

The New Buzludzha/Buzludzha Nova

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In collaboration with the Buzludzha Foundation and E-House Architects, our ambition was to create a vision for Buzludzha, a feasibility concept to convert Buzludzha, a former communist monument, into a venue for local culture and a conference center for (young) European democrats. Our proposal has been inspired by the unique architecture of the building and the beauty of the surroundings. We were impressed by the exceptional charisma and intrigued by the mysterious spirit of the monument sitting ufo-like on top of the mountain ridge (Fig. 1). It is a spectacular brutalist concrete structure with great potential to become part of modern Bulgaria. We weighed the options of creating a new Buzludzha while preserving its historic heritage by giving the monumental impression a new spin. We had to consider the controversial legacy and the dissonant perception of what to keep and what to take down or alter. We even thought about whether to preserve Buzludzha as a “controlled ruin”, or let it just disappear. As we played through the various options, we experienced the monument’s extreme spatial and artistic power: A theatrical stage with dignity even in its degrading fragility. It is important to us to preserve the character of Buzludzha and at the same time implement a new charisma by transforming the ruin of a former political symbol into the opposite, from a communist spaceship into a democratic venue as a statement for the next generation and the one after that.

The result is an ambitious feasibility study which is based on the deep conviction that Buzludzha has a promising future ahead of it. It is an exciting transformation from terminal abandonment to a lively meeting place for European democrats, with a venue in symbiotic balance with its social and natural environment. We want to invite people to meet in a dissonant building and fill it with new energetic purpose – without neglecting the painful past, but by accepting it as a part of local and national heritage. There is no better and more appropriate location to be reminded of the past and be aware of the future. Or as German politician Richard von Weizsäcker said: „Seeking to forget makes exile all the longer; the secret of redemption lies in remembrance.”

This study seeks to invite the audience to make a new and progressive journey, to explore the New Buzludzha. The tour of the visitors will start in the welcome area (Fig. 2). This foyer will prepare the visitors for what they may expect to see and experience in the main hall, the galleries, the meeting points and the tower. A reception desk gives the opportunity to pick up information or accompanying media such as flyers or audio equipment. The surrounding walls show indentations where sculptures of the communist party once protruded. In these niches, several synchronised pro-



Fig. 1 Buzludzha building concept sketch, Uwe R. Brückner

jectors can be used to visually present the history around Buzludzha, its possible future and the conversion efforts. At a certain point, visitors have the feeling that the wall dematerializes and a virtual window opens announcing events or current activities in and around Buzludzha, such as upcoming conferences or concerts.

From the foyer, visitors proceed to the main hall with its impressive domed ceiling featuring its historic, panoramic mosaic. The central circular hall could be used as a multi-functional event-space. The ceiling is fitted with thin panels that can be used to dim the entire space or just parts of the roof, as required. Both the seating and the combination of stage, backdrops and screens should be as dynamic and adaptable as possible. Several rows of translucent/semi-transparent smart screens can be lowered from the ceiling when needed and disappear into the ceiling when not in use, giving the main hall a completely sober appearance (Fig. 3). This allows Buzludzha to provide a rich variety of new and different experiences for smaller or larger groups. The smart screens can serve as backdrops for cultural performances or presentations (Figs. 4 and 5), or divide the space for exhibitions, seminars or forums (Fig. 6). With a system of projectors, Buzludzha can offer unlimited possibilities to fully immerse its visitors in the different events and experiences, show versatile content and tell many different stories in this multi-faceted hall.

