

The Buzludzha Memorial House and the Precarious Fate of Communist Monuments in Post-Communist Space

by

Richard F. M. Fawcus

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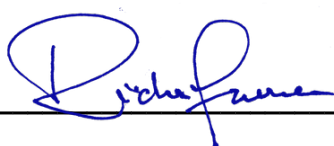
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Abstract

Communist governments of European nations throughout the 20th century constructed numerous and often grandiose politically ideological monuments. Today, in bygone post-communist landscapes, many of these monuments have become spaces of neglect, as well as places for contemporary touristic experiences. Consequently, these ideational monuments remain as semiotic markers within broader visitor economies that symbolise a conflicted past. The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is to critically evaluate communist-era political monuments in general and, specifically, examine the Buzludzha Memorial House in Bulgaria within the context of difficult heritage and dark tourism. Located on Buzludzha Peak, the Bulgarian Communist Party created ‘Buzludzha’ – a lavish ‘temple of communism’ – chronicling the Bulgarian socialist movement. In 1989, after Bulgarian communism collapsed, the monument was abandoned and, subsequently, suffered decay from looting, politically motivated vandalism, and an austere alpine climate. Nonetheless, in the 2010s, Buzludzha became an object of international allure, attracting increasing numbers of global visitors. Consequently, this study focusses on the visitor experience and ascertains the perceived value of visiting this ruined monument and implications thereof. Moreover, the study critically examines the site’s potential for (dark) tourism and, importantly, appraises the value a conserved communist monument could provide for post-communist Bulgaria. Adopting a phenomenological research approach through a case study design, and using mixed research methods of netnography, semi-structured interviews (n=8), and surveys (n=300), the study explores international dynamics through the philosophical lens of Orientalism and Balkanism. Indeed, underpinned by a conceptual framework of dark tourism and political heritage, the study scrutinizes motives and perspectives of those visiting the monument today. The study also highlights ‘academic activism’ and the inherent process of campaigning for the site’s conservation. In so doing, this study addresses a critical gap in political science and heritage studies. Particularly, this research argues that the Buzludzha Memorial House has touristification potential through its innate political qualities, but it faces an uncertain future for those who are keen to forget Bulgaria’s communist past. Importantly, although conservation work at the site has commenced, partly because of this study, any future ‘museumified’ version of Buzludzha is unlikely to regain the significance it once had, either as a ‘temple of communism,’ or as a poignant and authentic symbol of communism in ruins.

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Preface

Over the course of seven years this research project became my whole life. Being based in Bulgaria – immersed daily in the country’s language, culture and history – I often felt like I was living my case study. Though I was officially enrolled as a part-time student, this project has occupied my mind for more than full-time hours over these years. The research methods described in this thesis were often labours of love, going well beyond requirements in their scope and depth, as my own relationship with the landscape evolved.

As a result, this thesis is able to present a highly unique and original body of work. The research undertaken for this project has included:

- Conversations with a total of 52 Bulgarian visitors, encountered at sites of communist heritage in 32 locations (cities, towns, villages and mountain peaks) across the country.
- A comprehensive study of media representations of both the subject in general (post-communist heritage sites) and the case study in particular (the Buzludzha Memorial House) – taking account of references in film, television, art and video games; as well as news, media and online blogs in a variety of different languages, including Bulgarian, Russian, Ukrainian and Serbian. Prior to my research, a lot of this material had simply not been available, or discussed, in the English language.
- More than four hours of recorded interviews with Georgi Stoilov, the architect of the Buzludzha Memorial House and a former member of the politburo – the inner circle of the Bulgarian Communist Party.
- Semi-structured interviews (some lasting as long as three hours) with a further eight subject experts, including academics, archivists, architects, photographers and virtual reality software developers.
- A survey questionnaire designed to ascertain visitor motivations and experiences at the Buzludzha Memorial House – the first visitor research of its kind – which collected more than 300 individual responses.

Additionally, during this time I made visits to approximately one thousand sites of communist heritage, located across a total of 25 countries as well as in three unrecognised republics. In total I would spend more than 60 days documenting abandoned heritage sites within the

Chernobyl Exclusion Zone in Ukraine. On all these site visits I paid particular attention to any attempts at conservation or preservation, noting how such attempts were influenced or affected by local history, culture and politics; and all the while, investigating what heritage value conserved sites were subsequently able to offer.

From 2016 onwards I began designing and leading tours of communist heritage in post-communist space, and from 2017, I worked on these in collaboration with the American travel company *Atlas Obscura*. This has included personally leading tours in 10 countries, as well as helping to establish similar tours in a further 13 countries. My communist heritage tours have since been featured and favourably reviewed in places like *The Washington Post*, *Forbes*, and in Germany, *Der Spiegel*. In many cases, mine were the first tours to visit and discuss these sites in their contemporary post-communist context.

After four years of leading tours in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, and observing first-hand the rapid development of the Chernobyl tourism industry, in 2020 I released a book titled *Chernobyl: A Stalkers' Guide* – which took the form of a creative non-fiction ethnography of the Zone, illustrated with my own photographs. *The Financial Times* called it one of the “best books of 2020,” while Adam Higginbotham, one of the world’s leading Chernobyl historians, praised the book’s “evocative imagery” and “acute and well-researched essays,” which served to “reveal rarely-seen glimpses of the radioactive lost world and the men and women who live and work there.”

In Bulgaria, at my first meeting with the architect Georgi Stoilov in 2015, I expressed my interest in seeing his Buzludzha Memorial House conserved – and in response he strongly encouraged me to get involved, and bring my own skills and research to the project. It was at this point that my PhD work crossed into what might be described as ‘academic activism,’ and over the following six years I worked closely with a local conservation campaign.

I was able to advise and inform strategies at the Buzludzha Memorial House based on my extensive research of post-communist heritage sites in other countries. I designed and led the first ever international tours to Buzludzha, and the proceeds from my tours directly funded the creation of the first dedicated website for the monument, combining an archive of the monument’s history alongside proposals for its future as a conserved heritage site. This website soon became the de facto source of information about Buzludzha, being featured in

places like *CNN* and *The Guardian*. During these years I collaborated on a range of documents, reports, proposals and applications, including the creation of applications to heritage advocacy organisations such as the World Monument Fund and Europa Nostra.

In 2018 I co-authored a new ‘re-use concept’ for the monument’s future. Informed by my research in Bulgaria and elsewhere, and additionally inspired by similar virtual conservation approaches at sites such as Chernobyl or the Berlin Wall, the new proposal incorporated virtual reality technology as a solution to the controversial problem of physically restoring communist mosaics in a country with de-communisation laws. This proposal was well received by both the Bulgarian public, and also the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture.

That same year, my Buzludzha website caught the attention of the Getty Foundation. I co-authored a grant application to them, and the project was subsequently awarded \$185,000 towards the creation of a formal conservation management plan. The following year, a further \$60,000 was awarded to fund an emergency intervention conserving the endangered mosaic artwork inside the monument.

When I began this PhD, the Buzludzha Memorial House was an abandoned ruin with an uncertain future. When I finished, partly as the result of my own actions, the building was a protected heritage site and a global example for the conservation of difficult heritage.

More broadly, during the course of this research project I have written more than a million words on the subject of communist heritage, many of them published by a variety of internationally recognised online and print media, to the extent that in the process I have established myself as a key voice in the conversation. My own writing and photographs are often the first to come up in online searches for a lot of the places this thesis will discuss.

This following thesis charts my research in Bulgaria, as well as through the broader field of international responses to difficult communist heritage. To an extent that has never been done before, it shows exactly and in practical terms how the findings of this research might then be applied to the conceptualisation, planning, and funding of conservation projects in this field. As such, it is my belief that the following document makes a wholly original and unique contribution to the study of communist heritage in post-communist space.

VOLUME ONE

Chapter One

Introduction

“A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.”

The Soul of Man Under Socialism, Oscar Wilde

1.0 Introduction

During the second half of the 20th century, the communist republics of Europe and the Soviet Union between them created an extraordinary number of monuments. Many still stand today, appearing often as imposing anachronisms, reminders of a shared communist past, which rise now as contradictory symbols above the landscapes of their democratic successor states. The subject matter of these monuments ranges from the commemoration of events and conflicts – battlefields or sites of anti-fascist struggle – to more purely ideological manifestations of the Party’s political values. However, even those monuments focussed on historical remembrance in many cases did so through a lens of communist historiography, and were decorated with symbolic dedications that now, particularly following the introduction of contemporary ‘decommunisation’ laws in many of these countries, render these objects politically controversial. Some of these monuments have since been destroyed, some have been left to fall apart, a few are preserved, and a great many of them remain the subjects of heated local debate. This research project represents a study of one such problematic monument, and the question of what value it can offer in the 21st century.

1.1 Background

The Buzludzha Memorial House in Bulgaria is a towering work of ideological architecture situated atop a dramatic mountain peak at an altitude of 1432 metres. Built from reinforced concrete in the Brutalist architectural style, it consists of a saucer-shaped body containing a Ritual Hall, attached to a 70-metre tower decorated with red glass stars. It can be considered as a unique heritage site, partly owing to the value of its architecture: a striking design, built using techniques that were considered cutting-edge at the time of its construction in the 1970s. It was opened to the public in 1981 and during its subsequent decade of use, the monument was further valorised by way of countless appearances on state publications, postage stamps, and other memorabilia throughout the country. But the Buzludzha monument was unique also for the value of the art it contained, including more than 500 square metres of finely detailed mosaic panels that between them told an illustrated history of the Bulgarian socialist movement. During its heyday the Buzludzha Memorial House served as a memorial museum, a validation of Bulgarian communism, and was an encouraged political pilgrimage site for visitors travelling from all over the country (and sometimes, beyond). However, following the end of communism in Bulgaria (beginning in 1989, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall),



Plate 1: The Buzludzha Memorial House, exterior (own photo: 4 May 2013).



Plate 2: The Buzludzha Memorial House, interior of the 'Ritual Hall' (own photo: 1 March 2016).

the Buzludzha Memorial House soon became a site of controversy. It was closed to visitors in 1990, and then abandoned in 1995 – its guards were dismissed and its doors were left open allowing successive waves of looters, vandals, and the harsh mountain winters, to begin the process of destroying its interior fittings and decorations.

In contemporary Bulgaria, the Buzludzha Memorial House has taken on new symbolic significance as a ruin; what was once a symbol of communism has now become a symbol of communism's collapse. The monument has become a flashpoint in modern cultural debates, in a country whose democracy is still torn between historic alignments of East and West; with contemporary Bulgarian socialists continuing to demand it be restored in its original form as a monument to the socialist movement, while many others contend that the monument should now simply be destroyed, just as many other mementos of that era have been already. In the meantime, for almost three decades the monument received no protection from the elements, growing gradually more dilapidated each year.

Entering into this already-complicated conversation, the Buzludzha Memorial House was 'discovered' by the Western media sometime around 2012. Photographs of the spectacular ruin appeared online, and spread quickly. Tourists began to visit the mountain for themselves and by the mid-2010s, on a sunny weekend, it was normal to see hundreds of foreigners exploring or taking photographs around and inside the abandoned monument. The monument began appearing on book covers, in Hollywood films and in music videos. All the while, its status in Bulgaria remained unsettled. The Ministry of Culture did not recognise the site with protected 'monument' status; the state discouraged (though did not manage to prevent) visits to the site; and no efforts were made to slow the rapid deterioration of the monument's elaborate – and fragile – mosaics. By the mid-2010s, Buzludzha had become internationally recognised as one of the world's most famous modern ruins.

1.2 Academic Context

Local discourse concerning the future of the Buzludzha Memorial House has tended to be divided between four different perspectives, which respectively call for:

1. An authentic restoration as a socialist monument;
2. A new touristic function (and commercialisation) as an attraction or museum;

3. Inaction, non-discussion, and a continued state of ruin;
4. Complete demolition as a symbolic anti-communist action.

For three decades the Bulgarian state has pursued option 3, in an approach that Vukov (2012) describes as ‘institutionalised amnesia.’ However, there are vocal groups within the country calling for each of the four options, and Nikolova (2020) conceptualises these approaches along a political spectrum, from ‘Left’ (authentic restoration), to ‘Right’ (demolition), with what she calls a ‘capitalist’ or ‘neoliberal’ approach in the middle (commercialisation for tourism). The latter position argues that the monument can and should be ‘depoliticised,’ in a process that would separate it from its former monumental purpose, to be preserved instead purely for the value of its architecture and design. In this way the re-imagined monument could be repurposed as a cultural venue, or a museum, and Bulgaria as a country would be able to begin capitalising on the clearly demonstrated demand for the monument, through state-sanctioned tourism and ticket fees. However, as Nikolova observes, “Many on both the Left and the Right have criticised these plans, either for commercializing socialist architecture or for legitimizing its allegedly ‘totalitarian’ heritage.”

Moreover, the growing foreign interest in the Buzludzha Memorial House can be seen as part of a larger trend – over the past decade, many examples of Modernist architecture in post-communist Europe, such as monuments, hotels and political buildings, have become the subject of Western fascination (and, some argue, fetishisation). While some critics have labelled this trend as indicative of ‘Orientalism’ or ‘neo-colonialism’ (for example: Kulić, 2018), other local people have begun answering this foreign interest with merchandise and tour offerings, and are already profiting from it. On the question of whether such interest can have a long-term positive effect, the current literature is divided. Vladimir Kulić, an architectural historian and curator of a recent exhibition of Yugoslav architecture and design at the New York Museum of Modern Art, writes: “more than a decade after the images of late socialist architecture have started circulating in the digital realm, I have yet to witness actual positive effects of such exposure” (Kulić, 2018). Conversely, the Bulgarian architectural historian Aneta Vasileva contends: “It turns out that when the assessment of one’s own heritage comes from outside [...] Eastern Europeans are much more likely to accept multiple interpretations of their own past” (Vasileva, 2019).

However, although much has been written and argued about the phenomenon of Western tourists visiting sites of socialist heritage in Southeast Europe, most of the literature tends to make broad assumptions when it comes to explaining visitor motivations: “only selfie-hungry hikers and a few Communist mourners” visit Buzludzha nowadays, according to Nikolova (2020). No significant research to date has surveyed these visitors themselves, though this would seem to be potentially valuable information. The decision regarding Buzludzha’s future is one that belongs to the Bulgarian people, not to the foreigners who visit it; but knowing more about the nature of this interest, and how the value of the monument is perceived both locally and abroad, might allow for a more informed conversation... and certainly, if the ‘capitalist’ approach of preserving the monument as a depoliticised site of heritage tourism were to be pursued, then such information would become important in conceptualising a new tourism identity for the site.

1.3 Research Design

1.3.1 *Research Questions, Aims and Objectives*

A number of worthwhile questions arise from the discussion of Buzludzha’s future. For example: Who visits Buzludzha today, and why? What objective value does the monument have, and what are the barriers preventing it from being officially promoted today for those values? How should it be represented and understood in a post-communist context? Also, how is the case of Buzludzha similar, and how is it different, to other sites of contested post-communist heritage across Europe?

Ultimately, it was decided that either defining the objective value of the monument’s art and architecture, or attempting to explain the motivations of the contemporary Bulgarian state, were beyond the scope of this research. Instead, this thesis will focus on the theme of subjective value – and accordingly, will pursue the following research design.

Research Aim	To critically examine and assess whether and how the Buzludzha Memorial House’s perceived heritage value might allow it to provide utility and worth in contemporary post-communist Bulgaria.
Research Question	In what ways can the Buzludzha Memorial House – a monument built to

	celebrate the communist movement – provide value in post-communist Bulgaria?
Research Objectives	<p>1. To critically assess contemporary Buzludzha tourism through a lens of academic scholarship using theories on dark tourism, ruins and heterotopias.</p> <p>2. To critically evaluate what value the monument retains today that is separate from its now-defunct role as a political emblem.</p> <p>3. To consider how such value might continue to be appreciated in post-communist Bulgaria, and if indeed such a thing is possible, or desired.</p>

Table 1: Research aim, question and objectives.

1.3.2 Theoretical Framework

There are many valid academic approaches to discussing a place such as the Buzludzha Memorial House, including but not limited to worthwhile conversations within the frameworks of art and architecture, engineering, politics, and history. However, for the purpose of this study the site will be considered primarily through the lens of ‘dark tourism’: a practice that has been defined as tourism involving travel to places historically associated with death and tragedy (Foley & Lennon, 1996). The academic study of dark tourism might be a relatively recent discipline (that term having only been coined in 1996), but the practice itself is by no means a new form of social behaviour (Foley & Lennon, 2000). The extensive body of literature since published on the subject has raised many worthwhile questions, not least amongst them moral concerns (for example Stone and Sharpley, 2013); in addition to discourse on the questions of ‘motivation’ (for example, why do visitors engage in dark tourism? – Yuill, 2003) and ‘management’ (for example, how should sites of ‘dark’ heritage be managed? – Hartmann, 2014). As such, the dark tourism framework provides what might be considered an extensive ‘toolkit’ of literature that could readily be applied to the questions posed by a place such as Buzludzha.

From its inception, the Buzludzha Memorial House was always conceptualised at least in part as a ‘dark tourism’ destination, owing to the fact that it commemorated not only the

establishment of the Bulgarian socialist movement, but also a place of historic conflict, death, and sacrifice in the pursuit of national liberty (historical themes that will be explored in depth in Chapter 7). At some of the world's more famous and widely studied dark tourism destinations – places such as the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum in Poland or the September 11 Memorial and Museum in New York, US – conscious decisions have been made about how best to mediate and present the difficult heritage. However, the unresolved nature of the history and heritage at Buzludzha, combined with the lack of any current tourism infrastructure that might be able to offer a guiding narrative, means that the visitor experience at Buzludzha today is somewhat more open to individual interpretation. Bulgaria's communists and socialists still consider the monument as a place that commemorates historic conflicts against fascism, and the Ottomans before that; anti-communists visiting today may perceive it as having a different kind of 'darkness,' as a symbol of communist totalitarianism. For this reason, the study will place Buzludzha in a conversation on the subjective interpretation of the tourism experience, where it will be useful to consider concepts such as 'psychogeography,' and what the situationist philosophers referred to as 'the *dérive*' (Debord, 1967). The study will also assess the Buzludzha Memorial House in relation to Foucault's notion of 'heterotopic' space (Foucault, 1967a; Topinka, 2010; Stone, 2013).

More broadly, the study will place the Buzludzha Memorial House in a wider review of Europe's various surviving sites of communist heritage. It will ask why some of these sites have successfully made the transition to become managed places of structured touristic experience, places of continued memorial function, or venues for education, while others remain as-yet un-rehabilitated. The study will investigate the rise of foreign tourism to such places (termed by some as 'red tourism'), and it will aim to assess the motives of such visitors, and the potential education value that this form of tourism might be able to offer; but significantly it will look at these places from a local perspective, and consider what value there might or might not be for post-communist countries in developing such sites of difficult heritage into 'depoliticised' sites of tourism and tourism revenue. Examples will be showcased of places of difficult or unwanted heritage in various countries that have successfully managed the process of preserving, or commoditising difficult heritage. The study will question what gains – either financial, in tourism revenue, or cultural, by perhaps providing channels for reconciliation – a country may experience as an effect of developing such places for tourism purposes.

In its final discussion, what the study reveals from looking at touristified sites of communist heritage elsewhere in Europe, it will then offer as a potential framework to a discussion of the Buzludzha Memorial House: in order to suggest potential ways in which Bulgaria might go about reconstructing, reimagining or repurposing this controversial monument, in order to transform it from a place of difficult and contested cultural memory into a functional, educational tourist attraction... if indeed, such an outcome is even desirable. In closing, the study will look to identify and develop models describing this process, which might perhaps then be applied to the consideration of other sites of contested post-communist heritage.

1.4 Methodology

This thesis will outline the development of a method of analysis that combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches. It will include data collection through the following approaches:

1. Researching a concise historical overview of the Buzludzha Memorial House, highlighting historical events, uses, representations or political changes that have had an effect on the status of the building, its national context, and its perceived value;
2. A critical discussion of multi-disciplinary literature relating to the site, from academic papers through to references in books, films, documentaries and even digital formats such as virtual reality recreations;
3. A critical netnography of relevant blogs, visitor accounts, and other online platforms that are deemed relevant to the research objectives;
4. Semi-structured interviews with experts and stakeholders, deemed to be relevant to the overall research aim and specific research objectives;
5. Quantitative data collected through the use of questionnaires, to be completed by past visitors to the site.

The traditional literature review detailed in point 1 above will inform Chapters 5 and 6, which discuss the Bulgarian context, and the history of the monument, respectively. Online and multimedia research gathered from points 2 and 3 above will form the basis of a broader netnography, the results of which will be presented in the first part of Chapter 8, on Results, and these will aim to provide an understanding of both the monument's position in contemporary Bulgaria, as well as how it is typically conceptualised by international media

and scholarship. The findings gathered from the practical research stage (points 4 and 5 above) will be presented in Chapter 8 with an initial discussion; and then critically considered, compared and evaluated in the following Discussion & Implications chapter, in order to offer an analysis of the subjective value assigned to the monument by those visiting it today – and a perspective on the phenomenon of Buzludzha tourism, from various stakeholders and experts. By implication and extrapolation, it is hoped that these results might also be able to provide the basis for a comment on how the same phenomenon more broadly affects other cases of difficult heritage in post-communist space.

Specific definitions of key terms (‘dark tourism,’ ‘post-communist space,’ and so on) will be introduced in Chapters 3 and 4. A full methodology will follow in Chapter 7. Before that however, it is worth examining the broader methodology to be employed in the collection of data.

During the empirical stage of this thesis a number of field trips will be made to the location, while ethnographic data is to be gathered via a combination of semi-structured interviews with experts and stakeholders, and questionnaire-style surveys completed by past visitors to the site. These data will be supported with empirical observations of the visitor amenities available on site – or lack thereof. In order to better understand the process by which these touristic experiences are created, managed, promoted, consumed, experienced and remembered, the study will seek comment from people at all stages of the process of meaning-making at Buzludzha: from the monument’s architect, to contemporary tourists, the relevant managing authorities, and those proposing new plans for future renovation or reuse.

1.4.1 Ethnographic Research

This study will take a largely ethnographic approach, which is to say it will be concerned on the one hand with the personal attitudes and motivations that draw visitors to the site, and thus suggest factors which might be useful to the process of developing a fully-fledged tourism infrastructure; and on the other hand, it will consider the specific socio-political conditions defining the relationship between the site and its surrounding culture, which is to say, it will aim to analyse and critique the nature of the site as ‘difficult heritage,’ in order to assess challenges and hurdles to the promotion and development of the site as a tourism destination, and hopefully, then also be able to suggest solutions towards mediating those.

In considering precisely what constitutes a ‘culture,’ the definition proposed by anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn is a good starting point. He posited nine criteria for the term, namely: a group ‘way of life’; a way of thinking or feeling; an acquired social legacy; an abstraction from behaviour; an observer’s theories for the behaviour of a group; a collection of pooled learning; a learned behaviour; a behavioural matrix or map; and finally, a process for adjusting to one’s environment (Kluckhohn, 1949). The study will lean also towards the recommendations of Clifford Geertz (1973: 5), who proposed that the analysis of culture is “not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.” It is hoped that the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches here will add more breadth to the value of meaning that can be derived from the research, as the study attempts: “to collect and consider multiple sources of information, not facts alone, to convey the perspective of the people” (Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein, 1997).

1.4.2 Stakeholder Approach

The intention of this study is to explore not only the attitudes that visitors hold towards the Buzludzha Memorial House, but further, to analyse in greater depth what a process of touristification here might look like, who would manage it, and what potential barriers might exist on administrative and cultural levels. As such, its approach at least to semi-structured interviews might be described as being a ‘stakeholder approach’ inasmuch as it will be attempting to analyse the site from the perspective of local authorities, architects, cultural specialists and the providers of local tourism experiences. While one potential benefit of such an approach may involve the opportunity to discuss future developments with those in a position perhaps to make them happen, it should also be noted that, considering the ‘difficult’ or ‘unwanted’ nature of the heritage in question, such stakeholders may not even be receptive to the idea of tourism. Entry inside the monument itself is, after all, not encouraged by the state. Ultimately though, from the perspective of an ethnographic study, even ostensibly negative stakeholder responses may still prove informative.

1.4.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

In gathering its ethnographic data from stakeholders, this study will make use of semi-structured interviews. The purpose of these will be to invite broad and unanticipated

responses – truly qualitative data – but while providing the researcher with a certain degree of power in directing the course of those interviews. Naturally, there are limitations to such an approach. As the ethnographer Dell Hymes (1981: 84) comments, “Some social research seems incredibly to assume that what there is to find out can be found out by asking” – owing to the mismatch between: “the small portion of cultural behaviour that people can be expected to report or describe, when asked, and the much smaller portion that an average person can be expected to manifest by doing on demand.” As such, these respondents must not be considered as all-knowing representatives of their culture so much as individual pieces in a puzzle. Ultimately the final analysis and discussion should expect to assemble its theories based not on any single avenue of investigation, but rather by attempting to mediate and understand a balanced synthesis of the often-contradictory and sometimes emotionally-charged attitudes associated with the case study location.

1.5 Ethical Considerations

The Buzludzha Memorial House is a site of potent political symbolism, situated in a country where those same political themes have become subjects of heated disagreement. For many of this study’s respondents the topics of national sovereignty, political symbolism, history and its legacy, are likely to come attached to strong emotional responses; the same factors which define the case study as a place of ‘difficult heritage.’ It is important therefore, that all enquiry be tempered with compassion. It must be made clear throughout research gathering phases that respondents will be free to leave the study at any point and with the option of withdrawing all their respective information from the data pool. Anonymity will be provided where possible and interview questions should be set out with a consideration that the subject may elicit strong emotional responses for some respondents. All interviews need to be conducted with full, informed permission, and with sensitivity.

Furthermore: this study is considering a place where the desire for touristic experiences is not matched by the provision of available touristic access. While the resulting situation is expected to prove interesting territory for research (and leaves this thesis the task of coming to understand what factors might yet be preventing the appropriate facilities and/or infrastructure from being developed), it should also be remembered that such demand inevitably leads some tourists to ‘take’ the experience for themselves. While it will be of great interest to speak to these people who are engaged, effectively, in stealing the tourism experience (for example by

ignoring ‘Keep Out’ signs and thus committing acts of trespass inside the monument), it is essential that the research in no way encourages, inspires or promotes acts of trespass at the site.

Finally, all research conducted, and subsequent conclusions drawn, should make acknowledgement of the researcher’s own position as a foreigner, in relation to the subject matter. It would not be appropriate for an outsider to propose to Bulgarian people what they ‘ought’ to do with their own heritage, and so this study will aim to remain neutral in its treatment of the various potential outcomes for the Buzludzha Memorial House. Rather, the role of this study will be merely to provide information to the conversation that was not previously available, or not yet surveyed, for the purpose of creating a fuller understanding of the current phenomenon of tourism at Buzludzha.

1.6 Original Contribution

At present, there is no published history of the Buzludzha Memorial House available in English (nor, for that matter, is there any modern publication dedicated to this subject in Bulgarian). And so, a first contribution that this study will be able to make is that of presenting, for the first time, a comprehensive English-language account of the monument’s full history and context.

The local debate regarding the future of the Buzludzha Memorial House remains unsettled, and as has been stated above, the current effects of foreign tourism at the site have not been studied or evaluated in any serious way. So, by conducting research into exactly who visits Buzludzha now, and why, this study promises to bring new and potentially useful information to Bulgaria’s on-going debate around its most notorious site of difficult heritage.

Speaking more broadly, Buzludzha is not the only monument of its kind – many post-communist countries of Europe have their own sites of contested architectural heritage, in the form of monuments, political buildings, artworks, or other sites that represent the ideologies of former regimes. However, Buzludzha survives now as one of the largest and best-known such objects in the broader region, and as such, it might be considered a highly informative and fertile case study in which to ask questions about the nature of difficult heritage, the ethics of touristification, and the politics of memory. It is hoped that by better explaining the

effects and implications of modern tourism to a site like the Buzludzha Memorial House, this study may be able to present potential models for understanding similarly controversial sites in other places too. Additionally, as this study takes into account a broad range of ideas and literature – aiming to identify and discuss the ‘Buzludzha problem’ as it appears at a crossroads between different disciplines – the study has potential to make an original research contribution to the fields of heritage studies, tourism studies, political studies and historical studies.

1.7 Role of the Researcher

Throughout this study, care will be taken to reflect upon and evaluate the role of the researcher. My own relationship to the subject matter has grown quite complex since this research project began in January 2015. I had been living in Bulgaria since 2011, and quickly developed a deep personal interest in many of the country’s sites of former communist heritage. I also travelled abroad regularly, visiting such sites in other post-communist countries too – to date, having now visited more than a thousand communist memorial sites spread across 26 countries. Concurrently with pursuing my PhD research, I have been sharing my own photographs and writing online about the subject of communist heritage in post-communist space, and this has led to a number of high-profile features – including articles for news and culture platforms, photo-essays for art and architecture publications, and a number of inclusions in photography exhibitions – and in most cases, attached to the pseudonym ‘Darmon Richter.’ In 2015 I began leading international group tours to sites of communist heritage, initially just in Bulgaria, but expanding over the years to include tour itineraries (researched, planned, and led by myself) in a total of 10 different post-communist countries. To date I have run 30 such tours, offering experiences designed to facilitate cultural exchange, and to embrace pluralist perspectives on history through the inclusion of numerous and diverse guest speakers. In 2020, I released a book about Chernobyl, based on my own ethnographic fieldwork and tours in ‘the Zone,’ across my 20 visits there between 2013 and 2019, and it became an online bestseller. In all of my work, I have sought to educate, bring little-known histories to light, and also to positively reframe works of art and architecture that might otherwise be overlooked on account of their perceived connections to former regimes. A detailed summary of these various activities can be found in Appendix 1.

Local academics and media in the region have noted the growing Western interest in sites of post-communist heritage, and I must therefore recognise that I am not only a prominent participant in, but moreover a significant facilitator of, the phenomenon they describe. As such, a degree of self-reflection and introspection are therefore required on my part, as I critically assess my own motives and activities in relation to this work. My relationship with the specific site of research – the Buzludzha Memorial House – has similarly grown complex over the course of this project. When this research project began, the Buzludzha monument was a contested ruin in a rapid state of decline, with no clear proposals for any future conservation. As a result, the earliest versions of this Introduction chapter asked questions such as ‘Is conservation even possible?’ However, such questions have since been answered.

Beginning in 2015 I travelled around Bulgaria visiting hundreds of sites of communist heritage, and at these places frequently interviewed local residents and domestic tourists in order to better understand their feelings in relation to the country’s past (see Appendix 2). That same year, I began collaborating with a Bulgarian architect, Dora Ivanova, on a campaign calling for the conservation of the Buzludzha Memorial House. Over the following years I developed the first international website for the monument, as a platform to share both historical information, and proposals for its future. As the project developed, I collaborated in writing press releases, fielding media interviews, co-authoring numerous funding applications and reports; and eventually co-authored the final architectural proposal launched on the site in 2018, which was subsequently presented before the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture. That same year, Ivanova and I applied for funding from the Getty Foundation, and we were successful: the monument was awarded \$185,000 [£135,000] towards the creation of a conservation and management plan, and in 2020, after three decades of neglect, the first on-site conservation work began at the Buzludzha Memorial House.

In the meantime, my thesis has had to adapt to reflect the changing nature of its subject matter, while my role as a researcher has crossed into a position that might be described as ‘academic activism.’ As many of these activities detailed above could be considered as extracurricular to the central research aims and objectives of this thesis (I never set out to *save* the monument, only to study it), details of the conservation effort will only be discussed in the main chapters where it is relevant to the evolving narrative of the site; however, a more thorough overview of the conservation campaign (and its various associated challenges) will be featured in Appendix 1, and due to the relevance of this conservation success to the

research question being asked, these events will be brought into a larger discussion about the monument's future, in Chapter 9. It is believed that the conclusions drawn in this thesis will ultimately be strengthened by the evidence of having already successfully applied the theory to a real-world case of heritage conservation.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis will take the form of one document, divided into 10 chapters spread across 2 volumes. There will then follow a series of supporting appendices. The content of this thesis will be structured as follows.

Volume One

Chapter 1: The current Introduction.

Chapter 2: An introduction to the concept of 'ideological architecture,' and an exploration of the role of monuments in communist societies. What happened to these monuments after the collapse of communism in Europe, and how this relates to other contemporary debates about controversial monuments around the world.

Chapter 3: Introduces the literature and conceptual theories through which the thesis will analyse its site of study. Includes an overview and explanation of terms such as 'dark tourism,' 'red tourism,' and 'urban exploration,' and details the rise in popularity of sensationalised images of abandoned places in a trend that is sometimes dubbed 'ruin porn.'

Chapter 4: Considers the potential problems that arise when the ideas of the previous two chapters meet. Explores concepts such as the 'tourist gaze' and 'Orientalism,' particularly in the context of Western tourists visiting and photographing sites of (difficult) communist heritage in Southeast Europe. This chapter reviews one particularly well-documented case, the phenomenon of contemporary tourism to the Modernist war memorials of former Yugoslavia, and evaluates their subsequent 'fetishisation' as decontextualised visual icons. The chapter closes by reviewing a number of sites of commodified communist heritage in the broader region, assessing what challenges they have had to overcome, and proposing a model for communist heritage management.

Volume Two

Chapter 5: An overview of Bulgarian history, particularly under the rule of the Bulgarian Communist Party, and an introduction to the Party's tendencies for ideological architecture and political monumentation. Concludes by evaluating the climate in contemporary, post-communist Bulgaria – including the introduction of new 'de-communisation' laws, and the removal or destruction of many of the former regime's monuments. This chapter defines the local territory, culturally, historical and politically, in which Buzludzha is situated.

Chapter 6: Introduces the Buzludzha Memorial House, the building that forms the central study of this thesis. Includes an overview of the monument's history, from creation, through use, to abandonment in the 1990s, and a short biography of its architect. Discusses the current state of the monument, as a world-famous ruin visited by thousands of tourists each year, and reviews local attitudes to the site in addition to considering various perspectives on what should be done with it.

Chapter 7: Details the methodology to be used in studying the monument, laying out a philosophical and practical framework for the gathering of data by means of quantitative visitor surveys, complemented by semi-structured interviews with stakeholders.

Chapter 8: A summary of the netnography research, followed by a presentation of findings gained through the use of visitor surveys completed by foreign tourists who had visited the Buzludzha Memorial House. Includes visualisations of the data, and some preliminary discussion on the emergence of notable trends and themes in the research results.

Chapter 9: Discussion of the broader implications of the research. Quantitative data from the visitor surveys is analysed in relation to the research question, along with a discussion of related themes emerging from the semi-structured interviews with experts and stakeholders. This discussion is then related back to the literature reviewed in chapters 2-7, and based on what has been learned, a number of models are proposed – showing how a contested site of communist heritage might be successfully preserved as a heritage tourism destination, based on the experience of having played an instrumental role in campaigning for the conservation of Bulgaria's controversial Buzludzha Memorial House. The chapter discusses the

significance of this result in relation to the literature. Finally, the chapter asks who this stands to benefit, and whether such results can be generalised to other sites of communist heritage elsewhere.

Chapter 10: A conclusion to the thesis, offering a synthesis of research findings, and a final answer to the research question. The chapter identifies this project's contributions to the existing literature, and it points out potential shortcomings in this thesis before highlighting some areas for further future study.

Appendix 1 (Academic activism): Details the researcher's own personal research, writing and photography on the subject of communist heritage, and the process of developing communist heritage tours in various post-communist countries; in addition to campaigning for the conservation of the Buzludzha Memorial House. Provides an overview of events, as well as discussing various issues encountered.

Appendix 2 (Scoping Exercise): A preliminary research phase which involved visits to over a hundred sites of communist heritage around Bulgaria. The appendix includes photographs, and transcripts of informal conversations had with Bulgarian visitors onsite.

Appendix 3 (Interviews): Transcripts of semi-structured interviews with various experts and stakeholders related to the case study site.

Appendix 4: (Visitor survey): Includes the structure, questions, and data results of a survey questionnaire completed by more than 300 past visitors to the site.

Chapter Two

Monumentalism

“And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.”

***Ozymandias*, Percy Bysshe Shelley**

2.0 Introduction

For the past decade, and increasingly in recent years, countries around the world have been reckoning with their monuments to the past. In Bristol, on 7 June 2020, activists with the Black Lives Matter protest removed a statue of Edward Colston, a 17th century slaver, from its plinth and threw it into the Avon (Hudson, 2020). In Oxford, protestors called for a statue of Cecil Rhodes – who also had links to the slave trade – to be removed from the grounds of Oriel College (Race, 2020). In the United States, the discussion around the removal of Confederate monuments came under the spotlight particularly around the time of the polarising 2016 election and onwards (Cox, 2017). On 9 June 2020, during the Black Lives Matter protests, protestors in St. Louis pulled down a statue of Christopher Columbus, a figure now widely deemed to be problematic owing to the contemporary reappraisal of his treatment of Indigenous peoples (Salter, 2020). A similar movement was sweeping across continental Europe: in Belgium, protestors called for the removal of statues of King Leopold II, a 19th century ruler who presided over the deaths of as many as 10 million people in the Congo (Rannard & Webster, 2020). In France however, President Macron refused to allow the removal of controversial monuments in the country, stating: “I will be very clear tonight, compatriots: the Republic won’t erase any name from its history. It will forget none of its artworks, it won’t take down statues” (Reuters, 2020).

This chapter will introduce the subject of monuments, and their role in societies. Specifically, it will look at the role of monuments in communist societies, and how monuments more generally might be considered as a form of ideological architecture. The chapter will then discuss the problematic question of monuments that were built by past regimes, and whose messages may no longer be appreciated; and it will look at a number of cases around the world where creative solutions have been deployed to address these problems.

Finally, it should be noted that in this chapter, and those that follow, the terms ‘socialism’ and ‘communism’ will sometimes be used interchangeably. These are related, though significantly different concepts, however – in historical application, many of the former European republics that will be discussed in this thesis were governed by a Communist Party, and experienced a form of state socialism, with the ultimate goal being the attainment of ‘true’ communism. As a result, it would be equally accurate to describe such a historical period as

the ‘socialist era’ (according to the lived reality) or as the ‘communist era’ (according to the political orientation). In cases where either word might be considered appropriate, some authors and historians still prefer one to the other; and additionally, as Vukov (2012) notes, in some cases the choice might even be politically motivated so that it could be said to reflect a “revisionist approach to the recent past” (for example, owing to the less totalitarian connotations of the term ‘socialism’). However, as this thesis cites and discusses sources which will describe the period with either (and sometimes both) of these words, the choice has been made here to interchangeably refer to this as both the ‘socialist period’ and the ‘communist period,’ and subsequently no critical assessment ought to be read into this wording on a case-by-case basis.

2.1 Ideological Architecture

This thesis is concerned with the idea of ideological architecture – which it defines as monuments and memorial sites, in addition to memorial houses and sometimes other buildings too that were designed and intended to promote or commemorate certain political, historical or social ideas. Or in other words, architecture that has been designed in accordance with, or to create spaces which promote, one particular ideological system over others. There is a subtle distinction in meaning between the words ‘monument’ and ‘memorial.’ According to historian Judith Dupre, “Monuments are history made visible. They are the shrines that celebrate the ideals, achievements, and heroes that existed in one moment in time” (cited in Anthony, 2021). Allen (1992) discusses how “the memorial is a remembrance – a marker, plaque, statue, relief, or structure. Its focus seems to be upon the past, but its message is directed with hope toward future generations.” Waters and Russell (2012) note that: “Monuments generally tend to be classified as civic projects commemorating historic achievements, triumphs, or glory. Memorials on the other hand are normally associated more with the interwoven concepts of tragedy, death, and loss; giving them a symbolic meaning in a society that desires to remember.” That is to say, a monument is typically a designed structure that memorialises something, though a memorial needn’t always take the form of a monument. For the purpose of this thesis however, which considers memorials that do appear in the form of built monuments, the terms ‘monument’ and ‘memorial’ will sometimes be used interchangeably.

Much can be learned through the study of such objects, as they “serve as tangible reminders of the past, but also in the case of those monuments and memorials erected today, tell us something about our particular time and place in history” (Percoco, 1998: 48). Monuments can also be used as teaching aids in historical education (see for example: Wrenn, 1998); and “Since people respond to monuments differently over time based on historical, political, and social changes, studying the reception of monuments over time can reveal a great deal about the shifts in cultural values during periods of history” (Waters & Russell, 2012). Though Waters and Russell also caution that: “monuments need to be viewed critically both domestically and abroad in order to gain a better understanding of the cultural implications historic structures have on the collective memory of a nation.” By doing so, it can be said that monuments and memorial sites “reflect – and expose for study – social tensions, political realities, and cultural values” (Foote & Azaryahu, 2007). To put it more generally:

“[There] is always agenda in design. All architecture conveys meaning, whether intentionally or not. At best it’s complex, profound and liberating, but more often than not it is as blunt as ‘Buy me!’ [...] If we simply consume space without examining it, over time it can even shape our core values and beliefs” (Vukičević, 2020).

From the creation of the Soviet Union in the wake of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, and the incorporation of the earliest Soviet states, through to the occupation and installation of communist governments in new Soviet states following the aftermath of World War II, and the spread of Soviet-style communism and Soviet influence throughout a number of allied states across central and east Europe, architecture was deployed consistently throughout by communist governments as a tool of ideology. This form of widespread physical propaganda went hand-in-hand with a centralised movement in art and architecture (arguably reaching its zenith under the rule of Stalin), which some have described as “totalitarian kitsch”:

“It is the official art of authoritarian governments, aimed at extending state control through propaganda. Totalitarian kitsch exists to glorify the state, foster a personality cult surrounding the dictator and celebrate ceaseless and irrevocable social and economic progress through images of churning factories and happy, exultant workers” (Gibson, 2009).

However, the Czech writer Milan Kundera also notes the fragility of such a movement:

“In the realm of totalitarian kitsch, all answers are given in advance and preclude any questions. It follows, then, that the true opponent of totalitarian kitsch is the person who asks questions. A question is like a knife that slices through the stage backdrop and gives us a look at what lies hidden behind it” (Kundera, 1999).

The new political systems of communism reflected new governing styles as well, and purpose-built architecture provided a physical and infrastructural framework that promoted that hierarchy as well as facilitating its regular ceremonial confirmation, including via parade spaces and memorial sites (Aman, 1992). Petrov (2021) notes that: “Even though the socialist project might have failed, and its commonwealth did not materialise, it produced very real frameworks of interaction and exchange.”

Particularly following World War II, some cities needed more new architecture than others. Many of the cities which had become battlegrounds during the war on the Eastern Front had suffered great destruction which left the Soviet Union both with the responsibility and the opportunity to rebuild them in their own image; for example, Minsk in Belarus, Kyiv in Ukraine, Stalingrad in Russia, and Chisinau in Moldova. These instances where mass rebuilding was called for are the most informative in what they are able to tell us about communist policies towards urban living and city design (a robust overview of these urban (re)developments can be found in *Landscapes of Communism* by Hatherley, 2015) – an effect that can also be seen in places where cities were rebuilt by communist governments following natural disasters, such as the Modernist new urban design that was implemented after the 1963 earthquake in Skopje, North Macedonia (formerly Yugoslavia). In other instances, whole new cities were raised from the ground up by communist governments (such as Dimitrovgrad in Bulgaria, or the power plant workers’ towns at Pripyat in Ukraine and Visaginas in Lithuania). In some cases, new, purpose-built districts were added onto existing cities; such as the Novi Beograd district of Belgrade, Serbia; or the Novi Zagreb district of Zagreb, Croatia. In many of these cases it is possible to see how communist governments had incorporated ideology into the fabric of their architecture, by building environments specifically designed to support a prescriptive model for Marxist living. Typically, these new cities and zones would feature wide boulevards (suitable for grand parades) surrounded by micro-districts where residential units were stacked in tower formation. Private living areas would be small, but subsidised by large public parks and an abundance of public leisure facilities such as pools, circuses, cinemas, sports grounds, and the ubiquitous ‘Palaces of Culture’ (public venues that typically contained some combination of theatre spaces, lecture



Plate 3: Shumen Central City Square. Creative team: Architect Ivan Sivrev (co-ordinator, chief designer) with architects Elena Konyarska, Maya Petrova, and Tsvetan Vasilev; Chief consultant architect Georgi Stoilov.

Under construction 1988-1989 (unfinished) (own photo: 21 June 2015).

halls, cinema screens, libraries, and sports facilities). A high number of kindergartens would ensure that both parents were able to get out and work, contributing to the national economy, while children were raised by the community. Particularly in the Soviet Union, public transport or workplace shuttle services were favoured over the possession of private vehicles, and it was believed that the average family didn't need a car of their own; often reflected in the design of these districts by the relative lack of car parking spaces in the vicinity of residential blocks. In some socialist cities, attempts were made to advance society even further towards true communal living. In Romania, Nicolae Ceaușescu's government pioneered the concept of 'agro-alimentary complexes' (though these days, almost universally referred to by the name 'hunger circuses' in reference to the country's food shortages during the communist period), which had been intended to serve as 'centres of collective food retailing,' in addition to providing communal public canteens (Light & Young, 2015). In Bulgaria, architecture teams in the 1980s were devising new urban centres such as Central City Square in Shumen, intended to revolutionise urban transport, administration and commerce, by incorporating all the city's key facilities into one multi-purpose city centre

structure (Richter, 2019). Meanwhile in Moscow, the Narkomfin Building was an experiment in socialist architecture which sought to “break down social hierarchies and bolster a new working-class consciousness in its residents”; an effect it pursued by providing 54 housing units none of which featured a private kitchen, but instead residents of the building had access to a communal kitchen, creche and laundry facilities, designed this way to promote a more communal style of living (Clemoes, 2019). But aesthetically, too, this new form of socialist architecture would represent bold new stylistic choices, and particularly during the later years of ‘Mature socialism,’ this would see the creation of a new wave of Modernist and Brutalist urban design.

2.1.1 Brutalist Utopias

The architecture of late socialism was ideological not only in terms of its designed and intended use, but also in terms of aesthetic – with much of this effort going towards the conceptualisation of cities as future-ready socialist utopias. The pursuit of utopia, says Shore (2014), was a literary, linguistic and artistic remedy sought after by central and east European city dwellers recovering from the horrors of World War II. Gordin, Tilley and Prakash (2010: 11) note: “the goal of utopia was to use the present to conjure a future liberated of the context of that very present.” Particularly from the late 1970s onwards, architectural styles such as Modernism and Brutalism would become popularised in urban planning to create ‘utopian’ socialist cities. The Brutalist style, an architectural style characterised by its imposing weight, often strikingly monumental designs, and surfaces of raw concrete, in particular:

“...became synonymous with the socially progressive housing solutions that architects and town planners promoted as modern ‘streets in the sky.’ With an ethos of ‘social utopianism,’ together with the influence of constructivist architecture, it became increasingly widespread across European communist countries such as the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia” (Designing Buildings, n.d.)

Despite originating in Western Europe, the style was guided by design philosophies that proved a good match for socialist utopia-builders. Brutalism had emerged as a protest against the ‘frivolous’ forms of much early 20th century and late imperial architecture: a socially-minded critique which valued function over form (Mould, 2017). Brutalism was about pride in efficiency. Instead of hiding structures behind artificial facades of glass and plaster, the style celebrated the raw materials – the nuts and bolts – from which a structure was

composed. Lift and service shafts, stairwells and corridors, would often extend outside the main body of a building, so that function itself became an explicit feature of the view. The Japanese architect Kenzō Tange (1987), a notable proponent of the Brutalist style, explains: “There is a powerful need for symbolism, and that means the architecture must have something that appeals to the human heart. Nevertheless, the basic forms, spaces, and appearances must be logical.” Significantly, Brutalism was a style of honesty and logic, one that celebrated engineering prowess through a transparent (yet symbolically monumental) reveal of the building’s workings. Though it can be difficult to pin down a precise definition of the style, owing to a range of historical, cultural and geographical interpretations, the three-point definition of Brutalism offered by architecture critic Reyner Banham, in his 1955 essay ‘The New Brutalism,’ is perhaps the most widely known and respected:

1. Memorability as an image;
2. Clear exhibition of structure;
3. Valuation of materials ‘as found.’

(Banham, 2011 [1955]).

Though not stated in Banham’s checklist, however, there was an inherently social aspect to Brutalism as well. Living spaces were rendered as un-frivolous units of habitation, after which “the bare structure was ready for dressing by the art of inhabitation” and thus provided the model for a ‘more ethical way of inhabiting’ (van den Heuvel, 2004: 19). Ernő Goldfinger, designer of several iconic Brutalist buildings in London including the Balfron Tower (1967) and Trellick Tower (1972), once said: “The success of any scheme depends on the human factor – the relationship of people to each other and the frame to their daily life which the building provides” (cited in Warburton, 2003). More recently, Jacobs and Merriman (2011) talk about “dwelling with” as opposed to “dwelling in” such buildings. The Brutalist style advertises function, rather than luxury; It is more concerned with community than with capital; so it is perhaps no wonder that Brutalism was so enthusiastically adopted by the regimes and architects of the late 20th century communist republics of central and east Europe.

2.2 The Role of (Communist) Monuments

Monuments and memorial sites appeared with great frequency across the communist republics of Europe throughout the twentieth century. Many marked the anniversaries of conflicts, though as the decades went on, monuments would come to serve a range of different functions within communist societies. The model below suggests four key roles they took (often with a single site fulfilling all these roles), each of which will be subsequently described and illustrated with examples.

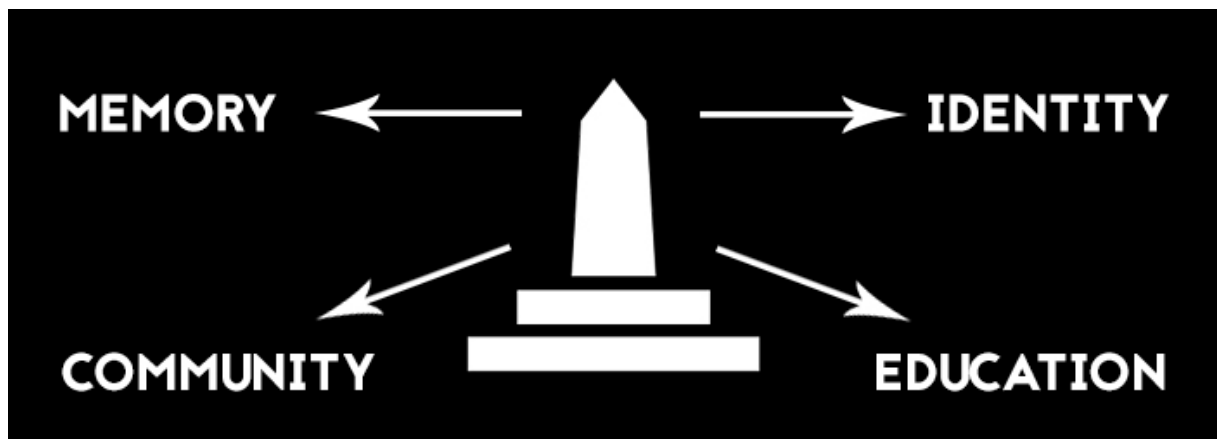


Figure 1: The role of monuments.

2.2.1 *Monuments for Memory*

The primary purpose of a monument is “remembrance – a marker, plaque, statue, relief, or structure. Its focus seems to be upon the past, but its message is directed with hope toward future generations” (Allen, 1992). In the early Soviet Union, countless monuments were raised to commemorate the Great Socialist Revolution of October 1917. Following World War II, the USSR’s sphere of influence grew and a great many new monuments were raised, in the second half of the twentieth century, across the newly communist republics of the East and commemorating the heroes and victims of the war. In these countries, that conflict was known as the Great Patriotic War (a title which technically refers only to the conflict between 1941-1944, beginning at the moment Hitler broke the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and launched an invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi forces, in June 1941, under the codename Operation Barbarossa). The appearance of war memorials was more pronounced in the regions that had seen actual conflict during the war. For example, in the Chernobyl region of northern Ukraine, where Soviet partisans fought many bloody battles against the occupying Nazi forces, almost

every village subsequently saw the creation of a monument to the Great Patriotic War. In many cases, the monuments of this region would each feature two lists of names, side by side – one showing the local villagers who had died during the war, and the other listing the Soviet soldiers from elsewhere, who had died in the liberation of this particular village (Richter, 2020a). In Yugoslavia, where the post-war socialist federal republic was presided over by Marshall Tito, leader of the region’s primary antifascist partisan movement, monuments were raised to illustrate a narrative of resistance under wartime Nazi occupation – marking the forest groves where specific local partisan detachments had formed, commemorating the valleys where armies clashed, and remembering the places where partisans and civilians were put to death in executions and massacres by the fascist forces (Niebyl, 2018).



Plate 4: A set of Yugoslav postage stamps released in 1974, depicting the monuments at Tjentište, Podgarić and Kragujevac (source: World Stamps Project, n.d.).

2.2.2 *Monuments for Identity*

In addition to their ostensible purpose of memorialising the past, in many instances monuments become symbols also of the present; a capacity in which their design, style, scale, and even the choice of which events should be memorialised, themselves serve to illustrate defining characteristics of the contemporary society and its politics. Monuments thus brand a state; they project symbols of a shared national identity, they can engender a sense of kinship through shared wartime loss, and even their removal is a powerful act advertising the changing values of a society (for example in the case of the removal of statues to slaveowners, discussed in Section 2.0 above). When the Soviet Union built monuments to the victims of the Great Patriotic War, for example, these objects would adopt a message and style that became almost uniform throughout cities and villages all the way from Estonia to Kamchatka, thus

advertising a uniformity of thought and purpose between communities and peoples located as much as 6,500 kilometres apart. Not only did monuments serve as branding for the Soviet republics, they also had a role as propaganda, reinforcing the political values of the state. An interesting case is seen in Armenia – a nation which suffered genocide under the Ottoman Empire, beginning in 1915, before joining the Soviet Union in 1920. The Soviet government in Armenia then commissioned thousands of new memorials that took the form of “totems of victimhood and monuments to Turk-killers.” In this location, the author has elsewhere noted:

“Perhaps this effect is no accident. From the 16th century up until WWI, a total of 12 wars were fought between the Russian and Ottoman Empires. After WWI Armenia joined Russia in the Soviet Union, becoming a border country between the lands of Russian influence and of Russian enemies. Naturally it would have been in Moscow’s best interests, back then, to support and even fund the construction of extravagant monuments that fanned the flames of the long-standing animosity between Armenia and Turkey. As was ever the case, the USSR defended its borders not only with tanks, but with dogma” (Richter, 2018a).

Whatever degree of political engineering may have been present in their original commission, the Soviet monuments to victims of the Armenian genocide have nevertheless been thoroughly adopted by Armenia as symbols of state identity, so that:

“[Even] in otherwise meagre settlements with broken roads, poor plumbing and sparse employment, amidst closed-down shops and crumbling industry, these stone and marble monuments are often maintained to a slavishly fine condition. Flags fly, and spotlights set them ablaze by night. [...] While generic Soviet monuments have been allowed to slip into ruin, anything associated with the conflict with Turkey appears to get almost sacred treatment. From an outsider’s perspective these monuments appear to be more than Armenia can afford” (Richter, 2018a).

In Southeast Europe, Yugoslavia has similarly been noted as having used the design of new monuments to reinforce a sense of national branding and unique identity. At a time when the Soviet Union and its satellites were still conforming with Stalinist-era design maxims, and formulaic approaches to memorialisation, Yugoslav architects were given the freedom to design large, modern and abstract shapes to mark their places of remembrance, a very visual exercise in artistic freedom which in itself projected a certain political message: “The openness which originates in the abstract language of the monuments is a visual manifestation of the emancipation from the Stalinist dominance of socialist realism in the eastern bloc” (Burghardt, 2010). That these design principles were part of a deliberate state-wide branding effort becomes quite apparent, when one considers the proliferation of government-produced

stamps and coins and other memorabilia, that presented new monuments as symbolic icons of the state (see Plate 4); such monuments therefore played roles far greater and more complex than simply ‘remembering.’

In Southeast Europe, it might also be inferred that communist states such as Yugoslavia and Bulgaria demonstrated a certain kind of one-upmanship in general (Daraktchiev, 2009), but specifically so when it came to the impact and scale of new monuments; as neighbouring countries appeared almost in competition to create the tallest towers, the largest mosaic panels, and so on. This aspect of competitive national identity projection would arguably reach its zenith in 1981, a year that saw numerous communist republics produce the largest and most extravagant monuments they would ever build; a point that will be discussed shortly, in Section 2.3 below.

2.2.3 Monuments for Community

In many cases, communist monuments were places where communities could gather for social rituals and shared acts of remembrance. Events were held to mark anniversaries, and travels to such events sometimes took on the mode of a pilgrimage. At more developed memorial complexes, community facilities were provided – such as museums, Palaces of Culture, play areas for children, or in the case of large and remote memorial sites, whole hotel complexes were sometimes constructed for visitors. In Yugoslavia, there was a tendency in the 1960s and 1970s for memorial sites to double as places of public recreation. At Kruševo in what is now Serbia, for instance, the architect Bogdan Bogdanović created a public rest area with memorial stones that doubled as stylised park benches, on land that had seen mass executions by Nazi forces between 1941 and 1944. In this way such places served the role not only of remembering the past, but also shaping the present and future in accordance with memorialised themes of historic sacrifice, and within a place that embodied a shared sense of national identity and purpose. It has been suggested that these memorial places were thus designed to encourage personal relationships with history:

“In the abstract formal language of the Yugoslav revolution, memorials instigate a certain sense of openness that allows for personal associations. They remain receptive to multiple interpretations, and they awaken fantasies. Their abstract vocabulary allows for an appropriation of meaning that bypasses official narrations, allowing

access to the monuments even for people who disagree with their official politic” (Kirn & Burghart, 2014).

The case could further be made that memorial sites adopted a similar role in (nominally atheist) communist society to the role that churches (and other places of worship) had played in pre-communist society. These were places of sanctity and sacrality, of remembrance and gratitude; often taking the form of solemn plazas or memorial houses, decorated in mosaics, with lists of names, and fashioned from austere materials such as concrete and marble. Other thematic similarities include the presentation of the conflict between the Soviet Red Army (or Yugoslav partisans) and Nazi forces as a black-and-white struggle between good and evil; the use of coloured stone mosaics to illustrate allegorical historical scenes, a technique previously associated with the Orthodox church; or the embalming of communist leaders such as Georgi Dimitrov (Bulgaria), Vladimir Lenin (Soviet Union), Mao Zedong (China), Kim Il Sung (North Korea) and others, to be placed on public display inside specially designed memorial houses, a practice only otherwise common to the remains of Christian saints.



Plate 5: A sculptural composition by Valentin Starchev at the Fraternal Barrow in Plevna, Bulgaria, resembles a stylised Modernist version of the traditional Catholic Pietà (own photo: 17 August 2014).



Plate 6: The Pantheon to Revival Heroes in Ruse, Bulgaria, a communist memorial house later rededicated as a chapel, with a Christian cross attached to its dome (own photo: 8 December 2018).



Plate 7: This Soviet monument to the Great Patriotic War at Opachychi in Ukraine has since been rededicated, with the addition of a metal cross welded on top of its Soviet star in 2002 (own photo: 16 July 2018).



Plate 8: Interior of the cathedral-like Tjentište Memorial House in Bosnia & Herzegovina. The walls feature murals reminiscent of the Christian ‘Stations of the Cross,’ with President Tito depicted in the position of the ‘pulpit’ (own photo: 18 April 2016).



Plate 9: A mural section inside the Tjentište Memorial House (left) shows a resemblance to a traditional Christian likeness of the Madonna and Child (right) (source: Niebyl, 2016c).

Plates 5-9 above show a variety of communist memorial sites in Bulgaria, former Yugoslavia, and the former Soviet Union, which between them demonstrate a certain degree of fluidity between communist and Christian styles of memorialisation. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a deeper analysis of the recurring similarities between these two memorial traditions, it simply suggests for now that perhaps in communist societies, these new memorial complexes filled – at least in part – something of the social role previously occupied by churches in pre-communist times. When the Romans conquered Britain, they eased the populace's transition to Christianity by building their new churches on previously sacred pagan sites, and introduced a new Christian holiday on the date of a former pagan celebration; perhaps it is not too much to suggest that communist societies attempted something similar.

2.2.4 Monuments for Education

Related to the point above, communist memorial sites served not only the role of communal places, but those communal places also acted as places of education. (The word 'propaganda' might also be reasonably used here, in place of 'education' – given the deliberate and political nature of the content of that education. However, in many contexts the word 'propaganda' comes with negative associations attached, and as the purpose of this section is to explore, not to critique, the less-weighted word 'education' is preferred.) Museums were commonly built alongside the more significant memorial sites, to tell detailed stories about the history in question. Some complexes featured theatres too, and in Yugoslavia, numerous memorial sites were built with landscaped outdoor amphitheatres to allow for dramatic performances, lectures, or other educational events. These monuments then often became regular destinations for school trips, where coachloads of children would be delivered to learn about the defining historical chapters of their nation. However, even the choice of which events and places to commemorate, and which to forget, typically reflected a conscious decision on the part of the state, and was informed by political ideology. For example, in Yugoslavia, after World War II, many memorial sites were constructed to mark the places where Nazi forces had led massacres against civilians and Yugoslav partisans. However, no monument was raised to the victims on the island of Daks, just off the Croatian coast – where in October 1944, Yugoslav partisans, having liberated the coastal city of Dubrovnik, proceeded to execute 53 suspected Nazi collaborators without investigation or trial (Richter, 2016a). As Hermann Göring is reported to have said at Nuremberg, "Der Sieger wird immer der Richter

und der Besiegte stets der Angeklagte sein” (*The victor will always be the judge, and the vanquished the accused*) (Phelan, 2019).

In other cases, the narrative presented by new monuments could be said to support one particular reading of history over others. In the USSR, for example:

“The actions of Nazi Germany were framed as anti-Soviet rather than anti-Semitic, and particular discussion of the Jewish experience was discouraged. As a result, the significance of the Holocaust was downplayed, and the universal Soviet proletariat was presented as the chief victim of the war. Monuments were built to commemorate the victims of Nazi occupation, the Soviet Red Army, and the antifascist partisans, but no special emphasis was placed on the Jewish victims” (Richter, 2020b: 63).

See also the example of Soviet monuments in Armenia, discussed in Section 2.2.2 above, where monuments served the role of *educating* citizens about the past through a memorial pantheon of (top-down imposed) national identity and memory.

Monuments therefore are powerful tools for historical education, and for engendering a sense of shared nationhood; but (particularly under a totalitarian state) both the selection of sites to memorialise and the content of those memorials is subject to the decisions of those in power, and is guided by their ideologies. As a result, under any government that represses pluralism and the freedom to criticise and challenge historical narratives, that ‘education’ can soon become propaganda and indoctrination.

2.3 1981

The Motherland Monument (or ‘Rodina Mat’) in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, is a vast stainless-steel statue which, at a height of 62 metres, dominates the hillside on the left bank of the River Dniepr. It is a distinctly Soviet symbol, holding aloft a 16-metre sword in its right hand (that weighs 9 tonnes on its own), while its left hand holds a shield decorated with a hammer-and-sickle placed on a Soviet crest. An original plan for the site would have been even more politically charged; in the 1950s, it was suggested that this location should receive twin monuments of the Soviet leaders Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin, both statues standing at a height of 200 metres (Tuchynska, 2011). That plan was never realised however, and instead in the 1970s the Soviet sculptor Yevgeny Vuchetich was commissioned to create this monument to ‘Mother Ukraine.’ Vuchetich had previously designed the Soviet war memorial

in East Berlin's Treptower Park, as well as the statue in Volgograd, Russia, on the site of the Stalingrad battlefield, titled 'The Motherland Calls' (finished in 1967 to commemorate a half-century since the Great October Revolution of 1917, and which, at 85 metres in height, was once declared the tallest statue in the world, and still ranks today as the tallest statue outside of Asia and the tallest statue of a woman anywhere in the world (Morris, 2018)). Yevgeny Vuchetich would not see his Kyiv Motherland Monument realised however – he died in 1974, with sculptor Vasyl Borodai taking over the project. Final plans for the statue were presented in 1978, with construction beginning in 1979. Even at the time, there were those who criticised the cost of the monument – which ran to a conservative estimate of 9 million rubles, according to director of construction Ivan Petrovich. The Motherland Monument was officially opened on 9 May (the day the Soviets celebrated their victory over Nazism), in 1981, with a grand ceremony attended by the USSR's General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev.

