Appendix 1:
Academic Activism

1 Background to the Study

During the course of this PhD, my personal work related to sites of communist heritage has extended beyond the research activities of the study itself. Throughout my writing, photography, tours and campaigning work, I have approached the subject matter with the objective of provoking new conversations, and encouraging the reframing of sites of difficult heritage in post-communist space with a view towards encouraging greater understanding and appreciation of their historical and cultural significance. Additionally, I have frequently noted how my coverage of such (sometimes controversial) sites has been perceived locally, in Southeast Europe, as a call for "using them for educational purposes, or by developing cultural tourism" (from a profile of the researcher by Penev, 2017). In this way my work has been informed by a similar principle to what Vladana Putnik Prica proposes: "We should try to make people who live in the post-Yugoslav space think about monuments as art. And do the reverse with the foreigners: the first thing they see is art but it should not be without some information about their history" (Korchňak, 2020). In some cases, my work could be said to have had a significant effect on the broader discussion and culture around this subject; and in the process it becomes an example of what might be described as 'academic activism' (a concept defined in Chapter 7).

These activities began when I left the UK in 2011, to take a three-month writing and editing job at an online promotion company in Varna, Bulgaria. However, as a foreigner newly arrived in Bulgaria, I began noticing the various abandoned communist monuments that punctuate the landscape here, and was particularly fascinated by the Monument to the Bulgarian-Soviet Friendship in Varna: a Brutalist memorial structure in the shape of a bird with wings outstretched, measuring 25 metres tall by 48 metres across. The monument sits atop an artificial mound, looking out to sea, and it is completely abandoned; its interior spaces (once containing museum exhibits, a library and a lecture hall) now stripped to bare concrete walls, and filled with old tyres, sacks of litter, and evidence of campfires. When I asked my Bulgarian friend about the monument, she was dismissive, and told me it was *just some old Russian rubbish*. However, I would soon discover that Bulgaria had many more sites similar to this, and I had never encountered anything like it before – neither the scale of ambition to which these monuments were built, nor the curious aura of amnesia that had settled over them in the present day, rendering even the most spectacular monumental constructions as seemingly invisible to the hundreds of pedestrians who passed by daily without so much as raising their gaze. I talked to everyone I could about this subject, I began

travelling around Bulgaria to see more monuments, and I started contacting some of the surviving artists and architects in order to better understand these sites through discussions with their creators. Around the same time, I became familiar with Dr Philip Stone's work on 'dark tourism,' and in 2014 I decided that I wanted to formalise my research efforts as a PhD with his Institute for Dark Tourism Research, which I applied for, then officially commenced in January 2015. My planned three-month stay in Bulgaria would become ten years.

During those years I also began travelling further afield, using Bulgaria as a base from which to investigate sites of communist heritage in other post-communist countries in the region (and beyond). During the course of this PhD, I would visit thousands of such sites spread across 26 formerly communist countries (Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Slovenia, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania, Romania, Hungary, Poland, Czechia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, China, North Korea and Cuba). I typically published online articles and photography reports following my visits, and in 10 of those countries I would additionally design and operate itineraries for educational 'communist heritage' tours. In some countries, mine were the first such tours to ever exist.

My work to date has focussed in particular on three areas of interest:

- The Modernist monuments and architecture of former Yugoslavia (where in 2017, I began running the first international tours to specifically focus on sites of Yugoslav heritage).
- The Chernobyl Exclusion Zone in Ukraine (a place where, since this PhD began, I have spent approximately as much time as I have in the UK, subsequently making it the focus of tours, articles, photography projects and a 2020 book).
- The Buzludzha Memorial House in Bulgaria (the chief focus of this PhD, a heritage site to which I have committed a great deal of work in campaigning for conservation – ultimately resulting in the award of an initial conservation grant of $185,000 in 2018).

The following sections introduce and discuss these various avenues of academic activism between 2015 and now, under the categories of 'Writing and Photography,' 'Tours,' and 'The Buzludzha Project.'

2 Writing and Photography

The first thing I ever wrote about the subject of communist heritage was in 2012, shortly after I relocated to Bulgaria. I had just created a blog (formerly titled 'The Bohemian Blog,' but in 2020 renamed 'Ex Utopia' – http://www.exutopia.com), which I wrote under the pseudonym 'Darmon Richter,' and there I shared a photo-illustrated article detailing my visit to the Monument to the Bulgarian-Soviet Friendship in Varna (Richter, 2012b). The handful of articles I had previously published to this website had been viewed tens or hundreds of times each; but my article about the Varna monument was picked up by a larger media site, *io9*, sending more than 18,000 new visitors to my blog over the following three days and causing it to crash.

As I visited more sites of communist heritage, located in a range of post-communist countries, I continued to write about them for my own website, though increasingly my work would be either featured on, or else discussed by, mainstream media and news outlets. For example, I wrote about: the unfinished Soviet nuclear power plant in Cuba, for *Foreign Affairs* (Richter, 2015b); the Buzludzha Memorial House, for *The Calvert Journal* (Richter, 2017); the fate of Soviet monuments in Georgia, for *CNN* (Richter, 2018b); and the relationship between real-life and video game versions of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, for *The Verge* (Richter, 2021a). Additionally, on the subject of Chernobyl, I wrote frequent news and analysis articles for the website *Atlas Obscura* (http://www.atlasobscura.com), as well as an article exploring the interior decor of the Chernobyl power plant, for the design magazine *The Modernist* (Richter, 2021b); and a profile on village life in the resettled areas of the Chernobyl Zone, for the travel magazine *Hidden Europe* (Richter, 2021c).

Various projects I conducted in Chernobyl have been covered by the international media, including my augmented reality investigation of the Zone, via the location-based game *Pokémon Go* (for example by *New York Post* – Klausner, 2016); and my project to document and map every war memorial located in the evacuated villages of the Chernobyl region (for example by *Radio Free Europe* – Chapple, 2021). My 'technological memorialisation' (see Lindsay, 2010) of communist memorial sites in Southeast Europe has been profiled on platforms such as *Balkan Insight* (Penev, 2017) and *Arch Daily* (Baldwin, 2018); and more broadly, my photography has been featured by *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, the *BBC*, *Scientific American*, *The Washington Post*, and on the cover of the 2017 *World Nuclear Industry Status Report*. My photographs of Yugoslav architecture in

Skopje featured in the North Macedonian pavilion at the 16th Venice Architecture Biennale in 2018, and my photography from other sites of communist-era architecture have featured in gallery exhibitions in five countries.

In 2016, I wrote four chapters for *Global Undergrounds* (Dobraszczyk, et al., 2016), discussing subterranean sites of complicated heritage in North Korea, Russia, Ukraine and Australia. I also wrote a chapter for *The Palgrave Handbook of Dark Tourism Studies*, developed from the discussion of psychogeography and dark tourism in Chapter 3 of this thesis (Morten, Stone & Jarratt, 2018). In December 2017, I presented a paper titled 'Communist Encounters with the Dead,' at the Encountering Corpses conference at Manchester Metropolitan University, drawing upon research from Chapter 2 of this thesis.

I have sometimes seen my own writing impact on places in unexpected ways; for example, when I wrote about 'catching Pokémon in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone,' my article was covered by the mainstream media and the story subsequently inspired a new wave of Pokémon-themed graffiti around the Chernobyl Zone. Other abandoned sites would sometimes begin to appear noticeably worse – more graffitied or vandalised – after either myself or others had written about them, thus bringing them to the attention of a wider audience. While correlation does not mean causation, I have on some occasions wondered if my attempts to celebrate particular places had instead had an overall negative effect on their condition. Increasingly, as a result, there have been numerous places that I have chosen *not* to write about, for fear that greater exposure may not benefit them (such as, for example, the lone Lenin monument that survived decommunisation and still stands in a small Bulgarian village, unbeknownst to most Bulgarians).

When I first started writing about Southeast Europe (and post-communist space more generally) in the early 2010s, I believe I was sometimes guilty of what Maria Todorova (1997) calls 'Balkanism.' My articles often noted the 'strangeness' of the places I visited, their 'wild' and 'unpredictable' qualities, as perceived from a Western, British perspective. My understanding of the former socialist society, whose monuments I was photographing, was initially shaped largely by what I had learned in school, including reductive Cold War binaries and notions of a fallen 'evil empire.' However, I learned a great deal, and came to have a much more nuanced understanding of the subject, over the course of my PhD studies, and as a result also of spending a decade living in the region. Especially as an effect of my

Scoping Exercise in 2015 (Appendix 2) – which involved interviewing Bulgarian visitors at sites of Bulgarian communist heritage – I grew increasingly fascinated with the stories that the older generation were able to tell, about the lived realities of communism. Sharing these local voices and memories grew more interesting for me than simply broadcasting my own outsider perspective on the places I was visiting. I began to structure articles around my interviews with specific personalities, for example when writing about: Georgi Stoilov, the architect of Buzludzha (Richter, 2017); Petro Oliynik, the Ukrainian revolutionary currently protest-occupying the mansion of former president Viktor Yanukovych (Richter, 2020e); Sofia Bezverhaya, a former Chernobyl resident who returned to live in her village post-evacuation (Richter, 2021c); and Alexei Ananenko, one of the three 'hero divers' who played an instrumental role in preventing further escalation of the Chernobyl disaster in 1986 (Richter, 2021d). In some cases, these were voices and perspectives that had never before been shared in English, and subsequently some of those articles were widely quoted and referenced.

A similar approach was pursued with the creation of my debut book, *Chernobyl: A Stalkers' Guide* (Richter, 2020). The work is perhaps best described as an ethnography of the modern-day Chernobyl region, researched over the course of 20 multi-day visits to the Zone (totalling roughly 60-70 days), between 2013 and 2019. It features dozens of different voices representing the broad range of communities and personalities who make use of the Zone today: including tour guides and operators, tourists, illegal tourists, ravers and 'stalkers'; scientists, engineers, 'liquidators' and administrative workers; poachers and metal thieves; residents, displaced evacuees and a cross-section of the 'self-settlers' who returned to live in the Zone post-disaster. The book was well received, with a five-star score on Amazon where it earned 'bestseller' status, and demand necessitated a second edition reprint within four months. Bradley Garrett (a social and cultural geographer currently at University College Dublin) called it "evocative, theoretically astute […] a one-of-a-kind contribution to the Chernobyl archive. No other author has achieved such a comprehensive investigation of the Exclusion Zone." Adam Higginbotham, author of *Midnight in Chernobyl*, and one of the world's pre-eminent Chernobyl historians, described the author as "an expert in Soviet architecture" and praised the book's combination of "evocative imagery" with "acute and well-researched essays." *Financial Times* listed it as one of the 'Best Books of 2020.'

3 Tours

By the mid-2010s, my writing was attracting a reasonably sized following online, and I was beginning to receive queries as to whether I might ever offer a tour. In May 2015 I agreed to lead a one-day tour for Atlas Obscura in Bulgaria, and following the success of this, I created a six-day tour itinerary visiting sites of communist heritage around the country, which I led in September and October 2015. Both departures sold out, and following the success of these I would continue to run biannual tours in Bulgaria, in addition to developing new routes in others countries. From January 2017 onwards, I began designing and leading longer tours for Atlas Obscura, and these heritage tours in post-communist space would become some of the best-selling and highest-rated trips offered on their website.

In accordance with tourism laws in Bulgaria (and later, in other countries too), it was required that a licensed tour guide accompanied our group – even though it would be myself who was ultimately presenting as the lead guide. Discussing the subject of communist heritage with Bulgarian tour guides, I would quickly learn that the Bulgarian tourism college does not encourage such sites as being considered viable destinations for tourism. One Bulgarian guide I spoke with about a potential collaboration said she would need to entirely rewrite the itinerary, and replace all communist monuments with vineyards and churches. Though in time, I would find guides in various countries who understood what I was trying to do, and were glad to collaborate on bringing such experiences to life.

To date I have led 30 group tours (more than 200 days in total), and have created these communist heritage itineraries in 10 countries – Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine (and the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone), Moldova (and its breakaway republic of Transnistria); as well as a three-country tour of Yugoslav monuments focussed on Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Croatia; and finally a Baltic tour through Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (though unfortunately, this latter trip is yet to be realised, as its first and subsequent departures coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic). In each of these countries, I have travelled extensively so that tour routes are informed through a process of careful and deliberate selection. I also test-run every route before it is offered as a tour, to ensure I have a good feel for travel times, accommodation options, convenient or scenic rest stops, and so on.

In my work as a guide, I am always very conscious of my ‘foreigner’ status in relation to the places where I’m guiding. In some ways I think this actually works to my advantage; as I

wrote in my Chernobyl book, “Sometimes it takes a foreigner to know what other foreigners will find most interesting” (Richter, 2020b). Moreover, communist heritage is quite a niche subject – a lot of local people, even professional guides, have no interest in it – and I have a knack for learning and memorising facts and dates, which qualifies me quite well for the role. But I cannot tell guests what it was like to grow up in these places. Through experience I’ve learned that the explicit act of guiding (i.e., repeating facts, sharing history, leading a group) is only one small part of what travellers are looking for. I can talk to them for hours about architects and politicians and wars… but what they’ll remember most when they go home, is the conversation about plums they had with a little old man in a Bosnian village. And so, at a certain point, I realised that the very best thing I could do was to *facilitate*, rather than solely educate.

I have always worked with a local co-host on tours, but beginning in 2018 I began taking on more and more guest speakers, to provide a diversity of pluralist opinions and ideas. In Ukraine, while most tour buses queue up to visit the famous sites such as the Ferris wheel in Pripyat, we drive deep into less-trafficked corners of the Zone, and spend time with some of the people who have come back since the evacuation to resettle their former homes. On my most recent tour in Ukraine, in September 2021, I was able to arrange a group dinner with the former deputy head of the Pripyat police, who was happy to share his own first-hand accounts of the disaster, and the subsequent evacuations, with these guests. However, it’s my Yugoslav heritage tour that has become the most widely diverse of all the trips I run. This route can feature as many as 12 different speakers over two weeks, including: Serbs, Bosnians and Croats; Orthodox, Catholic and Muslim guides; and pro- and anti-Yugoslav perspectives.

Finally, I have always tried to ensure that these tours are ultimately worthwhile for the countries where they take place. Naturally, this brings money into local economies – and I tend to choose smaller businesses, in rural locales, making bookings directly myself rather than going through intermediaries or agents, wherever possible. But these tours have also been able in the past to make financial donations to numerous local causes. For example, across numerous trips in Bosnia & Herzegovina, I have been able to make donations towards the conservation of murals at one site of significant Yugoslav heritage. In Ukraine these tours have been able to fund aid work, which brings food and supplies to the villagers who live in remote corners of the Exclusion Zone – often without independent means of transport. And in

Bulgaria, as will be discussed in the next section, my tours have been able to make a significant impact in the campaign to conserve the Buzludzha Memorial House.

4 The Buzludzha Project

4.1 Background

I first saw the Buzludzha Memorial House from a distance in 2007, while visiting the mountains during a family holiday in Bulgaria. A Bulgarian friend told me that it had been a meeting place for the former Communist Party, but was now inaccessible. In February 2012, three months after I relocated to Bulgaria, Timothy Allen published his photographs taken at the monument during heavy snowfall (Allen, 2012), and after coming across these spectacular images online, I visited the monument for myself that April.

Whereas Allen's account was largely visual, and provided little in the way of context or explanation for the monument, I worked from Bulgarian-language sources in order to write a comprehensive article offering an overview of the monument's construction, symbolism, years of use, and subsequent abandonment (Richter, 2012a). It was the first time much of this information had been made available in English, and afterwards I went on to write more articles about the monument, for a range of different websites. I revisited the Buzludzha Memorial House regularly over the following years, documenting its artwork alongside the increasing appearance of graffiti and decay. On various occasions I would arrange to meet other people at Buzludzha. In 2015 I attended the event 'A Time Specific Exploration of Buzludzha,' organised by Caroline Trotman at Goldsmiths University (see Appendix 3). Another time I participated in a performance of folk music in the abandoned monument; the experience of playing my flute in the centre of Buzludzha's Ritual Hall, with its extraordinary and disorientating acoustic qualities, during a thunder and lightning storm, is something I'll certainly never forget. On different occasions I visited the monument in the company of Bulgarians and British tourists, with Americans, Australians, Romanians, Ukrainians and Poles – allowing me to observe a range of different culturally-rooted perspectives on the site. When I met English-speaking tourists at the monument, often they would tell me that they had read my articles before visiting.

Watching the monument visibly deteriorate from one visit to the next, I became increasingly convinced that some kind of conservation action needed to happen. In the summer of 2014, with the help of a Bulgarian colleague, I began making enquiries as to the ownership of the monument, as well as sourcing quotations for tarpaulin, pumps and mobile generators, to see whether a grassroots conservation action might feasibly be able to make a stand against the decay. Amongst those regular visitors to the monument, many reported they would be happy to volunteer labour should such a project get approval. However, none of the stakeholders I contacted (such as the Ministry of Culture and the Bulgarian Socialist Party) responded to my (Bulgarian-language) queries.

In early 2015, shortly after the commencement of my PhD studies, I was contacted by VICE Media, who intended to shoot a documentary episode in Bulgaria, and asked if I could help them get permission to film inside the Buzludzha Memorial House (as well as potentially appearing in the programme myself as a guest presenter). This necessitated a call to Georgi Ranov in July 2015, who was at that time the regional governor of Stara Zagora province, and thus the decision-maker for the monument. Ranov declined to approve access however, despite VICE Media's proposal of paying €2,000 and signing full health and safety disclaimers. During this conversation (which was translated by Svilen Slavov), the regional governor repeatedly expressed his negative opinion of the monument. In response to mention of the growing number of foreigners travelling to Buzludzha from around the world, he replied that they had come to see the "famously beautiful mountains" of his region, and maintained that if the state gave him permission to dynamite the "concrete eyesore" on the peak, the region would likely see even more foreign tourists as a result (G. Ranov, personal communication, July 2015). The proposed VICE Media feature was subsequently abandoned.

However, that year I would begin meeting Bulgarian people who shared my enthusiasm for seeing the monument conserved. In the spring I became aware of Dora Ivanova, a Bulgarian architect who had just graduated in Berlin, where her Master's project had taken the form of a proposal to conserve and adapt the Buzludzha Memorial House as a 'depoliticised' tourist attraction, and 'Museum of Bulgaria.' On returning to Bulgaria, Ivanova's proposal for this controversial site made the national news, and I contacted her on 19 May 2015 to introduce myself and express my enthusiasm for her work.

Then, in August 2015, I had my first meeting and interview with Georgi Stoilov, the monument's architect (Appendix 3). Stoilov told me about an idea he had for the Buzludzha Memorial House: that would reimagine the communist monument as a "Pantheon to Bulgarian Heroes," commemorating figures from Bulgarian history including the early khans and tsars, through to 19th century revolutionary heroes, socialist leaders, and 20th century cultural icons such as the opera singer Boris Hristov. Busts and statues of these figures would be placed inside an interior which was otherwise largely restored to how it looked in 1981. However, in Stoilov's new proposal the communist stars on the tower would be replaced with red lions – the "symbol of Bulgaria." He explained: "all of Buzludzha's architectural elements, except the star, have the potential to be universal" (Appendix 3). Stoilov specified that the first, most urgent task was to repair the roof and windows, to prevent continued elemental damage, which he estimated would cost up to €1 million. The total cost for his proposal, he estimated to be approximately €5 million. Funding such a project was the main issue though, as Stoilov commented: "Who's to provide it? We may as well resort to the people once again. But the people may not all support this."

In response, I suggested that funding could be sought internationally, and I explained that "thousands of people already travel to Bulgaria just to visit the monument… if they were each charged a small fee to see inside, it would soon add up. And those who didn't visit could still have the option to donate." I suggested to him that I could create an international website for the monument, through which we could collect donations. Stoilov became quite excited – he laughed, and said "so you came in the capacity of creators even!" – then replied that he "hadn't really thought of that," and enthusiastically approved the idea, suggesting that next "we should establish a foundation for this project then. I already told this idea to Dora, so she would have a proper platform to present her architectural proposal from. […] It can then request to become an owner of the monument, since nobody wants it. We will then need to gather some influential people within the foundation, both from Bulgaria and from abroad as well. You talk to your contacts, and gather donations. I know people… so I will write some letters." Stoilov concluded: "I have deliberately stayed out of all this until now, so that people wouldn't say I wanted more glory for myself. I've had enough of that already. But if people from across the world, not only from Bulgaria, want to see this happen, then that's what's important… and if there is sufficient interest in restoring the monument, then of course it needs to happen" (Appendix 3).

The following day I had my first meeting with Dora Ivanova, where I relayed details of my conversation with Stoilov, and we began talking about how we might collaborate together on a project to conserve the monument.

4.2 Collaboration

During the period 2015 to 2020, I worked very closely with Dora Ivanova on the 'Buzludzha Project.' When we met, she already had a basic proposal – previously submitted for her Master's degree in architecture, in Berlin – for how the monument could be adapted and conserved. This proposal, which she titled 'Buzludzha – Memory of Time,' involved conserving the damaged mosaics and adding information panels alongside; installing figures of ancient Bulgarian rulers to the outer balcony; putting gallery and museum exhibits (on the theme of prehistoric Bulgaria) in the monument's basement; and allowing visitors to take an elevator up the tower to a panoramic viewpoint at the top. In this way she reconceptualised the communist monument as a 'monument of Bulgaria' instead, and initially, she proposed this work could be completed for approximately €1 million. As she told me, the main costs were "for the covering of the roof, the windows, the panorama elevator and the heating system. All the rest must be only cleaned and reused with minimal expenses" (Ivanova, 2015, Appendix 3).

However, critics of this plan suggested that "her ridiculous ambition to renovate the site with only €1 million seems moderately lunatic… Her vision of Buzludzha's future appears too diligent but unrealistic." Beyond these practical concerns, the idea of changing the political context of the monument – or 'depoliticising' it altogether – was criticised, as "the idea she stands behind is to change both the function and the significance of Buzludzha from a manifestation of the communist power to a display of the Great Bulgarian Kings and the Golden Epoch of the country during antiquity under the title 'Buzludzha – Memory of Time.' This concept opposes my morals and continues the tendency began by the democratic society to FORGET YOUR PAST" (Minkovska, 2015).

At this stage, Ivanova's focus seemed very much limited to Bulgaria. She talked about how the monument "should have a national significance," and should be promoted "so it reaches the wider public and becomes a national cause" (Ivanova, 2015, Appendix 3). However, viewing the monument as a foreigner, and from participating in many international

conversations about the site, I believed it had potential to become an *international* cause. As I told Ivanova, funding for such a project was more likely to come from outside Bulgaria, than from within; while positive appraisal of the monument by foreigners was likely, over time, to trigger a shift in how Bulgarians themselves valued it. Ivanova had already had numerous favourable features in the Bulgarian media, but her proposal was unknown outside the country; and though she had a website presenting her ideas, it was simple, old-fashioned and not aesthetically pleasing, and written entirely in Bulgarian (further, some key sections of text were embedded into image files, which meant they couldn't be searched or translated by Google). As I had experience in writing and online promotion (at that time, I was working as Head of Content for an SEO and online promotion firm), I proposed creating a new website, not only for her project, but as a website for the monument in general. For years already, I had been writing about Buzludzha, and had seen how in the absence of any single authoritative source of information on the subject, rumours and misinformation spread rapidly from one article or blog to the next (a similar phenomenon was noted by Horvatinčić, 2012). So, my concept was for a website that presented an accurate and comprehensive account of the monument's history and present condition, becoming the single authoritative Buzludzha source online, then using this platform to also showcase Ivanova's proposal for the monument's future, and to entice foreign investment in it.

I worked on the website over the winter, starting with a translation and adaptation of Ivanova's existing work, but then adding to and developing this. The website launched in July 2016 and I continued to work on it throughout the year, for example adding new details from my ongoing research, and uploading a transcript of my 2015 interview with Georgi Stoilov. I entirely funded the creation and hosting of the site myself, in addition to later also hiring translators, using money raised from my communist heritage tours in Bulgaria. On 4 December 2016, I additionally began correcting and expanding the 'Buzludzha' page on Wikipedia, and was able to list this new Buzludzha website as a source, particularly for materials such as original research and interviews. On 19 January 2017, my new Buzludzha website was featured in an article on CNN, the first of many such features as the site increasingly became the go-to source for information about the monument; and on 3 February 2017, the Buzludzha Project received its first financial donation from a website visitor. Meanwhile, Ivanova had established the 'Buzludzha Project Foundation,' as Stoilov had suggested, and was busy organising press conferences, exhibitions and other events within Bulgaria. When documents were required in English, I worked on these myself – translating,

editing, researching or writing texts as required – effectively becoming the English-language voice of the project. In October 2017, I helped Ivanova prepare content and information for a serious media feature on Buzludzha, when it appeared on the UK television series *Abandoned Engineering*.

Also, in 2017, Ivanova and I began collaborating on applications to various heritage organisations. For example, between 25-28 February, we worked on an application to the World Monument Fund. This was not successful, but much of that same content was able to be reused, when we completed a similar application process for recognition by the heritage organisation Europa Nostra, in June 2017. Specifically, the application was for the group's 'Seven Most Endangered' programme, which draws attention to the European heritage sites deemed to be facing the greatest degree of risk. We developed the application between 25-27 June, submitting it to Europa Nostra on 30 June. Subsequently, as only Europa Nostra's member organisations can nominate sites, Ivanova asked me for help again on 8 September, with an application to associate her Buzludzha Project Foundation with Europa Nostra. In January 2018, Buzludzha made it onto Europa Nostra's shortlist of 12 sites, and in March we were able to announce that the monument had further been recognised by the organisation as one of the 'seven most endangered heritage sites in Europe.'

In the summer of 2018, I worked with Ivanova to create a new architectural proposal for the Buzludzha Memorial House, which we titled the 'Buzludzha Museum.' For some years I had been very vocal about the potential for incorporating augmented reality technology into a concept for the future of the monument. Since 2015, I had been paying close attention to projects such as *Chernobyl VR* and *Berlin Wall VR*, and in 2016 I was so inspired by the release of *Buzludzha VR*, by two Bulgarian developers, that the very next month I met with Ivanova in Sofia, where I proposed creating a page about it on the Buzludzha website. I interviewed the creators of *Buzludzha VR* in June 2018, for more information, then in September I worked with Ivanova on creating the new proposal, which I subsequently developed into an online presentation, replacing her Master's project on the website. Meanwhile, Ivanova presented our proposal in person at a conference in Sofia, and to the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture.

Then, on 24 October 2018, we received an email from the Getty Foundation, who had found the Buzludzha website and wrote to recommend that we submitted the Buzludzha Memorial

House for consideration in their upcoming 'Keeping it Modern' grant award. We wrote a preliminary application in December, and then for a week in February 2019 we worked on the main application document, which involved the creation of a full project proposal detailing work teams and budgeting plans. In June we received the news that our application had been successful – and the Getty Foundation would be awarding a grant of $185,000 towards the creation of a conservation management plan for the Buzludzha Memorial House.

4.3 Additional Contributions

During these years I was also able to make a number of other contributions to the project, some of them more conceptual or philosophical in nature. By this stage I had visited conserved sites of communist heritage all around the world, very often speaking with site managers or with other visitors, and I had observed examples where conservation processes had been successful – and others, where they were not. As a result, I was able to feed a lot of ideas and research back into the Buzludzha Project.

Additionally, over the years I had been developing good relationships with a range of international journalists and editors (see section on writing above), which would prove helpful when we began sending out press releases in later years. Also, having worked in online promotion for many years, I was also able to professionally advise on promotional strategies and fundraising ideas. For example, I proposed the project could make use of online crowdfunding platforms such as Patreon (which I was then already successfully using for my own personal website). I provided suggestions of numerous ways to reward potential donors, including with:

- Prints or postcards of the monument, signed by the architect Georgi Stoilov (which the architect agreed to do, when I approached him about it).
- Key rings or other collectibles branded with a design of the monument and the project logo.
- Small decorative stars, coins, or items of jewellery, made from the broken pieces of red glass from the tower (which tourists were already taking as souvenirs, but unlike the mosaic stones, could not otherwise now be reused).

Another idea, which I had previously discussed with Stoilov in 2015 (see Appendix 3), was to invite donors to sponsor the conservation work, and then to reward significant donors with a commemorative plaque inside the conserved building. I had previously seen this done in the form of a 'wall of gratitude' inside the Juche Tower in Pyongyang, North Korea – the effect was aesthetically pleasing, and it made for a compelling incentive for donors. I showed Stoilov my photographs of the project in Pyongyang, and he very much liked the idea.

