the philosophy behind the project has been that the difficult past should be remembered to learn from it and to develop critical thinking. The purpose of preserving the monument is to be a platform for dialogue and education. The initiative shows that active citizens' involvement can be an important tool for successful heritage preservation. Indeed, it proves how each and every one of us can take responsibility, search for solutions and take action instead of complaining and waiting in vain for something to happen.



Fig. 1 View of Buzludzha Monument

2. First steps – starting the discussion and raising awareness

The first challenge to secure Buzludzha's future was to convince the Bulgarian public that the monument is a valuable heritage site in need of protection. During the first two years of the foundation's work, the initiative focussed on provoking the discussion and raising awareness through conferences, exhibitions, and strategic meetings. Such outreach was crucial for the viability of the project as it helped to steadily grow public support and yield professional advice. The list of the official events held during this period reflects the scope and variety of dialogues and exchanges, which paved the way for the next phases of the project.

Conferences:

- Roundtable Event *Soc Heritage – Heritage at Risk*, Sofia, 20 August 2015
- Roundtable Discussion *Soc Heritage*, Berlin, 5 September 2015
- Scientific Conference *Historiography of Transitions*, Veliko Tarnovo, 16–17 October 2015
- Conference *Modern Heritage at Risk*, European Parliament, Brussels, 23 February 2016
- International Conference *Heroic Art and Socialist Realism*, Sofia, 11 March 2016
- Panel *Universal Language of Culture – Regional Policies for Heritage Preservation*, part of the 12th World Meeting of Bulgarian Media, Prague, 17–21 May 2016



Fig. 2 Drone view of Buzludzha



Fig. 3 Open-air exhibition in Kazanlak, 2016

Buzludzha Project Exhibitions:

- 14th World Triennial of Architecture, *Interarch*, Sofia, Union of Architects in Bulgaria, 17–30 May 2015
- Public Library, Montana, 8 October–10 November 2015
- Art Gallery, Kazanlak, 18 November–10 December 2015
- Art Gallery, Gabrovo, 19 January–19 February 2016
- Central Library, Stara Zagora, 29 February–30 March 2016
- Annual Meeting of the Chamber of Architects, Sofia, University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy, 17–24 March 2016
- Open Air Exhibition, Main Public Square, Kazanlak, 22 August–1 December 2016 (Fig. 3)
- Exhibition and Discussion, National Palace of Culture, Sofia, 15–24 September 2016

Strategic Meetings:

- Prime Minister, Mr. Boyko Borisov, 5 June 2016
- Stakeholders meeting at the Ministry of Culture, 14 June 2016
- Local Authorities discussion in Kazanlak Municipality, 25 June 2017

3. Gaining international recognition – the 7 Most Endangered nomination

Following a nomination made by the Buzludzha Project Foundation, in 2018 Buzludzha was listed among the *7 Most Endangered* heritage sites in Europe, a programme run by Europa Nostra, a leading heritage organisation in Europe, and the European Investment Bank Institute.

Together with the foundation experts in cultural heritage and finance from these two organisations undertook a mission to the monument in September 2018. They visited the Buzludzha Monument and met with representatives from the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Culture, and the Regional Administration of Stara Zagora. The mission report, published at the end of 2018, presents key findings and recommendations.

“In summary: a very challenging project dealing with the recovery of a masterpiece of architecture and crafts, with evident European interest due to its historic significance, its peculiar characteristics, and its numerous potential future uses.” Mario Aymerich, Technical Advisor to the European Investment Bank Institute

This was the first international recognition of the Buzludzha Monument as a cultural heritage site at risk in an official European report.

4. Initial funding – support by the Getty Foundation

Thanks to the national and international awareness campaigns, word about the project reached the Getty Foundation in Los Angeles and the Buzludzha Project Foundation learned about their grant programme *Keeping It Modern* (KIM) supporting research and conservation planning of heritage sites of the 20th century. Since 2014, the KIM has supported 77 projects of outstanding architectural significance that contribute to advancing conservation practice. The grants focus on the creation of conservation management plans that guide long-term maintenance and conservation policies, thorough investigation of building conditions, and the testing and analysis of modern materials.

