

Conservation and Management Plan: Significance Assessment and Conservation Strategies for the Buzludzha Monument

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Exactly two years ago, the team of E House Architects joined the Buzludzha Foundation project funded by the Getty Foundation within the “Keeping It Modern” programme to prepare a Conservation and Management Plan (CMP) for the Buzludzha Monument (Fig. 1). The purpose of the presentation is to shed light on this task and to convince you that with the help of the CMP the building of the Buzludzha Monument and its surroundings will be preserved for future generations. Some would disagree – they would argue that this was a completely unnecessary pouring of huge funds into a cause doomed to fail and that there are so many other things that are more important. Others would add that the socialist heritage is not our heritage. Still others would not hesitate to accuse us of trying to “restore” communism on Mount Buzludzha.

Yes, the controversial past of the building erected 40 years ago is the main reason for its current condition. Functioning for only eight years, almost four times longer it was the subject of total looting and subsequent processes of destruction. Today, the distance of time allows us to discover and present to the world the enormous cultural potential of this place, analysed and developed in the Conservation and Management Plan.

Buzludzha is significant, but there is something extremely different about it that sets it apart from any other site anywhere in the world – its contradiction. Buzludzha is the legacy of two mutually exclusive periods – the period of socialism and the period of democratic changes (Fig. 2). We would

be hard-pressed to find another example of a site where destructive processes, decay and degradation add value to the extent of Buzludzha. The main credit for the development of the concept for controversial heritage goes to architect Aneta Vasileva and architect Emilia Kaleva, who are the key experts in the preparation of the study and analysis of the significance of the Buzludzha Monument.

The analysis of the values of Buzludzha was developed in parallel according to two criteria systems – the Bulgarian and the international criteria systems. The result of both systems showed the highest significance score, with no particular contradictions between them. Here are some main points of the evaluation according to the international criteria system:

We believe that Buzludzha can and will become a leading example for dealing with controversial heritage. Our society needs help in understanding and accepting its own past and moving forward, and perhaps Buzludzha is just what we need. This determines the high scientific value of the monument in the field of sociology and political science.

Architecture has always been and will always be a reflection of the time in which it was built. Buzludzha is undoubtedly the most vivid example in Bulgarian architectural history of the enormous strength and intellectual power that was harnessed for the purposes of propaganda and manipulative suggestions in totalitarian society. The traces of this overall urban planning, landscape, architectural and monumental solution can still be seen today. The visitor’s path was carefully considered, from the Dimitar Blagoev monument in the



Fig. 1 The grand stairs leading to the entrance of the Buzludzha Monument



Fig. 2 The square in front of the main building; in the foreground the remains of the monumental composition “Banners”



Fig. 3 “Forget Your Past” – graffiti slogan above the main entrance of the building (after the democratic changes)

lowland to the culminating moment of entering the building. All this is visible today, even under the collapsed concrete, cracked stone and stolen metal. The historic value is high to exceptional.

But for whom is Buzludzha actually valuable? In our analysis, we identified several different community groups that recognise Buzludzha as valuable. Perhaps the strongest impression is made by the group that uses the monument as a kind of stage for social dialogue. The slogan “(Never) Forget Your Past” has established itself over the years as an emblem of the monument and its contradictions (Figs. 3 and 4). In addition, of course, we have the political supporters of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, the local people, amateur motorcyclists and cyclists, architecture and art lovers, and, last but not least, the artists who are inspired by Buzludzha.

Have you ever stood in front of something knowing you liked it, but couldn't explain why? What happens is that the object affects you through its aesthetic qualities on a subconscious level. One definition of aesthetic value is: “for the object to evoke or provoke thoughts and emotions”. It would be hard to find a person who, upon first encountering Buzludzha, did not gasp in amazement (Figs. 5 and 6). This is proven by the strong creative response in the last ten years. Buzludzha is an object of creative inspiration in almost every sphere of art: opera; contemporary poetry; short movie; choreography; photography; fashion design, etc. The aesthetic value is high to exceptional.

Buzludzha has the power to attract the attention of the public. The proof of this is not only the hundreds of people who visit Buzludzha every day even though it is closed to

visitors, but also the incredible international team of specialists who have taken part in the preparation of this plan. This power of attraction is the most powerful weapon that Buzludzha currently has.

Now that we have a better understanding of the significance of the monument, let's look at the risks for its preservation. Here I want to thank Emilia Kaleva for her key participation in the development of this part of the plan. Let's start with the most obvious threat – Buzludzha has no roof anymore (Fig. 7). But how does this affect the building? First of all, the freezing and thawing processes separate the adhesive layer of the mosaics from the base of the wall (Fig. 8). The other major physical problem is the collection of water in the voids of the plate between the supporting concrete beams. In some places, water finds its way through the thin layer of the plate, the results of which are leaks, collapse of the concrete cover, exposure of reinforcement and growth of mossy vegetation. Buzludzha needs complete roofing as soon as possible.