At one meeting we had in Sofia, in 2016, Ivanova raised the idea of organising a music festival at the monument, to serve as a fundraising event. She had no experience with this kind of event management, she said – though as it happened, I previously studied a diploma in Music Technology & Business at North Devon College, and for numerous years I worked as an independent live music promoter in the region, which involved putting on more than a hundred music events. As a result, I was able to contribute towards the creation of a practical and realistic action plan: advising on issues such as technical, security and catering requirements, as well as the availability of shuttle buses to ferry attendees from nearby towns.

I told Ivanova about my Scoping Exercise too (Appendix 2) – I had just completed the project when I first met her in 2015, and she was very interested to hear about it. I believed that there was a lot of potential for the Buzludzha Project to apply something similar, by collecting interview fragments with ordinary Bulgarian people, in order to build a 'bottom-up,' pluralistic picture of the Buzludzha Memorial House and its place in relation to contemporary Bulgaria.

In April 2020, I showed Ivanova the preliminary results from my visitor survey research (Appendix 4). Ivanova showed these results to some other project partners, passing on my condition that this data was "for internal use only." Mario Aymerich, a Europa Nostra member and Technical Advisor to the European Investment Bank Institute, commented that the findings were very encouraging in what they said about the monument's attractiveness to visitors; and that these findings demonstrated how the project, backed by a strong marketing campaign, showed great future potential.

4.4 Issues

From around 2018 onwards, I began to perceive growing friction between Dora Ivanova and various stakeholders associated with the monument. For example, her Master's degree proposal for the monument – 'Buzludzha – A Memory of Time' – shared many characteristics in common with the architect Georgi Stoilov's own vision for a reconceptualised Buzludzha Memorial House (a fact noted, for example, by Minkovska, 2015). When I met with Stoilov again in 2018, I asked him about Ivanova's project, and he grew visibly angry, saying: "Dora Ivanova has no right to work on this, she has no right to make a project on top of somebody else's project. Copyright… there is such law for copyright" (Stoilov, 2018, Appendix 3). I subsequently raised the matter with Ivanova herself; she suggested that Stoilov was mistaken, and that any similarity between the projects was coincidental.

I was also having my own problems with the Buzludzha Project Foundation by this stage, issues which had gradually grown more serious over the years. From the beginning of our partnership, I had been clear that I was prepared to contribute a lot of time and even money to the project, but that I must always be credited for my work. However, I increasingly found I needed to remind Ivanova to do this. For example, in June 2018, a contact told me that at a conference in Sofia, Ivanova had claimed full credit for the website I created. Therefore, and at the recommendation of my supervisor, on 23 June I sent her a formal reminder that she needed to credit my work correctly. I voiced similar concerns again in March 2019, while we were writing the Getty application and I felt that Ivanova was omitting to mention my contributions to the project (a working relationship which she described in private communication as a 'partnership'). Both these times, and others, Ivanova assured me that my concerns were misplaced.

Following a site visit to Buzludzha by three board members in September 2018, Europa Nostra planned to publish a technical report on the current status, and potential conservation outcomes, of the monument. In November, Ivanova sent me the draft document to work on. It was 10,000 words long, and I worked on it extensively throughout 12-18 November – editing, correcting, adding new content and in some places making extensive rewrites. These contributions were well received and the report was subsequently published to the Europa Nostra website, and promoted through press releases (Aymerich, 2018). However, the final document was credited solely to Europa Nostra's Mario Aymerch, naming no other

contributors, which I again felt went against the agreed terms of my collaboration with the project.

Things became more complicated after the arrival of the Getty Foundation. On 21 July 2019, a notice of 'Protest' was sent by the Bulgarian academic Lolita Nikolova, to myself, Dora Ivanova, to the Getty Communications office, and also to the *LA Times*. The email alleged that the conservation of the monument was tantamount to the glorification of a criminal regime, and insisted that the work should be halted. (As shown throughout this thesis, such perspectives on Buzludzha are common within Bulgaria, even amongst some politicians and decision-makers.) In response to this, Antoine Wilmering, a senior programme officer with the Getty Foundation, wrote to the rest of the project partners stating that from this point onwards, the Getty Foundation would take the lead in dealing with any such protests; and further, that any text written about the project, by individuals or organisations involved, would now need to be approved before publishing by Getty's PR department in California.

By this stage I was suffering considerable anxiety resulting from the project. I was working extremely hard on it, but I felt invisible – my work was now consistently being credited to other people or organisations. Meanwhile, I was aware of an ever-increasing pressure from the Getty Foundation, and following a series of distressing miscommunications in 2019, towards the end of that year I became quite ill; eventually being hospitalised for one week over New Year, with an onset of diverticulitis which the doctors suggested was likely triggered by stress.

I finally made the decision, in April 2020, to officially quit the Buzludzha Project. By this stage I was deeply disappointed with how the project was being managed, and with the lack of transparency and dialogue between those working on it. I had been working towards this cause for six years at this point, with the sole condition that I be credited for my work; yet all of my contributions, including what might be considered some significant career achievements, it seemed, were being credited to others instead, and there was simply no indication that this was going to change. I sent Ivanova an email on 7 May 2020, explaining the above reasons for leaving. However, I decided to transfer ownership of my Buzludzha website to her, as on principle, I didn't want my departure to set back the progress we had made already. I created a new Buzludzha website instead, through which I could continue to

share my own research (and I kept my URL – http://www.buzludzha-monument.com – which I now pointed to my new website).

4.5 Tourism Management Plan

A proposed 'Sustainable Cultural Tourism Management Plan for the Buzludzha Monument' was developed between March and June 2021, in collaboration between Ivanova's Buzludzha Project Foundation, ICOMOS Germany, and the ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Committee headed by Fergus Maclaren. The original plan was to present the finished report to the public at a conference on 'dissonant monuments and sites,' to be held in Kazanluk, Bulgaria, on 23-24 July 2021 (Maclaren, 2021). The creation of this plan involved survey research with past visitors to the Buzludzha Memorial House, with respondents being invited to participate through posts shared on the Buzludzha Project Foundation's Facebook page (for example, Buzludzha Project, 2021b). However, this visitor survey appeared to be based very closely on my own research design; asking a virtually identical set of questions to my 2018 survey, sometimes with just a few words changed, but here credited entirely to Ivanova's Buzludzha Project Foundation (see table below).

Buzludzha Visitor Survey - 2018 (by the researcher, Appendix 4)	**Buzludzha Visitor Survey - 2021 (by Buzludzha Project Foundation, 2021)**
Demographics: nationality / age range	Demographics: nationality / age range
Who did you travel with? [*Alone* / *Friends* / *Family* / *Colleagues* / *Tour group* / *Other*]	Who were you visiting Buzludzha with? [*Alone* / *Family and friends* / *Tour group* / *Other*]
What made you want to visit Buzludzha? *Architectural value* / *Historical significance* / *Beautiful decay* / *Having an adventure* / *Mountain views* / *Photographic appeal* / *Sympathy for the Socialist movement*	Why did you visit Buzludzha? *For its architecture* / *For its historical significance* / *Interest in abandoned places* / *Just for fun* / *For the nature and views* / *For photos and videos* / *Nostalgia to socialist times*
What was the main purpose of your visit to Bulgaria?	If you are coming from abroad, was visiting Buzludzha the main reason to visit Bulgaria?
Have you visited other communist-era monuments in Bulgaria?	Where else have you visited on your trip to Buzludzha?
How many times have you been to Buzludzha?	How many times have you visited Buzludzha?
What month and year was your most recent visit?	When did you visit Buzludzha for the last time?
Did it live up to your expectations?	Were your expectations met when visiting Buzludzha?

Would you visit again, or recommend others to visit?	Would you return to Buzludzha?
How did you first hear about the Buzludzha monument?	How did you learn about Buzludzha?
What does the monument say to you? (Be as creative as you like...)	Describe Buzludzha with 3 words.
What do you think should be done with it? *Demolish it* / *Leave it to decay* / *Full restoration* / *Preservation in a semi-ruined state* / …	What should be the future of Buzludzha? *Remove it* / *Leave it to decay* / *Full restoration to its original condition* / *Open it for public in its present condition*
Are you aware of any plans to restore the monument?	Do you know about the ongoing preservation activities of Buzludzha Project Foundation?
If the monument was preserved, would you pay to visit it? (If so – what's a fair price? If not – why not?)	Would you visit the inside of Buzludzha and pay an entrance fee, if it remains in its present condition, but safe and open for visitors?

I found this deeply disappointing, because up until this point I had strived to maintain a friendly, collaborative relationship with the Buzludzha Project Foundation. Since leaving the project in April 2020, on multiple occasions I had directed journalists or publicity opportunities to Ivanova, who was also still contacting me from time to time to ask for help with historical resources. Had I been invited to collaborate on this tourism management plan, I could have shared my own work, or else, helped to create a new set of questions that did not pose a threat to the originality of my PhD thesis. (Though by this point, having already analysed my data, I was also now aware of some potential shortcomings in this research design – so in fact, if consulted, I would have advised on numerous potential improvements before use.)

My supervisor advised me to register my concern with the team producing this document, and so on 21 July 2021 I sent an email – expressing my concern about what I viewed as plagiarism of my work – to relevant project partners, including: Dora Ivanova (Buzludzha Project Foundation), Graham Bell and Mario Aymerich (Europa Nostra), Jörg Haspel and Fergus Maclaren (ICOMOS), Rand Eppich and Uwe Brückner. Ivanova subsequently responded on behalf of these recipients, suggesting that there had been a misunderstanding regarding the ownership of my work. In the interest of eliminating any room for further misunderstandings, I decided on 13 August to write again to the same recipients, providing a formal statement that detailed my involvement in and contributions to the project, from 2015 onwards, as well as noting my growing concerns, and the numerous times I had had to address the miscrediting of my work. It noted how I had made it clear to Ivanova, in April 2020, that these issues of miscredited work were my reason for leaving the project. The

statement also noted how, in addition to now appropriating my research instrument without permission, the Buzludzha Project Foundation was also making unauthorised use of numerous of my photographs on its website.

The proposed 'Sustainable Cultural Tourism Management Plan for the Buzludzha Monument' – originally planned to be shared at the July 2021 conference in Kazanluk – is still yet to be published (and is presumably now undergoing rewrites to ensure its originality). However, my final message received no response from either Dora Ivanova, or any of the other recipients included. No attempt was made to address my concern about miscredited work, and the numerous unauthorised uses of my photography were left as they were on the Buzludzha Project Foundation's website.

4.6 Damnatio Memoriae

In addition to the visitor survey, since my departure, the Buzludzha Project has completed: an ethnographic study of Bulgarian people's memories of Buzludzha (in a campaign titled 'Unwritten Stories of Buzludzha'); it has organised a small music festival; created a Patreon page; and successfully funded the stabilisation of the outer ring of mosaics via a crowdsourced sponsorship campaign. All these actions feel at least partially inspired by ideas I either brought to the conversation myself, or else significantly helped to develop. However, by the end of 2021, my name appeared nowhere in any of the Buzludzha Project's webpages, documents or archives, thus constituting a complete *damnatio memoriae*, and by effect crediting my thousands of hours of work on the project, as well as financial support, and numerous notable creative contributions, either explicitly to Dora Ivanova, or more generally to her Buzludzha Project Foundation and its partner organisations.

In the case of the Europa Nostra Technical Report, Ivanova (in personal communication around the time I left the project) did actually explain her logic for not crediting me. She suggested that having the work credited to a board member of Europa Nostra, rather than to me or her, would ultimately have given the document more weight and served the project better. She suggested this was normal, and pointed to how the Getty application (where she again privately noted my contributions) was credited in many public places not to us, but instead to ICOMOS Germany. (Indeed, it became normal for journalists to automatically assume the credit belonged to these larger organisations; for example, Nikolova (2020)

credits Europa Nostra for securing the Getty grant, when in reality, Europa Nostra only learned about it after Ivanova and myself had already discussed the grant with Getty and started work on the application.) Other times, Ivanova would do the same thing herself. In interviews and talks she would routinely take sole credit for work we actually did in partnership; for example, in a TEDx talk in 2021, she told an audience in Sofia that during those early years of the project all she had was her "confidence, motivation and dedication" (TEDx Talks, 2021: 7:00), making no public mention of her co-collaborator.

Fearing that my exclusion from the narrative might affect the perceived validity of my own work and writing on the subject, in the end I decided to hire a lawyer. From the years I worked with the project, there exists a mountain of emails and other written correspondences that confirm exactly what I contributed, and what the terms of my contribution were agreed to be. Dora Ivanova was contacted by my lawyer and given the choice between adding a note to the website crediting my contributions, or else having this conversation taken to other project organisations, to the media, or in the last resort, to potential legal proceedings. She chose the former.

I have mixed feelings about the Buzludzha Project today. On the one hand, I am delighted to have played a significant role in achieving such an extraordinary result – successfully starting a conservation project at the country's most iconic, yet problematic, site of national heritage. However, I am also deeply saddened about how my involvement in the project ended. In some ways I am still trying to make sense of it now. Though in the end, I have to remind myself why I got involved in this project in the first place: I was in a unique position to do something I thought could be extremely valuable, for the country that I had chosen to call home. Though I may have suffered a lot of unexpected (and I think, unnecessary) stress and upset along the way, today I still choose to celebrate the end result.

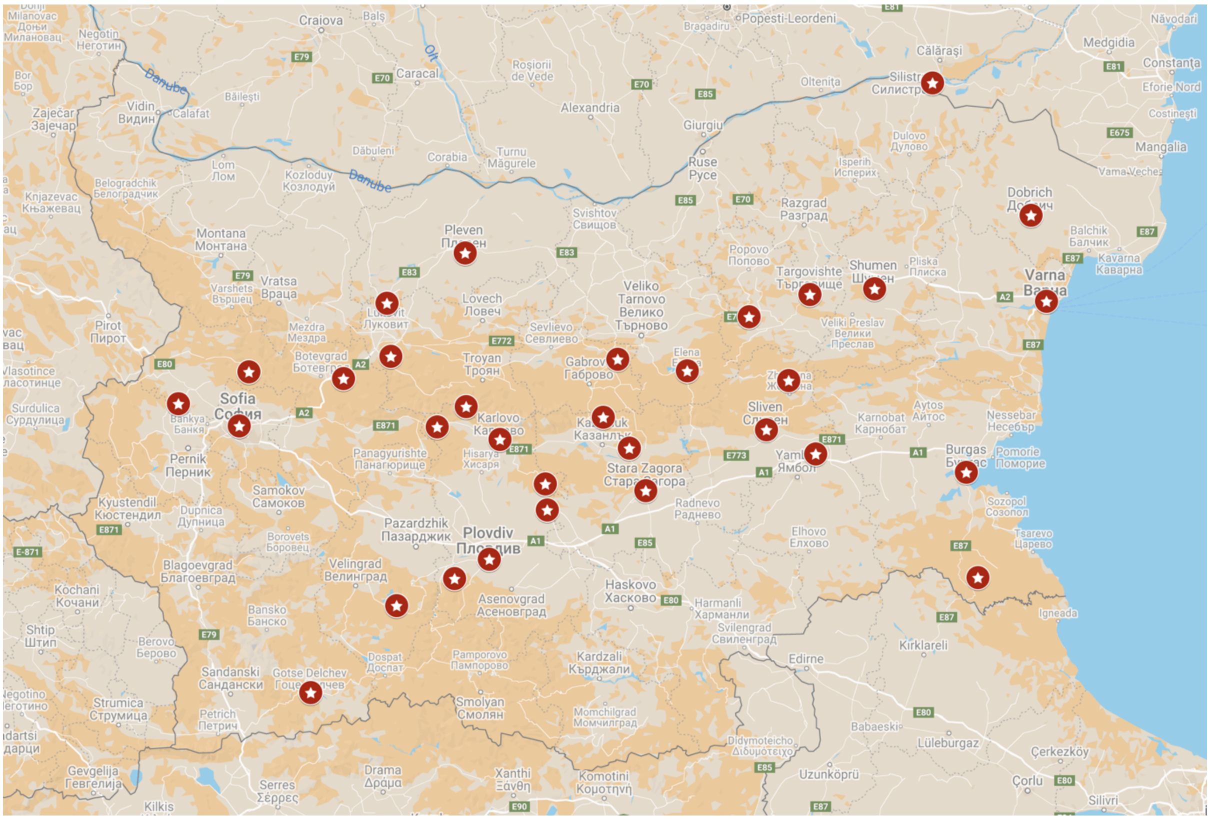
Appendix 2:
Scoping Exercise

The Scoping Exercise

This scoping exercise was conducted over the course of five weekend road-trips between June and September 2015, by the researcher and Mihail Kondov (a Bulgarian friend, who also played the role of translator), and involved travelling to more than a hundred sites of communist heritage located around Bulgaria. The purpose of this scoping exercise was to begin to form a baseline understanding of Bulgaria's relationship with its surviving sites of communist heritage, and thus to inform and frame the study's subsequent discussions. These monuments and memorial complexes were researched online, and via communist-era publications such as books and magazines, found in private collections and libraries, in order to create a map. The sites themselves ranged from city centre locations to remote mountains and forests, and the monuments were found to be in various conditions, from careful conservation to neglect and severe decline. Not all those sites researched were found to still exist. At many of the places visited (particularly in the case of more remote memorial sites), no other visitors were observed. When local people were encountered at these places, the researcher usually attempted to make conversation, provided those other visitors seemed amenable to interaction. Presented here (in alphabetical order) are the transcripts from conversations with Bulgarian visitors at sites of communist heritage in 32 locations across the country (also included, are a handful of pre-arranged conversations, including a meeting with the sculptor Alyosha Kafedzhiyski, in Varna). In some cases, these visitors have also given permission to be photographed. Many names have however been anonymised.

General Findings

During the communist period, many Bulgarian towns saw major (re)development work that often involved the creation of new pedestrian areas, parks, and town centre plazas hosting governmental or Party buildings, as well as Palaces of Culture and other social venues. Such developments almost always included the creation of new, town centre monuments. In the 1950s and 1960s, these monuments were usually dedicated to World War II-era partisan movements, or to the Soviet Red Army. Such monuments were visited in Burgas, Dobrich, Karlovo, Lukovit, Silistra and Varna, for example.



1. Batak
2. Bekelemeto
3. Brezovo
4. Burgas
5. Buzludzha
6. Dobrich
7. Dryanovo
8. Elena
9. Glozhene
10. Gotse Delchev
11. Gurgulyat
12. Karlovo
13. Klisura
14. Kotel
15. Lukovit
16. Muglizh
17. Perushtitsa
18. Petrova Niva
19. Pleven
20. Plovdiv
21. Pravets
22. Shumen
23. Silistra
24. Sliven
25. Sofia
26. Stara Zagora
27. Tompsun
28. Turgovishte
29. Varna
30. Yastrebino
31. Zelenikovo
32. Zimnitsa

A map and list of 32 cities, towns, villages, and other places in Bulgaria, where the researcher recorded conversations with domestic visitors to sites of communist heritage.

Later, and particularly beginning in the 1970s – when Bulgaria celebrated the 100-year anniversary of its liberation from the Ottoman Empire – an increasing trend was seen for new monuments to commemorate either local or national Bulgarian heroes and revolutionaries (though these always focussed on historical characters or episodes that supported a

communist historical hegemony). Examples of this style were seen at Dryanovo, Gotse Delchev, Klisura, and others.

A third significant memorial theme can be seen beginning in the 1980s, and particularly from 1981, the year when Bulgaria celebrated the 1300th anniversary of the nation's founding in 681 CE. These 1980s monuments often took early Bulgarian khans and tsars as their subject, and whereas the first wave of post-war Bulgarian communist monuments had generally presented the Bulgarian people as nameless subjects being rescued by Soviet Red Army soldiers, these newer sites took on more nationalistic and distinctly Bulgarian dimensions, also incorporating newer architectural styles and ideas, inspired by global trends in Modernist and Brutalist architecture. In January 1981, Bulgarian Minister of Culture, Lyudmila Zhivkova (the daughter of national leader Todor Zhivkov) visited Moscow to meet with the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. They challenged her on the subject of the Bulgarian anniversary celebrations, and on the radical design of this new wave of nationalistic monuments. Zhivkova responded that Bulgaria was filled, "with monuments of people with guns and bombs, with raised fists, with ugly aggressiveness"; and concluded: "With that kind of art we cannot go forward and build harmony in man and society" (Atanasova, 2004).

A study of the evolution of Bulgarian memorial art could be a whole thesis unto itself; and so this current (pilot) study now simply summarises the main memorial themes observed at these various different sites, before presenting transcripts from conversations had with other (domestic) visitors to these places.

Across the 32 sites listed here, the following memorial themes were observed:

- Monuments that celebrated the friendship between Bulgaria and Russia, or Bulgaria and the Soviet Union (for example at Beklemeto, Turgovishte and Varna);
- Monuments that marked the sites of tragedy and massacres under the Ottoman Empire (at Batak and Perushtitsa);
- Monuments that commemorated the victims of wartime fascist atrocities (such as the newer monument dedicated to British communist fighter Frank Thompson, in the

village which takes his name, or the monument to massacred partisans, villagers and children at Yastrebino);

- Monuments that marked the site of significant battles between Russia and the Ottoman Empire during the 1877-78 Russo-Turkish War (for example Pleven, Stara Zagora);
- Monuments that redeemed the participants of the 1923 attempted communist coup against the tsar, a failed uprising which was declared an act of terrorism at the time, but some of whose leaders would later return to positions of power within the subsequent communist government, retrospectively renaming the event as the 'September Uprising' (such as the monument at Maglizh);
- Monuments to the ancient and medieval rulers of Bulgaria, a theme which emerged particularly in the 1980s as Bulgarian monuments turned towards themes of nationalism and unique national history, in place of the prescribed transnational Marxist themes that dominated previously (for example the Monument to Khan Asparuh at Dobrich, the Monument to Tsar Ivaylo near Kotel, or the Monument to the Founders of the Bulgarian State at Shumen);
- Monuments to former communist leaders (including the Lenin monument in Sliven, which had already been removed by the time of this visit, and the monument to former leader Todor Zhivkov which still stands in his hometown of Pravets);
- And finally, monuments which celebrated the spirit of the communist movement, often symbolically summarising a communist perspective on Bulgarian history and then presenting this leading inevitably towards a future communist utopia (such as the Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria in Sofia, which was destroyed by the council in 2017, and the Buzludzha Memorial House).

There now follow transcripts of conversations had with visitors encountered at these sites.

1. Batak

Memorial 'Apriltsi and Antonivanovtsi,' Batak. 1978.
Architect: Dimitur Krustev; Sculptor: Dimitur T. Dimitrov

Ilya [Turkish-Roma labourer]:
The Batak monument signifies liberty… or at least that is what I think. The people depicted in the monument, I believe these represent the people from Batak who suffered so much.

This is my first time in Batak. I've read the history about the Russo-Turkish War, back in the time when we were all slaves… a lot of people were slaughtered here. It happened in the church over there – they even butchered pregnant women, infants dying in their mothers' bellies. I just visited the church for myself and saw the blood stains, the axe, the bones. This whole town was burned to the ground. There were some who managed to escape, I think, but everyone who stayed was cut down or burnt alive. These were just ordinary people

– although the massacre was related to the uprising at the time. The Turks were looking for the rebels, but couldn't find them. They destroyed this town as an act of vengeance against the hidden rebels.

I am Turkish Gypsy myself, but I was born in Bulgaria – in Karlovo, the hometown of [revolutionary hero] Levski. I may be a part of the minority, but I respect all people and Bulgarian history is very dear to me. I have wanted to come here for a long time, since I was a child. I'm 47 years old now and finally I've come to visit Batak with my wife and daughter. When you met me, I had just sat on this bench to gather myself from the shock. I'm still trying to understand how this massacre ever happened.

They were cruel people in those days. Nowadays things are very different… but while I have a lot of respect for Bulgarians, there is still something different about the Turks. For example, if I was in Turkey and looking for help from strangers, I could knock on many doors to no avail. But here in Bulgaria, I know that I could knock on a door and people would open it, even offer me bread. I am sure of that.

Like I said though, I'm part of the minority here and so maybe you don't believe me… but after that shock, I need time to recuperate. I'm still thinking about it now. How could they kill the unborn babies, even? A terrible thing happened here between the two nations and no matter how many generations pass, this will not be forgotten.

The people of Bulgaria don't have nearly enough appreciation for what we've got here – the culture, the nature, the history. Our politicians are the worst of all – they only care about stealing from the people, while they turn a blind eye to everything else. They'd rather sell off the country's natural wealth and beauty than take care of it!

I was born here, and I care deeply for my homeland… but there are some big problems in Bulgaria and our leaders do not work to find resolutions. For example, us Gypsies in this country are subject to a lot of discrimination. I don't suffer so much, because the people I work with know me. I've never been treated badly or humiliated, but that might be because I'm well mannered. It has nothing to do with education – one can have a university degree, but still have no manners! You see it particularly with people who have money. Well, let them have it: I wish them well.

In general though, the Roma people are not given a fair chance in Bulgaria. For example, if a business needs to lay someone off them it will always be the Roma who are first to be given their papers. If only there was work for us here in Bulgaria, everything would go so smoothly… we gypsies are work-minded people. You'll always see gypsies doing the dirty work, and we don't mind – just so long as there is some work, and we can keep our children fed by honest means.

We're not so bad as we're portrayed by the media. You will always be welcome in a Roma home, for example – we are very hospitable people. But there is a common saying here, used when a mother wants to scare her child into behaving. She'll tell it, "you should behave yourself or the gypsies will come and get you." What more can I say?

Simeon [Tour guide]:

The single word "Batak" describes everything about the Turks: barbarians, animals and most likely the missing link between ape and human. Many Bulgarians still treat them with mixed feelings even now, some 200 years after the event. Nothing much has changed in their beliefs

though, in their politics or their treatment of minorities. Just look at how they deal with the Kurds. [President] Erdogan demonstrates these attitudes clearly every day.

Such incredible cruelty – not only in Batak, but the widespread cruelty during their suppression of the uprising – has never been seen elsewhere in human history. Perhaps only the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki could rank higher.

Dido [Student]:
People make a big fuss about the massacre at Batak, and some Bulgarians use it as a reason to feel sorry for themselves. But war is war, and these things just happen sometimes. In school here, we all learn how great the Bulgarian Empire used to be, and as a nation we're very proud of that. Bulgaria once controlled three seas [the Adriatic, the Aegean and the Black]. But are you going to tell me we achieved all that without killing any innocent people in the process?

2. Bekelemeto

Radoslav [Photographer]:
The monument [in the Beklemeto Pass] is named the "Arc of Freedom." It was designed by the architect Georgi Stoilov and this memorial is 38 metres high, built on Mount Goral – 'Goraltepe – 'at 1550 metres above sea level. From here, the monument looks north over the valleys of Beli Osam and Troyan. To the south it's possible to see as far as Rila, and even the Rhodope Mountains.

The Arc of Freedom is dedicated to the Bulgarian-Soviet friendship, and it honours the Socialist Revolution of September 1944. It was erected in 1978, on the 100th anniversary of our liberation from Ottoman rule. On the north side is written the year 1878, and on the south, 1944. Other carvings on the arch depict rebels, Russian soldiers and women in traditional Bulgarian costume.

For me, this monument is an important testament to our recent history. I believe the arch symbolises infinity… and it reminds us that freedom is the most important thing for a nation.

It is in poor condition however, and receives no money for repairs or maintenance. It saddens me to see it painted in graffiti, and with the reliefs in such poor condition.

Monument to the Russian-Bulgarian Friendship 'Arch of Liberty,' Beklemeto. 1980.
Architect: Georgi Stoilov; Engineer: Bogdan Atanasov
Sculptor: Velichko Minekov

3. Brezovo

Krasimir [Retired school teacher]:
This is a sign of prosperity, and it shows our togetherness as well. One lady comes from Bezhovo, and the other is bringing grapes from Zelenikovo. The child – the child comes from a third village. So the statue shows unity, and the power and prosperity of local people coming together.

Sculptural Composition, Brezovo. Date unknown.
Sculptor: Radi Angelov

4. Burgas

Haralambi [Writer]:
This monument was built in the early days after the [Second World] War, in the 1950s, the 1960s… pretty much at the height of the Communist Party in Bulgaria. I think the design is self-explanatory – it expresses the greatness of the Soviet Union, and how they helped Bulgaria out of a tight spot. It illustrates the gratitude of the Bulgarian people – while at the same time depicting Nazis as cowards compared to the Russian soldiers who are shown as fierce warriors. Put simply, it portrays good versus evil.