That year – 1981 – was the year that monument-mania peaked in the socialist world. Soviet Ukraine received its largest monument and one the largest statues in the world, the Motherland Monument, and Brezhnev travelled to Soviet Georgia that year too, to unveil the grand Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, a huge memorial complex in Vake Park, Tbilisi. In Southeast Europe, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia saw an unprecedented number of new monuments erected in 1981. The *Spomenik Database* (<https://www.spomenikdatabase.org>), an online archive that maps and documents the largest and most significant Modernist war memorials of the post-Yugoslav region, lists a total of 96 locations built between 1953 and 1988, of which 10 entries – more than 10 per cent of the archive – were completed in the year 1981 (an interview with the website's creator, Donald Niebyl, appears in Appendix 3). This included one of the largest memorial buildings the country ever created, and the largest Yugoslav-era monument still standing, the Petrova Gora Memorial House: a monumental building measuring 37 metres tall, 40 metres wide, and covered in reflective stainless-steel panels. The neighbouring People's Republic of Bulgaria also created many of its largest or most significant monuments and memorial buildings that year, including: the Pantheon to the Fallen in the Fight Against Fascism at Burgas; the Pantheon of Immortality at Razgrad; the 50-metre tall Monument to the Founders of the Bulgarian State at Shumen; the National Palace of Culture in Sofia (an extremely large building whose infrastructure was said to contain more steel than the Eiffel Tower), along with the Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria that stood in front of it; the Monument to Khan Asparuh in Dobrich; and additionally, what would become the country's most internationally

recognised monument, the Buzludzha Memorial House (numerous of these Bulgarian sites will be visited in Appendix 2).

In each of these countries, there were local reasons why 1981 saw new monument projects. President Tito of Yugoslavia died in 1980, and in the absence of its iconic leader, the republic faced a potential identity crisis. By 1981, new monuments might have served to reinvigorate the Yugoslav brand, as unifying symbols that continued to hold these member republics together under their shared ideology and identity. In Bulgaria meanwhile, 1981 was a very significant year – marking 1,300 years since the official recognition of the first Bulgarian kingdom, in 681 CE (see Chapter 5). However, none of these dates necessitated the creation of monuments so *large* – rather, the scale to which these new monuments were created might be said to represent the culmination of decades of escalating one-upmanship in memorial size, and the ultimate manifestation of state-wide policies to create large-scale ideological architecture. After 1981, none of these socialist countries (the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia or Bulgaria) ever built such a large monument again.

2.4 Leninfall

In November 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall was the first in a series of seismic political events that would lead to a chain reaction across Europe and beyond, bringing to an end the regimes of numerous 20th century communist parties, and thoroughly dismantling what had once been described as the ‘communist bloc.’ The so-called ‘Soviet satellites’ were the first to leave. East Germany was reunified with West Germany. Hungary, Poland, Albania and Bulgaria all cut their ties with the USSR that year, deposing communist leaders in favour of new democratic elections. In some places this process was smooth and peaceful, as in the case of Czechoslovakia’s so-called ‘Velvet Revolution’; conversely, in Romania, the communist leader Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife Elena were deposed, subjected to a hasty trial and then executed by a firing squad on Christmas Day. The following year the Soviet Union itself began to disintegrate, beginning with Lithuania cutting ties from Moscow in March 1990, and followed in the coming months by the other Baltic states (Latvia and Estonia), the Caucasus republics (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia), the European republics of Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus, and the Central Asian republics of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and finally Kazakhstan in December 1991. Moscow, formerly the capital of an empire, was proclaimed capital of the new Russian Federation, as the USSR was replaced by

15 fledgling independent republics. Numerous autonomous or special administrative regions that had been carefully managed within the borders of the USSR now became flashpoints in resurrected conflicts, and those that couldn't be reabsorbed into the new model would instead settle into uneasy stalemates known as 'breakaway states,' or 'post-Soviet frozen conflict zones,' including the war-torn regions of Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Meanwhile, in the western Balkans, Yugoslavia faced its own crisis. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had presented what was known as a 'third way,' a moderate form of 'market socialism' that had allowed trade between the East and West, and at its peak Yugoslavia had profited greatly in its role as a middleman for trade between Cold War antagonists. With the USSR gone though, various Yugoslav import/export companies faced bankruptcy, and a resurgence of nationalist sentiment amongst member states (which had begun, gradually, following the death of Yugoslavia's unifying figurehead of Josip Tito in 1980) now erupted into new conflicts, spearheaded by the rise of new populist leaders such as the Serb nationalist Slobodan Milošević. Over the course of the 1990s, amidst much bloodshed and numerous wars, the former Yugoslav republic was eventually dissolved into the republics of Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia (now North Macedonia), Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and the newly formed republic of Kosovo, formerly an autonomous region within Yugoslavia, but which with UN backing declared its independence from Serbia in 2008. By the mid-2000s, the map of central and eastern Europe had become almost unrecognisable. (The above passage is an intentionally brief overview of the history, offered here to contextualise the rest of the study to come – but for a more thorough historical treatment of the collapse of the 20th century's various communist republics, see for example Brown, 2011; Westad, 2019).

In the West, commentators declared that communism had been defeated, and Margaret Thatcher's political slogan of the 1980s, stating that 'There is no alternative' to her proposed brand of free-market neoliberalism, appeared finally to have borne conclusive fruit (Berlinski, 2008). In 1992 the economist Francis Fukuyama published his work *The End of History and the Last Man*, in which he explains:

"Both Hegel and Marx believed that the evolution of human societies was not open-ended, but would end when mankind had achieved a form of society that satisfied its deepest and most fundamental longings. Both thinkers thus posited an 'end of history': for Hegel this was the liberal state, while for Marx it was a communist society. This did not mean that the natural cycle of birth, life, and death would end, that important

events would no longer happen, or that newspapers reporting them would cease to be published. It meant, rather, that there would be no further progress in the development of underlying principles and institutions, because all of the really big questions had been settled” (Fukuyama, 1992: xii).

Fukuyama concludes that where Hegel and Marx were proven wrong, Western-style neoliberal capitalism had finally vanquished all challengers to usher in society’s final form: the so-called ‘end of history.’ The cultural critic Mark Fisher borrows a phrase from Žižek when he wryly comments of this new status quo: “It’s easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism” (Fisher, 2009: 1). However, Fukuyama may have been premature in declaring a victory. In the 19th century, the Russian thinker, writer and activist Alexander Herzen wrote:

“The Death of the contemporary forms of social order ought to gladden rather than trouble the soul. Yet what is frightening is that the departing world leaves behind it not an heir, but a pregnant widow. Between the death of the one and the birth of the other, much water will flow by, a long night of chaos and desolation will pass” (Herzen, 1955).

By the 1990s the former ‘Eastern Bloc’ of Europe was no longer communist, but neither was it entirely democratic yet, as that ‘long night’ which Herzen foresaw would entail a complicated process of transition through which each of these newly formed republics would need to find its own way. Additionally, perspectives on communist history vary enormously from one former-communist country to the next. For some countries (for example Serbia and Russia), those years saw them at the historical zenith of their power and influence; for others the Soviet Union had brought safety and security (for example Armenia, who suffered mass genocide under the Ottoman Empire in 1915-1917 before joining with the powerful Soviet empire in 1920); however, there are other countries which still remember terrible suffering under communist governments (for example Ukraine, where the mass starvations of 1932-1933, under Stalin’s leadership, are now officially considered a deliberate famine-genocide by the Soviet authorities against the Ukrainian people (Jones, 2016)). As a result, even something so seemingly innocuous as a simple statue of Lenin is liable to be afforded a very different treatment depending on whether it stands in Belgrade, in Moscow, in Yerevan, in Kyiv, or wherever else; and even in any single former-communist country, there are usually a multitude of different voices and perspectives concerning the communist past. For example, in Serbia, while some may experience feelings of ‘Yugonostalgia’ (Bošković, 2013), Djureinović notes the rise of anti-communist state messaging after the 1990s, and how: “One

of the goals of anti-communist memory politics and historical revisionism [in Serbia is] to convince people there is no alternative to capitalism, to what we are living in the post-Yugoslav period, and that the Serbian neoliberal nation state is the best form of political order and statehood that exists” (Korchňak, 2021). Fukuyama had suggested that there simply was no alternative to the new normal, but in reality, many states had to work hard to cement this idea as fact.

In many cases, iconoclasm against the physical legacies of previous regimes became a performative act of political self-reinvention. In 1992, during the Croatian War for Independence, soldiers of the Croatian Army used large quantities of explosives to destroy the 30-metre Monument to the Revolutionary Victory of the People of Slavonia, located at Kamenska and perceived as a symbol of the Yugoslav state, thus serving a purely symbolic strike against their former allies (Niebyl, 2016a). Deleuze and Guattari identify this form of political iconoclasm within dual processes that they term ‘deterritorialisation’ and ‘reterritorialisation’; in which the incoming regime first targets and removes the propaganda of the previous regime, before replacing it with signs and symbols that endorse their own new rule. Capitalism, they note, is “the movement of social production that goes to the very extremes of its deterritorialization,” thus representing: “the new massive deterritorialization, the conjunction of deterritorialised flows” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983: 142, 244).



Plate 10: Soldiers pose with the destroyed Kamenska monument in 1992 (source: Niebyl, 2016a).

Shebelist (2013) comments on the “war of monuments” in Ukraine, and notes the variety of perspectives towards Lenin statues from region to region: in the east, statues of Lenin still stand decorated with flowers, while in the west the movement to remove them is largely conducted with duty-bound apathy: “On the one hand, there is no will to dismantle them, and on the other hand there is no loyalty and Soviet patriotism any more to honour them.” However, in central and northern Ukraine, the former leader has been more enthusiastically “dethroned,” in an effort “often attributed to the activity of the nationalist party Svoboda.” Shebelist refers to this phenomenon by its colloquial name, ‘Leninopad,’ a pun that literally translates as *Leninfall*. In April 2015, Ukraine passed a formal decommunisation law, “Condemning the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes and Prohibiting the Propagation of their Symbols” (Shevel, 2016); and this had the effect of accelerating the removal of Soviet symbols and monuments right across the country (barring the exception of war memorials). It was reported that in 2016, Ukraine saw the removal of 1,320 monuments to Lenin, and 1,069 monuments to other Soviet figures, while 51,493 streets and 987 cities or villages were renamed. Volodymyr Viatrovykh, chairman of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, called this action “an essential element of our integration into democratic Europe” (Ukrinform, 2016; Fedorova, 2017).

Those symbols that weren’t destroyed, were nevertheless impossible to protect in many cases as to do so could lead a government to being accused as communist sympathisers by their political rivals, or otherwise unfavourably associated with past politics. Commenting on the fate of the Mostar Partisan Cemetery in Bosnia & Herzegovina, for example, Mackic and Bogdanović (2015) note: “the monument is too loaded with meaning to be left alone and too charged with emotion to be protected after the horrors and ruination of the war.” Moreover, the large scale to which many communist monuments were built made them inherently difficult objects to manage under the typically less powerful, less affluent, independent successor states who inherited them:

“[Communist] architecture in general was very often characterised by huge, overblown statements, the kind of monuments built by people who were blind to the possibility of their own eventual downfall. It’s a fact that makes communist heritage sites the world over doubly difficult to reconcile – it’s not just the socio-political implications of these places that need to be addressed, but also the steep price that many would cost to maintain” (Richter, 2018a).

Elsewhere, Paletta (2012) summarised the whole problem in the following words:

“Totalitarian kitsch, in the realm of architecture, poses innumerable questions once the core of the totalitarian has passed. Architecture in totalitarian societies unquestionably constitutes an exercise of power; the question stands how effective this exercise remains once that rule has passed, and whether the nature of a given totalitarianism is indissolubly bound up in the stone, concrete, and steel to which it gave form. Some particularly egregious symbols are demolished, but far more often, buildings are simply repurposed and assume some new identity. The Reich Chancellery was demolished, with excellent cause; but the Luftwaffe headquarters now houses the German Finance Ministry. Few today, outside of perhaps any especially melodramatic Greek circles, would think that this amounts to any sort of continuity of purpose.

“Some wish to expunge the physical memory of totalitarian rule as fully as possible; others believe in retaining some memory of the humane strivings of these former socialist states, that would design and build a puppet theatre, or a ‘children’s health resort basin’ or countless other facilities for public recreation. These debates continue. There are, of course, far more buildings that many would like to see demolished, and this not because of the buildings’ latent symbolic power, but simply because they are godawful monstrosities. But, as you may have heard, money is not something in which the former Eastern bloc is generally much awash, and so they stand.”



Plate 11: 1991, a painting by Soviet artist Gennady Mikhailovich Zykov (1991). The painting comments on the collapse of the Soviet Union and its society, and suggests a regression to barbarism as a result, as characterised by violent territorial conflicts and the destruction of former symbols of state (Art Hive, n.d.).

2.5 Ghosts of Lost Futures

Mark Fisher's (2009) theory of our current state of society, what he called 'capitalist realism,' posits that it has become impossible to imagine alternatives: "Fisher feared that we were losing our ability to conceptualise a tomorrow that was radically different from our present" (Hsu, 2018). Communist monuments, as relics of historic political alternatives, take on a hauntingly misplaced form in this landscape. Derrida (1993) talked about the "Spectres of Marx," and how Marxism's atemporal nature caused its ghosts to persist, and continue to "haunt Western society from beyond the grave." He quotes Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, to declare that "time is out of joint." Abandoned communist monuments therefore, still standing today in their successor states, present a very concrete manifestation (pun intended) of Marxism's ghosts. However, in abandoned monuments to would-be utopias – monuments that prophesied a glorious communist future – we also see the ghosts of futures that never arrived. Fisher talked of "a city haunted not only by the past but by lost futures" (2006) and what he called the condition of 'hauntological melancholia': reflecting the refusal to accept this loss, as people continued to wallow in historical visions of a promised future that had failed to arrive (2014: 684-685). Communist monuments in post-communist space therefore recall not only a past fading fast into obscurity, but they symbolise also future paths left untrodden, and promises broken. These structures reached a state where, as Crowley and Pavitt (2008: 14) put it, "utopia and dystopia were not only concurrent: they could even be present in the same object."

Particularly over the past decade, the architecture and design of 20th century communism has seen a significant resurgence in interest. Most notably, the stylistic aesthetics of Modernism and Brutalism appear to have come back into vogue, as declared by a stream of mainstream media think pieces in the mid 2010s: "Brutalism Is Back" in *The New York Times* (Saval, 2016); "Concrete jungle: why brutalist architecture is back in style" in *The Guardian* (Salmon, 2016); "Concrete trends: How Brutalism came back into architectural fashion" in *The Independent* (Gander, 2016); and "Brutalism, a revival: From cool to crude and back again" on *CNN* (Page, 2016). That some of these articles lead with images of architecture in no way representative of the Brutalist style (for example Gander, 2016) suggests that while many commentators may have noticed the trend, it doesn't mean they fully understand it. As a result, there is a tendency to label any imposing concrete structure as 'Brutalist'; though as Hopkins (2014) notes: "For a movement that is synonymous with concrete, it is some surprise that the building that is often seen as inaugurating the New Brutalism was mainly made of

steel, glass and brick.” Meanwhile Gatley and King (2016) explain how the word ‘Brutalism,’ once denoting a form of architecture built around ideas of equality, communal living and the pursuit of social utopia, at some point became appropriated as “a pejorative term used to describe monolithic buildings of raw concrete construction that impose themselves on their surroundings.” It has been suggested that the political aspect of communist-era Modernist and Brutalist architecture should not be assumed as the one or only cause for its frequent contemporary maligning:

“The increased public interest in Sovietia is met by a body of work that’s pointing to the politically charged character of Communist monuments as the root cause of the abandonment and damage they suffer. This interpretation, however, is based on the assumption that those who seek to damage monuments are guided by their own political conscience” (Panagopoulos, 2021a)

After all, over the years since their construction many such sites have had the opportunity to foster a wide range of different associations and conceptualisations, becoming in the process more than simply symbols of the state(s) that created them; therefore, a simplified binary logic of pro- and anti-communist sentiment is not sufficient to explain the phenomenon. Besides, it might be asked whether communist ghosts even still possess the power to pose a significant political challenge to the contemporary status quo. Whereas other societal or political systems may be threatened by the presence of alternative messages and ideas, Fisher believes that our current state of capitalist realism is immune to such ideological competition:

“The role of capitalist ideology is not to make an explicit case for something in the way that propaganda does, but to conceal the fact that the operations of capital do not depend on any sort of subjectively assumed belief. It is impossible to conceive of fascism or Stalinism without propaganda - but capitalism can proceed perfectly well, in some ways better, without anyone making a case for it” (Fisher, 2009: 12).

As a result, he argues that capitalism is the only ideology able to consume the propaganda of other systems; because even anti-capitalist propaganda can have a price tag attached to it, thus converting it into capital. (See also the way in which Fisher’s own books, critiquing capitalism, are available to purchase online through Amazon.) He explains:

“The power of capitalist realism derives in part from the way that capitalism subsumes and consumes all of previous history: one effect of its ‘system of equivalence’ which can assign all cultural objects, whether they are religious iconography, pornography, or Das Kapital, a monetary value. Walk around the British Museum, where you see objects torn from their lifeworlds and assembled as if on the deck of some Predator spacecraft, and you have a powerful image of this process at work. In the conversion

of practices and rituals into merely aesthetic objects, the beliefs of previous cultures are objectively ironised, transformed into artifacts” (Fisher, 2009: 4).

Perhaps then, there is a possibility that these monuments and styles become popular again today in the form of what Jameson (1991: 17) called a postmodern *pastiche*: “Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter.” Jameson attributes this as a “symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way” (1991: 21) and concludes that “we are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach” (1991: 25). Fisher (2009: 6) also comments on this phenomenon of an age so over-saturated with history, that the past becomes almost meaningless:

“[Even] when Fukuyama advanced it, the idea that history had reached a ‘terminal beach’ was not merely triumphalist. Fukuyama warned that his radiant city would be haunted, but he thought its spectres would be Nietzschean rather than Marxian. Some of Nietzsche’s most prescient pages are those in which he describes the ‘oversaturation of an age with history.’ ‘It leads an age into a dangerous mood of irony in regard to itself,’ he wrote in *Untimely Meditations*, ‘and subsequently into the even more dangerous mood of cynicism,’ in which ‘cosmopolitan fingering,’ a detached spectatorialism, replaces engagement and involvement. This is the condition of Nietzsche’s Last Man, who has seen everything, but is decadently enfeebled precisely by this excess of (self) awareness.”

Something of this effect is visible in the way that – for example – modern cinema appropriates the architectural styles of the past. Following the 2021 release of *Dune*, a Hollywood sci-fi blockbuster that makes liberal use of sheer and imposing concrete architecture in its fictional landscapes, the architecture researcher Evan Panagopoulos noted:

“To paraphrase an excerpt from Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism*, *Dune*'s visuals is pastiche cinematography reproducing the forms of the past without anxiety, confirming the defeat and incorporation of Brutalist architecture’s utopian and promethean ambitions. In recent movies, Brutalist architecture is offered for consumption in a futuristic, mostly dystopian setting: the neo-noir, mega corporation-led Los Angeles in *Blade Runner*. The Nazi-dominated, mid-mod New York in *The Man in the High Castle*. Or the dark age-themed, baronial rivalries on the resource starved desert world of Arrakis [in *Dune*]” (Panagopoulos, 2021b).

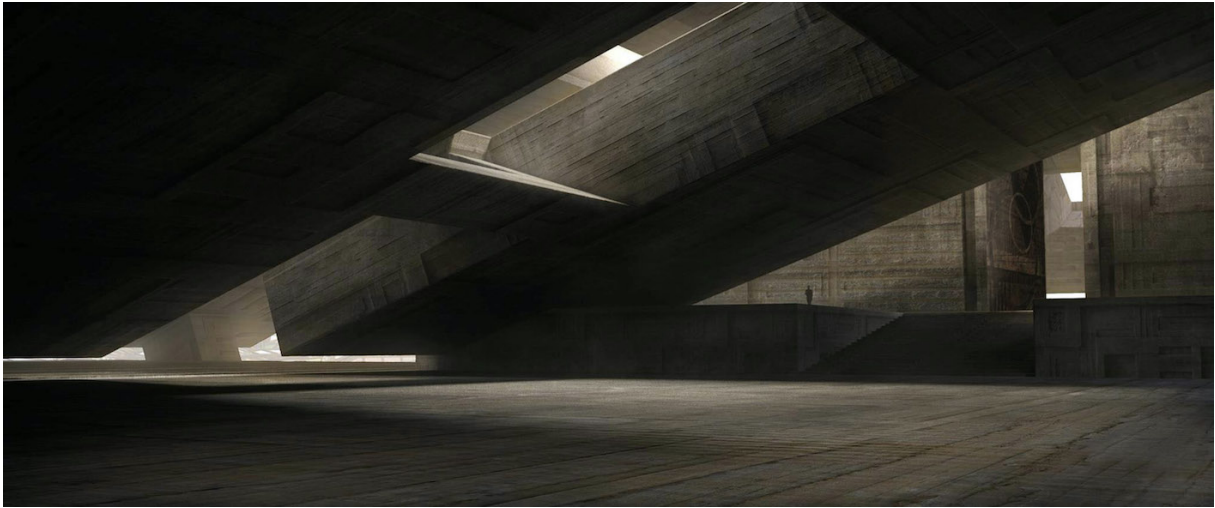


Plate 12: A ‘pastiche’ of Brutalist architecture, as featured in *Dune* (Villeneuve, 2021).



Plate 13: A dystopian scene from *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 2* (Lawrence, 2015) (left); the 1971 Monument to the Fallen Soldiers of the Kosmaj Detachment in Serbia, by Vojin Stojić & Gradimir Medaković (own photo: 4 April 2016) (right).

The examples above can be seen as part of a much larger trend, by which Hollywood recasts sites of Brutalist and Modernist architecture as code for evil villains’ lairs, nightmare cities of the future or totalitarian citadels. See also the examples of *Equilibrium* (Wimmer, 2002); *No Time to Die* (Fukunaga, 2021); *Equilibrium*; or *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 2* (Lawrence, 2015), in which the portrayal of a dystopian capital city is achieved through an amalgamation of what appears to be Ceaușescu’s Victory of Socialism Boulevard (a grand thoroughfare built through the centre of Bucharest, flanked in Socialist-realist housing blocks and allegedly inspired after the Romanian leader’s visit to North Korea), decorated with

pastiches of Yugoslav partisan memorials (see Plate 13). Such uses might be said to constitute a perfect inversion of what was in many cases the original design intent of such architecture:

“Brutalist architecture [...] is not an imaginary, cinematic illusion [but] a style borne of the urgent need to push back the darkness and anguish of the actual world. House the homeless of war-torn cities, or those previously living in impoverished slums. And maybe create a template for a fairer world by giving a satisfying solution to one of our primary needs. It was therefore an architecture of optimism and virtue, not one to represent our worst fears in the sci-fi cinematography of today. [...] Pushing it further into the realm of fantasy, and accepting its consumption as a mere spectacle – especially a dystopian one – is disappointing” (Panagopoulos, 2021b).

In essence, what was once thought of as progressive and proletarian architecture has now become code for the spaces of the ‘big Other.’ In the mid-twentieth century, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan proposed his notion of the ‘big Other’ and ‘small Other’; where Lacan’s small Other was really just a projection or reflection of one’s own ego, the big Other represented the symbolic order of the Other, so that the term:

“...designates radical alterity, an otherness which transcends the illusory otherness of the imaginary because it cannot be assimilated through identification. Moreover, not only is the ‘big Other’ inscribed into language and law, but also into individual subjects. Thus, the Other is both another subject in its radical alterity and also the symbolic order which mediates the relationship with that subject” (Katušić, 2017: 128).

In other words, the “big Other is the collective fiction, the symbolic structure, presupposed by any social field. The big Other can never be encountered in itself; instead, we only ever confront its stand-ins” (Fisher, 2009: 44). This big Other has often traditionally been situated within the symbolic order of communist-style totalitarianism (for example in the post-Lacanian work of Slavoj Žižek (De Kesel, 2004)). Today however, Zuboff (2015) locates a new big Other within contemporary surveillance capitalism, looking in particular at ‘big data’ companies such as Google and Facebook. Zuboff describes how “the global architecture of computer mediation,” as “constituted by unexpected and often illegible mechanisms of extraction, commodification, and control” produce “a distributed and largely uncontested new expression of power” which “challenges democratic norms and departs in key ways from the centuries-long evolution of market capitalism.”

Fukuyama proposed that after the ‘end of history,’ any further revolutionary effort would be conducted purely for its own sake. If “there exist no tyranny and oppression worthy of the name against which to struggle,” he says;

“[If] men cannot struggle on behalf of a just cause because that just cause was victorious in an earlier generation, then they will struggle against the just cause. They will struggle for the sake of struggle. [...] And if the greater part of the world in which they live is characterised by peaceful and prosperous liberal democracy, then they will struggle against that peace and prosperity, and against democracy” (Fukuyama, 1992: 330).

However, in the decades since Fukuyama wrote that, the world has seen an increasing critique of the current state of capitalist liberal democracy. Fisher (2009) notes the increasingly negative effects of capitalism on public mental health, and perhaps in part reflecting capitalism’s increasingly criticised role in climate change, and its problematic responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, in “one 2020 survey by the marketing and public relations firm Edelman, 57% of people worldwide said that ‘capitalism as it exists today does more harm than good in the world’” (King, 2021). The economists Jacobs and Mazzucato (2016: 57) conclude: “the performance of Western capitalism in recent decades has been deeply problematic,” and that “Western capitalism is not irretrievably bound to fail; but it does need to be rethought.”

Is it possible then that the survival of communist monuments, and other works of ideological architecture, might yet serve as reminders of unrealised (yet still attainable) alternative political and social models? Do these ghosts of lost futures give us a way to rethink capitalism? For example, amidst the Soviet-era ruins of Chernobyl, Dobraszczyk (2010) discovers “a secret world in ruins,” perhaps with the potential to “challenge existing certainties and provide liberating alternatives.” Therefore, is the promise of these alternatives in fact contributing to the appeal of such places, in a time when so many are growing disillusioned with the contemporary status quo? Fisher concludes:

“The long, dark night of the end of history has to be grasped as an enormous opportunity. The very oppressive pervasiveness of capitalist realism means that even glimmers of alternative political and economic possibilities can have a disproportionately great effect. The tiniest event can tear a hole in the grey curtain of reaction which has marked the horizons of possibility under capitalist realism. From a situation in which nothing can happen, suddenly anything is possible again” (Fisher, 2009: 80).

2.6 Monument Wars

The communist regimes of Eastern Europe frequently raised monuments to commemorate notable events, deeds and figures. However, as discussed in Section 2.4, the framing of these subjects often conformed to heavily politicised versions of history, leading many to question the relevance of their continued presence in a post-communist world. In more extreme cases, active measures have been taken to remove such monuments – but rarely does this occur without the challenge of historic revisionism being raised (for example, Poland’s increasing rejection of monuments depicting the USSR as the nation’s liberators from Nazi occupation, despite the fact that the USSR did in fact liberate Poland from Nazi occupation (Luxmoore, 2018)). Moreover, as Mamedov (2016) notes: “In countries across the post-Soviet space [...] there is a struggle to define historical memory through the dedication of new monuments and removal of old ones.” In the decades since the fall of Europe’s 20th century communist regimes, a number of formerly communist countries have passed ‘decommunisation’ laws. Estonia banned the public display of Nazi and communist symbols in 2007; Lithuania followed in 2008, and Latvia in 2014. A law passed in Poland in 2009 outlawing “fascist, communist or other totalitarian symbols” was updated in 2017 to also include “Soviet propaganda monuments” (BBC, 2017). In Bulgaria, a law highlighting the “Criminal Nature of the Communist Regime” was voted into effect on 24 November 2016, effectively banning the public display of communist symbols (Morton, 2016).

Meanwhile in Ukraine, where so-called ‘memory laws’ are similarly in full effect, sparking the onset of ‘memory wars’ (Koposov, 2018), cities have seen not just the removal of problematic monuments, but also cases of adaptation and rededication. For example, the Motherland Monument in Kyiv, once an unmistakable symbol of Soviet might that towered over the Ukrainian capital (see Section 2.3), can be seen in recent years to have undergone a dramatic shift in allegiance. On the ground floor of the structure, inside the statue’s base, a series of austere marble chambers contain what was once titled the ‘Museum of the Great Patriotic War.’ In 2015 though, the name was changed to replace this title – reminiscent of Soviet historiography of the era – with the more European-sounding ‘National Museum of the History of Ukraine in World War II’ (Channel 5, 2015). Perhaps more significantly though, the museum’s foyer space was adapted to include a new exhibit, showcasing artefacts from the contemporary conflict between Ukraine and Russia in the eastern region of Donbass; and in this way, Ukraine’s protective *Motherland* figure now symbolically defends the country against its former Russian allies, so that the Soviet crest that decorates the monument above

could no longer be said to reflect pro-Russian sentiment, so much as providing the simple, factual observation that this was the flag Ukraine flew during that particular period of its history. The new anti-Russian exhibits contained within now confirm this structure as a fundamentally Ukrainian – not Soviet, or Russian – symbol.



Plate 14: A new monument to the controversial Ukrainian historical figure Stepan Bandera, in Lviv, Ukraine (own photo: 22 August 2018).

However, at the same time, in Ukraine, new statues to Ukrainian patriots go unchallenged, even when those patriots were historically allied with the Nazis. Of particular note is the appearance of new monuments dedicated to Stepan Bandera, a general in the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, for some time an ally of Nazi Germany and one of the chief organisers of the 1943-45 massacres of ethnic Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia (Rudling, 2016). While many Ukrainians consider Bandera a *liberator*, his critics describe him as a Nazi collaborator and war criminal, one of the architects of the Holocaust in Ukraine; “a Nazi sympathiser who left behind a horrific legacy” (Lazare, 2015). This legacy even extends beyond the borders of Europe. Across the Atlantic, in October 2017, the Russian embassy in Canada raised awareness of a 1973 bust of Roman Shukhevych – an ally of Bandera – that stood on display in Edmonton (Rudling, 2011; Sevunts, 2018). Some commentators tried to downplay the

significance of the monument, dismissing the embassy's complaints as a "campaign of micro-targeted trolling by Russia's diplomatic missions in the West" (Colborne, 2018). No official statement was added by the Canadian government, but this led some to question how "Canadians can tolerate, ignore or approve of the glorification of Ukrainian radical nationalism in Canada" (Rossoliński-Liebe, 2010); or as the *Ottawa Citizen* put it: "Canadian government comes to the defence of Nazi SS and Nazi collaborators but why?" (Pugliese, 2018).

In Kilmarnock, Scotland, a small memorial is dedicated to victims of the Georgian-Abkhaz War. It bears a simple inscription: "In memory of those from our twin town of Sukhumi who died in the Abkhazian/Georgian conflict 1992-1993." Sukhumi is the de facto capital of Abkhazia, an unrecognised republic which, with Russian support, fought a bloody war to secure its independence from Georgia. The Abkhaz monument in Kilmarnock features the flag of Abkhazia, and it uses the Abkhaz spelling of *Sukhumi* (the Georgians, who still claim the territory, call this city *Sukhum*); and just recently, the Georgian ambassador to the UK called for the monument's "correction." A 16 November 2017 statement from Georgia's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Davit Dondua, explained that, "the memorial contains politicised symbols and does not correspond to the policy of the UK with respect to the territorial integrity of Georgia" (Pender, 2017). The suggestion of removing the flag from the monument sparked outrage in Abkhazia though, whose Ministry of Foreign Affairs went onto social media to call the proposed modification, "an act of vandalism aimed at destroying the historical memory of the Abkhaz people."

These kinds of controversies surrounding complicated monuments have met a range of different answers in different places – and the next section will highlight some examples of the creative and destructive ways in which controversial 20th century monuments have been managed.

2.7 Counter-Monuments

In Bolzano, a small settlement in northern Italy, a creative solution has been deployed to defuse tensions around a fascist monument that still stands in the town centre. The monumental frieze depicts Mussolini on horseback, accompanied by the fascist slogan 'Credere, Obbedire, Combattere' (*Believe, Obey, Fight*) and even until recently, the town

council was torn between calls to destroy the monument, or to preserve it as a historical artefact. The solution, unveiled in November 2017, was to superimpose an LED display over the surface of the monument featuring a quote from the German-Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt – ‘Nobody has the right to obey’ – thus subverting the original message without resorting to the destruction of a (controversial) work of sculptural art (Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017). In Orillia, Canada, a monument to the arrival of 17th century explorer Samuel de Champlain recently sparked controversy as well, for its unfavourable depiction of indigenous peoples. Initially there were calls for the monument to be removed, until another solution was proposed: “The initiative to correct the record with a counter-monument reflecting the Indigenous view of that event” (Barber, 2018).

This idea of ‘counter-monuments’ was popularised in Germany, as artists began to produce new works of sculpture and memorialisation in the second half of the 20th century, to counter the messages presented by older, now-problematic monuments (Franck & Stevens, 2015). The idea is that the new monument “critiques the purpose and the design of a specific, existing monument, in an explicit, contrary and proximate pairing” (Stevens, Franck & Fazakerley, 2012); as such, the approach seeks to present historical narratives as contextualised conversations rather than singular perspectives: a pluralist approach to history. It is possible to speculate whether such contextualizing approaches might have saved some former monuments from destruction – though sometimes the destruction of a monument is a meaningful political act in itself. In 2003 the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein in Firdos Square, Baghdad, was a deeply political event, which recent investigations have revealed to have been at least partially scripted by US invasion forces for the sake of providing the world’s media with an iconic image (Fisher, 2011).

A disconnect emerges between the stated intention of many of these 20th century monuments (to remember, to educate, to honour) and what they actually represent – in some cases, having become so politicised or imbued with ideological bias as to provoke attempts at destruction or in some cases to demand further explanation and contextualisation by way of ‘counter monuments.’ Ultimately, this has led some to question whether such monuments themselves have ‘failed’; and it is to this question that the next section is addressed.

2.8 Have Monuments Failed?

The previous sections have discussed monuments which over time, and as a result of changes in social and political outlooks, have become controversial. Yet even in the case of monuments that ostensibly maintain their place and purpose in society, critics now ask whether the monuments dedicated to World War II, to its victims and to the victims of the Holocaust, have simply failed. “In the twentieth century monuments were often criticised for failing to remind, for failing to hold people’s attention or for representing values that had become obsolete or objectionable” (Stevens, Franck & Fazakerley, 2012). More specifically, Gold points out:

“The dead are still dead; anti-Semitism still exists and sometimes thrives. Myths of Jewish power circulate, now with the added insult of ‘playing the Holocaust card’ [...] A clutch of these memorials, all counselling kindness to the refugee, could not save Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian boy, from drowning in the Mediterranean Sea in 2014” (Gold, 2017).

In Berlin, Germany, there are now more than 300 memorials dedicated to the Holocaust and the victims of the Nazi era (Leshem, 2017; Cocotas, 2017); but in particular, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe has drawn discussion in part due to the ‘inappropriate’ ways in which visitors engage with the site. Avner Shapira (2014) describes it as “2,711 concrete blocks spread over an area the size of two soccer fields,” and explains that “the memorial is not just a site for activities commemorating the Holocaust; it is perceived as a public park and a great place for hide-and-seek, taking selfies, making out, sunbathing, picnicking and napping.” These latter activities are often challenged as being ‘inappropriate,’ however, for example by the German-Israeli artist Shahak Shapira who in January 2017 released a series of images forming a gallery exhibition on a website titled *Yolocaust* (<https://yolocaust.de>). The *Yolocaust* series took ‘selfies’ created by visitors to the memorial, as they were engaging in behaviours that the artist deemed to be inappropriate – including juggling, jumping or practising yoga. These images were then superimposed over actual photographic scenes of the Holocaust, and shared online with the intention of provoking conversation; those visitors pictured in the images had to contact the artist, and thus engage in discussion about their actions, before their photographs would be removed. However, there are several issues with this project. The first is that Shapira’s images present a false equivalency: the scenes he digitally added to visitor’s photos were taken from elsewhere, from the places where the Holocaust actually happened; the site of the memorial was not formerly a place of Holocaust,

but rather an empty plot chosen to feature a representation of the events. Secondly, while the *Yolocaust* project puts a spotlight on the visitors perceived to be behaving inappropriately at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, it might rather be argued that the monument's role was to convey a sense of grief and solemnity befitting such an enormous and awful event; and so any perceived lack of respect from visitors might actually be understood instead as a shortcoming of the memorial design. The problem perhaps is that the memorial – and others like it – depend too much on the expectation that visitors will share the same historical education, the same cultural sensitivities and customs. This renders the visitor experience somewhat prescriptive: “It is a pilgrimage of performative guilt, a pilgrimage for performative contemplation of theoretical guilt; it expiates your imagined sins, leaving the real sins, and the potential for real sins, unperturbed,” concludes Cocotas (2017), in an article titled *Blow Up the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*. And yet for all this, perhaps monuments still might have a future by allowing for mistakes, allowing for conversations and disagreements, and recognising all these phenomena as a necessary stage of the reconciliation process. As Saunders (2018) puts it:

“[Dealing] with the past in a responsible manner is often a slow and arduous process, and one that cannot be solved through the simple erection or destruction of a material structure. Indeed, rather than embodying collective memory, such structures serve as sites of interaction, discussion and meaning-making. [...] monuments and memorials are perhaps best understood as a starting point – not an end point – for a society's engagement with its past.”

It is this final perspective that this thesis will adopt, moving forwards: the idea that monuments needn't be seen as the final word on whatever topic they memorialise, but rather – and this is true both for monuments built by contemporary societies, and also those left over from former regimes – that monuments cannot help but be a product of the context of their creation, but they nevertheless also provide useful starting points for worthwhile conversations about the more fluid and changing nature of heritage and identity.

2.9 Resurrected Monuments: The Case of Hagia Sofia

There are cases also, of monuments having been decontextualised and ceasing to serve their original purpose, only to be later rededicated and resume their former cultural functions, under a new regime. A pertinent example of this is the Hagia Sophia, in Istanbul, Turkey. Located 260 miles southeast of Buzludzha, Hagia Sophia is a former Byzantine cathedral,

originally built in the year 537 AD, then later converted to an Islamic mosque (with the addition of new minarets) by the Ottoman Empire in the 15th-16th centuries. Subsequently both Muslim and East Orthodox Christians of the region felt a sense of connection to the building. In 1935, under the first president of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the building was ‘desacralised’ in an effort to ease tensions between these religious groups. Hagia Sophia was designated a museum, and ceased all active religious services. This didn’t prevent people from saying a private prayer when they visited; but in this new form the building prospered as both a site of historical religious significance, and as one of the city’s premier tourist attractions, earning recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Visitors paid 100 Turkish Lira to enter, and once inside were free to appreciate the building on their own terms. For Muslim visitors, the building’s Islamic decorations would have been of particular significance; including one wall panel featuring a written quote from Muhammad, concerning the Islamic conquest of Constantinople; as well as the decorated interior of the dome above, which features part of the *Verse of Light* (verse 35 of surah 24 of the Quran), which reads: “Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth.” Though significantly, non-Muslims also found much beauty to appreciate in the building’s architecture and design. The site’s tourism identity was managed to encourage balanced and respectful visits that neither offended the faithful, nor proselytised to the non-faithful or those of other faiths. Even in a predominantly Muslim city, in a predominantly Muslim country (though after the Ottomans, no longer a politically Islamic State), for 80 years this new status quo was maintained. Only recently, in 2016, has Turkish President Recep Erdogan (a president described by his critics as an “Islamist Populist” – see for example: Yilmaz, 2021) reversed Atatürk’s decision and had Hagia Sophia rededicated as a mosque. In 2020, for the first time in 86 years, a muezzin gave the call to prayer from Hagia Sophia, and the sermon that followed quoted the words of Muhammad: “One day Constantinople will be conquered. Great is the commander who will conquer it, and great are his soldiers!” (TRT World, 2020). Though the move proved popular with Erdogan’s typically devout, conservative Islamic voters, the decision to re-sacralise this place was subsequently widely criticised, including by Russia, the US, the EU, various religious leaders and the UNESCO organisation, with a statement from Greece’s culture minister calling the decision an “open provocation to the civilised world” (Stoilas, 2020). Nevertheless, as a case study, the Hagia Sofia demonstrates clearly how sites of ideological architecture might be put to sleep, allegedly ‘depoliticised,’ and yet still retain the potential to be reawakened as a symbol again at some future point.

2.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter has been about monuments, which it has defined as a form of ideological architecture. The chapter discussed the role of monuments and other new forms of architecture deployed in the 20th century communist republics of Europe, and it introduced some of the problems that face the region now: reckoning with the existence of memorial heritage sites that continue to present messages that today appear contradictory to contemporary attitudes. Some specific solutions have been reviewed – such as the idea of ‘counter monuments,’ or the use of new technologies to add to, contextualise, or counter, the message presented by older monuments. The chapter considered the role of monuments as symbols of the future, of striving towards imagined utopias, and what it then means to see these future promises abandoned in the wake of regime changes. The question of whether monuments had failed was also introduced, though the chapter ultimately found that historical monuments, even those deemed controversial today, still have the potential to teach valuable lessons about history as a result of how they “reflect – and expose for study – social tensions, political realities, and cultural values” (Foote & Azaryahu, 2007).

Having now established the physical and social context of this study (communist monuments in post-communist space), as well as one of the key problems to be addressed (the ‘dissonant’ messages presented by the monuments of past regimes), this thesis turns now to the arrival of tourists into this equation. The following chapter introduces the subject of ‘dark tourism,’ as well as other new modes of postmodern touristic engagement, as it moves towards defining the framework within which touristic transactions take place at sites of difficult post-communist heritage.

Chapter Three

Modes of (Dark)

Engagement

“Look at how a single candle can both defy and define the darkness.”
The Diary of a Young Girl, Anne Frank

3.0 Introduction

The central research question of this thesis is concerned with the motivations, perspectives, and the perception of subjective value, made by the tourists who visit a particular site of difficult, controversial, contested, and in many senses ‘dark’ heritage: the Buzludzha Memorial House in Bulgaria. The thesis will analyse their reported experiences and impressions, and critically assess what value they derive from it. In its approach to these questions, the thesis will use the academic concept of ‘dark tourism’ (defined below) as a primary lens and mode of inquiry. The monument, built to commemorate a location with themes of historic death and sacrifice, meets the definition of a dark tourism destination, and many contemporary visitors could thereby be defined as dark tourists. Dark tourism is an academic field to which a great deal of scholarship has already been dedicated, and as a result, using this particular approach will provide a broad and robust academic framework within which to analyse and discuss the case study. However, as will be shown, not everyone visiting such places is necessarily participating in dark tourism, and some only do so unwittingly – their primary, conscious motivations sometimes being completely unrelated to any real or perceived ‘dark’ qualities of the site. For that reason, the chapter will also discuss ideas of ‘unwitting’ dark tourism, it will outline and discuss the constructivist nature of psychogeographical dark tourism, and introduce the novel idea of ‘Foucauldian’ versus ‘Debordian’ modes within dark tourism. Further it will go on to introduce a kind of alternative tourism ‘toolkit,’ including other modes of travel in which postmodern tourists engage with sites of (abandoned) memorial architecture in Southeast Europe, identified here as ‘urban exploration,’ ‘communist heritage tourism,’ and ‘architecture tourism.’ Each of these will be shown to have its own specific set of motivations and forms of on-site interaction. Finally, the chapter will discuss the fluidity of these definitions, and explain how different tourists might be participating in one, multiple, or all of these modes of tourism engagement at once.

3.1 Dark Tourism

The term ‘dark tourism’ can be defined as the “act of travel and visitation to sites, attractions, and exhibitions which have real or created death, suffering, or the seemingly macabre as a main theme” (Stone, 2005). As a field of academic study, it grew out of work in the 1990s that attempted to define what was then perceived as a growing public interest in morbid attractions. For example, Rojek (1993) coined the term ‘black spots’ to describe “the

commercial developments of grave sites and sites in which celebrities or large numbers of people have met with sudden and violent death.” Building on this, Seaton (1996) used the word ‘thanatourism’ to denote “travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death,” a phenomenon that he explained as arising at least partially in response to the treatment of death in contemporary society as something increasingly sequestered, hidden or taboo. In German, note Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996), the term ‘Gruseltourismus’ – literally meaning *shudder tourism* – was being used to describe a similar trend. The term ‘dark tourism’ was first used that same year, coined by Lennon and Foley (1996) in a study of tourism to the site of JFK’s assassination, and it was soon widely adopted by other scholars. In subsequent work, Lennon and Foley (2000) further developed their term in relation to specific contemporary anxieties: as Adam T. Rosenbaum puts it, their concept of dark tourism became “a practice that reveals larger anxieties about industrial, scientific, and political progress. In other words, visiting certain sights was a way to visualise the dangerous consequences of new technologies and ideologies” (Hartmann, Lennon, Reynolds, Rice, Rosenbaum & Stone, 2018). Other scholarship, meanwhile, explored the notion that ‘dark tourism’ was simply a new term for something humans had been doing for millennia; with roots that might be traced to the public executions that served as popular social events in the Middle Ages, or pilgrimages to the tombs of martyrs, or even to the Roman Empire, where death was an ‘entertainment commodity’ tailored for performance (Stone, 2006; Stone, 2013).

Over the past decades, the ever-broadening field of dark tourism scholarship has considered many different facets of the phenomenon, leading Lennon to summarise: “Dark tourism has become established as a specialist focus for tourism research and has been used to discuss the wider fascination we appear to have with our own mortality and the fate of others” (in Hartmann, Lennon, Reynolds, Rice, Rosenbaum & Stone, 2018). Scholarship on the subject has evaluated the cultural value of dark tourism, leading to suggestions that “dark tourism represents immorality so that morality may be communicated” (Stone, 2011a); and that dark tourism serves as a method for “domesticating death in a secularised world” (Korstanje, 2011). It has been suggested that the process of grieving for strangers can have a therapeutic effect, and moreover that the phenomenon raises awareness of sometimes hidden histories of human suffering and injustice (Sharpley & Stone, 2009). The study of dark tourism has led to the discussion of morality in tourism more broadly (Stone & Sharpley, 2013). Academic treatments of dark tourism have also turned their gaze away from the (often Western) tourist’s

experience, to consider broader issues pertaining to the relationship between dark tourism sites and their surrounding communities. In this way it becomes useful to consider dark tourism sites within a framework of ‘difficult heritage’ (Logan & Reeves, 2009), as ‘heritage that hurts’ (Sather-Wagstaff, 2011), or as places where visitations with the dead facilitate a potential reconnection with ‘displaced heritage’ (Roberts & Stone, 2014).

Today, numerous dark tourism destinations are listed amongst the world’s most (in)famous attractions, with some identifying the ‘Big Five’ dark tourism sites as: the Hiroshima Peace Garden, Japan; the September 11 Memorial and Museum, New York, US; the Pnom Pen Killing Fields, Cambodia; the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, Poland; and the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, Ukraine (for example: Sawyer, 2018). However, not all dark sites are equally dark: by most definitions the term ‘dark tourism’ would include everything from places of genocide, to cemeteries, to ‘dark fun factories’ (Stone, 2006) such as haunted house attractions and ghost trains. Additionally, dark tourism attractions may take the form of places where dark history actually happened, or they could be places of ‘created darkness’ (such as monuments or museums), that serve as symbolic reminders of dark histories elsewhere. Stone (2006) suggests that “dark tourism products may lie along a rather ‘fluid and dynamic spectrum of intensity,’ whereby particular sites may be conceivably ‘darker’ than others, dependent upon various defining characteristics, perceptions and product traits,” and he thus proposes a typology for “shades of darkness.”

Lightest	Dark Fun Factories
▼	Dark Exhibitions
▼	Dark Dungeons
▼	Dark Resting Places
▼	Dark Shrines
▼	Dark Conflict Sites
Darkest	Dark Camps of Genocide

Table 2: “Seven dark suppliers,” presented according to a “dark tourism spectrum” typology.

Adapted from Stone, 2006.

The table above outlines seven types of dark supplier, that Stone identifies as forming a spectrum from the lightest sites (more entertainment oriented, and only loosely associated with real death and suffering), to the darkest sites (more education oriented, and directly

connected to real death and suffering). Moreover, Stone shows how the lightest and darkest sites may typically conform with the following characteristics:

Characteristics of Darkest Sites	Characteristics of Lightest Sites
Higher political influence and ideology	Lower political influence and ideology
‘Sites of death and suffering’	‘Sites associated with death and suffering’
Education orientation	Entertainment orientation
History centric (conservation/commemoration)	Heritage centric (commercial/romanticism)
Perceived authentic product interpretation	Perceived inauthentic product interpretation
Location authenticity	Non-location authenticity
Shorter time scale to the event	Longer time scale to the event
Supply (non-purposefulness)	Supply (purposefulness)
Lower tourism infrastructure	Higher tourism infrastructure

Table 3: “Perceived product features of dark tourism within a ‘darkest-lightest’ framework of supply.”

Adapted from Stone, 2006.

This study locates its subject in the post-communist space of Southeast Europe; specially, Bulgaria. Dark tourism within post-communist space could be said to be still something of an emergent field. The Chernobyl Exclusion Zone is arguably the most rigorously studied example of the phenomena, with numerous notable works exploring the practice, the logistics, the motivations, the authenticity, and the subsequent moral questions of leisure visits to the ‘Zone’ (for example: Dobraszcyk, 2010; Goatcher & Brunsden, 2011; Stone, 2013). (This thesis will make a closer discussion of Chernobyl tourism in Chapter 4.) Other work has investigated Gulag-tourism, visits to Russia’s ‘Highway of Bones,’ and tourism to other post-political sites in the former USSR (for example Jaakson, 1998; Hudson, 2008; Wites, 2008). In Southeast Europe however, the topic of dark tourism is less widely researched. Amongst the post-Yugoslav countries, Jovanović, Mijatov and Šuligoj (2021) note that: “Research into the dark tourism in post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina [...] dominate, while Serbian commemorative practices and related dark tourism tend to be overlooked by the domestic and international scholars.” In Bulgaria, Mileva (2018) notes that “dark tourism in Bulgaria, in the narrowest sense is [a] relatively unknown, unexplored type of tourism, difficult to distinguish and overlapping with other types of tourism.” Dark tourism has been singled out as the “one kind of tourism that Bulgaria has been stubbornly trying to ignore,” despite the likelihood that some of Bulgaria’s darker sites “could attract fans of dark tourism and bring money into the

country” (Nikolova, 2014). However, there is also a noted need for new frameworks, greater local authenticity, and greater consideration of different cultural attitudes and identities in the study of dark tourism in Southeast Europe, as it has been suggested that much of the scholarship on dark tourism to date has shown a tendency to view sites according to a “western way of thinking” (Light, 2017: 297); whereas really, the “use of Western frameworks for understanding the tourism-death relationship in other parts of the world and particularly in Bulgaria as [an] Eastern European and orthodox country may not be appropriate” (Mileva, 2018).

These issues will be returned to, discussed and addressed in the following chapters, with particular local and cultural consideration made in Chapter 5, on Bulgaria. First though, this chapter considers the subjective nature of dark experiences, and asks to what degree perceived darkness may be a co-product of the tourist’s own prior knowledge and personal perception relating to any given site.

3.2 The Dark Dérive

The study of ‘dark tourism’ may be a relatively recent phenomenon, but the practice itself – including commemorative, educational or even leisure visits to places associated with death and/or suffering – is by no means a new social behaviour (Stone, 2007). Scholarly examination of dark tourism has raised fundamental lines of multidisciplinary interrogation, not least issues that focus on notions of deviance and moral concerns of consuming or producing ‘death sites’ within the global visitor economy (Stone & Sharpley, 2013). Discourse often revolves around visitor motives and tourist engagement (Yuill, 2003), as well as issues of how ‘dark heritage’ should be managed (Hartmann, 2014). While motivation is of a personal and subjective nature, managing or producing dark tourism sites is fraught with political difficulties and moral quandaries. Importantly however, the (dark) tourist experience at sites of difficult heritage is a process of ‘co-creation’ between visitor site interpretation and individual meaning-making.

Thus, dark tourism is an intrinsically emotional, subjective and phenomenological place-based pursuit. Moreover, due to the highly subjective nature of the touristic experience, some visitors at some sites for some of the time may be engaging in so-called ‘dark’ tourism while others are not. As Stone (2007: 1) notes, “if you have ever visited a Holocaust museum, taken

a tour around former battlefields, or had an excursion to Ground Zero, then you've participated – perhaps unwittingly – in dark tourism.” Elsewhere, Stone (2005: 1) defines dark tourism as “the act of travel, whether intentional or otherwise, to sites of death, destruction or the seemingly macabre.” Notions of the ‘unwitting’ or ‘unintentionality’ within dark tourism suggest that places may exist where tragic history – or its *darkness* – is not universally perceived. For example, historic UK battlefields of state-sanctioned killing are often marked for touristic encounters within a broader rural idyll, where wildlife lovers mingle with battle enthusiasts in traumascapes of yesteryear (Conduit, 2005; Stone, 2012). However, while other commodified tourist places and ‘attractions’ may be considered intrinsically ‘dark’ in nature – due to the nature of atrocity or associated depravity or level of horror – the broader practice of dark tourism is a deeply personal transaction rooted in memory and perception.

This chapter will now, therefore, address spatial subjectivity within dark tourism environments. Specifically, the chapter asks, through a broad-ranging conceptual and contextualised discussion, a number of interrelated questions: Who makes the association of ‘darkness’ to a place? Is the label ‘dark tourism’ applied by those offering (and commoditising) the visitor experience? Alternatively, is any ‘dark’ significance to be evaluated and decided upon by the tourists themselves? If the latter is the case, is it possible that one visitor to a (dark) site might be participating in dark tourism while another is not? Hence, the chapter suggests a transactional nature to the production and consumption of the dark tourism experience – a process entirely influenced by a very personal framework of knowledge, memory and associations. To that end, the research adopts a *psychogeography* approach – that is, the specific effects of the geographical environment on the emotions and behaviours of individuals. Ultimately, the chapter considers dark tourism not as a passive mode of tourism, but rather as a dynamic and individualistic way of interacting with space and place. In other words, dark tourism exists by way of deeply personalised responses to geographic places and, subsequently, the study seeks to present dark tourism as a very specific form of ‘psychogeography.’ The chapter aims to be a foundational text in which to conceptually locate dark tourism and its fundamental interrelationships with psychogeographical elements and, in so doing, offer a transdisciplinary challenge to human geography gatekeepers. It will also later become highly relevant to a discussion of the case study, as a place where some, but not all, visitors perceive the location as one of ‘darkness’ (see Chapter 6).

The conceptual assembly of both geography and psychology may be enough to satisfy some of the broader definitions that have been offered for psychogeography (Hay, 2012). However, it speaks very little to the *flâneur* philosophy (the idea of a connoisseur explorer) and the spirit of *dérive* (an unplanned journey or drifting through a place) which was integral to the original meaning of psychogeography (Debord, 1955). Indeed, Western philosophers have long been interested in the various ways that different people view and interpret our shared world. For instance, the German existentialist Martin Heidegger used the term *Dasein* to denote the transactional process of ‘being in the world.’ In other words, we are not being in the world simply by the act of existing within space, but rather as a performance of sorts, in which every aspect of our knowledge and character plays a role in dictating our subjective interactions with our surroundings (Heidegger et al. 1962). This interest in spatiality and its subjectivity provided the bedrock for the post-war psychogeography movement. Specifically, in Paris, in the wake of World War II, a group of avant-garde philosophers who called themselves ‘the Situationist International’ began chronicling their interactions with space. They sought to explore ways in which people created their own meaningful (inter)relationships with their surroundings. As a result, Guy Debord – one of the Situationists’ founding members – proposed psychogeography as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals” (Debord, 1955). Therefore, psychogeography offered a potential new way of ‘being in the world.’ The psychogeographical pilgrim/traveller (or ‘drifter’) – the *flâneur* – would eschew the objectivity of maps in favour of ‘letting the city speak for itself.’ They would *drift* according to whim, following emotions rather than street signs as they traced the “psychogeographical contours... constant currents, fixed points and vortexes” of their (usually urban) surroundings (Debord, 1956). This mode of exploration was known as the *dérive* (from the French word for ‘drifting’) and constituted “playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects” which immediately distinguished it “from the classic notions of journey or stroll” (Debord, 1956). The rules of the *dérive*, according to the Situationists, were simply that “one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there” (Debord, 1956).

The Situationists' response was to create new designs of urbanised space, while promising enhanced opportunities for experimenting through mundane expression. Arguably, Guy Debord's intention was to unify two different factors of so-called 'soft and hard ambiances' that, taking a Debordian perspective, determined the values of urban landscape. In short, Debord's vision was a combination of two realms of opposing ambiance – the *soft ambiance* (light, sound, time and the association of ideas) and the *hard ambiance* (or the actual physical constructions of place). Hence, the Situationist philosophers drifted about Paris (often frequenting bars) and drew their own maps to describe the urban landscape before them. However, these maps did not conform to objective and conventional cartography, but rather the Situationists experimented with their own new forms to create maps that might act as a narrative rather than as a tool of 'universal knowledge' (McDonough, 1994). These maps were created by slicing up conventional street plans and rearranging the component parts joined by arrows that indicated the subjective currents experienced by a *flâneur* exploring the city. These were maps of emotion and experience and, subsequently, replaced traditional and literal representations of streets and city blocks. For example, Plate 15 illustrates a 'Psychogeographical Guide to Paris' as conceived by Guy Debord. It exemplifies the city, as he perceived it, not as a comprehensive street plan but rather as a collection of nodal points of interest that possesses emotive value and joined by passages of potential movement – as indicated by the arrows. A caption on the map explains these arrows and nodes as 'psychogeographical slopes of drift and the location of ambiance units.'

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, this casual and rather bohemian approach to spatial geography has attracted some criticism. Even a member of the Situationist International, the artist Ralph Rumney, offered a playful critique of the psychogeographical practice:

"...as Debord defined *dérive* it was going from one bar to another, in a haphazard manner, because the essential thing was to set out with very little purpose and to see where your feet led you, or your inclinations... You go where whim leads you, and you discover parts of cities, or come to appreciate them, feel they're better than others, whether it's because you're better received in the bar or because you just suddenly feel better." (Rumney cited in Ward, 2000: 169)



Plate 15: ‘Psychogeographical Guide to Paris’ by Guy Debord (source: van Tijen, 2017).

Meanwhile, Debord’s biographer Vincent Kaufman states that the “apparently serious term ‘psychogeography’ comprises an art of conversation and drunkenness, and everything leads us to believe that Debord excelled at both” (Kaufman, 2006: 114) – a sardonic reference, perhaps, to the frequentation of Parisian bars noted earlier. Even Debord himself remarked the fate of ‘urban relativity’ and psychogeography and goes on to admit:

“...the sectors of a city... are decipherable, but the personal meaning they have for us is incommunicable, as is the secrecy of private life in general... None of this is very clear. It is a completely typical drunken monologue... with its vain phrases that do not await response and its overbearing explanations. And its silences.” (Debord, 1961)

Arguably, the philosophical origins of psychogeography lie within inebriated yet enlightened ‘pub-crawls’ of post-war Paris. Yet, despite some obvious critique of the conceptual and empirical foundations of psychogeography, it has nevertheless established itself as an

enduring mode of spatial geography – and a subject field that has attracted increasing attention over the past few years (Coverley, 2006; Richardson, 2015). Consequently, psychogeography may offer an alternative to conventional narratives on social spaces. Indeed, psychogeography seems set to become ever more popular in a contemporary society hallmarked by increasing privatisation of public spaces (Kayden, 2000), as well as an alienation of traditional human interactions in favour of ever more superficial entertainment – or what Debord (1967) referred to as the ‘Society of the Spectacle.’ Of course, a full analysis of psychogeography and its contemporary application is beyond the scope of this chapter, though a critical overview is now offered to provide a backdrop for subsequent discussions of dark tourism.

3.2.1 *Discovering Psychogeography (Within Tourism)*

Psychogeographical definitions range from the simple – a practice that “explains the relationship between psychology and geography” (Hay, 2012) – to the more esoteric:

“...we, as human beings, embed aspects of our psyche... memories, associations, myth and folklore... in the landscape that surrounds us. On a deeper level, given that we do not have direct awareness of an objective reality but, rather, only have awareness of our own perceptions, it would seem to me that psychogeography is possibly the only kind of geography that we can actually inhabit.” (Moore, 2013)

In recent decades, a ‘new school’ of psychogeography has emerged, largely because of the work of London-based journalists and scholars such as Iain Sinclair (1997), Stewart Home (2004) and Will Self (2007). However, Sinclair (1997: 4) appears to emulate Debord in his description of interacting with the city:

“Walking is the best way to explore and exploit the city... the changes, shifts, breaks in the cloud helmet, movement of light on water. Drifting purposefully is the recommended mode, tramping asphalted earth in alert reverie, allowing the fiction of an underlying pattern to reveal itself.”

Placing these textural similarities to one side, there are notable differences between the original Parisian psychogeographers of the post-war period and the more recent emergence of the London school of thought. Particularly, contemporary psychogeography appears to adopt a primarily literary form, albeit one that perhaps encourages action on the part of the reader. For instance, Williams (2008), in his review of Will Self’s (2007) *Psychogeography*,

describes it as “a Romantic text whose associations of writing and walking have less to do with Guy Debord’s influence on London-based writers and more to do with Wordsworth and Coleridge.” In contrast, psychogeography for the Situationist International was a purely tactile and phenomenological pursuit with Debord cautious of the idea of ‘psychogeographical texts’ – going on to lament that “written descriptions can be no more than passwords to this great game” (Debord, 1956). Similarly, Sinclair (2006) is also critical of Will Self’s journalism and treatment of psychogeography and suggests that it has “absolutely no connection whatsoever to whatever psychogeography was originally, or in its second incarnation.” Sinclair goes on to argue that psychogeography has “become the name of a [newspaper] column by Will Self, in which he seems to walk the South Downs with a pipe, which has got absolutely nothing to do with psychogeography. There’s this awful sense that you’ve created a monster” (Sinclair cited in Jeffries, 2004).

Another difference between the Parisian and London-based approaches is evident in the focus. The Situationists were concerned with the future and the ‘soulless’ restrictive nature of post-war construction projects. In turn, they had sought to provide a critique of mid-twentieth-century advanced capitalism (Plant, 1992). However, contemporary psychogeographers appear to be more interested in the history informing the fabric of their urban surroundings. As Duncan Hay, author of the *Walled City* blog, puts it, “where Parisian psychogeography orients its critique of the city around a utopian projection towards a newly revived post-revolutionary city, London psychogeography finds the strength of its critique in the past” (Hay, 2012: 1). Yet, despite the inherent and obvious complexities of psychogeography – both as a concept of spatial geography and an application of psychosocial connections – it can serve as a “brand name for more or less anything that’s vaguely to do with walking or vaguely to do with the city... a new form of tourism” (Sinclair, 2006).

Consequently, tourism studies have long examined subjective and phenomenological aspects of the tourist experience (Cohen, 1979), as well as the role personal (secular) pilgrimages (or tourist journeys) play in our (post) modern society (Urry, 1990; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Arguably, therefore, tourism simply defined as the ‘movement of people’ is allied to the central psychogeographical premise of exploring relationships between psychology and geography (Hay, 2012). Moreover, tourism is concerned with inherent personal emotions and behaviours of the ‘journey’ to and within any given place. Importantly, tourism is a deeply personal process of meaning-making. In other words, tourism can be an often-directionless

and sometimes unplanned pursuit of leisurely interaction with space and, as such, can be entirely removed from our usual mode of being in the world. This may constitute a very specific, if not unintentional, form of psychogeography. Importantly, similar arguments may be made for dark tourism. In other words, dark tourism is *dark* precisely because of a perceived ‘darkness’ assigned to certain locations and geographic areas; even allowing for the application of shades or ‘degrees of darkness’ as a measure of that emotional depth (Sharpley, 2009). The very nature of dark tourism relates to emotional attachment within place, where the tourist can play the role of a phenomenological pilgrim. However, in order to delineate particular places of darkness – for example, cemeteries, specific museum exhibitions, memorial sites and so forth – and in terms of bridging Debord’s notion of *geographical ambiance*, it is worth considering the work of another French spatial philosopher, Michel Foucault. Indeed, Foucault examined spaces of unusual ambiance and places of extranormative social significance within his conceptual work of the heterotopia, to which this chapter now turns.

3.2.2 Bridging Psychogeography: Heterotopia and Other (Tourism) Places

‘Heterotopia’ is a concept within spatial geography that denotes a place outside of the typical liminal systems of topography. First introduced by Michel Foucault, the idea of heterotopia holds that some social spaces function in a different way to the regular terrain of our day-to-day lives. The term ‘heterotopia’ is derived from ‘Other places’ and builds upon subtle yet significant distinctions between *place* and *space*. On the one hand, *space* is defined as ‘a continuous area or expanse which is free, available, or unoccupied,’ while, on the other hand, *place* is defined as ‘a particular position, point, or area in space – a location designated or available for or being used by someone.’ There is a great deal of subtlety that connects – but also differentiates – the two concepts of space and place. Indeed, the concepts are layered with meaning derived from a myriad of social, political, historical, geographical and anthropological structures. If *place* is to be understood as a location with particular meaning or significance attached, then that meaning, ultimately, renders the distinction highly subjective. As Agnew (1987) notes, place is more than just a location, but a composite of ‘location,’ ‘locale’ and a ‘sense of place.’ Furthermore, Cresswell (2004: 6) argues that “place, then, is both simple (and that is part of its appeal) and complicated.” This complexity is also recognised by Harvey (1993: 5) who points out:

“The first step down the road is to insist that place, in whatever guise, is, like space and time, a social construct. The only interesting question that can be asked is, by what social process(es) is place constructed?”