Buzludzha is an object for a purposeful visit. One does not pass there by chance at 1500 metres above sea level, so it needs a new active function, different from the original one, to ensure its sustainable preservation. This is directly related to the lack of targeted funding for conservation. Given the changed political and especially market conditions after 1989, it is unlikely that the state will provide permanent financing as it did before 1989. The lack of legal protection and of clear boundaries and regulations for the preservation of the monument poses the risk of inadequate interventions that would violate the integrity of the site. This makes it all



Fig. 4 A later photo with "Never" before the same slogan and new graffiti "Enjoy Communism" (reference to the Coca Cola slogan)

the more necessary to have clear rules and regulations for the protection of the site.

The Buzludzha Conservation and Management Plan is necessary for the monument's sustainable conservation. The essential part of the plan is the conservation policies and the timetable for their implementation. The time plan covers a ten-year period and is developed in three main phases: emergency measures; consolidation and adaptation. In the first phase, the most urgent measures to prevent direct physical threats will be carried out. Some of these activities have already started. The second phase envisages ensuring a controlled microclimate in the building and starting individual conservation activities on the artistic, architectural and structural elements of the building. The third phase is related to the implementation of a comprehensive project for the conservation and adaptation of the building. The adaptation project must be based on a well-thought-out assignment that is in harmony with the specifications of the conservation plan and the needs of society. This depends directly on the form of permanent and targeted funding for the building and its management.

The site conservation policies are a set of principles and regulations for restrictions, recommendations and instructions at various levels for the conservation of the heritage value. Three of the main principles that have been followed are:

1. Prohibition of the complete restoration of the appearance of the building from the first period of its existence. This

would erase the traces of the second period, which is inadmissible according to the arguments presented earlier.

2. New interventions must be made with respect to the two periods of the building's existence.
3. New interventions must have a minimal permanent impact on elements of cultural value. At the same time, the intervention must provide a new active function to ensure the permanent and sustainable conservation of the site.

Within the study and analysis of the site, four elements are distinguished which can be considered separately due to structural, functional, spatial or other characteristics. These are the volume of the main body of the building, the pylon with the two pentagons, the technical block together with its underground levels, and the surrounding space. These elements were considered with their specific value characteristics, resulting in different regulations for each of the four elements. Here are some of the main building regulations:

1. Permanent or temporary roofing should be provided as soon as possible. In the case of insufficient funding, a temporary covering should be carried out above the mosaics in the ceremonial hall, to protect them from the direct impact of rain and snow. The freeze-thaw cycle poses the greatest danger in terms of weathering damage. The temporary covering above the mosaics should be made in such a way as to protect them from snow drifts.
2. After protecting the building from the adverse effects of rain and snow, steps should be taken to pump out water



Fig. 5 The foyer at the main entrance



Fig. 6 The hammer and sickle mosaic medallion hanging over the main hall



Fig. 7 Photo from above: the pylon with the star; the main building and the stairs leading down to the square



Fig. 8 The couloir and the outer mosaic ring



Fig. 9 The interior of the main hall where the inner mosaic ring and the steel roof structure can be seen

- between reinforced concrete rings according to the plan for pumping out water and normalising humidity.
3. Periodic monitoring and maintenance of the concrete components and metal structures should be carried out. The conservation of items and materials of particular importance is a preferred method of interpretation. For elements of the building structure whose load-bearing capacity is impaired due to defects or erosion, it is permitted to apply the reconstruction method (Fig. 9).
 4. Any actions that threaten the stability of the mosaics are prohibited.
 5. Permanent interventions are permitted only when they are of vital importance for the new use of the building. Such can be: engineering infrastructures; new suspended ceilings; new roof; new windows. They should be executed with respect for the spirit of the place and in harmony with the original substance and design or in accordance with a concept of exposure of the ruin.
 6. The graffiti should be further analyzed for whether they contribute to the social and aesthetic significance of the site, as they may carry information about the social and political changes in Bulgaria after the fall of

communism. Special attention should be paid to the reproduced graffiti image of Todor Zhivkov. Based on professional analysis, it should be decided which graffiti works should be preserved and which removed. The memory of removed graffiti may be preserved in an alternative way through photographs, 3D mapping or other means.

For the technical unit:

1. Permanent changes are permitted if they serve the revitalization of the site. Such changes can be new functions: coffee bar; restaurant; information centre and/or ticket centre; exhibition space. The following interventions are allowed: removal of interior walls and/or additions; removal or change of openings; new openings in the roof and floors; change of levels; underground extensions; underground connections both functional and infrastructural.
2. No new openings are allowed on exterior walls.
3. A volume upgrade is not allowed.

In a similar way, there are regulations for the pylon and the surrounding space. As you can see, the conservation regulations aim to provide a general framework for intervention

in the building. This intervention can have a variety of very different readings. In Uwe Brückner's presentation, you will see and hear one such reading that we developed together. It should be noted that this concept is not part of the conservation and management plan.

Buzludzha is a place of highest cultural significance that is threatened with complete and irreversible destruction. A conservation and management plan is necessary to express and sustain this significance. To succeed, it needs broad institutional and public support. A first step in this direction can be your active participation as its advocates. For us, there is no doubt that the elaboration of the CMP is the best opportunity to set an example of successful management of controversial cultural heritage. Everyone will benefit from this, because only in this way can we be sure that the erased past will not be repeated.

Credits

Figs. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8: Nikola Miller

Fig. 2: Nikola Mihov

Fig. 7: Emil Iliev

Fig. 9: Dora Ivanova