The monument is very large, and was positioned in a public place to serve as a daily reminder to the people. Perhaps for some, it's still relevant… a significant portion of the Bulgarian population still looks towards Russia with awe, and the Communist Party remains strong

here. At election time, they'll usually manage to wiggle themselves into parliament with a sizeable representation.

For the younger generations though, I don't think this stuff matters all that much. The past is in the past, and a lot of the Bulgarian youth just don't really care about what happened – they'd rather live in the now, and look to the future. In my experience, back in high school, we really didn't care. For us these monuments were just old things, relics from a different time. Most people I know consider them ugly.

I think the symbolism of these monuments has largely been lost, since the population of Bulgaria was opened to Americanisation. We consume a lot of American media here, and it teaches us American ideals, American symbols. Bulgaria looks up to the US and the West in general, and we aspire to those ideals… certainly in terms of architecture. While we're busy looking West, these monuments just fade into the background.

What will become of our monuments? Well, we are still closely tied with Russia… so I don't see the government or municipalities taking action, or tearing these monuments down anytime soon. More likely we'll just let them stay there to rot. They'll disintegrate, succumb to rain, frost and erosion, so that in the end, time and nature will deal with them. The Monument [to the Soviet Army] in Sofia has been vandalised so many times now, and Russia is always quick to respond to us – they criticise Bulgaria for letting it happen, and start throwing their weight around. I think it would be a political faux pas for Bulgaria to remove them, simply because it's not in our interest to piss Russia off… and especially not now, given the situation in Ukraine.

You know, what's happening in Ukraine right now feels very close to home. Putin has shown that he doesn't play by the rules, and this latest situation suggests that he is very invested in forcing a reunion of the former Soviet allies. Bulgaria is a key strategic location, with a long and glorious history… there have even been competing bids for gas pipelines here, one project owned by Russia, the other in association with the European Union. Regaining control over Bulgaria would be very advantageous to Russia right now.

I don't want to sound paranoid, but I wouldn't be surprised if they're planning to bring all the former socialist states back into the fold. Russia has always acted through aggression.

They've now taken a large chunk of Ukraine by force, and the UN hasn't done anything about it – which is a green light, telling them they can do anything they like. I believe Bulgaria will be on their to-do list.

Monument to the Soviet Army, Burgas. 1953.
Architect: Mihail Milkov; Sculptors: Vasil Radoslavov (central figure and right-side bas-relief 'The Defeat of Fascism'), Aneta Atanasova-Milkova (left-side bas-relief 'Welcoming the Soviet Army in Bulgaria')

5. Buzludzha Peak

Nikolay [Bulgarian-American tourist]

My family was among the first to win the US green card lottery when they launched it in 1994. I was 6 years old at the time. For various reasons, my parents decided I should finish high school in Sofia and I only moved to the US in 2006 to start college. So I'm very much a child of the "democratic transition": some of my first memories in life are from early 90s anti-communist protests that my dad took me to.

Two reasons made me visit Buzludzha: First, my American girlfriend at the time was visiting Bulgaria, and this is the absolute best, freshest and most exhilarating showcase of post-war Bulgarian history. Secondly, I found the building stunningly beautiful since I first saw it on an old postcard when I was 13. Always had a thing for modern architecture, especially brutalism, especially when mixed with ideology and art.

I see it as a monument to several aspects of our history: the site where the Bulgarian socialist party was founded is close to Shipka, highlighting the conflicting relationship with Russia. The original design celebrates the triumph of tgstv ideology, and the current state its demise and lasting legacy.

I resent the system. It was oppressive, unfair to many and inefficient. Yet we need to accept our history and process it, not forget it. Restoring the monument in its original state with all the bling would be ludicrous. Perhaps the murals can be restored and shown in a museum of socialist art. The building should be conserved so it does not collapse, and made secure enough to be open to the public.

Buzludzha Memorial House, Buzludzha Peak. 1981.
Architect: Georgi Stoilov; Architect: Ivan Mihailov (surrounding park area)
Engineers: Bogdan Atanasov, Ivan Torchanov, Dimitâr Bratanov, Todor Todorov, Dimitâr Dinkov, Nikola Abadzhiev, Yosif Tsankov; Technician: Krâstyu Zlatarev (collective)
Contest: 1961; Developed: 1971-1974; Construction: 1974-1981

Vanya [Marketing specialist]:
In my mind the Buzludzha monument is very symbolic of communism. Every time I hear the name “Buzludzha” it reminds me of all the stories my family told me about those days, stories about oppression and even torture. I’ve never been there, but I’d like to go. I do wonder how I would feel there, on an emotional level – if I’d experience all the past memories of my family. Not because of the place itself, but because for me, “Buzludzha” is a synonym of “communism”: a place where old, desperate and manipulated people went to support their Party.

I personally don't remember anything about the communist period – but I've heard many stories about it from my parents, and especially from my mother. Her father had problems

with the communists, when they pushed him to join the “TKZS” [“Trudovo Kooperativno Zemedelsko Stopanstvo”; a Soviet-style co-operative labour farm]. In simple words, this was a system by which peasants gave the communists control of their fields, their animals and so on... and in return they would be given back a very small share of the produce. My grandfather was one of the elders in his village and local people respected him, listened to his opinions – so the communists considered it very important to “catch” him. With him on their side, others could more easily be manipulated and drawn to the communist party by following his example. But my grandfather didn’t want to be part of the communist system, and so they pushed him, they tortured him and they threatened his family.

6. Dobrich

Memorial Complex ‘Khan Asparuh,’ Dobrich. 1981.
Architect: Ivan Nikolov; Sculptor: Velichko Minekov
Contest: 1969-1971; Developed: 1977; Construction: 1980-1981

Kolio [Photographer]:

Our monument was built in 1981, 1982 maybe. It shows Khan Asparuh – the leader who founded this country about 1,300 years ago, back in the year 681. Why am I here? Well, it's the best place in town to see the sunset.

Monument to the Fallen in the Great Patriotic War, Dobrich. 1969.
Architect: Georgi Stoilov; Sculptors: Asen B. Popov, Nikola Bogdanov, Yordan Gavrilov

Ilya [Pensioner]:

This old thing? I have no idea. Maybe it's for the soldiers who died in the war. I can't tell you anything specific about it, though. But then I think maybe that's a cultural thing in some ways. You're English, and so it's genetically embedded in you to ask questions. You travel, you're inquisitive, you get to know things. We Bulgarians were under a communist regime for so long – and in those times, there were many subjects we were not allowed to speak about. There were many things we weren't allowed to see… and if for some reason you did see them, and told others, you could get into a lot of trouble. So we don't generally ask

questions. It's not in our nature. That's how I can walk past this statue every day, and not be able to tell you what it is!

You know, there used to be others like this one. All the way along this street. Those other ones got taken down though, after the fall of the communist government. They took them away, and put those old statues in the graveyard.

Those were difficult times we were living in back then… but these are also difficult times now, in a different way. The great world powers have never thought very much of Bulgaria. We're like toys, caught between the east and the west. Those bigger countries, Russia, America, they don't take us seriously. So many Bulgarians today leave the country, to go and find work abroad. I wonder what will happen to us. If you were born here, what would you do? Would you stay or would you go? The country is beautiful, and it's *home* – but there's no work here, no money. The culture here, the education – I can see it deteriorating. These are sad times now, and I don't know if I see very much hope. I think it's wrong for young people to leave Bulgaria. There's so much here, if they open their eyes. The space, the nature. I have travelled myself, I've been to London for example – but it's too busy, it's big and crowded and polluted. This place is better in so many ways. It makes me sad to see the young people leaving.

7. Dryanovo

Maria [Museum curator]:

Dryanovo has been known for its architecture since back in the day. The [Monument to the Associates of Levski] was built sometime in the 1970s. The three men portrayed were no historical figures – just art. In fact, the monument was built there simply because of the town itself. The actual place is not important, and it has no relation to other historical events. Look, it features on this postcard here… and as the postcard was printed in 1973, the monument must have been built sometime before that.

Monument to the Dryanovo Epic. 1976.
Architect: Simeon Dobrev
Sculptor: Iliya Y. Iliev

8. Elena

Ivan [Retired taxi driver]:

I don't like the monument here in Elena – it was badly done, it says nothing to me when I look at it now. The texts engraved around it… these at least are full of meaning, passed down from the great men of our country's history. But the monument itself was a poor choice that does not reflect any particular theme from that history.

The Party representatives in this region were not too bright, they were poorly educated men who made a lot of mistakes. In the case of the town monument, there were much better proposals they could have chosen – for example, there was a famous revolutionary from this town named Ilarion Makariopolski. He was a champion of the orthodox church, and he negotiated with the Ottomans for the local people to maintain their right to worship in the old way. We even had Makariopolski's hat and staff in the museum here, until they got stolen away a decade ago. That would have been a worthy subject for a monument, and there were

local painters and architects keen to do the work – but instead we got this meaningless junk instead.

Now the USSR, they really knew how to build fabulous monuments. When you look at the figures they were building during and after the war, it's as if they speak to you. I worked in the USSR from 1957 until 1960, building sewers and canals in Donbas. It was 12 years after the war had ended, and I bought a Moskvich automobile to go out and explore the countryside. I saw the most incredible monuments there… there was a mass grave for example, German and Italian and Russian soldiers all buried together and above it stood the figure of a soldier, fully equipped for war but with his helmet in his hand, and with one figure pointing down towards the grave. You can't imagine how impressive and emotional this scene was. The is another place, in Ukraine, where the Germans killed an old woman and her four sons… and now in the spot there stands a monument to this family.

Bulgaria has its own impressive monuments too… the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia, for instance, or Levski's Monument near there. In truth though, they just don't compare to Russian monuments.

Nowadays, it is the USA and the Western world who call the shots and who say what will happen here. I think our country needs to change – we need new people. These old monkeys don't cut it anymore, we've already seen what they can do. The Turks and the Gypsies are picking up pace. We have turned into a country of lawlessness. We need to start attaching minimum requirements to the right to vote, basic literacy skills for starters. Right now, we have Turks who live and vote in their own country, then come over the border to cast their vote here as well. Such things are only possible with a lack of firm laws… things need to get tougher, if we ever hope to get rid of these idiots and get some quality leaders. You'll hear some people say that back in the day, under the communist regime, the bosses and directors were stealing from the people – even if that was true though, it wasn't nearly as bad as our current leaders are. […] Bulgaria was a rich country during the times of socialism. It could afford whatever it needed. We weren't forced to pay excessive taxes, just 2 Lev a month to the Party… and the BCP was able to sustain itself entirely on these membership fees. The state never had to subsidise the Party. I was contributing between 10 and 15 Levs a month for the Party, and when you consider that there were 1.2 million party members across the country. […] All the wealth this nation had during its socialist years has been dismantled, and has since found its way into the pockets of the wealthy and powerful. The money these people have stolen from the country now numbers into the billions.

Monument to Freedom 'To the Fallen in the Struggle Against Fascism, Capitalism, and Turkish Slavery,' Elena. 1964.
Architects: Hristo Koev, Ivan Nikiforov
Sculptor: Nenko Nenkov
Artist: Vasil Barakov (typography design)
Stonemason: Dyanko Bratsikliyski
(additional figures on the memorial wall)

9. Glozhene

Sylvia [Waitress]:

I really don't know anything about this monument. It has been here for a long time, though – since the beginning of the town, I guess. I was born and raised here, but I really don't know anything about it, sorry. There's an old man in the village who would probably know, but he's not here right now. I really can't tell you anything though – and these people around the monument… [Gestures towards a group of Roma people gathered in the town square close to the monument] I can tell you now, that none of them will be able to help you either.

Monument to the Fallen for Freedom, Glozhene. 1974.
Architects: Aleksandaur Ovcharov, Zheko Zhekov; Sculptor: Stoyu Todorov

10. Gotse Delchev

Maria & Angela [School teachers]:

The statue here was built during the 1980s. Back then we had a mayor called Vasil Kanin who decided to commemorate the national hero Gotse Delchev, who gives our town its name. In truth though, Delchev has never been here – he's not connected to this city in any way! We have far more connection with Yane Sandanski, for example. Or Yavorov, our first mayor – you'll find a lovely statue of him down at the park. Our town used to be called Nevrocop but they changed the name to Gotse Delchev in the 1980s. It was a decision made by the council, in recognition of this great hero […] A few years later this monument followed, and the rest is history.

We don't really like this monument. The face wasn't made very well, while the raised hand, it doesn't seem to fit his figure. The man was indeed an incredible person… but this monument, in general, it just doesn't look very good.

Monument to Gotse Delchev, Gotse Delchev. 1980.
Architect: Dimitur Krustev; Sculptor: Dimitur Bonovski

11. Gurgulyat

Pantheon to the Dead in the Serbo-Bulgarian War, Gurgulyat. 1985.
Architect: Georgi Stoilov; Sculptors: Boris Gondov (main figure), Emil Mirchev (reliefs)
Artist: Todor Vardzhiev (typography design)

Elderly visitor to the monument:

It's disgraceful… we don't even have money to fix monuments of our heroes.

12. Karlovo

Pedestrian beside the monument:

Ah, don't bother with this… it was all built by the communists. The figure in the statue used to hold a five-pointed star, but now it's been replaced with the torch of liberty. The usual stuff, the communists only put it there to have something decorating the square. You should

go and look at the statue of Vasil Levski instead! Or visit the Levski museum. That's much more interesting.

Monument to the Resistance, Karlovo. 1963.
Architect: Alexandur Barov; Sculptor: Georgi Gergov

Waitress:
I like this old monument – I like all of the monuments in Karlovo. Does it represent our town? Of course, it's fine. All of our monuments are just fine. I can't remember the history though, so I can't tell you what it means.

Shopkeeper:
The monument commemorates 20 July 1877 – when the Turks came into Karlovo and slaughtered over a hundred people. This town earned a nickname after that event… the City of the Black Shawls, because the people were in mourning for so long after the massacre. I

can’t tell you when this thing was built… but it’s really not important. You should see our statue of Vasil Levski instead, you’d like it better.

13. Klisura

Monument to Borimechkata, Klisura. 1977.
Architect: Stefan Stefanov; Engineer: Anton Maleev; Sculptor: Metodi Izmerliev

Delcho [Family man]:

So you want to know about Ivan Borimechkata? Sure, I can tell you the story. Back in 1878 as the Turkish army spread through this part of the country, a group of freedom fighters took a defensive position on a hill outside of Klisura. While they held the Turks back from the town, Ivan Boremechkata was stationed alone on a nearby hill with an artillery cannon. He fired his first round at the Turks, but it fell short. He loaded again, changing his aim by single-handedly dragging the heavy cannon to a new position on the hill. Boremechkata fired again, and this time the blast split his cannon in two… but the surprise attack hit close enough

to cause confusion and panic in the Turkish ranks. This sudden distraction gave the freedom fighters time to escape the oncoming army, and they retreated to a stronger position on a hill above the town.

Boremechkata and the freedom fighters made their last stand on this very hill. They fought bravely… but the Turkish force was larger, stronger, and eventually they annihilated the defenders of Klisura. Borimechkata was killed, along with the other rebels, and the Turks pushed on into Klisura itself. Today the population is maybe twelve hundred people – but back then it was twice that. The Turks burned the town to the ground that day, killing everybody inside. In terms of physical destruction, it was the worst assault the Turks committed upon any town in Bulgaria. In terms of human casualties, the scale of the massacre at Klisura was second only to the terrible slaughter at Batak.

14. Kotel

Monument to 'Ivailo's Victory of 1280,' Kotel. 1978.
Sculptor: Lyuben Dimitrov

Family:

We're just passing through, we certainly didn't come here for this monument... but we saw it from the road, and thought we'd have a closer look. No, we have no idea what it is – or who – but we're about to go and find out.

15. Lukovit

Elderly man:

The monument here is being repaired right now, you can't get close to it. They're digging up the roads, you see. Putting in new cables for the telephone. It's going to run all the way from here to Ruse! Why do you care about this thing, anyway? It's not that interesting. Old war stuff. You'll see everything you need to see from standing right here.

Monument to the Fallen Antifascists, Lukovit. 1969.
Architect: Ivan Nikolov; Sculptor: Georgi Gergov

Elderly woman:

The monument in our town celebrates the liberation – and our heroes of war, who will always be remembered. There used to be other monuments here too, monuments dedicated to local heroes and people of note from the area. Not any more though, the democratic regime had them all destroyed. These monuments need to be preserved for the younger generation, because it's important to remind people of our history. Things are changing though. These

monuments are losing their meaning, thanks to the digital age. Young people know how to press a few buttons, and everything they need is right there in their faces. There's no need to build monuments like this anymore, and even though they're a part of our history they're even destroying the old ones.

Everyone here has a different opinion about it – some people want to keep them, some want to destroy them. But in the meantime, they're being desecrated, they're being painted over, graffitied, and slowly destroyed.

16. Muglizh

Monument to the 1923 September Uprising, Muglizh. 1979.
Architects: Rada Pencheva, Stefan Popov
Sculptor: Georgi Vurlinkov; Artist: Stefan Gachev (consultant)
Contest: 1971; Developed: 1971-1975; Construction: 1978-1979

Petko [Pensioner]:

They raised this monument to commemorate the 1923 uprising. There were gunfights here in Maglizh back then, the locals fighting against guardsmen sent from Kazanluk. If you look in the graveyard on the edge of town, you'll find thirteen of our people who were killed in that conflict, stabbed to death. There was a local man back then, called Genata, who became famous for throwing guardsmen off the bridge here into the river. So this monument, we named the figure 'Genata 'after him. It was built in 1974, I think… sometime in the early 1970s, anyway. I came back from the military in 1971 and I remember they built it shortly after that.

Some people here like the monument, others don't. But what can you do? This is a part of our town's history, and everyone will have their opinion. The same goes for governments… some people think it was better before, some people think things are better now. Of course, us old men prefer things the way they used to be… but everyone has a different view.

17. Perushtitsa

Monument to the Three Generations, Perushtitsa. 1976.
Architects: Vladimir Rangelov, Lyubomir Shinkov; Sculptor: Lyubomir Dalchev
Developed: 1975; Construction: 1975-1976

Todor & Spaska [Pensioners]:

Our monument is destroyed now, looted beyond repair. It was built in 1976, to commemorate the 1876 revolution. Mostly it was military construction corps who built it, but some folks from the village helped out as well… they're all gone now, they got old and they died. There's almost no one left here anymore. We're amongst the few remaining – on this whole street, there are maybe two or three women living here. All these houses are empty – this one, that one, they're all dead now.

We used to go up to the monument when we were young… there was a pond, and we'd go and catch fish up there. Lots of people used to come and visit it in those days, they came in coaches and drove all the way to the top. There were lamps going all the way up the hill.

There used to be guards up there 30 years ago, although they were never armed. We even had politicians here for the opening ceremony, and a great big Soviet star at the top of the monument. Although to tell you the truth, I don't think that Soviet star should have been here in the first place. Something like that belongs in Moscow – that's where these things come from. This is Bulgaria, not the Soviet Union.

I haven't been up to the monument in 15 years now. I have trouble walking these days… and besides, I just don't want to see the damage. They took away the red tiles, they stole the star, they removed the lamps from the hill and they even ripped up the electrical cables too. Inside, there was a large ring of bronze flowers – but that got stolen 15 years ago. They must have used a truck to take it away. You can't imagine how beautiful it used to be.

The monument was built on a place where three local men were killed, as they tried to negotiate with the Ottomans. I'm sad to say I don't know the local history as well as I should. I'm 80 now… when we were young we were far too busy building homes, getting married, raising a family. Bulgaria is a beautiful country but I think we appreciate it less than it deserves. Whenever governments change over, it seems a lot of things get lost in the process. The people who should care about these places do not – but there is hope, at least, if young folk like you are taking an interest in these monuments now.

18. Petrova Niva

Monument to the Preobrazhensko Uprising, Petrova Niva. 1958. Architect: Mihail Sokolovski

Svetelina [Shopkeeper]:

This is a monument for the Ilinden Uprising [St. Elijah's Day Uprising], built during the fifties, I think. At the end of August, on the last Saturday of August, a large number of people from all per the country gather there to commemorate the sacrifice of the soldiers from this area. Even famous people come, the president sometimes too. There are thousands of people and they celebrate with events such as singing events, contests as such. The women sing, and the men wrestle. It's freestyle wrestling.

Up at Petrova Niva there's a custodian. It's his job to show you around – he'll let you inside the museum, and tell you all about the monument. There's a chapel too, and the man there will be able to let you in to have a look around inside.

Dido [Park custodian]:

I don't know anything about this monument. If you want to know, you can just have a look around the museum for yourself. You'll find everything you need to know in there. Or, just come back at the end of the month – that's when the celebrations are, and there'll be someone there who can tell you more.

19. Pleven

Kiril [Student]:

The Pleven Panorama was constructed in 1978, to commemorate 100 years of liberation. For me, it has to be the most significant symbol of the city – there's no other monument here with such historical importance.

The Pleven Panorama, Pleven. 1977.
Architects: Ivo Petrov, Plamena Tsacheva (and collective)
Sculptor: Kiril Meskin (exterior concrete relief); Artists: Nikolai Ovechkin (lead), A. Chernishev, M. Ananiev, I. Kabanov, V. Esaulov, G. Esaulov, V. Tautiev, G. Shcherbakov, A. Trotsenko, Yu. Usipenko, H. Boyadzhiev, D. Donchev (panorama murals)
Contest: 1975; Construction: 1976-1977

Desi [Student]:
Actually, it was 1977… the monument opened just a year before the 100-year celebrations, on 10 December. When I was a little girl, my street was named after that date, 10 December.

The monument features four main chambers inside, and what's really fascinating is that they built it with a time capsule inside – intended to be opened one hundred years after the Panorama was built, which would mean 2077. I don't know what's inside it, but I heard it's some kind of message that supposed to travel through time to reach future generations. The townsfolk here wrote a good deal of it. I haven't visited the place since I was little, but I remember finding the idea of the time capsule really exciting.

I'm sorry to say that a lot of people think badly of my city, Pleven, nowadays – especially after an article published in 2013 that named Pleven as the Bulgarian city facing the most rapid depopulation. I have met people who were honestly ashamed to come from Pleven. I find that strange, because our town is so beautiful… if you can ignore the half-finished renovations in the city centre, that is. The Pleven Panorama is the largest building of its kind anywhere in the Balkans, and we also have a winery museum here. I have always felt proud to be from Pleven.

I'm always telling my foreign friends what we have over here, but not everyone is as proud as I am. Look at the young people of Bulgaria, for instance – many of them travel elsewhere to study, and then never return. I've done much the same thing myself, and nowadays I live in Denmark. Maybe they don't notice the effect in Sofia, but as a result of all these people leaving some of our smaller cities, like Pleven, just stop developing. Alright, so we have 15 new trolley buses now… but that does not equal urban development. In reality, there are no big companies here in Pleven offering employment to young people… local salaries are far too low as well. When I was little, Pleven was considered one of the largest and most developed cities in Bulgaria. Thanks to poor government and a lack of opportunities however, I can see it going gradually downhill.

20. Plovdiv

Konstantin [Bartender]:

I've never been interested in things like this. Look at some maps, check Wikipedia – you'll find all the information you need there. In fact, try this one. This'll show you every cultural site in Bulgaria… anything that's not on there isn't worth seeing. [Offers map produced by the Bulgarian Tourist Board. It features just four communist-era monuments.] But this monument, this is nothing but dead concrete. Why don't you just go there, and ask some old grandpa across the street? He'll probably even remember the day it was built. He'll be all like, "Oh, they came in with the big trucks and the concrete…" you know? But me, I have no interest in this stuff. You know Plovdiv has some of the best bars and the most beautiful women in Bulgaria, right? You should go and check those out instead.

Fraternal Barrow Memorial Complex, Plovdiv. 1974.
Architects: Lyubomir Shinkov, Vladimir Rangelov
Sculptors: Lyubomir Dalchev (lead), Anna Dalcheva, Petâr Atanasov
Contest: 1968; Construction: 1971-1974

Elderly man at monument:

No, I don't know when they built this thing. What exactly did you come here for? I guess they made it in the seventies. The sixties, maybe. It's just stupid. It's here, but it really doesn't belong here… there's nothing Bulgarian about this. It's a Soviet thing. There are some statues inside, but it's nothing interesting. It's nothing of ours. This project of yours though… it's a nice idea. I wish you luck with it. [Switches off hearing aid and walks away.]

21. Pravets

Monument to Todor Zhivkov, Pravets. 1974.
Sculptor: Sekul Krumov
Relocated: 2001

Rangel [Pensioner]:
During the war, Hitler was trying to persuade Bulgaria to fight on his side. He sent his best pilot to come and collect our Tsar Boris, and take him back to Germany. During that time they had long talks about collaboration… about sending the Bulgarian Army out to fight on the eastern front. The German war machine was already weakening, and the Allied Forces were pushing them back in the west – and so they desperately needed the extra numbers. Of course, Bulgaria did not want to join the Nazis – and certainly not to fight against our old allies in Russia, on the eastern front. Immediately after that meeting with Hitler though, Tsar Boris began to weaken. His health deteriorated, he had terrible pains in his stomach, and soon afterwards he died. A lot of people believe that Hitler killed our tsar with poison. After the death, Hitler sent his best surgeons to Bulgaria in order to conduct an autopsy… but really, they came here to cover up the truth. They declared it a natural death and although nobody here believed that, for all practical purposes their plan – to destabilise the country by removing our leader – had already worked.

As for socialism… well, here in Bulgaria it all started long before the war, with Dimitar Blagoev. He was the philosopher, the great thinker… he did for Bulgaria what Lenin was doing in Russia. We called him "Grandpa". After that we had Georgi Dimitrov – he worked alongside Grandpa, and then later he took over as leader. You could say he was like our Stalin. You heard of Stalin, right? Meanwhile in Serbia they had Tito in charge, doing a similar job. When Dimitrov stepped down, that's when Todor Zhivkov showed up. Zhivkov was a man of modest means. He didn't have lots of degrees, just a basic education at the school here in Pravets – but he was a real man of the people, and the people loved him for that. When Zhivkov gave a speech, he spoke in a way that people could understand and he'd always throw in a few jokes.

Now, things are very different. I may be old but I read a lot, I keep track of things. I subscribe to two regular newspapers and one magazine, and I see a lot of criticism towards this current regime of ours. They've earned it! I can tell you for myself, things have gotten really bad

here. Right now, two thirds of the people in this country would vote to bring back the old regime if you asked them. Bulgaria today is a country without money – we don't have the money for this, no money for that. It's not like it was before. During socialist times this was a prosperous place, and we built many large factories… such as the steelworks at Kremikovtsti, which produced the finest steel anywhere in the Balkans. Back then, everywhere in the country, in every village, everybody was working. Even the minorities had jobs to do… the Armenians, the Gypsies, the Turks, everyone was put to work. School children, students, when they were't busy studying they would be called up to work on this project, or on that project: building roads, factory work, railways, whatever needed doing. The state understood what was needed, and they would distribute the work force across the country according to labour requirements. On a work site you might see a boy with a wheelbarrow, or carrying stuff around for example – he may not be qualified, but there's always some way to help.

Back then you could just quit your job, if you didn't like your boss. Within hours, you'd be reassigned – and you'd have a new job somewhere else. My job? I was a film projectionist, and then I worked as a cinema director for 42 years. Under socialism, every single town in the country – every village, even – had its own cinema. We played films all the time, and we had the best equipment there was. The machines, the projectors were a Bulgarian brand, and we had some modern equipment imported from Germany too. It all changed though… when democracy came, our facilities were removed. You would see it everywhere – our cattle and crops were thriving in the rural parts of the country, but as soon as democracy came in then the trucks started arriving in the villages. The cattle were removed – they took all the animals away to the slaughterhouses, because there was more money to be made that way. Everything became about making a fast profit. And so the farming equipment, the factories, the oil refineries… everything we had built together was dismantled, cannibalised by this hungry new regime. They took the steel, they took all the metal and even the bricks… all of it stolen away from the villagers, so that someone, somewhere could make a quick profit.