In early 2019, the Buzludzha Project Foundation, in cooperation with ICOMOS Germany having supported the Foundation with expertise from the onset, prepared an application for the KIM programme. The scope of the proposal was carefully conceived with the support of experts from a variety of disciplines. Indeed, the application turned out to be successful. In late 2019, the Getty Foundation awarded a funding of USD 185,000 for the project *Research, Conservation Planning, and Adaptive Reuse Study of Buzludzha Monument*.

The project was undertaken by a multidisciplinary team of Bulgarian and international experts. The project partners were: ICOMOS Germany and the Buzludzha Project Foundation as project coordinators, the Technical University of Munich, and the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy of Sofia as academic partners.

Here we would like to express our gratitude to ICOMOS Germany for the constant support throughout the years,



Fig. 4 The team of conservator-restorers

helping to launch the operations of this highly complex preservation process of Buzludzha.

Building a team – decision-making through multidisciplinary discussions

Work on the Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the Buzludzha Monument led to the enlargement and wider development of the team (Fig. 4). An international advisory committee to consult on the interdisciplinary work was formed. Many team members had supported the initiative beforehand thanks to the previous networking efforts of the foundation. Others joined the team just for this specific project and remained involved ever after. Within a two-year timeline, a team of over 100 international specialists in the fields of architecture, engineering, restoration, tourism, business, and marketing carried out the research, analysis, and design.

Coordinating a large team of experts with a variety of backgrounds presents challenges. These challenges were met through open and constructive dialogue. The entire team met regularly, often in day-long meetings, to present results and discuss future development. Thanks to these meetings each team member could develop a thorough understanding of the complexity of the task. Moreover, regular public meetings were organized to reach out to all those who wished to get involved and become volunteers.

Volunteers are an essential part of the process. Their involvement shows public support, brings quality and transparency, and helps to build a stable community around the cause.

We are happy to state that following the completion of the CMP in 2021, all team members continue to be involved and support the project. Some of them became board members of the foundation while others took positions in the operational team.

5. Research – gathering information and getting a better understanding of the site

Research started with the digitisation of archival materials, including the categorization of the original blueprints and photographs and the scanning of the approximately 2,000 files.

Research on site started with the first-ever cleaning campaign in the monument. Its main focus were the staircases in order to gain access to all areas of the building.

Three-dimensional laser scanning, also known as LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging), was performed by Zenit GEO. The geodesy team made over 540 single station scans, which were georeferenced and combined into a single point cloud containing more than seven milliard points.

The point cloud, in combination with the archive's blueprints, were used to create an exact 3D model of the building (Fig. 5). The building information model (BIM) was created by the architecture team of E House Architects and the engineering team of BIAS-M, with BIM management carried out by AllStudio. The model allows further intelligent research and planning by all experts.