The social processes by which ‘place’ might be constructed can be viewed through the prism of definition. Cresswell (2015), for example, suggests that place can be defined as different from space by the process of naming it. Place may be defined by its nostalgic value, by its familiarity, and as *local* places (Lippard, 1997; Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). Meanwhile, both Relph (1976) and Tuan (1977) advocate that place can be defined by the subjective experience of ‘people in a world of places.’ It is here that place possesses “the notion of a meaningful segment of geographical space” (Cresswell, 2008: 134), while Tuan (1977) argues “what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value... the ideas ‘space’ and ‘place’ require each other for definition.”

Subsequently, the issue of space/place has now moved towards less reductive models, emphasising instead the way in which ‘places’ are constructed by the people moving through them. In other words, there has been a subjective and transitory definition of the concept that has been described as a ‘global’ or ‘progressive’ approach to knowing *place* (Massey, 1993, 2004). The study of embodiment, for instance, has presented new perspectives on what it means to be in place (Csordas, 1994); while other researchers have broadened the focus to consider how place is experienced through the senses (such as ‘smellscape’ – see Dann & Jacobsen, 2003). Arguably, however, psychogeography might be seen as a conceptual and relational, if not contested, process that bridges the two ideas of space and place. In short, psychogeography reveals the subjective pilgrimage that looks for meaning in typically overlooked spaces, thus forming areas of new or unexpected significance and emotion and, thus, rendering these spaces into *places* – or *Other places* as Foucault would have it. Indeed, Cresswell (2015) describes the ‘sense of place’ in language that resonates with original writings of the Situationist International and their efforts to resist the homogenisation of post-war Paris. He goes on to note that ‘it is commonplace in Western societies in the twenty-first century to bemoan a loss of a sense of place as the forces of globalisation have eroded local cultures and produced homogenised global spaces’ (Cresswell, 2015: 14).

Of course, it is beyond the remit of this study to consider all of these approaches to place. Instead, the chapter defines *place* simply as the product of building subjective relations to *space*. In turn, this emphasises a process that was the very essence of early psychogeography

and, subsequently, allows for the identification of the principles for Foucault's heterotopia and 'Other places.'

3.3 Principles of Heterotopia

Foucault introduced the perplexing and contested term 'heterotopia' to describe an assortment of places and institutions that interrupt the apparent continuity and normality of ordinary everyday space (Foucault, 1967a [1984]). More of a philosophical ramble than a codified concept, Foucault suggested *heterotopias* – as opposed to *utopias* as invented places – are real spaces where the boundaries of normalcy within society are transgressed. Foucault argued that heterotopias inject a sense of alterity into the sameness, where change enters the familiar and difference is inserted into the commonplace. Indeed, heterotopias are spaces of contradiction and duality, as well as places of physical representation and imagined meaning. In short, heterotopias may be broadly seen as real places, but which are perceived to stand outside of known space and, thus, create a sense of the alternative (Topinka, 2010). Stripped of its philosophical verbiage, the idea of heterotopias as alternative social spaces existing within and connected to conventional places offers a thought-provoking concept that can stimulate investigation into fundamental interrelationships between space, experience and culture. Ultimately, heterotopias can be physical or mental spaces that act as 'Other places' alongside existing spaces. As revealed shortly, heterotopias conform to a number of principles and include places where norms of conduct are suspended either through a sense of crisis or through deviation of behaviour. Heterotopias also have a precise and determined function and are reflective of the society in which they exist. They also have the power to juxtapose several real spaces simultaneously as well as being linked to the accumulative or transitory nature of time. Heterotopias are also places that are not freely accessible as well as being spaces of illusion and compensation. In short, Foucault argued that we are now in an era of simultaneity, juxtaposition, of proximity and distance, of side-by-side, and of the dispersed. The principles of Foucault's heterotopias are summarised here:

Principle #1: Foucault claimed that heterotopias were universal and would appear across all cultures. He went on to highlight two specific types – the heterotopia of *crisis* and the heterotopia of *deviation*. Here, Foucault argued that these were 'forbidden' places (such as care homes) and were places for people in a state of crisis in relation to their place in society or culture. Meanwhile, Foucault's deviation heterotopias were places reserved for those whose behaviour is deemed deviant to social

norms (for example, prisons).
Principle #2: The heterotopia can be acted upon by society in order to serve different <i>roles and functions</i> over time. Foucault offers the example of a cemetery; an internment site where the appearance, function and traditional location within a settlement has changed over the centuries in relation to changing cultural attitudes to death and disposal of the dead.
Principle #3: The heterotopia has the power to <i>juxtapose</i> , in a single real space, several spaces that are in themselves incompatible. In other words, they can become spaces for the representation of ideas, and places bigger than themselves. Foucault offers the example of the theatre and the cinema, but also the garden as a kind of heterotopia symbolic of the larger outside world.
Principle #4: Foucault's fourth principle stated that heterotopias were <i>heterochronous</i> – that is, linked to specific slices of time. On the one hand, Foucault suggested the museum or library as examples of places of 'perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time.' Conversely, on the other hand, Foucault also argued heterotopias as places of fleeting time linked to a specific moment or moments. Here, Foucault gave the example of travelling fairgrounds that are dismantled after the fair has ended.
Principle #5: A fifth principle suggests heterotopias possess a system of <i>(de) valorisation</i> that allows places to be both isolated but also penetrable. In other words, places are, in some way, both opened and closed and can only be accessed from the surrounding world by way of barriers or cultural rituals. Foucault gave examples of religious institutions or military barracks – each protected by 'barriers' that can only be breached by stating correct words or undertaking social gestures, or by submitting to a specific process of initiation.
Principle #6: Finally, Foucault states that heterotopias maintain a function relative to all the space that remains. In turn, the final trait of heterotopias is that they create <i>illusions</i> and <i>compensations</i> that expose all real spaces and, as a result, create a place that is <i>Other</i> . Foucault offers examples of the colony and the brothel as way of illustration, where the outside world is made to seem more accessible by way of illusion, or perhaps in some cases perfected, reordered or compensated in the way of a model town.

Table 4: The six principles defining Foucault's concept of the heterotopia.

With its all-encompassing and vaguely defined parameters, Foucault's idea of heterotopia has been a source of both inspiration as well as confusion in the application of conceptual frameworks that shape public space (Dehaene & De Cauter, 2008). Furthermore, Heynen (2008) argues that heterotopia, while being a 'slippery' term to employ, offers potentially rich and productive readings of different spatial and cultural constellations and, accordingly, justifies the continuing use of the concept. While a full critique of 'heterotopology' is beyond the scope of this chapter, the paradox of heterotopia is that they are spaces both *separate from* yet *connected to* all other places. Therefore, in our contemporary world heterotopias are everywhere and, consequently, highlight the public-private binary opposition (Dehaene & De Cauter, 2008). Indeed, heterotopian places are collective or shared in nature, and often perceived as marginal, interstitial and subliminal spaces. It is in this conceptual framework that heterotopias open up different, if not complex, layers of psychogeographical relationships between space and its consumption.

By way of contextualising notions of heterotopias and broader psychogeography, particularly within dark tourism, Stone (2013) offered a conceptual analysis of Chernobyl – the site of the world's worst nuclear accident. That analysis is summarised here in the following case example (Case 1). Specifically, Stone (2013: 90) asks whether Chernobyl as a heterotopia could "provide a blueprint of how other 'dark tourism' sites might be constructed as marginal spaces." Therefore, this study contextualises another dark tourism site as a potential heterotopian place: the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, a site synonymous with the Holocaust and the scale of atrocities that still haunts contemporary imagination (Case 2).

3.3.1 Case One: The Chernobyl Exclusion Zone as a Heterotopia

The 'Exclusion Zone' or 'Zone of Alienation' marks an arbitrary 30-kilometre radius around the nuclear reactor at Chernobyl (including the nearby abandoned town of Pripyat), Ukraine, which in 1986 went into meltdown, resulting in the worst radioactive accident in history. Recently, however, the site has begun a new life as a tourism destination – and with its obvious themes of death and suffering, it has become a notable destination for dark tourism (Dobraszczyk, 2010; Stone, 2011b, 2013). Particularly, Stone (2013) seeks to evaluate this dark site against the (six) heterotopian principles suggested by Foucault:

	The Chernobyl Exclusion Zone as Heterotopia
1.	“Deviant heterotopia.” A place of sociocultural and political crises, a remnant ‘forbidden’ place that highlights the divisions of the Cold War. Tourists separate crises of the past, and also (re)connect to current global predicaments and contemplate future quandaries.
2.	“Heterotopia of functionality.” Possesses duality of function and serves changing roles in relation to contemporary society. A symbol of “a failed political dogma as well as being symbolic of distant utopian ideals and Soviet power,” but also: “consumed by tourists as a pyramid of our technical age.”
3.	Multiple realities appear juxtaposed. Tragedy and loss, memorials, and the ruins of a past (would-be) utopia. It can “allow tourists to consume not only a sense of ruinous beauty and bewilderment, but also a sense of anxiety and incomprehension in a petrified place that mirrors our own world.”
4.	“Heterochronous.” Both the accumulation and transition of time occurs. Chernobyl seems to exist outside of regularly functioning time: “it accumulates time and collects evidence of an age in a perpetual and indefinite manner.” Time in its most futile, most transitory and most precarious state.
5.	“Heterotopia of (de)valorisation.” Militarised checkpoints surround the Exclusion Zone. Physical barriers enforced and made more meaningful by the social ritual of tourists having to apply for formal access to the site, paying access fees and signing medical disclaimers.
6.	“Heterotopia of illusion and compensation.” Both real and surreal. Chernobyl provides “a (relatively) safe and socially sanctioned environment in which feelings of helplessness of preventing the accident stimulates an enhanced awareness of the fragility of our modern world.”

Table 5: The Chernobyl Exclusion Zone as Heterotopia
(adapted from Stone, 2013).

3.3.2 Case Two: Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum as a Heterotopia

Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum is a former German Nazi concentration and extermination camp located on the outskirts of Oświęcim in Poland. Auschwitz has become a symbol of state-sanctioned terror, genocide and the Holocaust. With over one million people systematically murdered at the site, mostly Jews, Auschwitz as a museum and memorial was created in 1947. Today, with over a million annual visitors to the site (Auschwitz.org, 2016), the post- camp relics and structures are preserved to serve as a ‘warning from history.’

	The Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum as Heterotopia
1	A place of crisis – formerly of incarceration and mass execution for those considered socially ‘deviant’ by the Nazi regime. Today tourists report the kind of extraordinary, transformative or even ‘life-changing’ experiences that Foucault alluded to when detailing his heterotopias of crisis and deviation.
2	Has served multiple changing roles in relation to outside society and politics. Austrian and then Polish army barracks, before becoming a German Nazi prison and concentration camp. Since 1947 a museum, a place of education, a memorial, and a site of religious, political and cultural significance.
3	Tourism filled with juxtapositions. Combines horror and tragedy in a setting that many tourists have described as naturally beautiful. Conventional landscapes and buildings juxtaposed with historical deathscapes. Inherent contrast between knowledge and phenomenology of the site.
4	Heterotopia of chronology – focussed on a very specific slice of time. Modern-day tourists consume perpetual and unrelenting narratives of fear, murder and terror. Time is fleeting and (tourist) journeys transient. An eternity of horror is explored in the space of an afternoon.
5	The symbolic and historic border still stands – watchtowers, electric fences and guard points. Now added to those are contemporary valorisation processes and commercial rituals, for admitting over a million visitors a year. Visitation rules, audio guides and tour leaders define modern access.
6	The ultimate illusion: ‘Arbeit Macht Frei’ (Work Sets You Free). Today, the (somewhat surreal) museum exposes outside geopolitical disorder and the illusion of ‘Never Again.’ However, as an educative counterbalance space it perhaps becomes a heterotopia of compensation.

Table 6: The Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum as Heterotopia
(adapted from Morten, Stone & Jarratt, 2018).

3.4 Evolving Heterotopia

Arguably, while Foucault’s original definition of a heterotopia is a good fit for the kinds of commoditised *Other* places portrayed as ‘dark tourism’ – at least evidenced by the two case examples above – it is worth noting that the idea of the heterotopia itself has evolved since its conception. More contemporary interpretations have suggested heterotopias to better describe modern urban landscapes (Dehaene & De Cauter, 2008), while new technologies and cybernetic realities allow for new ways of experiencing and examining heterotopias – not to mention the idea of ‘virtual heterotopias’ (Rousseaux & Thouvenin, 2009). However, some heterotopias appear to manifest in different heterotopic forms over time. For example, and

taking the case examples of both Chernobyl and Auschwitz-Birkenau in this study, both have been shown to function as heterotopias in their current touristic states; but while their dark tourism appeal may be new, their status as heterotopia is not. In other words, the nuclear power station (Chernobyl) and the Nazi prison/concentration camp (Auschwitz-Birkenau), during their functional pasts, arguably met the heterotopic principles originally suggested by Foucault. Yet, presently, the Nazi prison/concentration camp has become a museum, while the power plant (perhaps comparable to Foucault's factory) and its surrounding area have been preserved as an exclusion zone.

It seems, therefore, that Foucault has accounted for this heterotopia evolution when he described such places as progressive and functioning relatively to outside society (Foucault, 1967b), while Topinka (2010: 56) suggests that heterotopias are universal, "although the forms they take are heterogeneous" from one culture to the next. The changing functions of these heterotopias might reflect a deeper truth of Foucault's Sixth Principle; that is to say, heterotopias, while being in many ways isolated from the outside world, continue to function in a relative manner. Of course, while Chernobyl and Auschwitz-Birkenau are incomparable in terms of purpose, they have nevertheless both changed, in time, from original spaces of 'function' towards a new existence as (visitor) places of commodified experience.

Consequently, this transition from intended function to contemporary touristic phenomenology relates to earlier discussions of space and place; to the relationship between geography and psychology; and thereby to the psychogeographers who sought to explore the latent emotional value contained within the urban environment. Therefore, this chapter will now offer the idea of both *psychogeography as dark tourism*, and *dark tourism as psychogeography* and, by way of summarising those ideas, outline the notion of *Foucauldian Dark Tourism* and *Debordian Dark Tourism*.

3.4.1 *Psychogeography as Dark Tourism*

As noted earlier, Iain Sinclair is widely regarded as one of the most prolific psychogeographers of the London tradition, and his work has always tended towards the macabre. In a review of Sinclair's work, Jeffries (2004: 1) notes "devoid of bucolic heritage idylls... [the] poet's journey will take him past plague pits, over sewers and burial mounds [...] across the occult vortices of Hawksmoor churches, Ripper landmarks and gangland haunts." In 1975, Sinclair published one of his most iconic works: the part-fiction/part-poetic

collection of occult-heavy London psychogeography, *Lud Heat* (Sinclair, 1975). Here, Sinclair is concerned with highlighting the esoteric symbolism of the British capital, drawing parallels and links between the legacies of historical characters such as William Blake, Nicholas Hawksmoor and Jack the Ripper. Much of Sinclair's narrative takes the form of a 'stream of consciousness,' or dense, epic poetry – but there are sections too that describe Sinclair's own experiences as he heads out on foot to trace symbolic shapes across a map of London.

Lud Heat is not, strictly, psychogeography – at least not as Guy Debord would have judged it. As discussed earlier, the Parisian *dérive* was a process of tracing the underlying current – those 'psychogeographical slopes' – by feeling alone, the process of discovering place within space. Sinclair, conversely, sets out with a pre-conceived mythology of London landmarks although his writing does nevertheless adhere to the principle of playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects (Debord, 1955). As a result, the author begins his journey from *place*, rather than *space*. Sinclair appears to acknowledge this when he admits:

“For me, [psychogeography is] a way of psychoanalysing the psychosis of the place in which I happen to live. I'm just exploiting it because I think it's a canny way to write...” (Sinclair cited in Jeffries, 2004)

However, psychogeographical traditionalism aside, the book is recognised as a significant work in the London psychogeography canon, and it's interesting to note that many passages of *Lud Heat* also adhere clearly to the academic definition of 'dark tourism.' Throughout the book, Sinclair demonstrates a seeming preoccupation with sites of death and suffering which are manifested from ancient history. For example, “it is all here in the coastal ridges of Dorset: burial chamber stones heaped over with earth” (Sinclair, 1975: 81), to more casual dark tourism – “take my lunch to Tower Hamlets Cemetery” (Sinclair, 1975: 41). Sinclair also investigates sites of ritual murders, while his fascination with occult lore and morbid detail serves to turn even a commonplace stroll through London into an apparent dark tourism experience:

“They have circumnavigated the Roman Wall, they have followed the Hawksmoor trail east, from Blake's grave and the glimpse of St Luke's, Old Street [...] to the place of the lichen-pattern on the grave, to the crossroads, the staked vampire pit, St-George's-in-the-East.” (Sinclair, 1975: 129)

That same vein of ‘witting’ premeditation which differentiates Sinclair’s contemporary psychogeography from that of the early 1950s psychogeographical *dérive*, also serves to qualify his work as dark tourism; he walks the streets of London, encountering dark heritage at every turn, amongst the crowds of pedestrians and conventional tourists who do not experience the city as he sees it. Sinclair does not visit packaged-up commoditised sites of dark tourism, but rather through application of his own form of psychogeography he becomes a so-called ‘dark tourist.’

3.4.2 Dark Tourism as Psychogeography

While psychogeography in certain contexts might be perceived as a kind of contemporary dark tourism, dark tourism might also be viewed as contemporary psychogeography. By way of illustration, the study highlights the travel narrative of a self-confessed ‘dark tourist.’ Namely, the collection of travel stories in *The Dark Tourist: Sightseeing in the world’s most unlikely holiday destinations* by Dom Joly (2010a, also see Joly, 2010b) is based on Joly’s visits to numerous dark tourism destinations around the world. In turn, Joly’s travelogue is briefly assessed for its psychogeographical content (Hay, 2012), as well as the more precise rules of the *dérive*, as outlined by Debord (1955, 1956) and as noted earlier in this chapter.

Joly paints with a broad brush in his application of the term ‘dark tourism.’ His travelogue highlights six visitor destinations across the world, each with varying degrees of ‘darkness.’ Specifically, he outlines a visit to Iran, a trip across the US (focussing on locations such as the September 11 Memorial and Museum, and famous assassination sites at Dallas, Memphis and New York), the Killing Fields of Cambodia, the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone in Ukraine, a package tour of North Korea and, finally, a trip to conflict-scarred Beirut in Lebanon. While some of these destinations may stand out as notably ‘dark destinations’ (such as Chernobyl, the Killing Fields or Ground Zero in New York), others are perhaps more debatable. As Hohenhaus (2010) comments in a review of Joly’s work, “his choice of Iran and North Korea had less to do with the ‘dark’ in the sense of death and disaster, but rather with experiences of what’s it like to live under *dark regimes*.” Of course, not everything a tourist may encounter in either Iran or North Korea is ‘dark’ and so to label generically tourism to these countries as ‘dark tourism’ reveals a very personal system of meaning-making. Indeed, commonplace activities at these destinations – Joly goes skiing in Iran, and walks through the streets of

Pyongyang, North Korea – are affected by his own preconceptions of ‘darkness’ or ‘dark regimes.’ Arguably, therefore, this synthesis of geography and psychology would seem to position *The Dark Tourist* as a work of psychogeography – at least according to some of the definitions of psychogeography as noted earlier in this chapter.

Taking Joly’s account of his Iranian visit as way of contextualisation, he appears to satisfy a more conservative *Debordian* definition of the term ‘psychogeography.’ Joly details his journey to Tehran, his emotions on arrival and the people he meets there, some experiences of touring the city streets and, finally, a skiing trip in the mountains above the city. His justification for calling this ‘dark tourism’ comes early in the chapter:

“As a founding member of George W. Bush’s ‘Axis of Evil’ club – infamous for religious extremism, anti-Western rhetoric and being not impartial to the occasional hostage taking – it’s most people’s idea of a holiday in hell. For a Dark Tourist like me, however, it’s a dream destination” (Joly, 2010a: 5).

Once again, the author details a perceived darkness associated with the place, in lieu of visiting specific locations of death or suffering. Joly explicitly describes the way in which he drops his usual motives for movement and action when he explains his motivation for visiting Iran – “I just needed an angle – something to actually go and do there” – before finding unexpected inspiration in the form of photographs from an Iranian ski resort (Joly, 2010a: 5). This would seem to satisfy Debord’s *flâneur* principle of letting oneself be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters one finds there.

Throughout the travelogue, Joly (2010a: 9) reiterates the draw of the terrain – “I was longing to see Tehran and wondered what touristic delights awaited me.” Moreover, his descriptions of human interactions provide the essence of his travel encounters: from suspicious border guards, to his friendly-yet-cautious driver, to meeting the denizens of Tehran’s central bazaar – “we wandered up and down through the crowds in the covered alleys. I was the only Westerner in the whole place but I was met with nothing but smiles and friendship” (Joly, 2010a: 11). *The Dark Tourist* also offers a great deal of reflection of the author’s own emotions and behaviour, as an effect of the environment. Upon arrival to Iran, Joly (2010a: 8) comments, “as I stepped off our plane it was biting cold and incredibly bleak outside. I felt depressed.” A little later, passing through airport security, he notes, “they still didn’t have a clue as to why I was coming into their country but the atmosphere had definitely lifted” (Joly,

2010a: 9). In accordance with Tehran's psychogeographical contours, constant currents and fixed points and vortexes (Debord, 1956), Joly is clearly guided by a subjective experience (rather than an objective itinerary) of the city. He fails to mention any of the Iranian capital's most celebrated landmarks, commenting only that "the drive into Tehran was ugly, very ugly... the centre of Tehran was equally ugly," before finding himself captivated instead by pieces of political street art and graffiti (Joly, 2010a: 9).

Finally, Debord's psychogeography calls for a certain degree of playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects, which Joly demonstrates at times when he allows the terrain around him to drive passages of reflection and abstract connection building. Throughout the travelogue, Joly comments on the psychology of his surrounding geography – for instance, "The further we drove into the mountains, the less I felt the grip of the Islamic State" (Joly, 2010a: 13). On other occasions, he follows these trains of thought into playfully constructive streams of consciousness. For example, upon leaving the capital city behind, he notices fewer men with beards, and begins to ponder: "what the relationship between facial hair and revolution was all about" (Joly 2010a: 13). This kind of playful reflection inspired by observation of often-overlooked details of the geographical environment seems to resonate with the very core principles of Debordian psychogeography.

Arguably, though Joly appears to be unaware of the psychogeography concept in his work, *The Dark Tourist* does appear to satisfy key criteria of psychogeographical writing. Consequently, the broad church of psychogeography offers an insight into potential new research avenues of 'Foucauldian Dark Tourism' and 'Debordian Dark Tourism.'

3.4.3 Foucauldian Dark Tourism and Debordian Dark Tourism

In summary, psychogeography is a practice concerned with making meaning – with finding place in space – and seems to be at its most authentic in locations where the desired tourism experience is not already provided. Though contemporary psychogeographical definitions have broadened to encompass all manner of emotionally reflective tourism pursuits, the Debordian *flâneur* requires only a blank canvas (the landscape) with which to begin. Arguably, therefore, dark tourism appears to exist between two opposing poles. Firstly, there are those well-defined packaged-up sites of dark tourism (e.g., massacre sites, morbid museums or memorials to tragedy) at which it is almost impossible for a visitor not *to be*

doing dark tourism. Secondly, there is a kind of free-range dark tourism, where the *darkness* is less explicit and those passing through the space may be so-called dark tourists or not, according to a very personal system of pre-conditioning, knowledge and perceptions. To refer to the spatial philosophy of Michel Foucault, as discussed earlier, organised sites of commoditised dark tourism might sometimes be considered heterotopias or ‘Other places.’ Consequently, this study set out to evaluate dark tourism as a form of psychogeography and, arguably, dark tourism is at its most psychogeographical when conducted at places other than Foucault’s Other places – at *homotopias*, as termed here. It is within the *homotopias* where the (dark) tourist is required to interpret ‘darkness’ for themselves, rather than reading about it in museum panels, captions or in tourist guidebooks. In short, the chapter offers two distinct and separate modes of dark tourism as schematically illustrated in Fig. 2.

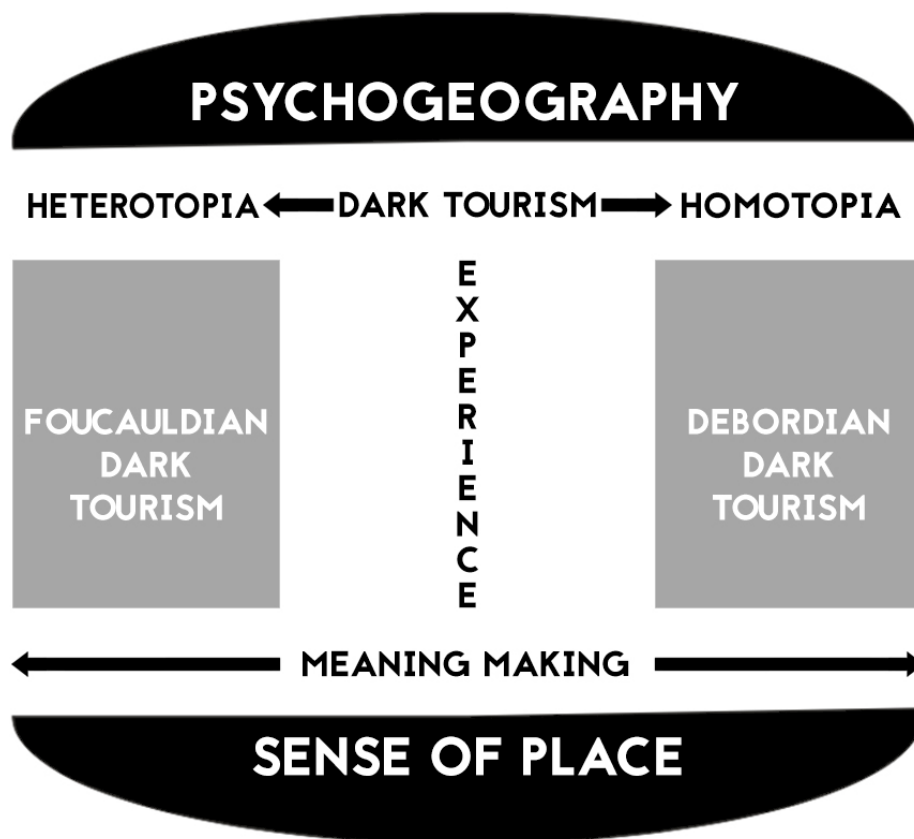


Figure 2: Dark Tourism within a psychogeographical framework
(adapted from Morten, Stone and Jarratt, 2018).

On the one hand, there is *Foucauldian dark tourism*. This is defined here as being conducted in heterotopian space(s) – at distinct and distinctly dark locations where a sense of darkness

may be universally perceived. *Foucauldian dark tourism* occurs at locations filled with juxtaposition, with chronological significance, in some way representative of the space outside and contained within a clearly recognised system of barriers that are physical, psychological or social. Ultimately, *Foucauldian dark tourism* is packaged dark tourism.

On the other hand, *Debordian dark tourism* is an intrinsically personal process of meaning-making conducted in regular, non-heterotopic space, where dark associations emerge from a private system of knowledge, memory, experience, culture and preconceptions. *Debordian dark tourism* allows dark tourism experiences that are not packaged (up), commoditised or endorsed, but rather are constructed as a product of geography and psychology. They may be similar spaces, or places with similarities, but the process of individualised meaning-making ensures a homotopia. Ultimately, *Debordian dark tourism* pays attention to psychogeographical slopes and fixed units of ambiance, and develops through interactions with people encountered in the terrain. *Debordian dark tourism* provides for a phenomenological journey that might not be shared by other tourists inhabiting the same space.

3.5 On Other Emergent Modes of Tourism

Owing to the highly subjective nature of the tourism experience, and due to the associations, perceptions and knowledge that individual tourists bring with them, as detailed above, it has been shown that some tourists might be finding darkness in places where others don't (a Debordian perspective). It may also be suggested that even at places packaged, commodified, or widely recognised as (Foucauldian) dark tourism destinations, those tourists in attendance might not be performing what they consider to be dark tourism. Indeed, some, instead, conceptualise their own travel experiences, even at arguably 'dark' sites, in line with other contemporary definitions or concepts within tourism. In recent years a number of other modes of non-traditional tourism have emerged, motivated by the pursuit of new experiences and places, and constituting what Munt (1994) recognises as 'postmodern tourism.' Light (2000) also identifies an "increasing tendency to intellectualise holidays, with an emphasis on study and learning." This chapter now provides brief introductions for three forms of tourist travel observed and discussed in contemporary Southeast Europe: 'urban exploration,' 'communist heritage tourism,' and 'architecture tourism.'

3.5.1 Urban Exploration (and Ruin Porn)

Urban exploration (sometimes shortened to ‘urbex’ or ‘UE’) is the name often given to a form of recreational trespass that involves “researching, gaining access to, and documenting forbidden, forgotten or otherwise off-limits places, including abandoned buildings, high-rise construction sites and infrastructure systems” (Kindynis, 2017). Its definitions vary from the academic: “a cultural practice of exploring derelict, closed and normally inaccessible built environments” (Garrett, 2010); to the poetic: “a celebration of decay and everyday poetry, with a touch of melancholia and a rush of lawlessness” (Mackinney-Valentin, 2012). The widespread contemporary use of the term is often credited to the influential book *Access All Areas: A User’s Guide to the Art of Urban Exploration* (Chapman, 2005); though much like dark tourism, urban exploration – as a mode of interacting with or documenting abandoned, disused or ‘normally inaccessible’ spaces – has a long history of practice in human cultures. For example the Russian journalist Vladimir Gilyarovsky, who lived at the turn of the 20th century and whose work chronicles the last days of the tsar and the rise of the Bolshevik movement, was also fascinated by the hidden spaces of cities, and published a visceral account of his exploration through the Neglinnaya, an underground river ‘lost’ beneath the streets of Moscow (Gilyarovsky, 2013); similar trips through these tunnels are now made by the city’s contemporary urban explorers (O’Callaghan, 2017). Macfarlane (2013) notes that the contemporary practice of urban exploration can be broken into a number of categories: “The scene has its subscenes. [...] the bunkerologists, the asylum seekers, the skywalkers, the builderers, the track-runners, the drainers. Most people start out in ruins, though: these tend to be the easiest sites to access, and the aesthetic payoffs – the pathos of abandonment, the material residue of inscrutable histories – are rapid.”

Urban exploration might be considered as a practice built on three pillars: 1. Embodiment; 2. Preservationism; and 3. Image-making (or, ‘adventurers,’ ‘guerrilla preservationists’ and ‘ruinistas’ as Macfarlane (2013) puts it).

1. An embodied approach to urban exploration is one which focusses on the physical challenge of entering and exploring hard-to-access sites, and the subsequent phenomenological experiences offered within; a ‘haptic placemaking process’ that has been described as ‘place hacking’ (Garrett, 2010; 2012), and which sometimes shares a cultural space with other ‘alternative urban practices’ such as graffiti writing,

squatting and parkour (Kindynis, 2017). On the appeal of being in such places, Edensor says they “offer an escape from excessive order. They're marginal spaces filled with old and obscure objects. You can see and feel things that you can't in the ordinary world” (Greco, 2012). Or as Huyssen (2010) notes: “In the ruin, history appears spatialised, and built space temporalised.”

2. A preservationist approach within urban exploration is practiced by those recreational trespassers who are “deep into heritage theory, and genuinely committed to creating a coherent photographic and textual record of buildings that would otherwise crumble unnoticed until a developer arrived to raze all trace of them” (Macfarlane, 2013). Such efforts can constitute a form of heritage activism, or ‘technological memorialisation’ (Lindsay, 2010); for example, the collaboration between urban exploration communities and heritage groups in the preservation Britain’s derelict ROC Posts – where urban explorers defined their own role as a kind of custodianship, “preserving, honouring and not damaging the place under inspection” (Bennett, 2010: 427). In this way, “[the] conscientious explorer [...] seeks to create a relationship with the past, to produce a history that’s not been museumised or curated by experts” (Edensor cited in Greco, 2012).

3. Modes of urban exploration focussed predominantly on creating and sharing images have gained popularity, alongside the rising use of social media image-sharing platforms. Kindynis suggests that other forms of urban exploration are now “largely subordinated to the *production and consumption of images*. There is an ongoing shift discernible whereby the focus of both the practices themselves and their representation has moved away from an emphasis on embodied experience [...] and towards an emphasis on showmanship and bravado, as well as competition for subcultural status and identity construction” (Kindynis, 2017, emphasis in original). These image-makers “distinguish themselves from these mostly older, more cerebral trespassers,” who “take photos mainly to document that they’ve been there”; for this newer breed of explorers, “the image is the *whole* point” (Chen, 2014, emphasis in original).

Though powered now by new technologies, this trend towards a predominant focus on image-making in abandoned spaces taps into an even earlier cultural tradition. Numerous Romantic painters of the 18th and 19th century, such as JMW Turner, Caspar David Friedrich or John

Constable, took abandoned churches and abbeys or other deteriorating structures as their subjects; had those painters been working today, with DSLR cameras instead of paints and brushes, the resultant images would fall into a growing genre of urban exploration photography that is sometimes dubbed ‘ruin porn’ (for example, in Greco, 2012; De Silva, 2014; Lyons, 2017). This cultural through-line was made explicit by the 2014 ‘Ruin Lust’ exhibition at London’s Tate Gallery, which presented “art works from the seventeenth century to today” side by side, to demonstrate the common thematic ground between the old masters and contemporary ruin photographers (Lyons, 2017). However, critics of this photographic genre point to the inherent objectification and decontextualisation involved in the process of turning real-world ruins into art; for example, in the case of Detroit: “‘Ruin porn’ is based purely on aesthetics and is almost always devoid of people. Employing the mismatched spoils of history, ruin porn ignores and overwrites the voices of those who still call Detroit home [...] There is a distinct neo-colonialist streak to these projects” (Doucet & Philp, 2016). Though not all ‘ruin porn’ is pure objectification, suggests Brown (cited in Lyons, 2017), who identifies a subcurrent of nostalgia: “Some will be fascinated from the outside, producing more ruin porn. Others will speak in mournful tones of what is lost, what I call rustalgia. As opposed to ruin porn, rustalgia can help show how sketchy is the longstanding faith in the necessity of perpetual economic growth.” Rann (2014) similarly notes a theme of nostalgia that underpins the increasing appearance of ruin photography captured in post-communist space – “after 1991 the old order was not replaced by a bold new world-making project, but rather by insecurity, suspicion and, increasingly, nostalgia” – and draws a parallel from Detroit to the former Soviet Union:

“[The] gaze of the photographer helps to demonstrate the inherent kinship between the ruins of the US and those of the former USSR. In both countries, at around the same time, giant factory cities emerged, with the same purpose and with similar architectures and philosophies (Taylorism, Fordism, technological positivism); in both countries, industrial progress went hand-in-hand with extravagant defence spending, scattering expendable outposts of a vast military-industrial complex around a continent. In the ruin, subtleties of dogma are forgotten.”

In this way, he suggests:

“[The] rise of western photographs of eastern ruins cannot be ascribed – at least not exclusively – to a desire to gloat over the decomposing corpse of its former Communist enemy. In the first place, it’s about supply and demand: the decay of the prodigious building projects of the Soviet Union has left a lot of impressive ruins lying around – magnificent mega-structures that now seem almost impossible” (Rann, 2014).



Plate 16: Urban exploration in post-communist space: a Lenin mosaic inside the abandoned former military base and ‘secret city’ at Skrunda-1 in Latvia (own photo: 26 October 2015).

The performance of urban exploration within post-communist space, however, undeniably provides an added dimension of political significance; even if the desire of practitioners is not exactly to ‘gloat.’ Fukuyama (1992) argued that the fall of communism, and the victory of liberal democracy, represented an ‘end of history’ (see Chapter 2). If such were true, then the physical ruins of 20th century communism may be the last time we’ll ever see a ‘rival empire’ in ruins, before we move together towards our homogenised sociocultural future. Indeed, approaching the question from a more socialist-nostalgic perspective, the Bulgarian academic Madlen Nikolova (2020) expresses a similar sentiment, positing that “[socialist] architecture’s presence across the post-communist world reminds people that another world – however flawed – was once possible.” Such meditations suggest that at least some of those participating in urban exploration in post-communist space might be motivated not solely by visual notions of ‘beautiful decay’ and the potential creation of ‘ruin porn,’ but rather, for a sense of closeness to history; and specifically, for closeness to a very different type of history, which today can less easily be encountered in the world first hand; see also Dobraszczyk (2010), for a discussion of the evolution of aesthetic ruin photography in post-evacuation Pripyat. A similar idea might explain the popularity of so-called ‘ruin bars’ – a phenomenon that has become increasingly popular in recent decades, notably in Budapest, Hungary, and

involves the development of new social venues within ruined buildings, usually frozen and managed in order to halt the process of decay at a balancing point between ruin aesthetics and public safety (Lugosi, Bell & Lugosi, 2010).

3.5.2 Red Tourism and Communist Heritage Tourism

Overlapping with and yet distinct from the above concept, some tourists are motivated by visits to sites associated specifically with communist heritage. Typically described as ‘communist heritage tourism’ (Light, 2000a; Light & Young, 2006), such activities can be defined as tourism to “places associated with the Communist or socialist past and present or to sites which represent or commemorate that past or present”; or, “as the consumption of sites and sights associated with the former communist regimes” (Caraba, 2011). While the term ‘red tourism’ has also sometimes been used to categorise such activity, it is important to note the significant difference between international communist heritage tourism, and what – for example – the Chinese call ‘red tourism’: constituting state-endorsed visits to current, active sites of ongoing communist significance (Li & Hu, 2008). It has been suggested that in China, as many as 400 million people took red tourism holidays between 2004 and 2007, raising revenues in excess of \$13.5 billion [£9.9 billion] (cited in Caraba, 2011). In the post-communist nations of central and east Europe, no such figures are available for the visitation of communist heritage sites, although such tourism has been identified as an emerging field of growth within the travel industry (Light & Young, 2006). Light (2000a) has explored the emergence of contemporary communist heritage tourism in Romania, while Ivanov (2009) presents it as a strong potential tourism growth market for Bulgaria. However, Caraba (2011) notes the potential problems with the touristic interpretation of such sites, particularly in a region where: “there is a tendency to ignore communist heritage or to present in a negative way.” Indeed, in these regions it has often be shown that communist heritage can be considered as representative of an ‘unwanted past’ (for example in Light, 2000a; Baločkaitė, 2012). While the rest of this thesis will continue to explore whether tourism to such places may nevertheless bring cultural value in the sense that it encourages a reconsideration of, and perhaps even reconciliation with such difficult heritage, it can at least for now be stated as fact that tourism to such places may contribute positively to regional economies (Light, 2000b; Li & Hu, 2008; Caraba, 2011; Timofeev, 2012).

Rather than examine the subject of communist heritage tourism more deeply here, the intention of this chapter is merely to introduce the concept as an alternate (though sometimes overlapping) form of tourism to dark tourism. This subject will later be revisited in Chapter 4 however, which considers communist heritage tourism in greater depth through a series of selected location studies across the region.

3.5.3 *Architecture Tourism*

Finally, this section identifies the practice of planning travel around monuments or other sites of architectural significance, not due to an interest in a real or perceived dark aspect or history, not out of any particular respect for nor interest in the political regimes which created them, and not in pursuit of the embodied experiences or ‘ruin-porn’ potential of urban exploration: rather, ‘architecture tourism’ here defines travel that is motivated solely by the appreciation of architectonic forms. This is proposed as *an approach to travel motivated more by design, than it is by politics or history*; and which takes more interest in the designers and architects of buildings and monuments than it does in the questions of who commissioned them, or for what (commemorative) purpose. Chapter 2 of this thesis has already discussed the potential educational value in studying monuments (see: Percoco, 1998; Wrenn, 1998; Waters & Russell, 2012). The researcher, elsewhere, has also used this form of architectonic-driven travel as a framework for investigating larger areas, for example in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone in Ukraine: “The monuments [...] would act as orienteering points, giving us a reason to cross otherwise unmarked corners of the map and visit almost all of Chernobyl’s abandoned villages in the process” (Richter, 2020b: 142).

Numerous publications and websites that deal with the subject of architecture in post-communist space have in recent years offered practical maps, designed to help readers to visit these places for themselves. For example, see the purely information-driven approach of the *Spomenik Database* website (<http://www.spomenikdatabase.org>), which provides detailed visiting instructions for the various sites of Yugoslav memorial architecture that it showcases, but avoids engaging in any contemporary political discussion or critique about the sites; conceptualising these places purely as historical art and architecture, rather than focussing on the communist ideological context. Or also, the various recent publications by Blue Crow Media, a British publisher that produces folded paper maps of Modernist architecture for various cities around the world; and in whose collection, the ideological significance of

Modernist architecture in cities such as Moscow, Belgrade and Skopje, is diminished, so that these maps sit without comment alongside maps of Modernist architecture in New York, London and Paris (see for example: Melikova, 2016; Slavković, 2017; Slavković, 2018). Similarly, popular websites such as *SOS Brutalism* (<https://www.sosbrutalism.org>), or publications such as *This Brutal World* (Chadwick, 2016) or *Atlas of Brutalist Architecture* (Phaidon, 2018), feature many locations in their collection that some might conceptualise as sites of communist (or even dark) heritage; though in the platforms mentioned here, they are conceptualised instead simply as regional examples of a global design trend.

As previously discussed, and explored in Chapter 2, architecture is an inherently political medium – or as Vukičević (2020) put it: “[There] is always agenda in design. All architecture conveys meaning, whether intentionally or not.” It might therefore be questioned whether any attempts to ‘de-politicise’ architecture can ever truly be successful. Nevertheless, following on from the discussion above of witting and unwitting dark tourism, and of Debordian and Foucauldian perspectives on dark travel, it follows that not all tourists visiting sites of dark, or abandoned, communist heritage are doing so for those particular conscious reasons; and thus the definition of this final mode of travel will prove useful later in discussing the motivations of those tourists visiting the primary location of this study – an abandoned, subjectively dark site of both communist heritage, and of architectural value. It is the belief of the researcher (as someone who has spent more than 200 days leading foreign tour groups to sites of memorial heritage in post-communist countries – see Appendix 1), that no matter what other associations fellow visitors, observers or academics might ascribe to the place and its visitors, that there will nevertheless likely prove to be some tourists who are not consciously aware or critical of the political dimensions of the monument. These people therefore believe (and would self-report) that they are visiting such a place for its architectural value alone, and they might therefore, in line with a Debordian approach, conceptualise themselves not as ‘dark tourists,’ ‘red tourists,’ or ‘urban explorers,’ but rather, simply as ‘architecture fans.’

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter set out to evaluate a range of different approaches within tourism. It introduced the idea of dark tourism, and showed how ‘darkness’ could be considered a subjective value in many cases. The study introduced the subject of psychogeography – a process of finding place within space – as well as identifying theoretical notions of heterotopias and their

application to psychogeography. The study also demonstrated, rather than empirically tested, two case examples of how dark tourism locations may adhere to heterotopian principles. The chapter also discussed how accounts of dark tourism at non-heterotopic locations followed behavioural patterns more indicative of psychogeography. As a result, the research has revealed two conceptual frameworks in which to locate contemporary dark tourism. Indeed, the chapter highlights how two schools of geographical thought (psychogeography and heterotopia) correspond to very different (yet equally valid) forms of dark tourism. Thus, the chapter distinguished between ‘dark heterotopias,’ as ‘Other places’ set aside for the deliberate and structured consumption of dark touristic experiences, compared to innate or subjective dark tourism experiences, wherein the dark associations are made by the tourist themselves. For these two modes of dark tourism, the chapter proposed the terms ‘Foucauldian dark tourism’ and ‘Debordian dark tourism’ respectively.

The conceptual study presented in this chapter is far from conclusive, and features only a limited discussion on locales and application. Nonetheless, the intention of this study was to frame a potential new paradigm within which to consider the practice of dark tourism. In so doing, a plethora of fresh and exciting future research avenues into the production and consumption of dark tourism has emerged. That said, however, it should be noted that the idea of ‘Foucauldian’ or ‘Debordian’ dark tourism should not be taken as a mutually exclusive binary. In other words, many examples of dark tourism across the world and within different cultures may satisfy elements of both philosophies – for instance, whether it be ‘dark tourists’ explaining the relationship between psychology and geography as they visit heterotopic sites of commoditised dark tourism; or students of Foucault tracing theoretical heterotopias around the slopes and vortices of a *dark dérive*.

Therefore, rather than promoting such a reductive model, it is hoped that the conceptual frameworks presented in this chapter will provide a useful way to consider the degree of investment, of interaction, inherent in the process of dark tourism consumption. Thus, a psychogeographical perspective reminds us that *darkness* is not always universally perceived, but rather is a personal response found often at the synthesis of geography and psychology. To return to the example of Auschwitz-Birkenau one last time, consider the mindscape of a Jewish visitor touring the site as compared to that of a visitor from some other ethnic background who is not implicitly connected to the history of the place. As Alfred Korzybski (1933) suggested, ‘the map is not the territory’; and in the case of Auschwitz, even the most

rigidly planned and carefully curated visitor experience is not necessarily predictive of the psychological journey experienced from one individual to the next. Understanding dark tourism as a broader system of processes – in terms of transactional, created or perceived darkness, rather than simply by the act of visiting a known dark tourism location – might lead to a more holistic understanding of the motivations and experiences inherent in dark tourism consumption. The commodification of dark tourism destinations may encourage a more predictable, controlled experience, but the psychological effect of the geography itself – its slopes, its drift, its vortices and ambiance – ought not to be overlooked.

Finally, while the main focus of the chapter has been in dark tourism, it also introduced three other modes of tourism that could at times be said to overlap with dark tourism. These were ‘urban exploration’ (tourism to off-limits or abandoned places), ‘communist heritage tourism’ (tourism to sites associated with a communist or socialist past or present), and ‘architecture tourism’ (which, although it might include visits to the same kinds of places, describes those tourists who are subjectively motivated by an interest in architecture and design alone). In Chapter 6, this thesis will introduce the Buzludzha Memorial House in Bulgaria – an abandoned and arguably ‘dark’ site of communist architectural heritage, and thus a place where all of these touristic themes are likely to come into play. First though, in the following chapter, the thesis will next consider the relationship between the tourist and the terrain, introducing a conversation around themes of ‘Orientalism’ and the ‘tourist gaze,’ with specific reference to the case of Western tourists visiting sites of former socialist memorial significance in Southeast Europe, and the problems that this can raise.

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Chapter Four

The Eastward Gaze

“They’re not here to capture an image, we’re here to maintain one.
Every photograph reinforces an aura... We’ve agreed to be part of a collective perception.
A religious experience in a way, like tourism...”

White Noise, Don DeLillo

4.0 Introduction

This chapter will build upon the ideas explored in Chapter 2 (the role of monuments) and Chapter 3 (modes of tourism), to look more closely at the phenomenon of foreign tourists visiting sites of former memorial significance in Southeast Europe. In establishing the nature and significance of such interactions, the chapter will first review literature on the subjects of the ‘tourist gaze’ and ‘Orientalism,’ before then considering the particular and well-documented case of Western tourists visiting and photographing the Modernist war memorials of former Yugoslavia. The chapter will review and discuss the literature on this specific phenomenon, before highlighting some potential gaps in the literature that merit further investigation. The chapter will also look at the local perspective, and consider the ways in which those native to the region now reference or otherwise use the region’s memorial heritage in new contemporary ways. Finally, the chapter considers various sites of managed communist heritage in post-communist space, identifies some of the issues these face today, and therefore proposes a model for the management of difficult communist heritage.

4.1 Defining the Territory

‘Eastern Europe’ is a geographical definition with complicated cultural connotations. The term was initially used by 18th century Western European geographers to present a counterpoint to places of perceived Western enlightenment, and in the 20th century it would earn strong associations with the idea of Soviet-style communism (Azarova, 2017); the words ‘Eastern Europe,’ at least during the Cold War period, serving as synonymous with ‘Behind the Iron Curtain.’ This period also saw the widespread use of the more politically weighted term ‘Eastern Bloc,’ which carries connotations of dystopia, of totalitarian government and repressive police states (Satyendra, 2003). Both terms are sometimes said to carry an ‘othering’ quality, fuelled in the mid-20th century by Cold War rhetoric, and in contemporary use continuing to carry connotations including qualities of ‘irrationality,’ ‘weakness,’ and ‘barbarism,’ as well as implying ‘a distance from and a lack of Europeanness’ (see: Hudabiunigg, 2009; Kuus, 2014). Moreover, in the post-communist context, both terms seem to be often associated with notions of perceived ideological failure and its resultant ‘dystopian’ urban landscapes.

Some countries prefer to avoid the label of ‘Eastern Europe’ altogether, for example many people in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Czechia (all members of what was once described by the West as the ‘Eastern Bloc’) now choose to identify themselves instead as ‘Central Europe,’ a preference which “is a reflection of the sense of belonging more to the West rather than to the East” (Thompson, 2012: 8); with the Czech writer Milan Kundera rejecting the term ‘Eastern Europe’ in a symbolic protest against Moscow’s influence in the region (Kundera, 1983). Meanwhile the Baltic nations – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – despite being former Soviet republics and amongst the easternmost countries of Europe, identify themselves today not as ‘Eastern Europe,’ but rather as ‘Nordic’ or ‘North European’ countries, thus emphasising their connections with Scandinavian cultures while separating themselves from perceived associations with post-communism and the Soviet Union (Bershidsky, 2017). Another solution to the naming problem is the use of the term ‘New East,’ as favoured by numerous cultural publications such as *The Calvert Journal*, who define the term as encompassing “eastern Europe, the Balkans, Russia and Central Asia,” a region which is “thanks to a rising generation of artistic talent [...] in the midst of tremendous change”; the platform adopted the term ‘New East’ sometime around 2015, then using it to replace all previous mentions of fully-capitalised ‘Eastern Europe’ on their website (The Calvert Journal, 2015). *The Guardian* is more specific when it defines the ‘New East’ as those countries “that rose from the ashes of the USSR” (The Guardian, 2014). Nevertheless, by grouping together a wildly differing range of countries in their coverage, from Central Asia to the Balkans, whose only shared characteristic is that they once had communist governments, post-communist identity still informs the ostensibly apolitical term ‘New East’ just as surely as it did ‘Eastern Bloc’ – only now, it is a definition via absence. Increasingly, and particularly in the past decade, there is a growing sentiment that “counting the ex-communist countries as a single category is outdated and damaging” (P.T.W. & E.L., 2012); after all, the Soviet Union, and the communist movement as a whole, was characterised by an attempt to unify a vast range of different countries and cultures under one single flag, sometimes against the will of their citizens. But the tendency in the West to continue using these outdated and potentially othering terms for the region persists; see for example, the travel guide on *The Telegraph* that states: “Here are 25 places to consider if you’re thinking of a trip to the old Eastern Bloc” (The Telegraph, 2018).

Unless citing others, this thesis will generally avoid using the loaded, and sometimes contested, historical terms ‘Eastern Europe,’ or ‘Eastern Bloc.’ However, it is clear that the

shared experience of communism has resulted in a number of common characteristics amongst the countries and cultures frequently described as ‘Eastern Europe’; while the physical heritage left behind presents similar challenges, in addition to similar opportunities for commodification through and for touristic experience. But recognising these more as political-environmental, rather than authentic national characteristics, the unifying term that will be used here is ‘post-communist space’ – a more conceptual framework within which to consider the common features that appear throughout a large range of countries which otherwise have entirely different cultures, characteristics, histories, languages and identities to one another (for other examples of this approach see: Pusca, 2008; Cooley, 2019).

The specific focus of this thesis is a case study in Bulgaria. Though many Bulgarian citizens and academics still comfortably identify themselves as an ‘Eastern European’ country (for example in Vasileva, 2019), here the regional definition of ‘Southeast Europe’ is preferred – not only as it avoids the political and cultural baggage attached to the term ‘Eastern Europe,’ but also because it allows a keener focus on a group of neighbouring countries that, although demonstrating “countless differences that exist among them,” nevertheless still share a number of defining influences resulting from the specific geography, the history and the politics of the Balkan Peninsula region (Thompson, 2012: 9).

4.2 The Tourist Gaze

The *tourist* is defined by Turner et al. (2005: 11) as, “someone who has travelled to another place for a brief sojourn, an experience that necessarily entails a distinct period of transition and discontinuity from the everyday world.” The sociologist John Urry (1990: 2) defined tourism as “a leisure activity which presupposes its opposite, namely regulated and organised work. It is one manifestation of how work and leisure are organised as separate and regulated spheres of social practice in ‘modern’ societies.” In what would become one of the most influential concepts in the field of tourism research, Urry coined the term “the tourist gaze” to describe the constructed and curated nature of touristic experiences, arguing that tourists are “directed to features of landscape and townscape which separate them off from everyday experience. Such aspects are viewed because they are taken to be in some sense out of the ordinary” (Urry, 1990: 3). He suggests that “the typical tourist experience is [...] to see named scenes through a frame, such as the hotel window, the car windscreen or the window of the coach” (Urry, 1990: 100). The implication here is that the gaze of the tourist falls upon scenes

which conform with the tourist's pre-existing expectations of a place – “the gaze falls upon what the gazer expects to see” (Turner et al, 2005: 11). Tour operators and marketers are complicit in setting these expectations, by establishing pre-visit notions of a place through the distribution of promotional images (Goss, 1993); and the tourists themselves subconsciously work to realise these expectations, as they scan the landscape for sights that confirm their pre-established notions (Culler, 1981). Urry (1990: 1) summarises this as a social transaction: “we look at the environment [...] we gaze at what we encounter [...] and the gaze is socially constructed.”

The concept of the ‘tourist gaze’ supposes a static position on the part of the tourist, however; and as times have changed, it has been suggested that modern tourists seek greater levels of ‘contact’ with their destinations (Thrift, 1999). Perkins and Thorns argue that the gaze is multifaceted, and “varied temporally and across social groups” (2001: 187), and that in seeking a deeper sense of embodiment in the tourism experience, tourists are “putting their bodies into tourism in a way that is not reflected in much of the analysis arising from a focus upon the tourist gaze” (2001: 199). Franklin and Crang (2001: 13) suggest that tourists have become bored with the gaze, as they are “seeking to be doing something in the places they visit rather than being endlessly spectatorially passive.” This idea speaks to a growing desire within tourism for perceived authenticity, with MacCannell (1999: 101) noting how “touristic consciousness is motivated by its desire for authentic experiences, and the tourist may believe that he is moving in this direction, but often it is very difficult to know for sure if the experience is in fact authentic. It is always possible that what is taken to be entry into a back region is really entry into a front region that has been totally set up in advance for touristic visitation.” At worst, therefore, the tourist gaze may constitute “a blueprint for the transformation of the global system of attractions into an enormous set of mirrors to serve the narcissistic needs of dull egos” (MacCannell, 2001: 26). It should be noted also that the gaze is not only present in cases of physical tourism: as the “notion of the tourist gaze captures both the consumption of places through mobile images and the actual travel to and embodied appreciation of specific places” (Larsen, 2014: 306), owing to the fact that people “are tourists most of the time, whether they are literally mobile or only experience simulated mobility through the incredible fluidity of multiple signs and electronic images” (Lash & Urry, 1994: 259).

Winter (2010) explores the idea of ‘performing the past,’ whereby individuals and groups repeat scripts or rituals about the past, in a process that binds the group together and preserves a sense of collective memory. However, when this performance is conducted purely for the benefit of cultural outsiders, it can instead have a less positive effect for local culture. As a result, other criticisms of the tourist gaze highlight its potential for robbing destinations of the depth of their unique regional characteristics, as Nicholson-Lord (2002) states:

“Perhaps most offensive for those on the receiving end, tourism is a powerful cultural solvent; it takes customs and beliefs that are locally rooted and distinctive, puts them into the global blending machine and turns them into liquefied gunk to which a mass market has been primed to respond. One consequence is the phenomenon known as ‘staged authenticity,’ in which a cultural tradition, once celebrated for its own sake and out of a belief in its intrinsic value, turns into a tourist spectacle and thus, insidiously, into a performance.”

There is a danger even that: “Encouraging tourism as a means to improve the economic situation of communities can, in fact, destroy their uniqueness and cultural value” (Caust, 2018). In a discussion of how this phenomenon manifests in Kerala, India, Sudheer (2014) notes: “[very] often the tourists are merely curious and want a cursory ‘feel’ of the local cultural flavour without wanting or having the time to enjoy and understand it at leisure.” However:

“This ‘commodification’ and ‘museumisation’ of local art forms and cultures for tourist consumption often violate the spiritual and aesthetic concerns of the practitioners [...] Some social researchers and NGOs unhesitatingly call this a form of neo-colonialism” (Sudheer, 2014: 6-7).

This speaks also to the inherent inequalities that underpin many examples of the gaze, when affluent visiting tourists arrive with expectations of ‘authentic’ entertainment from their local, and often less-affluent hosts: “In a world of hyper-mobile capital, instantaneous communications and increasingly the extensive movement of people, global tourism is an ambivalent phenomenon that encapsulates the contradictory forces of mobility and freedom on the one hand, and, immobility and disenfranchisement, on the other” (Bianchi, 2006).

These inequalities between the visiting tourist and the visited community give rise to a situation in which exploitative transactions may occur. In *Deviant Globalization: Black Market Economy in the 21st Century*, Nils Gilman (2011) describes the emergence of a kind of vice tourism in these contexts, which exists as “the unpleasant underside of transnational

integration,” and develops “most fiercely in the places where the state is being dismantled.” Moreover, those pursuing such exploitative experiences may be said to be engaging in a form of ‘deviant leisure’ (a topic explored by Stebbins, 1996; Stone & Sharpley, 2013; Rojek, 1999; Williams, 2009). Such relationships can be seen to exist in the region(s) of focus of this thesis: central and east and southeast Europe. For example, the German travel website Ampilot offers a list of the ‘10 Best Stag Do Destinations in Europe,’ of which seven cities are found in post-communist European countries; which according to the site, generally rank lower for English proficiency, but are cheaper for tourism, and rank higher in the site’s metrics for *alcohol*, *strip clubs* and *local women* (Thorsdal, 2016). The British-Chinese tour company Young Pioneer Tours also offers a wide range of experiences in the region for Western guests, under a website tagline that alludes to potential danger or deviance: ‘Budget travel to destinations your mother would rather you stay away from’ (<https://www.youngpioneertours.com>). Such interactions play into a contemporary conceptualisation of post-communist Europe as a lawless playground in which Western tourists may go to experience affordable vices, such as strip clubs and cheap bars, firing Soviet-era weapons or even driving a tank (see for example the website Prague Weekends: <https://www.praguestagweekend.com>). However, this is not a new phenomenon; and the following section will discuss literature on ‘Orientalism’ and ‘Balkanism,’ to explore how such conceptualisations of the region(s) have in fact developed over a matter of centuries.

Finally, it should be noted that over the decades since the release of his seminal work, Urry subsequently updated *The Tourist Gaze* with new chapters, to release new editions in the form of *The Tourist Gaze* (2nd edition) (Urry, 2002) and *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (Urry & Larsen, 2011). In the intervening years, critics had questioned what seemed to be the purely visual aspects of Urry’s ‘gaze’ model, suggesting instead more action-and-exchange oriented models such as performance (for example Perkins & Thorns, 2001), for understanding touristic encounters. Challenged by these new tourism paradigms, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* addressed emergent new worlds within tourism, commenting on the gaze in relation to themes such as “surveillance, ‘overconsumption,’ and climate change. [...] Urry became increasingly concerned about ‘bads’ to which the global tourist gaze contributes” (Larsen, 2014: 4). The new content went beyond purely visual cues to discuss how “gazing is embodied, multimodal, and involves other senses. Tourists touch, stroke, walk, or climb upon and even collect the building and objects that they lay their eyes upon”; and it notes also the significance of the tourist’s travel companions, and ‘relational’ gazes: because “[who] we happen to gaze with

can be as important to the quality of the experience as the object of the gaze” (Larsen, 2014: 5). *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* discusses the role of surveillance, increased security and the ubiquity of CCTV cameras in the modern world, particularly in relation to the increasing perceived risk of global terror attacks, and Larsen notes the effect that such surveillance systems have on the availability of the kind of free-roaming, associative exploration of space that was introduced in the previous chapter of this thesis, on ‘psychogeography’:

“The flaneur was the forerunner of the ‘gazing tourist.’ The flaneur’s anonymity and liminality is now largely impossible: almost all movements are recorded, tracked, and ‘databased.’ Tourists are now routinely captured by and subject to a powerful digital panoptic machine justified by the perceived risks of crime, violence, and terrorism” (Larsen, 2014: 5-6).

Finally, and of particular interest to this study, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* also tackled the idea of the ‘local gaze,’ turned back towards visitors and sometimes objectifying these tourists in return, and how these gazes meet in a ‘mutual gaze’ (Maoz, 2006; Urry & Larsen, 2011). It was thereby suggested that “*Everyone* gazes at each other in the spaces of tourism [...] The local gaze strikes back and positions the self-proclaimed traveller as voyeuristic gazer” (Larsen, 2014: 5).

4.3 Orientalising the Balkans

The notion of cultural practices being performed, reproduced, and thus robbed of some of their intrinsic authenticity for the benefit of visiting foreigners (in what is essentially a local internalisation of the foreign gaze), is reflective of a larger problem in cross-cultural engagements that Edward Said described as ‘Orientalism.’ Said’s work drew attention to Western cultural formulations and representations of the East (i.e., the Orient) that focussed heavily on its differences as perceived from a European or American perspective: Orientalist work takes “the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, ‘mind,’ destiny and so on” (Said, 1978: 223). Tracing the trend from the European Enlightenment era, and through the colonisation of the Arab world, Said highlights the Orientalising effect of prevalent Western narratives about the East, which frequently presented the region as strange, exotic, sometimes barbaric, and occasionally dangerous. Said’s work is credited as one of the foundational texts of contemporary post-colonial critique, and it remains highly relevant today as many of these tropes still persist; for example,

Disney's 1992 animated film *Aladdin* featured a song with the lyrics: "I come from a land, from a faraway place / Where the caravan camels roam / Where they cut off your ear if they don't like your face / It's barbaric, but hey, it's home" – a noted example of Orientalism (Smith Galer, 2017). Crucially for Said, these Orientalist works also had the effect of confirming and reinforcing colonialist power hierarchies: this way of thinking rationalised occupation as intervention, as it assumed that the West was always a positive and civilising force in the East (Said, 1978); or as the Bulgarian academic Aneta Vasileva summarises it, Orientalism constitutes: "the presentation of a complex culture as a homogeneous and exotic 'otherness' and the establishment of supreme power over its interpretations" (Vasileva, 2019).

The Balkan region has long been the subject of Orientalising narratives; from Archduke Franz Ferdinand's 1913 description of Serbia as "Some plum trees and goat pastures full of droppings, and a bunch of rebellious killers" (cited in Sass, 2013); to the patronising claim attributed to Winston Churchill, that "the Balkans produce more history than they can consume" (cited in Roberts, 2011); to more contemporary iterations, such as in the words of author Alan Furst, who said of his own novel *Spies of the Balkans*: "I love the combination of the words 'spies' and 'Balkans.' It's like meat and potatoes!" (Higgins, 2010). The region also gave birth to the word 'Balkanisation,' in use since the Balkan Wars of the early twentieth century, as a pejorative term for the chaotic and hostile fragmentation of a larger state into smaller ones (Todorova, 1994). The Bulgarian historian Maria Todorova took a similarly deconstructive approach to Said's, when she wrote her book *Imagining the Balkans*, a study of how – as the back-cover text puts it – "the Balkans has often served as a repository of negative characteristics upon which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the 'European' has been built" (Todorova, 1997). However, the process by which the Balkans became seen as the 'Other' within Europe differs from Western treatments of the Orient, Todorova explains, as unlike the Arab world that Said described, the Balkans was European, white, precisely defined in terms of geography, and predominantly Christian in religion. Rather, many of these negative associations took root in the wake of the region's liberation from Ottoman occupation, a time when the Great Powers of Europe were already looking to the Balkans, and debating how "to benefit best from a possible dissolution of the Ottoman Empire" (Grandits, 2014). A period of instability followed these liberations, marked by the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, followed by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914, the event that triggered the outbreak of World War I; and Western narratives of the region began to portray the Balkans as a place in dire need of civilisation, for

example by way of imperialist intervention, in order to manage its native qualities of “unreliability, misogyny, propensity for intrigue, insincerity, opportunism, laziness, superstitiousness, lethargy, sluggishness, inefficiency,” and “incompetent bureaucracy” (Todorova, 1997: 119). Todorova published her book in the 1990s, when the Balkans was once again divided by conflict, this time following the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; and during this decade Grandits (2014) notes how once again “the Balkans were increasingly conceptualised and constructed as ‘the other’ within Europe (which had far-reaching repercussions for Western policy making in the Yugoslav wars).” As with Said and the Arab world, Todorova also observes the internalisation of negative Western narratives inside the region, to the effect that many Balkan citizens themselves (from literary figures to politicians and policy-makers) could be said to be guilty of engaging in ‘Balkanism’ (Todorova, 1997).