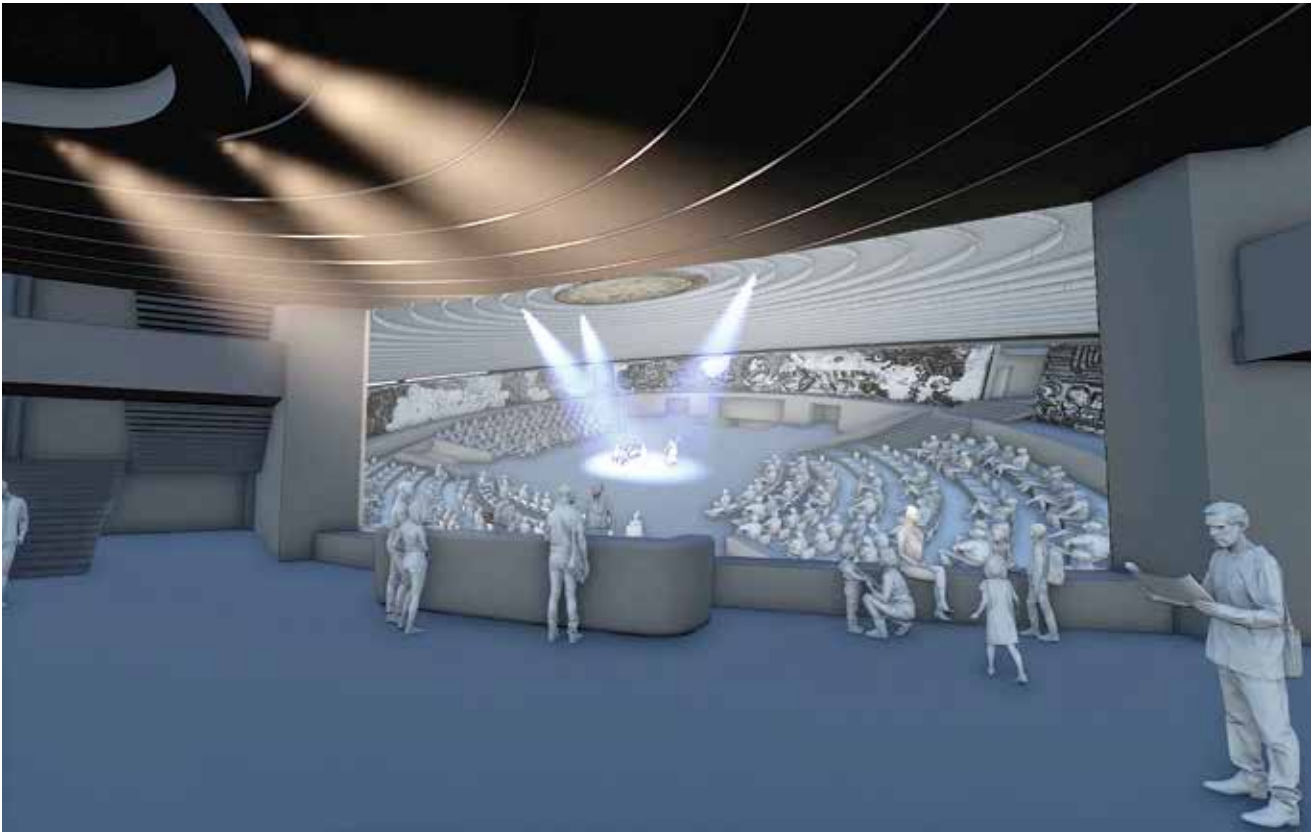


Fig. 2 Foyer, reception, concept rendering, E House Architects



Fig. 3 Main hall, panels, translucent, concept rendering, E House Architects



Fig. 4 Main hall, performance, concept rendering, E House Architects

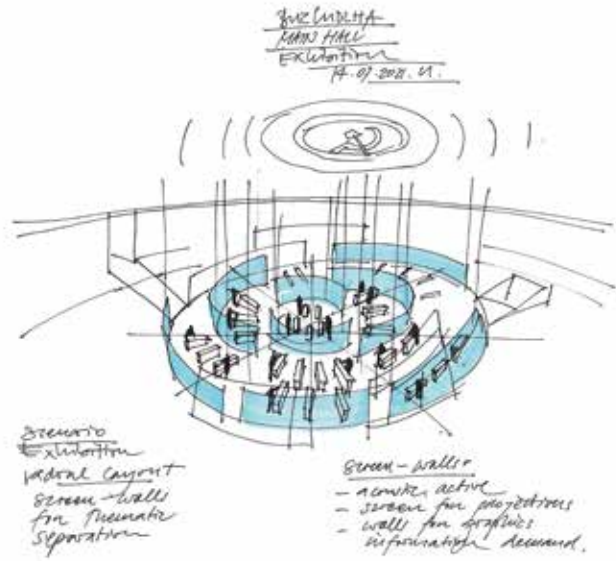


Fig. 6 Main hall, exhibition, forum, concept sketch, Uwe R. Brückner

Storytelling is an art form that has stood the test of time as a way to bring people together and pass on knowledge to the next generation. One of the stories Buzludzha will tell is its own. And who would be better to tell it than Buzludzha itself? For example, by staging its history from the late 1970s when it was designed and planned by architect Georgi Stoilov, to the opening in 1981, and the abandonment after the Cold War ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall. And finally, there are the conservation efforts to preserve the famous mosaics and the plans for the future of Buzludzha. The Gallery allows a fascinating 360-degree view that sweeps from the building over the equally spectacular landscape and gives a feeling as one from a timeless spaceship – Buzludzha.

As a first step, and to stabilise the building in view of the harsh weather conditions, we propose to close the exposed window openings with smart multipurpose panels that

transform the couloirs into galleries and provide safe experiences every day of the year (Fig. 7). The windows are to be installed from the inside to preserve the unique character of the building from the outside. If weather conditions permit, the windows can be moved to the side to provide the most unobstructed view of the surrounding mountain landscape. To make the light conditions controllable, we propose to provide an additional second row of sliding, opaque lamellas, which allow seamless shading or dimming of the galleries. These slats also act as screens onto which content can be projected (Fig. 8). Thus, the landscape behind the slats could be digitally projected and augmented, allowing the recipient to travel back in history and visualise the battle of Hadzhi Dimitar and Stefan Karadzha against the Ottomans. They can offer a virtual journey on rainy days, such as a balloon flight over the National Park, or show