22. Shumen

Monument to the Founders of the Bulgarian State, Shumen. 1981.
Architects: Georgi Gechev, Blagoi Atanasov; Architect: Aneta Kamenova-Bulant (surrounding park area and approach to the monument)
Engineers: Preslav Hadzhov (lead), Vladimir Stamov, Alexandâr Vasilev
Sculptors: Krum Damyanov, Ivan Slavov
Artist: Simeon Venov (mosaics); Artist: Vladislav Paskalev (mosaic typography)
Contest: 1978-1979; Construction: 1979-1981

Konstantin [Retired police major]:

The project started sometime around 1977, and the actual construction began in 1979. It was planned to be completed in 1981 – the year that marks exactly 1,300 years from the foundation of the first Bulgarian state. I was summoned to the construction site in 1980; the bosses were concerned about getting the project finished on time, and so they turned to university students for an additional workforce. By the end there were a good four or five thousand people involved in the project.

Mainly though, it was the army who built the monument – along with elite construction teams who were selected by the BCP, and then brought in from all across the country. These professional teams were paid for their work. Us university students were not… but we did enjoy the benefits of free food and accommodation throughout our service.

I was involved in general labour during my time there, helping to build the staircase leading up the mountain to the monument. We'd be given a quota of hours each week and we would work hard, aiming to reach our target in no more than six days. That way, we'd have the privilege of spending the last day of the week at a holiday cabin on a nearby hilltop. I remember we all worked with passion and enthusiasm. Nobody complained about the labour, or for not getting paid. Nobody complained that we were being exploited or anything like that. We worked hard, all of us aiming to deliver the highest possible quality. We worked on the project throughout July, we had August to ourselves and then resumed our university studies in September. After our service had finished though, at the end of July, we had the option to take a working holiday in Poland for a few weeks. Only five or six of us earned that right in the end – and it meant two weeks of labour in Poland followed by one week of free time to explore the country. Food and accommodation were provided once again, all at the expense of the BCP.

Nobody was ever asked to help with these projects – university students and construction crews alike were obliged to provide labour. Despite that though, we were all happy to do it. Times were different back then… people had a kind of idealistic enthusiasm in their hearts. We didn't care so much whether we got paid, as money was not so essential back then. Nowadays, everyone is happy to help… but only as long as the pay is sufficient. Yes, those were very different days indeed.

Today's police force are soft and indecisive… more concerned with paperwork, than with getting the job done. They really don't know – and could not comprehend – what it means to be a police officer. We were a lot tougher back in socialist times. Granted, things went too far at times and there was potential for abuse… but people had a respect towards the militia and the effect we had on society, and on crime rates, was self-evident.

Denyo [Software engineer]:

Proto-Bulgarians are anything but Slavs. Actually, Slavs are just different tribes adopting the habits of the empires they live within. When Khan Asparuh – son of Khan Kubrat – arrived at the lower parts of the Danube River from Central Asia, the people he led brought a very specific culture, religion, language and tradition. He took large portions of land from the Byzantine Empire, and began earning respect throughout Southeast Europe. The native Slavic population was more numerous however, and over time it influenced proto-Bulgarian culture – as Slavs gradually moved into local government, they married with rulers, and so on. Even in the 7th century, when Bulgaria was founded, it was a huge mixture of nations… but built around the administration, culture, military power and management core of the proto-Bulgarians. Some even say that those Asian tribes were one of the oldest surviving nations in the world.

23. Silistra

Monument to First Soviet Tank in Bulgaria, Silistra. 1969.
Architect: Hristo B. Tsvetkov; Sculptor: Vasil Simitchiev

Vitosh [Retired engineer]:
In the early days of democracy, they were thinking of removing our monument to the victory over fascism. But thankfully, in the end, sane thought prevailed.

24. Sliven

[Waste disposal site employee]:

Oh really, you drove all the way from Varna to look at our rubbish? No, there's no statue of Lenin here. Maybe someone was making a joke! I've only been working here for six months, but I'm positive there's nothing like that anywhere near here. If it was a concrete statue, then perhaps it has been moved… but if it was bronze, copper, any kind of metal, then the gypsies will have taken care of it by now. To be honest, this place is falling out of use anyway – they're building another site on the other side of town. They still bring in the trucks for now, but whatever they bring gets taken away by the gypsies right away. We just let them have it, we accept it, and so this is like a marketplace for them. They come in here and find useful things to take back home… mostly they come for the plastic. They can usually sell that.

Zheko [Restaurant owner]:

I used to work at the old customs office, in Sliven… that was fifteen years ago. The office isn't there anymore, it's just warehouses now. There were many monuments back then, but

[after 1989] they took them down and stashed them away in one of those warehouses where I used to work. I can show you the place on a map, but i don't know if the monuments are still there. You're right though, there used to be a big statue of Lenin here. It was right in the middle of the city. They took that one down though, with all the others; chopped it into little pieces, and sent it away somewhere.

[Mechanic]:

The old customs office? Sure, it's just over there. There might be monuments inside, I suppose – I went in there once a few years ago, but I didn't see any. Just confiscated vehicles, other things like that. There'll be a guard on the gate, you can probably talk to him. Anyway, you say you've driven all the way from the coast to get here? Why aren't you at the beach right now? You should be in the water on a day like this!

[Security guard]:

Communist monuments? I don't know anything about that. They used to be here, I think. I've been working here for about a year, but I never saw them. I don't know if there are any statues left. I don't mind letting you in to take a look around… but I should call my boss first, just to check if there's anything here worth seeing. [Two minutes pass.] Okay, so my boss said there's a new museum in Sofia, built to house all this communist stuff. They came by here already though, and collected all the monuments – Lenin, and… and… you know, all those other communist guys. Like I said, I'm happy to let you in to take a look around – but it's only rubbish left here now.

25. Sofia

Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria, Sofia. 1981.
Architects: Alexandur Barov (lead), Atanas Agura, Vladimir Romenski, Alexandur Brainov
Engineer: Rumen Mladzhov; Sculptor: Valentin Starchev
Artist: Stefan Gruev (typography design); Artist: Tsvetan Shopov (letters execution)
Contest: 1979; Construction: 1980-1981; Demolished: 2017

Aleksandar [Student]:

The [Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria] is one of the numerous monuments that were unveiled during the state-sanctioned celebrations for the 1300-year anniversary of the founding of the Bulgarian state. That said, it represents neither the history of the Bulgarian state, nor what could be considered the distinctive elements of traditional Bulgarian architecture. It's just a weird, ugly example of post-Stalinist communist architecture that didn't make much sense back then, and, in many ways, doesn't make much sense now either. Looking at it, it's anyone's guess what it's supposed to symbolise. I can't say I hold very

strong opinions about it. Then again, like many others of my generation, I don't care much either.

It’s hotly debated in Bulgarian society whether these monuments should be allowed to exist at all. After all, for many people the years between 1944 and 1989 were years of repression, pain and missed opportunities. Take my mother, for example. She’s in her early sixties now, and she never believed the fall of communism would ever come. She always felt that, in many ways, her life was wasted in a world with no social mobility, and no choice but to be part of a society of fear and conformity; not to mention the lower standard of living compared to the West, and some of the absurd peculiarities we knew under communism. For example, it was impossible to buy nappies, the banana was deemed a “capitalist fruit", and people had to wait something like 30 years to buy a car.

Personally, I still feel that these monuments should be preserved in one form or another. They're historically important and Bulgaria, for better or for worse, was communist for all those years after WWII. History shouldn't be destroyed, and in some ways, these monuments are more historically important now than ever before – since they reveal a certain aspect of the bygone communist era. Besides, I believe they have huge potential as unconventional tourist attractions. Your project you’re doing, as well as numerous articles in prominent Western media, unequivocally show that there's tourism potential here – but like many other things in contemporary Bulgaria, I can say with absolutely certainty that such potential will not be developed and nothing will come of it.

A sizeable portion of society wishes these monuments simply didn’t exist – and that, combined with a lack of funds, are the main reasons why structures like the Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria are in such severe states of disrepair. If we could put our politics aside, that particular monument is, although ugly, both interesting and unconventional… which alone should be reason enough for its preservation. I think it should be moved to another location and reconstructed, but I wouldn't say that's very likely to happen. There's a high probability it's doomed already. The same goes for the Monument to the Soviet Army. Perhaps all these monuments could be used to create a miniature Stalinist-themed park… something like a small-scale North Korea, only cheaper, with English signs and without the visa problems. As I’ve already said though, I'm not holding my breath.

26. Stara Zagora

Monument to the Defenders of Stara Zagora, Stara Zagora. 1977.
Architects: Bogomil Davidkov, Blagovest Vulkov
Engineer: Anton Maleev; Technician: Ivan Minev
Sculptors: Krum Damyanov, Bozhidar Kozarev
Contest: 1964; Developed: 1972

Stanislav [Security guard]:

Bulgaria is the oldest country in Europe. It has the oldest towns, and the oldest treasure in the whole world was found here, in Varna. It is such a rich and historical place… but today the European Union is allowing it to be destroyed. You probably don't know that Bulgarians are the saviours of Europe! A long time ago, Bulgaria was in a different place – today we have mixed blood, we are Bulgar and Slav and Thracian, and we are Europeans – but before that, the Bulgar tribes built a great kingdom on the Volga River. That place is now in Russia, near Volgograd. It was there that we fought the world's greatest empire, the Mongols led by the grandson of Genghis Khan. It was the only battle the Mongols ever lost… and they lost to

Bulgaria! If we had not defeated them there, then they would surely have swept further west and Europe would have been destroyed. Of course, the old Bulgar kingdom there was destroyed in the fighting. Russia stole that land from the weakened Bulgarians, we moved west and Khan Asparuh, the son of Khan Kubrat, founded the new Bulgarian state beside the Black Sea in 681.

But this was not the last time we saved Europe from invaders. Do you know about how the Muslims invaded Spain? Their armies came up from the south, from Morocco… but first they had tried to invade by land. Their original plan was to invade Europe through Bulgaria, but the Bulgarian army beat them back. I guess you haven't heard this story, though. History does not remember us. Europe does not remember what we've done for her. People today think of Bulgaria as weak – they remember how we were enslaved by the Turks for 500 years, but they forget our great victories before that. In the Balkan Wars we had the chance to fight the Turks again. Only this time, we had 500 years of anger behind us and the Bulgarian army was fierce. We were outnumbered 10 to one but still we annihilated them. We would have gone to Constantinople too, chased them back to their capital and destroyed them completely – but then Britain and the great European powers ordered us to stop. Britain was always friends with our enemy, the Ottoman Empire. Great empires tend to support each other like that. They are rich, and so they make deals together.

The same thing happens today… but now it is the European Union and the United States who play these power games. Honestly, I believe we were better under communism. We were better with Russia. Back in those days, Bulgaria made things. There was real work. We grew vegetables to feed ourselves, and we sold some to Russia as well. Russia would send us raw materials, and our factories would turn it into useful things and send it back. There was always work in those days, honest work. Now the European Union tells us not to make this, not to grow that – or else we'll upset the balance in Europe. We used to generate power from our hydroelectric stations on the River Danube… but the European Union told us it already had hydroelectric power from France, so we had to kill the factories or else upset the balance. At least Russia let us use our skills, and use the fruits of our land… and they rewarded us for that. The EU wants to turn us into slaves.

It is the same with Bulgaria's gold. Did you know there is gold here? In the mountains and in the rivers. Bulgaria is naturally rich, maybe the richest country in Europe. But now the

Americans are here, American and Canadian companies who mine the gold and send the profits back to their own countries. They pay our government as little as they can, and tell us not to upset the balance. The EU has no respect for us, they merely treat us like animals to be farmed. Just look at me now – I have to go and work in Scotland to earn my money. It's cold and the wind blows all the time… plus I have a wife and two sons back at home, who I haven't seen for seven months. But there is no money in Bulgaria, so I have no choice. The British people say they don't want immigrants in Britain, taking their jobs – but the European Union is destroying jobs in Bulgaria to keep us poor, so what can I do? I need to feed my family.

Things are changing though, you'll see. Just look at Russia now – there is no denying they are the strongest power at the moment, and their land is so rich in resources. They will have oil long after every other country has run out. They have the most weapons and bombs as well. Why would anybody want to fight them? So Russia wants Ukraine… well, I say let them have it. Those countries are connected by blood anyway, they are siblings – like England and Scotland, for example. They should be allowed to settle things between themselves, without help from Europe and America and the rest. I really think it would be much better for the West to accept that Russia has won already. It is better for us all to just be friends with them.

27. Tompsun

Yordan [Church caretaker]:

During World War II, Frank Thompson was the connection between the Bulgarian partisans and the anti-fascist forces in England. People named this village after him, but he never lived here. He acted as some kind of coordinator, working with the English intelligence services to supply weapons and ammunition to the partisans here in Bulgaria. It was not unusual at the time for "free" countries to send secret support to those occupied by the Nazis. The idea was to create a larger gap between Bulgaria and Germany, and to prevent the spread of Hitler's power.

Thompson was a member of Dicho Petrov's brigade, based in Batulia. During an operation in 1944 the brigade managed to capture two brothers from Bukovets, who could guide them to

Chavdartsi where they planned to join with another brigade. They got this far – to the village we now call Thompson – before night fell. The brigade hid in the forest for the night, but they were tired from their long journey and during the night even the watchmen fell asleep. That's when their guides, the two brothers, managed to escape in the darkness and make their way to Svoge to alert the police.

The police in Bulgaria back then were not exactly pro-Hitler, but still they had to be against the illegal activities of the partisans. So, a large detachment of elite police were sent down from Vratsa, and they set out to find the partisans in the forest. The police discovered their camp sometime just before dawn, and a gunfight broke out. The partisans had been caught by surprise, and they were too tired to put up a good resistance. They had made their camp beneath a hill, and I read that the police attacked first by rolling large rocks down the hillside at them. According to the story, Dicho Petrov lost one of his legs in the conflict – crushed beneath a falling rock.

Thompson tried to escape the fighting. He crossed the river and made it back as far as Batulia, but the police caught up with him there and he was shot. To them, he was just another partisan. He was wounded, captured, and later killed – though where exactly he met his end, I couldn't say. Those kind of things are surrounded in secrecy and it sometimes takes many years before they release the official records. The bottom line though, is that Thompson died fighting against Hitler just like many others did at that time.

I sympathise with these partisans, because they were fighting for the common people – defending the poor against the richer class. It's not so different from what's happening now! Bulgaria has some very rich people, and some extraordinary poor ones. It's hard to live with this imbalance, which is why we see national protests and widespread discontent today. That's why I can sympathise with these partisans… and I can sympathise with the communism that came after that, too.

During communism I was able to buy an apartment and make my home here. It's not much, but at least it's mine. Nowadays though, I can't do anything – I don't even have enough money to fix the bathroom. My pension is about 400 Levs a month [roughly £160], which is a lot better than what some people live on here… but still, it's very little. We didn't have large

salaries under communism either, but back then we always had more than enough to get by. I've lived under both systems and I can honestly tell you, I don't like the way things are now.

Granted, there were some major issues with the communist system too – and making communism work fully for everyone, well, that is an impossible concept. It's a fantasy, unachievable, largely because the rulers who are stealing from us now were stealing from the people back then as well! That's how I understand it, at least. I'm 70 years old now. I was born in 1945, and I have a lot of relatives who were partisans during World War Two… I remember them telling me that they fought for one thing, then got something totally different instead. They were fighting for communism, for an ideal world with equality for all – but in the end, the power fell back into the hands of crooks and cheats. Communism should mean "equality", but in practice it deviated significantly from that goal.

Monument to Major Frank Thompson, Tompsun. 2007.
Architect: Yuliya Velichkova
Sculptor: Andrei Vrabchev

28. Turgovishte

Monument to the Bulgarian-Soviet Friendship, Turgovishte. 1978.
Architects: Tsvetan Ignatov, Panko Karabakalov
Sculptors: Georgi Chapkânov, Iliya Ivanov

Daniela [SEO consultant]:
As far as I remember the monument was built to represent the friendship between Bulgaria and Russia, especially after the Russo-Turkish war in 1877-78. It's built over an old Russian cemetery, and dedicated to the soldiers who died in this area – Russians, Romanians, Finnish and Bulgarian – during the Liberation War. I'm not exactly sure what the figures represent, but I would assume these are local people greeting the soldiers. It is a Bulgarian tradition to welcome someone with bread and salt.

I can't say whether I like the monument or not – I don't really have an opinion. It's sad to read the text of course, as it's a reminder of our past and the years we suffered. It reminds me how strong we were, and how much we've deteriorated since then. The liberation happened

because of great leaders who managed to unite the nation against a common enemy – this monument represents the heroism of the hundreds of worthy men who turned their backs on home and family, to fight for freedom. Every man was willing to die for the freedom of the others. Looking at it now makes me sad. To think how great we once were, and how pathetic we have become.

Every year on 3 March, the kids leave their classrooms and go to the moment and leave flowers to celebrate Liberation Day. As they walk from their schools to the monument, it's like a festive procession. It's still winter then, so it's a little cold, but the children enjoy it – they feel like they're a part of something important, they sing patriotic songs and listen very carefully to every word that the speakers say. Then they grow up, of course, and most of them will no longer care about the monument. I'm not sure how things are now, but when I was living there the monument was a popular meeting place for local teenagers. They would be drinking there, using drugs, drawing graffiti. The next day you can typically see piles of empty beer cans, bottles, cigarette butts, even needles. I was always warned not to go there when it gets dark – but during the day it was a good place for walks, and I spent many mornings wandering in the area.

I'm not sure who is responsible for taking care of our monument, but I don't think anyone is now. It looks worse every year. People still visit on 3 March, so I assume that some money must be going into maintenance – but it isn't enough. Really, it needs to be completely renovated.

They say we shouldn't forget our past… but looking at the condition of most of the monuments in Bulgaria, it's pretty obvious how little we care about it. Old people remember and they tell stories, they try to get the young interested in the past – but for the majority the past is just a boring subject at school. In the generations to come everything will be forgotten, and these monuments will simply be ghostly stones left to decay.

Monument to Freedom 'The Horseman' Boaza Pass. 1968.
Sculptor: Vasil Radoslavov
Developed: 1960; Relocated from Turgovishte: 1977

Daniela [SEO consultant]:

The horse monument was in Targovishte once – on the top of the hill on the way to the cemetery. It shows a woman with a sword on horseback, a symbol of freedom. The monument was built here in the 1960s. It was removed later though, because someone decided that it didn't fit the architecture and that seen from the town beneath, it lost its artistic impact. I never saw it from up close, and my parents told me that it was moved out of the city when I was young – maybe two decades ago – and in the 1980s it was relocated to the mountains nearby. Now there is just a big hole on the spot where it used to be. I remember when I was a kid being really disappointed that they had removed the big horse statue from the hill, just to leave that place empty and ugly... it makes no sense to put it in the mountains instead, where people cannot visit it so easily. It was the communists who removed it, and I believe they did so just because they didn't like the idea of a warrior woman watching over them.

Nikolay Stavrev [Head of Scientific Archive and Cultural Estate]:
Most of the monuments here have been broken now. Whatever you see around the city – well, that's it. That's all there is. There used to be some tombs of notable partisans, but most of that has gone now. Nobody looks after these monuments anymore, and since 1989 they have been systematically destroyed.

During the 1980s, people from Sofia came to my province to take pictures of everything that was connected to socialism – which included our monuments, of course. I believe that catalogue contains the last records of many of these monuments, and I'd love to do something similar to that myself in the future. Because, the thing is, these monuments are a part of our history. Whatever people want to say about it, they can't change this fact.

29. Varna

Fraternal Barrow to the Fallen in the Antifascist Struggle, Varna. 1959.
Architects: Kostadin Yarumov, Boris Dalchev, Nedelcho Paskalev
Sculptor: Lyubomir Dalchev (main figure)
Sculptors: Anna Dalcheva, Petur Kutsarov, Ivan Neshev, Nikola Terziev, Veselin Nachev, Ivan Kovachev (reliefs)

Iva Todorova [Researcher]:
Bulgaria played a significant role in the Balkan Wars. Look at the numbers – Bulgaria's figures for both participants and victims are several times higher than those of other nations. The First Balkan War was fought with inspiration and enthusiasm; here it was called the "War for Freedom". The Second Balkan War however, was desperate and catastrophic. There is a famous marching song called "Allies, Thieves" that expresses the Bulgarian feeling of betrayal at that time. The authentic heroes of the Balkan Wars were replaced for ideological reasons, with the false heroes celebrated in the communist times. Communism was competing with Christianity, and so it was impossible for them to praise heroes who were fought in the name of God and King.

If you look at the most communist monuments, like the Pantheon in Varna for example, usually the first year of communist chronology begins at 1923. The 19th century was the

romantic period of the Bulgarian Enlightenment, a time of revolutions, and we have a narrative about it both in our history books and in literature. On the other hand, The heroes of the Balkan Wars were not suitable for commercial use in politics, or in the tourism industry. Besides, the topic of the Balkan Wars was considered an obstacle to keeping good relationships with our neighbours.

Anna-Maria [Student]:
This monument is a part of our history; it represents the soldiers who fought for our country. It's a way of showing pride in our history and in our heroes, the people who saved our town. This is our way of saying that we're proud of who we are. I think [the Pantheon] is beautiful – just the sight of it makes me want to go there, to go inside, to touch it and to explore its history.

I don't know what's inside it, but I'm pretty curious. Is it ever opened for visitors? I don't know. Even without going inside though, I think if you open your imagination you can see – it's like a small room, maybe with a lot of different paintings, you know? But I've never seen photos, I've never even spoken to anyone who's been inside. I think I heard something about tunnels beneath it though, back in the war, maybe. I think it would be interesting if there were stairs inside… and imagine if there were tunnels, how interesting that would be. Back then anything was possible. But now I guess people are trying to cover this up, to close the doors to these monuments so you can just see the outside… and you're never sure what's inside them.

Memorial Park to the Bulgarian-Soviet Friendship, Varna. 1978.
Architect: Kamen Goranov; Engineer: Nencho Tsanev (lead)
Sculptors: Alyosha Kafedzhiyski, Evgeni Barumov
Contest: 1973; Construction: 1974-1978

Alyosha Kafedzhiyski [Sculptor]:
The first thing that happened was for a decision to be made – for the creation of a monument to the Soviet Army. A national contest was then announced. In such a contest, all architects and engineers are eligible to take part. There is a special jury assigned by the Central Committee in Sofia; the institution that evaluated the quality of project proposals.

There was a particular mania back then to build enormous monuments. A lot of large monuments were built in the 1980s... the monuments in Sofia, Dobrich as well as Shumen. In those times, the political element had a more important role than pure artistic merit. The jury was comprised of proven specialists, architects and engineers, and its job was to find projects with the right balance. There was a first, second and third prize in the contest, as well as monetary prizes... and of course, the winner was burdened with the task to make it happen. I

think there were about 10 different projects entered into the contest in Varna – I can't remember exactly, but it was ours that was chosen.

I was very young at the time – I must have been around 36 years old when we started. It took us a full year before we submitted our project before the committee. We considered a multitude of plans, as it was a tremendous undertaking... you can probably tell by the size of the monument. From there we began a long procedure aimed at eliminating potential errors and clarifying everything down to the last detail: measurements, location and everything else. It took us five years to complete it – up until 1978. The monument was to be opened on 7th November, commemorating [Russia's] October Revolution. Unfortunately, there was an accident though, a nearby bridge collapsed and about 30 or 40 people lost their lives. The municipality delayed the opening of the monument to allow the people some time to grieve.

The monument illustrates a bird watching over the hill. That is why the base is so narrow, while the wings are spread wide. There was an eternal flame in front, fuelled by underground diesel pipes. The fire erupted from a sculpted rock – it was arguably the most beautiful element [of the complex]. There were large bronze letters, now all taken away. Dozens of kilograms of bronze per letter, all stolen. The main door alone weighed three tons.

The monument was especially impressive at night. It was illuminated, at a great cost, and music was played all around it. There was a library and a bookshop under the main stairs leading up to the monument, but all that is destroyed now. The front of the monument portrayed Bulgarian women on the left side, greeting the liberating Russian soldiers on the right. Each individual statue weighs about 25 tons. That was the theme of this monument – *Welcoming the Soldiers*.

Emil [Taxi driver]:

I work as a taxi driver in Varna, but I like to come up here sometimes when I have nothing to do. Other times I just walk around the city. Sometimes I walk thirty, or even forty kilometres in a night. I got high earlier, then decided to come up here. Did you know that this place is haunted? There are ghosts that appear at midnight. My friend saw them one time, ghosts with no feet. There are murders here all the time, too. Maybe ten every year. Nobody reports them though… the police know about it, but they never record it. People just disappear from inside

this monument. They go inside but never come out, and the bodies are never found. This monument is a really strange place […] I've seen it with my own eyes. One time we found a giant spider in here. My friend stamped on it, but when it exploded another forty, maybe fifty spiders came out and we had to run away. It wasn't natural.

There are more tunnels underneath the monument as well, a lot more that you can't see. People say that there are more than 6000 different rooms. I've never been down there myself, because I'm too afraid. Do you think maybe the missing bodies are down there? One time I went to have a look – there are steps going down, that disappear into the ground. It's really deep though. The tunnel just goes on forever, and with my torch I couldn't see the end.

Do you guys have any drugs? I could tell you some more stories, if you have something to trade with me.

Anna-Maria [Student]:
This monument is powerful. The moment you see it you're just frozen in place, out of respect. Respect for the view, respect for the soldiers… in those statues you can see both pain and bravery. These soldiers were brave enough to fight, brave enough to die for us. Sometimes it scares me, because you can feel the fear of the people who died, you can feel that coldness. You want to explore it but at the same time you want to stay away, because you don't know what's going on there.

I want to go inside the monument. I tried, I want to, but I can't. Just on an emotional level, I can't go in – and I can't explain it. This is like a supernatural thing for me, you know? I can feel these sorts of energies. My family are from Armenia, where a lot of people have this sort of mediumship… especially the women. For me, on a spiritual level at least, it sounds crazy but I can't go inside. If I do, it's like a disrespectful thing.

I even asked my mother what she thinks about it, because when I go there I feel fear. But she's the same – she said, you're not alone, I can't approach it. Before they built the monument it was a battlefield. My mother told me that a lot of people died there, and some people say that their spirits haunt it. I guess that's the reason I can't go inside. I do admire people who enter the monument though, because when it comes to the dark… well… it's not

my thing. I'm afraid of it. But at the same time, monuments are made for you to look at them from the outside, so this is what I do – I look at it. It's so beautiful, it makes me want to cry. It makes me feel the pain of the people who died there and the people who fought in this place. And yes, there are tunnels underneath that one. There were many people hiding down there during the war – hiding and fighting – but after the war they closed the tunnels and built a monument. Those tunnels are much older than the monument… centuries old, at least.

Today though, it's only drunk people and drug addicts who go down into the tunnels. I'm not kidding. They literally just go there to do this, because it feels like a safe place to drink, do drugs, you know, smoke weed… and by doing this they disrespect a part of our history. There is graffiti as well. The monument's creators were trying to illustrate something from our history, but to go there and do street art, well… that's for the street. There are places in the Sea Garden where you can do this, but to do it in the monument? It's not nice. And especially to use it as a toilet, as some people do! It's like going to someone else's house, into the backyard and using that as a toilet. It's the same thing – disrespecting a property.

I haven't heard about any murders, but I've heard the tunnels go for many levels under the ground, and only the people who were involved in this know the truth. It might have happened, and the police here are so corrupt, of course they would cover it up. So who knows? Anything is possible.

Petko [Construction worker]:

I live in Dobrich now but when I was child, growing up in Varna, we used to play in the underground tunnels there. I remember there was an entrance somewhere near the beach, and you could go down inside and then come out in a different place in the Sea Gardens. There were many tunnels down there, but we were young and we were scared to explore too much in case we got lost.

Pavel [Urban explorer]:

Here we are, in the legendary tunnels under the Soviet monument. I come down here for fun – it's just my kind of place. I like the atmosphere and the eerie quietness of the tunnels. I don't come here every day, obviously, but I visit the tunnels when I want to show the place to a friend, or when I have an idea for an interesting photography shoot. One time I crawled down here just because it was too hot outside. In these tunnels it's always pleasantly cool. Is it safe? Actually, I feel safer here than outside. It’s the safest place in Varna, really. Most people are afraid of the dark and those who aren't probably don't know about the tunnels, so this place is actually very safe. I mean, who would bother to come down here to rob or murder me? It's just too much hassle.