Duncan Light (2012) explores an interesting evolution of this phenomenon in Romania, with what he describes as the ‘Dracula dilemma.’ The novel *Dracula*, by Irish author Bram Stoker, was published in 1897 and it presented a fictionalised version of Romania, and Romanian folklore, that was more informed by Balkanist and Orientalist narratives about the region that existed in the West at that time, than it was by any true knowledge of the place itself. However, in Western culture the iconic novel would become closely associated with people’s perception of the real Romania. The Romanian Communist Party did not engage with the notion of ‘Dracula tourism,’ as the stereotype was not in fitting with the national character that it sought to present to the world; but now post-communist Romania faces the dilemma, of either embracing the global interest in the Dracula myth in an effort to capitalise on the potential tourism capital, or else, rejecting what might reasonably be considered an offensive, and Orientalist / Balkanist foreign mischaracterisation of the country. As will be demonstrated later in this chapter and the next, this particular dilemma (whether or not to seek profit from foreign-assigned negative characterisations) is also highly relevant to the discussion of communist heritage tourism.

Sometimes overlapping with the idea of Balkanism, is the targeted mistreatment of the Slavic people, the ethnic group which inhabits most of the Balkan nations (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Bulgaria are considered to be Slavic nations), in addition to the central and eastern Slavic nations of Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. Anti-Slav sentiment has a long history (in the Balkans it has its

roots in the region's subjugation under the Ottoman Empire, an era that will be covered in more depth in Chapter 5), though it arguably reached its peak in the 1930s and 1940s, when Nazi Germany identified the Slavs with the term 'Untermensch,' meaning *Subhuman* (Gumkowski, Leszczynski & Robert, 1961). As depicted in Nazi propaganda posters, "the zoological portrayal of Slavs justified the elimination of their polities, creating the zones where the Holocaust could become possible" (Snyder, 2015). Some historians further believe that the Nazis had planned a mass genocide against the Slavic people, codenamed 'Generalplan Ost,' as part of an unrealised effort to 'colonise the East' (see Moses, 2008: 20; Longerich, 2010).



Plate 17: A slavophobic image featured on a World War II-era Nazi propaganda poster (source: Kenyon, n.d.).



Plate 18: Heavily stereotyped depiction of a Slavic character in the Marvel television series *Wandavision*. (Source: Donney & Shakman, 2021)

In a Master's thesis for the University of Zadar, Croatia, Gloria Makjanić (2020) identifies Slavic stereotypes appearing in modern Western films and television, categorising these into two distinct branches. *Slavophobia* she identifies as a negative and discriminatory portrayal of Slavs with its noted applications in World War II-era Nazi Germany, though continuing in popular media to this day. *Slavophilia* however is a more insidious form of stereotyping, being “a form of Orientalism which glorifies Slavs as unusual and exotic.” Examples of the latter can be seen in: the reduction of Slavic characters (or perceived Slavic traits) to sets of stereotypes, either positive or negative; the homogenous and reductive representation of the Slavic world; as well as in the deliberate misuse of the Cyrillic alphabet – sometimes known as ‘faux Cyrillic’ – in which Cyrillic characters are used in place of similar-looking Latin characters. This latter phenomenon often occurs when Western designers attempt to create titles and slogans with a particular East European, Russian, or Soviet feel to them, though to native Cyrillic users the results are typically nonsense, and can sometimes be considered culturally offensive (Rothrock, 2017). While it would be beyond the scope of this thesis to give a full historical account of the phenomenon of anti-Slav sentiment, or ‘Slavophobia,’ it is useful nevertheless to be aware of such concepts – particularly when understood as including “a form of Orientalism which glorifies Slavs as unusual and exotic” (Makjanić, 2020) – as

this chapter now turns to consider the particular objectification and sensationalisation of memorial architecture within (predominantly Slavic) post-communist space.



Plate 19: An example of ‘faux Cyrillic’ text. From the perspective of a Latin alphabet user, the text above is supposed to say ‘Saint Petersburg. Cooperation Togo Russia.’ For a user of Cyrillic though, it reads as nonsense: ‘Saint Reteyasvtsyag. Sooreyadtioi Togo Yatsssid’ (source: Republic of Togo, 2021).

4.4 The Case of Yugoslav War Memorials

The monuments created to memorialise the World War II victims and battles of Yugoslavia, now located in Kosovo, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Slovenia, Montenegro and North Macedonia, were always designed to serve as tourist attractions (see Chapter 2). They were state-endorsed places of pilgrimage, where children and adults alike were able to learn about the struggle of Yugoslavia’s anti-fascist partisan movement during World War II. In some cases, and particularly when these monuments commemorated places far removed from nearby towns, whole hospitality complexes were built to cater to visiting groups, including the provision of hotels, information centres, memorial houses and other tourism facilities (for example at the Korčanica Memorial Zone, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Niebyl, 2016b); the Battle of Sutjeska Memorial Complex, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Niebyl, 2016c); and at the

Monument to the Revolution of the People of Moslavina at Podgarić, Croatia (Niebyl, 2016d)). As such, these sites originally served a role that could be described as both dark tourism (as touristified places of real historic death) and red tourism (inasmuch as they were state-endorsed and illustrated pro-party narratives). Since the Balkan Wars of the 1990s and the collapse of Yugoslavia, however, these places have taken on additional layers of meaning. As discussed in Chapter 2, some became targets of nationalist groups in the 1990s who recognised them as symbols of the former regime. This same association holds true for many tourists who visit today. The monuments, often now neglected, in some cases abandoned or even semi-destroyed, appear so emblematic in their abstracted style of the future that Yugoslavia once hoped to build, that they might be read now as symbols not only of dead partisans but perhaps of a dead state, or a dead idea; ghosts of lost futures. Nowadays these sites receive an increasing volume of visitors from abroad, with the popular travel guide *Lonely Planet* featuring socialist-era Yugoslav war memorials amongst its online ‘Travel Tips’ section, commenting how the structures, “have begun to inspire a new generation of visitors” (Crevar, 2018). However, the increasing visibility of these memorial structures has begun to lead towards a global reappraisal of their artistic merits, one of the most significant markers in this process having come in summer 2018: when MoMA (the New York Museum of Modern Art) opened an exhibition titled ‘Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980,’ with a specific focus on the socialist-era architectural heritage of Yugoslavia (MoMA, 2018). One review of the exhibition noted:

“Yugoslavia barely figures in the Western Euro-American account of modern architecture. [...] MoMA’s curators see Yugoslavia as an inspiring chapter in purposeful design that improved lives and fostered hope. You might also see it as a moralizing tale about the danger of high-minded intentions and architectural arrogance. There, as in so many fallen nations, the symbols of one ideology became the targets of another” (Davidson, 2018).

However, as foreign tourists began to visit former Yugoslav memorial sites in increasing numbers in the 2010s, local experts would raise concerns over what they recognised as reductive Orientalist and Balkanist narratives (re)emerging in the process; and it is to this problem that the chapter now turns.

4.4.1 *The 'Spomenik Effect'*

In 2010, the Belgian photographer Jan Kempenaers released a hardback photo book called *Spomenik* (Kempenaers, 2010), which took for its title the Serbo-Croat-Bosnian word for *Monument*, and featured photographs of a series of 25 monuments located across the countries of former Yugoslavia. Using a 1975 map of monuments as his guide, Kempenaers took these photographs during his travels through the region in 2006-2007. He later explained: “My main concern is making interesting images. I only photographed the ones that I liked, the ones with an interesting shape” (cited in Bergfors, 2012). The *Spomenik* book included an accompanying essay by the Dutch architect Willem Jan Neutelings, and the abstract, Modernist structures that Kempenaers’s photographs depicted proved to be such eye-catching images, that the collection quickly ‘went viral’ online. The general visual aesthetic of the collection (monuments shown devoid of visitors, with colours washed out to create a universally dismal, grey effect) had the effect of encouraging particular readings of these locations, such as the conclusion from *The Guardian*: “What is apparent from Kempenaers’s photos is that today, nobody – old or young – cares about them” (Surtees, 2013). However, in many cases this representation and interpretation of the subject matter was far from accurate, with many of the monuments still being in regular use and good maintenance, some even featuring dedicated websites, information centres and regular opening hours; as the author of this thesis concluded, after personally visiting many of these locations in 2016:

“[It] takes a real effort on the part of the photographer to make these objects look so lifeless; and so, such images, perhaps, tell us more about the photographer’s preconceptions of the post-communist world, than they do about the spomeniks themselves” (Richter, 2016b).

The title of the book itself has been described as Orientalising by critics, with Kulić (2018) explaining:

“An otherwise ordinary Slavic word that translates into English unambiguously as monument, the exotic-sounding term, often incorrectly pluralised as ‘spomeniks,’ allows Kempenaers to fabricate a new stylistic category, suggesting that Yugoslav war memorials fall so far outside of normal commemorative practices and of the existing artistic lineages that they require their own special name.”

Horvatinčić (2012) notes “Soon after the publication [...] the unintelligible, ‘catchy,’ exotic title of the book seems to have triggered a semantic shift – semantic narrowing – of the word spomenik,” so that: “Despite the fact that the word is indigenous to the countries of the former

Yugoslavia, its meaning has on the Internet primarily become associated with several representative examples taken from Jan Kempenaers' book." Kulić (2018) hypothesises that this effect may constitute a "post-socialist version of cultural appropriation." Kulić is perhaps over-judicious in calling the English pluralisation of the word (*spomenik* to *spomeniks*) 'incorrect': because it is typical for a loan word to obey the grammatical rules of whichever other language adopts it. For example, the Serbian language similarly adapts a number of English words, and these are then subjected to Serbian-style pluralisation: 'weekend' in English becomes *vikend* in Serbian, and is pluralised to *vikendom*; the English word 'barman' is used in Serbian as (singular) *barmen*, and its Serbian plural form is *barmeni*. Therefore, the English-style pluralisation of the borrowed Slavic word 'spomenik(s)' is linguistically correct, though the deeper question here remains: what the use of that word conveys in terms of meaning, and why English speakers might perceive these objects as being conceptually different from the monuments for which they already have a word.

Sanja Horvatinčić is a Croatian art historian, who in 2012 published a paper that summarised her critical discourse analysis of sixty online website and blog articles disseminating and discussing Kempemaers' photographs (Horvatinčić, 2012). She identifies a number of problematic themes, first with the images and information presented in the book itself (1), and secondly within the online discourse that followed its release (2) – which she dubs 'the spomenik effect.'

1. Horvatinčić describes how *Spomenik* serves to decontextualise the monuments: "The original names of the monuments which indicate their purpose are missing [...] and the photographed objects are simply listed as 'spomenik #1–26.' The only information accompanying the images is where and when the photographs were taken. This kind of scientific cataloguing of objects reminds us of natural taxonomy of unknown species, which emphasises the peculiarity, specificity and – above all – alien character of the photographed objects." In his foreword to the book, Willem Jan Neutelings notes how: "Kempenaers did not set out as a documentary photographer, but first and foremost as an artist seeking to create a new image" (in Kempenaers, 2010). This approach however, Horvatinčić explains, "decontextualises the images and gives the impression of presenting a homogenous group of objects." In addition to this, Horvatinčić observes that the "images and text deliberately seem to lack precise geographical setting. The introductory thumbnail catalogue offers information about

their individual micro-location (name of a city, village, mountain or an area) and the year the photographs were taken [...] There is no name of the country where the monuments are today located, which further emphasises the mysticism of the objects. [...] Combined with the uniform aesthetic quality of the images [...] the observer gets the impression that these ‘strange,’ ‘eerie’ and ‘mysterious’ structures are scattered in some kind of neverland.”

2. Addressing the mass-media response to Kempenaers’s work, Horvatinčić draws attention to historical inaccuracies presented within the book *Spomenik*, and notes how websites promoting, sharing, or commenting on the book would repeat these errors, distributing them across wider audiences, as well as introducing new errors in their own commentaries. Some of these mistakes included “attributing the Yugoslav monuments as Soviet or placing Yugoslavia within the [Eastern] Bloc” (see for example, ‘12 Pics Of Ghastly Soviet Brutalist Monuments Scattered Around Post-Yugoslavian Balkan States’ by O’Neill, 2020), as well as the incorrect assumption that these monuments were specifically commissioned by Yugoslavia’s President Tito himself (for example, in ‘25 Abandoned Yugoslavia Monuments that look like they’re from the Future’ by Tratnjek, 2011); which, Horvatinčić explains, “is not only wrong, but casts a completely different shadow on the nature of commemorative cultural policy in Yugoslavia.” The reality was that monuments “were commissioned either by local communities or by the official state organisation which systematically took care of all aspects of preserving and fostering ‘revolutionary tradition,’ which included competitions for monuments, their renovation and systematisation.” She laments the now widespread “use of the word *spomenik* as the official terminology for Yugoslav commemorative sculpture,” as it results in those Modernist or abstract examples captured in Kempenaers’s work to be taken “as symbols of Yugoslav commemorative sculpture as a whole,” thus undermining “the heterogeneity of styles and specific local characteristics of monuments in different regions of the state.”

Finally, Horvatinčić notes a pattern in the sort of exoticising language used to describe these monuments, amongst which the most commonly featured words included: “‘fascinating,’ ‘abandoned,’ ‘futuristic,’ ‘retrofuturistic,’ ‘eerie,’ ‘amazing,’ ‘mysterious,’ ‘surreal,’ ‘theatrical,’ ‘monumental,’ ‘peculiar,’ ‘striking,’ ‘imposing,’ ‘haunting,’ ‘space-age’”; as well as descriptive comparisons that likened these structures to “‘spacecraft sculpture,’

‘dimensional portals,’ ‘interplanetary communication centres,’ ‘winged eyes,’ ‘giant flowers,’ ‘macro-views of viruses or DNA,’ [or] ‘concrete UFOs.’” Such responses, Horvatinčić speculates, reflect a situation of “invisibility and ignorance”: on the one hand, resulting from a void in knowledge from local residents and scholars, owing to their “lack of political will, intellectual reluctance or deliberate political neglect when it comes to antifascist legacy and symbols of the former Communist regime”; but combined with a perception of peculiarity as seen through the Western gaze, such reactions are:

“[Mainly] the result of the Western perspective of the former Yugoslavia (in some cases perceived in the bipolar Cold War division as belonging to the ‘other’ block), the inability to conciliate prejudice about that geo-political area with the idea of High-modernist abstract art. The natural reaction is disbelief [...] pure aesthetic fascination, or a Wunderkammer effect – not being able to locate such structures in their organisation of art historical knowledge, they are isolated from its course and associated with something alien, ‘out-of-this-world’ – such as scenes from video games and SF movies” (Horvatinčić, 2012).

4.5 Bus Stops, Ghosts, and Neo-colonial Adventurism

Following the release of Jan Kempemaers’s *Spomenik* book, it became apparent that the visual popularity of these Yugoslav monument photos reflected something of a growing zeitgeist (Kulić, 2018); as “the heroic concrete structures of the 1960s, 70s and 80s proved to be the object of unceasing interest and admiration in a new generation of foreign explorers who, armed with cameras, and neocolonial adventurism, as well as being supported by galleries and publishing houses, explore the ‘distant’ and ‘desolate’ lands of Eastern Europe in search of more and more ‘cosmic,’ peculiar buildings, landed as if ‘from an alien planet’” (Vasileva, 2019). The Serbian sociologist Dario Hajrić similarly observes: “Foreigners find it attractive to approach communist monuments as archaeologists who discover some lost civilisation” (cited in Pisker, 2018). Various other photography books showcasing the architecture and monuments of the post-socialist world released to great success in the years that followed, including titles such as: *CCCP: Cosmic Communist Constructions Photographed* (Chaubin, 2011), *Forget Your Past* (Mihov, 2012), *Soviet Ghosts* (Litchfield, 2014), *Soviet Bus Stops* (Herwig, 2015), *This Brutal World* (Chadwick, 2016), *Decommunised: Ukrainian Soviet Mosaics* (Nikiforov, 2017), *Looking for Lenin* (Ackermann & Gobert, 2017), *Holidays in Soviet Sanatoriums* (Omidi, 2017), and *Spomenik Monument*

Database (Niebyl, 2018). In his widely-shared paper *Orientalizing Socialism*, Vladimir Kulić (2018) notes:

“The past decade has seen the emergence of an entire new photographic genre that focuses on the mesmerizing forms of late socialist architecture, of which Yugoslav monuments are just one small segment. From Baltic resorts and Balkan memorials to Central Asian bus stops, spectacular socialist architecture is now content much sought after for mass-media circulation.”

This new interest, he explains, constitutes a form of “neo-Orientalism,” wherein, “this time around the alleged otherness rests on ideological rather than cultural or racial grounds,” with the photographic subjects being robbed of their complexity and context, and instead “firmly inscribed into the old ideological framework inherited from the Cold War that reduced all agency under state socialism to totalitarian control” (Kulić, 2018). This criticism reflects similar comments made by Horvatinčić (2012) about Kempemaers’s *Spomenik* project, which presented photographs of significant memorial sites purely for visual effect, with arbitrary numbers added in place of contextual information. Similarly, Christopher Herwig, the author of *Soviet Bus Stops* (2015), when interviewed about the history and context of his photographic subjects, responds: “I think it was for public art. [...] To be honest I have no idea”; and asked about his own motive for taking the photographs, answers: “They’re just really cool” (in Learson, 2014). However, a more explicit example of Kulić’s ‘neo-Orientalism’ might be read in the press release that accompanied *Soviet Ghosts* (Litchfield, 2014), which declared: “Only the most intrepid urban explorers cross the tattered ruins of the old iron curtain to endure the excessive bureaucracy, military paranoia and freezing winds of the East to hunt for the ghosts of an empire” (Rizzoli Bookstore, n.d.). Rann (2014) dismissed this claim as “specious bullshit,” describing the book’s aesthetic as “the marriage of trendy post-industrial ‘ruin porn’ with the on-going ‘othering’ of Russia and eastern Europe.” The claim is reminiscent too, of comments that were previously made in the press regarding the subjects of Kempemaers’s *Spomenik*, such as: “This superstructure is seen by just handfuls of people, brave enough to explore the nether regions of the Balkans” (Surtees, 2013). Moreover, both these statements could be said to reflect the ‘fearless explorer’ narratives identified by earlier works on post-colonialism and Orientalism (for example Said, 1979; Todorova, 1997).

4.5.1 Counterpoints to ‘Orientalising Socialism’

Kulić critiques Western interest in sites of communist heritage in post-communist space as a case of the West ‘Orientalising socialism,’ but there are a number of worthwhile counterpoints that may be raised against the theory. Several of these are detailed below, followed by a proposal of how this current study might be able to test the theory in the field.

1. Kulić states: “more than a decade after the images of late socialist architecture have started circulating in the digital realm, I have yet to witness actual positive effects of such exposure: rather than becoming identifiable in their own right, socialist buildings have only become further integrated into the economy of digital images, with the same anonymous detachment that ignores both their original meaning and their artistic merit.” However, many of the published works that constitute the trend Kulić identifies do at least attempt to effect positive change for their subject matter.

Decommunised: Ukrainian Soviet Mosaics (Nikiforov, 2017) is a work by a Ukrainian photographer, which constitutes a documentary record of Soviet-era mosaics in Ukraine, many of which are in the process of being destroyed to conform with the nation’s new decommunisation laws. *Looking for Lenin* (Ackermann & Gobert, 2017) takes a similar documentary approach, recording examples of Ukraine’s last Lenin monuments before they can all be destroyed, with the work thereby presenting itself as a “catalogue and typology of decommunisation.” Kulić mentions the *Spomenik Database* website as a “rare exception,” though there are many similarly education-oriented projects which nevertheless constitute part of the trend he broadly identifies as ‘neo-Orientalism.’ It might be added that Kulić himself has likely benefited from this zeitgeist too, when he co-curated the exhibition ‘Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980,’ for the New York Museum of Modern Art in 2018; the popularity of which cannot be treated as entirely unrelated to the pre-existing popularity of its subject matter, because as Kulić himself notes: “To their credit, it is through Kempenaers’ and Chaubin’s eyes that the world got to know late socialist architecture.”

2. Kulić is broad in his criticism of the ‘new Orientalists,’ however, he does not address the fact that amongst his cited examples of the trend, some of the earliest works were created by researchers and photographers native to the regions they are documenting. These include: Roman Bezjak, a Slovenian photographer whose work

from the region was published as the book *Socialist Modernism* (Bezjak, 2011); *Socialist Architecture: The Vanishing Act*, a scholarly volume on Yugoslav architecture by German photographer Armin Linke with text by Serbian architect Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss (Linke & Weiss, 2012); and *Forget Your Past*, by the Bulgarian photographer Nikola Mihov, whose book features black-and-white art photography of a number of Bulgaria's communist-era monuments, presented with captions detailing their titles, the designers' names, and their construction dates (Mihov, 2012). While Orientalism theory has covered the notion of local people turning their own cultural traditions into tourist spectacle in response to a foreign demand (see Nicholson-Lord, 2002), given the dates of the above publications, it seems likely that Bezjak, Linke & Weiss and Mihov were already working on their projects prior to that demand existing (Kulić gives 2010 as the earliest date that this subject was "discovered by global mass media"), and so, these local photographers and researchers ought really to be credited with agency as co-progenitors of the trend. Kulić writes that "even when it deserves attention, the architectural heritage of socialism appears to be worth knowing only as a Western art project," and while publications by Western Europeans and Americans do account for many of the more high-profile releases listed above, the foundational contributions to this trend by local artists and photographers should not be ignored.

Moreover, Kulić identifies this problem as one of 'Orientalising socialism,' and he selects specific examples made by Western cultural producers by way of illustration. However, these examples do not represent the whole picture. When a Cuban artist recreates a Yugoslav monument in Lego bricks, stripping it from its political context to appear purely as aesthetic physical art, does this still count as Orientalising socialism; considering how different this Cuban artist's relationship to socialism would be compared to the perspectives of the Western 'neo-colonialists' Kulić discusses (Laster, n.d.)? Similarly, some of the most sensational photographs of Yugoslav monuments to appear online in recent years are the work of Xiao Yang, a Chinese photographer who works at night and uses various coloured light sources to create surreal works of visual art in her images (see Plate 20). In the Chinese media, commenters have remarked that the monumental subjects of Yang's work resemble "Science fiction," and look "like a contact signal left by aliens on the earth"; one Chinese user commented: "It's so beautiful. These monuments for foreigners are so

imaginative. Our monuments are all square and blocky without any special features” (Yang, 2016). And so, this thesis asks, when public conversation in China – an East Asian country today ruled by its own Communist Party – discusses Yugoslav memorial art using this same kind of language, can ‘Orientalising socialism’ still be considered an adequate explanation of the phenomenon? Or, in light of the larger picture, does this then suggest that a more universal model is required that goes beyond the binary model of West-East Orientalist and Balkanist narratives?

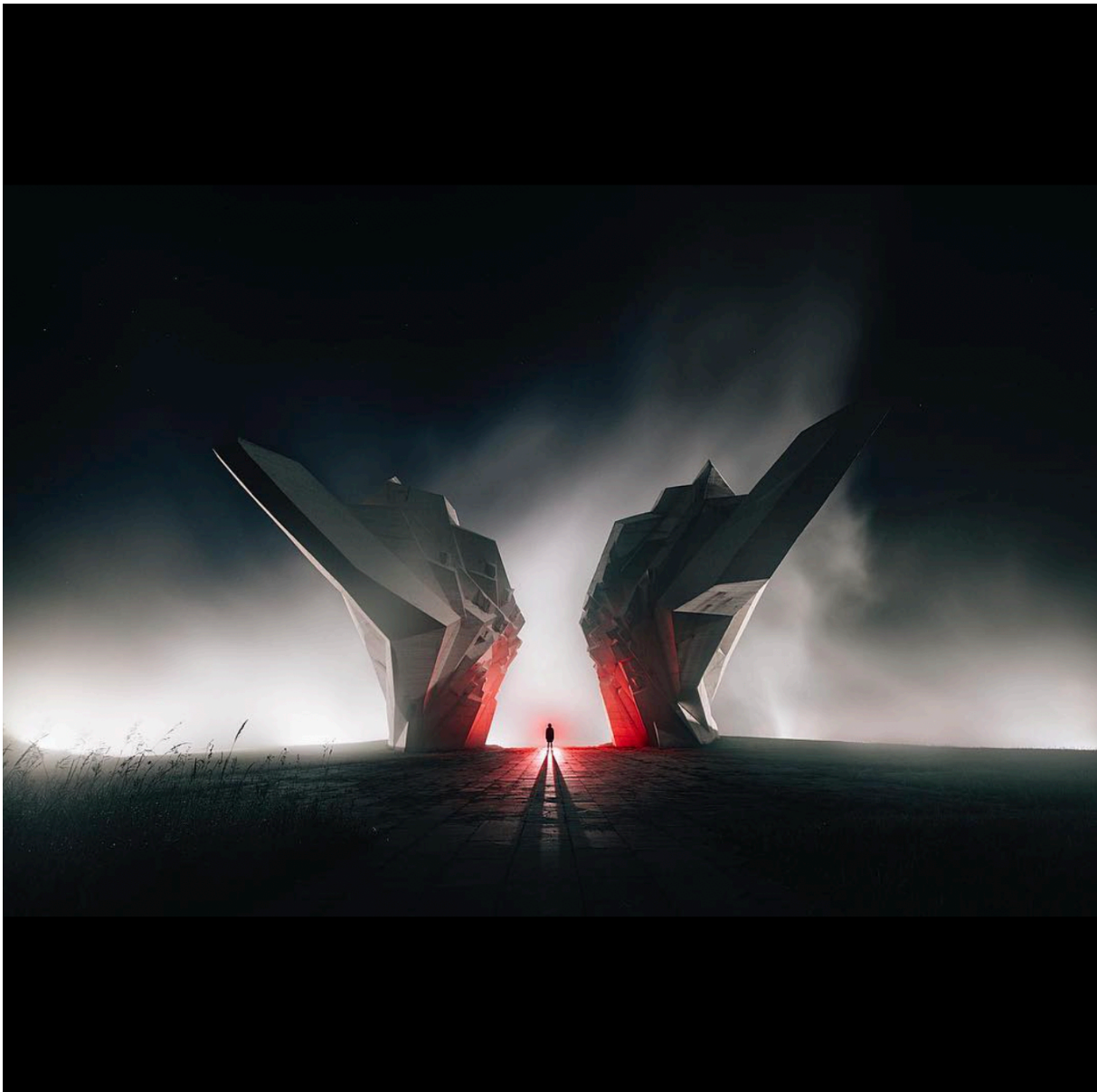


Plate 20: The Chinese photographer Xiao Yang's work often combines night photography with innovative lighting to enhance the otherworldly quality of architecture and monuments. Featured here, for example, the Tjentište War Memorial in Bosnia & Herzegovina (Yang, 2018).



Plate 21: *Podgarić Toy*, 2013, is a wood and Lego brick sculpture by the Cuban art group Los Carpinteros. Intentionally paradoxical, it is said to be a comment on “crass commercialism” and “how quickly utopian origins may wear away” (source: Art Books, 2015).

3. Finally, Kulić does not provide empirical evidence for his assertions about visitor motivations; instead, these are intuited from his perception of the situation. As a result, it would be interesting for the empirical phase of this study to address this question in its surveys of foreign visitors to one such site, to see if their own self-reported motivations offer support for Kulić’s theory or not. If Kulić’s theory of ‘Orientalising socialism’ is accurate, then as a result, the data from this survey of site visitors ought to reveal:

A predominance of Western visitors.
For visitors to be less likely to hold socialist outlooks themselves.
An attraction to the site primarily for purposes of adventure, and the potential for photography.
A tendency for visitors to take the monument out of context, and show less interest in learning about its history.
A perception of the site as being similar to (‘homogenised with’) other sites of socialist heritage in the post-socialist world.

A conceptualisation of the monument as symbolic of a ‘failed’ or ‘defunct’ regime (and thereby, symbolic of the ‘victory’ of Western ideologies).

Table 7: Common characteristics of tourists visiting sites of communist heritage in post-communist space, as suggested by Kulić, 2018.

4.6 How (Not) to Visit the Dead

One of the most important – and also the most difficult – questions to be asked by contemporary scholarship on post-socialist monuments is this: how should a memorial site be conceptualised, after the political system that allowed for its creation no longer exists? Underpinning this question, is another question – to what extent were these monuments influenced and shaped by the particular political lens of the era in which they were created, as opposed to reflecting an authentic and apolitical memorialisation of their subject matter? Or in other words, is it possible (or even desirable) now to separate their various functions – as historical memorials, as expressions of regional art and creativity, and as symbols of the former socialist state? Kobal (2019) notes of the Yugoslav monuments: “Whether these monuments were political propaganda or not has been a subject of debate within the region’s academic community for years [...] Finding an objective and conclusive answer for this question is next to impossible.” He explains that the case for calling these monuments propaganda, “finds its basis in the sheer amount of monuments being built in a similar style in a relative small amount of time. Experts claim that this kind of cohesion is highly improbable not to be planned, especially in the historic and political context of the time. Moreover, the project of Yugoslavia was one of trying to unify different ethnic groups that have during World War II experienced deadly conflicts. [...] It is in that sense, that these memorials can be regarded as political, as they are the expression of a particular structure of power relations.” He goes on to describe how:

“[In] their heyday, the Yugoslav memorial sites formed a physical network of education and memorialisation centres, spread out across the six republics. Often the memorial complexes were fitted with museums and a central feature of many were amphitheatres. Busloads of school children would visit as part of their history curriculum or via Tito’s ‘Young Pioneers’ political youth initiative. The monuments acted as outdoor classrooms, used as a tool to communicate the history, mythology and ideology of the country. They were a national network of grand teaching tools for relating to the population the ethos, history and narrative of Tito’s Yugoslavia.”

One approach to this question is to discount the political dimension of these structures altogether, presenting them now instead as pure material art. Such a reconfiguration was proposed by the ATRIUM (Architecture of Totalitarian Regimes) group, who in 2014 received recognition from the Council of Europe, for their ‘ATRIUM Cultural Route’ (Battilani, Bernini & Mariotti, 2014). The route included a number of architectural sites created by “antidemocratic regimes,” and which were noted for: “a certain monumentalism, a strong impact on the urban landscape, and the inclusion of the daily life of citizens within an overall ideological framework imposed by the state.” The ATRIUM group presented their work to the public with an online photographic exhibition titled ‘Totally Lost,’ and which was offered with the intention of “encouraging a shared view of European identity that is able to face the uncomfortable and contradictory aspects of the history of the twentieth-century.” However, ATRIUM’s approach of reducing complex political context to a simple binary of *totalitarian* versus *democratic* had a result many viewed as problematic. Hatherley (2016) notes of the ATRIUM project: “Monuments built by the Nazis stand alongside those built by and for their victims. It is comparable to placing a photo of Yad Vashem alongside images of Albert Speer’s Zeppelinfeld, as if they were the same thing.” However, the project’s coordinators responded to this criticism as follows:

“The purpose of the project is to raise some questions around buildings that were built by regimes that don't exist anymore. This is why Totally Lost features buildings from such different regimes as German Nazism and Yugoslavian Socialism, even though there is no intention to compare them or their impact. We are focused on what's left, both materially and ideologically, of places that were built by or during regimes, and that were associated with them. While it is not possible to look at them without considering their past, we think that political and social changes questioned their existence and function, and this is the subject of our research. We hope that Totally Lost, by looking at those buildings through the eyes of different people, will contribute to the creation of a common identity for our continent” (M. Pini, personal communication, 21 December 2016).



Plate 22: The Macedonian artist Gligor Čemerski watches children play on his newly completed Freedom Monument (1981) at Kočani, Yugoslavia (source: Niebyl, 2016i).



Plate 23: As pictured in the project *Former*, a Yugoslav traceur performs parkour moves across a Yugoslav war memorial at Kragujevac, Serbia. (source: Day, n.d.)

The opposite approach to the above, is to treat these memorials in the same sense that they were intended by the political regime that built them, without questioning or criticising the potential political intentions that surrounded their creation. While Kulić doesn't rule out such a critique, he does imply that the interpretation of the message of these monuments should remain consistent, even despite their changed post-socialist context – and particularly in so much as such interpretations inform public behaviour on site. In *Orientalising Socialism* (2018), he cites the example of a photography project titled *Former*, by the British researcher Andy Day, which documents local *traceurs*, or parkour athletes, physically interacting with (by climbing, jumping or flipping on) a number of different Yugoslav war memorials. The *Former* project was said to investigate “embodied engagement with historicity, subversive practices and apolitical irreverence for sacrosanct space” (Jennifer, 2015). However, Kulić criticises the project, asking: “Surely World War II has not become so much of a distant memory that it is now broadly acceptable to exercise ‘apolitical irreverence’ by literally trampling over the monuments to its victims. Antifascism is still supposed to be the founding block of postwar Europe and practicing ‘irreverence’ over its memorials should be a cause for controversy” (Kulić, 2018). He draws a comparison to the *Yolocaust* project (previously discussed in Chapter 2) and the public condemnation of ‘inappropriate behaviour’ at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, asking “why, then, is it taboo to take a selfie there, whereas it appears perfectly acceptable to practice parkour in Jasenovac?” (referring to the Jasenovac Memorial Site, built in 1966 to commemorate the victims of a former Nazi concentration camp). Another crucial difference to note between these Yugoslav memorials and the Berlin Holocaust memorial, is that while the Yugoslav memorials very often marked the actual places of conflict, torture and massacre, the Berlin memorial does not, but rather was designed to memorialise events that had happened elsewhere; as its designer, Peter Eisenman, notes: “there are no dead people under my memorial” (Gunter, 2017). Kulić later answers his own question, stating: “The answer is simple: unlike the Berlin memorial, Yugoslav monuments are the products of a defunct socialist system, assumed to be emptied of any meaning.”

However, in the case of the Berlin memorial, not everyone invested in the site shared the same idea of what constituted ‘inappropriate behaviour.’ Karen Pollock, the chief executive of the Holocaust Education Trust in London, described the *Yolocaust* project as “powerful,” but refused to condemn those behaving with an apparent lack of respect at the site, saying: “When I looked at the pictures I didn't think gosh aren't these people terrible, I thought these are

young people who have different experiences to previous generations.” Meanwhile, Eisenman, the architect who designed the Berlin memorial, described the *Yolocaust* project as “terrible,” explaining:

“People have been jumping around on those pillars forever. They've been sunbathing, they've been having lunch there and I think that's fine. It's like a catholic church, it's a meeting place, children run around, they sell trinkets. A memorial is an everyday occurrence, it is not sacred ground [...] My idea was to allow as many people of different generations, in their own ways, to deal or not to deal with being in that place” (cited in Gunter, 2017).

This approach towards the memorial space has been criticised by a number of academics, who believe “[pretending] that a metaphorical graveyard has no coded meaning is just another case of an architect avoiding responsibility” (Vukičević, 2020). Hatherley (2017) notes that “the lack of grand claims was always, to some degree, the point of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe”; but labels its creator, Eisenman, as “one of architecture's immoralists,” and asks: “If the memorial isn't intended to induce some sort of solemnity or respect, what could it possibly be for?” He concludes that the *Yolocaust* project “performed a service – it imposed the meaning that Eisenman wouldn't.”

In the 1960s and 1970s, similar criticisms were levelled against some of the Yugoslav architects who were then designing the nation's Modernist memorial sites. In 1960 the architect Bogdan Bogdanović was invited to submit a proposal to the Yugoslav government, for a memorial installation to be built on the site of the former Jasenovac Concentration Camp, a place that had seen incredible cruelty and suffering during the war, and which claimed the lives of an estimated 80,000-100,000 people (Niebyl, 2018). Bogdanović decided that his memorial would not incorporate overt messages of death and suffering however, explaining: “I knew... that I would neither look for nor find inspiration by bringing the evil back to life” (cited in Niebyl, 2016e). Instead, he designed a 24-metre tall ‘stone flower,’ a semi-abstract sculpture made from reinforced concrete, that stood over the site of the former camp, and symbolised “not only life and rebirth, but also, the overcoming of suffering, eternal renewal and, most importantly, forgiveness” (Niebyl, 2016e). However, critics at the time allegedly called the monument too abstract, asking of its design: *Where are the victims? Where are the crimes?* Other memorial works by Bogdanović show a similarly non-prescriptive approach to imposing meaning; or to prescribing the particular behaviour of visitors within these commemorative spaces. For example, at his Slobodište Memorial Park in

Kruševac, Serbia, he designed a flock of stone-winged sculptures, arranged above the site of a mass grave dating from Nazi-era massacres; and he made these grave markers into ergonomically pleasing public seats. Nowadays, locals can often be seen using them as they would park benches, while they read books or eat packed lunches on the memorial grounds (see Plate 24).



Plate 24: At the Slobodište Memorial Complex in Kruševac, in what is now Serbia, locals relax and play in a park built over a former Nazi massacre site (own photo: 3 April 2016).

In 2009, Bogdanović gave an interview in which he discussed his Partisan Necropolis at Mostar, Bosnia & Herzegovina – a landscaped memorial cemetery containing the physical remains of 810 World War II-era Yugoslav fighters (Niebyl, 2016f) – in which he made the comment: “Once a girl from Mostar told me that her parents had conceived her in the Partisan Necropolis. For me, it was the most beautiful thing that could have happened there” (in Akrap, 2009). Other Yugoslav memorial designers seemed similarly to encourage visitors to engage in physical, tactile interaction with their commemorative spaces. For example, the Monument to the Revolution at Kozara, in Bosnia & Herzegovina, designed by Dušan Džamonja (1972), consists of a circular tower formed from 20 narrow reinforced concrete fins, which:

“...are spaced in such a way that the average person is able to just barely squeeze into the hollow centre of the structure. Inside of this strange environment, one feels trapped, confined and *encircled* (and squeezing back out of this space is difficult and cumbersome), almost as though some dark and oppressive force is bearing down onto you. This imposing atmosphere forces one to recall the similar oppressive feeling of the Axis forces bearing down on Partisan rebels and peasant fighters at this spot during the Battle of Kozara in 1942” (Niebyl, 2016g).

Andy Day, the photographer who created the *Former* project showcasing images of parkour athletes jumping off Yugoslav memorials, wrote a response to Kulić, which was published in 2018 to a private ‘Parkour Research Group’ on social media, and in which he argues that Kulić had ignored the agency of the local people featured in these photographs, who had been physically interacting with these sites in such ways even before Day chose to photograph them doing so. Day explains:

“I do not produce these images in isolation. Long before I began this project, traceurs from the region were exploring these monuments. Like many of my parkour photographs, I’m facilitating a self-portrait; these are collaborators, not subjects. [...] With the monuments, it was about creating a new visual presence within a very fractured and confused spatial narrative. These athletes are from a region that is weighed down by history, and this project was about creating an alternative vision of it that celebrates freedom, communality and transnationalism. [...] The traceurs of Serbia and Croatia form what is for me the most important parkour community in the world. Despite the horrific violence of a brutal past, the border between them is not a division, but an opportunity for discovery and adventure. Parkour is transnational, and its athletes are global citizens that wish to share and celebrate diversity, rather than allow historic differences [to] maintain a sense of fear and otherness. Parkour trivialises nationalism and, through its progressive politics, repudiates fascism” (A. Day [July 2018], personal communication, 15 May 2021).

Day notes that his project had been well received by many in the region, with his photographs being exhibited in the Croatian Embassy in London; and additionally, that the architect Miodrag Živkovic (the designer of numerous Yugoslav monuments including the Monument to the Battle of Sutjeska), had hung in his own studio one of Day’s photographs of parkour athletes interacting with his monument. Responding specifically to Kulić’s allegation of ‘Orientalism,’ Day says:

“One of the wonderful things about these monuments is that they were deliberately designed to be otherworldly. They were intended at their inception to be surreal and impressive [...] A local farmer in the 1970s encountering one of these monuments for the first time would look at it and feel almost as though it came from another world;

contemporary responses are not that different. Of course, there are frustrations about their treatment as clickbait, but complaining that these spectacular things are treated as spectacular does a disservice to the architects and designers, just as Kulić does a disservice to the athletes” (A. Day [July 2018], personal communication, 15 May 2021).

Concluding from all of the above, it might perhaps be suggested therefore that the more conservative contemporary attitudes towards how visitors ought to behave at memorial sites do not always accurately reflect the designs, conceptualisations or intended uses for those spaces as envisaged by their own creators. Indeed, in the case of Yugoslav memorial sites designed by Bogdan Bogdanović and others, there is a clear accommodation – if not *encouragement* – of physical interaction built into the very design of some of these places. This is a theme that will be returned to and discussed more in future chapters; but first, this current chapter next considers the visual and commercial appropriation of Southeast Europe’s memorial art and architecture in recent years, including the role that local producers have also sometimes played in this process.

4.7 Capitalising on Socialism

The stylised, Modernist war memorials of the Balkan region have become so familiar in the West that they have begun to appear in popular culture, from film and television to virtual representations in video games, in contexts where, in many cases, they seem to be presented almost as shorthand symbols for dystopia and/or totalitarianism (see Section 2.5). More recently, the Monument to the Uprising of the People of Kordun and Banija at Petrova Gora, in Croatia (designed by Vojin Bakić and completed in 1981), featured as a filming location in a 2020 German production for Netflix, titled *Tribes of Europa* (Niebyl, 2021). This post-apocalyptic drama series was filmed on site in 2019, with local news sources reporting that even Vjera Bakić, the granddaughter of the monument’s designer, knew nothing about the project even though the production was “obliged to inform them, as copyright heirs, about the filming.” This led Horvatinčić to ask, “Is it legally possible for a registered cultural property to be closed to the public and leased to a private production company?” (cited in Kish, 2019).



Plate 25: Film crews at work at the Petrova Gora Memorial House in Croatia (own photo: 15 October 2019).



Plate 26: The monument as featured in the German Netflix production Tribes of Europa (source: Niebyl, 2021).

Foreign attempts to repurpose the aesthetics of these monuments for commercial use have often been met with backlash from local communities, as was the case in 2018 when an

Australian fashion company used images of the Jasenovac Memorial Site in Croatia as a device for selling their sunglasses. The company Valley Eyewear posted to their website a series of moody black-and-white images showing models, wearing their products, posed in front of the monument to concentration camp victims (Herrero, 2018). The stunt was shared widely on social media, drawing global criticism and being condemned as “morbid, offensive and hideous”; in response to which Valley Eyewear eventually pulled the campaign, and issued an apology that explained: “We didn’t know it was a death camp at the time” (BBC, 2018). One Croatian anti-fascist news site drew attention to the company’s logo – “the typography of which reminds one of Nordic runes – crypto-symbolism of contemporary neo-Nazi subculture” – before concluding: “As we witness daily exploitation of the living by the merciless logic of capitalism, why would we be surprised by its exploitation of the dead?” (Antifašistički Vjesnik, 2018).

However, it can also be seen that local people – and particularly those young enough to have curiosity for (in place of memory of) former socialist regimes – share in the apparent fascination that foreigners have for the historical symbols of the region. Many more examples of the adaptation and reinterpretation of local memorial architecture and design come from within the region itself, rather than from outside; a focus on the visual aesthetics of communist history that has elsewhere been described as “communist chic,” an effect as of being “stuck in a prolonged visual hangover of the era” (Fedorova, 2017). For example, the graphic designer Zoran Cardula, based in North Macedonia, has built a large following on social media for his artwork that often reinterprets the region’s memorial architecture in pop art styles, for example by combining anti-fascist monument designs with iconography from *Star Wars*. (Cardula, n.d.) (see Plate 25). The result is reminiscent of a recent case in Odessa, Ukraine, where a local artist transformed one of the city’s last remaining Lenin monuments into Darth Vader (Hartmond, 2017). A similar example of creative adaptation occurred in Bulgaria in 2017, where the photographer Nikola Mihov – whose 2012 photo-book *Forget Your Past* is cited as an early example of the zeitgeist by Kulić (2018) – launched an art project titled ‘ReForget Your Past,’ for which “thirty Bulgarian and international artists, photographers and designers were asked to appropriate, intervene and work with” Mihov’s black and white photographs of Bulgaria’s communist-era monuments, with results that ranged from colourful collages full of anti-communist political commentary, to the superimposition of scantily-dressed pop-folk performers into photographs of memorial spaces (Butseva & Atanasov, 2020). In this case, it was primarily Bulgarians themselves who were

exercising ‘apolitical irreverence’ towards their inherited socialist heritage sites, here with the purpose of critiquing the regime that had built the monuments.



Plate 27: The Macedonian artist Zoran Cardula blends together themes from pop culture and Yugoslav memorial art and architecture in his work (source: Cardula, n.d.).

The field of video game development is another area where contemporary citizens of Southeast Europe have explored their relationships with the architecture of past regimes. The Serbian game developer Ivan Notaroš explored themes of architecture and memorialisation in his independent game *House of Flowers* (named after the memorial mausoleum in Belgrade

where President Tito was laid to rest in 1980), which is described as: “a game about the war without the war. Rather, it is a story about the people that live on the other side of the conflict, living the indirect consequences of it. The economic crisis, the collapse of established systems, the rise of corruption in a society on the brink of the national breakup. It is also a game about what led to the state of things today” (Stugan, 2016). In 2018 another Serbian-made video game, titled *Golf Club: Wasteland*, featured post-apocalyptic landscapes dominated by some notable works of Yugoslav architecture, including the Monument to the Uprising of the People of Moslavina, located at Podgarić in Croatia. On the choice of featuring Yugoslav memorial architecture, the game’s visual artist, Igor Simic, explains: “Firstly, it looks great and, then, secondly, it is a great example of blind use of scientific planning on humans, and where that leads us. [...] the game also features a gigantic monument to [Elon] Musk, designed to reference the ruined head of Karl Marx in Berlin” (Garcevic, 2018). The British architecture critic Owen Hatherley (2017) commented that the “transformation into space-age kitsch of the anti-fascist memorials of the former Yugoslavia [...] seems to me utterly grotesque”; however, often it can be seen that it is residents of the region – the de facto owners of this heritage – who are making these transformations themselves, and by doing so in many cases they are exercising a post-modernist agency in critically re-evaluating a complicated shared past.



Plate 28: A screenshot from the video game *Golf Club: Wastelands* features an artistic interpretation of the Yugoslav monument at Podgarić, set in a post-apocalyptic landscape (source: Garcevic, 2018).

Sometimes the artistic reinterpretations of monuments are used in the context of marketable new products. The clothing company Bazerdžan, based in Bosnia & Herzegovina, sells shirts and other fashion items decorated with designs based on Yugoslav war memorials. Their website features information about the monuments themselves, and one page, focussed on the Monument to the Battle of Sutjeska, offers the statement:

“The creative team of Bazerdžan commemorates in its own way the historic magnitude of Tjentište with an original design. We feel strongly about every aspect the monument represents and see this t-shirt as both a reminder and a message for everyone who wears it. The importance of the Battle of Sutjeska mustn’t fall into oblivion, and this is our little way of keeping it out there” (Bazerdžan, 2018).

Another example is a project called ‘Yunicorns,’ created by a group of ex-Yugoslav expats living in New York. Through an online shop, the group sells miniature replicas of various works of memorial architecture from the region with the stated intent to “promote and preserve modernist architectural heritage of Yugoslavia” (see Plate 27). According to an explanation on their website:

“After years of extensive negligence, Yugoslav monuments, dedicated to the anti-fascist struggle and memory of the victims of the Second World War, are going through their popular revival. As society has changed from the time of their creation to the present day, the very form of popularity has also changed. [...] Yunicorns seeks to connect the cyber-existence (non-existence) of the monuments with their physical actuality in post-Yugoslav countries and their societies. By creating tangible physical models and objects, that clearly reflect physical similarity to the monuments and illustrate materialisation and construction process of originals, we are accentuating that they are very much more than merely their own images. Allowing one to hold a piece of it, and to experience its heaviness and physicality, we endeavour to create the feeling of these monuments belonging to all of us and the responsibility of all for their treatment” (Kocic, Luzanin & Stevanovic, 2018).

The group provides accompanying information with each miniature monument they sell, detailing locations, authors, dates, and an overview of the historical events being memorialised. It also calls for the implementation of conservation strategies at the memorials themselves – which they note have suffered severe physical damage resulting from the “rampage of nationalism” in the region – and Yunicorns pledges to donate a portion of income from each sale towards the financing of “forums, conferences, workshops” and “competitions” aimed towards conservation. Nevertheless, despite the pro-remembrance and pro-conservation messages shared by companies such as Bazerdžan and Yunicorns, some commentators remain critical of “monuments being sold as merchandise – from ‘cool’

figurines to ‘stylish’ T-shirts,” explaining that: “Capitalising on iconic architecture is not a new phenomenon, however it is far more ignorant and insensitive in the case of monuments that serve as stark reminders of anti-fascist struggle, war crimes or even genocide” (Vukičević, 2020).

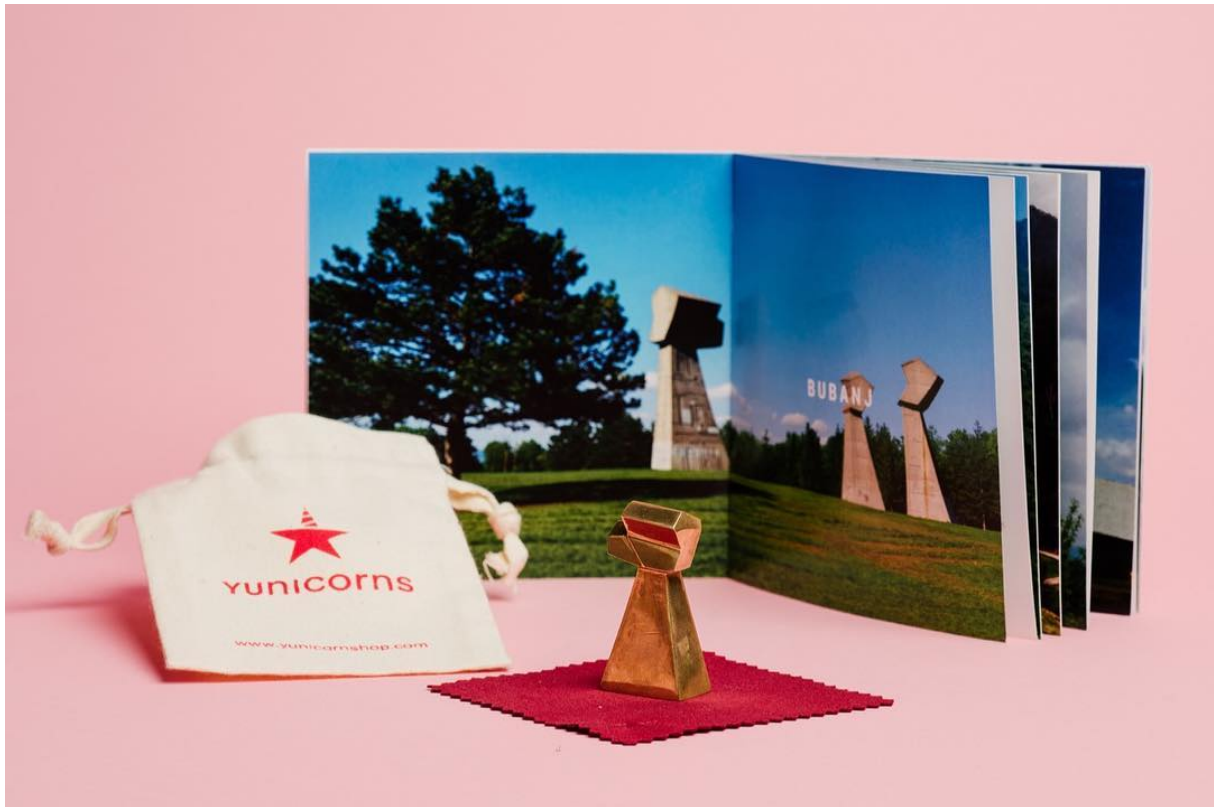


Plate 29: The ‘Yunicorns’ group produces miniature replicas of Yugoslav memorials, which come accompanied by information booklets (source: Kocic, Luzanin & Stevanovic, 2018).

4.8 The Management of Communist Heritage Sites

The above conversation has focussed on numerous examples of unmanaged sites of communist heritage – particularly the case of monuments and memorial sites in former Yugoslavia – where visitors, domestic and foreign, are left to interpret and frame the site in their own way, through *Debordian* or psychogeographical modes of personal meaning-making (see Chapter 3), and often with minimal or no information provided to them onsite with which to scaffold and guide these interpretations. As a result, it has been said that such visitors approach these sites “as archaeologists who discover some lost civilisation” (Pisker, 2018), and that these explorations may take on Orientalist overtones as these “‘cosmic,’ peculiar buildings, landed as if ‘from an alien planet’” (Vasileva, 2019) inevitably become

decontextualised, to instead be commoditised in the form of online images, so that an entire vernacular movement in art and architecture is reduced to “content much sought after for mass-media circulation” (Kulić, 2018). Meanwhile, locally, these sites have often become places of heated debate, as symbols of a difficult or contested past – similar to what Sather-Wagstaff (2011) describes as “heritage that hurts” – added to which the processes of iconoclasm, decommunisation and post-communist reterritorialisation (see Chapter 2) have in many cases served to increase the risk to physical heritage sites which had become “too loaded with meaning to be left alone and too charged with emotion to be protected” (Mackic & Bogdanović, 2015).

In reply to these domestic and foreign issues with the framing of such sites, the Serbian art historian Vladana Putnik Prica proposes a model for how (specifically, Yugoslav) communist heritage could be better managed: “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). Even in mainstream media conversations in Southeast Europe, recent years have shown an increasing tendency towards reappraising the architecture of former communist regimes – without it necessarily having to be seen as an endorsement of those regimes themselves:

“If there is anything good left from the communist and socialist heritage of our former state, then it is monuments and other buildings created after the Second World War in the former Yugoslavia. [...] While foreigners admire monuments and other buildings, we have allowed monuments to decay, many of them neglected” (Mondo, 2020).

Moreover, in the management and presentation of that history, there is a need for pluralism and authenticity, reflecting the real and remembered life-worlds of communist citizens, showing both the positive and the negative aspects:

“Communist heritage sites need to reflect the realities of the past and provide interpretations that weave together the stories of the everyday lives with the repressive and often violent aspects of the regimes. One-sided presentations risk alienating locals and increasing resistance to such tourism developments, or creating a sanitised and commercialised version of the history of the communist period” (Ivanova & Buda, 2020).

Therefore, it can be seen that while today many sites of communist heritage in the post-communist world are left unmanaged, or indeed are largely abandoned, even those developed

and managed tourism attractions at sites of communist heritage now face a range of different challenges; and numerous such sites have been criticised for how they handle the difficult heritage in question. This thesis now proposes three key factors, that need to be observed and balanced in the management of communist heritage sites, in order to avoid such pitfalls:

Authenticity, Accountability and Accessibility.

4.8.1 Authenticity

As has been demonstrated above, in regard to places of contested, controversial history, or difficult heritage, there are usually a plurality of different and equally valid perspectives, reflecting the lives and ideologies of all those people who experienced that history. Therefore, an *Authentic* heritage management approach is one that accurately reflects this diversity of thought and opinion, without showing bias towards any one particular (political) perspective or interpretation. In this way, “Pluralism [...] is presented as a way in which to move beyond the settling of scores in the past and towards a respectful recognition and acknowledgement of historical difference” (Kattago, 2009).

There are numerous examples of sites of managed communist heritage which have been criticised for their failure to present pluralist perspectives. At one end of this scale are those places which present overly nostalgic or uncritical reflections on complicated histories, a prime (and perhaps extreme) example of this phenomenon displaying in the modern rehabilitation and even glorification of monuments to Stalin within some formerly Soviet countries. For instance, in the town of Bor, in the Nizhny Novgorod Oblast of Russia, 2021 saw the unveiling of the new Stalin Centre: “a museum and educational centre presenting a positive view of the creator of the gulag and the architect of Russia’s mass repressions in the mid-20th century.” While avoiding the fact that under Stalin’s rule, “approximately 1.7 million Soviet citizens were evicted from their homes and taken to forced labour camps. About 690,000 were executed,” it has been suggested that the “public rehabilitation of Stalin’s image reflects the social and political tensions that have gripped Russia in recent months. To some, the memory of Stalin suggests an era of national greatness” (Nemtsova, 2021). In Belarus, the Stalin Line Historical and Cultural Complex is an open-air museum located on the site of the former Eastern Front battlelines. Opened in 2005, on the 60th anniversary of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany, the Stalin Line has been described by the state as “[one] of the most iconic and dear places for every Belarusian” (Minsk Regional Executive Committee,

2021). However, the site treads a thin line between memorialising anti-fascist actions, and celebrating the Soviet wartime dictator, as visitors enter the complex under the gaze of “a bust of Josef Stalin surrounded by wreaths and bunches of flowers,” suggesting there may be a “cult of personality about the Red Tsar still alive here” (Hohenhaus, 2017). In Gori, Georgia, the hometown of Joseph Stalin, “there is still controversy over how to view his legacy” with a tendency for some locals to conceptualise Stalin, even today, as a “local hero.” The town features a museum dedicated to Stalin’s life and death, and which presents a notably one-sided and overwhelmingly positive portrait of the former Soviet leader: “The ornate building, with its collection of heroic photographs and Stalin’s death mask, appears frozen in time – a Soviet shrine to the dictator, almost untouched since the museum was built in 1957” (Bell, 2013).



Plate 30: Free range Stalins are now a rare site in the post-communist world. These two still stand at: the Stalin Line Historical and Cultural Complex in Belarus (own photo: 6 January 2017) (left); and outside the Stalin Museum in Gori, Georgia (own photo: 12 August 2017) (right).

Meanwhile, sites that promote a more nuanced and self-critical reflection on Soviet history have not always fared so well in the post-Soviet world. For example, the Perm-36 Gulag Museum, formally titled the ‘Memorial Historical Centre of Political Repression Perm-36,’ was one such rare example of Russian self-scrutiny, presenting “a solitary monument to the millions of political prisoners who suffered and died under communist repression, not only during Stalin’s rule, but decades afterward” (Sternthal, 2012). However, the museum, which had “played a vital role in informing the public about Soviet repression,” and commemorated

amongst its victims “many Ukrainian political prisoners,” was subsequently denied state funding in 2014, and then forced to close completely in 2015; the timing of these actions coinciding with escalating conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and reflecting a more widespread trend in which “openness about the dark aspects of Russian and Soviet past has been increasingly frowned upon under President Vladimir Putin” (Coynash, 2015). The closure of the Perm-36 Gular Museum could therefore be ascribed to an unwillingness on the part of the state to entertain pluralism in historical representations, preferring instead to stick with a single positive state narrative of national history; an approach that might be characterised as ‘historical revisionism,’ and thus recalls the words of the Russian satirist Nikolay Zadornov, who once described Russia as “a great country with an unpredictable past” (Fedina, 2013: 69).

At the opposite end of the scale of Authenticity, are those sites which outright reject any positive appraisal of the communist past, to present instead a version of reality characterised only by suffering and misery. The House of Terror in Budapest, Hungary, is one such site, a tourist attraction located in a building that was formerly used by both the Hungarian Nazis and subsequent Communist Party, and which operates with the objective “to portray the state terror of both the fascist (1944–1945) and the communist regime in Hungary (1945–1956/1957–1989).” However, its somewhat subjective and sensationalised framing of these historical eras has “elicited much outrage and criticism among historians and museologists.” Frazon and Horváth (2019) criticise the site for sharing an “uneven representation of the past,” and “for disregarding the historiographical consensus.” They explain:

“[Neither] the Holocaust, nor the communist era is a *purely historiographical subject*: since some of their survivors are still alive, both the Holocaust and communist persecution are positioned in the extremely complex and problematic intersection of *memory* (discourse based on the authority of survivors) and *history* (discourse based on the disciplinary exploration and criticism of resources).”

Frazon and Horváth therefore conclude that the museum has failed to represent authentically the plurality of the Hungarian experience(s), and should be considered “not as a tool for the manifestation of academic consensus, but as a *memorial-historical representation*.” A similar case is seen in the Museum of Communism, in Prague, Czechia: a tourist attraction established by an American businessman who arrived in the country during the post-communist transition years, whereupon he created an “exhibit of 100 artefacts collected during the 1990s,” establishing the earliest version of the museum as a space “populated with

discarded objects worth a total of 28,000 USD bought from flea markets and junkshops,” so that it “looked like a dusty cabinet of curiosities devised by Communist imaginaries of the West” (Smith, 2021). This outsider approach to the curation of a museum about Czechoslovak history would result in a collection of decontextualised bric-a-brac, “omnipresent propaganda posters,” and even a “selfie point with the life-sized statues of Stalin and Lenin,” leading some critics to describe the museum’s exhibits as a form of “communist kitsch” (Bukovská, 2020). Following a first-hand visit to the museum in 2015, the author of this thesis noted:

“The place lay just near Wenceslas Square; on the upper floor of an 18th century palace, sandwiched between McDonald’s and a casino. It almost felt ironic, that setting... until I passed up the regal staircase and turned a corner, to find myself confronted by a wall of Lenin t-shirts inside the museum’s ample gift shop. This place was as much a shrine to capitalism, I soon realised, as the fast food joint next door.”

Moreover, commenting on the thematic contents and presentation of information inside:

“Every fact was served with an adjective; all details were emotive. The regime was never simply ‘the regime,’ but always seemed to be ‘the oppressive regime’ or ‘the despotic regime’; Stalin’s Monument was referred to as ‘an eyesore at Letna Park.’ After thirty minutes in the museum, I got tired of being told what to think... and therein lay the problem. What the museum was attempting to do was denounce propagandists using propaganda” (Richter, 2015a).

A final example, also from the author’s own observation, is the case of the Salaspils Memorial in Latvia: a memorial park constructed and opened by the Soviet Latvian government in 1967, and which commemorates the victims of a former Nazi-operated ‘Police Prison and Labour Correctional Camp’ that had stood on this site during World War II.

“The memorial architecture of the park tells the story of Soviet people who fell victim to the Nazis. It is somewhat jarring then, to read contemporary panels that describe both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union as ‘occupying regimes.’ [...] If it seems strange to foreign visitors that a site as significant as this – and so close to the capital – should feel quiet, hidden away, and poorly advertised, then perhaps this is why: from a Latvian perspective, the Salaspils Memorial might very well feel like a monument built by one trespasser to present themselves as the chief victim of the previous one. [...] While obviously Latvia can and should be having these conversations, I can’t help but wonder if it isn’t slightly antagonistic (at least, to the ethnic Russians who make up a quarter of Latvia’s population), to have them here; to stand on the symbolic graves of dead Soviets while comparing them to the Nazis” (Richter, 2020c).

4.8.2 *Accountability*

A managed communist heritage site that is *Accountable* is one that reflects and responds to the culture around it, that is transparently managed, and works for the betterment of the society that owns the heritage – as opposed to being managed (or mismanaged) for personal gain or private profit. In this context, corruption (either in financial, political or ideological terms) is the enemy of Accountability. An Accountable heritage management plan is one that treats the nation's citizens as shareholders in the heritage, and it should be open to the idea of change over time, in accordance with their changing needs, values and wishes (but while nevertheless remaining *Authentic*).

One example of a site of managed communist heritage that has presented issues in relation to Accountability is the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone in Ukraine. Following the disaster in 1986, and the subsequent establishment of a 2,600 square-kilometre 'exclusion zone' in Ukraine, the first visitors to return to Chernobyl included "Official delegations, photographers, journalists, and scientists" in addition to fire and forestry, conservation, research, construction and radiation control workers employed by the state; as well as 'unofficial' visitors including poachers, looters and illegal foresters. The first purely touristic visits were organised by private companies beginning around 2002-2003, and this gradually built towards a 'tourism boom' in 2006–2007, by which point, the number of annual tourists visiting the Zone grew from the hundreds to the thousands. However, in these years, Chernobyl was not recognised by the state as a destination for tourism, and so on official paperwork, all visitors were described as scientists, journalists, or some other false designation, in order to gain entry. This growing tourism industry was de-centralised and chaotic, it was not closely monitored by the state, and it established a system in which those companies able or prepared to bend the rules had the potential to make a very large amount of profit. By 2011, when a state-led report on Chernobyl "showed an increase to 10,000 visitors," the phenomenon of Chernobyl tourism came under much closer government scrutiny, and "Ukraine's Emergencies Ministry (the political body responsible for managing the site) was accused of profiteering. Alexander Ampleev, speaking on behalf of Ukraine's Prosecutor General's Office, said: 'We urge the ministry to inform the government of every dollar earned from these trips. We know that a lot of money has been made – but we have no idea in whose pockets it ended up.'" From this point onwards the Ukrainian government took tighter control over tourism in the Zone, "and the entry price was significantly increased, so that the profits might spread more readily around various governmental departments" (Richter, 2020b: 88). This action, at the initiative

of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych – whose government was in 2016 ranked the world’s “most corrupt” by human rights watchdog Transparency International (Zhuk, 2016) – was viewed by many critics as a state-level cash grab at a difficult communist heritage site that (to the surprise of many Ukrainians) had now proven itself to be a highly lucrative tourist attraction.