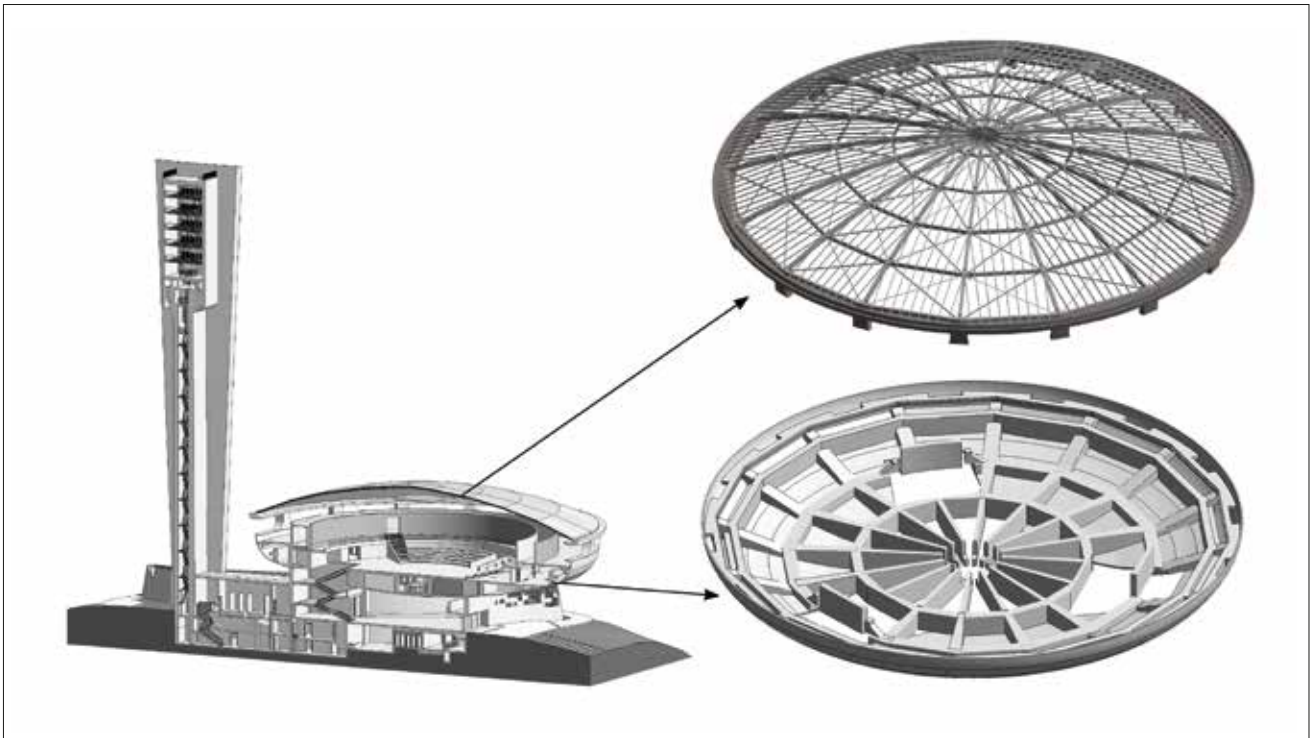


Fig. 5 3D Model of Buzludzha

A detailed field study was carried out by a team of restorers and architects from three universities from Germany and Switzerland — the Technical University of Munich, the University of Applied Arts of Bern, and the Academy of Fine Arts of Dresden. The team created a catalogue of Buzludzha's materials and surfaces; it is divided into three main categories referring to their location or type – exterior, interior, and mosaics. The catalogue brings light to the high number of materials and techniques used in the construction of the monument and the high-quality craftsmanship involved.

The utilities study was carried out by a group of experienced engineers from Bulgaria: Miroyub Bozhinov (water sewage system), Katia Ivanova (heating, ventilation and air conditioning), Rad Stanev (electricity). The conclusions were that the installations and technologies in the building were excellently planned and implemented to the highest standards of their time. Technologies were imported from both sides of the Iron Curtain and were well used on site. Unfortunately, there is no usable infrastructure left. However, the technical principles can be considered and analysed for the future reuse.

The structural investigation was crucial for the further planning. It was conducted by the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering, and Geodesy of Sofia (UACEG) and led to the conclusion that the main structural elements were stable and the building could be conserved. Afterwards, the engineers of Bias-M conducted structural calculations to examine the load capacity of the elements with generally positive results.

The heritage experts Dr Emilia Kaleva and Dr Aneta Vasileva from ICOMOS Bulgaria and UACEG analysed the architectural and historical aspects of the Buzludzha Monu-

ment. Their research contextualizes Buzludzha and positions it within the specific socio-political, economic, and cultural backgrounds in Bulgaria.

Mariela Malamatenova examined the artistic elements from an art-historical perspective.

Grigor Perchekliyski, Desislav Evlogiev and Stoyka Ru-seva further scrutinized Buzludzha's landscape setting including the park, the infrastructure and the objects, built to serve and enhance the monument, their condition and cultural value.