This place was built as a bomb shelter in case of an emergency, but nobody uses it anymore. This is the thing that irritates me the most – it took a lot of hard work and a lot of time to build these tunnels, but for what? To be left to crumble, forgotten and decaying? No. I think they could, and should, be used for something. Maybe turn them into a museum about that era of history, or even create an art gallery. Anything, really. Just so long as they’re not left

like this. Just because most people today don't believe in the same things people believed in back then, it doesn’t mean we should let our heritage disappear.

There are stories about more tunnels beneath where we are now. My friend’s friends say they got lost down there for three days. When they came out, it was through a totally different exit on the other side of town. I’ve even heard myths about secret psychotronic weapons labs, and a hospital nine floors under the ground. There are plenty of sealed doors down here, so who knows? Some of these stories might have a grain of truth in them, but obviously most of them are complete nonsense. These tunnels are large enough to disorient you, but small enough that you can’t really get lost. I don't know when they were built exactly, but I know that my grandfather's generation was involved. Our country had different ideals back then… ideals which today are seen as one of the most destructive forces in our history.

The monument above was built to remind people of something. Maybe that original meaning has been lost, but that doesn't mean we should destroy it. People worked really hard to build this, and I think we should respect their effort, if nothing more. You will probably hear a lot of different opinions about what should be done with the monument, but if you ask me, we shouldn't forget it and we shouldn't worship it either.

On the contrary we should renovate it, because it's in really bad condition right now. That way it can remind us of our past, so that we don't repeat the same mistakes we made back then. Should we really forget our past? Wasn't there a quote along the lines of, “whoever forgets his past is doomed to repeat it”?

30. Yastrebino

Sculpted frieze 'Alley of Immortality,' Yastrebino. 1984.
Sculptors: Ivan Slavov, Vladimir Ignatov

Caretaker:

Oh, you just want to see this monument? That's fine – go and take a look. It's not the best one though. You should go into the forest, and look at the monument in the place where they killed all the children.

Memorial to the Victims of the 1944 Massacre, Yastrebino.
Creators and date unknown.

31. Zelenikovo

MiG Memorial, Zelenikovo.
Creators and date unknown.

Petyr [Retired school teacher]:

The old MiG-17 in our village was engaged in combat once. It served under the Bulgarian airforce, flying out of a military base not far from here. Its pilot was a famous airman from this village. Look, they named this square after him – Ivan Krumov Grozev. Grozev was a record holder… he performed 18, maybe 19 parachute drops during combat. He's a national hero, but now there are pigeons nesting in the cockpit of his plane. They're not there now, they don't like the sun in summer – but they'll be back. Nature is taking a hold.

Then that monument over there celebrates all the soldiers from our village who were lost in wars – from the Russo-Turkish war, through to World War II – and that includes two famous partisan fighters from this village. I guess they built it about 40 years ago now.

These days, village life in Bulgaria is a tragedy. The villages are emptying, people are leaving – and there is no one left. After that the gypsies move in, and they steal from the old people. They even pull knives on the elderly residents, and take their pension money. It happens all the time, but what can we do? There's a village near here where some gypsies attacked an old woman, trying to take all her money… but she pulled out her dead husband's kalashnikov to defend herself! That gave them a shock.

32. Zimnitsa

'The Shepherd' town sign at the entrance to Zimnitsa.

Creators and date unknown.

Petyr [Bartender]:

The shepherd monument on the edge of the village? Well, how can I explain it… This village always had a lot of animals, it's a real farming community. Perhaps that's why they built it. They gathered money from the villagers to pay for the monument, but I still don't know exactly what purpose it was meant to serve. There was another monument too, further down the road, but it's not there anymore.

Appendix 3:

Interviews

Informal interviews with:

Caroline Trotman (Researcher),

Les Johnstone (Photographer),

Georgi Stoilov (Architect),

Dora Ivanova (Architect).

Semi-structured interviews with:

Adrien Minard (Art historian),

Andrew Lawler (Researcher),

Donald Niebyl (Researcher),

Todor Rusanov & Rafał Czarnowski (Game developers).

Guide questions for semi-structured interviews

To what extent is preservation of the site managed?

To what extent has memorialisation been achieved?

To what extent does the tourism experience offer reconciliation for the past?

What is the best use this site could have now for the country and its people?

Which factors – if any – stand in the way of future reconciliation through developed tourism?

How do you envisage the future of this site?

Interview with Caroline Trotman

Researcher (Goldsmiths University in London), organiser of the event 'Buzludzha: A Time-Specific Exploration'

22 July 2015 (by email)

RFM:

What does a 'Time-Specific Exploration' mean?

CT:

To me a time-specific event or exploration is related to two words: affective and experience. Concepts must be experienced and lived as a live-event performance. Months before I encountered Buzludzha 'physically', I already knew a lot theoretically – but then the experience is different, it nourishes the theory and vice versa. As the monument affects a person and vice versa, a person affects the monument (uncertainty principle, graffiti, looting, and so on.).

Finally I would say a time-specific exploration is like a photo, snapshot of something, it's temporarily unique. Both the person and the monument are affected by the encounter, hence they can stimulate a potential future... I hope i make sense! [This is] a powerful visual symbol that has the ability to trigger thought and mnemonic movement.

We are living in 'ruinophilia' period, I feel. [We are] quite nostalgic, as we can't really think of an alternative for the neoliberal system we live in. For instance, the next V&A big exhibition is about the 60-70s era... and so on and on. [We are] endless looking back at the end tail of history... much like *The End of History*, by Fukuyama. And the ruin aesthetic fits very well with that.

RFM:

What alternative to neoliberalism does a communist ruin present? I wonder if, in some ways, it reinforces our Western Cold War narrative. i.e.. We won. Communism is dead. Do you think that might be something that has an effect on Western visitors? The reinforcement of a narrative we've grown up listening to?

CT:

To me, not at all – the monument shows how the USSR was capable to build an amazing, creative, innovative kind of architecture... and the big Other was not that different from us after all.

RFM:

Does the ruination close the gap between us and the big Other, in some ways?

CT:

There are ruins everywhere (Detroit, etc.) and yes, maybe in a way this generalised nostalgia we are experiencing now could intra-connect the old binary system of the Cold War. [It] could help us realise that it was a political construct and not reality. It was just propaganda... and now the propaganda is being deconstructed.

RFM:

What is the value of this for Bulgarian people? Can they use it as they move forwards? Can it bring closure on a past filled with difficult heritage?

CT:

To me – for Bulgarian people it is a massive piece of their history and identity, that can't really be erased or avoided. If they want to know themselves better, [and] hence construct a

future more consciously, maybe they should not forget it. We all have a difficult heritage and it’s part of who we are. And I think it’s important to know it, if we want to move forward and have closure.

Interview with Dora Ivanova

Architect, director of Buzludzha Project Foundation

7 August 2015 (via email)

RFM:

Many Bulgarians I spoke to – even those with strong anti-communist feelings – said the monument should be preserved. Why isn't it happening?

DI:

I really want to believe this, but I am afraid that there are people who don't want to see the building renovated. Usually, the elderly people are nostalgic about the past and want to see the socialist heritage in good condition. The young people are also enthusiastic about preserving the history and especially this architectural wonder. However, there is a part of the society, mainly among the middle aged, who are strongly affected by the socialist regime, or more exactly by what is caused after its end. In the 90s they were young and ambitious, but there were no normal conditions for work, development, career, business, and so on. Many of those people don't want to hear about socialism or anything related to it. Of course, also among this layer in the society there are people, who appreciate the cultural monuments, no matter to which historical period they belong to, because they are witnesses of their time and the past shouldn't be forgotten. My impression is also that the majority of the Bulgarians share the opinion, that Buzludzha should be preserved, which makes me hopeful.

RFM:

What could or should be done with it?

DI:

The monument should be preserved. For me there is no doubt for this and it will happen now or then. The most logical future usage is a museum of communism. However, I think this concept will not work for this time and this country, because of the affection of many people about this period and because of the politicization of its function and association with present political parties. Beside of this Buzludzha is not only a symbol of communism. Its condition today shows the traces of the transition to democracy. Moreover, on this place the rebel Hadzhi Dimitar and his men fight for the liberation of Bulgaria. In this area there are hundreds of Thracian tombs from the antiquity. Because of this and the fact that Buzludzha is located next to Shipka - one of the national symbols of the country, I believe that the monument should have a national significance and usage, should unite the different layers of the society around the idea that the history and the cultural monuments must be preserved. My proposal is called ‘Buzludzha - Memory of Time’ and suggests a usage as a monument of the entire Bulgarian history, presented clearly and emotionally, through the atmosphere of the existing architecture. In this museum the building will be the most important and influence component.

RFM:

Is the damage permanent? Is it possible to save this structure? What would it cost?

DI:

The building has a reputation, that it is completely destroyed and nothing has left, which is incorrect. The glance and glitter is away, but the frame of the building is still there - the concrete structure, the steel roof construction, the mosaic, the pentagrams are in a visibly satisfactory condition. Despite of this only a construction laboratory expertise by qualified engineers can give an exact and correct evaluation of the present condition and the necessary strengthening of the construction. I spoke to diverse specialists, who all agree that the building can be renovated, but the big question is what would it cost. My initial calculations show that the renovation of the building as proposed in my project will cost around 2 million leva. It might sound a small sum for the scale of the building, but this is due to the minimal architectural interventions, which are planned. The main costs are for the covering of the roof, the windows, the panorama elevator and the heating system. All the rest must be only

cleaned and reused with minimal expenses. The big unknown value in this calculation is the cost for the construction restoration, which can vary very strong. Because of this, a construction expertise is the first step in the actions for the preservation of the monument.

RFM:

What need to happen next?

DI:

First of all, the owner (which is the state) should want to preserve it, because only they have the right to do anything with their property. Second, the owner will only be willing to do this if the people insist on it and if the majority is positive about such initiative. Finally, a promotion of the topic and its problematic situation is needed, so it reaches the wider public and becomes a national cause. The future of the monument Buzludzha can be decided only through wide public discussions. I believe that its outcome will be positive and will work for this.

6 December 2016 (via email)

RFM:

Should Buzludzha be remembered as a political site, or as an architectural site? And why?

DI:

For me Buzludzha is an architectural and historical site. What was politics in the last century is now part of the history. Of course, I understand the elderly generation, who lived during this time. They can very difficult take it as a history and preserve its evidences. For them it is a question of personal persuasions, success or failure. The problem is that we cannot wait until the next generations to preserve masterpieces, simply because they will not survive until then. Buzludzha monument is a great example for the national and east-European history, but also for the architecture and monumental arts from the second half of the 20th century. It is

simultaneously typical, but outstanding and unique with its function, shape, positioning and ornaments.

RFM:
What effect does online photo-sharing have on architectural preservation projects? Is it a good thing?

DI:

This is often the way how people get informed and involved about sites. This was also my case, I just saw incredible pictures of Buzludzha and was so amazed, that I did my master thesis about it and afterwards started the preservation campaign. Pictures and visualizations are the most powerful language to talk about architecture to the public. There are always several opinions about a written statement, but pictures provide direct impact, that cannot be easily manipulated. Moreover, pictures show the architecture direct, without prejudices, but also without the historical context. This is the reason why foreigners get easily impressed by the building and Bulgarians are often still confused about it. However, the photo-sharing can really help preservation projects or even make them happen. The interest towards Buzludzha is an indicator of its value and future potential. The reason, why the monument is in its present condition is, because people and authorities in Bulgaria are not convinced in its value as an object. Therefore, it has no status of monument, it cannot apply for funds and it is still abandoned. The great interest towards Buzludzha can make authorities rethink it not only as a political object, but instead as a historical artifact and architectural masterpiece, which can inform, educate, attract interest and tourism, which can only help a land with average salary in the tourism branches of €300. So keep sharing Buzludzha, it really helps!

24 October 2017

DI:

Buzludzha needs to be preserved before the mosaics are completely lost and the roof collapses, which might happen in the next decade, and before an incident with an illegal tourist happens. This might be a clear statement, but Buzludzha was and still is a political tool, which makes decisions about its future so difficult. In my opinion the only chance for

Buzludzha not to be lost physically and meaningfully, is to become a non-political heritage site and to be reused as a museum, which offers open forum for history and art. A productive discussion about the traumatic past is missing in Bulgaria, which leads to many social problems, including Buzludzha.

29 October 2017

DI:

I don't think anymore that authorities don't recognise its value. Before I thought people don't recognise its value and this is the reason why the monument is still decaying. After all this publicity inside and outside Bulgaria, after all the tourists and the interest, after all the events I organised, I believe that people do appreciate its value. However, it is still left in its present condition, because it is so politically controversial.

This is the reason why I don't continue with my work in Bulgaria. Before I thought I have to prove to the world what Buzludzha is worth. Now I know, that the world already knows it, but politicians don't care about worth, they care about policies and I am not sure how can I influence that. I have to develop a political plan, not an architectural one...

Interview with Les Johnstone

Photographer

22 September 2015 (by email)

RFM:

What is your personal experience, and connection, with the Buzludzha Memorial House?

LJ:

I have been [to Buzludzha] four times. Twice in the summer and twice in the winter. I prefer going in the winter as the place is more of a spectacle and it's more of an adventure getting there in the bad weather.

After visiting the building four times I've reached the stage where it may become a yearly pilgrimage. I prefer visiting the building in the winter. It's an excuse for a bit of adventure. It can be difficult to get there in the winter due to -20 degree temperature, foot-deep snow on the road up the mountain, mist, snowstorms and cutting wind. It's also a time to meet fellow urban explorers in an extreme place, old and new friends. We have a strong common bond and we are all there for the same reason.

My relationship with the monument has several layers. In the urban exploring community it's a bit of a Mecca, I feel that it belongs to me, and my fellow urban explorers. I feel this way because it's only in abandoned buildings like this we are free to do what we want, be there anytime, photograph it, explore it, sleep in it, arrange meet-ups, and at certain times be there on my own... and for some people, vandalise and graffiti it.

On another level I'm aware that this building has a huge historical and cultural significance for Bulgaria, something I'm not a part of at all. It's very much a symbol and reminder of the communist regime, signifying good or bad times depending on your opinion of that ideology. On that level I feel disconnected from the building as it's not my country and I've never lived under such a regime. I don't want to trivialise its significance to Bulgaria.

The building is deteriorating so it’s always different on each visit and I enjoy taking people with me for their first visit who I might have inspired with my own photographs and tales of the adventure. From a photographic point of view it allows me to improve on previous work, and try newly learned techniques such as night sky photography, motion controlled cameras and drones (next visit). It can be a spectacular testing ground for all that.

I'm happy with the graffiti where it’s appropriate in adding political comment to this place, such as the "Never forget your past" quote above the main door. It all adds to the political and social view of what the place represents. Other graffiti such as the current “enjoy communism" seems to be more self-indulgent of the artist and doesn’t take into account the context of the place. It’s worse when this is put at the front of the building. If I lived locally I would be tempted [to] paint over that!

Maybe this is because I'm a photographer and I think it spoils the shots of the building, where "Never forget your past" acted as a strong signifier of what the building and its decay is about. I don't mind some of the more fun graffiti on the side of the building, I guess the graffiti artists are taking ownership of it the same way us photographers and urban explorers do.

Interview with Georgi Stoilov (2015)

Architect of the Buzludzha Memorial House.

Translation by Mihail Kondov.

7 August 2015. Sofia, Bulgaria.

RFM:

First of all, I would like to thank you for making the time to speak with me. It's quite an honour – not only are you the creator of many of Bulgaria's most interesting monuments, but having been a partisan yourself during WWII, you're also the subject of many.

GS:

[Laughing] Yes, I was a partisan myself… the youngest partisan in Bulgaria. I was 15 years old then. I served in the First Sofia Brigade with commander Slavcho Transki. I was his courier, but not only that, I was in battles too. We fought Bulgarian fascists. It was 1944 when I became a partisan, along with my mother, father and everybody. This movement had taken hold of the whole country, and it was a just cause indeed.

RFM:

During your career as an architect, you've been responsible for quite a number of monuments around Bulgaria. Which ones were you involved with?

GS:

Well, let me see now. You know about Buzludzha, don't you? I designed one in Dobrich too. And one in Durankulak. Another one in Lovech district, in the village of Stoyanovo. I haven't been there since we built it, in 1963. I designed the Arch of Liberty at Beklemeto, in the Troyan mountain pass, and another at Gurgulyat about the [1885] Serbo-Bulgarian War.

RFM:

The pantheon at Gurgulyat is quite unique. It appears almost alien, this great pink pyramid beside a small rural village…

GS:

Here's why it is so… the initial idea was to place it on the hill next to the main road to Yugoslavia… to what is now Serbia. But we were friends at the time, and the Serbs thoroughly objected to the project. They said: *How can you speak of the war between us? Get rid of it!* And so we moved it further away from the border, away from the historic battlefield.

RFM:

Your Gurgulyat monument is shaped like a pyramid, while the Mother Bulgaria statue inside has a head like a sphinx. Did you knowingly draw inspiration from Egyptian motifs?

GS:

Yes, from the Egyptian and also Mexican pyramids.

RFM:

There seems to be a running theme of ancient civilisations in your work.

GS:

Well, that is true. Architecture needs inspiration and it needs to embrace international themes. Architecture is a world phenomenon, though of course, it also has many national characteristics. In the middle ages and around the revival period, national architecture [in

Bulgaria] was greatly developed. But later, it began to grow more uniform. Especially now, when the world is globally united. One can't come up with ideas that exist completely outside of the world's traditions. Works need to incorporate elements of quality world architecture. And as you know, I didn't study in Bulgaria… I studied in Moscow and in Paris.

RFM:

So you were able to draw inspiration from both the East…

GS:

And from the West, correct. In Bulgaria I initially worked for Glavproekt. My first significant work was Hotel Rila, you know it here in Sofia. Near Varna I designed Hotel International, at Golden Sands. A few more hotels as well. After that I was Mayor of Sofia. Then Minister of Regional Planning. Then, as I told you, I was a president of the Bulgarian Union of Architects and later I was elected a president of the International Architects Union.

RFM:

An impressive resumé!

GS:

[Laughs] Also, honorary member of many architecture academies. Later, on my initiative, we created the International Academy of Architecture in Sofia. All in all, this is my biography.

RFM:

Regarding Buzludzha, the shape is very interesting. So many of the monuments built here during the 1970s – your own, included – feel very masculine, with sharp shapes, squares and angles. Buzludzha feels much more feminine in design, and it seems to mark quite a

departure from the monumental architecture that preceded it in Bulgaria.

GS:

It was a reflection of the general state of Bulgarian architecture at the time. Bulgarian architecture too, witnessed large-scale transformations, and all in a relatively short period of time. After 9th September 1944, our architecture was entirely classical under the Soviet influence. This classical style is represented by the National Library in Sofia, or the centre of Sofia in general – in the development of which I took part as a student. That was our classical period, neo-classical. Soon after that though, from around 1960, we began to pursue a path of *world architecture*. We were looking at things built by Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and so on. This is the period that you accurately call more crude, masculine. By the 1980s though, we couldn't just remain in the same place. We couldn't keep making these big squares, and so forth. We began seeking out modern architecture.

RFM:

How much of this change was your initiative? Or were you aware of following a broader trend?

GS:

Every architect seeks those changes on his own. Everyone observes what is being done in other countries, what world architecture has to offer, and changes their style accordingly. World architecture was changing, and so Bulgarian architecture changed with it. In fact, our architecture changed before our [communist] government did – we were way ahead of the government when it comes to joining the global community. Our government, as you know, only transitioned in 1989… and that transition is still struggling. At least in terms of architecture though, we are now on the same footing with everyone else, I hope.

RFM:

Bulgaria features a very broad range of architectural styles today – from traditional village houses, to modernist town squares and futurist mountaintop monuments…

GS:

Of course! But you see, architecture has many different genres. One is public housing. Monumental architecture is its own very special genre, and it can never stray too far away from global traditions, from the earliest history up until today. As a result, you have here various ideas incorporated from the Egyptian architectural tradition, or from Mexican history. Or Roman arches, like my arch in the Beklemeto Pass. All sorts of things.

RFM:

Did your design for Buzludzha also draw on classical inspirations?

GS:

[Smiling] In Rome there is a building called the Pantheon. It is 40 metres in diameter… this one is 60 metres.

RFM:

How did that design come about?

GS:

Buzludzha was finished in 1981… but the design contest was announced 10 years before that. My design won it, but the shape of the original project was different. There was a wreath with six supports and a tower in the middle carrying a red star. This was the project that won the first prize. After that, the regional committee of Stara Zagora decided that the Buzludzha monument… well, the contest at that time was actually for four monuments. One monument

to Hadzhi Dimitar. The second was a monument to the founders of the socialist movement in Bulgaria. Another one to the Gabrovo partisan regiment, and the last project was to place a ruby star on top of Buzludzha peak. This was the requirement, and my design was the winner in that last category.

RFM:

They wanted a ruby star specifically?

GS:

Yes, with real rubies… Well, *real* in the sense that these were synthetically produced. But the intention was always to create a quality star. At the time, they made the first three monuments because those projects were comparatively modest. The last project was sort of left aside.

Ten years later, Stara Zagora's local government decided to finish it, because people were visiting the peak and there was nothing to see there! So they called me and said: *You have a monument design that won a contest, let's build it.* I told them however, that what they wanted was difficult. They wanted an interior area so they could hold party gatherings, host speeches there and suchlike. I told them, the project needs to be changed. They agreed that it was my right as author to do so, and so of course, I changed it. The tower was moved to the side. This saucer, this intergalactic saucer echoed popular themes of the era – cosmic, flying saucers. And that's how Buzludzha came to be.

RFM:

Where did the construction funds come from?

GS:

It was important that the monument should be financially free from the state. In the beginning, Stara Zagora district told us that they had voted for the project, and had

successfully secured the money required to construct it. But I said: *Alright, so there is money… but the people themselves need to build this monument.* The government liked that idea. So they collected donations, made souvenir postage stamps for people to buy, and so on. We managed to raise 16 million levs in total.

RFM:

And 16 million levs back then was a lot of money.

GS:

A lot of money indeed. The actual cost of the monument was 14 million, and the other 2 million went towards the construction of new kindergartens. So, in the end the monument was both ideologically and financially free from the government! It truly was an intergalactic monument of the people.

RFM:

The design certainly seems to captivate the imagination of visitors. You can go there now, and on any day you'll meet people from all around the world. Last time I visited I met tourists from Canada, Brazil, Australia…

GS:

And not from Bulgaria?

RFM:

From Bulgaria too. But many people are buying flights and travelling half way around the world just to see this one monument. How do you feel about that?

GS:

Well, first, about the appeal of the monument: back at that time Bulgaria was a Warsaw Pact nation. Contact between us and the West was therefore limited. Now however, Bulgaria is a member of the EU and is open to everyone. This provides an opportunity for the re-evaluation of all things in Bulgaria, both our treasures and also the legacy of our more stupid deeds.

RFM:

Do you think Buzludzha's decay plays a role in this attraction too?

GS:

Decay certainly plays a role here… but you should have seen it before, it was absolutely fantastic.

RFM:

The mosaics in particular were truly beautiful.

GS:

Yes, it was the largest mosaic project in Bulgaria. Around 800 square meters of mosaics. The monument was unique from this standpoint. Eighteen teams from the Union of Artists worked on the monument – creating paintings, sculptures and so on.

RFM:

Regarding the monument's abandonment, it's hard to find reliable dates. It seems the decay did not begin until the late 1990s however – and some sources even suggest the government played a role in the vandalism.

GS:

I did not follow the news closely but that is true. The destruction was primarily caused by the government of that time. When Ivan Kostov became prime minister, he dismantled the whole country… dismantled our industry, all the factories, all industrial zones, Sofia's western and eastern industrial zones. These were gigantic complexes and everything was utterly dismantled. Naturally, much of this was done out of spite toward the previous regime. I am not sure what Kostov did beforehand, he was probably nobody – but during this period he went on a rampage. He sent organised bands from the SDS [Bulgaria's 'Union of Democratic Forces' political party] to Buzludzha, and you can see the evidence there… the roof was damaged by explosions in an effort to remove all the copper. It could not have been destroyed like that otherwise.

RFM:

Regular citizens could not have caused such damage alone?

GS:

There used to be two monumental metal flags down at the front of the saucer… not mine, they were the work of another sculptor. I visited the monument a few years ago and when I got there, I saw a man with his horse and carriage there, chipping away the metal from the flags. Regular citizens have certainly taken a lot of materials away in this fashion, but to bring down that copper roof inside would surely have required some large explosions.

RFM:

Do you know when it all began?

GS:

With the arrival of Prime Minister Ivan Kostov. Immediately after the Changes we had a socialist government, then one from SDS, then another socialist government and later came Kostov. So 1997 is when this mayhem began.

RFM:

The same government who destroyed Georgi Dimitrov's Mausoleum in Sofia…

GS:

Yes, that's the one. Ivan Kostov, with Bakardzhiev as his deputy.

RFM:

And it all happened despite the people being against the demolition of the mausoleum?

GS:

Who listens to people?

RFM:

During the late 1970s, Minister of Culture Lyudmila Zhivkova was supposed to have been very much involved in the ideas for numerous monument projects. Would she have had any input regarding the Buzludzha project?

GS:

Look, architecture is a very special kind of art. It could not be mastered by everyone. Thankfully, our leaders understood that and said: *You architects are crazy people, do whatever you want. We'll deal with literature, painting, the theatre and so on, you just build*

what you want to. And so we decided to build world architecture.

Lyudmila, she was very proactive indeed. And versatile too. She was involved in foreign relations, with visits to India and China and so on. When it comes to monumental architecture however, she had almost no involvement at all. The bell monument [Banner of Peace Memorial in Park Kambanite] was made on her suggestion, here in Sofia. But that's the only monument she was personally involved with.

RFM:

So from beginning to the end, there were no comments, no suggestions…

GS:

Absolutely none. I told you, in the case of Buzludzha, there was a contest at first and then I was given complete freedom to design the project. Afterwards, when they called me from Stara Zagora, I told them: "Alright, I will do it my way."

We built the monument with a construction crew, an army building corps under General Delchev. Lyudmila didn't have any input at all, and Zhivkov had only one himself – next to the main entrance, he insisted on leaving a message to future generations. But I wrote it.

RFM:

The time capsule?

GS:

The capsule, yes. I personally wrote it. But this suggestion was his only input… aside from speaking at the opening ceremony. After that, the monument went into use. There was a schedule for Party members, both local and otherwise – important discussions took place there, meetings and rallies and so forth. But the process of actually creating the thing was left entirely to us crazy architects.

RFM:

The opening ceremony for Buzludzha was held 27-28 of August 1981, less than 40 days [a customary mourning period in Bulgaria] after the tragic death of Lyudmila Zhivkova. It's strange to see images of her father, Zhivkov, at the ceremony, cheerfully inaugurating the new monument.

GS:

Well, what was he to do? He was the leader of the nation. He couldn't show personal emotions at such an event, and the opening ceremony could not be delayed.

RFM:

Nowadays, it seems like Buzludzha has the potential to be a significant tourist attraction for Bulgaria. People from all over the world are coming to see it. A lot of Bulgarians, too, say they would like to see it preserved.

GS:

The people may want that, but Bulgaria's leaders do not. They are subordinate to the European leaders, and the latter are subordinate to America.

RFM:

And American leaders certainly don't want to preserve something they might view as a Soviet symbol…

GS:

They have no reason to want that. Although, to be clear, this is *not* a Soviet monument. It is completely free from that association. Of course, the ruby star was manufactured in the USSR because we didn't have the means here… but other than that, Buzludzha does not have anything to do with the Soviet Union.

RFM:

So it celebrated Bulgarian Communism, not Soviet Communism…

GS:

Exactly. The first person to create a Marxist group in Russia was Dyado [Dimitar Blagoev, founder of the 1891 Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers Party]. That was before [Georgi] Plekhanov, and before Lenin. The first was *Bulgarian*. So we lead the way there as well.

The [Buzludzha] star was the largest illuminated star in the world, at 12 metres in width. The Kremlin stars are 3 metres wide but this is 12 metres… the largest in the world. So no, this is not a Soviet monument. It's a world monument.

RFM:

For many of the monuments in Bulgaria, ideology appears to be interwoven with design. Stars, fists, hammers… the politicisation is often a feature of the shape itself. Buzludzha feels different however, more like a universal vessel. Of course its mosaics contain political themes, but the monument itself seems more suited to being repurposed than perhaps any other monument in Bulgaria.

GS:

I agree completely! Your reasoning is excellent.

RFM:

Do you believe this monument could still be preserved?