Plate 31: A souvenir stall at the entrance to the Chernobyl Zone, operated by the Ukrainian company Chernobyl Tour, sells empty tins labelled ‘Air of Pripyat’ (own photo: 28 August 2019).

One of the tour companies that saw the most growth during these chaotic years was Chernobyl Tour, a Kyiv-based organisation founded in 2008, who saw rapid growth over the following decade and whose marketing around the Zone, and Kyiv, including billboard advertisements and souvenir kiosks, grew so prolific that “tourists would occasionally ask me if they owned the Zone” (Richter, 2020b: 92). Chernobyl Tour operated popular social media channels, hosted academic seminars, and additionally claim to have spearheaded, beginning in 2016, the campaign to have the abandoned city of Pripyat listed as a UNESCO heritage site. However, other tour companies have accused Chernobyl Tour of “overly aggressive business

practices” – and an expansionist attitude towards the commercialisation of the Zone. The company’s souvenir kiosks have also drawn criticism for the “tacky” range of goods on offer – including “Gas masks, mugs decorated with radiation-warning symbols, glow-in-the-dark Chernobyl-branded condoms, even novelty containers of ‘Air from Chernobyl’” (Richter, 2020b: 92) – and in 2019, when *The Guardian* visited the Zone with Chernobyl Tour, they said “[it] was disturbing – and felt devoid in historical context,” and described it as “a messy and morally queasy experience” (Nolan, 2019).

However, in 2019, Ukraine’s new president Volodymyr Zelenskiy promised to take a hard line on the corruption that had flourished under previous leaderships, and he soon focussed on Chernobyl, describing the Zone as “a symbol of corruption,” and stating: “We must give this territory of Ukraine a new life [...] Until now, Chernobyl was a negative part of Ukraine’s brand. It’s time to change it.” To this end, Zelenskiy gave the Chernobyl Zone official state recognition as a tourist attraction, and announced a plan to “create a ‘green corridor’ for tourists and remove preconditions for corruption” (President of Ukraine, 2019). In 2021, the government revoked Chernobyl Tour’s license to take tourists into the Zone, with the Ukrainian State Agency for Exclusion Zone Management issuing a statement in November that claimed the company had committed ‘severe violations’ of the rules of conduct in the Zone (USAEZM, 2021). However, Yaroslav Yemelianenko, the co-founder of Chernobyl Tour, denied the charges in a statement on social media, where he wrote:

“There was an attempt to suspend the activities of Chernobyl Tour by stripping us of the special permit to conduct tours in the Zone. Who [would do that], you might ask? Those who created their own pet tour operators which [bring in bribes] from each tourist. They establish unfairly low prices, the rules of the Zone do not apply to them, but, of course, there is not a single violation they were charged with. Because they are [friends of the administration]. They are trying very hard to reintroduce corruption to Chernobyl tourism” (Yemelianenko, 2021).

The Chernobyl Tour ban from operating in the Zone may yet be overturned, though nevertheless, this situation presents what might be described as a longitudinal case study in the role of Accountability at a site of difficult communist heritage. It illustrates how a site of difficult heritage was largely ignored by a corrupt government, until it was shown to be profitable, at which point that government positioned itself to profit from it. Furthermore, it shows how the corruption of that previous government fostered a business environment in which private companies could only succeed by adopting elements of corruption themselves

(i.e., by misrepresenting their business activities and filing forms dishonestly). Ultimately, the case shows how Accountability and transparency are naturally positioned in opposition to private profit and corruption. According to Ukraine's new 'anti-corruption' government, the company Chernobyl Tour are in breach of the rules; according to Chernobyl Tour, they themselves now represent the only company or agency that isn't corrupt. Both accounts implicitly agree however, that corruption and Accountability cannot co-exist in this site of national heritage (by making the cases respectively that an Accountable state would remove a corrupt tour operator; and that a corrupt state would remove an Accountable tour operator). The case also demonstrates how even after a private company has put a decade of work, investment, and promotion into building its business at a state-owned site of difficult heritage, their access to the site can still inevitably be suspended almost overnight, at the decision (or policy change) of the site owners – in this case, a newly formed government. This case therefore suggests the fragility of any investment made by a non-state actor into a site that carries with it so much political weight, and the importance of Accountability from all parties in order to ensure a successfully managed future for the heritage site.

4.8.3 *Accessibility*

Accessibility is the measure of how easily a society is able to engage with its sites of heritage value. This factor may be considered in a number of ways. The geographic location will affect how readily people can visit. If locations are remote, or otherwise hard to reach, then transport services or overnight facilities might be provided. Additionally, the price of admission might also in some cases provide a certain bar for entry – in developing countries, for example, attractions priced according to tourist rates might place the consumption of this heritage out of easy reach for those who ought to have the closest connection to it. Some world heritage sites have therefore applied systems of multi-tiered pricing, for example, entry to the Taj Mahal in India costs 1000 rupees for a foreigner, or 40 rupees for an Indian visitor; the Hermitage in St Petersburg is 700 rubles for a foreigner, and 400 rubles for a Russian. However, this system too has its potential drawbacks, as it assumes “that foreign tourists have much higher disposable incomes than third-world locals, and therefore they should pay more,” however, “a two-tier price system that lumps all foreign visitors into the rich bucket is not exactly fair for those nationals who are not overburdened with wealth (Gebicki, 2018). In some cases, even reduced prices might not be enough to make sites accessible to locals. At Chernobyl, tourist experiences typically cost upwards of £100 per day, and even though some tour companies

offer half-price trips for Ukrainian nationals, this is still expensive for those earning Ukraine's national minimum wage of roughly £150 per month; thus making it easier for foreigners, not Ukrainians, to engage with this place of Ukrainian national heritage, while also becoming one of the factors motivating local people to enter the Zone illegally, for free, on 'stalker' trips (Richter, 2020b).

Sites oriented at foreign tourists may nevertheless be successful in their own right, and bring money into local economies; though if presented in some way that gates the experience off against local visitors, then the heritage in question does little or nothing to benefit its contemporary inheritors, or any conversations that the country might be having towards finding reconciliation with the past. In order for a heritage site to provide value, perhaps even reconciliation, to its cultural owners, it should be easy for them to access.

The tone, content and presentation of exhibitions are other factors which may affect how Accessible a site is perceived to be. In her examination of the Prague Museum of Communism, Bukovská (2020) notes how "according to official statistics, one of the most visited museums in Prague attracts mainly international tourists and is basically ignored by the Czech population." This is caused in part by the fact that the museum is largely designed for foreigners: "the current curator of the exhibition, Alexander Koráb, declared in a recent interview that the targeted audience has always been tourists from abroad." This effect can be seen in the preferable treatment given to the English language throughout the museum, where English texts "are notably, almost three times larger" than equivalent Czech texts, and other instances such as the entrance sign and labels in the museum shop appearing "predominately in English." But there are also subtler ways in which the Prague Museum of Communism seems to be aimed primarily at foreigners, rather than locals. Bukovská explains:

"[Only] visitors coming from the USA can feel directly addressed, as the explanatory texts make various references to events and phenomena from the US-American history and the popular culture: the automobile manufacturer Škoda from the west-Bohemian city of Plzeň is presented as the 'European General Motors,' the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 is paralleled with dramatic events which shocked the American public earlier that year (the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy) and finally, the first Czech musical film *The Hop-Pickers* (*Starci na chmelu*) from 1964 is described as 'a kind of forerunner of *Grease* starring John Travolta.' These references seem as if they reflected the (national) perspective of the museum's [American] founder and at the same time excluded the point of view of

other ‘Western’ and non-Western countries [...] some of the comparisons made seem to reveal remnants of a Cold War mind-set” (Bukovská, 2020).

The result of all this, according to Bukovská, is that Czech people feel a certain degree of “scepticism” towards the Prague Museum of Communism, which is reflected by visitor statistics showing how mostly foreign, and not domestic, tourists tend to frequent the place.

4.8.4 A Model for the Management of (Difficult) Communist Heritage

By way of summarising the points above, the thesis now proposes the following model for the management of sites of difficult communist heritage, taking into account the ‘Three As’ detailed in the previous sections, and positioning these within the necessary contexts of both the ‘global tourism market’ and ‘local heritage value.’

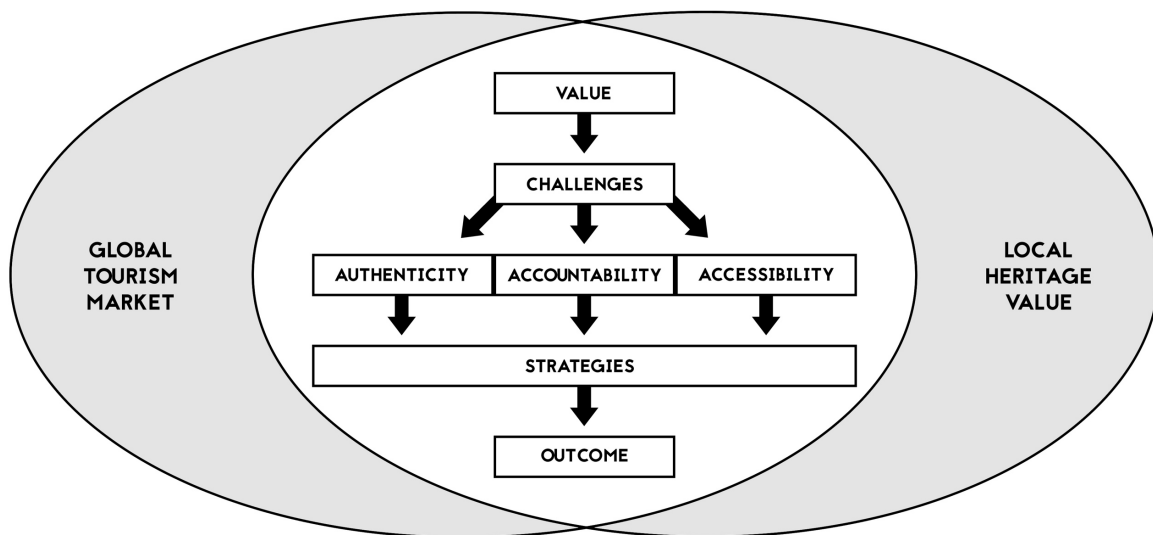


Figure 3: A model for the management of (difficult) communist heritage.

4.9 A Potential Solution: The Virtual Consumption of Communist Heritage

In recent years, evolving technology in the fields of 3D cameras, photogrammetry, VR (Virtual Reality) and AR (Augmented Reality) have begun to make a significant mark on the global tourism landscape. The development and application of this technology has been further accelerated by the global COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020, when many tourists were forced to abandoned their travel plans, and virtual alternatives to physical travel

presented an appealing alternative. Hintz (2020) lists 10 destinations that can already be explored virtually, without leaving one's home, including the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, Angkor Wat in Cambodia, the Zeppelin Museum in Friedrichshafen, Germany, and Japan's 'Cat Island' – in addition to some darker destinations, such as the Paris Catacombs and the abandoned city of Pripyat in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone – all of which could be explored on a computer screen, using either Google Maps or official virtual tours offered by site managers. When COVID-19 caused the cancellation of plans for the 2020 Solstice celebration at Stonehenge, English Heritage instead proposed a virtual alternative via an online livestream (Morris, 2020); supplementing a project they began in 1995, to create a detailed VR model of the site, based on a “comprehensive photogrammetric survey of the monument” and incorporating accurate star charts and a “virtual sunrise” (Burton, Hitchen & Bryan, 1999). Moreover, the use of dedicated VR hardware for immersive virtual travel experiences has seen a significant rise during the pandemic. It has been reported that “[in] the absence of travellers, tourism boards, hotels and destinations have turned to virtual reality” (Debusmann, 2020), as this technology “can offer a try-before-you-buy experience which will give people a taste for travel again leading to more holidays being booked” (Rogers, 2020), and as a result, the “pandemic could provide watershed moment for technology, potentially leading to more sustainable tourism” (Davies, 2021). For tourists visiting a destination in person, VR and AR technology can additionally allow for deeper and more meaningful engagement with physical exhibits. For example, beginning in 2016, the Salvador Dalí Museum in St. Petersburg, Florida, began offering VR experiences that allowed visitors to “step into [...] Dali's mind” by immersing themselves within three-dimensional virtual reconstructions of famous paintings (The Dalí, n.d.).

In 2016, the Polish development studio The Farm 51 released *Chernobyl VR Project*, an interactive virtual tour of Pripyat and surrounding areas within the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. Consumers who owned a compatible VR headset were then able to purchase and download the software, to experience this immersive tour in their own homes. The *Chernobyl VR Project* was created by “physically visiting all of these locations, shooting up to 2000 photos per room, and combining photogrammetry with 3D graphics to construct a pixel perfect recreation of the affected areas.” The result was an “interesting blend of gaming, educational software, and documentary filmmaking,” which served to provide a respectful, educational, and immersive interactive product which might prove to be “the history book of the future” (Evangelho, 2016). The following year, VR technology was similarly used in the creation of a

virtual educational experience based on the history of the Berlin Wall. In 1993, the Newseum – a US-based interactive museum also offering travelling exhibits and, later, online experiences – acquired eight pieces of the former Berlin Wall, and in 2017, they launched their *Berlin Wall VR* experience which allowed users to “experience the divided city from the perspectives of suppressed Germans and the East German and Soviet guards” (Museum Revolution, n.d.). Visitors to Newseum’s Berlin Wall Gallery would be invited to don a VR headset and headphones, and then:

“Walk through the streets of East Berlin and see the communist propaganda posters. With room-scale VR, visitors can walk within a 10-by-10-foot space and experience the anxiety of dodging the guard tower searchlights looking to spot wall jumpers. On the West Berlin side of the wall, visitors can use their controllers to help break down the iconic barrier to freedom” (Georgieva, 2017).

It was reported that during its first opening months, roughly 125 visitors per day were trying the *Berlin Wall VR* experience, which had a duration of approximately 7 minutes. Mukul Agarwal, a member of the development team, said: “I think it’s important for people to experience how terrifying it was to be in Berlin in the ’80s and what people living there were feeling at the time.” Speaking about the technology as a whole, another commenter added: “Having a VR component helps people really experience important points in history” (Feingold, 2017). Specifically, the technology has been said to show potential for a more personal and pluralistic way of teaching about difficult history, with the hope of this leading to healthy conversations about the past: “Projects like the Berlin Wall VR experience can become the beginning of conversations that can trigger transformation over time. VR stories will become more multifaceted and not only illustrate journeys but also allow a space for different personal narratives to emerge. We will no longer be mere visitors but involved participants” (Georgieva, 2017).

In relation to the subject of communist heritage tourism, and to the issues highlighted in this chapter, such virtual experiences pose a number of interesting possibilities and potential solutions.

- A virtual experience can show a place or an artefact as it appeared in a previous condition (for example, before decay or vandalism have taken place).
- It can recreate a specific time in history (for example by illustrating the artefact’s historic context, or a historic mode of use).

- A virtual experience can be structured, written and directed in a way that educates, avoids insensitivity, and it can showcase whatever perspective (or pluralist perspectives) its creators chose.
- Such an experience can also potentially be offered remotely, increasing the reach of the exhibit, while helping to minimise the negative effects of increased traffic to the site.
- Furthermore, a virtual exhibit can achieve all of these things without changing the physical artefact itself.

The final point above is particularly significant for sites of communist heritage in countries which have passed decommunisation laws (see Chapter 2), where a virtual representation of these historic symbols may be tolerated, whereas a real-life reconstruction of those same symbols might not.

Virtual Reality should today still be considered as an emergent technology. Both the technology for creating VR environments, as well as for experiencing them, is undergoing rapid advancement year-by-year. Meanwhile, the hardware remains quite expensive from a consumer perspective, posing a certain barrier for entry. In the case of a museum or other attraction though, which provides its own hardware for guests to use, it is already feasible to employ VR in creating novel and immersive visitor experiences; and furthermore, such technologies do inevitably become cheaper, more widespread, and thus more accessible for consumers over time. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the technology and potential of VR beyond just this brief overview, the subject is presented here as an avenue deserving of further research, particularly with application in sites of difficult or contested history, and notably, as illustrated here, in places of (post-)communist heritage.

4.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter began by defining the geographical region of study as ‘Southeast Europe,’ and discussed how the term ‘Eastern Europe’ has grown to be seen by many as a politically weighted descriptor rooted in historic imperialist narratives. The chapter went on to critically assess the presence and perspectives of the Western tourist in Southeast Europe – reviewing literature on the concepts of the ‘tourist gaze,’ ‘deviant globalisation,’ ‘Orientalism,’ and ‘Balkanism.’ These ideas will become important frameworks for investigation as the thesis

progresses. The chapter then turned to a discussion of one particular example, the recent global interest in the Modernist war memorials of former Yugoslavia. It reviewed charges made by academics from the region that Western interest in these places often took the form of ‘neo-colonialism,’ and involved the (re)production of Orientalising narratives about the region. However, in considering this example, it was found that even domestic conceptualisations of these places tend to vary – for example, while some commentators stress the importance of showing solemnity and respect at these memorial sites, it was shown that in numerous cases, the monuments’ own creators have historically held more relaxed attitudes towards the expected behaviour of visitors onsite.

Looking at the case of Yugoslav-era war memorials in the Balkans, Horvatinčić (2012) used critical discourse analysis to identify a number of problematic aspects to the way these sites were visited, conceptualised, and written about in the West. Primarily she identified three problems:

1. The decontextualisation of subject;
2. The propagation of historical inaccuracies; and
3. The use of exoticising language.

Kulić (2018) built on this and introduced the term ‘Orientalising socialism’ as a way to describe the activities and interest of Western visitors in sites of communist-era heritage in Southeast Europe. He identified much of this tourism activity as ‘neo-colonial’ in nature, and made a number of additional assertions about the trend he identified. The following list of principles is therefore a synthesis of the two papers above:

1	Monuments are decontextualised from their narratives by the (primarily) Western gaze
2	The online sharing of images has the effect of spreading historical inaccuracies.
3	Western visitors attach and spread exoticising language to describe the monuments.
4	Visitors have little sympathy for the (socialist) political messaging of such sites.
5	Tourists visit primarily for the purposes of adventure and photography.
6	These tourists visit other sites of post-communist heritage too.
7	Visitors conceptualise such monuments as being symbolic of a ‘failed’ regime.

Table 8: Principles defining Western Orientalism at sites of communist heritage in Southeast Europe.

The chapter then showed how various projects, both foreign and domestic, have since attempted to make use of the artistic and architectural heritage of the region in new creative (or commercial) expressions. Finally, the chapter closed with a broader look at some of the issues facing managed sites of communist heritage in post-communist space, and it identified three key challenges – *Authenticity*, *Accountability* and *Accessibility* – which it summarised by way of a model.

This chapter also marks the conclusion of this document’s literature review. Figure 4 shows a condensed summary of the literature discussed in this and the preceding two chapters, highlighting the questions raised in relation to this study. The following chapter marks the start of Volume 2, which will introduce the case study itself before defining a practical methodology for the research.




	<p>2. MONUMENTALISM [SUBJECT]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How representative is Buzludzha of ‘The Changes’? • Is it comparable to other communist heritage sites? • Can Buzludzha work as a modern counter-monument? • If not, is ‘depoliticisation’ a realistic alternative?
	<p>3. MODES OF ENGAGEMENT [ACTION]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can Buzludzha tourism be defined as dark tourism? • Is this a heterotopia? Is this psychogeography? • Is the perceived darkness Debordian or Foucauldian? • Are tourists doing urban exploration? Or ‘ruin porn’?
	<p>4. THE EASTWARD GAZE [ISSUES]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the tourist gaze view Buzludzha? • Are representations subject to Orientalist attitudes? • How can/should tourists respectfully visit the site? • How might the site be managed and promoted?

Figure 4: A summary of Chapters 2-4, showing questions to be investigated by this study.



Plate 32: A 're-forgotten' Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria. Stanislav Belovski (source: Vizh Mag, 2017).



Plate 33: A 're-forgotten' Buzludzha Memorial House. Martin Kaspur (source: Vizh Mag, 2017).

VOLUME TWO

Chapter Five

Bulgaria

“Even if they cut off my head, I will still shout: *Long live Bulgaria!*”
Nikolay Haytov

5.0 Introduction

Bulgaria is a small country in the southeast corner of Europe. It borders the Black Sea to the east, Romania to the north, Serbia and North Macedonia to the west, and Greece and Turkey to the south. The country today is a parliamentary republic with a population of 6.9 million people, of which 1.2 million people live in the capital, Sofia – a city nestled in the Balkan Mountains at the west end of the country. From here, the mountain range (known locally as ‘Stara Planina’ – the *Old Mountains*) cuts due east across Bulgaria almost all the way to the sea, and this has the effect of dividing Bulgaria into two, north and south. Those mountains, and the limited number of passes that cross them, have ultimately played a deciding role in almost every war in Bulgarian history.

This chapter will give an overview of Bulgarian history, first from the period 681-1944 CE, and then during the communist period, 1944-1991 CE. The chapter will introduce the various works of ideological architecture created in the country during the latter period, and it will discuss the ‘Changes’ that took place in Bulgaria during the transition to democracy, beginning in 1989, and the effect that this had on the country’s communist heritage sites. Finally, the chapter will discuss the political and social climate of contemporary Bulgaria, the country’s attitudes towards sites of communist heritage, and also how this has affected the development of a communist heritage tourism industry in response to foreign (and indeed, domestic) interest in the subject.

5.1 A Brief History of Bulgaria: 681-1944

Bulgaria traces its history back to the 7th Century, and the arrival of the Bulgar tribes in Europe (Crampton, 1997). According to the myth, the leader of these people, Khan Asparuh, son of Khan Kubrat, crossed the Danube and arrived in present-day Bulgaria where he planted his sword into a hill and declared this land as his people’s new nation. Though historical details of this period are scarce, the date 681 CE marks the first outside recognition of an independent Bulgarian kingdom, in the form of a treaty signed by Emperor Constantine IV after the Bulgars defeated the armies of neighbouring Byzantium; and so this date is subsequently treated as the official birth of the nation. Khan Asparuh and his descendants established a capital at Pliska (near present-day Shumen), and ruled for three centuries. In 864, the Bulgarian ruler Knyaz Boris adopted the Christian faith, abolished paganism, and

replaced his *Khan* title to become 'Tsar Boris I.' This first Bulgarian kingdom grew to its greatest size under Tsar Simeon I (893-927), who restyled himself as 'Emperor Simeon,' after conquering much of the Balkans. However, attempts to expand southeast were less successful, with the Bulgarians making unsuccessful sieges of Constantinople in 923 and 924. The Byzantines eventually retaliated, and in 1014 the Byzantine Emperor Basil II (known as 'Bulgaroktonos': the *Bulgar Slayer*) led a heavy force against Bulgaria, and by 1018 had conquered and disbanded the First Bulgarian Empire.

The Second Bulgarian Empire was established in 1185, when two brothers in Turnovo led a rebellion against Byzantine rule and quickly gained the support of many ethnic Bulgarians (Crampton, 1997). After defeating the Byzantines in a series of battles they established a new capital at Turnovo, and this medieval state would eventually grow to cover much of the Balkan peninsula, spreading from the Black Sea to the Adriatic Sea. It was conquered, however, by the Ottomans in the 14th century, and Bulgaria would then remain a subject of the Ottoman Empire from 1393 until 1878. These five centuries are considered locally as a dark time in Bulgarian history, widely referred to as a period of 'slavery' under the 'Turkish yoke.' The Ottoman caliphate imposed a brutal Islamic law on the Bulgarian Christians, destroying many churches and monasteries, executing those who refused to convert, as well as allegedly outlawing Bulgarian culture, language and writing, so that Bulgarians were only able to preserve their traditions and religion in secret. Ottoman rule relaxed somewhat towards the end of this period, and certain allowances were later made for the practice of Christianity – monasteries were permitted to exist, and churches could be built so long as they were no taller than the local mosques (as a result, Bulgarian churches and chapels of this period were often built into pits dug into the ground, to allow for more building height). Rather than bells, which were forbidden by the Ottoman overlords, Bulgarian churches and monasteries called their faithful to prayer using wooden clapper boards known as 'klepalo.'

In the 18th century, Bulgaria entered a period known as the 'Bulgarian National Revival,' or 'National Awakening,' which was marked by a resurgence in nationalism, the promotion of Bulgarian culture, ideas of independence, and a resultant anti-Ottoman sentiment. The birth of this movement is typically credited to the book *Istoriya Slavyanobolgarskaya (Slavonic-Bulgarian History)*, written in 1762 by the Bulgarian clergyman Paisii Hilendarski. It was the second modern history book about Bulgaria (preceded by Petar Bogdan Bakshev's 1667 *History of Bulgaria*), but it was the first to attempt a complete history of the people, and it

was written to appeal to the awakening of Bulgarian national consciousness (Berend, 2003: 76). Of particular note, was a dedication in the book that promoted Bulgarian national culture and identity in opposition to the increasing Hellenisation promoted by the predominantly Greek clergy of that time (as noted in Daskalov, 2004):

“Oh, you unwise moron! Why are you ashamed to call yourself a Bulgarian and why don't you read and speak in your native language? Weren't Bulgarians powerful and glorious once? Didn't they take taxes from strong Romans and wise Greeks? Out of all the Slavic nations they were the bravest one. Our rulers were the first ones to call themselves kings, the first ones to have patriarchs, the first ones to baptise their people. [...] Why are you ashamed of your great history and your great language and why do you leave it to turn yourselves into Greeks? Why do you think they are any better than you? Well, here you're right because did you see a Greek leave his country and ancestry like you do?” (Hilendarski cited in Katsikas, 2021: 38).

Two centuries later this passage would be adapted to verse by the Bulgarian poet Ivan Vazov (known as the ‘Patriarch of Bulgarian literature’), in his 1882 work *Paisii* (as part of his poetic cycle *Epic of the Forgotten*):

*“We too had kingdoms and capital cities,
Our own patriarchs, saints of mercy and pity.
We too, in this world have performed our proud deeds,
And given the Slavs something worthwhile to read;
So, when other folk call us ‘Bulgarian’ idly,
Let brothers know this is a name to take pride in!
And know that great God, to whom praises are sung,
He too understands our Bulgarian tongue.”*
(Vazov, 1893; translation by Mihail Kondov and Richard Fawcus.)

By the mid-19th century, Bulgarians attempted several revolts against Ottoman rule in their country. Two of Bulgaria’s most famous revolutionaries, Hadzhi Dimitur and Stefan Karadzha, formed a rebel detachment in Romania in 1868, before crossing the Danube and launching a series of attacks on Ottoman strongholds in Bulgaria. Their campaign enjoyed some early victories, until 9 July when Karadzha was injured in battle and taken prisoner by the Ottomans. Hadzhi Dimitur led the remaining rebels in one last battle, fought at Buzludzha Peak on 18 July 1868. By this point the detachment numbered just 58 men, and they were soon defeated by the much larger Ottoman force. Some were captured, others killed in battle, and Hadzhi Dimitur himself was fatally wounded. He was carried from the mountain on a stretcher, and later died from his injuries. That same decade, a Bulgarian revolutionary named Vasil Levski (referred to as the ‘Apostle of Freedom’) founded the Internal Revolutionary

Organisation, and travelled about Bulgaria in secret while establishing a network of regional revolutionary committees. Levski's plan was to organise the whole country to rise in revolution at once, thus overwhelming the limited Ottoman militia forces stationed in Bulgaria. Though he typically travelled in disguise, and under fake identities, Levski was eventually captured by the Ottomans and was hanged in Sofia on 18 February 1873. (A monument to Vasil Levski now stands on the site of the former gallows.) Levski's revolutionary committees survived however, and Bulgaria eventually rose in widespread rebellion against the Ottomans in April 1876. The fighting continued across many towns and cities of Bulgaria into the next month, until it was brutally suppressed by the Ottomans who not only defeated the insurgent forces, but followed up with a series of massacres against entire settlements by way of punishment. The most notorious of these was at Batak, a town in the Rhodope Mountains whose local revolutionaries had been tasked with attacking and disrupting the Ottoman supply lines between Constantinople and Sofia. In response, a force of 50,000 'bashi-bazouk' (a class of irregular soldiers in the Ottoman army who were famed for both their bravery, and their brutality) was sent to Batak, where they surrounded the town and began the indiscriminate slaughter of citizens. The mayor of Batak, Trendafil Kerelev, tried negotiating with the Ottoman commanding officer Ahmet Aga. His son's wife Bosilka Kereleva would later recall:

"The words he used were 'Shishak aor' which is Turkish for 'to put on a skewer.' After that, they took all the money he had, undressed him, gouged his eyes, pulled out his teeth and impaled him slowly on a stake, until it came out of his mouth. Then they roasted him while he was still alive. He lived for half an hour during this terrible scene. [...] At the time this was happening, Ahmet Aga's son took my child from my back and cut him to pieces, there in front of me." (cited in More, 1877: 112)

As the bashi-bazouk ran riot in Batak, some townsfolk barricaded themselves inside a stone-walled church. The Ottomans laid siege to this building for three days, until the townsfolk, hungry and dehydrated, eventually opened the doors and surrendered, to be met with rape, torture and execution. Of the estimated 15,000-30,000 deaths that Bulgaria suffered during the 'April Uprising' and its subsequent suppression, reports attribute between 1,200 and 7,000 deaths to the massacre at Batak (Detrez, 2014: 38; Nielsen & Nielsen, 2011). Januarius MacGahan, an American journalist who worked as a war correspondent for the *New York Herald* and the *London Daily News*, visited Batak in August 1876 and sent home the following report:

“We looked into the church which had been blackened by the burning of the woodwork, but not destroyed, nor even much injured. It was a low building with a low roof, supported by heavy irregular arches, that as we looked in seemed scarcely high enough for a tall man to stand under. What we saw there was too frightful for more than a hasty glance. An immense number of bodies had been partially burnt there and the charred and blackened remains seemed to fill it half way up to the low dark arches and make them lower and darker still, were lying in a state of putrefaction too frightful to look upon. I had never imagined anything so horrible. We all turned away sick and faint, and staggered out of the fearful pest house glad to get into the street again. We walked about the place and saw the same thing repeated over and over a hundred times. Skeletons of men with the clothing and flesh still hanging to and rotting together; skulls of women, with the hair dragging in the dust. Bones of children and infants everywhere. Here they show us a house where twenty people were burned alive; there another where a dozen girls had taken refuge, and been slaughtered to the last one, as their bones amply testified. Everywhere horrors upon horrors...”
(MacGahan, 1966: 59-60).

Following the failure of Bulgaria’s 1876 April Uprising, and due in part to the coverage provided by international correspondents such as MacGahan, the Ottoman atrocities in Bulgaria became a global talking point. Soon after, Russia deployed its armies to push the Ottomans out of the Balkans in what became known as the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War (Crampton, 1997). Under the command of Russia’s Tsar Alexander II (subsequently known in Bulgaria as the ‘Tsar-Liberator’), thousands of Russian troops would die in the conflict. The campaign was promoted ostensibly as a brotherly action in support of Russia’s fellow Orthodox Slavs, and this established a sense of kinship and gratitude towards Russia which persists amongst many in Bulgaria to this day (Kelleher, 2009); though it has been noted that the war also served other purposes of Russian imperial ambition and dominance in Europe (see Jelavich, 1991). The war ended with a victory for Russia, and Bulgarian independence was restored in the northern half of the country, with the Russian tsar’s nephew, Alexander of Battenberg, taking the throne in 1879 as Tsar Alexander I of the Principality of Bulgaria. The southern half of Bulgaria, which had remained in Ottoman control under the name Eastern Rumelia, was reunified into Bulgaria in 1885. An initial Russian-backed treaty in 1878 had restored to Bulgaria all territories considered as ethnically Bulgarian, which included regions of what are now Greece, Serbia and Turkey. However, the European Great Powers subsequently reduced the country’s size when they forced a new treaty, and Bulgaria would spend the next 50 years fighting to reclaim its other former territories.

Both Balkan Wars (1912 and 1913) as well as the Balkan theatre of World War I (1914-1918, in which Bulgaria sided with Germany and Austria-Hungary) saw a number of newly

independent countries in the region battling one another to each regain what they perceived as their pre-Ottoman kingdoms (Kelleher, 2009). After facing defeat in both the Second Balkan War and World War I, Bulgaria entered a period of political chaos and Tsar Alexander I's successor, Tsar Ferdinand, abdicated in 1918 to be replaced by his son Tsar Boris III, who surrendered a number of territories to neighbouring countries in the interest of maintaining peace. Meanwhile a strong socialist movement was building in Bulgaria, having been established in the country in 1891, when the philosopher and academic Dimitur Blagoev gathered together various regional socialist groups on Buzludzha Peak (the site of the 1868 revolutionary battle against the Ottomans), to form Bulgaria's Social Democratic Workers' Party. Bolstered by the 1917 victory of the Bolshevik revolutionaries in Russia, and the subsequent establishment of the Soviet Union, numerous of Bulgaria's socialists decided to follow suit and attempt a socialist revolution in Bulgaria. The Social Democratic Workers' Party was divided on the subject – its founder, Blagoev himself, declined to participate in the uprising, stating that the 'conditions were not yet ripe.' However, a rival faction of socialists, including future Bulgarian leaders such as Georgi Dimitrov, Vasil Kolarov and Vulko Chervenkov, attempted in September 1923 to instigate a nationwide coup against Tsar Boris III. The uprising was a disaster, which was quickly quashed by the Tsar's police. Many regional instigators were tried and executed, while others fled the country. Dimitrov escaped to the newly formed Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Bulgaria's western neighbour, since 1918 officially titled the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, but known colloquially as Yugoslavia), Chervenkov to the Soviet Union, and both were tried and sentenced to death in absentia.

Tsar Boris III tried to keep Bulgaria out of World War II, initially refusing offers of alliance from both the Soviet Union and Germany; but Bulgaria had become economically dependent on the latter, and eventually agreed to Germany's terms in March 1941. At that stage, the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact (the pact of non-aggression between Germany and the Soviet Union) at least seemed to ensure that an alliance with Germany would not involve any hostility between Bulgaria and its historic Russian allies. However, Hitler broke the pact in June 1941 when he invaded the Soviet Union. Tsar Boris III was pressured to send Bulgarian troops east, to fight against the Soviets, but he refused; and so instead the Bulgarian army was deployed west, to hold the Nazi-occupied regions of Greece and Yugoslavia. The tsar also refused to send Bulgaria's 50,000 Jews to Nazi concentration camps, echoing a strong public movement in the country, which was spearheaded by the Orthodox church, and opposed

Hitler's 'Final Solution'; though the Bulgarian army was nevertheless responsible for managing the deportation of Jews from neighbouring occupied regions (Chary, 1972). In return for collaboration, Hitler returned to Bulgaria some of the 'lost' territories that had been considered as historically Bulgarian. The alliance with Nazi Germany would begin to come apart in 1943, however. Tsar Boris III died in August, passing the throne to his six-year-old son Simeon II and the team of bureaucrats who managed on the child's behalf; and then the Nazi defeat at Stalingrad that winter marked a changing tide on the Eastern Front. The German army began to retreat, the Soviet Red Army marched west, and meanwhile the Allies led bombing raids against Sofia in November 1943 and March 1944, killing thousands of citizens with incendiary bombs, to pressure Bulgaria into changing sides (Miller, 1975). Though as John Bell (1991: 25) notes, Bulgaria suffered far less domestic damage from the war than many other occupied European countries did, and these bombing raids, which would be remembered for decades, "did more psychological than physical damage."

All the while, a coalition of leftist organisations within Bulgaria (including workers' unions, the agrarian party, the Bulgarian socialists and communists, as well as those who were simply pro-Russian or anti-fascist) had christened themselves the Fatherland Front, and since 1941 had committed to a domestic anti-fascist campaign; a violent partisan struggle that fought against the Bulgarian police and military to disrupt supply routes, destroy weapons caches, or assassinate German and Bulgarian officials. British intelligence had made contact with these partisans too, supplying them with weapons to aid their struggle. In August 1944 when the Soviets reached Romania and liberated Bucharest from Nazi control, the Bulgarian government declared itself neutral; but the Soviets continued to advance, declaring war against Bulgaria on 5 September and launching a series of naval assaults on the country from ships in the Black Sea. To avoid a direct war with the Soviets, Bulgaria's government ceded power to the Fatherland Front, now increasingly under the leadership of its communist constituents, on 9 September 1944.

5.2 The Bulgarian Communist Party: 1945-1991

Following the war, Bulgaria's Fatherland Front formed a government with the backing of the occupying Soviet Red Army. Although not all members of the Fatherland Front had been pro-communist, its communist factions now eliminated opposition groups to take complete

control over the government. Formerly exiled communists returned to Bulgaria too, including Georgi Dimitrov, who had previously been sentenced to death for his role in the 1923 socialist coup, but now returned to a hero's welcome, and in 1945 became prime minister. On 8 September 1946, the new government held a referendum on the Bulgarian monarchy, with a reported 95.6% of the country voting to abolish it. That referendum has since been described as "unconstitutional," "rigged," and as having been heavily influenced by state-controlled media which had been deployed to "brainwash the population" (Kolev, 2014). Nevertheless, it brought Bulgaria's third kingdom to an end, and the royal family, including the 9-year-old monarch Simeon II, were given an ultimatum of just one day to leave the country in safety. In December 1947, the government passed a new constitution (modelled closely on Lenin's 1917 Soviet constitution) which declared the Bulgarian Communist Party to be the leading power of the country. When Georgi Dimitrov rose to the new leadership position as General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, Vasil Kolarov, another former exile, served as his prime minister. A new communist historiography began, which re-branded 1944 as the 'Great Socialist Revolution,' and re-characterised Bulgaria's domestic anti-fascist struggle as an entirely pro-communist and pro-Soviet movement. Following the Soviet naming convention (such as the 'February Revolution,' the 'October Revolution,' and so on), Bulgaria's 1876 uprising against the Ottomans became known as the 'April Uprising,' while the failed socialist coup of 1923 became the 'September Uprising,' and its instigators – including the current leaders of Bulgaria – were commemorated as heroic revolutionaries.

Georgi Dimitrov, who during his exile had served as Secretary General of the Comintern in Moscow, oversaw rapid rebuilding and industrialisation efforts across Bulgaria during his term in power. When he died in 1949, he was followed by his brother-in-law, another *Septembrist*, Vulko Chervenkov. Chervenkov had also spent much of his exile in the Soviet Union, where he had been the director of a Marxist-Leninist school in Moscow, an agent of the NKVD (the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs), and during the war had been the director of a radio station broadcasting anti-fascist and pro-Soviet messages into Bulgaria. In 1926 he had married Dimitrov's younger sister, Elena Dimitrova. Chervenkov was a loyal disciple of Stalin, and was responsible for adopting many similar governmental styles into

Bulgaria – including the establishment of political prisons, most notably at Belene on the Danube River and at Slunchev Bryag near Lovech, where many of his political opponents would find themselves. One of Chernvenkov's first actions as national leader was to rename Bulgaria's port city Varna to 'Stalin' (a name it kept from December 1949 until October 1956), and by 1953 he had expelled over 100,000 members of the Communist Party. As a result of his policies and purges, during his time in power from 1949 to 1954, Vulko Chervenkov would earn the nickname 'Little Stalin.' Joseph Stalin himself died in 1953, and in the years that followed a de-Stalinisation movement swept across the Eastern Bloc, reaching its peak fervour after First Secretary Nikita Krushchev of the Soviet Union delivered his 'secret speech' before the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, denouncing the crimes and cult of personality of his predecessor. In Bulgaria, 'Little Stalin' stepped down from leadership in 1954 to serve as prime minister, and in 1954, Todor Zhivkov replaced Chervenkov as the leader of the People's Republic of Bulgaria.

Zhivkov had been a member of the Bulgarian Workers' Party, and a wartime partisan leader, who following the war became the head of Sofia's new police force. In 1951 he entered Chervenkov's inner circle as a full member of the Politburo, and it has been suggested that Chervenkov had intended to continue to exert power over the country by naming the mild-mannered Zhivkov as his puppet successor; however, Todor Zhivkov proved to be a formidable ruler in his own right, denouncing and expelling his mentor from the Central Committee in 1956, and going on to lead Bulgaria for 35 years. For many people today, Zhivkov is remembered as the face of the Bulgarian Communist Party. He maintained very close relations with the Soviet Union, once announcing that "Bulgaria and the Soviet Union will act as a single body, breathing with the same lungs and nourished by the same bloodstream" (1969, cited in Brunwasser, 2009); and leading the Bulgarian journalist and dissident Georgi Markov to comment that "[Zhivkov] served the Soviet Union more ardently than the Soviet leaders themselves did." Markov would later be assassinated on Waterloo Bridge in London, using a pellet of ricin injected into his leg via the tip of an umbrella, on 7 September 1978 – Todor Zhivkov's birthday (Bell, 1998: 251). In 1968, Zhivkov sent Bulgarian troops to assist in the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia (known as 'Operation Danube'), a suppression of the liberalisation reforms, known as the Prague Spring,

under the Czechoslovak First Secretary Alexander Dubček (Rubinstein, 1985). At home however, Bulgaria saw a period of relative stability and growth during the Zhivkov era, witnessing “perhaps the most rapid and drastic change of an Eastern European nation from a rural to an urban, industrialised society” (Kelleher, 2009). Zhivkov opened Bulgaria considerably to trade and tourism from the West, as well as building strong relations with foreign powers; he pushed the nation’s productivity to new levels, developed schools, factories, large-scale cooperative farming schemes and began a construction boom that would see many Bulgarian cities drastically redeveloped. Under his rule Bulgaria would win 153 Olympic medals, and Zhivkov even began to welcome foreign brands into the country, including such rare treats as Cadburys chocolate and Coca-Cola. Some historians suggest that the general improvements to the standard of life in the country, as well as the increased availability of consumer products, made many citizens less critical of their relative lack of freedoms (for example Bell, 1991). Behind the scenes however, Zhivkov maintained the forced labour camps at Lovech and Belene, where ruthless punishments were enacted on artists, writers or journalists found guilty of political criticism, cultural pessimism or of expressing sentiments of Western formalism. “A good journalist is not the one that writes what people say, but the one that writes what he is supposed to write,” Zhivkov once allegedly said. In 1971, at the 10th Party Congress, Zhivkov replaced Georgi Dimitrov’s constitution with a new constitution of his own, which served to further distance his political opponents from the seat of power, thus consolidating his own grip on the country. Todor Zhivkov styled himself as the father of the nation, encouraging citizens to refer to him as ‘Tato’ (*Papa*) or by the familiar nickname ‘Bai Toshov,’ and in 1981 he compared himself to Bulgaria’s 7th Century founder, saying: “As Khan Asparuh has given you a nation and land, so too do I give you nation and land” (Richter, 2019).

By the 1980s, economic conditions in Bulgaria began to decline, and even while Mikhail Gorbachev promoted policies of ‘glasnost’ and ‘perestroika’ (*transparency* and *restructuring*) in the Soviet Union, Zhivkov’s Bulgaria proved reluctant to reform. The natural environment of Bulgaria was by now in poor health too – a result of the Party’s rapid and unchecked industrialisation programmes. In 1989 *The Ledger* reported that “85% of Bulgaria’s river water and 70% of its farmland had been damaged by industrial wastes and pollutants”

(Richter, 2019). In the Danube city of Ruse, citizens were subjected to the toxic fumes from a chemical plant built across the river at Giurgiu in Romania. Soil around the Ruse area was shown to contain concentrations of mineral acid at 40 times over the safe limit (Pollack & Wielgoths, 2004). A cloud of chemical gas descended on a Ruse meeting of the Young Pioneer organisation in September 1987, and children as young as seven were seen choking, running for cover with their red neckerchiefs clutched over their mouths. (see for example Anderson & Van Atta, 1991) Zhivkov refused to act however, unwilling to upset his fraternal relationship with the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu. The Committee for the Ecological Protection of Ruse was subsequently founded, and began protesting Zhivkov's lack of solutions. Initially these demonstrations were crushed – Zhivkov allegedly ordered the beating of a group of environmental activists outside an OSCE summit in October 1989 – but national dissatisfaction grew. Organised, nationwide protest gave birth to the 'Eco-glasnost' movement: a forerunner to the contemporary Bulgarian Green Party. As Pollack and Wielgoths (2004: 275) note:

“On November 3 [1989], Ecoglasnost delivered the crucial blow to the Communist political system. [...] At least 10,000 people came and marched to parliament, carrying posters and chanting the word 'democracy.' It was a crucial breakthrough [...] Just a week following the Ecoglasnost march, Zhivkov was sacked.”

Or, as Anderson and Van Atta (1991) put it: “The Bulgarian revolution will be remembered as the one in which the greens routed the reds.”

Ultimately, Zhivkov was removed from power by members of his own Party, who on 10 November 1989, the day after the Berlin Wall came down, offered him a choice between a discreet resignation or a public trial. Zhivkov chose the former, stepping down from leadership amidst public claims of poor health. As Kelleher (2009) notes, Zhivkov's fall from power took the form of a 'palace coup' within the Party, rather than a case of the Party itself being overthrown by public action; a fact which reflected the Bulgarian people's greater tolerance towards the communist model compared to some of their neighbouring nations. Petar Mladenov was appointed as the new leader of the Party, and he would oversee Bulgaria's transition to democracy. The Bulgarian Communist Party rebranded itself as the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), and political opposition groups which had begun to emerge

during the glasnost period consolidated into the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF). At Bulgaria's first democratic election since World War II, in July 1990, the BSP won – but the result was criticised as having been rigged, and the next year another election was held and won by UDF in November 1991, marking the end of Bulgaria's communist era. Meanwhile in January 1990, Todor Zhivkov was arrested and tried on charges of fraud and nepotism. He was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment, but on grounds of his failing health he was permitted to serve his sentence at home under house arrest. Acquitted in 1996, Zhivkov released a best-selling autobiography in 1997, and then died at home from pneumonia, aged 86, in 1998.

5.3 The Changes

In Bulgaria, the period after the end of communist rule, during which time the country slowly transitioned – culturally, politically, economically, and industrially – to a model of democratic capitalism, is usually referred to as the period of 'Prehod' (*Transition*), or simply as 'Promenite' (*the Changes*). Not all post-communist countries went through the same post-communist trajectories, with different national experiences resulting from different nation-to-nation politics, culture, levels of economic development, and other factors. Whereas some of these countries made more dramatic or revolutionary breaks with their history (an economic 'shock therapy'), the 1990s in Bulgaria was characterised by the decision to "gradually 'dismantle' the old system and slowly move forward" (Kelleher, 2009). State institutions were dismantled, the lev was floated and its value dropped to one tenth of its former rate, resulting in hyperinflation of up to 1000 percent value. Shops began to empty of stock, and a black-market system began to flourish as a result. Bulgaria's nuclear power plant at Kozloduy was downsized too, with four of its five reactors put into decommissioning, resulting in power shortages and electricity rationing across the country (Crampton, 2017).

In 1973, Todor Zhivkov had declared that Bulgaria and the USSR should "act as a single body, breathing with the same lungs and nourished by the same bloodstream" (Brunwasser, 2009); however, by the 1990s, the bridge over the Danube between Bulgaria and Romania, originally christened the 'Friendship Bridge' and which had represented the main land connection with the larger communist bloc, became a symbol of the mass exodus of Bulgarians leaving the chaos of the transition years behind to seek out new futures in

Germany and other central and western European nations (the period was subsequently dramatised in the popular Bulgarian TV series *Dunav Most* [Danube Bridge] (Ivanov, 2000)).

Politically, the country swung between left and right, with successive governments in the 1990s formed by the BSP and the UDF respectively. In 2001, Tsar Simeon – who had previously fled Bulgaria as a child, when the Fatherland Front took control after the war – returned from Spain and ran as Bulgarian prime minister, under his new civilian name of Simeon Sakseburggotski (a Bulgarianisation of ‘Saxe-Coburg-Gotha’). This ‘tsar-premier,’ Prime Minister Simeon II, served alongside a Marxist president, Peter Stoianov, as a duo that illustrated the political contradictions inherent to post-communist Bulgaria. In 2005 the former tsar was ousted however, replaced by a government formed as a socialist-led coalition. In 2009, the next election was won by the party GERB, ushering in new prime minister and future president Boyko Borisov – a former bodyguard of Todor Zhivkov – who would become a mainstay of Bulgarian politics for the next two decades, in the process being dubbed by some the ‘Bulgarian Putin’ (Kaspruk, 2012). Borisov’s government would be characterised in part by its ideologically ambiguous politics, as it was noted: “the Bulgarian electorate has swung from left to right, from East to West, and from EU/NATO to Russia several times since the 1990 elections. It’s a situation where being neither here, not there, is a rather wise way to govern” (Panagopoulos, 2021a).



Plate 34: Todor Zhivkov and his bodyguard, Ivan ‘Boyko’ Borisov, who would later serve as prime minister of Bulgaria. Photograph by Zhivko Angelov, 14 September 1996 (source: Novinite, 2007).

Even by the late 2000s, it was noted that Bulgarian society showed a “deep ambivalence about democracy,” which was related to “the amnesia of Bulgarians about their Communist past, and apathy about their democratic present”; a predicament on which the poet Edvin Sugarev commented: “Everything in Bulgaria looks fine formally: the free market, human rights, free speech, the multiparty political system, membership in E.U. and NATO. But that’s only a facade. Behind it there is nothing” (Brunwasser, 2009). Brunwasser notes how in October 2008, Bulgaria “became the first in the bloc to see its E.U. funds stopped [...] because of corruption and poor administration,” and how according to the Pew Global Attitudes Project, “Bulgaria appears the most dissatisfied with democracy and nostalgic for Communism of all the former Warsaw Pact members,” with 76 percent of the Bulgarians saying they were dissatisfied with democracy. It became commonplace in the transition years, and remains so today, to hear older Bulgarians exclaim: ‘Po Bai Toshovo vreme beshe po dobre’ (*It was better in Bai Tosho’s [Todor Zhivkov’s] time*).

According to recent UN projections, Bulgaria has the fastest shrinking population in the world, with a predicted decrease of 23% by 2050 (Mohdin, 2018). For three years in a row (between 2018 and 2020), Bulgaria was ranked lowest in Europe for press freedom, according to the annual report by journalism NGO Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF), though in 2021 it overtook Turkey, Russia and Belarus to rank fourth lowest in Europe, and 112 out of 180 scored countries worldwide (Hurst, 2021; RSF, 2021). A 2011 global ranking by Gallup of ‘thriving’ and ‘suffering’ countries found Bulgaria to be “the most suffering country in the whole world” (Novinite, 2012); while a 2015 Brussels poll found that “Bulgaria is by far the most unhappy country in the EU,” with Bulgarian political scientist Dimitar Bechev explaining: “Joining the EU has not made Bulgarians happy [...] It’s seen as a necessary evil and perhaps expectations were higher, they thought it was the silver bullet. Bulgarians saw their own government as problematic and Europe as the solution. But since the economic crisis that’s changed, they can’t trust anyone. There’s an underlying nature in Bulgarian people and society – not to trust anyone” (Harris, 2015). Speaking anecdotally as a 10-year resident of the country, distrust of one’s own neighbours is a common sentiment in Bulgaria; as the popular idiom goes: ‘Do Bulgarskiya kazan v ada nyama diavoli, zashtoto Bulgarite cami se topyat edin drug’ (which loosely means: *There are no devils guarding the Bulgarian cauldron of hell, because the Bulgarians burn each other on their own*).

A 2019 ‘Corruption Perception’ report by the European Commission gave Bulgaria the lowest score (i.e., most corrupt) out of all EU countries (European Commission, 2020); and for some years now, Bulgaria has frequently been recognised with the moniker of “Europe’s most corrupt country” (for example Kuebler, 2016). However, this corruption is not limited solely to the ruling class. The Bulgarian sociologist Petar-Emil Mitev warns how “[enrichment] by dishonest means has become a part of the Bulgarian transition and that has been absorbed by the young generation [...] This is an important part of trauma of the transition” (Brunwasser, 2009). Such problems manifest in a variety of ways. For example, according to contemporary research, post-communist countries have a tendency to show “very different standards for respecting intellectual property rights” (Nalepa, 2016), and international studies into academic plagiarism and cheating have found “that students in former Soviet-bloc countries [noting Bulgaria] were more accepting of academic misconduct than were their counterparts in Western Europe or the United States and less likely to report others’ cheating when they knew about it,” a problem which “could make it hard to harmonise academic standards across Europe” (Heitman & Litewka, 2011). One 2012 study into academic plagiarism, conducted with 1,300 respondents across five European countries, found that Bulgarian teachers and students were amongst the most tolerant to instances of plagiarism (particularly when some words had been changed), and also notes that Bulgaria showed the greatest discrepancy out of all countries surveyed between suspected and admitted instances: “In Bulgaria almost all of the people think their colleagues may have used plagiarised materials, but nobody admits that he or she may have plagiarised himself or herself” (Foltýnek & Čech, 2012). It has been suggested that tolerant attitudes towards plagiarism amongst Bulgarian students are in part shaped by a culture of “Internet use practices such as downloading music or taking text for their own,” combined with “the perception in students that cheaters get away with it” (Chankova, 2017). On the latter point however, things are beginning to change in the country. After a couple of cases where high-profile Bulgarian academics were called out for plagiarism, in 2018 the Bulgarian parliament revised the law adding its first ever legislature against academic plagiarism (BTA, 2018).

Indeed, the mood in Bulgaria as a whole seems to be changing. Bulgaria’s parliamentary election in November 2021 was won by a party named ‘Change Continues,’ led by two Harvard-educated Bulgarian businessmen; whose anti-corruption message attracted a quarter of the available votes (Deegan-Krause, Haughton & Zankina, 2021). Beyond their optimistic rhetoric, it remains to be seen whether such a government might be able to enact real change

in the country, given the deep-rooted and institutionalised nature of so many of Bulgaria's social issues; however, the voter results from 2021 do at least show a growing desire for change in the country, even though the precise path to achieving that change remains less certain.

5.4 Iconoclasm

During this period of Changes, the urban landscape of Bulgaria shifted dramatically in response to changing attitudes towards the former communist regime and its legacy. Amongst the first physical changes was the removal of the decorative red star, a communist symbol, atop the Party House in Sofia, which was lifted off by helicopter on 4 October 1990 (BNR, 2020). The Lenin statue that once stood opposite was removed from its plinth, to be later replaced by a statue of the city's namesake, Saint Sofia. Throughout the 1990s, various Bulgarian cities faced similar challenges as they discussed and confronted their sites of (now contested) communist heritage (see for examples, Kelleher, 2009). In Plovdiv, a proposal was considered for hiding the local Soviet Army monument – a likeness of the ubiquitous Red Army hero *Alyosha*, here erected as a towering and highly-visible statue atop a hill near the city centre – inside a large Coco-cola bottle, in what would have made for a decidedly unsubtle case of symbolic 'reterritorialisation.' In 1993, in the north-western Bulgarian city of Montana, the local municipality made the decision to convert a monument and memorial tomb to fallen insurgents of the 1923 September Uprising (an attempted pro-communist coup) into "a monument to the prominent figures of nineteenth-century Bulgarian enlightenment"; but the idea met local resistance, it "was considered a vandal's act by a large part of the town population," and a petition of 10,000 signatures was presented to block the proposed conversion (both these examples discussed in Vukov, 2003). In the city of Ruse, the Pantheon of National Revival Heroes is a memorial tomb, completed in 1977, and containing the remains of fallen soldiers. To make way for its construction, the former Church of All Saints had been demolished from this site, much to the dismay of local Christians. This communist-era Pantheon memorial was then built in a style reminiscent of an Orthodox church: a square building with a golden dome, its interiors dimly lit, with marble floors, and lined with dramatic sculptures and artwork presented for the contemplation of visitors. Following the end of Bulgarian Communism, the decision was made to re-christen the Ruse Pantheon in 2001, with an Orthodox cross being welded to the top of its metal dome.



Plate 35: On 4 October 1990, a helicopter removes the communist red star from the top of the former Party House in Sofia. (Source: BNR, 2020)

On 24 November 2016, Bulgaria passed a ‘decommunisation’ law, similar to those already then in effect in other post-communist countries such as Ukraine, Lithuania and Poland (Morton, 2016). This new law outlawed the creation and public display of communist symbols. It specified that objects branded with communist symbols should be removed from public places, or in cases where that wasn’t practical (such as with larger buildings, sculptures, monuments, and so on), a notice should be added to provide context to the symbol, with text that clearly disavowed the former communist government as a ‘criminal regime.’ The only monuments excluded from the new law were war memorials, or memorial sites that contained the bodies of fallen soldiers. However, many of the other monuments and sites of communist heritage in Bulgaria have not subsequently been recognised with protected ‘monument’ status by the contemporary Bulgarian Ministry of Culture. In this way, by ruling their symbols illegal, and without criminalising the act of damage against them, many such structures have since succumbed to vandalism, graffiti, or even demolition, either by the state, by members of the public, or by private landowners.

This chapter will now examine four of the most significant recent discussions around the fate of communist heritage in Bulgaria.



Plate 36: The Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov, in Sofia, pictured in 1968.

Photographer unknown (source: Wikipedia, n.d.).

5.4.1 The Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov

One of the most symbolic events of decommunisation in Bulgaria was the demolition of the Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov. Dimitrov died during a trip to Moscow in 1949, after which his body travelled back to Bulgaria on a train draped in black shrouds, and for six days, while his remains made that journey, a final resting place was built for him in Sofia. As Moscow had the embalmed body of Lenin on display, so too would Sofia display its own ‘Father of Communism,’ and the embalming process was carried out by the same Soviet specialists who had previously worked on Lenin’s corpse (and would later work on Stalin, Ho Chi Minh, and Mao Tse-Tung) (Todorova, 2006). For the first few years the mausoleum was managed by Soviet specialists, until 1955, when their newly-trained Bulgarian counterparts took over (Stankova, 2010). The mausoleum was designed in a socialist classical style, fronted with pillars, and sat on the city’s Ninth of September Square, a new public space inside what was once the tsar’s private garden, and facing directly across from the former palace. As well as this placement symbolising the toppling of the former regime, the “intended effect was to create a Bulgarian version of Moscow’s Red Square,” and the mausoleum subsequently

became a focal point during important parades and ceremonies, with a platform on top from which the nation's leaders could wave to crowds (Kelleher, 2009).

Bulgaria was the first communist country outside of Russia to embalm its head of state in a public mausoleum. It is also the only country to have destroyed one. During the Changes, the mausoleum was vandalised and graffitied, it became a focal point for anti-communist protests, and on 18 July 1990 the government permitted Dimitrov's family to discreetly remove the former dictator's body during the night, so that he could later be laid to rest in Sofia Cemetery (Verdery, 1999: 130). During the 1990s, the building itself was cleaned and it served as a venue for numerous outdoor performances and operas. In a poll, two-thirds of the population of Sofia favoured keeping the now-vacant mausoleum, and turning it into a venue for the arts. In 1997 however, the anti-communist UDF (Union of Democratic Forces) party came to power under Prime Minister Ivan Kostov, and began a renewed effort to cleanse Bulgaria of its communist relics. The UDF hastened the dismantling of former state industry, including the large-scale steel works at Kremikovtsi, outside Sofia. Kostov was committed to repositioning Bulgaria as a Western state, for example cooperating with NATO in Kosovo in 1998; he is sometimes credited as "the mastermind behind the country's transition to democracy," and it is widely accepted that his economic reforms and globalist foreign policy paved the way for Bulgaria to join NATO (in 2004) and the EU (in 2007); though under his leadership Bulgaria's relations with Russia notably declined. This government was also plagued with charges of corruption, and it was reported that Kostov "gifted factories and plants valued at a combined 30 billion BGN [£12.8 billion] to hand-picked oligarchs. As a result of that scheme only 2 billion BGN [£854 million] entered the coffers under those deals" (Europost, 2020). On 21 August 1999, the UDF government ordered the destruction of Dimitrov's mausoleum, which Kostov had previously branded a "symbol of totalitarianism." The building was remarkably resilient however, and it took as long to destroy as it had to build. "For six days it looked as if Bulgaria's socialists would have the last laugh," the BBC reported, after the building, which had been designed to withstand a nuclear attack, survived three rounds of dynamite explosions, before eventually being toppled days later with the help of bulldozers (BBC, 1999). The same Communists who had been accused of demolishing churches had now had their own temple defiled by the incoming regime, thus fulfilling the cycle of *detritorialisation* and *reterritorialisation* (see Deleuze & Guattari, 1983).



Plate 37: Statue garden at the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia (own photo: 7 August 2014).

5.4.2 *The Museum of Socialist Art*

For several decades after the Changes, Bulgaria struggled to reckon with its past and the state was noted for providing no official channels or institution to address the history, heritage or memory of the socialist period (Vukov, 2008); an effect sometimes described as an “institutionalised amnesia in post-communist Bulgaria” (Vukov, 2012). (As a personal note, I remember visiting Bulgarian museums in the mid 2000s and seeing exhibits labelled ‘1878-1944’ and then ‘1989-present’ – leaving a mysterious gap of 45 years unaccounted for, as if the country had simply ceased to exist during that time.) However, in 2010, noting the existence of other such museum of socialist art in foreign countries (such as in Czechia and Hungary – see Chapter 4), Bulgaria’s Ministry of Culture proposed the creation of a ‘Museum of Totalitarian Art’ in Sofia, where “representative examples of art produced during our recent past will be exhibited.” The location for the museum was to be a government building outside the historic city centre, formerly occupied by the traffic police, which was proposed as a good location as it was “not encumbered by another historical meaning, which will allow the impartial reception of the exhibition” (Guentcheva, 2012).

The new museum was opened to the public as the ‘Museum of Socialist Art’ on 19 September 2011. It was organised as a branch of the National Gallery of Art, and Bulgaria’s Minister of Culture, Vezhdi Rashidov, a sculptor himself, was responsible for initiating the project and also for much of the subsequent arrangement of exhibits around the site – which consisted of a statue garden measuring 7,500 square metres accompanied by an indoor exhibit hall of 550 square metres (Guentcheva, 2012). Many of the exhibits for the museum were collected from various other cities around the country, where they had already been moved from plinths to warehouses. It was believed by Rashidov and others that the museum would become a popular tourist attraction, that was “expected to ‘close a page in history,’ but also to be a profitable enterprise by hopefully paying off the price of €1.5 million [£1.25 million] for its creation within only two years of tickets’ sale” (Vukov, 2012). However, as Vukov also notes, the creation of the museum caused a certain degree of anxiety amongst the Bulgarian public, and raised questions about “the ‘resurrection’ of the former ideology and the ‘rehabilitation’ of the artistic production during communist rule” – he cites the vagueness of the project proposal and its lack of preliminary public discussion as causes for this. This lack of transparency and public involvement created the sense of a “top-down approach in interpreting the communist epoch,” which was being forced upon the capital now by people who themselves had close connections to the former regime (for example, Prime Minister Borisov, present at the museum’s opening ceremony, had in the 1990s served as a personal bodyguard to the former communist leader). Even the name of the museum caused consternation – the early title of ‘totalitarian art’ was dropped, as it was reasoned by museum directors that Bulgaria had known more than one period of totalitarianism in its history, though critics contested that the use of ‘socialist’ rather than ‘communist art’ represented a softening of terminology that implied a revisionist approach to the history (Vukov, 2012). The Bulgarian journalist Hristo Hristov subsequently added the word ‘totalitarian’ in brackets after every instance of mentioning the official name of the museum, arguing that this terminology was “the historically true notion defining the communist era – a practice adopted both by the European Parliament and the Bulgarian National Assembly” (cited in Guentcheva, 2012). Noting that the Bulgarian Council of Ministers had approved the title ‘Museum of Totalitarian Art,’ and that the change to ‘Museum of Socialist Art’ had been made independently by the museum itself, Minekov (2011) further frames the name change as a contravention of Bulgarian law.