As further part of the research complex, the project launched an oral history campaign called *Buzludzha's Unwritten Stories*. The documented stories helped to better understand the many technical and organisational elements of the monument, but most of all yielded insights into what Buzludzha meant for the people of Bulgaria. The stories shone a light on the emotional dimension of the building and helped build a coherent image of it. The team was led by Anelia Ivanova and all interviews were video recorded.

6. Conservation planning and adaptive reuse study – conclusions

After research had been carried out in all its forms, the project began a detailed analysis in all important fields. E House Architects assessed the monument's cultural significance based on internationally recognized criteria. The study covered the historical, aesthetic, social, scientific, and spiritual values of the building and its elements. Emilia Kaleva assessed the significance based on the Bulgarian criteria system. Both analyses proved that Buzludzha is a site of exceptional national and international cultural significance.

In addition, the assessments identified some risks as well as constraints and opportunities for the future. Based on these assessments the team developed conservation policy principles for each element of the building as well as a set of conservation guidelines.

Developing a revitalization concept was a key part of the process. The concept was based on the results of the interdisciplinary research and analysis referred to above. It was carried out by the architectural team of Studio Uwe Brueckner and E House Architects. The team developed different reuse scenarios leading to the creation of the final multifunctional revitalization concept that showcases the potential of the monument as a place for culture, history, and events.

Furthermore, a sustainable tourism plan was developed by the International Cultural Tourism Committee of ICOMOS. It was informed by tourism research and marketing studies involving a visitors' survey and visitation analysis. Two of the main recommendations were to encourage year-round visitation and to make the opening of the monument for visitors the first step in the conservation process.

Finally, a business plan presented the implementation costs of the project and a timeline reflected the phases of the conservation work. The document, developed by Martin Zaimov and his team, also included a management and a financial plan.

In fact, the report at hands gives a brief overview of the foundation's efforts throughout the years. Editing, synthesising and a translation of the Conservation Management Plan is in progress and the document will be available to the public in 2023.

7. Emergency stabilization measures – saving the mosaics (Figs. 6–11)

Through the research and analysis of Buzludzha it became clear that the most valuable and, simultaneously, most endangered elements of the monument were the mosaics covering an area of almost 1000 square meters. Prompt actions were required to stop the rapid loss of the artwork. Therefore, the team submitted a second application to the Getty Foundation's *Keeping It Modern* programme and received a grant of USD 60,000 in support of the mosaic stabilization in 2020.

An international team of conservator-restorers from the National Academy of Art in Sofia, the Technical University of Munich, the Bern University of the Arts, and the Diadrasis NGO from Athens collaborated to implement the project. Eager volunteers supported the process.

The team began its work by studying the characteristics of the mosaics, including the supports, the deficiencies of the materials, the variety of art techniques used, etc. It gathered the information about the main phenomena to then plan the next emergency measures.

After this documentation campaign, the team collected all loose mosaic tiles (tesserae) that had fallen off, documented and stored them in over 150 containers. Subsequently, the areas around the mosaic walls were cleaned from debris in preparation of the planned works.

As a matter of fact, all emergency measures planned in the preparatory campaign were fully implemented and all



Fig. 6 Mosaic documentation



Fig. 7 Emergency measures carried out on the mosaics



Fig. 8 Gathering the mosaic tesserae



Fig. 10 Shelter erected around the outer mosaic ring



Fig. 9 Monitoring mission during the winter



Fig. 11 Team of volunteers in front of Buzludzha

mosaics stabilised mechanically. To protect the mosaics from climatic impacts, a temporary shelter was constructed to shield the inner mosaic ring. The shelter consists of a structurally independent protective roof over the mosaic and a water-repellent but air-permeable textile providing vertical protection. The shelter functions as a climate buffer. It avoids rapid shifts in the general climate, prevents condensation, and protects from snow, frost and wind erosion during winter months, which had caused significant damage to the mosaics in the past.