GS:

Of course! And if it is renovated, it would need to be renovated to the state it was in before… though perhaps with some new elements included. For example, the tower… why not put a lion there? A symbol of Bulgaria instead of the star. Pantheon of Bulgaria. And we can put the khans inside – Kubrat, Asparuh, all of them. So, if the monument is renovated, it will include these new elements too.

RFM:

What challenges would a project like that face?

GS:

This is a two-sided question. One side is ideological, the other is financial.

About the ideological side… all of Buzludzha's architectural elements, except the star, have the potential to be universal. The star, however, is symbolic of communism. There is no way around that. Dora Ivanova wants to keep the star. But if we are turning this into a Pantheon to Bulgarian Heroes, the star needs to go. Bulgaria's symbol is the lion, and I believe a red lion should replace the star.

Now as for the financial question… what's it going to cost? First and foremost, the roof needs to be repaired immediately. Rain and snow are getting in. It needs to be protected at once. This is the first thing that needs to happen, it'll likely cost one or two million levs [€500,000-1,000,000].

RFM:

That's not so much.

GS:

Exactly. After that, we would need to make a project for the artistic layout and interior redesign. Of course, if we are to make it a Pantheon to Bulgarian Heroes, we have to include large figurines of the khans and tsars, and the liberation heroes – Rakovski, Levski, Botev, Vazov. Heroes and cultural activists. Boris Hristov [an opera singer] also needs to be there. I have comprised a list of those who ought to be featured… [18th century historian] Paisiy Hilendarski, [patron saint of Bulgarians] Ivan Rilski, [founder of Bulgarian socialism] Dimitar Blagoev and [communist leader] Georgi Dimitrov.

Now, Dimitrov was a very interesting and versatile character. Like it or not, he needs to be included there. The modern attitude of forgetting Dimitrov baffles me, as does the attitude of modern Russians towards Lenin. How can that be? As if they played no role in history. These men accomplished a great deal.

RFM:

How would such a project be funded, and brought to life?

GS:

The design part of the project we can do ourselves. That entails no cost. However, realising the project requires money. Who's to provide it? We may as well resort to the people once again. But the people may not all support this.

RFM:

Perhaps you could look further afield. Thousands of people already travel to Bulgaria just to visit the monument… if they were each charged a small fee to see inside, it would soon add up. And those who didn't visit could still have the option to donate. Many foreigners are

interested in this monument simply for its unique architecture – they have no personal connection to the ideology, and no negative feelings towards it whatsoever. Dora is talking about looking for funding in Bulgaria, but as I already told her, I think nowadays it is much more likely to come from outside the country.

GS:

Oh well, so you came in the capacity of creators even! Now, that's entirely different. I hadn't really thought of that. Alright, you just made a significant contribution towards the renovation! We need 8-10 million levs, not more. That's around 5 million euros… so this could work.

RFM:

I believe it could be possible to raise money by creating an international website for the monument, in English. And encouraging donations this way. And perhaps then, those donating could be commemorated somehow inside the monument too – to give them incentive to donate more. For example, in Pyongyang I visited a monument that had one small room by the entrance, which all visitors pass through, and the walls in this chamber were covered in small bronze plaques, each showing the name of an individual or group who had donated money to the construction. The effect was very visually pleasing, but it also gave donors a sense of really having been involved and remembered in the project.

GS:

This is a beautiful idea, I love it. Alright, so we should establish a foundation for this project then. I already told this idea to Dora, so she would have a proper platform to present her architectural proposal from. We will register it. It's not difficult at all – I already have multiple foundations I manage. This will become a legal entity. It can then request to become an owner of the monument, since nobody wants it. We will then need to gather some influential people within the foundation, both from Bulgaria and from abroad as well. You talk to your contacts, and gather donations. I know people… so I will write some letters. First

and foremost, to architects. Secondly, to people who are interested in general. So, this could be done.

I have deliberately stayed out of all this until now, so that people wouldn't say I wanted more glory for myself. I've had enough of that already. But if people from across the world, not only from Bulgaria, want to see this happen, then that's what's important… and if there is sufficient interest in restoring the monument, then of course it needs to happen.

Interview with Georgi Stoilov (2018)

Architect of the Buzludzha Memorial House.

Translation by Gergana Dyakova.

23 May 2018. Sofia, Bulgaria.

GS:

Back in the planning stage, we asked, what will be the purpose of this monument? Well, once per year we'll celebrate the founding of the party, but also everyday there will be people coming from all over Bulgaria. Then, I decided that as there will be people coming, gathering, talking, playing music, declamations and so on, I decided that there should be an indoor space. In the beginning the pillar was here, but then I decided that it's disturbing the interiors, that's why I moved it on a side – it turned into the composition which you now see. Furthermore, those were times when all over the world people were talking about space saucers in the sky. When we were almost done I called the Union of Bulgarian Artists and asked for people who can make the mosaics inside. They came. They were about 22-23 people who made all the mosaics which you now see. For the 1981 celebration of the party anniversary, the monument was ready. And they opened it very grandiosely with lots of people. Since then, it lasted for about ten more years. It was visited every day, but changes happened in Bulgaria and the new authorities decided to demolish it.

RFM:

Ivan Kostov. Same as the mausoleum.

GS:

Yes, Ivan Kostov (laughs). That's right. But they couldn't destroy it because it is colossal. It's made out of ferroconcrete, very strong. They wiped out the mosaics, broke all of the marble in the auditorium, but the monument still stays. (laughs) And now there are people

coming from Western Europe, America, Canada, but no one in Bulgaria speaks about Buzludzha.

RFM:

I've taken 8 tour groups to Buzludzha, since the last time we met and spoke about it and they come from all over the world. My last group… I can show you actually. [Shows photograph] This is very, very misty... but these people, they're from Australia, Mexico, Britain, America, Kenya and Bulgaria. Here's another tour group. This time, it's Germany, America, Wales, France, the Netherlands.

GS:

So international! [laughs]

RFM:

Yes, very international. And this again mixed group: Scotland, America, Austria… This is Michael, he was here when I met you last time. That's me and Michael. He sends his regards. He's working in Albania now. But I think architectural tastes are changing right now, and I think a lot of this architecture from the 70s - the brutalism, the architecture inspired by the Corbusier, Miec van der Rohe is going back into fashion I think.

GS:

I don't think that there is a return of constructivism, it's not true. It's from the 20th century, from the socialism. Corbusier, Miec van der Rohe and so on – they created a very powerful wave, very powerful style – the constructivism, but after that a pseudo-constructivism appeared all over the world and the architecture lost its leading ideology. Now we are in state where there is no specific style, everything is free. Every architect is free to do everything they want.

RFM:

Yes, I understand. So, I suppose that leads me to a philosophical question.

GS:

…how many post stamps in order to give me the money… So, after I heard from Stara Zagora that there are enough money, I told them: "you've got money, but this monument should be built by the nation/people" and they told me: "All right, good." They made the post stamps, released them and 16 million were collected, but the monument with all the infrastructure costs 14 million, 2 million remained for childcare facilities.

RFM:

So then, they've not been taxed from people. They're not coming from taxes, it's a choice that they had?

GS:

Yes, yes. Whoever wants to give money for the monument, buys the post stamps and the money comes.

RFM:

So, my philosophical question about that is: can the monument, if it's preserved, for example by the project proposed by Dora Ivanova. Can the monument exist as a museum or it's inseparable from its politics?

GS:

(Grows angry) Dora Ivanova has no right to work on this, she has no right to make a project on top of somebody else's project. Copyright… there is such law for copyright. (relaxes, then laughs) Anyway, yes, it can. The political idea is over, it's already a history, so the

monument will become a museum. But it needs to be restored. It has two parts. One is the inside and the second is a couloir around the internal part. The external part needs to be changed and all the Bulgarian tsars and khans to be put there. Because Bulgaria has been under Turkish slavery for 500 years. The internal part should be kept is it has been.

RFM:

How do you feel about Dora's idea? To preserve things, not fix them, but preserve them.

GS:

(laughs) Wait, wait, wait. No. 3-4 million will be needed for all the mosaics and marble to be recovered, around 2 million euro.

RFM:

Ok, for the main hall, the pantheon. And for the roof, for the windows?

GS:

Of course, new ones are needed – roof, windows. All this has to be fixed because now all the snow and rain falls in.

RFM:

So, I was there just a week ago and they had a security guard up there.

GS:

They are securing it so that no one can get in to fix it.

RFM:

Yes, maybe… [laughs] I spoke to the Regional Governor in Stara Zagora, I told him that people from all over the world come just to see the monument, from Australia, Sweden, Brazil… and he told me "they are coming to see our beautiful mountains" [laughs] He thinks they are coming here from the Andes and the Alps…

GS:

And why were they not coming before Buzludzha?

RFM:

Exactly. So, he told me that in his opinion, if they destroy the monument then even more people would come to see these famous mountains.

GS:

Idiot.

RFM:

In Kazanluk are better and Galina Stoyanova, she's very positive, she's the mayor of Kazanluk.

GS:

Yes, she's positive. She is also an architect.

RFM:

Oh, really? So she understands what is involved a little better. I spoke with the guard last week and he said that most days they have about a hundred people coming. The record is the

last day of April – they got 400. So, it's incredible, even when politicians are trying to stop people from coming that this many people would still find their way there. And I think that if they put some money into fixing it, making it safe and encouraging people to come and appetizing, it would be able to pay for itself.

GS:

Of course, if it is recovered, for 2-3 years it will be possible the investment of, let's say, 3-4 million to be collected back from the visitors. I haven't been there in the last two years. Two years ago there was a Polish journalist who was really interested in the monument. She told me: "I want to see it in real" and I said: "OK, I'll take you there". So, I took her and I saw a crowd of approximately hundred people, Americans, French, they all asked me for an autograph (laughs)

RFM:

I have a small question, actually, I was interested. We are staying in Rila, was this basin your design?

GS:

No, no.

RFM:

We were… This is just in front of Rila and I was just wandering if the shape was.. just interesting.

GS:

If you want to see all my artworks, not all but my main works - about 50-60 of them, they are exhibited in the University of Architecture. All those were here before.

RFM:

Thank you, thank you. I saw some (?)..where was it... You were working in Astana...

GS:

Yes, Astana, I remember. Two years, I make 3 or 4 projects for Astana. In the first year we laid the foundation, and suddenly came a lady from Astana and she said to me “I don’t want this shape!” (laughs) “I want a cube.” I said: “I’m finished with you”. I had an agreement about a new one there but I said “I have received nothing, I want nothing from you ... I’m finished!”

RFM:

They had... Norman Foster was working there, wasn’t he?

GS:

Idiotism.

RFM:

You know the pyramid…

GS:

It’s not a pyramid, it’s stupidity.

RFM:

I read a theory recently about… someone has written a book about Astana saying that it's actually very profound and is full of very clever meaningful symbolism.

GS:

I don't know.

RFM:

When I was there, my feeling was that it's very kitsch, it was someone with lots of money trying to show off.

GS:

They have no architects, they have no artists, that's why I finished collaboration with Astana.

RFM:

So, I was also curious about was there much communication between the architects here and the Yugoslav architects?

GS:

Yugoslavia? No. I had in the academy two professors, but in the academy not work conditions. We had 2 levels, 1st level is professor, the second is (??) from Yugoslavia. From Serbia I have two people, professors. No.

RFM:

I was curious, because I've seen… feels like similar things some times in a monument.

GS:

There are. Yugoslavia was very active in the times of fascism. When I was 15 year old, together with my mom and dad, I became a partisan. We were going to Yugoslavia to get guns. There were English airplanes which were dropping schmeissers. After that we returned to Bulgaria and went to Rila mountain. Our brigade was very big – 350 partisans. When we moved (??) were following us. They always knew where we are. We couldn't hide. When we went to Rila mountain, the headquarters… I was the courier of the commander of that brigade Slavcho Tratski – I was his courier and was listening the discussions in the headquarters. They decided that the brigade should part and everyone should go to his region. We went in the Radomir detachment.

RFM:

There were some terrible events, I think there were some places like Yastrebino, Antonovo, where the authorities were catching partisans. I've seen some of the monuments to be... That was a dangerous job. I'm very interested in the idea of what looks like religious themes in some of the memorial sites and the way sometimes these places, these complexes could take on the role that churches had before. I wonder if you feel there is any thrift to this... I find it very interesting to see how sometimes memorial complexes, the way they bring people together and they have the mosaic icons almost often (??) the spaces feel very special and almost holy, I wonder if you feel in some way they were replacing the role of the church?

GS:

No, absolutely no. The partisans were against religion. This is a new philosophy.

RFM:

I just asked, because when I go to places like the memorial complex at Shumen or how I imagine Buzludza must have been. The feeling I have at these places is as if… It's very impressive... a contemplation, respect and (a just?).

GS:

That's right. This feeling is present in every monument. In every monument there is this feeling of respect, admiration. But the model, you see it, the model is very different. In Rome there is a pantheon which is 40 m, and this one is 60 m. and the shape is totally different.

RFM:

I've seen several of your buildings and monuments and I feel that they are recurring themes of ancient civilizations.

GS:

Of course there are, of course. Architecture is an eternal art, so there are links, similarities. The architecture, the big architecture has links. Visit my exhibition in the University of Architecture.

RFM:

I will go, thank you.

GS:

In two days it will be over.

RFM:

I've seen the Roman Arch at Beklemeto, the Pyramid at Gurgulyat, it's very interesting. But I think this makes these things timeless as well. For example this is last week and the shape, the lay out, the silhouette of it is, I think, it's timeless.

GS:

These are the two epochs – the fight against the Ottoman occupation and the second – the fight against the imperialism.

RFM:

Oh, the two torches.

GS:

Yes, the two torches. The sculptor is Stoyo Todorov.

RFM:

It's interesting. I've seen a lot of monuments form the 1970s, especially 1976 that talk about 3 generations: 1876, 1923, 1944. I wonder if you know whose idea it was to… It seems to be a very big organized movement, celebrating the 3 dates.

GS:

Where have you seen them?

RFM:

Batak, Perushtica, Kalofer.

GS:

OK, this is the history of Bulgaria. It hasn't been a common idea. These are the ages with the biggest/ strongest tension for the Bulgarian people.

RFM:

Were most of these monuments local ideas, local expressions?

GS:

Some of them are local, of the region where they've been build. Others are national. Buzludzha is national, despite the fact that the initiative came from Stara Zagora, but in a matter of fact it's national. But now, I wrote a letter to the Minister of Culture that it has to be recovered. The Minister responded that there is no such monument in Bulgaria.

RFM:

I wrote a letter to Europa Nostra with Dora Ivanova – she wrote it in Bulgarian first, and then she sent it to me as some notes, and I finished it in English. It's a heritage organisation that's part of EU. To qualify for UNESCO protection something has to be preserved exactly how it was and they need a detailed plan how it will happen, so that's a big project. But this other group Europa Nostra is part of the EU. Every two years they announce a list of the most endangered sites in Europe and because of this letter that we've sent them, they said that Buzludza is one of the most important examples of heritage. So, I think that's why people like the BBC (??) and they're interested.

GS:

Where do you live? Are you from England?

RFM:

I'm from England, but we live in Varna.

GS:

Ah, Bulgarian (laugh)

RFM:

I have a map… This is one of yours, isn't it? I think this is one of my favourite monuments that I've seen. I find it fascinating the way it appears. Appears simple from a distance and when you come close you realize how complicated the shape is. Stunning like, this is fantastic! How did you created the forms, the wooden forms for that concrete? This is an incredible project!

GS:

(laugh) And difficult too.

RFM:

You must have had very skilled carpenters and to do all this on the top of a mountain is wow! Bravo! I very much like this one. What have to happen next to Buzludzha? What is the next step and how would that happen?

GS:

First the roof has to be fixed and the windows – immediately. This will cost not more than 200 – 300 thousand leva, not more. It has to be saved from the destruction which the rain and snow are causing.

RFM:

And who will do it?

GS:

Who will do it? Europa Nostra (laugh)

RFM:

I hope so, I hope so. I think there is a real potential for raising money from lots of different people, donations from people, but not just in Bulgaria this time.

GS:

Who will do that?

RFM:

There are so many people visiting. There are so many people writing about it. So, I'm briefing about the history of the monument CNN and for Russia Today as well. People are so interested and every time there is an article discussing this, you can see hundreds of comments by people saying "it's such a terrible shame" "it could have been saved". And I think of all the people saying this, if each one gave 1 euro…

GS:

Not possible, because the Ministry sais: "Such monument does not exist."

RFM:

(laugh) and you need new staff in the Ministry…

GS:

New Minister is needed, we are waiting for new elections. (laugh)

RFM:

What is changing I think, I mean there is interesting young politicians, or younger. Galina Stoilova I think is very – very helpful.

GS:

Socialistic party, Kornelia Ninova – the head of the socialists, wanted to take care of it for 10 years, to recover it and to give it back to the nation. Then, the minister of culture back then Vejdi Rashidov (idiot), but he is a sculptor (idiot) said that this is impossible. I'll show you the article in which he…

GS:

These are some policemen… they've put policemen in front of Bulzudzha. "The saucer of Bulzudzha – a hit in the United States". And here: "Americans are looking for UFO in Bulzudzha area". I couldn't find the one of Vejdi Rashidov.

RFM:

Yeah, I know people from all around the world that are coming to see it. I could

(noise)

GS:

I'll show you some more of my projects. These are skyscrapers in Russia. It's most of a kilometre tall, 600 m. This is skyscraper, right actual. This is my design.

RFM:

This is incredible. (noise) Are you still working on this now?

GS:

This is another for China. This is (??) new. Different design. You'll see everything in the exhibition.

RFM:

Yeah, I look forward to it. Ah, I know this one.

GS:

This is Gurgulyat.

RFM:

I think you designed, I think the embassy in Kabul.

GS:

Yes, only design. Now I have a new idea – to build a design for Saudi Arabia where summer time it's 60+ degrees, or the same for Russia when winter time is -60. It's Urbia, the name is Urbia – for about 5000 people.

RFM:

So, uh residential, commercial, everything in one.

GS:

Everything inside, everything. There will be 5000 people inside, there will be housing, offices, commercial areas, entertainment – there will be everything inside. A new fantasy.

Adrien Minard

Art historian

28 June 2018 (via email)

RFM:

To what extent does contemporary tourism to Buzludzha offer potential channels of cultural and political reconciliation with a difficult shared history?

AM:

I would say that, at first glance, such tourism does not play a major role in a reconciliation process of memory insofar as those visitors, until recently, were merely young connected hitchhikers from Western Europe, whereas Bulgarian people did not pay any real attention to the collapsing monument. But nowadays, things are a bit different. Since the monument has attracted a growing interest among Bulgarian authorities and media, and now that a new generation of Bulgarian students are coming back home for summer vacation and decide to visit Buzludzha (of which they often heard about abroad), the monument could generate a different vision of the communist past (still often associated with labour camps and repression in the collective mind).

RFM:

Have you been to the Buzludzha Monument yourself?

AM:

I've been to Buzludzha once with two friends in October 2015. The fog and the temperature were terrible. It was almost impossible to take pictures, but it was not so serious, given the enormous amount of clichés available online.

RFM:

What is the most desirable outcome for the monument?

AM:

My greatest wish would be a restoration of the roof and the reconstitution of the most deteriorated mosaics, with no new function at all, because according to me the monument is self-sufficient as a “lieu de mémoire”. I am very much attached to its emptiness and kind of sacrality, so I would like that it keeps on being a sort of abandoned temple dedicated to communism, just like a Roman sanctuary or a pharaonic tomb.

RFM:

What is the worst outcome?

AM:

For me, the worst outcome would be its transformation into a commercial business, like a luxury hotel or a restaurant, which would be at the total opposite of its original meaning. More generally, I am in favour of preserving the remains of Twentieth century vanquished regimes, as well as for any sacred relic of an ancient civilization, without any interference into their past appearance/significance. Why ? Because as material “archives”, such vestiges help to comprehend past ideologies and alternative ways of thinking.

RFM:

Should Buzludzha be considered first an architectural site, or an ideological one?

AM:

Both all together, but I have to note that its ideological scope is too often ignored by people who just appreciate its “aesthetic” brutalist value. This situation is partly due to the “emotional” impact of the pictures shared on social networks and the prominent role of photographs in the rediscovery of the monument. Hence, the power of images entails an oblivion of history.

RFM:

Can buildings like this be rehabilitated to serve a new purpose? (ie. Can the design and ideology of a monument be separated?)

AM:

Yes they sadly can, especially when they are considered valuable for the market of tourism industry.

RFM:

Would Bulgaria benefit from having a museum dedicated to its socialist past?

AM:

Personally, I would be, of course, very interested in visiting such a museum, which could complement the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia if it presents the different dimensions of the communist experience, but is not be focused solely on repressive politics or terror as it is the case for example at the National Museum of History in Tirana.

RFM:

Do any of the political ideas illustrated in the monument’s art resonate with your own political outlook?

AM:

Well, that's a tricky question! I am not an activist but I guess I have an obvious sympathy for left-wing narratives, a special interest in the history of communism, and probably a fascination for socialist aesthetics. I have to admit that these affinities are not fully rational, but partly motivated by a nostalgia for the period when capitalism was challenged by alternative models.

RFM:

Do you believe such a project could find funding?

AM:

Definitely, especially since that European non governmental organization put the monument among the top ten endangered sites that should be urgently preserved, but this funding also probably need a consensus between Bulgarian political parties concerning the future of Buzludzha – this could be more difficult.

RFM:

How do you explain the current interest in Buzludzha?

AM:

There are many reasons. Undoubtedly, I shall begin with the role played by social networks, where pictures of spectacular sites are perfectly fit to raise immediate interest and can be easily shared or retweeted. Thanks to its location, the monument is so easy to shoot that even amateur photographers can obtain great pictures and may hope, by putting them online, to increase the number of their followers. The possibility (until recently) to enter the monument despite the warning notices prohibiting access has attracted many urbex fans looking for a

thrill. Buzludzha's viral fame is also linked with a growing public curiosity about the eastern margins of Europe in a context characterised by new tensions between Russia and the Occident. Moreover, a certain postmodern mood has entailed, since the fall of communism, a growing fascination for ruins as metaphors of the collapse of ideologies of progress and emancipation, as well as a kind of nostalgia for twentieth-century millenarist hopes. Buzludzha, with its ruined sci-fi shape, embodies the failure of such hopes and thus perfectly matches with our present dead-end situation.

RFM:

Do you see this as part of a global shift in architectural tastes?

AM:

The recent interest in Buzludzha is obviously resulting from the brutalist fashion and the current taste for concrete. The site has benefited from the editorial success of several photo books dedicated to modernist soviet buildings of the Brejnev era such as Frédéric Chaubin's CCCP published by Taschen in 2011.

RFM:

Do you see this as part of a global shift in tourism tastes? (ie. Related to the rise of 'Red tourism,' focussed on sites of communist heritage.)

AM:

Yes. Although I am absolutely not a specialist in that matter, I am quite convinced that this tourism corresponds to a new way of traveling which has a generational meaning : young educated people are more and more interested in discovering sites that are different from what their parents appreciate when the travel abroad. That is why they are attracted by such an alternative heritage which was, a few years ago, not even mentioned in touristic guides.

RFM:

Do you think the monument would attract more visitors, if it were made safe? (How much does the ‘adventure’ play a role in its current appeal?)

AM:

My answer is in your question. If [Buzludzha] is rehabilitated, and even more if it is transformed into a kind of consensual patriotic museum, there is great risk that its frequentation will be lower than today, because the monument would have lost all its exciting significance.

RFM:

As a tourist attraction, would you consider Buzludzha to be a ‘dark’ destination?

AM:

Not at all. To my mind, the site is not linked with death, suffering or catastrophes. Since it was dedicated to the so-called great achievements of the socialist regime, it radically differs from mass killing sites for example and should be rather considered as a “red nostalgia destination”. But this is just my own point of view….

Andrew Lawler

Heritage researcher

3 November 2018 (via email)

RFM:

To what extent can contemporary tourism to socialist-era memorial sites (for example, Buzludzha) offer potential channels of cultural and political reconciliation with a difficult past?

AL:

I think that this is an impossible question to answer: Are you talking about non-domestic tourists, or tourists from within a country (or former constituent countries)? I think non-domestic tourists' opinions are more heavily formed and influenced by what they read, watch, and are told than by visits to such sites. With regard to 'local' tourists, again, it's not the visits themselves that influence opinions, rather the way information is presented to them (both formally through institutions and informally by ideas within the family, local community and friendship circles, as well as the media).

RFM:

Have you been to the Buzludzha Memorial House yourself? Or if not, are you at least aware of it?

AL:

No, I haven't visited the site myself (I've only spent a few days in Bulgaria – in Sofia and a small town over the border from Pirot), although I am aware of it.

RFM:

What is the most desirable outcome for the monument?

AL:

I'd say the most desirable outcome is stabilization of the monument, involving a full and careful conservation project, followed up by a long-term management, conservation and condition monitoring plan.

RFM:

What is the worst outcome?

AL:

The worst outcome could either be continued decay and eventual destruction or a large-scale 'restoration' plan that sees irreversible interventions undertaken which destroy the monument's integrity.

RFM:

In contemporary discussion, should memorials such as Buzludzha be considered first as architectural sites, or as ideological ones?

AL:

It depends what you mean by 'such as'. Buzludzha isn't in the same category as many such memorials. It's far more an ideological imposition on the landscape than war memorials seen in Bulgaria and neighbouring countries, and should be seen as such, as well as an impressive architectural and artistic feat. However, many sites that have been fetishized in a comparable

way over the past decade are war memorials, and should be seen (and respected) as such first and foremost, rather than as either works of art or ideological agents.

RFM:

Is it possible – or even desirable – for memorial structures to be rehabilitated, in order to serve a new purpose? (ie. Can / should the design and ideology of a monument be separated?)

AL:

It is possible for (parts of) some memorial structures to be repurposed – I have no problem with this happening in, for instance, local museums that were established or re-purposed with the primary intent of establishing a narrative of a given historical event. This is primarily the case with museums, which need to be flexible (to a certain degree) in what they exhibit. However, Buzludzha is quite a unique example in this respect – it has been built in an isolated location, and is primarily a usable space. I don't know how it could become a sustainable space were it to be re-purposed without some form of 'inorganic' tourism, such as shipping people on organized visits from other tourism centres in Bulgaria for day trips, or implementing visitor fees that price out the local population.

RFM:

One proposed future for Buzludzha is to redevelop it to feature a museum about Bulgaria's socialist period. Do you think this is a good idea?

AL:

No, I think this is a terrible idea. I think it is too isolated to attract sufficiently high numbers of visitors to be sustainable or to benefit any communities within the vicinity, and I would also be worried about who would be responsible for the curation of such a museum. Also, I'd be worried about how such an initiative would be funded; with Bulgaria's history of

misspending EU money, and the EU's recent attempts to redefine all forms of 'totalitarianism' as equal, I think this would be a recipe for disaster.

RFM:

Recent years have seen a dramatic increase in foreign visitors travelling to socialist-era memorial sites in southeast Europe. Have you been aware of this yourself, and if so, how would you explain it?

AL:

Yes, I am aware of this. I think there are a number of issues at play here. First, with the Middle East and many African countries that have been relatively accessible (due to transport infrastructure and visa policies) becoming less attractive to younger adventurous tourists – largely for safety and economic reasons – in recent years, they have turned to SE Europe as an alternative. Second, people who grew up in Europe after their families emigrated from the late 1980s onwards are reaching an age where they are starting to bring friends over and visit independently, rather than going on annual family holidays to see grandparents, etc., and are travelling around countries that they may have visited every year, but have only seen 3 or 4 towns in before. Because of these two issues, I think the number of tourists in and of itself is increasing, rather than exclusively 'foreign visitors travelling to socialist-era memorial sites in southeast Europe'. The visiting of Socialist-era memorial sites is just one small facet of this. However, I will concede that, with the explosion of social media in recent years, (pictures of) these sites do hugely influence people's decisions of where to go and what to see. Having said that, in the 16 months that I regularly visited the Partisans' Cemetery in Mostar June 2012 to September 2013, I think I saw foreigners there (excluding the schoolchildren from the international school located a few hundred metres away) on 3 or 4 occasions, out of maybe 50-60 visits, each lasting between 45 minutes and 8 hours (averaging somewhere around 2 hours). I will ask a few colleagues who works with smaller communities about opinions on this, but I have never heard anyone describe an influx of foreigners 'coming to see a monument'; I think it's just the perception people have as a result of social media and mainstream media representations. However, I don't have any stats that could support or refute either view.