Fig. 5 Main hall, panels, backdrop, conference, concept rendering, E House Architects

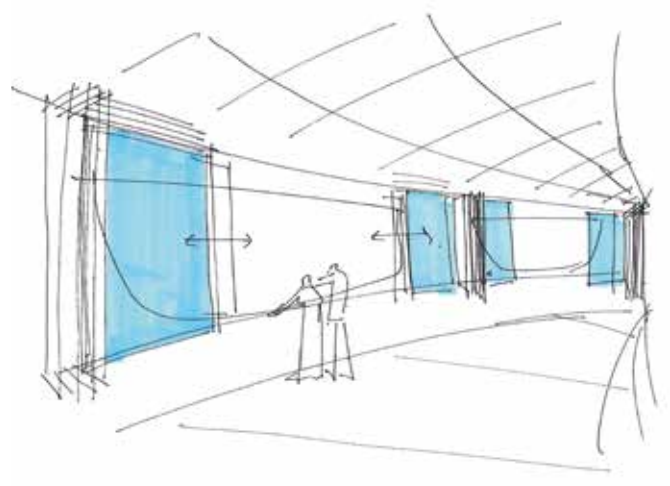


Fig. 7 Gallery, windows, concept sketch, Uwe R. Brückner



Fig. 8 Gallery, projection, concept rendering, E House Architects



Fig. 9 Café, concept rendering, E House Architects

images that complement the content displayed, e.g. in an exhibition staged at Buzludzha. The galleries can also be divided into segments by temporary curtain walls lowered from the ceiling to allow independent staging of content or objects.

From the main building, visitors can access the terrace. In the former service-building of the tower, we propose a small café where visitors can have a cup of coffee or a meal (Fig. 9). The café can also be used as a meeting place during hiking tours, conferences, for a reception before a performance or simply as a place to rest. Open glass surfaces acting as membranes between the landscape and the architecture offer surprising new views onto the building and the tower. If the weather allows, the seating on the terrace invites people to admire the impressive mountain landscape.

The literal highlight of Buzludzha is the 60-meter-high tower at the end of the café. In a waiting lounge and ticket office with a panoramic window facade, visitors can wait for the elevator that will take them to the top of the tower,

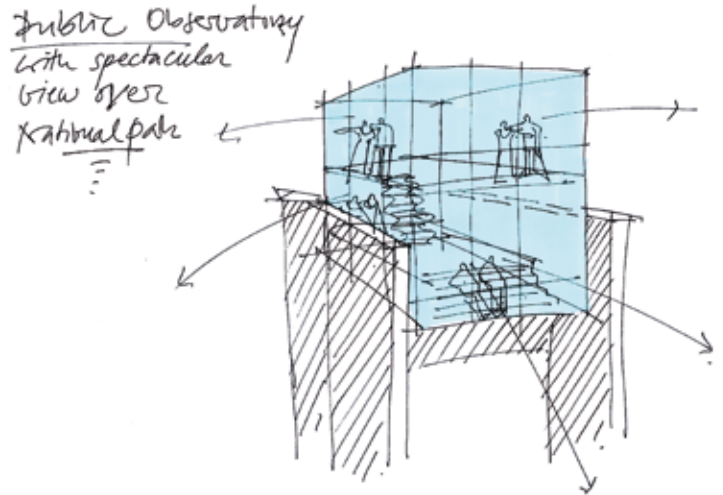


Fig. 10 Tower, observatory, concept sketch, Uwe R. Brückner



Fig. 11 Tower, smart screens, concept rendering, E House Architects

to the final thrill – a place to meet and rest with the same quality of visual access to both the building and the nature. To ensure a 360-degree view over the Buzludzha ridge all year round, we propose a glass box at the top of the pylon – the “Observatory” (Fig. 10). This spectacular two-storey vantage point will be accessible via the glass cabins of the elevator, which will hover freely above the mountain ridge. Or visitors can ascend via the interior staircase that leads past the gigantic “Ruby Star”, where several panoramic screens (Fig. 11) allow an extended journey through the local flora and fauna in the area around Buzludzha over the past centuries.

We expect the new Buzludzha to become a prestigious regional, national and European place to meet, debate and send democratising signals to the international community. We deeply believe in a successful and profitable future for the New Buzludzha and that it will become a venue for (young) European democrats. Possibly in a biannual course, like-minded people could meet in Buzludzha and discuss the future of democracy, Europe and the world. We are sure that

a meaningful and impactful revitalisation and repurposing of Buzludzha and the preservation will make Buzludzha a hub for Europeans that shape modern democracy for future generations. The preservation of a unique and iconic piece of architecture, the transformation of a communist monument into a living cultural site, and the transformation of an ideologically contaminated place into a think-tank for interna-

tional democrats is not only a sign, but a binding statement with radiant power.

Credits

Figs. 2–5, 8, 9, 11: E House Architects

Figs. 1, 6, 7, 10: Uwe R. Brückner