To continue work on the preservation of Buzludzha's mosaics and to also protect the outer mosaic ring from destruction, the foundation announced the funding campaign *Adopt a Mosaic* in 2021. It was a success and provided the necessary funds to carry out the required work. Ten mosaics were adopted by individuals and local companies: Georgi Stoilov, architect of the monument; Galina Stoyanova, mayor of Kazanlak; Roman Zhelev and Dr Antonia Bozukova; M+S Hydraulics; Edelweiss Hotel; Dimana and Dimitar Shopovi; Dr Eng. Krasimira Dimitrova; Neli and Adel Zakut; and Dr Ivan Doshkov. In addition to the adopters, 162 people joined the campaign with smaller donations. A total of approximately EUR 49,000 was raised. Thanks to the financial support and the help of some 100 volunteers on site, a protective shelter was constructed over the outer mosaic ring in 2021. Hence, the outer mosaics have now been through their first winter protected from the harsh weather on Buzludzha peak.

Since the beginning of the project, the restoration team had regularly monitored the site and confirmed that all mosaics remained stable. Indeed, the emergency measures proved to be highly effective.

In recognition of their generous support to save the mosaics, the adopters were awarded with the title *The Honourable Bulgarians of 2021*, an annual campaign launched by the newspaper *24 Hours* and the Bulgarian National Television bestowing citizens, who engaged in the most significant good actions in and for the country.

The whole process greatly attracted the media's interest and national and international coverage sparked excitement in Bulgaria, Europe, and beyond.

8. Celebration of achievements – organising public events

Involving the general public is key to the sustainable development of any social project, especially one of dissonant character. This is why the foundation focused on reaching out to the people not only through traditional and social media, but also through live local events and organized a scientific conference for the professionals as well as a festival for the broader public. The events were an invitation for dialogue and discussion. The aim of the festival, in particular, was to share the project development publicly and to show that it is not a topic for experts only. In fact, the event addressed all citizens and encouraged them to learn more about the topic, to participate in the discussions and to get involved. Both events were highly successful.

The international conference *In Restauro: Post-War Heritage of Art and Architecture in Central and Eastern Eu-*



Fig. 12 *In Restauro* conference at the Iskra Museum in Kazanlak, 2021

rope – Integrated Approaches to Dissonant Monuments and Sites was held on 22 and 23 July 2021 in the History Museum Iskra in Kazanlak and also streamed online (Figs. 12 and 13). The event presented the two main outputs of the two projects for the Buzludzha Monument: the conservation management plan and the emergency stabilisation project of mosaics, both carried out between 2019 and 2021. The conference was a key event not only because of its international scope (with participants from Bulgaria, Germany, Estonia, Russia, Georgia, Switzerland, Italy, the UK and others), but also because of its interdisciplinary and broad nature involving experts from various fields and with disparate experience and perspectives on dissonant heritage. At the conference the Buzludzha project's accomplishments were presented as a best practice in the field of dissonant heritage preservation, and also in the field of research and detailed conservation management planning for heritage sites. Examples of other international cases further strengthened the impact and outreach of the event.

The conference greatly contributed to the foundation's work in terms of partnerships, and local and expert support. The foundation plans to hold similar events on a regular basis to create a platform for knowledge exchange on national and international level.

The first Open Buzludzha Festival's slogan was "Music for Mosaics". The aim was to raise awareness and funds for the protective shelter of the outer mosaic ring. The three-day festival took place right after the conference, from 23 to 25 July 2021, and offered a diverse music programme on two stages as well as presentations, discussions, and tours outside the monument. It was organised by the Buzludzha Project Foundation, Bar Dak and the Kazanlak Municipality through a committed team of volunteers. It brought over 800 people closer to the cause and the possible future of the monument.

Inspired by the success of the first festival, the team organized the second Open Buzludzha Festival in 2022, from 19 to 21 August. The slogan was "You Are the Key. Open



Fig. 13 Participants of the *In Restauro* conference visiting the monument

Buzludzha” as the festival supports the opening of the monument for visitors and promotes the message that everyone is key to preserving cultural heritage and making a change. There were 130 musicians on three stages and a colourful daily programme focused on cultural and natural heritage. In addition to the Buzludzha presentation and tours, 10 cultural organizations were invited, representing the richness of the region. They included local museums, art performances, nature and sport activities. The highlight of the festival was the stage right at the monument, which featured 3D-mapped projections on Buzludzha (Fig. 14). A total of 1,500 people visited the festival. Today, the team is already planning the next festival, which is turning into an annual event, celebrating the site and its preservation.