Edit – I just had a response from the colleague. She's asked around in two semi-rural communities in NW Bosnia about this, both of which have monuments mentioned (one fully written up, one just placemarked) on 'Spomenik Database'. Neither (from straw polls of local historians, municipality employees and people in the town/village centres) location has seen an influx of foreigners, and for one of them (the one with the placemark) both the municipal employee and some people in the village centre added the comment that she was the first person without a direct familial connection to the place to have ever shown any interest in the monument post-'95, to the best of their knowledge.

RFM:

Do you believe foreign tourism to sites of socialist heritage can have a positive effect – and if so, what is the best way to cater to such visitors?

AL:

I think that in the posing of this question things are the wrong way round. The policy regarding sites like this shouldn't be about 'the best way to cater to visitors' but about 'educating visitors as to the best way to treat them'. I've witnessed evidence of 'souvenir' hunting, in the form of fragments of memorial plaques disappearing, graffiti (normally carved, rather than using spray paint or ink) left by non-locals (i.e. common British, German and other Western European names), and other damages ranging from evidence of camping and campfires to littering at various monuments and memorials throughout Bosnia & Herzegovina. This kind of (to reduce things to a single phrase) neo-colonialist attitude from visitors, whereby locals' monuments are there to cater to their needs, needs to be confronted. If attempts are made to educate people about behaving around war memorials and other sites of significance as if they were in their own country, i.e. through signage and (possibly) promotional leaflets created for such sites and available from bus/train stations, hostels/hotels and local museums and tourist information centres, then I believe that the relationship between tourists and such sites will improve, and we can start analysing the positive effect.

RFM:

The Buzludzha Memorial House currently sits abandoned and severely decayed. As such it has attracted much attention from 'urban explorers' and many visitors describe the ruinous quality of the site as a strong visual attraction. Do you believe the monument would attract more or fewer visitors, if it were made safe? (How much does the 'adventure' play a role in its current appeal?)

AL:

I think the ruinous 'quality' is a strong attraction. However, this kind of attraction of a site is unsustainable. 'Ruin' sites become 'cleansed' through continuous visits (paths are worn, mementoes are taken, etc.) or lose their 'exclusivity' as more and more people visit such sites and they become better-known (compare this to ruinophilic attitudes of Ruskin et al. in 19th century Britain and sites such as Villers Abbey, among others, in the south of Belgium), leading (in combination with other factors) to a wane in interest. On the other side, decay may become so severe that a site becomes dangerous or is destroyed, leading to it no longer being an attraction. As with the example of Villers I mentioned, this then becomes an issue for conservators: How can a site be preserved as an 'authentic ruin'? With interventions from authorities made with the intention of preserving a site as a ruin (while concurrently increasing access, regulation and monitoring), its 'exclusivity' will be even less of an attraction, thus acting as a deterrent to many of those for whom the abandonment was an attraction. Therefore, while such a site being made safe may deter the current visitors, there's a strong chance that these will no longer visit if it isn't made safe, as a result of its loss of exclusivity and air of abandonment and/or destruction, too.

Donald Neibyl

Researcher, author of the 'Spomenik Database' website

15 November 2018 (via Skype)

RFM:

To what extent can contemporary tourism to socialist era memorial sites offer potential channels of cultural and political reconciliation with a difficult past?

DN:

I saw that question and I was like 'where do you even begin'? The first thing obviously is that any attempt, whether it be in Bulgaria or in the former Yugoslav states, is a very controversial sort of proposal or a concept to even think about. You know, trying to integrate officially the communist heritage of a former communist republic. I'm in the process now of working with the RCC doing this touristic route. One thing the NGO keeps emphasising is 'let's do everything we can to not mention ideology as much as possible.' Not mention the 'c word.' Because, in an effort to do this, they want to do everything they can to strip away the sorts of controversial and more touchy elements that politicians will kind of shrink back at.

[However] I don't think that this idea of hiding the history is really going to amount to much, because you have this idea of trying to hide it or escape it… that's just going to make people more interested in it, and wonder: *Why is the government hiding this*? You know? It's kind of like with Chernobyl… if people make it exclusive, or off-limits, then that's only going to make people more curious and more eager to want to explore it in the first place. And maybe even people… maybe the governments… opening up to it and embracing it, in an official capacity, will make people less interested in it. Because then, all of a sudden, it becomes: 'Oh, this is government sanctioned… this is official now, it doesn't seem so fun and exciting anymore to visit it.' So, if it is embraced, to what point can it help with reconciliation? I mean, obviously it *could*. I guess the question is what is there to be reconciled exactly?

RFM:

I guess the question was deliberately vague because I wanted to see which way people went with it. As it applies to Bulgaria, I think largely researchers in Bulgaria would look at this question and consider this as reconciliation with the communist period. But then in the post-Yugoslav countries, where many people and groups are still reconciling the ethnic conflicts of WWII… I guess you've got multiple levels of difficult history there, to be reconciled, and the Yugoslav period isn't necessarily remembered as the most difficult period.

DN:

I only actually kind of fully understood this just recently. Do you know how they reconcile it in Slovenia as far as their monuments? I found this kind of interesting… One thing I noticed while travelling there is that Slovenian monuments are by far the best kept now… Compared to any other of the former republics, they are in the best condition. And I thought, *Oh, maybe they are just more in touch with... they've been able to integrate the narrative better into their history…* and I thought all of these ideas, but one of the main reasons, is that their way to reconcile their heritage has been to just valourise *everybody*. So, they valourise not just their anti-fascist heritage, but also valorise their fascist heritage at the same time. They built monuments in the post-war – post 90s war – period to the home guard of Slovenia, who were the collaborators with the Nazis during WWII. And they treat them with the same respect as they do their anti-fascist monuments. That's the official government way of reconciling the heritage there… to just say: 'we're just going to honour everybody.'

Some people would see that – people in the West especially – and say 'This is ridiculous, this is atrocious, that Slovenia is commemorating the Nazi collaborators, there is no place for it.' For me, I'm not trying to pass judgement, but I can see how other people might think such a solution is not an acceptable one.

RFM:

I understand that approach of honouring everyone. I wouldn't dare venture whether I thought it was right or wrong. I don't know. It's one approach.

Regarding the role of tourism – So I am looking at it from a Western perspective and looking at how other Westerners are looking at it and I think you would agree there is a rapidly growing number of people from outside the region travelling into the region to see things associated with that heritage. It's interesting because Andrew Lawler said, for example, it wasn't true. There's no increase in numbers. I didn't anticipate someone refuting what I took to be a given.

DN:

I guess I wonder where is he getting his information from. What is he basing that of?

RFM:

Local communities, he says. People who live in the region, tourism providers. Not the same sources as me, obviously. But it was interesting, it took me back, that was interesting to hear.

DN:

I don't quite understand where Andrew is at as far as studying the monuments as he is. Whether it's like, you know, he's kind of [attracted more] by the region or the subject or the monuments. Where his fascination is or what his approach is, you know there are different ways, to approach academically or preservation or ideological perspective. Because I know a lot of people that are interested in monuments like this guy, Owen Hatherley. He's interested in the monuments for what they do to promote the ideology he subscribes to. And I think there are a lot of people that study them also because that like I think Sanja and some other people are ideologically kind of invested. They think that they are studying them promotion of them will be part of kind of resurrecting them. Not in a way of awareness to tourists but resurrecting the ideological messages behind them.

One thing that people told me was that in places like former Yugoslav states, something like, academics very often become politically motivated or they become activists themselves because of I guess maybe the limited capacity to engage in any other way with the topic they are passionate about. They explained it to me that there is some set of situations that where,

you know, in the West I think most people who study a discipline don't necessarily think that they are an advocate of it. Something like that. They are coming from an objective perspective. I think academia in the West will at least offer people that assumption from the beginning. That they are objective kind of academic professional. Whereas people told me that in the former Yugoslav states, at least there, probably other places too you can't assume that the people who are researching are doing so objectively. They are doing so potentially because they had invested political beliefs in researching or writing about what they are doing.

RFM:

It's interesting actually as well because I can see the agenda divide here. But in Bulgaria the assumption is that if you are interested in Buzludzha, if you think it has any value at all, if it deserves to be discussed, let alone preserved, you must be a communist, obviously.

DN:

You were talking about a museum. A museum is fascinating. I can't see it being anything but a political lightning rod. Either it will present the history in a glamouring and over-the-top fashion which will draw attention to it, the wrong attention to it. Or it will present it in a very condemning and like this piece of the dark times. Millions were suffering under this evil regime. And not to say which side is right or anything, but it will hardly be… hard to imagine the museum being put together in a thoughtfully non-political ...

RFM:

You are part of facilitating increased tourism to these places. You are getting feedback from people all the time. They are using you as a guide. Do you think it's helping people locally? How and why?

DN:

Well, one thing that we are working towards with this RCC, the Regional Cooperation Council, part of the project is focusing the tour route on places that are deemed to be underserved by tourism. And so we are going to, planning to create, there's going to be a whole kind of network of ways to engage the tourists who come with these communities, with businesses, with the business districts and vendors, retail services, you know, restaurants, lodging. It's all going to be engineered into the experience from the very beginning. So we are creating avenue for people from around the world to experience these. They will be doing so in a way also serves the local communities which is something I think done to a small degree. I mean just by the virtue of being in these locations you can't help interact with the communities but I think this will help make it a more purposeful endeavour for telling people where to go, letting people know what tour attractions are there locally. I mean just in the process of doing my research I found so many amazing things that were literally just a few meters from a place drove right by.

RFM:

I guess in some ways seeing foreigners looking at something which people might have otherwise taken for granted is invariably going to affect people. It might cause them to re-evaluate things for themselves. I guess it is kind of unusual. Do you think that can help promote more conversations about some of these things?

DN:

At the very least it might make people rethink the idea of wanting to destroy them. They realise what they have in the community is potentially a cash-cow to use a delicate phrase. Maybe rethink like maybe we should take good care of it. Maybe we should stop setting up grills next to it or something like that or making bonfires right up against it. And you know preserve it as something that people from around the world want to come here and explore and experience. And is that a good thing? Sure! Respect from the tourists happening amplifies the experience and from money being injected into the community but as far as these people's specific culture or feelings...is it our business to try and change those? You know, like as far as...for instance let's say, you know, let's say there are some monuments that represent some history that the people that are around it have very negative feelings

about. Is there, let's say, don't quote me on this but let's use Jasenovac as an example. A lot of people who live around it probably might not have very good feelings about it. But because they don't doesn't necessarily mean that anything bad should happen to the monument. If it starts becoming a great tourist attraction that might even amplify people's resentful feeling towards the monument in the first place. Before there were just a couple people coming but now this symbol of resentment potentially all of a sudden gets even more positive attention might make these people feel even more angry towards this. Not to say this is going to happen in these cases but I think is certainly something that could happen. Just from what I understand about the relationships that some people have towards some of these monuments.

RFM:

Yeah, that's interesting. I mean the idea that maybe some of them are better off flying under the radar.

DN:

Yeah, I talked to Sanja about it, maybe bringing these to a wider attention only puts them further at risk. There is one of the monuments that I've not labelled on my map that she told me about near Dreznica by Zdenko Klacio that is probably one of the most unknown sites and least visited and least documented and she told me where it was and I found it despite how difficult it was. At her request I had not pinpointed that site yet because I think it is such a special site, so few people know about it, so few people been there and even though it is already looted maybe pinpointing it only would serve as target for people who had less than enthusiastic feelings towards it to target it because while it has been looted of all of its metal resources, there are no graffiti anywhere. It's completely untouched as far as defacement or spray paints or such things that you see a lot on other sites. I could pinpoint it eventually. Maybe at some point in the future but I think there's also maybe something good about having one of these sites be the elusive one. The rare Pokemon if you will.

RFM:

Back in… I think it was June or July I stumbled across a statue of Lenin in Bulgaria. Officially there aren't any. It's in a small village by the Danube and it was paid for by local citizens. I thought about writing about it but don't know if I will because I wouldn't want to be responsible for necessarily bringing it to the wrong attention.

DN:

It's only really a matter of time. Something like that won't go unnoticed forever and maybe bringing it up in a constructive way before let's say some government official finds out about it and quietly brushes it away and maybe you go back a year or two from now and it's no longer there. And there is no fanfare or recognition, not saying there should be fanfare but you see what I'm saying. It's a cultural and historical artefact. No matter what you think about it ideologically, there is significance to that.

RFM:

So we've talked a lot about monuments in the Western Balkans. You haven't been to Buzludzha, have you?

DN:

No, I have actually. 2012. Then they still had the big graffiti up at the top that said "Forget your past". Because it fills into what I had thought about history in the first place. Which was one of the first conversations we had in Belgrade. How destructive, history as a tool and as a social phenomenon, can be. This idea of thinking that we understand history, this thing, you know, is history even a real thing? Can you understand something that's not real, because I don't think there is a real understanding of history. I don't think such a thing can even exist. You can understand what you think you know about history or you can think you understand of what you think you understand….tadatada. I don't want to diverge too much but yeah.. my impression were that it's deeply affecting structure was luckily opened. Someone had broken and opened the thing. So we are getting inside of it. Seeing it was just unbelievable. It's state

of degradation, having our guide tell us about everything. He was a very good guide. From Hostel Mostel.

The mosaics were amazing and the tour guide was very keen on making sure we were respectful , not looting things he was telling a story how he came a couple times ago and found these kids chipping away the mosaics. He got angry at them and was yelling at them. You are just humbled when you are there. It's such an amazing space. And that's amplified by the state that it's in but I think even right after it was opened obviously it would have still been a stunning site to behold. Not just the architecture but the setting it's within. It testifies to the awesomeness of the design of it. What's interesting is that people in academics get angry at foreign journalists that try to characterise monuments in Yugoslavia being alien or UFO-like. But I don't think there is any question that UFOS and aliens future technologies wasn't in the mind of the designer who created Buzludzha. Obviously you could say better than I can but you look at that and it looks like a goddamn UFO. If the creator didn't have that in mind then that's the wildest coincidence that I ever heard of.

RFM:

I can give you an actual direct quote here. I asked him about design. About how it looked and he said: "this intergalactic saucer echoed popular things of the era – cosmic flying saucers". And he talked about how he really enjoyed some sci-fi films in the 1950s.

DN:

I can't say for sure for all the monuments in Yugoslavia but I know for a fact there are many of them that did overtly the artist integrated these ideas kind of futurism I don't know about aliens but certainly progressive otherworldly sort of architecture. To refer to them as futuristic or otherworldly in many cases the artist would be flattered by such characterizations. I think Grmec, Podagaric, Jasenovac, they can be straight out of any sci-fi film. Jasenovac himself was fascinated with the idea of his monuments being kind of interpreted in all sorts of wacky ways. Did you hear that story of him when he was building the Novi Travnik site?

They were supposed to be snakes with heads on both sides. So when he was building that, when he was in the later stages of it, apparently there were some Austrian hill hikers or something like that coming through the region and saw everything going on there and they came up to him and asked if it was some sort of excavation. He said that was the best compliment he had ever received in his life. That sort of mistake. They were trying to capture all sorts of things. Bogdanovic was trying to capture a lot of ancient symbolism. Others were trying to do more futuristic interpretations of things. I disagree with Owen Hatherley and the idea that they shouldn't be understood as futuristic or otherworldly forms. That was certainly what some of the designs had in mind. Can't say all of them. Certainly some of them.

RFM:

One of the problems here is that monuments to the anti-fascist in Bulgaria are so interchangeable with monuments to the Red Army and monuments to the glory of communism that just through people's associations being simplified over time. It almost gives the anti-fascists a bad name which is a sorry place to get to. You see a lot of monuments here which are monuments to the anti-fascist movement or whatever and there would be graffiti, or falling apart, left to crumble. Which I think is unfortunate but this whole thing of going the other extreme as Lawler and Hatherley suggest to take everything at face value and whatever the monument says – happened. That's the story you've got to tell about that monument. I don't think that's helpful either. I think you need to come in the middle somewhere.

DN:

I want to quickly insert my interpretation. A lot of people like Lawler or Hatherley say that what needs to be remembered first is the history and the things that monuments are commemorating. Obviously, these do commemorate very tragic events, very notable historic events. But the thing is that choosing what to commemorate in the Yugoslav state was not chosen on the basis of what event was most tragic, or what historical event was most important. The way they were chosen was on an ideological basis, as far as what individual sites will be most helpful in communicating the ideology and the message of the Communist Party in Yugoslavia. Because there are tons of sites where really tragic occurrences... you can

look at Sarnishta, Sremski Front, barely anything was done for most of the lifetime of Yugoslavia to commemorate these sites. It was only at the very end. Barely any meaningful effort was done to commemorate these sites. These sites were problematic to the narrative of the party. So therefore they were marginalised. They really can't say these are at the centre historical sites, because they are, but only to the ends of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Not in a definitive sort of way.

Or Gumlioto, Kino, Bleiberg, there's other stuff. Many people on the anti-fascist movement were rather forget about and not commemorated. People who are taking this approach – *they should only be remembered for historical reasons* – are simply, in my opinion, trying to massage their personal ideology. Like trying to say these are universal. They are not necessarily as universal as you try to illustrate. They are universal from the perspective of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. That's it. Not in any real sense of universalism.

RFM:

Being opposed to the same ideology does not inherently mean you are on the same side as someone. It's a nice simplification to sympathise with a group of people who call themselves anti-fascist 70 years ago but that doesn't you would like what they were trying to build, necessarily. Or their methods.

DN:

The chetniks of Serbia were certainly not communist but they were anti-fascist.

You can say that the current state of the UK is more socialist than Yugoslavia ever was in some respects. One thing I found interesting there were a lot of subversive leftist organizations within Yugoslavia that were persecuted who thought that Yugoslavia's government was way too far right and needed to be overthrown with something more representative of the people. And I thought that was really fascinating because a lot of people think communist countries are so left, they are so progressive. But that's not the case. There were anti-Yugoslav government factions within Yugoslavia. Not because they were conservative or fascist but because they didn't think the socialists were far left enough.

RFM:

Going back to Buzludzha… What's the best outcome for it and what's the worst outcome for it?

DN:

I think it depends on what kind of communities you hope such redevelopments are... Who do you think you want to serve really? Because at the end the day there are different interest groups who would like to see different things or different people that the monuments could serve and any number of ways it could be approached to serve each one of those different communities whether it's international tourism like the way you optimise for international tourism probably will not be the same way you would optimise it for the people of the country of Bulgaria. If you have this approach to redeveloping it, the first thing that needs to be isolated is who are you redeveloping it for, exactly? What do we hope that they get out of this redevelopment. Is it a heightened sense of touristic adventure? Or is it a deeper understanding of what this place was? What it did? Or how it operated? Or is it something else entirely?

RFM:

What's being discussed as a potential solution at the moment is essentially doing it for Europe and making it one of Europe's heritage sites. And the touristic experience will be aimed largely at foreigners. The idea being that Bulgarians would best be served by a monument that catered primarily to outsiders that brought money into the country. It's got to serve the country. But while Bulgaria is still deciding how to process that history, at least in the meantime it might serve the country by bringing foreign money in.

DN:

That can be said for most of these sites. I can't think of any other way to develop them that doesn't directly involve the groups that are most interested in them. I think at the end of the day that's international tourists. And maybe through that avenue maybe people themselves will find ways to be invested in them as a cash cow or as a way to better understand their own history. I don't know about Bulgaria but I think people in some of these countries, the younger people give a critical look at their own history. Because a sufficient amount of time has passed. But there is no way to do it that would make everybody happy.

RFM:

No. It's impossible. What would you say is the worst outcome for it?

DN:

It's hard to say what would be THE WORST. Arguably complete annihilation would be the worst outcome for it. I think that goes without saying. If it was turned into a museum, that's being used as a tool, a device in and of itself like what we were saying if I were a conduit to glorify communism or some sort of anti-communism lightning rod. I think both of those would not be best. Because they would allow it to be even more of a device of, maybe even more so than it was before. Which will threaten its future.

Did I tell you about the Yunicorns project? There is this group of Yugoslav expats, living in the New York City and they created this array of miniature brass figurines in the shape of the monuments, maybe about 6-7. They are really beautiful little creations. Everything is cast and hammered in NYC. It's spelled YUNICORNS. They are neat little things. They wanted to lend some of my writing. They also created these little pins. I met them in NYC and they gave me some and a little book which has information. Here you can see what they look like. Yugoslav academics I talked to – Sanja and Vladina – they hated it. They think it's exploitive, they think it's evil what they are doing. They wanted to stop what they are doing. I was really surprised opposed everyone I talked to in former Yugoslavia was about that project. They are saying it's commercialising, it's exploiting the images, that sort of anti-corporate excuses you can hear in that part of the region for a lot of stuff. I just did not and still do not get it. They are giving part of the money to organisations there, doing the best-

case scenario for something like this being put together. I don't see anything they are doing that could be done better. There are infinite amounts of ways this could be done worse. They are doing everything by the book sort of way. I just can't understand why people are so angry about it.

RFM:

I am trying to think of another example of a war memorial becoming a commodity like that.

DN:

People go on tours in Auschwitz and they sure pay money to go there, it's not for free. I'm sure they have a gift shop where you can buy some sort of merchandise that depicts the likeness of what they have there.

RFM:

For me it also comes down to where the money's going. It sounds like they are doing it right. It is different because these architects, I mean Stoilov as well, they seem to be of the same kind of thinking where they're taking these awful events but they were not dwelling on it, they were making something fabulous about the future. Kind of growing out of the mass graves and aiming for the future. So I don't think it would offend them to think that their designs are being mass produced.

DN:

If you would add people like Miodrag Zivkovic for instance. He went from making these amazing anti-fascist monuments to turning around making nationalist Serbian monuments. Same with Marko Music. He went from making anti-fascist monuments in Slovenia, he started making fascist monuments to commemorate the home guard. So you can't say to these people we are some sort of... so involved with the ideology that they would be offended. They were making money at the end of the day. They were businessmen at the same time.

They were artists but they were also businessmen making a living. I think a lot of people are being obsessed with being offended on behalf of other people. ‘Oh, you are offending the author.’ Well, let’s hear the author say that.

It’s easier to understand for instance Jasenovac, I’m sure you were familiar with some of the marketing blunders with some companies trying to use Jasenovac. That sunglasses company... There are ways to do it right and ways to do it wrong. What Yunicorns is doing is something right whereas that Jasenovac one company was clearly doing it wrong. I don’t think it takes a rocket scientist to pick on that one.

RFM:

What do you think of Golf Club Wastelands?

DN:

I haven’t played the game so I can’t comment but from the images I saw, it’s hard to say. Not that I feel offended. I can understand a perspective from which someone could be offended by it. It’s hard for me to make judgements because it’s not my history its not my heritage, not my place to feel or be offended. That's for other people to decide. For me personally, my judgement would be that it's ok, it's not a big deal. Does it add, or is it antagonising? Maybe, in a way. But these are exotic looking objects, there is no way to get yourself around the reality that these things are futuristic, they are otherworldly. And to expect that people are going to blindly conform to this understanding that they are historic sites they should be always respected and appreciated only for their historic value is a bit silly.

RFM:

What about physically interacting with them.

DN:

I think we are talking about the parkour? I think it depends on which sites we are talking about. Some are clearly much more sensitive and sacred, others are not so sensitive or even dismantled and destroyed in such away. You know the Koshuta site the one falling over. If someone was to walk up on that. I don't think there is any problem with that. But jumping on and climbing on the Jasenovac flower, I think that would be taking it too far.

I can't remember. I don't think they climbed into the flower but I think they climbed on the supporting structure. I mean when we were there on the memorial, people were climbing the supporting structure.

I think Andy Day, he's the one Vladimir Kulic called out publicly in his paper. He could have found someone much more on the wrong than Andy Day. But at the same time justification Andy Day uses is very similar to a lot of people that they are skateboarders. You can see the stuff they put together: we are paying respect to these by exploring them and we are really understanding….datatada kind of like really the pathetic kind of half-assed excuse just to skate on some cool shit. That's what Andy Day is doing but his kind of rationalisation is not too far from theirs.

RFM:

He takes a position of saying this was happening before I got here. I'm just documenting it, writing about it.

DN:

He certainly uses a lot of his posts to sell his own products.

RFM:

I suppose maybe that complicates things. But I get where he's coming from.

DN:

That's why I try to do my best not to complicate myself too much as far as my involvement with the monuments. Not necessarily trying to promote or became an activist on behalf...or trying to sell merchandise or products. I mean the book is one thing but the book has a place and is done with the best of intents.

RFM:

I doubt anyone is going to mistake it for a cash grab.

DN:

No. My book does everything in its ability to tell the history and context of the sites. And if it's a cash grab, then I haven't seen any of it yet.

RFM:

Would it be as interesting if tourism to a monument like Buzludzha, if it was made legal and safe? People have listed it as one of the great 'urban exploration' destinations of Europe. But by the time tour buses start rolling up, and there's a ticket desk…

DN:

Yes – they will be onto the next thing, whatever the next Holy Grail or sacred site of urban exploration is. I think those groups… I understand why they don't want to pursue this sort of experience. This idea of place...Leaving your space and going to another space. Nature is one time you can go out and unquestionably be outside your space. Another is the ruins of old society or civilizations or whatnot. This is another place you are unquestionably outside of your habitat. That is why people are drawn to them. If Buzludzha was another museum then people would say oh I am bound up in my space again. I am not somewhere else. And everyone has a different concept of what outside their space is. For some people is leaving their god damn house, for others going to another country, other people it's going to

Chernobyl when they had no guard and they were getting in illegally. There is going to be that mass exit you speak of but do you care at the end of the day if those people stop coming.

RFM:

They won't be necessarily be the ones spending money.

DN:

That's a good point there. Are they doing anything for the local citizens there or the country?

RFM:

They'll spend some money in the country at least. But many don't stay long after seeing Buzludzha.

DN:

People go to Bulgaria just to see Buzludzha and leave? Oh wow. See when I went there, I didn't even know about Buzludzha. When I went to Hostel Mostel they had some pictures of this strange creation on one of their little tour packages. I was like that looks like fun, looks like it could be interesting. I was in Bulgaria for like a week or two just going to different places and ended up in Veliko Tarnovo because some people said it was a cool place to go to. Buzludzha was among the places I visited that day, amongst couple others. The weird thing is people fly to Bulgaria just to see it...there is so much there.

There will always be a surge of people. I don't think there will be a loss if they stop coming. And I don't think their group is worth catering to in the first place.

I didn't answer the best-case scenario also. I think putting too much money recreating that sort of exalting ornamentation would be wasted money.

RFM:

One idea being discussed is creating a virtual experience – to minimise the work that goes into literally reconstructing communist symbols.

DN:

That would be a way to do it without having to physically recreate them. Think of it like rebuilding the ruins or something like that. They don't necessarily rebuild the ruins that they find. You see them in this ruined state which preserves them historically but doesn't try to recreate them. That's probably the best way to do it. Good to hear that's the approach they are taking.

RFM:

It's one idea on the table, at least.

DN:

I was going to say that the RCC project I am working on now... I didn't apply, they messaged me out of the blue. They said *We are getting this project together – we'd love you to apply for it*. *We think it would be perfect.* When you have that sort of thing happening it's a testament you are on the right track.

However, at Buzludzha… a project that size… in the growth of a project like that there will be people who come along and want to take it from you once you've done all the groundwork. Like – *We know it's a sure thing now. Now we can go in.* Maybe they were just waiting for you to do the heavy lifting yourself so they don't have to. I expect that sort of thing to happen. I think it should be anticipated. I mean, hell… You might get Hilton coming along wanting to build a skyscraper right next to it, who knows.

I think what you are doing as far as activism is different to what people like Sanja are doing. She is doing what she is doing because of the ideological component. I feel people like her and Owen Hatherley an Andrew Lawler. They see their place as activists from that

perspective while your perspective is more like saving the structure. Full stop. And trying to do from an ideological-free perspective.

The building is clearly worth saving. Things like that are worth saving. I think reckless destruction of history, no matter what history it is, whether it's Civil War monuments or monuments to communism, I don't think they should necessarily be destroyed just because the history is problematic. If they are preserved, they should be done so in a thoughtful way. The preservation of a certain monument should not be done just because you think slavery should be brought back… or the preservation of a communist monument because communism should be brought back.