The layout of exhibits in the museum is a haphazard and eclectic affair. Beyond the entrance gate (which is flanked between a bust of Che Guevarra and the same large red star that had previously decorated Sofia's Party House), statues of Lenin, Georgi Dimitrov, and Dimitur Blagoev are amongst the tallest objects in the garden, overlooking an assortment of smaller busts, figures, and semi-abstract works of art. Most (but not all) are labelled with a title, artist name and date (largely written in Bulgarian), though none of them are explained or put into context. Visitors are not provided with a guidebook, or an audio guide (as is available, for example, in nine different languages at Grūtas Park, a similarly conceived open air museum of communist statues in Lithuania), but rather are left to wander the garden and make their own guesses as to what the objects mean. The exhibition hall contains a similar lack of context – political, portrait, still life and landscape paintings from the period hang alongside busts of Stalin, Marx and Engels (and for a time these were accompanied by a temporary exhibition of contemporary photography that appeared, but was never explained, to be presenting an anti-communist statement). Inside the building selling tickets, a film reel plays on loop in a small room arranged as a cinema; it consists of black and white clips from documentaries and state propaganda films produced during the socialist period, but no contemporary counter narrative is offered to challenge or contextualise the messages on the screen. The souvenirs offered for sale range from academic works on the subject of Bulgarian socialist art, to fridge magnets and coffee cups with Stalin's face on them. From the perspective of a foreign visitor, it is extremely difficult to determine what message, if any, one is supposed to understand from the museum (and from my own years of taking tour groups there, I found that tourists typically left the place with lots of photos of striking monuments and sculpture, but no contextual understanding besides what I was able to explain to them myself).

Local reception to the museum has often been critical, with the exhibition being described as “disgraceful, lawlessness, absurdity, an example of ignorance, and even a joke”; a place where “marginal works with an overt political character stand side by side with valuable works which survived by chance and despite the pressure of the communist party.” The location and affiliation of the museum are also noted, being geographically removed from the city's tourist centre – or “hidden” – and existing legally as a non-registered entity under the power of the National Art Gallery so that it becomes “an instrument of manipulation, so that if and when the museum becomes threatening to the political power it could be easily and quickly shut down” (Guentcheva, 2012). As cited in Vukov (2012), the UDF – the political

party that previously oversaw the demolition of Dimitrov's Mausoleum – put out a statement that accused the museum of attempting to rewrite history and rehabilitate communist propaganda; it urged that the museum be re-conceptualised, to remind visitors of the criminal nature of the former regime, and to “honour the memory of the crushed human lives.” On the other hand, the BSP objected to the idea that all Bulgarian art from the period was being condemned to history, seemingly dismissing the notion that anything good, or worth keeping in the present, could have come from it. Nobody, either on the left or the right, seemed to feel that the museum had achieved its stated goal, and Guentcheva (2012) summarises from the various critiques the notion that “a museum of communism is still missing in Bulgaria,” and that the Museum of Socialist Art's real purpose was: “to postpone the foundation of an authentic museum of communism, by pushing this idea to the background.”

5.4.3 Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria

In 2017, another debate concerning Bulgaria's communist heritage reached its climax, with the state's removal of a prominent monument from the centre of Sofia. This monument actually stood in place of an older one – which had been dedicated to the 1st and 6th Infantry Regiments of the Sofia Division of the Bulgarian Army during the Balkan Wars and World War I (Vasileva & Kaleva, 2017). This older monument had consisted of three memorial walls around a central pedestrian plaza, built in a pillared, classical style and bearing the names of the fallen, with a stone lion, the symbol of Bulgaria, placed in the centre. However, during a World War II Allied bombing raid one of the walls was severely damaged, and the whole ensemble was removed, ostensibly for repairs; though more generally it should be noted that the Bulgarian Communist Party avoided commemorating the events of World War I, as Bulgaria and Russia had fought on opposite sides, and so to memorialise potential ‘Russian-killers’ as war heroes represented something of a *faux pas* in relation to maintaining the current Bulgarian-Soviet friendship. The site remained empty for some time, until the Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria was established in 1981, as part of the country's celebrations to mark the 1,300th anniversary of the recognition of the first Bulgarian state (in 681 CE). The new monument stood 32 metres tall, in the park in front of the National Palace of Culture (NDK), and the two structures were conceptualised as complimentary elements within a shared urban space (Vasileva & Kaleva, 2017). This monument was created by the architects Alexander Barov, Vladimir Romenski and Atanas Agura, and built from reinforced concrete clad in panels of bush-hammered granite. It consisted of three linked structural



Plate 38: The Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria in Sofia. Pictured in the 1980s (source: Pametnik 1300 Godini Bulgaria, n.d.) (left); and three decades later (own photo: 7 August 2014) (right).

elements, taking the form of abstract totems rising in a spiral composition. Each of the three upright sections featured a sculptural installation on its front side, created by the noted Bulgarian sculptor Valentin Starchev. The first (lowest) of these depicted Tsar Simeon, and the so-called ‘Golden Age’ of Bulgarian antiquity (893-927 CE); the central pillar was decorated with Starchev’s interpretation of the Catholic *pietà*, a fallen soldier being embraced by a shroud, and symbolising the struggle and sacrifice of recent history; the final, tallest column featured a sculpture of the ‘perfected man,’ the communist citizen of the future, staring nobly towards the horizon. At the very top of the arrangement the spiral twisted up into a pair of wings, representing eternity, while on the reverse of the monument, facing towards the Palace of Culture, appeared bronze lettering spelling out quotes from the nation’s poets and revolutionaries: ‘Time is within us and we are within time’ – Vasil Levski; ‘He who falls in the fight for freedom shall never die’ – Hristo Botev; ‘March Ahead, O Revived People’ – Stoyan Mihaylovski. According to sculptor Valentin Starchev, the monument symbolised “the evolution of the Bulgarian spirit” (cited in Trankova, 2017).

However, after the Changes the monument was left unmaintained, and it began to severely deteriorate in the 1990s. When the Pope was due to visit Sofia in 2002, Sofia City Council ordered that the monument be fenced off prior to the event. By 2009, the monument was declared a danger to the public, and the order was given to begin stripping its panels of granite cladding (Vasileva & Kaleva, 2017). For more than a decade the monument would stand in the city centre as a semi-clad skeleton, with elements of bare steel infrastructure and concrete panelling left exposed. According to Alyosha Kafedzhiskiy, a sculptor who worked on numerous significant monuments during the late socialist period, the decline of the Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria was due in part to its poor construction, the majority of funds and expertise at the time having been spent instead on the Palace of Culture behind it.

“They made it in a rush from metal and granite plates. After 25 to 30 years the plates started to fall off – the metal itself began to erode and the whole thing decayed. We ended up with that wreck of a monument you see today. It was very beautiful back in the day... although the people never liked it” (Kafedzhiskiy, Appendix 2).

In 2012-2013 the Transformatori Association in Sofia held a public debate on the future of the monument, followed by a competition through its website that invited proposals for creative preservation plans. Submitted entries included ideas that ranged from hiding the monument inside a new ‘green hill,’ to turning this large, angular structure into a skate park or climbing wall (Transformatori, n.d.). However, the will to adapt or change the monument was not universal; Professor Pavel Popov of Sofia’s University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy had notably commented:

“Today, the [Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria] is a phenomenon precisely because a quarter-century after its creation, it more accurately represents what Bulgaria is – arrogant, illogical, smug, talkative, chaotic, confused, a self-destructive structure. [...] I have always thought that the monument should be removed without much fuss, or be drastically remade. Today, however, I think that after taking the necessary precautions, the monument should be left as it is, without any interference... until Bulgaria has changed enough to deserve another monument” (Popov, 2008).

For many years Sofia City Council had discussed demolishing the monument, though it wasn’t until December 2014 that the council voted to reinstate the earlier war memorial, while dismantling and relocating the current Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria (Vasileva & Kaleva, 2017). Numerous further protests and public forums were held over the following years, and on 3 July 2017, when bulldozers were sent to the site to begin work, an organised demonstration was launched in response, with the creation of a new website (at

<http://www.save1300.com>) which featured archive photographs of the monument, details about its creation and use, and arguments in favour of its preservation or adaptation. A statement from Martin Angelov and Delcho Delchev, two of the architects responsible for the protest website, explained how the monument represented an important part of Sofia's urban history and artistic heritage, and stressed that the monument did not need to be viewed as politically problematic and that it didn't contravene the country's new decommunisation laws, as it was "lacking in fact any communist symbols." A Facebook group was established for the protest movement too, presenting itself as a forum "for sharing information, ideas and opinions about the future of the Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria," in the hope that it might help to "formulate a proposal to present to the public, based on a multi-layered analysis, competent opinion, professional assessment, historical, ideological and civic commentary" (Pametnik 1300 Godini Bulgaria, n.d.). The group gathered several thousand members and also facilitated the organisation of on-site protests as the demolition work began. While these protests were mostly peaceful, on the night of 8 July, one of the cranes being used for demolition was destroyed by a fire inside its cab, causing almost one million leva (£427,000) in damage, and reportedly was the result of vandalism by one of the protestors (Novinite, 2017a). Nevertheless, the plan went ahead and the Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria was demolished. The place where it had stood was filled in, landscaped, but then instead of re-installing the original World War I memorial in full, the council instead placed only a simple stone lion atop a plinth on the new lawn. Meanwhile, the metal sculptural elements that previously appeared on the front of the monument were taken away to a scrapyard outside Sofia. According to Kamen Starchev, the sculptor's son:

"There is no plan for housing the monument anywhere. Nobody has put forth any plans. Public opinions have voiced having it to go to the Museum of Socialist Art, but this is not an official suggestion – just people talking as they tend to. The idea for moving them to the Museum is nonsense. Those figures are massive and can't just be placed on the grass. A new structure would have to be created, and the space at that museum is incredibly limited. Currently, and for the foreseeable future, the monument will remain in the yard of the factory outside of Sofia. The Sofia City Museum is solely owned by the Municipality of Sofia, whereas the Museum of Socialist Art is owned by [the State]. Neither have put forth any bids" (K. Starchev, cited in S. Spassov, personal communication, 4 December 2021).

The website which had previously campaigned for the monument's protection was updated after the monument's removal, to display instead the simple message 'They Destroyed It,'

accompanied by the photographs, names, personal addresses and phone numbers of both the mayor of Sofia and the head of the Ministry of Culture.



Plate 39: A protest against the demolition of the Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria. July 2017.

Photo: Stanislav Belovski. (Source: Pametnik 1300 Godini Bulgaria, n.d.)

5.4.4 Monument to the Soviet Army

The last significant communist monument still standing in Sofia's city centre is the Monument to the Soviet Army, completed in 1954 in recognition of the Red Army's victory over fascism in Bulgaria. Today it occupies a park, adjacent to a more recently installed skate park, and protest groups have long called for either its demolition or removal. In June 2011, it was painted by unknown artists to reimagine its socialist-realist sculptural ensembles as American comic book characters and cultural icons (see Plate 40). The Red Army soldiers were transformed into Superman, Captain America, the Joker, Santa Claus, and Ronald Macdonald waving the 'Stars and Stripes' flag. Beneath, the artists scrawled the expression: 'V krak s vremeto' (literally *in pace with the times*, an expression meaning *up to date*) (Lazarova, 2011). An initiative to have the monument dismantled was registered in 2010, though nothing came of it. More recently, in March 2020, the political alliance group Democratic Bulgaria sent a joint letter to the Sofia Municipal Council urging that the monument be taken down and removed to the Museum of Socialist Art. They estimated a total

cost for this work at no more than 200,000 BGN [£85,000], and reasoned that the monument did not have the legal status of ‘immovable cultural property,’ and nor did it qualify for protection as a ‘war memorial,’ as it neither contained human remains nor marked the site of a specific conflict. Rather, Marta Georgieva, a municipal councillor with the group, called the monument a “symbol of violence and threat in downtown Sofia” (Karadzhov, 2021). However, another group – the National Initiative Committee for the Protection of Monuments and National Memory – issued a statement in response, saying:

“We will not allow monuments to be destroyed, shrines to be renamed, our memory to be erased, our history to be replaced. This has been going on for 30 years and nothing good has come of it. If we don’t stop the hysteria, books and people will burn tomorrow” (Nikolov, 2021).



Plate 40: Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia (own photo: 8 August 2014) (left); photographed with political graffiti, Dimitar Dilkoff /AFP/Getty Images, (from top to bottom) 23 February 2014, 21 August 2013, 17 June 2011, 15 March 2012 (source: Panagopoulos, 2021a) (right).

Today, the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia remains where it is – though it is poorly maintained, and frequently still the target of (political) graffiti. Based on the fate of other similar sites of communist heritage, and given its highly visible location in the centre of the capital, and the increasing prominence of groups and organisations calling for its removal,

there is a reasonably high chance that before long, this monument will also be facing the bulldozers.

5.5 The Current Status of Bulgaria's Communist Heritage

Today, thousands of monuments created during the communist period still stand across Bulgaria, though they currently face a range of different challenges, often as a result of the particular themes they represent. Communist-era monuments dedicated to ancient Bulgarian khans, or to 19th century national poets and revolutionaries, in many cases still receive local (if not state-level) protection; whereas monuments from the same years, and often by the same authors, but symbolising themes of communist triumph or World War II-era anti-fascist struggles, are very often now left to fall apart (see Appendix 2). Beginning in the early 1990s, some of the latter category of monuments became victims of vandalism, being defaced or dismantled by public actions, in response to which the state took no official position. The majority have remained more or less intact however, “episodically turning into points of debate about their preservation and meaning” (Vukov, 2012). According to Vasileva and Kaleva (2017) these surviving monuments “have infinite potential for dividing people, not only on political, but also on [aesthetic] or emotional bases,” and their varying degrees of appreciation by the public “reflects different post-totalitarian processes in Bulgarian post-socialist society.” Nevertheless, they reason, such places maintain “social importance as the keepers of dissonant public memory,” and moreover these “politically burdened, traumatic and dissonant material traces bear particular importance and should be preserved as the keepers of public memory.” In making sense of this ‘public memory,’ Guentcheva (2020) posits “the Bulgarian public still hesitates between a ‘totalitarian approach’ to communism and an ‘everyday-life-objects approach’ to it.” The latter approach is often evidenced by the recorded conversations presented in Appendix 2, where local people tended to report little knowledge even of the monuments in their own towns, or what they represented. Therefore, the solution to conflict, often, seems to be to simply avoid conversations through the practice of “institutionalised amnesia” (Vukov, 2012), with Panagopoulos (2021a) noting: “there’s a somewhat established choreography of challenge and reprieve between the state and its disaffected, with everyone tiptoeing around the post-socialist political minefield while avoiding direct confrontation.”

In the last decade, three notable works have been published in Bulgaria on the subject of the country's socialist heritage sites. The first of these was *Witnesses of Stone* (Vukov & Ponchiroli, 2011), a catalogue-like volume featuring more than 300 memorial locations. Featuring text by Nikolai Vukov, one of Bulgaria's leading academics on the subject, the book takes a highly objective approach to its subject matter, explaining the context and significance of various heritage sites, along with providing suggested routes and itineraries for visiting them, written in the practical style of a travel guide. (A longer, as-yet unpublished version of the work also exists, with locations numbering into the thousands.)

This was followed the next year by *Forget Your Past* (Mihov, 2012), a black-and-white photography book (also discussed by Kulić, in Chapter 4), featuring artfully framed representations of a few dozen of the more significant communist memorial sites around the country, accompanied by some basic details about their creators, dates, and symbolism. Perhaps largely due to its artistic visual appeal (and despite providing far less information than *Witnesses of Stone*), *Forget Your Past* became an influential release on the subject and Mihov's photographs would be widely shared online in the years that followed.

A more recent treatment of the subject was found in *A Guide to Communist Bulgaria* (Trankova & Georgieff, 2020), appearing first as three separate volumes which were widely advertised domestically on their release (with promotional displays appearing in the windows of many Bulgarian bookshops), and then later republished as a single volume. *A Guide to Communist Bulgaria* presents itself as an unbiased and academic review of the "architectural, artistic and material heritage of the People's Republic of Bulgaria put in context"; which, it claims, rather than offering judgement on its subject matter, "focuses only on the locations of the monuments to 'our brothers' that not even the most self-declared anti-Communist governments during the past 30 years dared to toss on the dustbin of history." The Bulgarian authors present Bulgaria as being an unusual case, even in the post-communist world, as although other post-communist countries also have their own leftover monuments from the past, "Bulgaria has [...] many of them – many more than elsewhere in the former East bloc. [...] Bulgaria is the only former Communist country outside of the former Soviet Union that has at least a dozen still standing monuments of... foreign troops." This, they reason, combined with "the uneasy transition to democracy, additionally compounded by pro-Communist propaganda during the past few years," has led to a situation where "many Bulgarians seem as if they have lost their sense of identity." In the process of rediscovering

that identity however, the book proves to be rather more polemic than its back-cover blurb suggests. It uses emotive and politicised language throughout as it critically addresses “the make-believe of Communism” and “the material heritage of Communism that now evokes surprise if not laughter.” According to the book, what it identifies as “totalitarian architecture” made use of “inhumanly monumental” spaces, to imply “the ultimate victory of the ‘New Order,’” at a time when “Bulgarians needed to be given a clear indication that they now lived in a world according to Stalin where any opposition was meaningless.” The subsequent Modernist architecture of “Mature Socialism” is described as having created a “depressing urban environment” of which many buildings “still stand, like ugly leftovers.” Later, the authors matter-of-factly state that “kids who grew up in Communist Bulgaria between 1979 and 1989 had few things to get excited about.” Volume 2, on monuments, opens by describing its subject matter as a “parade of misery.”

It is worth noting that despite presenting many facts and figures about the period in question, the authors provide no sources for any of this information – and in some cases the information provided seems to in fact contradict some of the established, and evidenced, literature on the subject. The photographs included in the book do at least seem to support the ‘misery’ hypothesis, however. The three volumes are illustrated with sensationalised photographs of monuments, ruins, factories, communist-era typography and street signs, typically shot from dramatic or awkward angles, focussing particularly on evidence of decay, graffiti or other vandalism, and usually created in stormy, bleak or overcast weather conditions. Colour dilation around darker objects in some of the photographs points to the use of post-processing software to boost contrast levels, and thereby enhance the visual ‘grittiness.’ *A Guide to Communist Bulgaria* seems to be designed specifically to capitalise on the growing demand for visual representations of communist-era architecture and design (as identified in Chapter 4), while at the same time, presenting a subjective, unevidenced and overwhelmingly negative appraisal of communist society, politics, art and architecture.

Whereas the position of the Bulgarian state in relation to the country’s socialist heritage has usually been characterised by passive avoidance, as typified by the conversation around the Museum of Socialist Art – what Vukov (2012) describes as ‘institutionalised amnesia’ – *A Guide to Communist Bulgaria* takes a far more active and prescriptive stance, aligning with the values and definitions that Nikolova (2020) identifies as belonging to the political ‘Right.’ It is interesting then to note that the book was published with support from a foreign

organisation. Both *A Guide to Communist Bulgaria*, and also *Vagabond Magazine*, an English-language blog created by the same authors and which regularly shares similarly negative perspectives on communist architecture and design in Bulgaria, benefit from “the generous support of the America for Bulgaria Foundation” (Vagabond, n.d.). This foundation, according to its website, traces its own mission back to 1989, when “the US Congress passed the Support for East European Democracy (SEED) Act,” amongst the stated goals of which was “to promote democracy and the transition to free markets in former communist countries” (ABF, n.d.). However, this is not the only Western-backed organisation in Bulgaria that today promotes the negative appraisal of Bulgaria’s communist heritage, with some other groups going further, to actively campaign for the removal of monuments. One example is the Atlantic Council of Bulgaria – an NGO established in 1991, as a pro-NATO political lobby group, and run by a board of directors spread across Bulgaria, Europe and North America (Clyatt, 1993). In 2020 the Atlantic Council of Bulgaria produced a map of “Soviet monuments” still standing in Bulgaria, which it described as “symbols of occupation,” and “monuments of shame and national humiliation,” which “we continue to endure for more than 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall” (cited in Gelovska, 2020). Meanwhile, the group calls instead for an “enhanced military presence of NATO in the Black Sea Region” (ACB, n.d.), suggesting that their negative appraisals of “Soviet monuments” above are not purely about the intervention of foreign armed forces, so much as they reflect a specific frame of political allegiance.

However, the BSP is one of a number of groups who have made strong statements in favour of preserving Bulgaria’s communist heritage sites. Krum Donchev, the party’s candidate for MEP, in 2019 stated: “Good or bad, we must keep our history, because this is our lesson for the future! [...] We will work for a common, social and economic European Union, but with the preservation of the historical identity of each of the countries” (cited in BSP, 2019).

5.6 The Bulgarian Brand

In 1966, the Bulgarian Tourist Union (BTU) established a list of the country’s 100 most important sites of natural, historic and cultural significance. Designed as part of a movement to promote domestic tourism, Bulgarian citizens were able to purchase a booklet and map of the ‘100 Tourist Sites of Bulgaria’ at any BTU centre, and at each site they visited they received a stamp in their booklet. Prizes were awarded for filling up the book – a bronze

badge for 25 stamps, silver for 50, or gold for a full book of 100 stamps – and each year, badge-earners would be entered into a lottery for a chance of winning foreign and domestic holidays, as well as bicycles or camping and travel gear. When the programme began, the ‘100 Tourist Sites of Bulgaria’ included numerous sites with connections to socialist history in general, or to the Bulgarian Communist Party in particular. After 1989 however, the BTU removed many such places from the list, including: sites of industry (the Burgas Petrochemical Plant, and the Kremikovtzi Metallurgic Plant); the homes of important communist politicians (the houses of Georgi Dimitrov in Kovachevtzi, of Dimitur Blagoev in Sofia, and of Vasil Kolarov in Shumen); as well as monuments and museums, including the Museum of the Bulgarian-Soviet Friendship in Sofia, the monument in the Beklemeto Pass, the memorial ensemble on Buzludzha Peak, and the memorial to the massacred villagers at Yastrebino (BTS, n.d.; I love Bulgaria: n.d.). Currently, only three notable communist architectural heritage sites remain on the ‘100 Tourist Sites of Bulgaria’ list, and all three of them share the characteristics that they memorialise pre-communist historical events and do not feature communist symbols in their design: the Monument to the Founders of the Bulgarian State at Shumen, the Pleven Panorama, and the Monument to the Defenders of Stara Zagora.

The updating of Bulgaria’s top tourism list represented part of a nationwide rebranding campaign, as the country pivoted towards international tourism in the post-communist period. This new Bulgarian ‘brand’ was focussed on celebrating and advertising what were perceived as being Bulgaria’s best qualities by contemporary standards. This included promoting Bulgaria as one of Europe’s oldest countries, with one of the world’s oldest continuously inhabited cities: Plovdiv, first settled in the 6th millennium BCE (Angelova, 2018). Bulgaria claims to be the origin of the Cyrillic alphabet (though this is contested by other countries, such as Greece), and has sometimes been described as the ‘birthplace of Slavic culture.’ Bulgaria also boasts seven UNESCO sites, and the oldest golden treasure found anywhere in the world. Bulgarian folk music is world famous, partly owing to the international success in 1975 of *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares* (*The Mystery of Bulgarian Voices*), an album recorded and released by Swiss ethnomusicologist Marcel Cellier. The album became highly influential, the choir toured the world, and one of their songs was played at David Bowie’s wedding ceremony (Denselow, 2019). An example of Bulgarian folk song was also contained in the time capsule onboard NASA’s Voyager-1 in 1977 (Novinite, 2017b). Bulgaria prides itself as a destination for beaches and skiing. It is proud of its yoghurt, with the *Lactobacillus*

Bulgaricus bacteria used in creating the local product found nowhere else in the world.

Bulgaria is also a major exporter of roses and rose products, with an annual rose festival held in the Valley of the Roses near Kazanluk, at the southern base of the Balkan range.

The qualities above were all perceived as defining a version of post-communist Bulgaria that the country was keen to present to the world. However, abroad, Bulgaria doesn't always achieve the associations it desires. Bulgaria is a parliamentary democracy, but is seen as a place where pro-EU sentiment on the one hand is pitted against lingering Russian influence in the country on the other (Daraktchiev, 2009). As discussed in Section 5.3 above, international perceptions of Bulgaria, informed by studies, reports and polls, have often identified it in terms such as “the most unhappy country in the EU” (Harris, 2015); “Europe’s most corrupt country” (Kuebler, 2016); “the most dissatisfied with democracy and nostalgic for Communism of all the former Warsaw Pact members” (Brunwasser, 2009); and as having the fastest shrinking population in the world (Mohdin, 2018). In 2018, the Bulgarian journalist Viktoria Marinova was raped and murdered in the city of Ruse, while investigating government-level corruption surrounding the misappropriation of incoming EU funds; Asen Yordanov, another Bulgarian investigative journalist, commented: “Viktoria’s death, the brutal manner in which she was killed, is an execution. It was meant to serve as an example, something like a warning” (cited in *The Guardian*, 2018). As a tourism destination, Bulgaria has become popularised for its combination of beaches and cheap alcohol – and Western documentaries such as *What Happens in Sunny Beach* explore the drunken, debauched behaviour of foreign tourists at Bulgarian Black Sea resorts (Risk, 2014). In 2014, one such holiday ended in a police investigation after German tourist Lars Mittank went missing under strange circumstances in Varna, and became the subject of international intrigue and much online speculation, as a result of which he was later dubbed the “most famous missing person on YouTube” (Taylor, 2018).

For such a small country, ‘Bulgaria’ is mentioned disproportionately often in Western media. Though portrayals of Bulgaria in the West, particularly in films and television, have not always been kind. In the action-comedy film *Spy* (Feig, 2015), the antagonist Rayna Boyanov (played by Rose Byrne) reminisces of her home country:

“When I was a little girl growing up in Bulgaria – which is the worst by the way, poor people everywhere and cabbage is constantly cooking – there was this woman who was kicked out of her house. She lost all her money and couldn’t even sell her body,

so she became a clown on the streets. She would perform all her tricks standing in mud and would just cry, cry.” (Feig, 2015)

The Bulgarian language is used in *The Terminal* (Spielberg, 2004), where Tom Hanks plays a national of an unspecified ‘Eastern European’ country, who becomes stuck for a prolonged period of time in an airport; the language the actor speaks throughout is Bulgarian. In *T2 Trainspotting* (Boyle, 2017), the Bulgarian language is used as untranslated, unintelligible speech; and also, in the comedy *Borat Subsequent Moviefilm* (Woliner, 2020), where the language spoken throughout by Bulgarian actress Maria Bakalova, though stated in the script to be Kazakh, is actually Bulgarian. In the American horror *I Spit on Your Grave 2* (Monroe, 2013), Bulgaria is a place of terror: the young, female American protagonist breaks down in tears to discover she has been kidnapped by a Bulgarian gang, and then woken up in Sofia. Bulgarian villains have long made for popular fictional antagonists (in addition to those above, see also *Game Night* (Daley & Goldstein, 2018) – where the American characters’ antagonist is simply named ‘the Bulgarian’). Conversely, sometimes, the country’s name is used for comedic value, implying that audiences already have their own associations with this word that make it amusing (See Plates 36 and 37).



Plate 41: ‘Bulgaria’ as a punchline, in the television series *Twin Peaks* (source: Frost & Lynch, 1990).



Plate 42: ‘Bulgaria’ as a punchline, in the television series *Red Dwarf*
(source: Grant, Naylor, and de Emmony, 1993).

This phenomenon of thriller/horror stories on the one hand, and comedy stories on the other, both making use of the name ‘Bulgaria’ to build on assumed audience preconceptions, perhaps speaks to something like the dualistic paradigm of *slavophilia* and *slavophobia*, as previously discussed in Section 4.3.

However, Bulgaria’s relationship with mainstream cinema has begun to change somewhat in recent years, particularly due to the output of the Bulgaria-based Nu Boyana Film Studios. Built in 1962 and formerly belonging to the Bulgarian Communist Party, by whom it was used as a place to create as many as 25 feature films a year for domestic release, the 75-acre studio and set complex near Sofia was bought in 2006 by the Israeli-American film producer and financier Avi Lerner, who is also the founder and CEO of US-based Millennium Media (Alzayat, 2011). Among the country’s selling points, Nu Boyana cites Bulgaria’s “rich and varied natural scenery,” and its “huge range of architectural styles and historic sites,” as well as “a fixed 10% flat rate tax for personal and corporate income” (Nu Boyana, n.d.). Over the years, Nu Boyana Film Studios has provided Bulgarian locations and/or labour for a roster of international blockbuster films that includes: *Conan the Barbarian*, the *Expendables* series, *300: Rise of an Empire*, *London Has Fallen*, *Loving Pablo*, and *The Outpost* (Nu Boyana,

n.d.). However, a more recent project from the studio demonstrated what might be described as a problematic approach to the treatment of the country's antifascist heritage. From September to December 2017, Nu Boyana Film Studios worked on *Hellboy* (Marshall, 2019), during a key scene in which a group of Nazis attempt to open a portal to another dimension using an 'ancient occult ritual.' This takes place – in the story – on a remote Scottish island, in what appears to be a purpose-built ritual chamber, a concrete theatre open to the sky above. Swastika flags and banners hang from the crossbeams, as black-clad Nazi officers in SS uniforms watch the experiment. In reality though, the scene was filmed inside the Fraternal Barrow Memorial Complex in Plovdiv, a memorial mausoleum inaugurated by the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1974 (on the 30th anniversary of the victory over fascism in Bulgaria), to commemorate fallen antifascist fighters. Set into the walls that surround the actors and props therefore, behind the swastika flags installed for the benefit of the film shoot, are ceremonial urns the still contain the remains of real, dead antifascists and the historic victims of Nazi aggression. Meanwhile, the same year this film presented its symbolic Nazification of an antifascist heritage site in international cinemas, a far-right political march was held in Sofia, gathering “[hundreds] of neo-Nazis from across Europe” to honour General Hristo Lukov, the leader of the pro-Nazi Union of Bulgarian National Legions, who “helped send over 13,000 Jews to Treblinka” (Harris, 2019). It is not a partisan opinion therefore, to suggest that Bulgaria perhaps ought to do more to remember, and honour, its antifascist heritage.

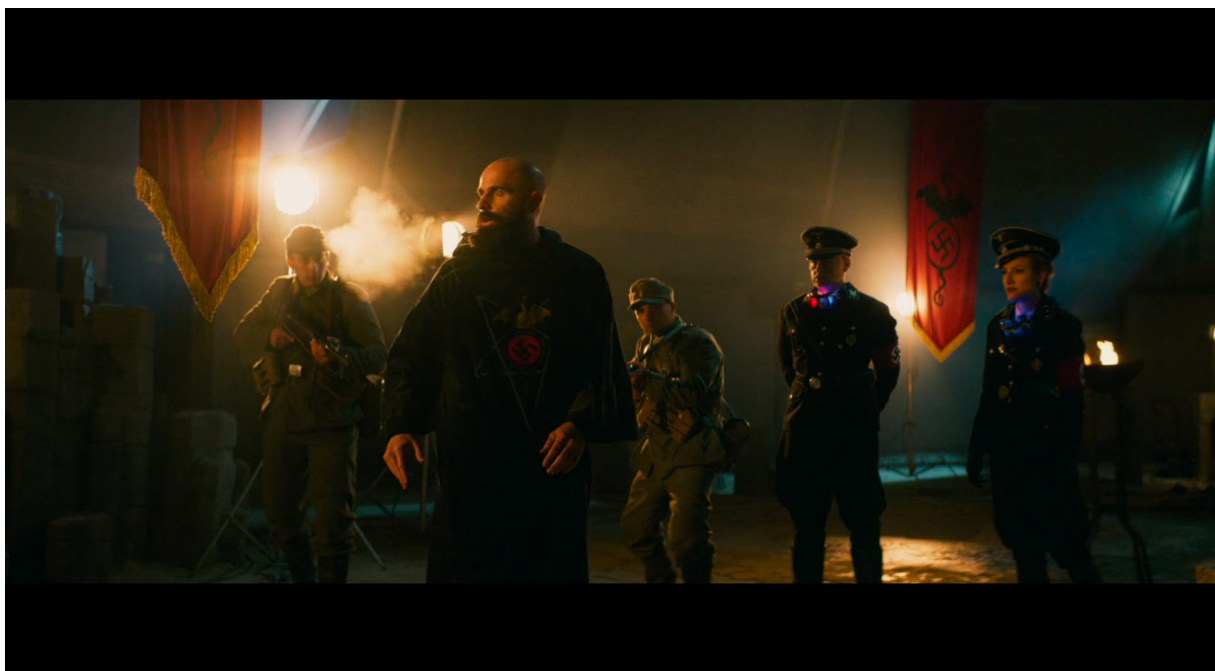


Plate 43: The Fraternal Barrow Memorial Complex, in Plovdiv, decorated with swastikas for the film *Hellboy*. (Source: Marshall, 2019)

A more recent example of this phenomenon occurred in Shumen, in 2021. The Monument to the Founders of the Bulgarian State was opened in 1981 as a cathedral-like space populated by towering statues of the nation's 7th century founder, Khan Asparuh, and early rulers. In one sculptural detail, symbols of Thracian and Greek culture (including the three Fates, and Orpheus with his lyre) are carved onto a flat stone which is about to be trampled beneath the hoof of Asparuh's horse. According to information provided onsite, this symbolises the conquering Bulgar armies arriving in Europe and planting their new empire on top of what came before: a 7th century Bulgarian de- and re-territorialization of the Balkan peninsula. In November 2021, the car manufacturer BMW presented a promotional video in which their new XXL SUV Concept XM is seen driving through the Bulgarian monument, and over the top of its marble plazas that were once reserved for near-sacred national events (Bulevard, 2021); an act that would have been considered sacrilegious during the communist era, but today, just further serves to illustrate how former sites of national identity-making in Bulgaria have increasingly been co-opted and reterritorialised by the agents of global capitalism. Though on social media, the Serbian researcher Srdjan Garcevic noted that such outcomes are made possible primarily by domestic decisions, and perhaps therefore could be read as suggesting that such monuments themselves had ultimately failed: "As sad, infuriating and tacky as this is, it goes to show that the fatal flaw of those making these monuments is that they failed [to] produce believers and even those who would treat them (almost) like places of worship and protect their sanctity" (Garcevic, 2021).



Plate 44: Still from a BMW promotional video shot at the Monument to the Founders of the Bulgarian State, at Shumen (source: BMW M, 2021).

5.7 Communist Heritage Tourism in Bulgaria

Even without official recognition, promotion or support, numerous sites of communist heritage within Bulgaria have become popular destinations for both domestic and international tourists. Domestically, an increased interest in discussing this period, or in some cases a nostalgia for the period, can be seen in the appearances of popular photo sharing groups, such as the group ‘Memories of the Peoples’ Republic,’ on social media (Spomeni ot Narodnata Republika, n.d.). Venues and museums have begun more openly to refer to the period. ‘Raketa Rakia’ (<https://raketarakiabar.bg>) is a bar and restaurant established in Sofia in 2013, whose interior décor plays heavily with themes of *communist kitsch* – images of communist leaders hang on the walls and shelves are filled with the kind of mass-produced homewares that had appeared almost universally throughout homes in communist Bulgaria, including plastic telephones, tricycles, standard issue salt and pepper shakers, and so on. The word ‘Raketa’ in the title is Bulgarian for *Rocket*, and the restaurant takes as its logo the stylised rocket insignia used as a mascot for the 1980 Soviet Olympic Games. In Varna, the ‘Retro Museum’ (for example in Bennetts, 2017) opened in 2015, consisting largely of a collection of classic cars but with additional exhibits including police uniforms, mopeds, mass produced communist-era homewares, and so on. The unifying theme of the museum is Bulgaria’s communist period (it even opened on 1 May – ‘International Workers’ Day’), and yet the tourist experience, and marketing, for the most part shies away from the word ‘communism’ itself; instead, a sign reading ‘Retro Museum – 1946-1989,’ accompanied by a red star logo, becomes a euphemistic descriptor for a venue that elsewhere might simply be titled a ‘museum of communism.’

There are several companies based in Sofia that offer ‘communist tours’ around the capital, and sometimes, elsewhere in the country. Companies such as NVision Travel (<http://nvisiontravel.com>) and Iron Star Tours (<https://www.ironstar.bg>) cater to the growing communist heritage tourism industry with itineraries that include communist-era monuments, former Party buildings, factories, and other places where the physical heritage of the communist era can be seen. Gradually, however, through both the passage of time as well as the more targeted efforts of decommunisation actions, the landscape of Bulgaria is changing and there are ever fewer sites of communist heritage for such tourists to visit. Visitors may no longer see the Kremikovtzi factory site, outside Sofia, once promoted as one of the ‘100 tourist destinations of Bulgaria’ but finally demolished in the late 1990s (Section 5.6). The Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria has gone, and while visits to leaders’ mausoleums have

become a destination of interest for those pursuing communist heritage or dark tourism experiences (see for example the ‘Ultimate Leaders Tour,’ visiting such mausolea in North Korea, China, Vietnam and Russia – Young Pioneer Tours, 2020), Bulgaria, since the state’s demolition of the Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov in 1999, no longer has any such attraction to offer visitors. Bulgaria may possess great potential for communist heritage tourism (Ivanov, 2009), but due to Bulgaria’s fraught relationship with its complicated past this therefore involves tourism to difficult or dark attractions, and a kind of tourism that remains relatively unknown and unexplored (Mileva, 2018), while politically and culturally, it is “the one kind of tourism that Bulgaria has been stubbornly trying to ignore” (Nikolova, 2014). As one former communist heritage site after another is either co-opted or removed, thus ‘cleansing’ the urban landscapes of post-communist Bulgaria, Kelleher (2009) notes that the last great material trace of Bulgarian communism to remain today are its residential housing blocks, once indicative of mass urbanisation projects and rapid communist-era industrialisation, built for a utopian future which never quite arrived; and which today, albeit in poorer states of maintenance than intended, nevertheless continue to house a large portion of the nation’s population.

5.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of Bulgarian history from the country’s foundation in 681 CE, to the present day; with particular attention to the period of rule by the Bulgarian Communist Party between 1945 and 1991. The chapter discussed the ‘Changes’ that swept across Bulgaria during the early years of the post-communist era, and in particular, it looked at four significant conversations that have taken place in regard to specific sites or objects of communist heritage: the Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov, the Museum of Socialist Art, the Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria, and the Monument to the Soviet Army. Following this the chapter evaluated the state of remaining sites of communist heritage in the country, and introduced some of the varied perspectives on it held by Bulgarian people. Two key themes to emerge from this conversation, which will be returned to in future chapters, were: the fact that Bulgarian national identity has historically been built around the idea of fighting for independence from foreign empires; and how, since the Changes, Western (and particularly, American) cultural investment into Bulgaria has often revealed political dimensions, for example in lobbying on behalf of NATO in Bulgarian parliament, funding anti-communist

Bulgarian-language literature, and even proposing the removal of communist heritage sites (specifically, those defined as ‘Soviet monuments’) around the country.

The chapter then talked about Bulgaria as a brand, discussing the differences between how the country has represented itself internationally, post-communism, compared to how it is still often portrayed according to the Western media. Finally, the chapter highlighted the early development of a communist tourism heritage industry in the country, while noting how limited Bulgaria’s approach to this subject has been compared to that in other countries which have already more fully embraced the potential for this kind of tourism. The chapter therefore concludes by identifying a market, while noting some of the historical local reasons why that market has not yet been taken advantage of.

The following chapter will discuss the Buzludzha Memorial House – a site that has been intentionally omitted from this chapter, but which could be said to be Bulgaria’s most iconic work of communist ideological architecture; and as such, it both promises a significant potential for tourism, but simultaneously, fuels some the most heated debates the country has seen regarding the fate of its communist heritage.

Chapter Six

The Buzludzha Memorial House

“Let the pathways leading here – to the legendary Buzludzha Peak, here in the Stara Planina where the first Marxists came to continue the work of sacred and pure love that was started by Bulgaria’s socialist writers and philosophers – never fall into disrepair.”

Todor Zhivkov

6.0 Introduction

This chapter will provide a comprehensive introduction to the Buzludzha Memorial House in Bulgaria. Built in the 1970s, the monument was opened to the public as an ideological memorial house and political museum in 1981. It served in this form until the ‘Changes’ that began in 1989, after which Buzludzha was closed, and then in the mid-1990s the building was abandoned and left open to the elements. The chapter will chart the building’s history in detail, considering first the significant national history of the site, then the proposal and construction of the memorial house. It will provide a brief biography of the building’s architect, Georgi Stoilov; and provide some historical information about the monument’s years of use under the Bulgarian Communist Party. The chapter then considers the growing international interest in the site and subsequent waves of unofficial tourists who began travelling to Buzludzha particularly in the mid-2010s. The chapter will also consider Buzludzha’s appearances in media such as films and music videos, as it rose to prominence as one of the world’s most famous modern ruins; and the chapter then closes with a reflection on the current status of the monument, with note of its current heritage status in Bulgaria as well as the Bulgarian public’s feelings towards the site.

6.1 The History of Buzludzha Peak

The Buzludzha Memorial House commemorates a location with great significance in Bulgarian history; indeed, it has been said:

“There is no other peak, no alternative piece of the native land so intensely linked to the breakthrough times for the Bulgarian nation. Mount-sustainer of the Bulgarian spirit, preserving heroic grandeur and glory of the revolutionary traditions of the Bulgarian societies and the Bulgarian Communist Party. Here are found the three revolutionary eras, three generations of fighters for national and social liberation” (Noev, 1989).

The monument thus stands as a “symbol of three epochs,” symbolising the Bulgarian “struggle against Turkish oppression, the foundation of Bulgarian social democracy and the anti-fascist fight” (Stoilov, 2018: 28). It is, as Communist leader Todor Zhivkov once put it, the “eagle’s nest from where our party has begun its flight” (cited in Minkovska, 2015). These themes were tied to three events that occurred here on Buzludzha Peak, in 1868, 1891 and 1944 respectively, and which will be discussed in the following sections.

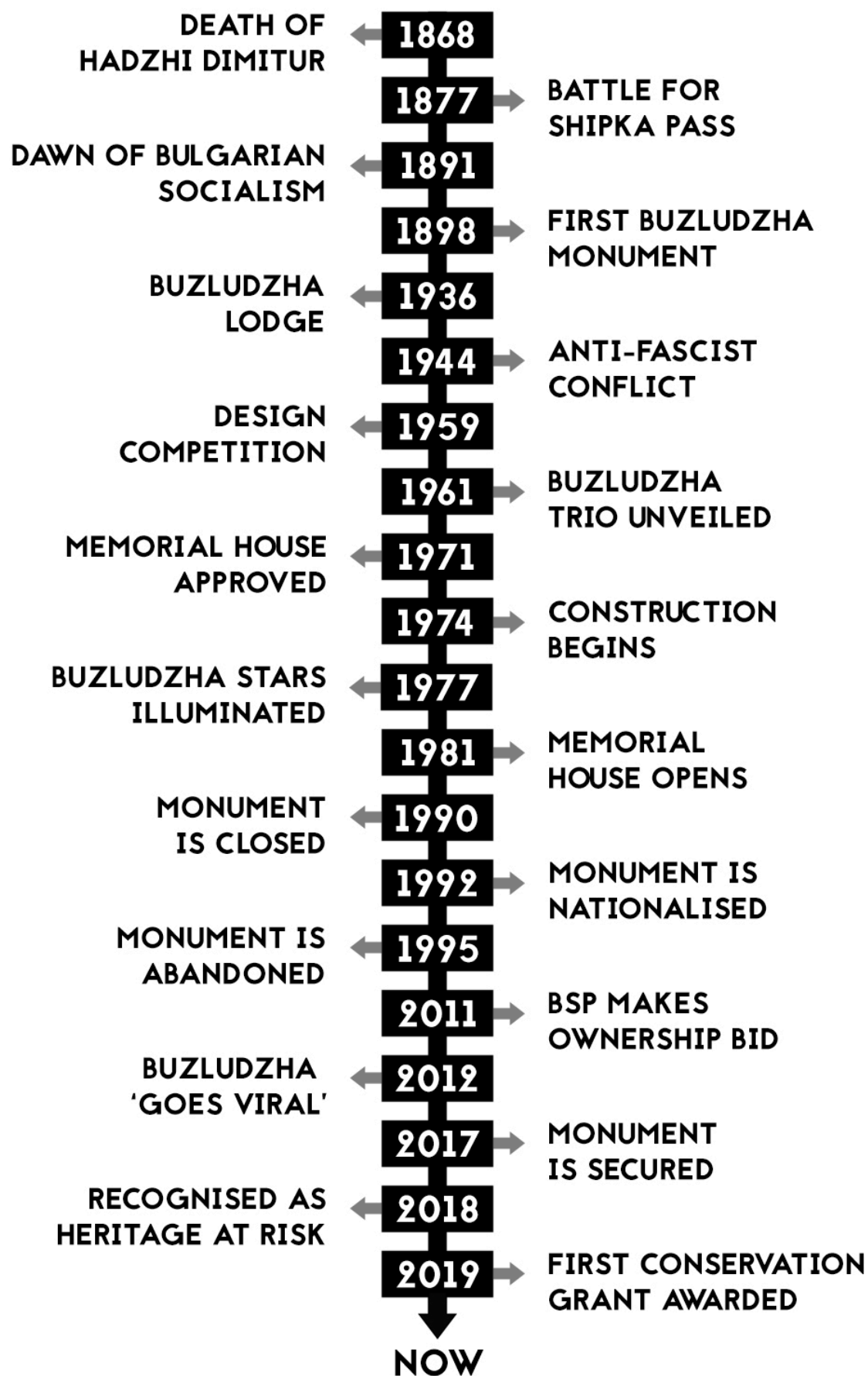


Figure 5: 150 years of history at Buzludzha Peak.



Plate 45: The Buzludzha Memorial House in a snowstorm (own photo: 12 December 2018).

6.1.1 The Death of Hadzhi Dimitur (1868)

Since 1396 Bulgaria had been incorporated into the Ottoman Empire, but during the second half of the 19th century a strong revolutionary movement was growing in the country. Two of Bulgaria's most famous revolutionaries, Hadzhi Dimitur and Stefan Karadzha, formed a rebel detachment in Romania in 1868, before crossing the Danube and launching a series of attacks on Ottoman strongholds in Bulgaria (Hristov, 1991). Their campaign enjoyed some early victories, until 9 July when Karadzha was injured in battle and taken prisoner by the Ottomans. Hadzhi Dimitur led the remaining rebels in one last battle, fought at Buzludzha Peak on 18 July 1868. By this point the detachment numbered just 58 men, and they were soon defeated by the much larger Ottoman force. Some were captured, others killed in battle, and Hadzhi Dimitur himself was fatally wounded. He was carried from the mountain on a stretcher, and later died from his injuries. Although Stefan Karadzha and Hadzhi Dimitur never lived to see it themselves, just a decade later the nation would gain its freedom: beginning with the 1876 April Uprising, leading into the arrival of the Russians and the 1877-78 Russo-Turkish War that would see Bulgarian independence restored (see Chapter 5). 'Buzludzha' Peak, derived from a word meaning *Icy* in Turkish, was in 1942 renamed

‘Hadzhi Dimitur’ Peak, and the location became synonymous with themes of liberty and self-sacrifice (Hristov, 1991).

6.1.2 The Battle for Shipka Pass (1877-1878)

One of the most decisive campaigns of Bulgaria’s 19th century war for independence was fought just 10 kilometres from Buzludzha, in the Shipka Pass. The Russian army was unable to advance into southern Bulgaria until it had defeated the Ottoman garrisons that guarded the mountain passes – and the most significant of these passes lay in the middle of the mountain range, at Shipka. On 17 July 1877, the Russian General Gourko led four divisions against the 4,000-5,000 Turks who made up the Shipka garrison under Suleiman Pasha. After two days of tactical assaults, Gourko’s forces seized Shipka Pass and the Ottomans retreated. Suleiman Pasha would lead two subsequent attempts that year to retake Shipka from the new garrison composed of Russian soldiers and Bulgarian volunteers. On 21 August, an army of 38,000 Ottomans were sent against the 7,500-man garrison, but were repulsed. According to stories, when the defenders ran out of ammunition, they hurled stones and the bodies of fallen comrades down on the advancing Ottomans. The next month, Suleiman Pasha returned – launching artillery shells at the Shipka garrison from 13-17 September, before attempting a frontal assault. Again, the Ottomans were repulsed by a strong Bulgarian and Russian defence. A fourth battle was fought in the Shipka Pass from 5-9 January 1878. After defeating the last pockets of resistance in northern Bulgaria, General Gourko was able to move west to Sofia and around to the south side of the mountains. The Ottoman army at Shipka were pinned between the garrison in the north, and Gourko’s approaching army to the south, cutting off all chance for retreat. The Ottoman force surrendered, and by 3 March 1878 the Russian coalition had won the war. In 1934 the Shipka Independence Monument was established to commemorate these events. Although the 1981 Buzludzha Memorial House was never explicitly dedicated to the battles in the Shipka Pass, it nevertheless built on a strong sense of Bulgarian nationalism already tied to this mountain location – both monuments were subsequently co-managed by the National Park-Museum Shipka-Buzludzha, and during the communist period would typically be visited together by tourists in the form of a day trip.



Plate 46: The Defence of 'The Eagle's Nest' in the Shipka Pass in 1877.
Painting by Andrei Nikolaievich Popov, 1893 (source: Buzludzha Monument, n.d.a).



Plate 47: The 1891 Buzludzha Congress. Painting by Kiril Buyukliyski and Peter Petrov, date unknown (source: Buzludzha Monument, n.d.a).

6.1.3 *The Dawn of Bulgarian Socialism (1891)*

The political philosopher Dimitur Blagoev was instrumental in shaping Bulgaria's socialist movement. He published the first Bulgarian-language translations of books such as Karl Marx's *Capital* and *The Communist Manifesto*, in addition to his own influential work, *What is Socialism and Does it Have Roots in Our Country?* Socialist groups had begun meeting in Bulgaria by 1886 – but they were frowned upon by the tsarist, post-Ottoman state and so they typically met in secret. Some of the key early factions existed in places such as Stara Zagora, Gabrovo, Sliven and Kazanluk, central Bulgarian towns that lay scattered north and south of the mountain range. In 1891, when Blagoev decided to unite these different factions into one Bulgarian socialist organisation, Buzludzha made a logical meeting place – a discrete and central location, already steeped in national significance. The annual celebration commemorating the sacrifice of Hadzhi Dimitur was used as cover for bringing together some of the nation's most prominent socialist groups. Bulgaria's first socialist congress – the ‘Buzludzha Congress,’ as the gathering would retrospectively be known – was held on 2 August 1891 at Buzludzha Peak, and it led to the official formation of the Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers’ Party (a precursor to the Bulgarian Communist Party), which accepted Marxism as its guiding ideology and thus marked the start of organised socialist action in Bulgaria (Blagoev, 1971).



Plate 48: Monument to Dimitur Blagoev (1981), on the road to Buzludzha Peak (own photo: 14 February 2015).

6.1.4 A First Buzludzha Monument (1898)

By the late 19th century many Bulgarians were already making the pilgrimage to Buzludzha Peak. In 1898, Bishop Kusevich of Stara Zagora proposed the creation of a monument at the site – an obelisk with a cross, a chapel, and memorial gardens commemorating the sacrifice of Hadzhi Dimitur's brigade. An 8-metre statue of Hadzhi Dimitur was planned too, overlooking the mountain. The reign of Tsar Ferdinand was beset by economic crises however, and the project was never completed.

6.1.5 The Buzludzha Lodge (1936)

The first memorial project on Buzludzha Peak to reach completion was a guest house, the 'Buzludzha Lodge,' that was opened in 1936. The building was created to accommodate the many visitors who by then were already travelling to Buzludzha Peak in order to pay their respects to Hadzhi Dimitur and his detachment. The completion of the Buzludzha Lodge was intended to facilitate educational tourism in the region.



Plate 49: The Buzludzha Lodge was the first building to open at Buzludzha Peak, on 2 August 1936. Photographer unknown (source: Buzludzha Monument, n.d.a).

6.1.6 *Anti-Fascist Conflict (1944)*

During World War II, Bulgaria joined the side of Nazi Germany, much to the protest of many of her citizens. A nationwide partisan resistance movement was organised, in which the Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers' Party – by then known as the Bulgarian Communist Party – took a significant leading role. On 25 January 1944, partisan detachments from the towns of Gabrovo and Sevlievo ambushed fascist forces engaged in training exercises on Buzludzha Peak. A fierce firefight ensued, during which three partisans lost their lives.

6.1.7 *A Design Competition (1959-1961)*

Following World War II, the new regime erected many monuments to celebrate the victory of Bulgarian socialism. In particular, Buzludzha Peak was considered a highly significant location, as the birthplace of the socialist movement in Bulgaria. On 29 January 1959, a competition was announced that would welcome design proposals for four new monuments celebrating the history of this mountain. On 2 July 1961 – 70 years after the foundation of Bulgaria's first socialist organisation – three of the four monuments were unveiled: a statue of Hadzhi Dimitur, an engraved relief of Dimitur Blagoev's 1981 Buzludzha Congress, and a monument dedicated to the Gabrovo and Sevlievo partisan forces who had battled fascists here during World War II. The fourth monument was intended to be larger and more impressive than the others – the specification was for a red star, placed at the top of the mountain peak. The competition bid was won by the young Bulgarian architect Georgi Stoilov; however, due to its scale and complexity his grand Buzludzha monument was delayed, and would not be presented in the 1961 opening ceremony.



Plate 50: Monument to Hadzhi Dimitur (left); monumental stone bas-relief of the Buzludzha Congress of 1981 (centre); Monument to the Fallen Partisans (right); all monuments 1961, photographs by Artin Azinyan, 1984 (source: Buzludzha Monument, n.d.a).



Plate 51: Georgi Stoilov, centre, pictured with partisan officers in 1944.

Photographer unknown (source: Buzludzha Monument (n.d.b)).

6.2 A Short Biography of the Architect Georgi Stoilov

Georgi Vladimirov Stoilov was born on 3 April 1929 in Kondofrey, Bulgaria – a village in Pernik province, located roughly 60 kilometres from Sofia. During World War II, Stoilov was one of Bulgaria's youngest anti-fascist partisans, serving with the Radomir Partisan Detachment at the age of 15. He joined the Labour Youth Union in 1944, becoming a full member of the Bulgarian Communist Party by 1949. In 1954, Stoilov went to study at the Moscow Architectural Institute and took a job the same year with the engineering firm Glavproekt. Later, in 1965, he would spend a year in Paris developing a specialisation in urban planning.

Stoilov's early projects included various state and leisure buildings throughout Bulgaria, such as Acacia Hotel at the Golden Sands resort, and Orbita Hotel in Sofia (both 1960), Rila Hotel in Sofia (1961), the BCP building in Pernik (1962), the International Hotel at Golden Sands (1963), and the Bulgarian Radio building in Sofia (1971). He designed the International

Youth Camp at Druzhba and the National Centre for Air Control at Sofia Airport. In addition to his work in Bulgaria, other projects by Georgi Stoilov include a residential complex in Dubna, Russia; Bulgarian embassy buildings for Kabul, Afghanistan and Havana, Cuba (both 1983); and a commercial project for Astana, Kazakhstan. The architect is also responsible for designing some of the most striking memorial complexes in Bulgaria. He created bold monuments to resistance fighters in the villages of Stoyanovo (1963) and Durankulak (1965), the Monument to the Dead in the Fatherland War at Dobrich (1964), and later, the Arch of Liberty in the Beklemeto Pass (1980) and the Pantheon to the Heroes in the Serbo-Bulgarian War, at Gurgulyat (1985) (Yuroukov, 1991). The Buzludzha Memorial House remains his most famous design, however.

Georgi Stoilov served as mayor of Sofia from 1967 until 1971, following which he was appointed Bulgaria's Minister of Architecture and Public Works, up until 1973. In 1979 Stoilov was appointed Chairman of the Union of Architects in Bulgaria and from 1985 until 1987 he served as Chairman of the International Union of Architects. In 1987 Stoilov co-founded the International Academy of Architecture, and he remains its president to this day.

Date	Honour
1984	Honorary Professor of Tbilisi Technical University, Georgia
1985	Visiting Professor of US New York University
1985	Honorary Professor of the National Polytechnic Institute in Mexico
1985	Academician of the French Academy of Architecture
1986	Honorary Member of the Union of USSR Architects
1986	Honorary Member of the American Institute of Architects
1986	Honorary Member of the Federation of Mexico Architects
1986	Honorary Member of the Union of Spanish Architects
1986	Honorary Professor of Buenos Aires University, Argentina
1987	Honorary Member of the Royal Institute of Canadian Architects
1987	Honorary Member of the Union of Architects of the former Czechoslovakia

1987	Academician of the International Academy of Architecture
2001	Honoris Causa Doctor of Moscow Institute of Architecture, Russia
2001	Academician of the Russian Academy of Architecture and Civil Engineering
2001	Academician of the Russian Academy of Arts
2002	Academician of the Ukraine Academy of Architecture
	President of the International Academy of Architecture

Table 9: Architect Georgi Stoilov's list of honours (adapted from Stoilov, 2018).



Plate 52: Georgi Stoilov at his office in Sofia (own photo: 23 May 2018).

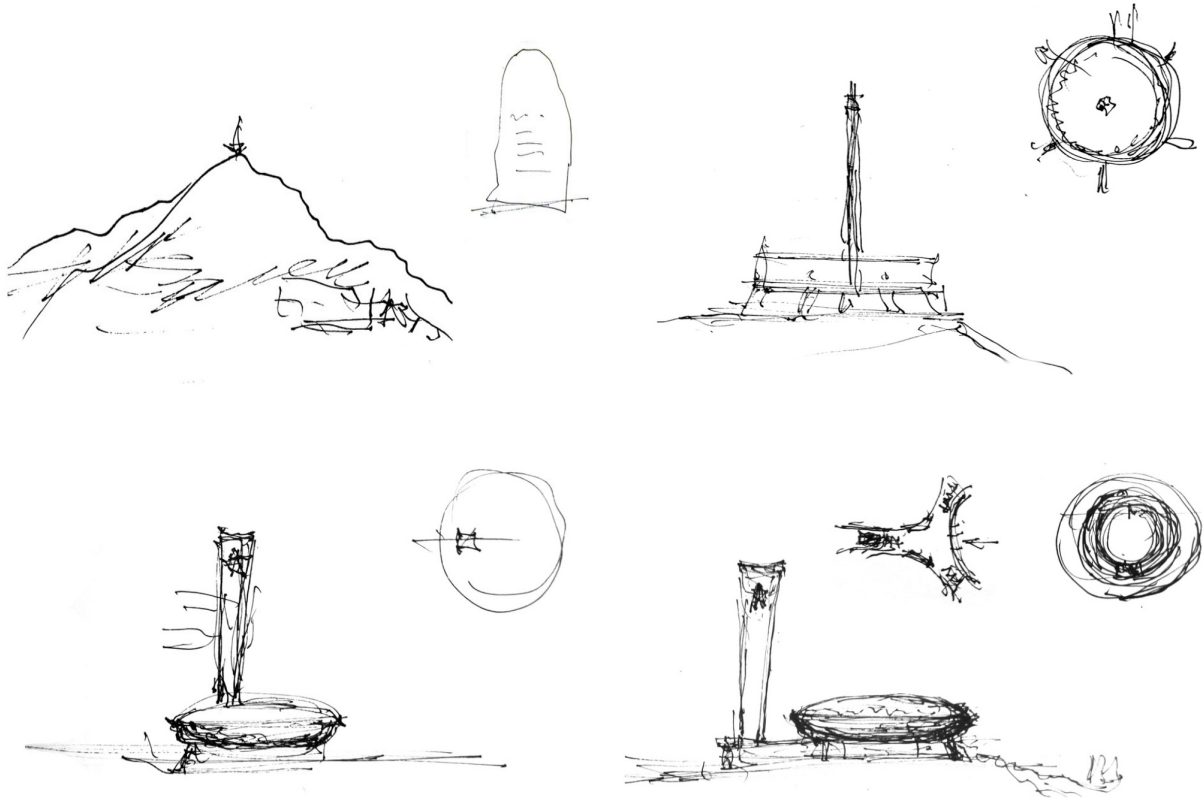


Plate 53: The initial assignment was for a red star on Buzludzha Peak (top left); Georgi Stoilov wins the contest with his design for a ring on six columns, around a tower bearing the red star (top right); Answering the need for an interior visitor space, Stoilov designs a spherical body in place of the ring (bottom left); The final design has the tower offset, to provide greater stability (bottom right). Sketches by Georgi Stoilov, 2014 (source: Stoilov's personal archive).

6.3 The Buzludzha Memorial House

6.3.1 *Memorial House Approved (1971)*

For the 1959 Buzludzha design contest, Georgi Stoilov had submitted a plan for a monument atop Buzludzha Peak, which would consist of a ring perched on six columns and with a tower at its centre bearing the star. His project wasn't used at the time however, and it was a decade later when Stoilov was contacted by the regional administration, asking him to revise his plans so that his design could finally be built (Stoilov, Appendix 3). Given the extreme winter conditions at the peak (with strong winds and temperatures often as low as -25 °C), the new specification was for a memorial house featuring heated interior spaces for hosting visitors and special events. Stoilov revised his designs to feature a saucer-shaped body, with the star mounted in a conjoined tower. Over subsequent revisions Stoilov decided to further separate

these elements, positioning the tower outside the saucer in order to give it better stability against the wind. The look of Georgi Stoilov's Buzludzha Memorial House was influenced by the Brutalist style then popular in Western Europe, and in particular the architect notes personal influences including Mies van der Rohe, Gropius and Le Corbusier (Appendix 3). Stoilov's idea was to create a monument that could become timeless, by incorporating both ancient and futuristic motifs into his design. He lists both the Roman Pantheon and the sci-fi films of the 1950s amongst his inspirations for Buzludzha, though more broadly, similar themes can be noted as a trend in other works of communist memorial art of the era.

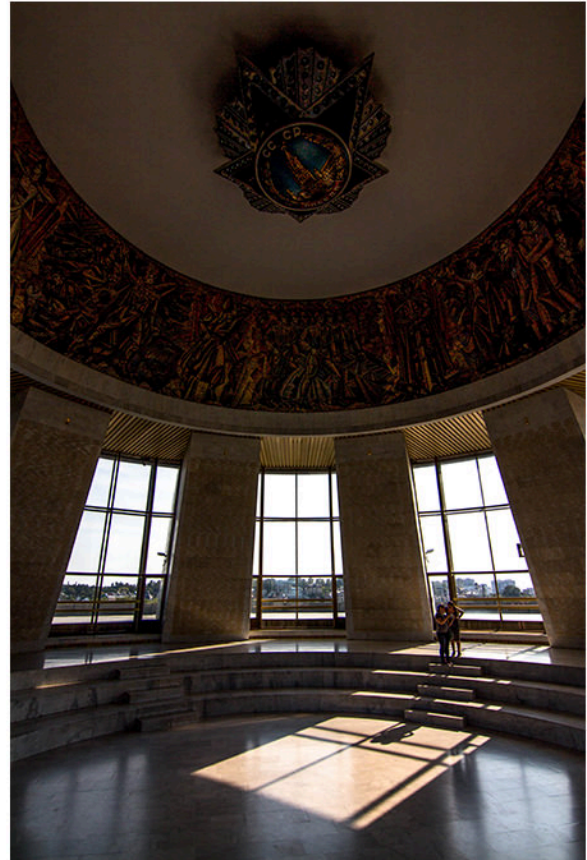


Plate 54: Contemporaries (and even possible inspirations) of the Buzludzha Memorial House, as built by the USSR: the Mound of Glory in Belarus (own photo: 6 January 2017) (top left); the Monument to the Georgian-Russian Friendship in Georgia (own photo: 11 August 2017) (top right); the Motherland monument in Kyiv, Ukraine (own photos: 27 August 2017) (below).

6.3.2 Construction (1974-1981)

Work began on the Buzludzha Memorial House on 23 January 1974. First, the peak was levelled to create a stable platform for the monument, using TNT to bring the height down by nine metres – from 1441 metres altitude, to 1432 metres. In laying the foundations for the monument, more than 15,000 cubic metres of rock were taken away from the peak. In total, more than 6,000 people contributed their work to the creation of the Buzludzha monument. This included engineers, artists, designers, sculptors, a large number of volunteer labourers and 500 soldiers from the construction corps under General Delcho Delchev. The construction teams worked in shifts from May until September, to make the most of the milder climates. A village of workers' huts was established near the construction site and would remain on Buzludzha Peak for the following seven years. A number of workers allegedly died during the construction project – and though such accidents are sadly not unusual (eight workers died building Brazil's 2014 World Cup stadiums, for example), the Party nevertheless took care to bury the bad news. Meanwhile, new roads were built to transport building materials up the mountain: including 70,000 tons of concrete, 3,000 tons of steel, and 40 tons of glass.