9. Securing the building – providing visitor access

In 2021, the monument was visited by approximately 50,000 individuals who would have liked to, but could not, enter the building as it remains closed and surveyed to prevent accidents. Yet, the number of people interested to visit the building’s inside is further growing in 2022. Providing visitor access is an important step to raise awareness and to ensure the sustainability of the project. This is the main goal of the foundation in 2022.

In September 2021, the Buzludzha Monument was listed as a heritage site of national significance. This very important step allowed applying for state funding from the Minis-

try of Culture for the first time. The Buzludzha Project Foundation thus prepared a proposal aiming for save temporary visitor access. The regional administration of Stara Zagora, as the legal manager of the site, in partnership with the Buzludzha Project Foundation and the Kazanlak Municipality, submitted the project proposal with success and received a funding of EUR 198,000. The project comprised the following three phases.

First, the roof of the building was cleared (Fig. 15). In fact, since the original copper sheets of the roof cover had been stolen in the 1990s, the remaining layers of the roof were left unprotected and decayed constantly. Therefore, the risk of falling objects had become the main safety threat inside the building. Whenever a strong wind blew, roof material fell off in- and outside the building. Now, the debris was carefully removed from the roof but also from the other main areas to prevent accidents and allow access also for future conservation works.

Second, emergency conservation measures were implemented to safeguard the dome mosaic (Fig. 16). Indeed, the mosaic artwork in the dome was the last remaining unprotected mosaic piece owing to its inaccessible position up on the 12m high ceiling. To do the required work, a stable working platform with the dimensions 10m x 10m x 10m was constructed. The works stabilized the mosaic and constructed a protective shelter over it. With the accomplishment of these emergency measures for the mosaics, all mosaics in the monument are now stabilized and protected.

Third, secure visitor access yet required some equipment. Many marble and granite plates had gone missing leaving



Fig. 14 Open Buzludzha Festival 2022, 3D projections



Fig. 15 Drone view of the cleared roof

uneven surfaces on the floor. To avoid tripping hazards, the project realized temporary wooden pathways creating a new temporary layer and providing safe zones for visitors. Finally, an information pavilion, video projection, and a physical

model of Buzludzha will become part of the visitors' experience.

The process was supported by the business community, by volunteers, and experts. The work will be finalized before