RFM:

I would love for someone to do a good treatment on the comparison between American civil war monuments and monuments here. Though I don't know enough to write that myself…

DN:

I've heard some people say there is no comparison, there is no similarity… *don't even try to make such a comparison*! But I think there certainly is. But to wade into those waters would be incendiary. You'd better be certain about what you are saying before you say it. I think the same can be said for every monument. They generally ride the wave of some sort of social phenomenon. No monuments are built in a vacuum. Their creation is a catalyst for something bigger than they are. So, it's not surprising such correlations can be seen in Civil War monuments, and probably about any kind of monuments.

Todor Rusanov & Rafał Czarnowski

3D Designers and Developers

20 June 2018, Skype

RFM:

So you've been working on this game, *Buzludzha VR* – what stage of development is it at now? Is it ready to share?

RC:

Well, it's ready enough in a sense the form and the design and size are nothing I don't think we are going to change that much. So our version is ready. The thing that's not ready is the final package going to release to the public which is the whole kind of experience surrounding the monument. The VR experience that is. So once we call the shots which should take a bit more, like maybe a couple of months.

TR:

So basically we are working on the interactivity, the overall user experience, because we'd like to make it public so people from all around the world can download it and we should make sure they are able to use the experience without us being there

RC:

What we used to do and we are going on basically VR is another exhibition that we are invited on. We were always there with the equipment and the VR headsets so we able to explain how our...how the Buzludzha VR experience works and to interact with it. If we are not going to be there and just release it to the public for anyone essentially to download, then we need to somehow explain that through the user interface and the experience design. That's basically our focus, what we are doing now.

RFM:

It sounds like you've spent years of your lives on this.

TR:

We keep improving it and we keep expanding the exploreable area. A few months ago, we expanded the experience and now you are able to go to basically the area of where the torches are. So you can start your experience there, climb the mountain, the hill and make your way to the monument.

RFM:

That's interesting, because I assumed…I get the impression that was very much intended as part of the memorial experience. You know, starting there. It's like a pilgrimage. You are meant to sort of see it, approach it. That's really interesting that you are incorporating that.

TR:

As you can imagine, it takes time. It takes time to develop the area, to make it believable and just to add the right level of detail.

RC:

There are a lot of technical stuff that we basically have to keep in mind apart from making it look beautiful but also to make it work. We want to be able to enjoy it without any technical problems and issues so that's our focus.

TR:

The experience itself is pretty easy to explain. You put the goggles and it's as if you are looking around the real world.

RC:

It's a one-to-one translation of your motion to the virtual world. It's kind of hard to convey virtual reality just by talking about it. You really need to experience it. You basically have a set of two motion controllers in your hands. Controllers that you use to move around in the space basically using a teleportation function. So imagine having a laser pointer. So wherever you point the laser pointer at, you press another button you get to teleport to that place. Without having to physically walk around even though you can still do that within the confines of the physical space that you are currently at. So if you are in a room for with the VR headset and have only 2x2 meters for example because there I no space to move around physically by you can alleviate that by just teleporting through the virtual world. But you are still within your physical space.

TR:

So for example teleportation would be a great way to get quickly from the torches to the monument but once you are in the reception and you want to explore objects in greater detail, you can move around in your physical world, in your room and… Obviously, your room has certain size and virtual reality allows us to overlay a grid, a wire frame…

RC:

The overlay is basically showing where the physical boundaries of the space are. The physical walls are so you don't bump into a wall if you are wearing a VR headset.

RFM:

So, what sort of hours do you put into creating this environment?

TR:

Countless, countless hours.

RC:

It's hard for us to put into one total number. It's not something we are doing constantly, in a constant flow of time. It's when we have a moment to spare to work on some bits. That kind of work ends up in time, that's why it drags for such a long time. It's not a constant flow like a full time job. It's more like a hobby.

TR:

The thing is we keep coming up with new ideas, new interactions new areas to develop at. At some point we just have to say: "Stop, that's it."

RC:

That's when we have enough and finally release that. Hopefully that will happen in the very near future.

RFM:

How many years has it been since you started?

RC:

We started thinking about this project back in May 2015. No, that was June 2015.

TR:

I think exactly three years ago. I think it was three years ago we went to Buzludzha and measured the monument.

RC:

We took photos and took measurements of some bits that we needed. Based on that, at the start of 2016, within the first quarter of the year we developed the prototype, but the… the data taken, the final model, that's basically the results of those four months of work between January and April.

TR:

That was the proof of concept that we can do it.

RC:

It was part of our dissertation and honours.

TR:

Since then, we've gathered a lot of feedback from Georgi Stoilov, from the architect. We [also] had meetings with some other architects in Bulgaria and here in the UK. Also feedback from people because we were doing a calculation that we have presented the project in person to at least 600-700 people over the course of two years.

RC:

That's on the VR headset – a proper, proper experience. It sounds like a crazy number but once we add up all the events that we've been to and all the people that we showed it to. That's a very accurate approximation at this time.

RFM:

I can believe it. So what did Stoilov say?

RC:

Well, we didn't actually manage to show it to him on the VR headset but we showed it on the screen, just on a laptop as a playable walk around so we were able to explore the monument within on the same time just on the laptop. We didn't have the equipment with us there, unfortunately. He loved those, he got really emotional as well.

TR:

Initially he got kind of confused. He was sure that we are showing him footage of the monument when we were outside. And then when we got inside, he was like: "Ok, it's not really like this. How is it done? What happened here?

RC:

He couldn't piece together the fact that that this was a virtual representation. Our take on it. He really believed this was a video footage essentially. I guess it must be the whole concept of transferring something from reality to a virtual sphere and being able to experience it in a completely different way than you would walking on it or something.

RFM:

One thing that I find really interesting, looking at your trailer and some of the images on your site, is that you've completely depoliticised the monument. You are celebrating the structure, and the shape and the spaces… but without any communist symbols. So do you see this as a vision of a potential future for Buzludzha?

RC:

I think we are seeing it as a potential future. How it could it could be restored and brought back to life for a different kind of purpose. Using the space of the monument as a space for events, for a concert hall for example, for an exhibition space, a gallery and panoramic corridor. It's something that we honestly believe could be achieved in real life. Like, if there was a push to bring it back to life, to restore it...We don't imagine it would be restored to its previous glory. Having it the same way that it used to be back in the 80s. It's like building on top of history but not forgetting about it as well.

TR:

Once you get on top of the hill, you don't really think about the communist party or the history of the monument. You know, the first thought that I had when I saw Buzludzha for the first time was: "Wow is just like… amazing, such an achievement. To build such a huge structure on top of a mountain that's like 1,400m high…

RFM:

It's an achievement, exactly.

TR:

The effort that went into building this structure, that's the fascinating part about it.

RC:

That's what we are trying to celebrate in our redesigned version… essentially this is what we think is the focus: the preservation of the architecture and form and style of the building. That's what I think is of worth. I know that people are scared and ashamed, especially Bulgarians about what the building signifies. That's why there is such a big controversy

surrounding it. Once you completely ignore that part, the political part, and its controversially ugly past, then you see a beautiful building, a beautiful structure that is unique on a worldwide scale. I mean there is nothing else like that anywhere else in the world.

RFM:

No, there really isn't. Another thing that I liked about the images I saw on your site, is the way you've kept this kind of like 70s, 80s aesthetic inside. It felt like it could have looked like that, almost. Maybe in a different time, in a different system. The decor that you created inside compliments the shape, I feel. With the murals, is that something that you created digitally there and kind of wrapped around the 3D model?

RC:

The images that we have on the outer corridor and also the main arena, that's kind of artistic impression. That's what Todor was doing. Converting photographs he took and converting them into artful forms and colours.

TR:

That's a lot of iPhone photography on the walls.

RFM:

Ok, so it's got those filters that kind of turns it into watercolour painting.

TR:

No, it's actually artificial intelligence.

RFM:

It looks good. I guess you must be keeping up to date with all the news recently. Buzludzha has just been recognised by Europa Nostra as one of the most endangered sites in Europe. The idea of restoring it or preserving it somehow seems more realistic now than it has for a long time. If they do decide to restore it or to preserve it, it is possible that they would open this up to different design proposals. So if people are talking about different ideas and what to do with it, would you send them you work? Would you offer that as one potential future?

RC:

I would say so, I mean our idea, our concept is already out in the open. Anyone can see it online. We've already received emails and messages from people that have seen our concept. That even stretches way back to year and a half, two years ago. And they were saying this should be done, we should go with this idea to turn the monument into something like this. A lot of people were really keen on the design concept that we've prepared.

TR:

And it's not just people from Bulgaria and Europe, it's people from all around the world as far as Canada and Australia.

RFM:

Can I ask what you think would be the best possible outcome for the monument, and what is the worst?

RC:

The best and the worst outcome? The best I would say is definitely preserving it, even restoring it to basically give it more of a certain future. At the moment, it's very, very uncertain what's actually going to happen to it. It might as well very soon turn into a

complete ruin. That's going to be basically irreversible so we are not going to be able to restore it from that point if the structure is beyond repair. That would be the worst. Just letting it deteriorate on its own. I think the middle ground which seems to be happening right now is trying to preserve further deterioration and vandalism. At least from the human factor. There is also all the seasons and the weather that's playing a role all the time. Again, it's hard to tell what's going to happen and how soon we might not be able to preserve it anymore. They would need to have surveys done. I guess it's up to the local government there that has to decide what happens, what's good for it. I mean, you can try to influence it as much as we humanly can but it's still not up to us.

RFM:

Another question I wanted to ask, following on from this, is whether you think art and ideology can be separated. There are some people who argue that Buzludzha is political by nature and the way it was built, the way money was raised, what it represents, and that you can't ever get past that. I have spoken to people, intelligent, nice people, who say: "Yeah, we should knock it down." I am sure you have met them as well. And they say it can never be depoliticised. Do you feel there is potential for separating the monument from that meaning though…?

TR:

We've met the kind of people that, you know come to us and they are like: "Yeah, it's a nice idea but in the end it used to be a communist monument so there is no way it can exist in 21st century". And then we put the goggles on them and they spend 30, 40, 60 minutes in the experience. And once they get out their perception about the monument is completely changed. Virtual reality helped us change people's perception about the monument, which is fascinating. You know, in just 30 minutes.

RC:

We can actually show them and help them actually and present an idea what it can be turned into. It's going to be a political suicide for whoever foreign investor that is actually going to touch a communist monument. That's not something that might play nicely.

TR:

Especially with the government...I would say that the government would try to keep distance from Buzludzha topic because it's so controversial. If you say something that doesn't meet the expectation of the population, things might go wrong, very wrong.

RC:

The people are divided – especially in Bulgaria, on that topic. So I don't think we can please everyone with whichever path we decide to take… Besides, there are more pressing matters that need funding. That's going to drive the conversation. I mean, why should we spend the taxpayers' money to try and restore a communist monument? There are other problems.

TR:

There are a lot of political games between the Socialist Party in Bulgaria and the current ruling party trying to decide who owns the monument. But at the same time, a couple of years ago they tried to give the monument back to the Socialist Party but they refused to take it.

RFM:

It's a mess, it's complicated. So your plan, it doesn't include the mosaics that are there now?

RC:

As a part of our VR experience we are including the mosaics as a secondary layer that's basically underneath the murals that we have in the experience. Only in some of the spaces

we are able to figure out which actual mosaic used to be there. But we don't have enough information, enough photographic reference to be able to recreate the mosaics and place them where they used to be. We would love to have that information but… Maybe you have access to some archive designs or photographs of the mosaics? We'd be more than happy to include that in the experience. And Todor just sent you a walkthrough showing how the VR part integrates.

TR:

It's a bit outdated now, this version because we've changed quite a lot now since October last year. But you see the most essential functionality within the experience and the mosaics. Recreating the mosaics in virtual reality will require very, very high quality images, flat images at the mosaics. And that's something that wasn't feasible. The other thing nowadays is that mosaics are pretty much beyond the point where they can be recovered.

RFM:

I can see you've got a grand piano there, and seating, and it looks very much like a functional social events space. Would you image there being a sort of a museum element as well, discussing the history of the monument?

RC:

We do have a museum element in our design actually. It's in the back corner if you are familiar of the layout. That's where the museum parts in our redesign version is. The VR experience what we have is a set of images at least those are the images from the monument at its current state. I mean in the state it was at when we took the photos. This way we were able to compare and contrast our version with the actual reality of it currently. We do actually have some voiceovers in some places I think.

TR:

For example, when you are in the outer corridor, you see this huge panorama of some of the most beautiful places in Bulgaria… and in front of each, there is a hotspot that you touch with your controller and then you hear a voiceover explaining, *Okay, the picture in front of you is representing Shipka…* Also, we have the functionality to reveal the mosaics underneath the panorama. You can grab a flashlight in virtual reality and, shine it onto the wall and you will reveal the layer underneath the panoramas basically. And you will be able to see parts of the mosaics.

RFM:

That's a really nice idea. So… obviously the country is quite divided in its opinion about the monument. Do you think that having somewhere like Buzludzha, and making it a forum for discussion and having these educational elements as well, do you feel that could… maybe provide sort of a healing experience for the country in a way? Or maybe that's too big of a word, but you know, some kind of positive place to discuss difficult things?

RC:

Like specifically regarding that period? It's hard to say.

TR:

In the long run, maybe. But I would say it would be really difficult to push this concept forward, at least initially. Even to explain to people why they need something like this…

RFM:

I see. So if it happened – great! But you are mostly focused on preserving a valuable building. That's practical.

TR:

It isn't one concept. It's a multifunctional venue where the back corner is the place of the building dedicated to the history of the building.

RC:

So the space as a whole could be used for meetings and gatherings of that kind… to help people understand better what actually happened. As you mentioned, there's even a gap of that period in the museums. So that might be one of many potential uses of the redesigned monument.

RFM:

Doing that at the same time as celebrating contemporary culture. That makes sense. So it's got forward momentum…

RC:

Exactly.

TR:

But it shouldn't be the key selling point of the idea. It's a venue that drives conversation.

RC:

We are celebrating the structure, and also almost literally building on top of the history… instead of forgetting about it.

RFM:

Obviously a lot of people are going up to the monument these days. It's hard to know exactly what each person is looking for… probably it's a very different experience, for someone from Kazanluk… from Sofia… or even someone from Australia. So I wonder, if it was depoliticised, do you think that would make it less interesting for some people?

RC:

I don't think we can depoliticise it. I mean the history is always going to be there so if you are going to go there, even to the restored version of it, if it happens, you can still… Well, as we've proposed, there would be a museum part to the monument about that period anyway. I think there's always going to be the political aspect to it. But it's not going to be the main focus anymore. It's going to be just the historical part.

TR:

You can really feel the ghosts of the past, but that's another reason why people will go and visit.

RFM:

The other thing is… right now, it's technically forbidden to go inside the monument. And so you see all these people entering it anyway, having these dangerous, illicit adventures there… sneaking into this great big abandoned thing that they're not supposed to see. Do you think this side of the experience is an important factor for many visitors?

RC:

I noticed it's quite appealing to some people. You definitely see the thrill seekers. They are definitely going there trying to climb the tower as well. Made the trip to do that in the first place. That's definitely a thing going on. One of the reasons why actually some people go there. As you mentioned… urban explorers and abandoned buildings…

TR:

But I have also seen a lot of families, parents with their children going to visit the monument. I have been there couple of times. Last time it was April and we were not allowed to go within 50 meters of the building, something like this. I have seen a lot of families with children being there. Parents showing it to their children and you can see the excitement, the children being fascinated by the architecture.

RC:

Exactly, we can see many reasons people can decide to go there. It's the balance, I would say.

TR:

Also, don't forget it's very close to the monument with the biggest significance in Bulgaria – Shipka. Just 10 or 15 km. A lot of families visit Shipka during the weekend, so why not visit Buzludzha as well?

RFM:

So perhaps, if the monument was made safe, then even more family groups would visit, and people would want the chance to explore the monument in safety…

TR:

Exactly. I mean, I would love to see the view from the tower! But I am not really into risk. At least not that kind of risk. So the closest I have been to the top of the tower is in virtual reality.

RFM:

The growing interest in the monument… How would you explain the number of people who are aware of it, and talking about it now? Would you say it was a change in the way people travel, a change in the tastes in architecture, or something else?

RC:

It's really hard to say. This spike in interest kind of happened over the last two-to-three years. Maybe we are biased, because we started to follow the topic more closely then we used to. Like before 2015-16. It's hard to say, but it would be nice to know that it was partially due to our project and Dora's project. If there is interest, because of that, for people to see it in real life. To see what it is. Again, it's hard to say the reason… but it could be many, many factors, not one single one, I would say.

TR:

I would like to think that our generation is more curious than previous generations. Now with the power of internet, it's so much easier to discover places like Buzludzha. Because twenty years ago it was pretty difficult to find out anything about the monument. And also the location... I think that's really important too.

RFM:

And maybe with Bulgaria being a part of the EU now as well…? So it's cheaper and easier to travel internationally.

RC:

Yes, it's much more accessible than it used to be, definitely. I think also the media coverage, like the mainstream media that have been interested in this monument a bit more recently as well.

RFM:

One last question I wanted to ask you. So obviously, this monument was built to remember certain things. Maybe the most important, at least the most important to the Party, was the foundation of the Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers Party in 1891 and the 90th anniversary of that. But also other events… the death of Hadzhi Dimitar, the battles in Shipka pass nearby, and then also the partisan battles during WWII. Do you feel that these deserve to be remembered in a new version of the monument?

RC:

Well, that's all part of the history. I don't think that should be forgotten. If it's something that closely concerns the monument, it would be nice to know it actually happened there, what kind of backgrounds and what kind of historical events are actually significant to the location and why it was built, where it was built. It's useful to know.

TR:

We were discussing options of turning it into a museum that's dedicated to Bulgarian history but again, that's going at the other end of the spectrum. It's becoming a bit controversial again. Because, you know, turning the communist headquarters into symbol of Bulgarian history, it's controversial. That's why we decided to stay in the middle.

RFM:

So the way you'd imagine it, it would still be a memorial. It would still be a place for memory and respect for certain events but that would be just one aspect of it.

TR:

Yes. There would be multiple aspects to the monument itself… to Bulgarian history, to the history of the monument, to architecture, to art maybe. But it should definitely be a functional space. It shouldn't be an empty arena or an empty building in general.

RFM:

Did you think about cost at all? Did you have an idea… Obviously you haven't proposed a plan or anything. But to actually restore it or to preserve it along the lines of what you have designed, do you have a vague idea of what that would cost?

RC:

The architect, Georgi Stoilov, he did mention to us his rough estimation. I mean looking at our project how much that would potentially cost. I don't really remember.

TR:

I think he said something around 4-5 million but again I am not entirely sure what he meant by that. That's leva… 4-5 million leva. I guess one of the most expensive things will be preserving the structure. The ceiling itself… and I don't know what's the situation on the underground level. And again, the state of the structure in general – the concrete and the iron inside – is it beyond repair even? So many questions…

Appendix 4:
Visitor Surveys

Buzludzha Visitor Survey

My name is Richard Morten and I'm a PhD candidate with the Institute for Dark Tourism Research (iDTR), at the University of Central Lancashire, UK. I am currently researching the Buzludzha monument in Bulgaria. My project aims to show:

- What the monument means, who still goes there, and why;
- Whether it could have a useful future in contemporary Bulgaria;
- What this all says about the process a nation goes through in dealing with difficult heritage.

After submitting a few details about yourself, there follow 20 questions – a mixture of short response and multiple-choice questions.

This survey is aimed at past visitors to the Buzludzha monument, and it will help to inform a discussion about the monument's potential as a tourism destination. Mostly it aims to understand current levels of tourism, but it will also ask for your feelings about potential future plans for the site.

The survey asks for your name, which will only be seen by myself. Your data will be stored under your initials and if you prefer, you are welcome to enter just your initials instead of a name. By submitting your responses you agree to them being recorded and processed for the purposes of this research. However, you may withdraw from participating in this survey at any point – now, or up until the end of 2018 when the analysis phase begins. Until then, your data will be securely stored in a password-protected file.

This research project is due to be completed in mid 2019, after which digital records of your data will be erased – though your answers may be quoted anonymously in the final thesis, or in related publications.

If you have any questions about this research you can contact me at: RFMorten@uclan.ac.uk

Alternatively, you may contact my supervisor, Dr. Philip Stone, at: PStone@uclan.ac.uk

Thank you.

Research Conditions and Demographics

Please confirm:

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time.	
I understand that my answers may be quoted, anonymously, in future publications.	
I understand that my answers will be stored in a password-protected file until the research project is finished.	

Name or Initials

Nationality

Age Range

Under 20
21-30
31-40
41-50
51 and over

About Your Visit

1. What was the main purpose of your visit to Bulgaria?

2. Who did you travel with?

Alone
Friends
Family
Colleagues
Tour group
Other

3. If you took a tour, what was the name of the company or guide?

4. What made you want to visit Buzludzha? Please score the following, according to their appeal (where 1 is not very interesting, but 8 is a strong reason for visiting).

Architectural value
Historical significance
Beautiful decay
Having an adventure
Mountain views
Photographic appeal
Sympathy for the socialist movement

5. How many times have you been to Buzludzha?

6. What month and year was your most recent visit?

7. Did you read about the monument's history before (or after) you visited?

8. Did it live up to your expectations?

Yes
No

9. What was your favourite / least favourite aspect of the visit?

10. Would you visit again, or recommend others to visit?

Yes
No

The Buzludzha Phenomenon

11. Of all the places you have ever been, which was the most like Buzludzha? And why?

12. Have you visited other communist-era monuments in Bulgaria? Feel free to name any that made a strong impression on you.

13. How did you first hear about the Buzludzha monument?

14. What does the monument say to you? (Be as creative as you like...)

15. How do you feel about the current state of the monument?

16. What do you think should be done with it? Rate the following suggestions out of 8 (where 1 is terrible, and 8 is a very good idea).

Demolish it
Leave it to decay
Full restoration
Preservation in semi- ruined state
Commercial use (i.e. hotel or casino)
Museum of Bulgaria
Museum of Socialism

17. Or can you suggest a better idea?

18. Are you aware of any plans to restore the monument?

19. If the monument was preserved, would you pay to visit it? (If so – what's a fair price? If not – why not?)

20. And the final question: 'Dark Tourism' is a term often used to describe tourism to places associated with death and/or suffering. With that definition in mind, how dark does Buzludzha feel to you? Please give a number out of 8 (where 1 is a walk in the park, and 8 is an extremely dark place to visit).

Survey Results

Demographics: The respondents were asked to state their nationality in an open field, and to select an age range from one of a series of fixed groups.

Nationality of Respondents	Number of Responses
UK	175
Bulgaria	25
USA	20
Germany	17
Netherlands	10
Romania	9
Italy	8
Belgium	6
Ireland	6
Australia	5
France	4
Canada	3
Austria	2
Denmark	2
Lithuania	2
New Zealand	2
Russia	2
Sweden	2
Switzerland	2
Argentina	1
Belarus	1
Croatia	1
Czechia	1
Finland	1
Greece	1
Kyrgyzstan	1
Malaysia	1

Malta	1
Mexico	1
Poland	1
Serbia	1
Slovenia	1
Ukraine	1

Respondents by nationality.

Age Range of Respondents	Number of Responses
Under 20	5
21-30	42
31-40	65
41-50	80
51+	124

Respondents by age range.

Question 1 asked: “What was the main purpose of your visit to Bulgaria?”

Purpose of Visit	Number of Responses
Business	1
Buzludzha	50
Buzludzha and other Monuments	27
Communist-era Heritage Sites	10
Friends / Family	25
Motorbike Tourism	6
Photography	7
Academic Research	1
Tourism	69
Volunteering	1

Question 2 asked: “Who did you travel with?”

	Number of Responses
Alone	34
Colleagues	3
Family	108
Friends	105
Other	18
Tour Group	44

Question 3 asked: “If you took a tour, what was the name of the company or guide?”

	Number of Responses
365 Free Tours	1
Andy Ducommun	1
Atlas Motorcycle Tours	1
Atlas Obscura [with the researcher]	6
Communism Tour Bulgaria	1
Creative Endeavours	1
Ivaco Travel Shumen	1
NVision Travel	1
OnAdventure	1
Private Guide Bulgaria	1
The Bohemian Blog [with the researcher]	27
Wild Rovers	1
[Unspecified]	1

Question 4 asked: “What made you want to visit Buzludzha? Please score the following, according to their appeal (where 1 is not very interesting, but 8 is a strong reason for visiting).”

Key Value of Site	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Mean
Architectural value	8	5	27	11	12	31	42	180	6.72
Historical significance	9	6	27	18	22	40	44	150	6.43
Beautiful decay	24	17	36	27	23	30	40	119	5.70
Having an adventure	17	17	39	32	16	32	41	122	5.79
Mountain views	17	18	34	34	33	47	35	98	5.59
Photographic appeal	17	8	30	20	14	31	39	157	6.29
Sympathy for the socialist movement	124	50	30	38	26	22	8	18	2.94

Question 5 asked: "How many times have you been to Buzludzha?"

Number of Visits to Buzludzha	Number of Responses
0	2
1	175
2	49
3	29
4	13
5	16
6	7
7	2
8	4
10	4
12	1
20+	6
50+	1
300+	1
[Unspecified]	6

Question 7: asked: "Did you read about the monument's history before (or after) you visited?"

Did Visitor Research Independently	Number of Responses

Yes	132
No	24
Before visiting	80
After visiting	41
Both before and after	32
[Unspecified]	7

Question 8 asked: “Did it live up to your expectations?”

Were Expectations Met	Number of Responses
Yes	292
No	18
[Unspecified]	6

Question 10 asked: “Would you visit again, or recommend others to visit?”

Would Visit Again	Number of Responses
Yes	307
No	4
[Unspecified]	5

Question 11 asked: “Of all the places you have ever been, which was the most like Buzludzha?”

What Place Compares to Buzludzha	Number of Responses
None	158
Ancient heritage sites	14
Other Bulgarian monuments	13
Chernobyl	12
Other communist heritage sites	25
Other modern architecture sites	8
Other modern ruins	11

Shipka Freedom Monument	4
Yugoslav monuments	12
Other	16
[Unspecified]	43

Question 12 asked: "Have you visited other communist-era monuments in Bulgaria? Feel free to name any that made a strong impression on you."

Visits to Other Bulgarian Monuments	Number of Responses
Yes	76
Yes, example given	93
No	104
[Unspecified]	43

Question 13 asked: "How did you first hear about the Buzludzha monument?"

Introduction to Buzludzha	Number of Responses
Book	8
Can't remember	5
Media	10
Online	117
School	4
Seen in person	25
Tour	9
Word of mouth	124
[Unspecified]	14

Question 15 asked: "How do you feel about the current state of the monument?"

Adjective	Frequency of Use
Alarming	1
Angry	2

Appalling	1
Bad	4
Beautiful	2
Concerning	1
Cool	1
Dangerous	1
Deplorable	1
Depressing	7
Disappointing	8
Discouraging	1
Disgraceful	2
Disgusting	3
Disrespectful	1
Fantastic	1
Fascinating	2
Heart breaking	2
Horrible	2
Intriguing	1
Perplexing	1
Pissed off	1
Pity	2
Sad	147
Shame	21
Shocking	3
Sorry	7
Stupid	1
Tragic	2
Upsetting	4
Waste	1
[Unspecified]	82

Question 16 asked: “What do you think should be done with it? Rate the following suggestions out of 8 (where 1 is terrible, and 8 is a very good idea).”

Proposed Action	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Mean
Demolish it	301	6	3	3	0	0	0	4	1.15
Leave it to decay	222	32	15	16	13	4	4	10	1.87
Full restoration	36	12	35	31	23	27	23	129	5.57
Preservation in semi-ruined state	55	20	17	27	26	31	50	90	5.19
Commercial use (i.e. hotel or casino)	195	31	32	16	17	5	7	13	2.17
Museum of Bulgaria	31	11	32	19	21	38	38	126	5.80
Museum of Socialism	44	14	29	40	32	30	35	92	5.19

Question 18 asked: "Are you aware of any plans to restore the monument?"

Aware of Plans	Number of Responses
Yes	148
No	140
[Unspecified]	28

Question 19 asked: "If the monument was preserved, would you pay to visit it? (If so – what's a fair price? If not – why not?)"

Would Pay to Visit if Preserved	Number of Responses
Yes	282
No	17
[Unspecified]	17

Question 20 asked: "How dark does Buzludzha feel to you? [Ranked 1-8 where 1 is 'A walk in the park' and 8 is 'An extremely dark place to visit.']"

Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Mean
How dark is Buzludzha?	60	51	50	58	49	32	5	8	3.45