6.3.3 The Mosaics

The main artistic feature within the Buzludzha Memorial House was the inner wall of the Ritual Hall, upon which was built “the world’s largest mosaic work covering 900 square metres and completed by 18 Bulgarian artists” (Stoilov, 2018: 28); which has also been described as “one of the largest mosaics of the twentieth century [...] over two million stones, arranged by hand” (Todorov, 2020). These illustrated an allegorical history of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Notable scenes depicted space travel, warfare, and communist workers driving their pitchforks into a serpent symbolic of foreign capitalism. One side of the hall featured the faces of international communist heroes – Marx, Engels and Lenin – while the opposite side was dedicated to Bulgaria's own communist figures. The faces of Dimitur Blagoev (founder of Bulgarian socialism) and Georgi Dimitrov (first communist leader of

Bulgaria) were positioned alongside that of Todor Zhivkov, communist leader of Bulgaria from 1954-1989. There was a debate at the time as to whether Zhivkov's face ought to be included. It was not traditional to memorialise communist leaders while they were still alive – but Zhivkov was already 69 by the time Buzludzha was opened, and it was believed the monument would survive as his legacy. These mosaics were formed from 35 tons of cobalt glass – or smalt – imported from Ukraine. The stones had 42 different colours and were assembled over a period of 18 months. The outer ring of the monument – the observation deck inside the rim of the saucer – featured a different kind of mosaic on its walls. Here the designs were created using natural stones, collected from rivers around Bulgaria. A team of 14 artists created one panel each, to illustrate a broader history of Bulgaria (albeit, as seen through a socialist lens). A third mosaic piece was created at the centre of the monument's interior dome – a hammer and sickle emblem covering an area of roughly 5 square metres, positioned above the Ritual Hall, and encircled by Bulgarian text spelling out the communist slogan: ‘Workers of the World, Unite!’



Plate 55: The construction of the dome. Photograph by Artin Azinyan, date unknown (1970s) (source: Buzludzha Monument, n.d.c.).

6.3.4 *Buzludzha Stars Illuminated (1977)*

The construction of the tower was treated as a separate project to the main body of the monument. Genadi Milovanov led the construction brigade, and in total the tower took two years to build. The Buzludzha tower measured 70 metres in height, 9 metres across at the base, and widening to 16 metres across at its highest point. The tower's foundations descended 16 metres into the ground. A lift inside the tower went up to an observation deck at the top of the monument, offering panoramic views over the Balkan Mountains. The glass stars that flank the north and south sides of the tower were alleged to be the largest in the world – at 12 metres across. These stars were produced in Kyiv using synthetic ruby glass, and weighed 3.5 tonnes apiece. They would be lit from inside the tower by a series of 32 spotlights, and powered by a generator large enough to power 500 homes. The Party once claimed that the red stars at Buzludzha could be seen from as far away as the Romanian border in the north, and the Greek border to the south. Originally the plan had been to complete the tower and its stars in time for the grand opening ceremony, in 1981. However, in 1977 a memo came down from the secretariat which ordered the workers to advance their plans in order to light the red stars for the 60th anniversary of Russia's October Revolution, on 17 October 1977.



Plate 56: Examples of the commemorative postage stamps sold to raise money for the construction of the Buzludzha Memorial House (source: Buzludzha Monument, n.d.c.).

6.3.5 *Funding the Project*

It was the monument's architect, Georgi Stoilov, who suggested that the Buzludzha Memorial House should not be paid for by the state, thus putting strain on the national budget. Instead, he saw this as a 'monument of the people' and believed that the people should be encouraged to donate willingly towards its construction (Stoilov, Appendix 3). The construction of the monument cost 14 million BGN [approximately \$35 million, or £25 million, allowing for currency changes and inflation] and between a population of 8.8 million Bulgarians, a total of 16.2 million BGN was raised. What wasn't used on the monument was spent on developing new roads and kindergartens in the area. This money was collected through donations and the sale of commemorative stamps, though anecdotally, some Bulgarians claim to remember that a 0.50 BGN tax was discretely docked from the pay of all working citizens. Additional funds were spent on the development of new roads and infrastructure in the area. According to Delcho Delchev, commander of the construction corps:

“The additional construction challenges, such as provisions for water, electricity, the new road from Krun to Buzludzha, and so on, amounted to roughly 9 million leva and was funded independently by the relevant ministries. The completed Buzludzha Memorial House complex reached a total cost of 25 million leva.”

The entire project therefore cost equivalent to roughly \$62.5 million [£45.7 million] today.

The American funded *A Guide to Communist Bulgaria* additionally claims that “there were labour accidents, some of them resulting in fatalities”; and “owing to poor workmanship the building had serious technical deficiencies even on the day it was inaugurated. Shortly thereafter some of its installations had to undergo a major overhaul” (Trankova & Georgieff, 2020). However, it is difficult to confirm the veracity of such statements, as few historical sources seem to support this, and the book itself – which as noted in Chapter 5, takes a pointedly anti-communist tone throughout, and provides no references to support these claims. (Furthermore, the results of the first architectural survey of the building since abandonment, conducted in 2019, suggest that the building was actually exceptionally well-made, seeming to support the BCP's claim of the era that this was a pioneering work of monumental architecture for its time.)

6.3.6 *Buzludzha Memorial House Opens (1981)*

Todor Zhivkov, Secretary General of the Bulgarian Communist Party, declared at the opening ceremony of the Buzludzha Memorial House on 23 August, 1981:

“I am honoured to be in the historical position to open the House-Monument [of the Bulgarian Communist Party], built in honour of the accomplishments of Dimitur Blagoev and his associates; who, 90 years ago, laid the foundations for the revolutionary Marxist Party in Bulgaria. Let the pathways leading here – to the legendary Buzludzha Peak, here in the Stara Planina where the first Marxists came to continue the work of sacred and pure love that was started by Bulgaria’s socialist writers and philosophers – never fall into disrepair. Let generation after generation of socialist and communist Bulgaria come here, to bow down before the feats and the deeds of those who came before; those who lived on this land and gave everything they had to their nation. Let them feel that spirit that ennobles us and as we empathise with the ideas and dreams of our forefathers, so let us experience that same excitement today! Glory to Blagoev and his followers; those first disciples of Bulgarian socialism, who sowed the immortal seeds of today’s Bulgarian Communist Party in the public soul!”



Plate 57: The opening ceremony for the Buzludzha Memorial House. Photograph by Artin Azinyan, 23 August 1981 (source: Georgi Stoilov’s personal collection).



Plate 58: Large crowds attend the newly-built Buzludzha Memorial House. Photograph by Bedros Azinyan, shortly after the 1981 opening. (source: Buzludzha Monument, n.d.c.).

6.3.7 The Monument in Use (1981-1990)

The Buzludzha Memorial House enjoyed almost a decade of use. Along with the many other memorial complexes around Bulgaria, it served as part of a network of educational heritage sites; though its size and complexity would set it apart as the jewel in the crown. The Bulgarian people had paid for the construction of the monument – many had volunteered labour too – and so entry was free for everyone. Due to demand however, visits had to be booked in advance. Many visits were arranged by schools or employers, and a great many people visited the monument: more than two million during its eight years of use. The architect Georgi Stoilov claims the building could handle as many as 500 people per hour on busy days (Appendix 3). When it wasn't functioning as a public museum, the Buzludzha Memorial House was used as a venue for certain events by Bulgarian Communist Party. Award ceremonies were held here, and foreign delegations were often taken on a tour of the BCP's extravagant monument to Bulgarian socialism.

By August 1987, six years after opening, a total of 1,426,597 people had visited the Buzludzha Memorial House (Minard, 2018), giving an average of approximately 238,000 visitors per year in that time, or approximately 650 visitors per day. These visits were recorded according to the various categories of tourists, as follows.

Category of Visitors	Total	Proportion
Workers	450,000	31.5%
Collective farmers	190,000	13.3%
Employees	365,000	25.6%
Students	294,000	20.6 %
Military personnel	55,700	3.9%
Pensioners	26,000	1.8%
Foreign delegations	13,400	0.9%
Foreign tourists	29,400	2%
Total	1,426,597	100%

Table 10: Attendance at the Buzludzha Memorial House between
23 August 1981 and 30 August 1987 (adapted from Minard, 2018).

The Buzludzha Memorial House remained in use until 1989; however, following the beginning of the Changes, it would soon become apparent that the monument's fate was inextricably linked to that of the Party which built it.



Plate 59: Interior of the Buzludzha Memorial House. Photographs by Artin Azinyan, 1981 (source: Georgi Stoilov's personal collection).

6.4 Post-Communist Decline

6.4.1 *The 1990s*

In the years that followed Bulgaria's transition to democracy, many interventions were made to remove communist symbols and monuments which appeared in population centres such as Sofia; but the relatively remote location of the Buzludzha Memorial House ensured that this monument would, initially, go largely unmentioned in such discussions. However, it did see one act of iconoclasm, in 1992, just shortly after the trial of former leader Todor Zhivkov – as the new leaders of the Party had Zhivkov's face removed from the mosaic wall inside Buzludzha's Ritual Hall, in an effort to distance the Party from his legacy (Minard, 2018). The monument was officially closed and ceased welcoming visitors in 1990 (except by special arrangement), it was nationalised in 1992, and it remained guarded up until 1995; but after this point the guards were dismissed, and the building was left open and deserted. During the economic chaos and hyperinflation that beset Bulgaria in the mid-1990s, Buzludzha became the target of vandalism and looting. For some, it was perceived as an emblem of the regime responsible for the country's current hardships, and so acts of violence towards this monument took on a symbolic quality. For many others however, it simply became an attractive source for valuable scrap – as Bulgaria entered triple-digit inflation, many citizens who had previously donated to the creation of the Buzludzha Memorial House would return now to Buzludzha Peak, taking back their investment in the form of stripped marble slabs and copper cables. Some visitors, believing the red stars in the tower were made from real rubies, shot them out with rifles – only to get showered in shattered, and worthless, synthetic ruby glass. Bedros Azinyan, a photographer and archivist whose father Artin Azinyan had been documenting the monument since its construction in the 1970s, laments how “the people destroyed the people's monument” (cited in Nikolova, 2020). According to Stoilov however, the most severe damage done to the monument was caused by government employees, who Stoilov believes were amongst the first to loot the site for valuable materials. Most notably, the thick copper ceiling which had been installed above the Ritual Hall, carried a significant value, and was amongst the first features of the monument to disappear.

“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 UDF [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” (Georgi Stoilov, Appendix 3).

Elsewhere, the architect has therefore summarised: “Buzludzha is an epitome of Bulgaria. Externally, when [seen] from outside, it seems strong and steady but internally, while one is inside – it is falling apart” (cited in Minkovska, 2015).



Plate 60: Inside Buzludzha's Ritual Hall (own photo: 14 February 2015).

6.4.2 Ownership of the Monument

The Buzludzha Memorial House was built by the Bulgarian Communist Party. After the Changes, the BCP rebranded as the Bulgarian Socialist Party, and they retained ownership of the monument until 1992, when it was officially nationalised by the new, democratic Bulgarian government. However, as the monument increasingly fell into disrepair under state ownership, the BSP continued to express an interest in reclaiming ownership – and in 2011 the BSP leader Sergei Stanishev sent a formal ownership request to the government (Trifonova, 2011). This application was provisionally approved on 30 September 2011, albeit

with the government's condition that the BSP would own the monument, but not the land beneath it (Mladenova, 2020). This condition would make conservation work difficult, as the BSP would be unable to change or develop the site without applying for approval from the Council of Ministers each time. As a result, no final ownership contract was agreed, and the monument remained under the de facto possession of the state, managed by the regional governor of Stara Zagora province (Morten, 2017). Despite insistence from the BSP that the state should take more action towards maintaining the site, no work was undertaken and the condition of the monument continued to deteriorate (Vukov, 2012).

In June 2017 the BSP made another legal application for ownership, with the Socialist MP Krum Zarkov proposing that: "The first and foremost thing is to stop the decay because the monument is in a horrible condition" (cited in Morton, 2017). However, the terms of such a transfer would now be subject to a new Bulgarian law, which had been passed in February 2017 – and which made it impossible for state property to be given freely to private individuals or organisations (Morten, 2017). Rather than receiving the monument freely therefore, the BSP would need to either buy the monument from the state outright, or else it could apply to manage the Buzludzha Memorial House for a 10-year period, after which time ownership would automatically revert to the Bulgarian state. During these 10 years, as per the new law, the BSP would be unable to use the monument for commercial purposes (which would limit the potential for events and functions that might otherwise have helped in raising the funds necessary for any kind of restoration plan). The BSP submitted their application for a 10-year custodianship of the site on 16 June 2017, but it was rejected by the state in early July: with seven government representatives voting in favour of the transfer of the monument, and twelve against. This rejection was said to be made in large part due to the BSP's lack of any clear plan for the future of Buzludzha, and their failure to present written documents evidencing a consideration of purpose, costs and timeframe for a conservation project, or any evidence that they had the necessary funding to achieve such outcomes. Allegedly, this lack of clarity resulted in part from division amongst the socialists themselves – with some members of the party believing the monument should be comprehensively restored to its original, lavish condition, and others arguing in favour of a reimagining of the site as a contemporary museum to the Bulgarian, or even the global, socialist movement (Morten, 2017).

To date, all post-communist ownership bids have been unsuccessful, and the monument remains the property of the Bulgarian state, though its status is simply that of a ‘building’; as since the transition to democracy, the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture has not yet recognised the Buzludzha Memorial House as having sufficient cultural significance to be granted ‘monument’ status.

6.5 A First Conservation Study

In 2011, a team of researchers conducted a study at Buzludzha Peak, investigating visitors’ attitudes towards the site and their willingness to donate towards restoration projects (Poria, Ivanov & Webster, 2014). The research was conducted on 30 July, during the annual gathering of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, which is traditionally held in a meadow just below the Buzludzha Memorial House. Results were gathered from 236 questionnaires completed by attendees at the rally, and these were then divided into two groups, according to those respondents who considered the socialist past to be part of their own heritage, and those who did not consider it to be. Establishing these groups allowed the researchers to observe the following points:

Respondents who identified the socialist past as their own heritage were less inclined to agree with the statement:
Socialist monuments are well maintained.
But were more likely to agree with the statements:
Socialist monuments are an important part of Bulgaria’s heritage.
Socialist monuments need restoration.
I am willing to pay for excursions to places connected with Bulgaria’s socialist past.
Visits to places related to socialism must be offered to international tourists.
School children should have the opportunity to visit places connected with Bulgaria’s socialist past.

Table 11: Domestic attitudes towards sites of socialist heritage in Bulgaria
(adapted from Poria, Ivanov & Webster, 2014).

Additionally, the respondents were polled according to their willingness to pay an entrance fee, and to donate money to restoration projects, with the following average results:

Average amount willing to:	Those who regard the site as part of their own personal heritage.	Those who do not regard the site as part of their heritage.
Pay as entry fee	4.48 BGN [£1.91]	2.80 BGN [£1.20]
Donate to renovation	28.25 BGN [£12.06]	13.20 BGN [£5.63]

Table 12: Willingness to pay entry fees at sites of socialist heritage
(adapted from Poria, Ivanov & Webster, 2014).

The study concluded that those who considered the site to represent a part of their own cultural heritage expressed a greater willingness to donate money to the preservation of the site, as well as a stronger belief that socialist heritage sites should be managed and promoted as places of national importance. However, highlighting the limitations of their study, the researchers note that the respondents represented a very specific group of Bulgarian people; namely, those in attendance at a political event hosted by the Bulgarian Socialist Party. It is also to be noted that when defining their groups (those who do, versus those who do not, identify with the socialist past on heritage terms), the researchers don't specify how many of their 236 respondents fell into either group. It is perhaps left to be wondered then, whether an approximately even number of attendees at a socialist political event might realistically have fallen into the negative group. Furthermore, whatever number of respondents did indeed answer in the negative here, they are still not necessarily to be taken as representative of other Bulgarian citizens; with both the positive and negative comparison groups established in this study likely to fall at the same end of the broader political spectrum, once the whole population of Bulgaria (not just its active, rally-attending socialists) is brought into consideration. Another noteworthy point is that even at this socialist event, and amongst the group who identified a personal heritage connection to the site, the average entry fee they reported being willing to pay for the Buzludzha Memorial House was only 4.48 BGN [£1.91] – less than the typical entry price for museums and managed heritage locations across Bulgaria, which typically cost somewhere in the range of 5-10 BGN [roughly £2-4] for entry.

In their discussion, the researchers commented on how these results suggested the possibility of a different approach to that of the post-communist state, which since 1989 has tended to avoid the preservation or promotion of socialist heritage sites: “The thought that the elite have the ability to destroy heritage which does not represent their own social and economic

interests, simply by not sustaining it and thus undermining what may be a profitable visitor attraction, may not be valid to today's world.” They additionally note that “artefacts and heritage sites can survive by support from those who regard them to be part of their own heritage, possibly attaching to them symbolic meaning, which provokes in them sense of nostalgia and forgotten dignity” and they suggest that future research into this subject should potentially consider other cultural contexts, including the willingness of non-socialist participants to donate to heritage conservation (Poria, Ivanov & Webster, 2014). This is particularly pertinent, considering the prediction by Kulić (2018) that most of those tourists visiting sites of communist heritage in Southeast Europe are likely not socialists themselves. So, this thesis will address precisely those questions in its visitor survey phase – and moreover, it also proposes the counter suggestion that sites such as the Buzludzha Memorial House also have a kind of intrinsic material value, beyond just their perceived political affiliations, so that subjective symbolic meaning, nostalgia, and the perception of ‘being one’s own heritage,’ are not necessarily the only motivations in those who would be willing to donate money to such a cause.



Plate 61: Graffitied text above Buzludzha’s entrance tells visitors:

FORGET YOUR PAST (own photo: 9 April 2012).

6.6 Buzludzha's Second Life

In February 2012 the photographer Timothy Allen shared a set of photographs of the Buzludzha Memorial House on his website. The previous month Allen had spent four days on the mountain in the snow, photographing the monument inside and out, in addition to flying over it in a microlite for aerial photographs (Allen, 2012). The article he published contained some basic details about the structure and its origin (including some errors – for example Georgi Stoilov's name appears as “Guéorguy Stoilov,” and Allen offers the incorrect pronunciation of “Buz’ol’ja” for the monument’s name), though mostly it focussed on the spectacular visuals of the site, made all the more striking for its snowy conditions. His descriptions added to the sensationalising effect, describing the monument as “a cross between a flying saucer and Doctor Evil’s hideout perched atop a glorious mountain range,” and he also noted the appeal of this monument in its decayed state:

“On the rare occasions that I get to visit a forgotten building as magnificent as this one, I can’t help day dreaming about some of the incredible monumental relics I know back home and quietly wishing that a few more of them had been left to grow old and perish naturally rather than being unceremoniously hooked up to the proverbial life support machine of modern tourism as is so often the case these days” (Allen, 2012).

Allen’s photographs of Buzludzha spread quickly across the internet, and had the effect of introducing the monument to a much larger audience – just as Jan Kempenaers’s photographs had previously done for Yugoslav memorial sites (Kempenaers, 2010). The following year, Buzludzha appeared in a list titled ‘The 33 Most Beautiful Abandoned Places in the World,’ on the popular website *Buzzfeed* (Greenring & Stopera, 2013); and in this context Buzludzha was seen by more than a million internet users around the world.

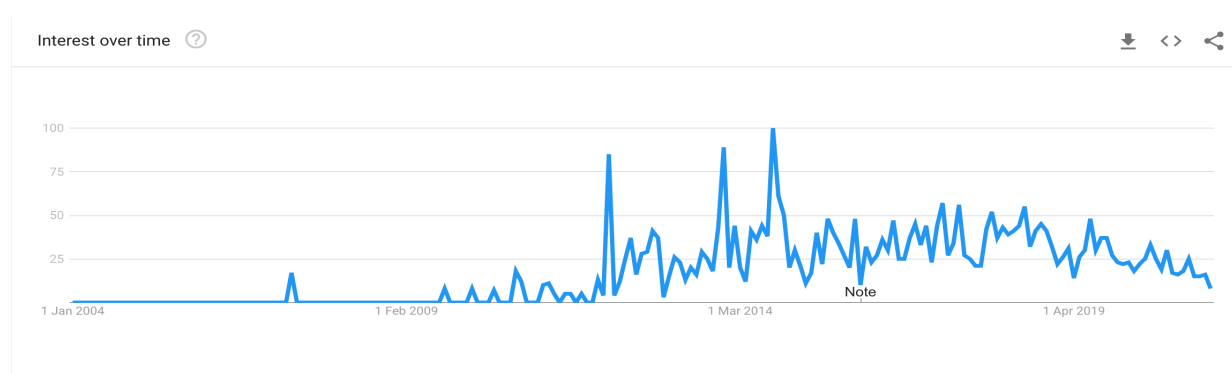


Plate 62: Internet searches for ‘Buzludzha.’ A first significant spike, in March 2012, corresponds with the publication of Timothy Allen’s photographs. Data source: Google Trends (<https://www.google.com/trends>)

Western interest in the monument exploded over the next years, and the Buzludzha Memorial House soon became a cultural icon. It was featured widely in the international press, including reports in *The Daily Mail* (Smith, 2012), *The Economist* (The Economist, 2014), *Reuters* (Nenov, 2014a), *The Guardian* (Nenov, 2014b), *World Travel Guide* (Hillier, 2014), and many others. During this period the monument also appeared on the front cover of numerous ruin photography books, with names like *Forbidden Places* (Margaine, 2013), *Soviet Ghosts* (Litchfield, 2014) and *Abandoned Places* (Happer, 2015). Television crews from *VICE Media*, the *Discovery Channel*, *BBC Travel*, and others would all rush to create video segments about the monument. Many of the media features at this time repeated common errors and perpetuated misinformation about the monument however, such as that the monument had been the “headquarters of the Communist Party in Bulgaria” (The Economist, 2014); presenting the location as being more “remote” than it actually is, and also alleging that the donations used to fund the monument’s creation were “compulsory” (Foer, Thuras & Morton, 2016: 75), an assertion which, as discussed, is now a matter of some debate, but is strongly denied by the monument’s architect (Stoilov, Appendix 3). Meanwhile, at Mount Buzludzha this interest was translating into a surge in physical tourist visits; the monument became a tourism hotspot – a ‘snow-park’ in winter – where visitors also engaged in activities such as photography, base jumping, drone piloting, and making graffiti (Minard, 2018). Despite not being recognised as a tourism destination or official monument by the state, beginning in 2012, visitors started leaving reviews of the monument on the tourism score aggregator website *TripAdvisor*, and within a few years the site had earned a large number of very positive reviews, as well as the website’s ‘Traveller’s Choice’ award (on the website <http://www.tripadvisor.com>). In 2016, when the augmented reality mobile game *Pokémon Go* became a global summer hit, the monument was featured in the game’s playable maps, with some visitors subsequently catching virtual creatures during their visits to the site (Richter, 2016c).

In 2016, *Valley Eyewear* – the same Australian company that caused controversy with their advert filmed at the site of the former Jasenovac Concentration Camp in Croatia (see Chapter 4) – released a sunglasses advertisement featuring models wearing their products at Buzludzha (Green, 2016). That same year, *Red Bull TV* aired a television series called ‘URBEX: Enter at Your Own Risk,’ one episode of which featured two young Russians following the increasingly popular tourist route inside the Buzludzha Memorial House and up its tower in order to hang a banner from the top advertising their own website. (It is not clear

from the programme whether Red Bull had considered the ironic and potentially colonialist implications of following Russian ‘explorers’ as they travelled around Bulgaria, speaking to confused locals in Russian, and then using Buzludzha as a place to ‘mark their territory’) (Flynn et al., 2016). The monument also appeared as a filming location in the 2016 American-French action film *Mechanic: Resurrection* (Gansel, 2016), starring Jason Statham and Tommy Lee Jones. Using digital effects, the filmmakers moved the monument to Varna, adding a helipad to its roof and placing it on a hill overlooking the Black Sea (though they didn’t remove the graffiti from its exterior, with the words ‘Enjoy Communism’ still appearing spray-painted on the monument’s front in the final film). That same year it also appeared in another film, *King of the Belgians* (Brosens & Woodworth, 2016). Production teams behind series such as *Doctor Who* and *Top Gear* made enquiries about using the monument as a filming location in the years that followed, and a slew of indie bands shot music videos inside the crumbling communist monument too. Panagopoulos (2021a) summarises:

“Over the years, the haunting beauty of the endangered communist monument seems to have attracted today’s radical chic. Rock bands and film studios have used the monument as a backdrop. A host of performers, visual and graffiti artists, and curious tourists have invaded it en masse in recent decades. I am wondering how many from this army of culture vultures who partook in the dramatic appeal of the decaying ‘UFO’ have done anything at all to try and save it.”



Plate 63: The Buzludzha Memorial House, as it appears in a modified digital reconceptualization as a seaside villain’s lair for the film *Mechanic: Resurrection* (source: Gansel, 2016).



Plate 64: A promotional image shot at Buzludzha, by Valley Eyewear (source: Green, 2016).

During these years, “checking out the desolate beauty of Buzludzha eventually became a mundane episode of mass consumption for the urbex generation – like TikTok trends, or leaving love locks on a bridge” (Panagopoulos, 2021a). By 2016, on a summer day the monument could typically receive upwards of 100 visitors, roughly half of whom were non-Bulgarian tourists (data based on researcher observations over the course of numerous full days spent at the site). By mid-2016 however, the local government attempted to seal the monument, to prevent tourists from gaining access. September 2016 was the first time during this research that the building was found to be inaccessible, and Regional Governor Gergana Mikova commented to the press, “the architectural structure is guarded electronically, with sensors that monitor the presence of intruders. Its entrances are welded, but this does not stop thrill seekers and vandals who enter the building through vents, narrow cracks, illegally, in the dark.” However, any time the monument was sealed, it would be broken open again shortly after and in 2017 it was reported that some unknown visitor had stolen a solar panel which had been installed to power the cameras and motion detectors (Tsenkova, 2017). The graffiti grew worse, and other acts of vandalism by visitors became apparent too; Panagopoulos (2021a) notes how “[around] 2018, someone tried to sell bags of glass chips from Buzludzha on eBay.”

In May 2018, the monument was more securely sealed against visitors and a permanent guard detail was posted, with the installation of a security hut (and chemical toilet) beside the monument that was staffed by security police from the Ministry of the Interior (Morten, 2018). This decision was made by Gergana Mikova, who commented: “At the beginning of my term I said that one of the priorities in my work would be the preservation and socialisation of the Buzludzha monument. The most important thing at first was to stop the illegal entry into the building, because we know it is no secret that whole groups of young people – Bulgarians and foreigners – are trying to get inside.” Concerning long-term plans, she said: “Once we have clarity on whether and to what extent the structure has been compromised, we can consider clearing and securing a certain area inside the monument and providing tourists with access to it” (Bankova, 2018). It was additionally noted that the installation of the security building cost a little over 3,000 BGN [£1,280], and was connected to power via one of the original generator cables for the building (Hristov, 2018). However, the monument’s architect Georgi Stoilov believed that the building was being secured only to prevent an accident, and the resultant negative PR, rather than because the governor had any real desire to preserve the building. He wryly noted: “They are securing it so that no one can get in to fix it” (Stoilov, Appendix 3).



Plate 65: A security booth and chemical toilet are installed alongside the monument (own photo: 5 May 2018).

Since 2018, visitors have been unable to gain access inside the monument except with special permission, which is rarely granted; nevertheless, large crowds of tourists continue to arrive at the monument day after day, if only to see it from the outside.

6.7 First Conservation Actions

Between 2015 and 2020, the researcher collaborated with a Bulgarian architect, Dora Ivanova, in conceptualising and enacting a plan to campaign for the conservation of the Buzludzha Memorial House. These actions (detailed in Appendix 1) were ultimately successful, and as a result, the monument was recognised in 2018 as one of the ‘seven most endangered heritages sites in Europe’ by the heritage organisation Europa Nostra (a group who describe themselves as the ‘largest heritage organisation in Europe’). The group subsequently published a full report on the monument’s conservation potential (Aymerich, 2018). In 2018, Ivanova and the researcher co-authored a grant application to the Getty Foundation, who, as a result, awarded a grant of \$185,000 [£135,000] towards the creation of a conservation management plan for Buzludzha, as part of its ‘Keeping it Modern’ programme. This grant was noted as the ‘Architectural Event of 2019’ in Bulgaria’s annual WhATA Awards, which recognise the major successes and failures in national architecture (Panayotova, 2021).

The organisation ICOMOS Germany stood in as grantee, with Ivanova’s Buzludzha Project Foundation acting as local project coordinator, and subsequently, work was conducted at the peak in late 2019 to make a comprehensive assessment of the structural condition of the building (Buzludzha Project, n.d.). This work found the monument to be structurally sound, but noted that the greatest risk was faced by the monument’s 924 square metres of mosaics. An additional grant application was made to the Getty Foundation in 2020, which resulted in a further \$60,000 [£45,000] grant to fund the emergency stabilisation of the inner mosaic ring surrounding Buzludzha’s Ritual Hall. The next phase of work involved gathering and documenting all the mosaic stones (“2.5 million stones, two-thirds still on the walls, the rest on the floor” (TEDx Talks, 2021)), cleaning debris, and then mechanically stabilising the surviving mosaics. After this, a temporary shelter was built to protect the mosaics from the elements. These works were conducted by “18 restorers from four countries” (TEDx Talks, 2021): an “international team of restorers from the National Academy of Art in Sofia, the Technical University of Munich, the Bern University of the Arts and the Diadrasis NGO from Athens,” while “[eager] volunteers supported the process” (Buzludzha Project, n.d.).



Plate 66: Mosaic detail from the outer gallery of Buzludzha (own photo: 18 September 2015).



Plate 67: Mosaic detail from the Ritual Hall of Buzludzha (own photo: 21 September 2017).

With the mosaics of the Ritual Hall thus stabilised, in 2021, the project's focus turned to the outer ring of mosaics on the gallery. Fundraising campaigns and events were organised throughout the summer, including a music festival in a meadow beneath the monument in July, that was attended by some 800 people (Panayotova, 2021). Subsequently, a scheme was announced whereby people could 'Adopt a Mosaic' – by choosing a piece of artwork that appealed to them, from 14 distinct mosaic panels, and then donating the respective cost to see that section of the ring stabilised – typically in the region of 5,000 BGN [£2,100] per mosaic section (Buzludzha Project, 2021a). Towards the end of 2021, conservation teams once again went to work at the Buzludzha Memorial House, now completing the documentation, cleaning, and stabilisation of the gallery mosaics, which were then similarly protected by the installation of temporary shelters. In total, it was said that more than 100 donors, and 100 volunteers, took part in the campaign (Panayotova, 2021, Buzludzha Project, 2021a).

The mayor of the local municipal town Kazanluk, Galina Stoyanova, commented: "It's time to wake up Buzludzha. If the state that owns the monument is still a bad owner, and not interested in it, let the municipal council vote on a decision to provide it to the municipality of Kazanluk for management and administration" (cited in Stoilov, 2021). However, even should the monument be opened to tourists in 2022, as has been suggested as a target, the mosaics inside will remain hidden beneath their protective covers, until such time as the roof above is repaired – a task for which a further 5 million BGN [£2.1 million] in funding will need to be found (Stoilov, 2021).

6.8 Responses to Conservation

The proposed conservation of the Buzludzha Memorial House made international news in March 2018, and again in July 2019, when Europa Nostra and the Getty Foundation respectively announced their support. Expert opinions on the subject were generally positive, particularly in the international media, and messaging from these organisations themselves stressed the importance of 'depoliticising' the monument to preserve it purely on the merits of its architectural value. For example, the 2018 Europa Nostra report advised:

"The main communist symbols (e.g., pentacles, the text of the main façade, the medallion on the ceiling in the central hall and the mosaics) must be preserved because of their architectural value and artistic craftsmanship, but must not be restored. They are not preserved to popularise the past socialist period, but to place it

in the broader context of Bulgarian history in the last two centuries” (Aymerich, 2018).

Laurent Levi-Strauss, a board-member of Europa Nostra, commented: “Today, [Buzludzha] has not to be considered any more like a communist monument, but as an achievement of architecture” (cited in Krasimirov, 2018). The report projected an estimated cost of roughly €500,000 [£418,000] to cover the first protective works, leading to a total of €7.5 million [£6.3 million] for a full conservation, in a process that would be estimated to take between four to five years to complete (Aymerich, 2018; Todorov, 2020). Additionally, Europa Nostra’s Mario Aymerich commented:

“In order to have an adequate financial assessment, one must take into account not only the interior of the monument, but also what it represents as a whole complex and how it can interact with the local population and foreign tourism” (cited in Krasimirov, 2018).

Official messaging from the Getty Foundation, beginning in 2019, similarly focussed on the theme of ‘depoliticization,’ while also noting that the final use and role of the monument was yet to be decided, as first Buzludzha would need to “undergo thorough analysis to determine the best possible conservation approach, as well as a new public purpose” (Pippin, 2019).

However, not all Bulgarians were pleased with the news regarding Buzludzha, as many still believed “it should be demolished, arguing that it represents a painful legacy of an oppressive regime that should not be glorified after killing tens of thousands” (Krasimirov, 2018). Moreover, the involvement of the American Getty Foundation in a site of distinctly Bulgarian communist heritage has resulted in a varied range of responses across Bulgarian society. As was previously demonstrated in Chapter 5, Bulgarian national identity has historically been built around the idea of fighting for independence from foreign empires; while since the Changes, it was shown that American cultural investment into Bulgaria has often revealed political dimensions, such as in the propagation and funding of anti-communist rhetoric. Both these underlying themes have had effects on the contemporary conversation around Buzludzha’s conservation, though there are also some interesting ideological questions that might be asked, specifically in relation to the Getty Foundation.

The J. Paul Getty Trust was established in 1953 by the oil tycoon J. Paul Getty, a man once described as the richest private citizen in the world. On his death in 1976, Getty left most of

his fortune to the trust, an organisation which continues to enjoy tax-exempt status to this day so long as it keeps giving away enough money to qualify as a ‘charitable institution.’ Norman (1992) explains: “Every day of the year, the Getty Trust spends half a million dollars on art. It has to. But it can’t keep on buying Van Goghs, so now it runs a scheme to teach six-year-olds about the ‘negative space’ in modern sculpture, and funds seminars to authenticate its own Greek sculptures. [...] The J. Paul Getty Trust will have to spend at least £100 million on art this year if it is to retain its tax-exempt status as a charitable institution.” (Norman writes at a time when the Getty endowment stood at £2.2 billion, though it has since grown considerably, and in 2020 was stated to be £7.7 billion (Getty, 2020).)

The Getty Trust began by collecting art, but at a certain point it became harder to donate money fast enough to stay tax-exempt, as it was “deemed to be impossible to spend the income of Getty’s legacy on further purchases alone, without upsetting the world market and running out of goods to buy.” Therefore, the Getty Trust was forced to expand from one original museum, to “a modern Atlantis of Centres and Institutes [...] doling out millions in grants and fellowships,” in addition to other initiatives such as the Getty Foundation and the Getty Conservation Institute; the latter of which has invested into conservation projects at the tomb of Egypt’s Queen Nefertari, at Roman sites in Cyprus, ancient buildings in Mexico, Buddhist caves in China, and so forth (Norman, 1992). The Getty Trust also manages two locations in Los Angeles, US: the Getty Villa, with its focus on collecting European antiquities, as well as the Modernist hilltop campus of the \$1.3 billion Getty Centre, of which Lewis writes:

“A visitor might spend many hours at the Getty and never encounter a painting or a statue. Not even in the rotunda that forms the museum’s centrepiece is there any sense of the presence (or even the proximity) of art, which is sequestered in the pavilions beyond. If the traditional museum was an architectural jewel box for the objects within, at the Getty the art sits in discrete containers, much like a corporate collection in a carefully manicured boardroom. [...] critics have likened the Getty to the anonymous, antiseptic headquarters of a pharmaceutical company” (Lewis, 1998).

Despite the huge positive impact that the Getty Trust is able to claim in the world of art, Norman notes that this is only made possible “by a tax system that lets rich Americans off the hook if they donate money to art, and in moral terms puts statues before people.” This leads her to a critical conclusion:

“I have to confess a residual disquiet that the whole affair is a gigantic waste of money. But it is a waste that is structured and supported by the American tax system. The channelling of tax-free money to good causes by private foundations has become an American sub-culture. The Ford Foundation is the richest in the country; the Getty Trust is number two. If I were a black in downtown Los Angeles, I think that such structured waste might make me explode with mindless hate” (Norman, 1992).

Moreover (and of particular interest to this study), Norman notes how the Getty Trust represents a new type of organism, unique to contemporary capitalism:

“[An] institution created out of thin air in order to spend Getty's money in conformity with US tax laws. The normal life-cycle of artistic or academic institutions begins with a need, and follows up with an attempt to meet it; if the institution is perceived as useful, it will grow. [Conversely, Getty] desperately want the trust to be useful, but it has not come into existence to meet any obvious need – except to spend the legacy” (Norman, 1992).

As such, the new sponsors of the Buzludzha Memorial House might be conceptualised as the ideological opposite of the socialist state that built the monument; implying a significant reframing of the values of the ‘people’s monument,’ and which may partly explain why local responses to the news of the grant have been so varied and often political in their appraisal of the situation. For example, shortly after the announcement of the Getty grant in 2019, the US Embassy in Sofia made a post about Buzludzha’s conservation – which congratulated the Getty Foundation for its contribution – on its official Facebook page (US Embassy Sofia, n.d.). The (since deleted) post received a high engagement, with hundreds of user comments, including:

“This is the best treatment for gullible people [...] reliant on Western assistance in solving the problems of the remains of communism. [...] The good thing is that more and more Bulgarians understand that they can’t rely on help from the outside, our problems require only our solutions and actions – something that our national enlighteners and revolutionaries saw even a century-and-a-half ago.”

A more sarcastic comment read: “Huge thanks! There are also several monuments of Lenin neglected in Bulgaria... help their resurrection too! This is the kind of help we hoped for! We are so grateful. Regards, BCP [Bulgarian Communist Party].” And another: “It is strange to put funds into monuments praising an ideology that has cost thousands of lives and has been designated as criminal by the EU.” One commenter wrote: “we should use this money to blow up the monument, and spend the rest on schools.” Not all comments were negative however, with some Bulgarian social media users praising the result, for example: “Thanks to the Getty

Foundation! Let's put politics aside! [...] This is part of Bulgarian architectural history and must be preserved." As user comments became increasingly argumentative and volatile, the US Embassy in Sofia later deleted the whole post from its page. Meanwhile, the BSP – the former owners of the monument – reported news of the Getty grant through their official newspaper, *Duma*, where they refrained from commenting on it themselves (Duma, 2019); however, user comments from the BSP's followers – contemporary Bulgarian socialists – were largely negative, including one that read: "Hands off our dear homeland, capitalist pigs!"

Some Bulgarian commenters were critical of the news, because they conceptualised Buzludzha as a place of socialist and national value, which should not fall into the hands of foreign capitalists; but others were critical because they didn't think Buzludzha should be saved at all. For example, shortly after the announcement of the Getty grant, a protest email was sent by a Bulgarian academic to Getty's communications office, to the researcher, and to Dora Ivanova. It criticised "the shameful ignorance of the Getty Foundation to donate funds for a monument to the criminal communist regime that terrorised Bulgarians"; suggested that, in humanitarian terms, there was "no difference between Buzludzha and a monument to Hitler"; and concluded that "[this] monster of communism should be [forgotten], or simply allowed to disintegrate" (L. Nikolova, personal communication, 21 July 2019; see also Appendix 3). The wording of the protest thus reflected themes common to many Bulgarians' negative appraisals of the country's sites of communist heritage, for example, such as the statement from the UDF political party in relation to the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia: a place which they accused of rewriting history, rehabilitating 'dangerous' and 'anti-humanist' propaganda, and failing to condemn the criminal former regime (Vukov, 2012). Ultimately, Getty made the decision to send just a brief, polite reply to this, and other protest emails received, thanking the senders for sharing their perspectives (see Appendix 1).

Even as work began in 2020 on conserving the most at-risk elements of the Buzludzha Memorial House – its elaborate mosaic panels – public opinion in Bulgaria remained divided on the subject, with many still wondering: "Is it possible to look at the monument as one of the most emblematic buildings of the Eastern bloc, without considering its protection as a validation of the former totalitarian regime?" (Todorov, 2020). There is also the issue of future funding. A total of \$245,000 [£180,000] has been provided by the Getty Foundation so far, but this still falls a long way short of the estimated cost of a full conservation; and even

following a successful conservation, Nikolova (2020) questions the reliability of any long-term plans for the monument, noting how “it is highly unlikely that enough private funding could be acquired to cover the monument’s enormous maintenance costs.” The architect Dora Ivanova believes that should the monument be opened for tourists, and also begin hosting cultural events, then current visitor numbers “will triple, and the monument will be self-sustaining and will bring income” (in Stoilov, 2021). However, her estimates have not always proven accurate in the past; for example, at the time of her original proposal for the monument’s conservation, it was noted that “her ridiculous ambition to renovate the site with only €1 million seems moderately lunatic” (Minkovska, 2015)

These questions therefore remain unanswered, and although the Buzludzha Memorial house is currently still not recognised with official heritage status, in July 2021, the Ministry of Culture convened a meeting to discuss the status of the site. Also present at the meeting were Dr Momchil Marinov, director of the historical museum in Kazanluk, as well as the monument’s architect, Georgi Stoilov. At this meeting it was proposed by the Specialised Expert Council for the Protection of Immovable Cultural Property, a branch of the Ministry of Culture, that Buzludzha should be granted the status of ‘Immovable Cultural Property of National Significance’ (BNR, 2021; Glasove, 2021). Though it has been noted by the ministry, in a statement, that Minister of Culture Velislav Minekov has yet to make his final decision on the matter (Touchev, 2021). The implication of this decision is significant, as it would grant the site legal protection, and commit the Bulgarian state to recognising and maintaining the Buzludzha Memorial House as an official site of national heritage. However, this final hurdle can be seen to be political in nature; so even while conservation work on the mosaics has already begun, the project remains fragile, contested by many in the country, and ultimately the decision on the future of the Buzludzha Memorial House still rests with the government.

However, in the meantime, some have noted that the Getty Foundation grant might also have had more than merely monetary value – as it represents an objective expert assessment, a valuation of the monument’s heritage worth by people outside of the post-communism conversation, and this in turn is being seen to slowly change attitudes towards the monument within Bulgaria, as Vasileva (2019) concludes: “It turns out that when the assessment of one’s own heritage comes from outside, well-packaged as a ‘Western’ project, Eastern Europeans are much more likely to accept multiple interpretations of their own past.”

6.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has given a thorough introduction to the Buzludzha Memorial House. It began by exploring the historical significance of the location, and then the various historic actions to provide commemorative spaces and memorials on the mountain peak. It introduced the architect Georgi Stoilov and detailed his project for the final memorial house which was built between 1974 and 1981. The chapter gave some information about the monument's years of use, and then charted its decline in the post-communist period – paying particular note to the growing interest in the monument by Western and global audiences, many of whom made visits to the site themselves. The chapter then assessed the various ways that the monument was commonly conceptualised, both by domestic and foreign commenters, and it discussed a study conducted in 2014 that sought to find out Bulgarian people's willingness to fund the conservation of socialist heritage sites such as this one. Finally, the chapter discussed the results of a campaign for the Buzludzha Memorial House's conservation, in which the researcher played a significant role (see Appendix 1), and as a result of which, a first grant was awarded for the development of a conservation plan for the memorial house. The chapter closed by reviewing how this news was received in Bulgaria.



Plate 68: A view from the Buzludzha tower, behind its red stars (own photo: 26 May 2013).

Chapter Seven

Methodology

“...there is always a certain method in madness.”
Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Friedrich Nietzsche

7.0 Introduction

Monuments have been shown to have great potential as aids in teaching history, as they “serve as tangible reminders of the past, but also in the case of those monuments and memorials erected today, tell us something about our particular time and place in history” (Percoco, 1998: 48). Furthermore, “studying the reception of monuments over time can reveal a great deal about the shifts in cultural values during periods of history,” though it should also be noted that “monuments need to be viewed critically both domestically and abroad in order to gain a better understanding of the cultural implications historic structures have on the collective memory of a nation” (Waters & Russell, 2012). The Buzludzha Memorial House in Bulgaria already attracts a great number of foreign visitors, even during a period when the Bulgarian state itself has declined to recognise the site as having any official heritage significance. Further, rather than such tourism interest universally being seen as positive, the motivations, interests and activities of those visiting the site are sometimes called into question. It has been said that “[foreigners] find it attractive to approach communist monuments as archaeologists who discover some lost civilization” (Pisker, 2018); and that such interactions constitute a form of ‘neo-Orientalism,’ the effect of which is that “rather than becoming identifiable in their own right, socialist buildings have only become further integrated into the economy of digital images, with the same anonymous detachment that ignores both their original meaning and their artistic merit” (Kulić, 2018).

The statements above between them suggest some kind of missed potential in the case of Buzludzha, and it should further be noted that as no research has yet been conducted into the interests and motivations of those visiting the site today, there is still work to be done in understanding: firstly, why these people are drawn to the monument; secondly, how their visits might be better able to provide a more positive, educational experience for those visiting; and thirdly, how this demonstrated demand might be managed to better serve Bulgaria itself.

In order to assess and evaluate the relationship between contemporary visitors and the monument, this study has created a methodology that enables the researcher to discover what factors these visitors find most attractive about the site, and whether they are interested in the monument as a visual presence alone, or if they would in fact prefer to find more information at the location. The study will also discover what visitors believe would be the best future

outcome for the monument. The study will analyse discussions with experts and stakeholders related to the site, to better understand the conditions and challenges that currently face the monument; and also, discussions with regular Bulgarian people on the subject of their nation's communist heritage, in order to provide a robust groundwork upon which these evaluations can take place.

For convenience, the table below reiterates the research aim, question and objectives. The purpose of this chapter will be to outline and justify the methodological philosophy adopted by this study and the research instruments used. In doing so, subsequent sections illustrate the research strategy and design, as well as highlighting data collection methods and analysis techniques. The chapter concludes by noting specific determinant factors upon the conduct of the research, including particular limitations.

Research Aim	To critically examine and assess whether and how the Buzludzha Memorial House's perceived heritage value might allow it to provide utility and worth in contemporary post-communist Bulgaria.
Research Question	In what ways can the Buzludzha Memorial House – a monument built to celebrate the communist movement – provide value in post-communist Bulgaria?
Research Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To critically assess contemporary Buzludzha tourism through a lens of academic scholarship using theories on dark tourism, ruins and heterotopias 2. To critically evaluate what value the monument retains today that is separate from its now-defunct role as a political emblem. 3. To consider how such value might continue to be appreciated in post-communist Bulgaria, and if indeed such a thing is possible, or desired.

Table 13: Research aim, question and objectives.

7.1 Research Philosophy

The practice of social research does not exist in a vacuum, “hermetically sealed off from the social sciences and the various intellectual allegiances that their practitioners hold” (Bryman, 2004: 4). Instead, methods of social research are closely allied to different visions of how

social reality should be studied. As Bryman (2004: 4) states, “methods are not simply neutral tools: they are linked with the ways in which social scientists envision the connection between different viewpoints about the nature of social reality and how it should be examined.”

Accordingly, this research will consider a broad range of sources as it assesses the range of attitudes a society holds towards a site of memorial heritage. It will adopt what could be called an inductive phenomenological research philosophy, in its approach to understanding the value ascribed to such a site by those who inherit it. Gilgun (2001) suggests that induction is centred upon the belief that research should come before theory and that it is from collected data that theories are generated. With an inductive stance, the generation of theory is the ultimate outcome, whereby the process of induction involves drawing inferences out of the empirical data. Furthermore, Brotherton (2008) notes that the inductive approach is generally regarded as one that favours the use of “ideographic methodologies,” such as case studies – which are discussed later in the chapter. In essence, an inductive research approach is rooted in a philosophical view of the world that emphasises social construction, perceptions, meanings and subjectivity as important in understanding and the development of knowledge – often referred to as phenomenology or interpretivism.

Meanwhile, the alternative research philosophy is that of deduction. Often adopted by archetypal scientists who believe that the world and knowledge are factual and objective, deduction is based upon a set of beliefs known as positivism. In short, deduction takes the existing body of theoretical and empirical knowledge as its primary starting point. However, as Bryman (2004: 9) notes, “just as deduction entails an element of induction, the inductive process is likely to entail a modicum of deduction.” Indeed, Veal (2006) argues that most research is partly inductive and partly deductive because data is rarely collected without some explanatory model or at least some initial information on the subject. In line with this principle, this study will deliberately employ both inductive and deductive research approaches as it addresses the question of what value people today place in the memorial architecture built by previous regimes. Ezzy (2002) advocates support for any research philosophy that utilises both inductive and deductive approaches. He suggests that theory is not arrived at solely through logical derivations from abstract principles, nor is theory developed solely through objective observation of an empirical world. Rather, the development of theory is through an ongoing dialogue between pre-existing understandings and the data – derived through participation in the (real) world (Ezzy, 2002). For similar

reasons this study will focus heavily on the lived experiences of its research participants, and real-world interactions between visitors and the site in question. The issue of data analysis is examined later, but firstly, the next section presents the research strategy.

7.1.1 (An Integrated) Qualitative Research Strategy

A qualitative research strategy was adopted by this study, in order to offer a greater insight into the complex relationship between an ideological site of memorial heritage, and the people who visit it today. Crucially, however, the qualitative research strategy is integrated with quantitative research instruments in a mixed method approach that complement each other rather than seeking mutual validation. In other words, the study uses “mixed method inquiry as an approach to investigate the social world that ideally involves more than one methodological tradition and thus more than one way of knowing, along with more than one kind of technique for gathering, analysing, and representing human phenomena, all for the purpose of better understanding” (Greene, (2006: 94; also see Section 7.3).

Moreover, the connection between research strategy, on the one hand, and epistemological and ontological commitments on the other hand, as revealed shortly, is not deterministic. In short, there is a tendency for quantitative and qualitative research to be associated with particular epistemological and ontological positions (Bryman, 2004). Moreover, all research methods carry with them inherent epistemological and ontological obligations. For example, quantitative survey research is frequently viewed within a science model and objectivist worldview. On the other hand, some of the unscripted interview research conducted in the scoping exercise of this project might be said to take a more interpretivist or constructionist approach to knowledge building. However, such a view implies “research methods are imbued with specific clusters of epistemological and ontological commitments” (Bryman, 2004: 443). Bryman goes on to note that “the difficulty with such a view is that, if we accept that there is no perfect correspondence between research strategy and matters of epistemology and ontology, the notion that a method is inherently or necessarily indicative of certain wider assumptions about knowledge means that nature of social reality begins to founder” (2004: 443). Fundamentally, therefore, research strategies and the methods that they employ are much more dynamic in terms of epistemology and ontology than is often supposed (Bryman, 2004). Hence, it is within this deliberately fluid context of a social research strategy, with the purposeful utilisation of integrated research instruments, which this study is conducted.

Whilst the epistemology and ontology of the research is discussed in the next section, the thesis relies upon interpretivism as a general guiding philosophy or paradigm (Jamal & Hollinshead, 2001; Guba & Lincoln 1994; Sparkes, 1992). Consequently, interpretivism “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998: 67). Qualitative research often uses an integrated multi-method focus that involves interpretative and naturalistic approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Jamal & Hollinshead, 2001), both of which are appropriate for the research question outlined for this study. Indeed, emergent and dynamic understandings within tourism studies generally, and dark tourism in particular, are optimised through integrated multi-method research strategies that take full advantage of innovative methods available, many of which remain under-utilised in tourism research (Hollinshead, 2004a; 2004b). Indeed, Hollinshead (2004a: 65) calls for research that provides “genuine cross-disciplinary coverage of the tacit, the subjective, the discursive or the interpretive” in order to address the omission in our understanding of the perspectives of tourists and their experiences. This cross-disciplinary coverage together with the call by Stone (2005) for dark tourism research to be located within a thanatological framework, ensures the thesis is based upon a definition of tourism as a set of activities and relationships occurring in spaces that are constructed with temporal and consequential socio-cultural meanings. In essence, this study relies upon emerging ways of conceptualising and undertaking integrative investigations as to the relationships between types of dark tourism, dark tourist activities, and the experiences and understanding of those involved (after Tribe, 2005).

Further to the notion of an integrated qualitative research strategy, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) categorise the history of qualitative research into ‘five moments’ which operate simultaneously in the present. The first moment, often referred to as the ‘traditional moment,’ is associated with the positivist paradigm (1900-1950). The positivist paradigm asserts that objective accounts of the world can be given. The second moment, also known as ‘modernist’ or the ‘golden age’ moment (1950-1970), and the third moment – or ‘blurred genres’ moment (1970-1986) – are both associated with the appearance of post-positivist arguments. The latter claim that partially objective accounts of the world can be given. Consequently, the second and third moments are influenced by new interpretative, qualitative perspectives such as hermeneutics (whereby prior understandings and prejudices shape the interpretative process), and cultural studies (an interdisciplinary field that merges critical theory, feminism, and post-

structuralism). The fourth moment reflects the ‘crisis of representation’ (1986-1990) and is a reflection of the struggle researchers deal with in locating themselves and their subjects in reflexive texts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Finally, the fifth moment, or the post-modern or present moment (1990-present), is “characterised by new sensibility that doubts all previous paradigms” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 2).

Hence, according to this categorisation, this research is located within the third and fourth moments. Consequently, within the blurred genres (third) moment, the researcher is a *bricoleur* and borrows from different disciplines (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The interpretive bricoleur produces a bricolage – that is “a pieced together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 4). The bricolage is an emergent construction and the qualitative researcher deploys diverse and integrative strategies, methods, and empirical techniques. In essence, the researcher as bricoleur engages with the research and the iterative process at work with the subject matter under investigation. The blurred genres approach reflects the belief that research can benefit from a flexibility and pragmatism that allows the researcher to adapt, if need be, the research design, the methods, and theoretical underpinnings to changing circumstances – as well as his own understanding of a phenomena or situation. This flexibility also allows the researcher to engage in “an interactive process shaped by [the researcher’s] personal history, biography, gender, social class, and ethnicity” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 6). Furthermore, Hollinshead (1996: 69) suggests that the bricolage provides tourism research with “a ventilated approach to social and human enquiry that seeks to combine the intellectual stimuli of post-modernity with the necessary practicalities involved in knowing local/grounded/population specific situations.”

Similarly, Goodson and Phillimore (2004) claim that the traditional (first) and modernist (second) moments dominate tourism research. They suggest that this may be due to a reliance on earlier and more familiar methods influenced by anthropology and sociology. They also suggest that there is an increasing reference to the fourth and fifth moments in tourism research. The fourth moment, or crisis in representation, is relevant to this study for three key reasons. Firstly, place-based tourism research located in the fourth moment considers as a central theme the diverse and complex dimensions of people and place. Indeed, Goodson and Phillimore (2004: 38) note that “some of the key debates central to the fourth and fifth moments have formed the focus of a number of discussions, with key considerations

including the social construction of tourism space, place, reality and knowledge; the conceptualisation of the ‘self’ in tourism; and issues of subjectivity and embodiment.”

Secondly, this research conceptualises communist heritage tourism as relationships and interaction, and through this conceptualisation critically examines the relationship between the Self and the Other (or subject / object dichotomy) that has been commonly applied to tourism research. Consequently, a possibility arises to reconceptualise tourism relationships and tourist experiences, including those who visit and those who are visited (Goodson & Phillimore, 2004). Therefore, it is suggested that communist heritage tourism research in the fourth moment is better understood as it lends itself to the perspective of the both the visitor and the visited. Finally, whilst the third (blurred genres) moment provides more attention to methodological, epistemological and ontological issues than do the first or second moments, the fourth moment attends to issues that revolve around participants’ voices, including their personal and intellectual biographies (Goodson & Phillimore, 2004). Therefore, the fourth moment makes room for researcher reflexivity as a legitimate way of creating knowledge. Moreover, reflexivity is defined as more than a self-indulgent practice, but rather it relates to the researcher’s “ability to look and reflect inwards upon themselves as researchers, and outwards upon those that they *research*” (original emphasis – Tribe, 2005: 6). This raises broader notions of epistemology and ontology, as now considered.

7.1.2 Epistemological and Ontological Considerations

Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge and deals with “how we know what we are” (Crotty, 1998: 8). This integrative study adopts a constructivist-interpretive epistemology. Constructivist or constructionist epistemologies are based upon the fundamental belief that “human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it” (Schwandt, 2000: 197). Indeed, constructionism challenges objectivist epistemologies in its rejection of the idea that there exists an objective truth waiting to be discovered. Consequently, knowing is not passive and humans do not simply reflect or mirror what occurs around them: they filter what occurs through their collective understandings of the world and the practices that are a consequence of this understanding (Schwandt, 2000). Similarly, Crang (2003: 494) advocates that the constructionist agenda view “people discursively creating their worlds.”

In contrast to positivist epistemologies which were utilised in much of the qualitative research that occurred in the first (traditional) and second (modernist) moments, ‘truth’ of constructionism reflects an epistemology of the third (blurred genres) moment. It proposes that ‘truth’ is produced and unveiled through interpretive practices. It is here that “knowledge of what others are doing and saying always depends upon some background or context of other meanings, beliefs, values, practices and so forth” (Schwandt, 2000: 201). In short, constructionist perspectives adopted by this study assert that knowledge imposes a subjectivist epistemology that is based upon co-created understandings – that is, between researcher and respondent (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Indeed, all research findings approximate the truth at a particular moment in time (Middleton, 2010). Thus, the approximations in this study represent an accurate appraisal and analysis for those tourists set in diverse, yet related, sites, sights and their desired cognitions.

Matters of ontology relate to questions of seeing, experiencing, meaning, being and identity. In essence, ontological considerations “help determine or designate the nature of the knowable (or otherwise, the nature of reality in terms of concerns of *being*, *becoming* and *meaning*, etc)” (original emphasis and parenthesis – Hollinshead, 2004a: 75). Therefore, constructionism is ontologically relativist and does not operate within the confines of a singular reality – it also assumes that research occurs in the natural world, thus is naturalistic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Hollinshead (2004a: 77) argues that ontological relativism seeks to “understand the identities of, the meaning attributed by and the experiences of different populations, against a background of competing perspectives of life and the world, within the setting being investigated.” Consequently, this relativism is seen as critical to what differentiates constructivism from other paradigms – for instance, positivism, post-positivism, and critical theory (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

According to Hollinshead (2004a), ontological reflections are particularly significant in tourism research because tourism, by its nature and processes, implicates interactions between individuals and places. His review of ontological matters in tourism, drawing upon the work of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1992), suggested tourism research is limited by its inability to embrace the “ontological *madness* of places” (original emphasis – Hollinshead, 2004a: 66). Hollinshead goes on to suggest that this limitation has had significant consequences for tourism scholarship given that tourism is the quintessential ‘place-maker.’ With this in mind, challenging the idea of objective knowledge can facilitate researcher capacity to “try and

understand the contextual realities and subjective meanings that shape people's interactions with their world" (Samdahl, 1998: 126). Hence, such epistemological and ontological considerations make it possible to view the original contribution to knowledge by this study, as having being filtered through the researchers' own experiences, as well as being co-created with research respondents.

Furthermore, Ley (1988) reflected upon the nature of people and place, and the construction of meaning, and advocated the epistemological and ontological requirement to grant it more respect because of its complexity. He called upon researchers to interpret the complex relations between people and places with a methodology of engagement: one that involves informal dialogue as well as formal documentation. As a result, this study takes onboard a commitment to understanding and exploring the manifestations of this complexity, in the case of communist heritage tourism, and to this end it adopts a constructionist epistemology and ontology.

7.2 Research Design

Research designs are blueprints that connect researchers to research philosophies, strategies and methods for collecting and analysing empirical data. Consequently, the research design comprises the "skills, assumptions, and practices that the researcher employs as he or she moves paradigm to the empirical world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 22).

Hollinshead (2004b) stresses that 'a gap' is clearly evident between the positivist and interpretative traditions. He suggests that this could be addressed through the enablement of a deliberately designed integrative multi-method research approach. It is towards this reported 'gap' that this research study aims its attention, with the intention of revealing knowledge in the understanding of subjective meaning-making on the part of visitors to sites of communist heritage tourism, with a particular acknowledgement of visitor motivations, emotions, and other subjective and phenomenological aspects. However, as Middleton (2010) notes, human subjectivity continues to embody a composite process. In other words, human subjectivity both constructs and assimilates a series of sensory and intrinsic perspectives that occur in response to the extrinsic surroundings and the temporal situations they depict. Consequently, as revealed shortly, this study deliberately implemented a research design that embraced a

specific range of compatible and complimentary techniques through a progressive and sequential manner.

Stake (2000) refers to the case study as an established research tool that is used for theory building as opposed to theory testing (Merriam, 1998; Kitchin & Tate, 2000). The case study is used to gain in-depth understanding of a situation (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000), and is particularly appropriate for the study of events, roles and relationships, including specific encounters (Kitchin & Tate, 2000). Hence, case studies focus upon meaning and relationships (Veal, 2006; Merriam, 1998), and are both a process of inquiry and a product of that inquiry (Yin, 1994; Stake, 2000). Merriam (1998) suggests case studies should be focused on processes, context, and discovery rather than outcomes, specific variables, and confirmation. Additionally, as ‘bounded systems,’ case studies possess three key dimensions:

- Firstly, case studies are particularistic – that is, they focus upon a particular event or phenomenon;
- Secondly, case studies are descriptive whereby the end result is a so-called ‘thick and rich’ description of the phenomenon;
- Finally, case studies are heuristic in the sense they illuminate understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Whilst there is no singular pertinent research modality to tourism research (Ritchie et al., 2005), the case study is particularly suited to this inductive research due to the flexibility not evident in many other alternative research modes (Jennings, 2001). However, case studies have been broadly criticised as speculative, unreliable and too specific to be replicated or applied generally (Beeton, 2005). It has also been argued that case studies tend to reflect the bias of the researcher. Indeed, Hoaglin et al (1982) suggest that the value system of the researcher tends to influence the presentation of the facts as well as analysis. They go on to suggest that the usefulness of a case study can also be influenced by the value system of the reader, who “tends to remember results that support his/her values, rejecting the others that do not fit as neatly” (Beeton, 2005: 39). Nevertheless, whilst the possibility of bias in the case studies is recognised, bias is not restricted to a case study design (Bryman, 2004). Even so, “criticisms of case studies are valid and cannot simply be passed off as mere historical or etymological aberrations” (Beeton, 2005: 39). Indeed, according to Yin (1994: xiii), “investigators who do case studies are regarded as having deviated from their academic

disciplines, their investigations as having insufficient precision (that is, quantification), objectivity and rigour... [Yet] case studies continue to be used extensively.” Beeton (2005) suggests this continued use of case studies is due to the inherent development of the human psyche. In other words, the case study is a process that provides instant recognition and understanding, as people “learn from analysing and processing our observations of the world around us, from both direct and vicarious experience” (Beeton, 2005: 39).

Some scholars argue for a greater use of case study research that includes the investigation of more than one case (Bryman, 2004), suggesting that multi-case study research improves theory building. As Yin (1994) suggests, by comparing two or more cases, the researcher is in a better position to establish the circumstances in which theory will or will not hold. Indeed, the comparison may itself suggest concepts that are relevant to an emerging theory (Bryman, 2004). Accordingly, this research was originally conceived as a comparative multi-method case study design, with an idea to study four different sites of communist heritage tourism using identical methods in order to compare and contrast the results. However, the researcher had a much closer relationship with one of these places, than with the other three – over time also becoming involved in a certain degree of academic activism in relation to the site (see Section 7.2.2). Therefore, ultimately, it was decided that this research study would benefit from going *deep*, rather than going *broad*; that is to say, by focussing on a comprehensive multi-method research approach applied to just one single site of study. Theories therefore will be produced related to the one single site, but will be presented in the conclusion with the proposal that they might be further tested through application to other sites, in future research.

7.2.1 Case Study Selection

The earliest proposals for this study featured a selection of four different case studies: the Buzludzha Memorial House in Bulgaria, the Balaklava Naval Museum Complex (formerly known by the code designation ‘Object 825’) in Crimea, the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone in Ukraine, and the Perm-36 Memorial Centre (a museumified former gulag) in Russia. Between them, it was believed that these case studies could provide a fascinating cross section of the various challenges faced by politically charged sites of history and heritage in post-communist space; that they demonstrated a range of different ‘degrees of darkness’ on a dark tourism spectrum; and additionally, represented different stages in the process of contemporary touristification.

However, this multi-site case study design also presented a number of challenges. Spread across three countries, it would have required a lot of travel to make multiple visits to each of the sites. Additionally, on 18 March 2014, Crimea was annexed from Ukraine by Russia, complicating the issue of access to the Balaklava Naval Museum Complex. The Perm-36 Memorial Centre was officially closed the same year, as a result of related discussions within Russia around the themes of patriotism and nationalism, with critics of the memorial centre claiming that it presented an ‘anti-Russian message’ (see Chapter 4). Of the original four, this left only the Buzludzha Memorial House and the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone as practical case study options.