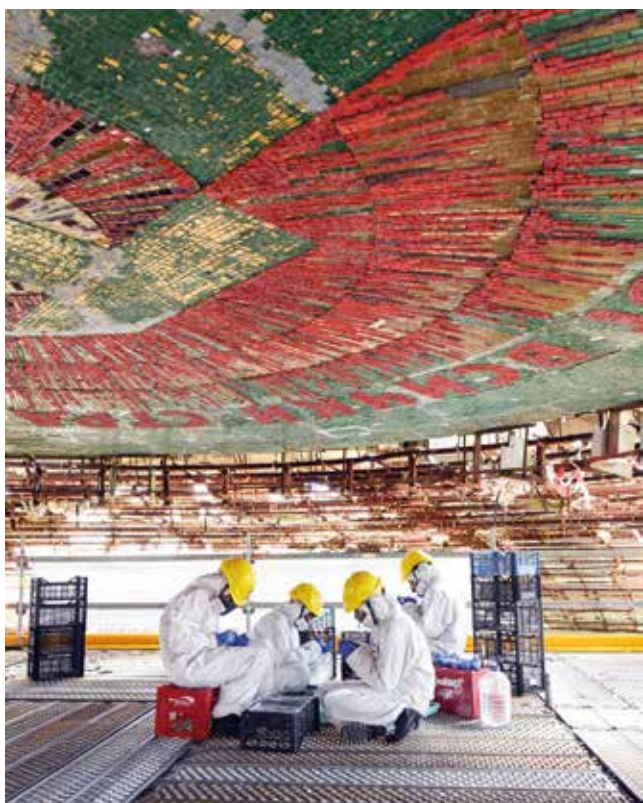


Fig. 16 Stabilisation of the mosaics of the dome

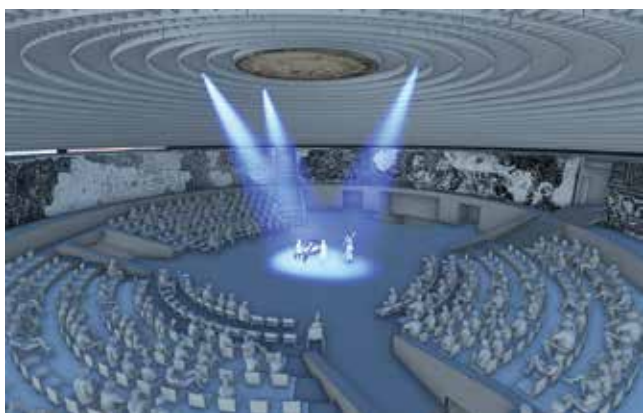


Fig. 17 Vision of events at Buzludzha

the end of 2022 and the official opening of the monument for visitors is planned for 2023.

10. The vision – long term goals

After finalizing the first two main tasks on-site – implementing emergency measures for the mosaics and providing visitors access – the next most urgent goal is the consolidation of the building. To stop the decay of the entire monument and provide a controlled environment inside, a new roof covering and new windows are needed. This task requires research, design, budgeting, financing, and institutional approval as well as the actual construction works. The existing metal structure of the roof can be used, but some specific

elements need to be strengthened or replaced. Moreover, the coating of the entire structure needs to be renewed. After the metal construction is repaired, the new roof covering can be implemented.

The next task would be the adaptation of the pylon to allow visitors access to its top. From a panoramic platform at a height of 70m above the mountain peak, visitors will enjoy a spectacular view. The visit to the top of the tower can operate independently of the programme in the main building. Additionally, the technical rooms on ground level can be converted into a café and lounge, offering a place to relax before and after a visit or when waiting for events and tours in the main building or the pylon.

The final phase should transform the building from a visitable artefact to a functional building, which can host a wide range of events and exhibitions. This phase includes new technical equipment and infrastructure for the whole building such as heating, electricity, ventilation, running water and a sewage system. Conservation, restoration, or renovation works have to be implemented on all surfaces. Furthermore, measures for the acoustics of the main hall will be required.

At this point, full revitalization of the building will be achieved. The authenticity of Buzludzha is preserved and the building has become a storytelling platform serving educational purposes through diverse exhibitions and events. Visitors can see the architecture of Buzludzha as it is. The story of Buzludzha, and many other related topics are presented through 3D-mapping projections, and further technological tools. For events and conferences removable seating transforms the space into a functional conference hall for at least 400 people. The Buzludzha experience includes a year-round cultural calendar with events in the fields of music, cinema, theatre, dance, fashion and more. The space and the flexible technical equipment create exclusivity for each event.

The concept for the revitalization vision is developed by Studio Uwe Brückner and E House Architects and shows the possibilities for a new Buzludzha experience (Fig. 17).

To summarize, the Buzludzha Project Foundation works for the preservation and the reuse of the Buzludzha Monument. However, the goal is bigger than the monument itself. It represents a cause for the care of cultural heritage in general, for the development of cultural tourism, the motivation and mobilization of civil society, the development of the region and the creation of bridges between institutions, municipalities, museums, and society. The goal is to develop best practices contributing to the efficiency of the heritage preservation system in Bulgaria and the development of a significant cultural destination on the map of Europe.

Credits

Figs. 1, 14: photo Aaron Tyler

Fig. 2: photo Mariyan Tashev

Fig. 3: photo Alexander Ivanov

Figs. 4, 6–10: photo Dora Ivanova

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Figs. 11–13, 16: photo Nikifor Haralampiev

Fig. 15: anonymous

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