Both of these sites were well known to the researcher, due to numerous previous personal visits, and it was believed that both could provide potentially fertile grounds for investigative research into tourist activity and motivations. However, as the first stages of the literature review began, it became apparent that the Buzludzha Memorial House offered more unique potential for conducting original, meaningful research, due to a number of factors:

- When this study began, in 2015, no research had so far been conducted into the phenomenon of tourism to the Buzludzha Memorial House, which at that time was still a contested, abandoned, and ruined site of former communist heritage. Chernobyl, on the other hand, had already been the subject of research, and the phenomenon of Chernobyl tourism was well documented.
- The researcher was based in Bulgaria, only a four-hour drive away from the monument. He already spoke some Bulgarian, and was rapidly building meaningful personal connections with people involved in conservation proposals as well as with the monument’s original architect. This promised a level of access far beyond what might then have been available at Chernobyl.
- Whereas Chernobyl was already in 2015 managed by the Ukrainian state (albeit, still somewhat unofficially) as a tourism destination, Buzludzha was clearly at that time undergoing a process of change. The building’s condition was rapidly deteriorating, while the number of visitors was increasing year-on-year. The Bulgarian state had so far made no effort to conserve the site or to manage or promote tourism, and so as a result it felt like a case study with a far more complex and meaningful story to tell.

As a result of the above, the decision was made in mid-2015 to redesign this research study, and rather than focus on multiple case study sites (as per the earlier plan), to focus instead on one conflicted place of post-communist heritage which seemingly offered a great potential for rich and meaningful research approaches. The depth into which this research would be able to go, in addition to observing changes over time, and creating something of a longitudinal study of the site, seemed more interesting than comparing static snapshots of multiple different places at one single point in time.

However, the researcher's focus on the site would evolve into a two-way relationship as it progressed, both gathering data about the monument, but then also using that data to feed directly back into a campaign for conservation, with which the researcher became actively involved over the years – eventually resulting in the successful application for a first conservation grant. These latter activities constitute a form of involvement perhaps best characterised as 'academic activism,' and which shall be discussed now.

7.2.2 *Academic Activism*

'Academic activism' is a term used to describe academic work which steps beyond the usual threshold of academia, in order to pursue positive and/or progressive real-world change. Many famous examples exist, not least amongst them Nobel Prize winners – such as the 1970 recipient, Norman Borlaug, whose biological research was directly applied to a real-world problem by creating disease resistant high-yield crops in regions where millions of people faced the danger of starvation. There are a number of ways in which academics can engage in forms of activism, including for example in the production and dissemination of truth and knowledge; in facilitating progressive approaches to education and teaching; or by participating in research which is itself new and progressive, and thereby either conducive to or informative for social change (Zerai, 2002; Downs & Manion, 2004; Flood, Martin & Dreher, 2013). In application, academic activism can range from the use of educational techniques designed to challenge the status quo of university classrooms (Curle, 1973; hooks, 1994; Newman, 2006; Shor, 1980); to pursuing progress in the field, for example in the areas of feminist studies (Eschle & Maiguashca, 2007), or human geography (Ward 2007); or other juxtapositions of action and academia, such as for example giving seminars in conjunction with organising blockades on nuclear weapons (Vinthagen, Kenrick & Mason, 2012). It could be said that this current study falls into the category of academic activism, as during the

process the researcher has become personally involved in campaigning for conservation of a site of communist heritage in Bulgaria, including the activities of creating a website for the project, working on campaign plans, leading educational tours, writing grant applications, and personally funding various of the above activities (see Appendix 1).

However, Flood, Martin and Dreher (2013) note that “academic activism can be risky,” as progressively-intentioned work may often be met with reprisal, whether politically or even by threat of violence in some cases; and moreover, they note that “both academic peers and students may perceive activist academics as violating their appropriate roles,” inasmuch as such action may be perceived as being “nonconformist.” One potential solution to conflict that they highlight, is to postpone activism work until the completion of academic work; or to partition the two into “separate worlds.” They also note another challenge to the academic activist:

“Academics whose research or teaching is oriented towards activism will often experience expectations, among their peers and within institutions, to use academic frameworks in their work. Scientists are expected to ‘stick to the science’ [...] and social scientists are expected to study structures and explanations but not strategies [...] Using an activist-friendly framework can be seen as being unscholarly” (Flood, Martin & Dreher, 2013).

Ultimately, they conclude that activism and academia are inherently different pursuits, but “[although] combining activism and an academic career is challenging, it can be immensely rewarding.” Phakathi (2014) elaborates that “[every] activity has a bottom line. In politics, it’s votes. In business, it’s money. In religion, it’s souls. Activism is about promoting social change, which is a different bottom line to that of academia, which is knowledge generation.” Though Phakathi also goes further, to suggest even perhaps a sense of *duty*: “Academics have a privileged place in society and, as such, can play a powerful role in shaping its direction for the better.”

In this case, the researcher participated in academic activism after noting the increasing natural decay of this heritage site, over numerous visits, and then realising that he was ideally situated to make a real difference by doing something to halt it. He was able to ‘play a powerful role’ as Phakathi says, and so, as someone who cared about the country and the state of its heritage sites, felt it would be the noble and right thing to do. However, this study acknowledges also the ‘risky’ nature of academic activism, as pointed out by Flood, Martin

and Dreher, and so this activism has been approached carefully and conscientiously, not least with recognition of the researcher's own status as an outsider to the heritage in question; a relationship which might be considered to face the potential risk of falling into dynamics of 'Orientalism' or 'neo-colonialism' (see Chapter 4). These themes will be revisited, and evaluated in relation to the researcher's own academic activism, both in Appendix 1 and in Chapter 9.

7.3 Research Methods

Methods are instruments and techniques used for data collection. Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 3) refer to research methods within integrative designs as "a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible." Consequently, with methods that seek to represent the world, "the researcher can study things in their natural settings [and] attempt to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 3). Hence, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection in case study research whereby an integrative multi-method research strategy can be utilised (Merriam, 1998).

This study will use a purposeful integration of mixed methods, namely an online netnography, semi-structured interviews, and survey questionnaires. Additionally, ethnographic field trips were conducted in 2015 which served as a scoping exercise before the focus turned solely to the case study of the Buzludzha Memorial House. These involved making visits to more than a hundred different communist-era memorial sites located around Bulgaria, so that Buzludzha itself could be discussed not as a unique object, but rather in the context of a broader understanding of Bulgaria's communist heritage sites in general. During these visits, informal interviews were conducted with a number of local people who were encountered on-site. Whilst not an integral component of the other case study designs, the unique opportunity to gather 'thick' and 'rich' data from such a valuable source was captured. As Sarsby (1984: 96) notes:

"Every field situation is different and initial luck in meeting good informants, being in the right place at the right time and striking the right note in relationships may be just as important as skill in technique. Indeed, many successful episodes in the field do come about through good luck as much as through sophisticated planning, and many unsuccessful episodes are due as much to bad luck as to bad judgement."

This initial scoping exercise stage was instrumental in helping to shape the main research approaches that would follow; as conversations with local people would often highlight underlying issues within Bulgarian society relating to the condition, treatment, and attitudes towards sites of communist heritage in the country. Thus, the issues that were raised in these informal conversations often informed the wording of questions to be asked in the later, more structured research phases. These conversations will also occasionally be drawn on in the later discussion chapters, in the form of rich ethnographic data. The researcher also has experience of having visited the main case study, the Buzludzha Memorial House, on numerous occasions before this current study began, beginning in 2012. These prior site visits will be summarised – noting the changing condition of the monument and the estimated number of visitors encountered there – and presented in Chapter 7 as a part of the ‘scoping exercise.’

The second stage of research will take the form of a netnography, reviewing the rich and varied accounts that past visitors to Buzludzha have uploaded to the internet – on social media, blogs, news websites and online magazines.

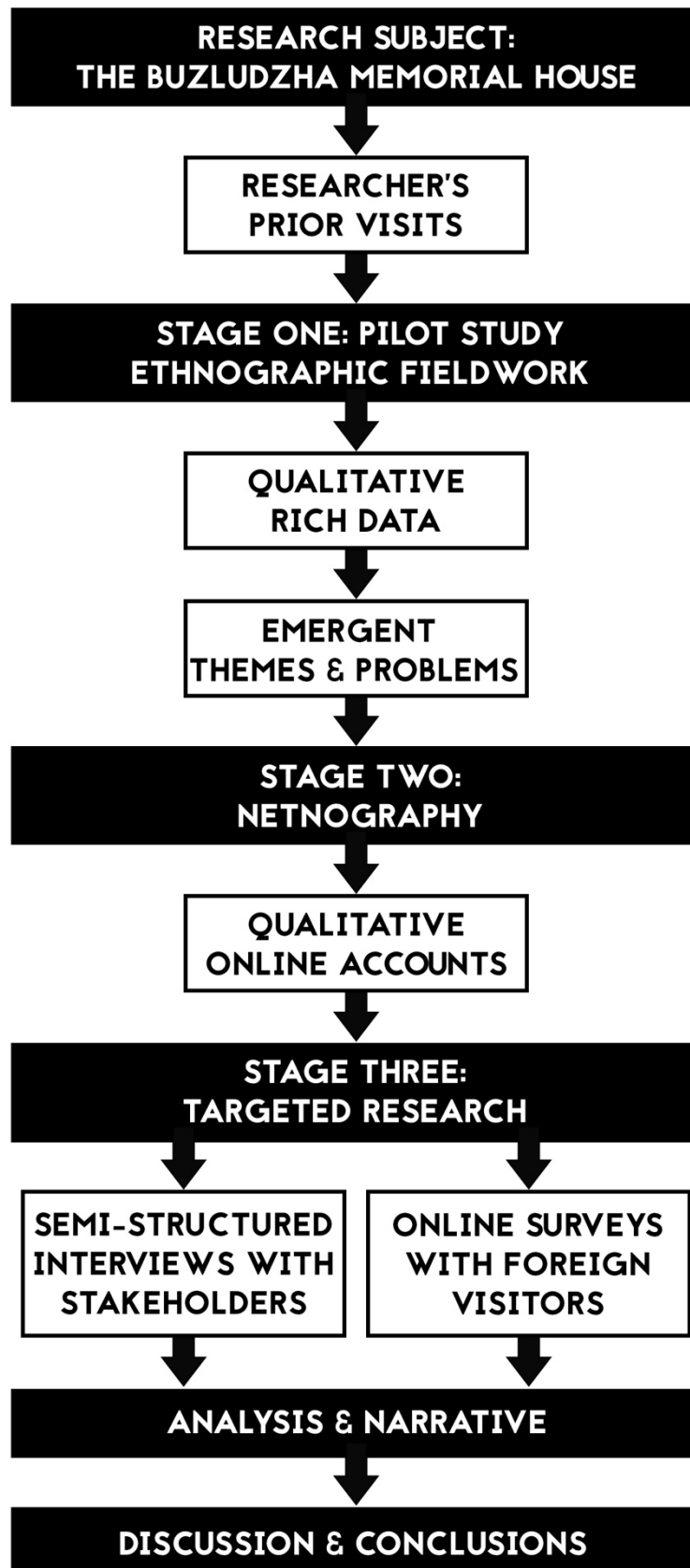


Figure 6: A schematic of empirical methods and research design.

Finally, the third phase will consist of targeted empirical research, following two dual approaches: semi-structured interviews conducted with various experts and stakeholders either connected to the site, or to the subject of communist heritage more broadly; and a survey questionnaire which will be made available online, to be completed by non-Bulgarian tourists who had previously visited the Buzludzha Memorial House. The rationale and criteria for each method, including sampling strategies, as well as particular advantages and disadvantages, are discussed in the next sections, but in the meanwhile, Figure 6 schematically illustrates the methods and their relationship within the overall research design and subsequent analysis.

As discussed earlier in Section 7.1.2, the integrative nature of a mixed-method approach utilised in this study was to address different aspects of the research aim, in order that a fuller picture be developed and which may be regarded as complementary. However, as Wollney (2009: 87) points out, “because competing claims for the justification of mixed methods studies currently abound in the literature, some of which are highly contestable, this [complementary aspect] is an important point.”

Hence, according to Johnson and Turner (2003), in what they called the fundamental principle of mixed research, researchers should collect multiple data using different strategies, approaches, and methods in such a way that the resulting mixture or combination is likely to result in complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004: 18) also suggest that “effective use of this principle is a major source of justification for mixed methods research because the product will be superior to monomethod studies.” They go on to propose that mixed method research is a “research paradigm whose time has come” (2004:14). Sells, Smith and Sprenkle (1995: 203) also advocate this potential superiority of integrative qualitative and quantitative research methods and suggest that they “build upon each other and offer information that neither one alone could provide.”

Consequently, Yin (2006) suggests that integrative mixed method research embraces much more than the traditional dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative research. As discussed in Section 7.3, this dichotomous perspective disguises the reality that there can be different mixes or combinations of methods. However, Yin outlines criteria for integrative research, and notes it is critical that mixed methods should be within a single study with a

defined research question. In particular, he suggests that for integration, the following five procedures should be addressed, either separately or in tandem with each other:

- Research question
- Units of analysis
- Samples for study
- Instrumentation and data collection methods
- Analytic strategies

Firstly therefore, and applying Yin's framework, the range of methods used within this study related to a single research question – in this case, within a heritage tourism context, what value is the abandoned communist memorial site able to offer to contemporary Bulgarians? All methods used within this study addressed this question in a purposeful, sequential and complementary manner. In other words, the study was construed as a single study but made use of a range of different methods that all addressed the same specific research question.

Secondly, “every study has an implicit if not explicit unit of analysis [which] holds a study together” (Yin, 2006: 43). However, as Yin also notes, “the challenge in using mixed methods arises because different methods inherently favour different units of analysis – leading to another threat to the integrity of a single study” (2006:43). However, to mitigate any threat to this study's integrity, the research consistently maintained a point of reference as a ‘unit’ of analysis. Put another way, the research makes persistent reference to the contemporary perceived value of communist heritage sites as a unit of analysis. Subsequently, “such persistent reference to this unit of analysis created the needed integrative force to blend all of the methods into a single study” (Yin, 2006: 43).

Thirdly, sampling procedures need to be considered carefully in maintaining a single study. Whilst sampling techniques are discussed in more detail shortly, the principle adopted within this integrative study was for the samples of each method to be nested within that of the other (Yin, 2006). In short, “fieldwork samples may be nested within survey samples” (Yin, 2006: 44). Thus, the online survey was nested within interview samples, inasmuch as various respondents were both interviewed and surveyed. However, as Yin (2006) points out, the nesting arrangement is an ideal when using mixed methods, although in practice it is not

always achievable. Hence, for this reason, particular limitations are recognised within this study (see Section 10.5).

Fourthly, as mixed method research uses an array of different data collection instruments, which in turn, can “contain directly analogous variables, if not actual items [then] the more that the items overlap or complement each other; the more that the mixed methods can be part of a single study” (Yin, 2006: 44). Thus, the data collection methods used in this study were deliberately designed to create directly comparable items, although by design they also had many non-overlapping items. This, in turn, added to the richness of data within the confines of this study.

Finally, analytic integration within a mixed method approach, which can be the most problematic, relies on determining a counterpart relationship between the differing method analyses. As Yin (2006: 45) states:

“...the goal is not to force the mixed methods into the exact same analytic routines. Rather, the goal is to design and carry out what might be ‘counterpart’ analyses. Such analyses should be formulated in directly analogous fashion, although they may use entirely different methodological techniques.”

Thus, whilst specific analytic techniques are discussed in more detail shortly, the overriding principle for this study was to formulate analogous counterpart relationships within and between the analyses and respective methods, and to offer an interconnected narrative that addressed the research question within the confines of a single study. As Bryman (2007) notes, it is the conjunction of interpreting mixed method data with writing a narrative which is crucial in any integrative research method approach.

7.3.1 Ethnographic Fieldwork

The terms ‘participant observation’ and ‘ethnography’ are often used interchangeably and thus are very difficult to define (Bryman, 2004). Both draw attention to the fact that the observer/ethnographer is immersed within an environmental setting for a period, and observes interactions and behaviours, listens to what is said in conversations – both between others and with the researcher – and asks questions. Additionally, ethnography may simultaneously refer to both a method of research, including participant observations and the written product of the

research. Indeed, “‘ethnography’ frequently denotes a research process and the written outcome of the research” (Bryman, 2004:292). Thus, for clarity, this study adopts the term ‘ethnography’ to mean both the actual research method of ‘talking/listening’ with research respondents (that is, through interviews as well as through on-site interactions during the scoping exercise), and the subsequent writing-up of the research findings. This latter point is discussed in more detail later.

Meanwhile, participant observation is an ethnographic method used to seek understandings of place and context of everyday life (Hay, 2000). Indeed, it is a particularly effective method for researchers who intend to collect data that arrives from local perspectives, through community involvement, or by recurrent contact with people and relatively unstructured social interactions (Hay, 2000). In the context of this study, ethnographic fieldwork took the following form:

- Locating, researching, and visiting former memorial sites built during the communist period.
- Observing the condition, and the number or frequency of other visitors to the site.
- Talking to other visitors, and recording their responses – asking them informal questions such as “what does this place memorialise?”; and, “what does this place mean to you?”

In this way the scoping exercise was able to provide context for the main case study to follow, and better illuminate the researcher as to the larger trend of the treatment of communist monuments in post-communist Bulgaria, in addition to shedding some light on general public perception of such places. Prior visits to the case study site, and the researcher’s subsequent observations there, similarly contribute towards forming a more robust knowledge foundation upon which to conduct targeted research. This informal ethnographic approach could also be said to have facilitated dialogue between research participants and researcher (see Belsky, 2004), as well as providing the study as a whole with what Scott and Usher (1999) identify as “direct experiential value.” Observations were “unstructured” and “naturalistic” (Veal, 2006) as the researcher, posing as a visitor, was immersed within the case sites and gazed not only upon the gazer but also consumed the touristic interpretations on offer. Consequently, there are few systematic guidelines for participant observation given that every observed situation is relative and unique (Hay, 2000). Indeed, “the strict application of rules has less to do with

the approach than does the researcher's high capacity for introspection with respect to his or her relationship to what is to be (and is being) researched" (Hay, 2000: 109).

For this study, ethnographic fieldwork took the form of visits to sites of communist heritage across Bulgaria. More than 100 such sites were visited over the course of five weekend road-trips between June and September 2015. At each place, the researcher photographed the monument or memorial, and while most of the places visited were not frequented by anyone else, at 32 of these places, potentially interesting interactions resulted between the researcher and other visitors. The purpose of this process was to assess not only the material legacy of communism in Bulgaria, but also to get a sense of its social and cultural legacy, and thus, before the study focussed in depth on the Buzludzha Memorial House, one specific site of communist heritage, the study aimed to use this ethnographic fieldwork phase in order to inform a baseline understanding of Bulgaria's relationship with its communist past, and those physical sites that still stand as mementos of the period. The results of this ethnographic fieldwork from 32 locations where informal conversations were had, are presented in Appendix 2.

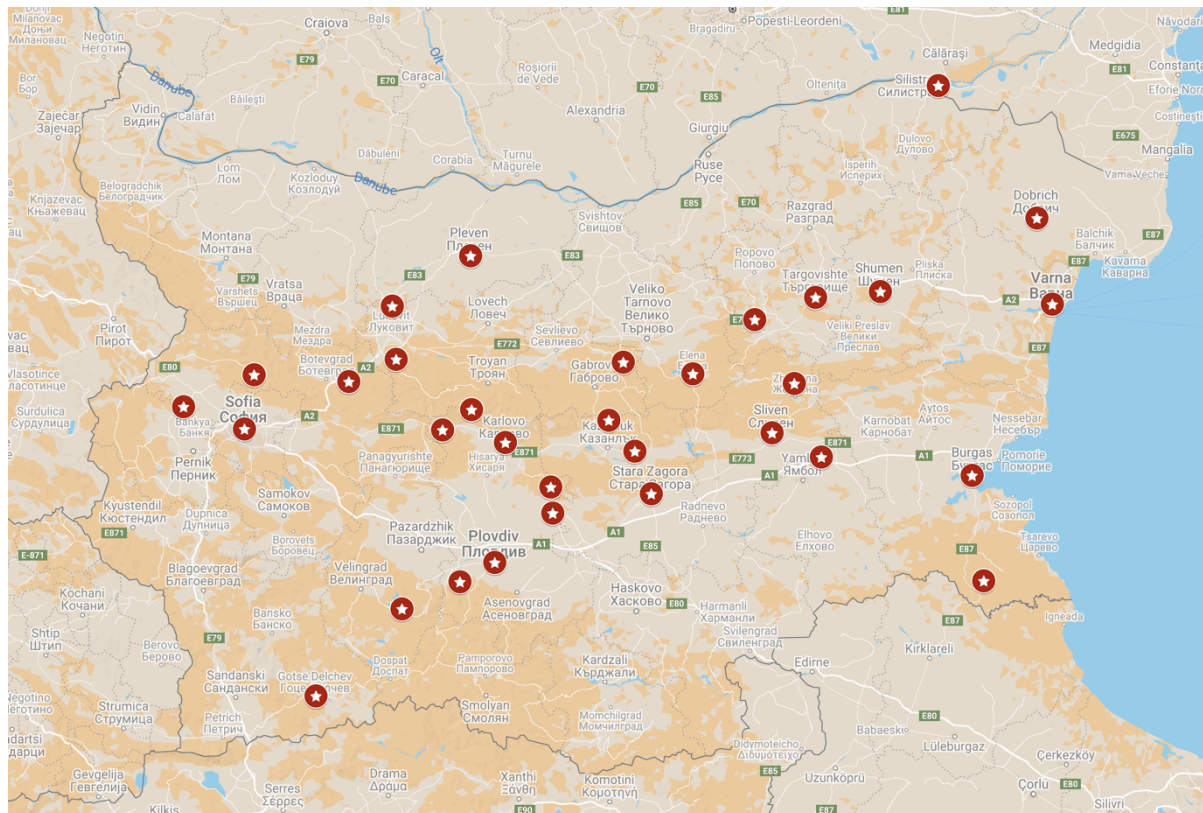


Plate 69: A map of Bulgaria marked with 32 locations where ethnographic fieldwork was carried out.

7.3.2 *Netnography*

The second stage of this research process will consist of a comprehensive netnography – collating and evaluating references to the Buzludzha Memorial House online, as they appear in news articles and media reports, on travel blogs, forums and social media. A *netnography* is an approach that takes as its object of focus “a complex world” of networked individuals, a “unique social phenomenon,” and through its study, “can help you to understand that world. It can help you understand the various contexts that make it possible, the new social forms it advances, and the old forms it replaces” (Kozinets, 2015: 1). By taking advantage of technology and digital forums – including websites, social media and online communities – the netnography can be seen to be a uniquely contemporary form of methodology, and one whose objects of study transcend geography, authority, and culture, to offer democratic and potentially highly revealing insights into attitudes, language and perspectives in relation to any given topic of enquiry. In this study, the results of the netnography will then be assessed and evaluated using an approach of critical discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis is a form of analysis which focuses on language; it uses qualitative methods applied within an inductive approach, to look at both conscious and unconscious uses of language in creating and maintaining social and psychological phenomena (Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Willig, 2014). Building upon this framework, *critical* discourse analysis uses such approaches to interrogate the power relations inherent within language, and as such becomes a tool that might be used to explore language as a medium for constructing, transmitting or legitimising social inequalities (Van Dijk, 1993). Critical discourse analysis might therefore be defined as discourse analysis that is conducted with the aim “to bring about change through critical understanding” (Mullet, 2018).

Critical discourse analysis has also been demonstrated as a useful tool with which to evaluate the discourse surrounding sites of ‘difficult heritage.’ For example, Horvatinčić (2012) uses critical discourse analysis in her study of the online representations of Yugoslav war memorials, considering 60 examples “found on websites and blogs dedicated mainly to the field of design, architecture, history, technology.” Between these, she is able to distil a critical meta-commentary, as the sources are shown to provide a “significant research *corpus* for analysing the broader issue of reception, production and distribution of knowledge.” Particularly, Horvatinčić is able to observe trends such as the “semantic narrowing” of particular words, which are seen almost to take on new life, as they evolve and are ascribed

new and changing meanings through successive online uses. The approach also allows her to critique these discourses, as a product of observed “cultural and economic dimensions,” which prove to be “significant in the creation and maintenance of power relations.”

In the context of the current study, critical discourse analysis is proposed as a potentially informative means through which to approach, assess, and critically evaluate the knowledge being produced, shared and understood in association with the Buzludzha Memorial House in Bulgaria; and not least as this study seeks to evaluate the monument’s representations in relation to socially constructed narratives of ‘Orientalism’ and ‘Balkanism,’ and as it is seen through the ‘tourist gaze’ (see Chapter 4). Nevertheless, the challenge to the researcher is to remain impartial and unbiased throughout this process of collecting, assembling and evaluating the artefacts of contemporary discourse, because as Mullet (2018) notes: “[critical discourse analysis] research studies are no less likely than other forms of scholarly research to reproduce ideological assumptions.”

To address this challenge, the netnography research will be comprehensive in nature, rather than selective or reductive. The researcher will not simply consider sources that support particular arguments, or conform to narrative patterns established elsewhere, but rather, an exhaustive search will be conducted of *all* online materials that refer to the Buzludzha Memorial House. These searches will be conducted both in English and in Bulgarian, so that for the first time in any published work on the subject, this thesis will be able to discuss in detail the full range of both local and foreign perspectives on the monument.

Whilst computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), such as NVivo, were considered, because of the researcher’s own preference to work ‘hands on,’ and the lack of universal agreement about the utility of CAQDAS (Hesse-Biber, 1995; Weaver & Atkinson, 1995; Catterall & Maclaran, 1997; Fielding & Lee, 1998), ultimately the analysis was manually undertaken to ensure “rich and thick” description (Bryman, 2004). As a result, the researcher considered in total more than a hundred individual articles, news stories, video segments, reviews, and other online artefacts of discourse, related to the Buzludzha Memorial House, during the course of this study: regardless of whether they appeared on high-profile, well-respected websites, or on personal blogs, or in social media posts; and including both English- and Bulgarian-language commentaries. Increasingly through this process, certain

recurring themes began to appear – either through the repetition of the same words or descriptors, or else, symbolically so, as specific ways of framing or talking about Buzludzha. It was decided that one way to remove the potential for researcher bias was that rather than trying to present (or worse, to *force*) any kind of general correlation, or meta-consensus, between these artefacts, the discourse would instead be considered in relation to a number of emergent archetypal themes – five different, and sometimes even contradictory, common contemporary conceptualisations of the monument.

The five prevalent themes to emerge during this critical discourse analysis of the Buzludzha Memorial House were those that presented the site: as a symbol of totalitarianism; as a temple; as a symbol of the Other; as a victim of decommunisation; and as a token of communist kitsch. These themes will be defined and discussed at length in the following chapter, in Sections 8.2.1 through 8.2.5, and illustrated with key examples from the netnography. Of particular note also are virtual representations of the monument, appearing in recent years in a number of different video games, and these will further be discussed – also in relation to the archetypes above – in Section 8.2.6.

7.3.3 *Semi-Structured Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews are methods that seek to understand key informants in complex social and cultural situations (Hay, 2000). More importantly, semi-structured interviews allow flexibility to change the wording and sequence of questions once the interview has been initiated (Hay, 2000; Kitchin & Tate, 2000). Consequently, “the interviewer has much greater freedom to explore specific avenues of enquiry, and logical gaps within data can be anticipated and closed” (Kitchin & Tate, 2000: 214). Indeed, new lines of enquiry that emerged out of the interview process were pursued, and interviews often evolved into conversations, which points to Kvale’s (1996) claim that interviews often transpire as “co-authored narratives.” In essence, interviews were characterised “by the interplay of interviewee and interviewer in the interview process” and included an appreciation for the interviewee’s statement as “a joint social creation” (Kvale, 1996: 183). Thus, it was within this context of narrative conception and flexibility that the interviews were conducted.

As the types of questions asked in qualitative research are highly variable (Bryman, 2004), the researcher adopted the framework offered by Kvale (1996), whereby interviews included a

specific combination of introducing questions, follow-up questions, probing questions, specifying questions, direct questions, indirect questions, and interpreting questions. Thus, the essential objective of the interviews, within the context of specific expert and stakeholder assessments, was to discover and reveal respondent values, beliefs, behaviour, insights, encounters and emotions in relation to their role in conducting, facilitating, observing or studying the phenomenon of communist heritage tourism. Interview selection was conducted using a purposeful sampling strategy. Such sampling “is essentially strategic and entails an attempt to establish a good correspondence between research question and sampling” (Bryman, 2004: 333). In other words, the researcher sampled individuals on the basis of wanting to interview people who were considered relevant to the research. Therefore, specific and purposeful criteria were adopted for interview selection.

Firstly, all respondents were over the age of eighteen – so that they might be positioned to describe an adult relationship with the subject matter. Secondly, they were required to have some kind of connection in relation to the subject matter, though this might vary from an architect, responsible for creating such sites, to academics involved in studying them.

Whilst the general goal was to achieve a balanced cross-section between age and gender of respondents, as well as an international profile featuring as much as possible a good representation of academics and professionals coming from the region of Southeast Europe, ultimately sampling occurred within the confines of convenience rather than any specific quota-based approach. Table 14 shows the names of interviewees, as well as the geographical profile of respondents and their connection to the site.

Informal Interview	Title	Nationality	Format	Visited Buzludzha	Date
Caroline Trotman	Researcher	French	Face-to-face	Yes	22 July 2015
Les Johnstone	Photographer	British	Email	Yes	22 September 2015
Georgi Stoilov	Architect	Bulgarian	Face-to-face	Yes	7 August 2015 23 May 2018
Dora Ivanova	Architect	Bulgarian	Email	Yes	7 August 2015 6 December 2016 24 October 2017
Written					

Interview					
Adrien Minard	Historian	French	Email	Yes	28 June 2018
Andrew Lawler	Researcher	British	Email	No	3 November 2018
Semi-structured Interview					
Donald Niebyl	Researcher	American	Skype call	Yes	15 November 2018
Todor Rusanov, Rafał Czarnowski	Game developers	Bulgarian	Skype call	Yes	20 June 2018

Table 14: Semi-structured interview respondents.

In parallel with the scoping exercise, between July and September 2015 the researcher conducted four interviews with experts and stakeholders related to the Buzludzha Memorial House. These took the form of informal interviews, conducted before this study had formulated a clear research plan and a set of semi-structured interview questions to work with. In some cases, this was a case of simply seizing the opportunity when it was available – for example, interviewing the monument’s architect, Georgi Stoilov, who was already in his late eighties by the time we spoke. This first set of interviews effectively served as a pilot for the semi-structured interviews that would be conducted later; giving the researcher a chance to practice his interview technique, as well as discovering which lines of questioning yielded the most interesting or detailed responses. A preliminary analysis of the transcripts of these early interviews then informed the selection of semi-structured interview questions which would be used as a template for the subsequent interviews.

Those early interviews are also included in the research findings of this thesis – as between them they provided a great deal of rich data that still answer many of the questions this study would eventually formulate. A series of more targeted, semi-structured interviews were conducted in 2018. Two of these were conducted online, via Skype calls, and were recorded by the researcher in order to create full text transcripts for subsequent analysis. This approach also allowed the researcher to capture “not just *what* people say but also in the *way* that they say it” (original emphasis – Bryman, 2004: 329). Two interviewees reported that they were unable to find the time for a call, and so instead submitted written answers to the questions that were sent to them. An initial brief explanation of the research project was given to all interviewees, and informed consent as to publication of responses was attained.

Several intended interviewees declined to speak on the subject – for example, the original hope was to speak with representatives from the contemporary Bulgarian Socialist Party, as well as someone in the current government, though these bodies did not respond to the researcher’s interview requests. Nevertheless, a great deal of data was gathered by way of these interviews – full transcripts can be seen in Appendix 3, and the findings will be discussed in Chapter 9.

7.3.4 *Survey Questionnaires*

The second stage of the empirical process comprised social survey research. A survey is defined “as an inquiry which involves the collection of systematic data across a sample of cases” (Marsh, 1982: 9). Thus, for the purpose of this study, a survey refers to an investigation where:

- systematic measurements, made over the series of cases, in turn, yields data;
- variables within the collected data are analysed to look for any discernible patterns;
- the subject matter is social – that is, the survey seeks to measure individual relationships with communist heritage tourism, but may have broader implications for society.

A self-completion questionnaire was the principal research instrument of the social survey – an example of which can be found in Appendix 4. Questionnaires are considered economical in the sense that they can provide a considerable amount of research data for a relatively low cost of materials, money and time (Bryman, 2004). The development of questionnaires to supply standardised data (Ritchie et al., 2005) was an important consideration for collecting together the perspectives and self-reports of a wide variety of visitors to the site, who otherwise might each have been pursuing quite different modes of engagement. The idea of the questionnaire was to find the points of similarity, through a standardised measure of perceived value. In particular, the design of the questionnaire sought to not only gauge site-specific experiences, but also to reveal the extent of respondent perceptions that surround the idea of visiting such places; and so, respondents were asked about other places they had visited too, and were invited to reveal their own personal frames of meaning-making through

questions that freely invited them to compare the site in question with other heritage sites around the world.

Some questions in the form were left open-ended, and respondents were permitted to write their answers as paragraphs of prose – an approach that was adopted in the hope of gathering rich data, and to allow for unscripted responses in these instances. However, for ease of data gathering, and in order to provide strong numerical data for analysis, the majority of questions were offered as multiple choices. In these cases, the researcher decided against using a Likert scale of measurement, where an odd number of responses are provided which equate to negative scorings, a neutral score, and then positive scores (for example: *very low*; *low*; *neutral*; *high*; *very high*). Instead, the questionnaire's multiple choice entries featured responses scaled from 1 to 8. This was done because it was believed that most respondents would answer in the positive for the majority of different factors offered – that is to say, the researcher believed that rather than finding some aspects of the experience valuable, and ascribing others negative value, that respondents were more likely to have multifaceted perceptions of the site in which many different aspects of the experience were considered valuable; but the real question for the research to ask, was which of these were generally considered the *most* valuable. To this end, the 8-point positive scale applied allowed for much more variance between positive answers than would a Likert scale. Face validity (Bryman, 2004) of the questionnaire was also sought from the researcher's supervisory team. Consequently, appropriate alterations were made to the questionnaire to minimise issues of question bias, misapprehension, or cultural misunderstanding (Oppenheim, 1992).

The survey asked 20 questions, the answers to which it was believed would give a clearer picture of the motivations of those visiting the site and the subjective value they attributed to, and derived from, both the monument and the experience of visiting it. A preliminary section of the survey explained the nature of the research. It asked respondents to confirm their willingness for their data to be used in the study, and it invited them to provide either a name or initials to be identified by, as per their preference. An introductory series of demographic questions then asked for their nationality, and an age range within the categories: *Under 20*, *21-30*, *31-40*, *41-50*, and *51 and over*. There then followed a series of 20 questions focused on respondents' experiences and attitudes in relation to the Buzludzha Memorial House. These questions can be seen in Table 15.

#	Question	Response type
1	What was the main purpose of your visit to Bulgaria?	Open
2	Who did you travel with? [Alone] [Friends] [Family] [Colleagues] [Tour group] [Other]	Multiple choice
3	If you took a tour, what was the name of the company or guide?	Open
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]	Ranking
5	How many times have you been to Buzludzha?	Open
6	What month and year was your most recent visit?	Open
7	Did you read about the monument's history before (or after) you visited?	Open
8	Did it live up to your expectations? [Yes] [No]	Multiple choice
9	What was your favourite / least favourite aspect of the visit?	Open
10	Would you visit again, or recommend others to visit? [Yes] [No]	Multiple choice
11	Of all the places you have ever been, which was the most like Buzludzha? And why?	Open
12	Have you visited other communist-era monuments in Bulgaria? Feel free to name any that made a strong impression on you.	Open
13	How did you first hear about the Buzludzha monument?	Open
14	What does the monument say to you? (Be as creative as you like)	Open
15	How do you feel about the current state of the monument?	Open
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]	Ranking
17	Or can you suggest a better idea?	Open
18	Are you aware of any plans to restore the monument?	Open
19	If the monument was preserved, would you pay to visit it? (If so – what's a fair price? If not – why not?)	Open
20	And the final question: 'Dark Tourism' is a term often used to describe	Ranking

	<p>tourism to places associated with death and/or suffering. With that definition in mind, how dark does Buzludzha feel to you?</p> <p>[Ranked 1-8 where 1 is ‘A walk in the park’ and 8 is ‘An extremely dark place to visit.’]</p>	
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Table 15: Survey questions to be presented to former visitors to the site.

The survey research was conducted online, taking advantage of what might be described as a convenience technique (Bryman, 2004). In July 2016, and in line with the principles of ‘academic activism’ outlined in the above section, the researcher launched a dedicated website about the Buzludzha Memorial House (<http://www.buzludzha-monument.com>), and by the time of the research phase, this was already attracting a lot of traffic from internet users interested in the monument. The visitor survey was created as an interactive form using Google Docs, and this in turn was linked to and promoted from the website, and through its mailing list. Additionally, the researcher promoted the survey through social media, in user groups focussed on subjects such as heritage, architecture and photography, and invited a number of contacts working in related fields to do the same.

Similar to the criteria set for interviews, specific criteria for survey completion were set, whereby respondents had to be eighteen years or over and have previously made at least one visit to the Buzludzha Memorial House. It was also specified in the instructions that this survey was aimed at non-Bulgarians, as it hoped to record the motivations and perceived values ascribed to the site by those engaging in international tourism. Regardless of this instruction however, a number of Bulgarian respondents would still submit completed questionnaires; and indeed, a couple of respondents filled out the form while noting they had never (yet) visited the site themselves. The latter category was discounted from the results, though the Bulgarian respondents were left in the study – owing to the fact that they often delivered the most interesting and nuanced answers to the questions posed. Ultimately, all data capture instruments remain subjective to the co-operation and participation of respondents. Arguably, within a written narrative analysis, as revealed shortly, those who voluntarily wish to share them best express the intrinsic views and values of people. Individuals across the global population, who demonstrate an active interest in communist heritage tourism and its associated components, must reflect directly and indirectly a deeper

knowledge and insight to the topic under scrutiny. Indeed, some would refer to this form of data capture as enhancing expert cognition and its derived meanings (Middleton, 2010).

The online questionnaire was launched on 11 September 2018, and during the first week the link to the survey was shared only with a small handful of previous site visitors who were already known to the researcher. This week thus served as a pilot for the main survey research phase. The researcher received feedback from these first respondents, and some minor changes were made to the questionnaire as a result (for example, rewording Question 4 to make the implications of visitor motivations less directly political, as well as rewording Question 20, and adding examples, in order to make its meaning clearer). After this first pilot week, the edits were applied and the survey questionnaire was then opened and promoted to the general public. It remained open to respondents for approximately two months in total, until being closed on 7 November.

The original plan was to gather at least 100 responses, though the survey was soon seen to be attracting a lot of interest, with a great deal of rich data being submitted by users, and so the researcher made the decision to leave the survey open until it had collected 323 responses. Of these, 7 responses were either blank or incomplete, and so were discounted, to give a final total of 316 complete survey responses. After this began the process of data tabulation.

There was, however, one inevitable limitation inherent to conducting survey research in this fashion. As noted in the Preface, and detailed also in Appendix 1, over the course of this research project the researcher himself became a prolific voice in the conversation around the Buzludzha Memorial House, and one of the main international sources for information about the monument. Additionally, by 2018, the researcher had already taken approximately 100 foreign visitors to Buzludzha on guided tours. Many of those past tour guests completed the survey, and as a result it ought to be noted that a significant number of respondents had encountered the monument only in the company of the researcher. A great deal more would have encountered and potentially been influenced by the researcher's work elsewhere. By 2018 this already included writing many articles on the subject (often under the pseudonym of 'Darmon Richter,' as discussed in Appendix 1), in addition to (anonymously) managing the monument's Wikipedia page, plus the only dedicated website about the monument, and also providing texts for the conservation campaign. It is likely therefore that even survey respondents who had never heard of the researcher before may yet have been inadvertently

affected by his own perspectives and opinions on the monument and its future. None of this should imply that the survey research was not still able to yield worthwhile and interesting results – and indeed, the situation could be said to speak to the greater value and contribution offered by the researcher’s work in general – but it simply ought to be noted that in this survey phase of the research it was impossible to entirely eliminate the potential influence of the researcher’s own personal perspectives and potential biases.

7.4 Research Analysis

Interpretive analysis embodies an iterative process, involving both inductive and deductive logics. Analytical processes can move from description to explanation, as well as from explanation to description. Thus, analytical activities undertaken within this research hinged upon the constant (grounded) interaction between research design and data collection (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Consequently, analysis is not separate from other features of the research process – including writing. Richardson (1990, 1994) suggests writing up social research is a “way of knowing” as well as a method of discovery and analysis. Meanwhile, Coffey and Atkinson (1996:109) claim that writing “actually deepens our level of analytic endeavour.” Similarly, Parker (2004: 163) proposes that academic writing is an intrinsic part of the analytical process: one that involves “the construction of a narrative that presents persuasive themes and story lines, argues influences, connections and outcomes, and develops wider implications for the discipline in which the study is situated.” Therefore, this study deliberately utilises rhetorical strategies in the writing style – that is, rhetoric that is designed to convince and persuade – and is apparent not only in the case study ethnographies, but also in survey interpretations. Consequently, the aim is for “the conventions of text and rhetoric to be among the ways in which reality is constructed” (Atkinson, 1990: 2), and for writing to be a cathartic process that involves a journey of discovery and meaning.

Specifically, however, the research employed analytic strategies that extracted key research findings in a methodical and disciplined manner. The first stage of the empirical research (which comprised the scoping exercise’s unstructured conversations, in addition to prior site visits) as well as the subsequent semi-structured interviews, employed the strategy of narrative analysis. As noted in relation to the netnography – Section 7.3.2 above – the researcher decided against using computer-assisted means of qualitative data analysis, such as for example NVivo, preferring instead to work manually with the intention of building a

closer personal relationship to the data. Particularly in the case of interview transcripts, interviewees were of various different nationalities and not all of them spoke English fluently (if, indeed, at all – translators were used in several cases); additionally, in the case of face-to-face interviews, the researcher often had a clear visual picture not just of what was said, but *how* it was said. Given this context the researcher preferred not to delegate the analysis of linguistic patterns, themes and significance to a software package, but instead, as someone who had lived in the case study country for long enough to have developed something of a feel for its cultural and linguistic specificities, in addition to having a deep familiarity with the subject matter and the subtle implications and connotations of the many places, names and events being discussed, although manual analysis would ultimately involve more work, it was the researcher's belief that it would also yield more comprehensive and nuanced results.

Thus, narrative analysis was employed to aid the comprehension of interpretive processes involved within the qualitative context. This approach allowed for the revelation of narrative structures imbued within respondents' meaning-making processes, as well as the identification of narrative devices employed by individuals in recounting their relationships to sites of communist heritage (after Polkinghorne, 1995). The analysis commenced with a prolonged review of the interview transcripts, with the goal of gaining an understanding of overall meanings while concurrently preserving a holistic image of value-attribution within the phenomenon of communist heritage tourism (after Hall, 2004). This stage entailed identifying narrative structures that respondents used in making sense of the value of such sites, and it also enabled the documentation of recurrent elements. In other words, all the transcripts and notes were iteratively reviewed from numerous horizontal passes, which required not only (re)reading the documents from beginning to end, but also the assembling of narratives by themes (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Therefore, the coding procedure described by Miles and Huberman (1994) was employed to identify emergent themes. Within the theme identification process, words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs that were affiliated with the same theme were clustered together, facilitating the classification of the theme. Thus, via a thorough review and coding process, key emergent themes were identified, and a rhetorical interpretation offered.

The findings of this interview phase of research will be discussed in Chapter 9. Though, rather than presenting a stand-alone analysis of the findings there, the decision was made instead to structure Chapter 9 around the previous literature findings from Volume One of this thesis;

thereafter, in revisiting and discussing these themes, the findings of the interview research provide a valuable source of rich data which will be drawn upon to illustrate, support, or to counter the theories and assertions from the literature, as they relate to the case study of the Buzludzha Memorial House.

The second stage of the empirical process comprised survey research. In order to determine the value systems, perceived qualities and individualistic experiences reported by those visiting the Buzludzha Memorial House, electronic interpretation was undertaken. Computer software such as SPSS was considered and discounted. For ease of use and access, Microsoft Excel software was chosen as a mechanism to collate survey data, as well as to analyse and present the data. The use of software to present data included frequency analysis as well as diagram and chart displays, which aimed to build a 'picture' of communist heritage tourism experiences and relationships within the broader picture of international heritage tourism.

Thematically, and for ease of analysis and presentation, the survey questions were grouped together according to particular lines of enquiry, namely: 'the Visitors' (i.e., *Who visits Buzludzha?*); 'the Appeal' (i.e., *Why do people visit Buzludzha?*); 'the Experience' (i.e., *What is it like to visit Buzludzha?*); and 'the Future' (i.e., *What should be done with Buzludzha?*). It is according to this format that the findings will be presented, and then discussed, in the following Chapter 8.

7.5 Research Determinants, Conduct and Ethical Considerations

Both the third and fourth moments in research history emerged from challenges made to positivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; 2000). For positivism, research trustworthiness hinges upon criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity; and subsequently locates the concept of triangulation at the centre of trustworthiness issues.

Thus, this research, which adopts a constructivist paradigm, attends to issues of trustworthiness primarily from the requirements of the third (blurred genres) moment and, in doing so, utilises the tools made available to qualitative researchers operating in the post-positivist moment. Post-positivists such as Decrop (2004) assert that positivist expectations of triangulation assume a "fixed-point," and affect how, and even if, a multiple range of interpretations can be sought and investigated. Hence, for Janesick (2000) removing the

expectation that there is one correct interpretation necessitates that validity has more to do with description, interpretation and explanation. Furthermore, Decrop (2004) refers to trustworthiness in the third moment by drawing upon the work of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria-based typology for trustworthiness in qualitative research. In particular, their typology is formulated from a re-assessment of validity, generalizability, and reliability. In turn, they suggest four reformulated criteria which parallel an equivalent criterion in quantitative research (see also Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Crang, 2002);

- credibility or truthfulness (which parallels internal validity);
- transferability (which parallels external validity);
- dependability (which parallels reliability); and
- confirmability (which parallels objectivity).

This reformulated approach to trustworthiness hints at Kvale's (1996: 231) concept of a "moderate postmodernism," whereby the rejection of an objective universal truth opens up the possibility of "specific local, personal, and community forms of truth, with a focus on daily life and local narrative." Thus, drawing upon suggestions by Silverman (2006) that combining methods and comparing and contrasting data contributes to data credibility, this study used a triangulated multi-method strategy within a research design that required constant interaction between analysis and findings. This grounded interaction led to opportunities that confirmed, supported, or challenged insights, and opened up new analytical avenues.

Additionally, during the process of this study numerous research findings have already been extrapolated and submitted for use in various publications related to the potential conservation of the Buzludzha Memorial House. For example, work produced by the researcher both for this study, and in parallel to it, has appeared in printed brochures and exhibition texts, has been cited in the Bulgarian and international press, it has been presented to (and subsequently discussed by) the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture, has been quoted in documentary format by the BBC and other broadcasters, has featured in grant applications and press releases, and has appeared in a technical report published by Europa Nostra, the 'EU's largest heritage organisation.' Arguably, therefore, this study has already demonstrated a high degree of real-world credibility, and already made steps towards proving the usefulness and applicability of its findings.

Transferability is achieved through “referential adequacy involving the provision of contextual information that supports data analysis and interpretation” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 160). In other words, this study adopts what Geertz (1973) called thick description – that is, rich and rhetorical accounts of the details of an investigation. Consequently, Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that a thick description provides others with what they refer to as a database for making judgements about the possible transferability of findings to other milieux. Meanwhile, dependability as a parallel to reliability in quantitative research relies upon notions of auditing raw data. However, as Bryman (2004: 275) notes, “auditing has not become a popular approach to enhancing the dependability of qualitative research.” Nevertheless, through the certification of the supervision process of this study together with related publications and other uses, dependability may be validated. Finally, confirmability is concerned with ensuring that, while “recognising that complete objectivity is impossible in social research, the researcher can be shown to have acted in good faith” (Bryman, 2004: 276). In short, the researcher has not overtly or manifestly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway the conduct of the research and the findings derived from it.

Considering both the research design and the evocative nature of the research subject, ethical considerations were a key feature of this study. The empirical design was submitted to the University of Central Lancashire’s Research Ethics Committee within the Faculty of Management, and was subsequently granted ethical approval on 16 May 2018. Generally, the researcher abided by the BSA Statement of Ethical Practice which advocates researchers need “to anticipate, and to guard against, consequences for research participants which can be predicted to be harmful [and] to consider carefully the possibility that the research experience may be a disturbing one.” This latter point became a guiding principle in the ethical conduct of this study, particularly as it approached sensitive matters of national identity, politics and remembrance.

7.6 Chapter Summary

The next chapter begins the task of analysing and interpreting the empirical findings that resulted from the methods outlined. Firstly, however, Table 16 summarises the research methodology.

Research Philosophy	Inductive / Phenomenological
Research Approach	Inductive Principles
Research Strategy	Qualitative
Research Epistemology	Constructivism
Research Ontology	Interpretive / Ontological Relativism
Research Design	Multi-Method Case Study
Research Methods	Integrative Methods: Stage One – Scoping Exercise (ethnography) Stage Two – Netnography Stage Three (a) – Interviews Stage Three (b) – Survey Research
Research Analysis	Stage One – Narrative Analysis Stage Two – Electronic Interpretation & Narrative Analysis

Table 16: Research methodology summary.

Chapter Eight

Initial Findings & Discussion

“Faults are beauties, when survey’d by love.”

*The Idyllia, epigrams, and fragments, of Theocritus,
Bion, and Moschus, with the Elegies of Tyrtæus, Theocritus*

8.0 Introduction

This chapter will begin introducing and discussing the findings of the research outlined in the previous chapter. The chapter is divided into three parts, which will in turn focus on the scoping exercise (specifically, the researcher's observations made during site visits to the Buzludzha Memorial House), the netnography, and visitor surveys. Other elements of the research (namely the transcripts of conversations had with visitors to various Bulgarian communist heritage sites, for the scoping exercise, and the transcripts of semi-structured interviews) will be reproduced in full in the Appendices (1 and 3, respectively), and then drawn upon as a source of rich data for discussion in the following Chapter 9. A more detailed overview of this current chapter, on 'Initial Findings and Discussion,' is as follows:

Scoping Exercise: A series of visits and observations conducted by the researcher, prior to the commencement of the main phase of research. This section will feature a summary of all of the researcher's visits to the Buzludzha Memorial House between 2012 and 2019, along with any pertinent observations made on-site during these visits. It will include field notes on the number and behaviour of visitors to the site during these years, and also on the increasing appearance of graffiti at the site.

Netnography: This section details online research related to the Buzludzha Memorial House, conducted prior to, during, and after the commencement of the practical research phase. Its sources include websites, news stories and blogs, and from these a number of different contemporary conceptualisations of the monument are established and defined; and these can also be seen to be evolving over time. This section will also discuss more recent appearances of the Buzludzha Memorial House in digital forms such as music videos, video games, and VR (virtual reality) simulations. The section reviews online feedback left by those who have visited the site, as well as assessing how these visitors themselves are conceptualised by both the local and international media.

Visitor Surveys: This section presents the data obtained through questionnaires completed by past visitors to the monument, and it makes up the largest portion of this chapter. It will first explain the survey design, and its list of 20 questions, before sharing quantitative data gathered from the 316 respondents, and will begin to look at relationships between different

sets of data, offering a visual presentation (in the form of graphs and charts) of some of the key early findings.

The chapter will then end with a brief conclusion, and the significance of these results will then be analysed in greater depth – and in relation to the literature – in the following Discussion & Implications chapter.

8.1 Scoping Exercise

8.1.1 *Site Visits and Observations*

Between April 2012 and November 2019, the researcher made a total of 24 visits to the Buzludzha Memorial House and these have provided much insight into the changing status of the site, from a post-political ruin, little-known (outside Bulgaria) and rarely visited, to an internationally recognised (albeit unofficial) tourism destination. This research project began in January 2015, and so the 17 trips after that date involved a more conscious effort to document the site, its condition, and its visitors. Note is also made of the nationality of the researcher's travel companions, as this frequently impacted on the nature of the experience (American visitors to Buzludzha comprehend the monument in very different terms to how Ukrainian visitors do, for instance). A brief summary of all trips is as follows.

Date	Observations
April 2012 [Solo]	Front doors open and unlocked. 'FORGET YOUR PAST' written in red above the entrance. Minimal graffiti inside, and no other visitors present, save for one group of Roma people, who as we arrived were just leaving, on a horse and cart loaded up with pipes, panels, and other pieces of metal stripped from the monument. The interior is rubble-strewn, but mosaics are perhaps 70-80% intact.
April 2013 [American travel companion]	Door locked, but access possible through hole in side wall. Graffiti reading 'Don't Forget Your Past' has appeared inside. Mosaics are visibly worse than last year, particularly the faces of the leaders. Numerous crude graffiti pieces have appeared on exterior, particularly rear wall. Poor weather, no other visitors.

May 2013 [Bulgarian and Romanian travel companions]	Large graffiti piece has been painted in main hall. Created by British visitors, it reads 'Lurkers of the World Unite.' A small mock shrine has been created inside. First time climbing the staircase to the top of the tower. Perhaps a dozen other visitors present.
August 2013 [Polish travel companion]	The monument has been re-painted grey, covering all exterior graffiti, in advance of the annual meeting of the Socialist Party on Buzludzha Peak. The side entrance has also been sealed, and this is the first time the monument's interior was inaccessible.
June 2014 [British travel companion]	Busy weekend visit, most Westerners seen so far – around 30-40 people in 4 hours, maybe 50% foreign. Access possible through hole in the side wall. British, American, Australian, Swedish and Brazilian visitors. Met one British man in his 70s inside.
August 2014 [With Bulgarian travel companions to an international gathering]	Attended a group intervention on 20 August called 'A Time-Specific Exploration,' organised by Neda Genova and Caroline Trotman of Goldsmiths, University of London. Around 20 people in attendance. Folk music performed inside Ritual Hall. Stayed overnight inside the monument. Dragon mosaic has now completely deteriorated.
October 2014 [Bulgarian travel companions]	'NEVER FORGET YOUR PAST' has been painted above the entrance, though not as skilfully as the previous piece. 'Enjoy Communism' now appears alongside it. Around 20 visitors.
February 2015 [Bulgarian travel companions]	Winter visit with three Bulgarian friends. It is bitterly cold, with a heavy snowfall on the peak, which falls through holes in the roof and collects in drifts inside the Ritual Hall. No other visitors.
March 2015 [British travel companion]	Test-run for tour route. The monument is particularly waterlogged after the winter, and water runs down exterior from cracks in the concrete. Ground floor flooded with six inches of water. Another car of visitors arrives as we leave.
September 2015 [Group tour]	A steady stream of visitors, including to the top of the tower – where tourists are eating lunch, and admiring the views. An estimated 40 visitors seen over 4 hours.
October 2015 [Group tour]	Fewer visitors as the weather grows colder – an estimated 30 people seen during the 4-hour visit. New stickers have appeared, posted over the outer mosaic ring.
March 2016 [Australian travel]	New 'Danger' signs pinned to outside of monument. Graffiti has begun appearing in the spaces between the surviving mosaics in the Ritual Hall. One

companions]	piece reads ‘The Bulgarian Chernobyl.’ It is a national holiday, and Bulgarian families have driven here to show the monument to their children, with 8 cars parked outside.
May 2016 [Private tour]	Sunny weekend, and the most visitors I have seen – perhaps 100 in the space of 4 hours. Inside, one American girl is trying to chip out mosaic stones with a penknife, to take as souvenirs.
September 2016 [Group tour]	Side entrance to monument has been sealed. Access not possible. Security cameras are attached to the front and side of building. Several cars are parked outside, with maybe a dozen people.
October 2016 [Group tour]	Cameras on front of building have been destroyed by vandals. Side entrance has been broken open again. Inside, motion detectors are installed around the outer gallery, powered by solar panels, but the cables for them have been disconnected by visitors. Graffiti is worse, with several large new pieces covering the mosaics on the gallery. Busy day, around 40-50 visitors in 4 hours.
January 2017 [Group tour]	Monument has been sealed again for the winter. Access not possible. Road is blocked so we ascend the peak in the snow. No other visitors.
May 2017 [Group tour]	Very misty visit. Previous side entrance is still sealed, but visitors are now gaining access through a vertical shaft on the left of the building, climbing down a rope ladder into the basement level then up interior stairs. Outer walls now covered in graffiti almost all the way around. Roughly 30 visitors seen.
June 2017 [Music festival]	‘Buzludzha Rock’ festival organised by Kazanluk municipality. Bands perform on a meadow downhill from the monument. Many of the several hundred attendees make trips up to visit the monument, climbing in through basement to look inside.
September 2017 [Group tour]	New graffiti appears on gallery – snowboarding figures. ‘Kosmo Flash’ tag also spotted. Many new tags written across Ritual Hall. Zhivkov’s and Lenin’s faces graffitied (in gaps between mosaic stones). Around 80-100 visitors in 4 hours.
October 2017 [Group tour]	The tower access has been sealed on recent visits, but this time someone has cut a square hole through the metal door with an angle grinder. My last visit inside the monument. Around 40 visitors.
May 2018 [Group tour]	Basement entrance covered, and now a small security hut is stationed beside the entrance for a 24/7 guard detail. Access not possible. A crowd of 40-50 people

	circle the exterior with cameras.
December 2018 [Group tour]	Deep snow on this occasion. The access road is covered, and at one point we got stuck and had to dig ourselves out with shovels. Entrances sealed, no other visitors, and no guards either.
May 2019 [Group tour]	Guards present. Exterior visit only. An estimated 40 people arrive during our visit. Guards report that they often see 100 visitors per day, half of them foreign – and the busiest day saw 400+ visitors.
November 2019 [Ukrainian travel companions]	Dramatic mist and snow. Guards present. Exterior visit only. Four other cars of visitors arrive, and photograph the monument from outside.

Table 17: First hand observations made during visits to the Buzludzha Memorial House between April 2012 and November 2019.

8.1.2 *Buzludzha Graffiti*

A special note might be made of the appearance of graffiti around the Buzludzha Memorial House. The tone of this graffiti, and the nationality of its authors, has changed greatly over the years – but some forms and instances of graffiti have been present on site since the researcher’s earliest visit in 2012, with the walls of the monument serving in this way almost as a kind of guest book. Some of the more notable examples to appear included the following.

Graffiti Text	First seen	Interpretation
‘Forget Your Past’	April 2012	Clean red lettering above the main entrance. Suggests a kind of cultural amnesia about the period that produced Buzludzha. Became an iconic slogan associated with the monument.
‘Here Begin Your Nightmares. Ha Ha Ha.’	April 2012	Crude text written in Bulgarian along an interior staircase. Presumably left by a local visitor.
‘Lurkers of the World Unite’	May 2013	Written inside the main hall by a London graffiti crew called ‘The Lurkers.’ The first notable foreign piece.
‘Never Forget Your Past’	October 2014	Replaces earlier ‘Forget Your Past’ slogan, though somewhat less neatly realised.

‘Enjoy Communism’	October 2014	Appears beside front entrance, written in the style of the Coco-Cola logo.
‘The Bulgarian Chernobyl’	March 2016	Simple text inside the Ritual Hall – presumably written by a Bulgarian, it compares Buzludzha to another famous site of difficult post-communist heritage in ruins.
‘Kosmo Flash’	September 2017	The name of a group whose ‘tag’ already appeared on numerous Yugoslav monuments in preceding years. Likely by visitors from that region. Implies a conceptualisation of Buzludzha as being comparable to those places.
‘Dikspi’	September 2017	Heavily stylised characters in the Ritual Hall, probably the artist’s pseudonym. The first graffiti piece to be written on top of the mosaics, rather than around or between them.

Table 18: An overview of notable new works of graffiti to appear inside the monument between April 2012 and September 2017.

Norman Mailer once described graffiti as “the most germane expression of the possible end of civilization” (Mailer & Naar, 1974). In his analysis of postmodern graffiti, Jean Baudrillard (1975) suggested that urban graffiti often took the form of counter interventions running against the symbolic hegemony of a state; and subsequently, graffiti analysis has been performed with illuminating results at contested political sites such as the Berlin Wall (see Stein, 1989; Neef, 2007). However, Panagopoulos (2021a) notes how “the graffiti art at [Buzludzha] seemed to be severely lacking the punch or ethic of the subway graffiti in 70s New York or the Berliner-Mauer-graffiti of the 80s.” Whereas Buzludzha, as a canvas, “could readily invite counter art in criticism of the old regime,” instead he found a “shallow mishmash of little acts of defiance, the kind of vague discontent that just cannot be taken seriously [...] vandalism lacking the ethic of a pure political motive.”

Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to perform a thorough analysis on the graffiti appearing at Buzludzha, the samples above give an idea of how the tone of Buzludzha graffiti has changed over the years – from early conceptualisations of the site and its relationship to Bulgaria, to show instead a gradual increase in territorial statements, by Bulgarians and non-

Bulgarians, ‘tagging’ the building to show that they had been there. This change can perhaps be seen as reflective of Buzludzha’s status, changing over the years from a uniquely Bulgarian place, into an internationally recognised destination; and one perceived as offering challenge, or adventure, so that those reaching the symbolic summit would sign their name on it. (With many more pieces to be found inside and around the monument, a more thorough analysis of Buzludzha graffiti would make a very interesting subject for future research.)



Plate 70: Graffiti on the Berlin Wall, left by Germans (source: Panagopoulos, 2021a).



Plate 71: Graffiti inside the Buzludzha Memorial House, left by Londoners (own photo: 26 May 2013).

8.2 Netnography

The self-reported perspectives shared by visitors to the site are nuanced and varied. They appear in articles, travel guides, book chapters, and video segments, on personal blogs, on social media, and in the comments sections beneath mainstream media reports about the monument. After a page was created for the monument on the *TripAdvisor* website, many visitors began sharing reviews of their experiences there. Tsenkova (2017) notes that on *TripAdvisor*:

“The saucer is amongst the top destinations in Bulgaria [...] in the company of the Madara Horseman, the Rila Monastery, the Thracian tomb in Kazanluk, the Boyana Church, the Ancient Theatre in Plovdiv, etc. It enjoys an enviable rating – as high as the Eiffel Tower.”

Tsenkova further notes that some tourists visit Bulgaria only for Buzludzha, and that comments on the *TripAdvisor* sites from foreigners are overwhelmingly positive, such as: “If I had money, I would buy it,” and: “Perhaps the most unique building you will ever see” (cited in Tsenkova, 2017). Many visitors to the site have additionally proposed their own conceptualisations of the monument, or suggestions for its future use. For example, the actor, director and television presenter Stefan A. Shterev, who participated in a 2018 artistic intervention at the site as part of the *Nonument* art project, described his visitor experience at Buzludzha as follows:

“We took the time to think about why this monument is there, to look at the mosaics and the messages they carry. My feeling was that we were in an abandoned temple of utopia, located in the ‘Zone’ of the Strugatsky brothers. [...] I would like to see it as a place where everyone can come in and see, without a guide, without a ticket, in silence. Then architecture will reveal much more about meaning and meaninglessness, about truth and post-truth, about utopia and leading ideology. Not a museum of communism, but of its remains” (cited in Todorov, 2020).

Julian Manev, an architect who had previously presented potential re-interpretation projects for the Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria, in Sofia, commented:

“In my opinion, Buzludzha has a future after careful conservation, not restoration – its current condition is part of history [...] I would suggest something like the Archive of Monumental Art in Eastern Europe. Not only in Bulgaria, but throughout the region there are examples of monumental art from the second half of the twentieth century, which is worth studying and archiving [...] The grand hall would be an amazing exhibition space” (cited in Todorov, 2020).

Hannes D’Haese, a Belgian artist and gallerist, visited Buzludzha and subsequently proposed that due to the inherently capitalist nature of modern art, turning the monument into a repository for conceptual artwork might be the most effective way of countering and cancelling out any former totalitarian associations:

“I think the only way to get the government onboard as they have anti-communist feelings is to make it into a museum of modern art and get it restored with that idea. Modern art is capitalism and thus the opposite of the communist regime, that way you can preserve what is there and have a lot of visitors. The (capitalist) museum of modern art would show what communism was and that this new museum is the future in contrast to communism which has always failed. It is basically turning the tables on the communists. Visitors would then see how it was and how it failed and what is now successful” (H. D’Haese, personal communication, 10 May 2017).

Emerging from the online narrative however, are a number of recurring themes in the contemporary conceptualisation of the Buzludzha Memorial House. This section will now outline and define five such conceptualisations, namely: the monument as totalitarian symbol; the monument as temple; the monument as the Other; the monument as victim; and the monument as communist kitsch.

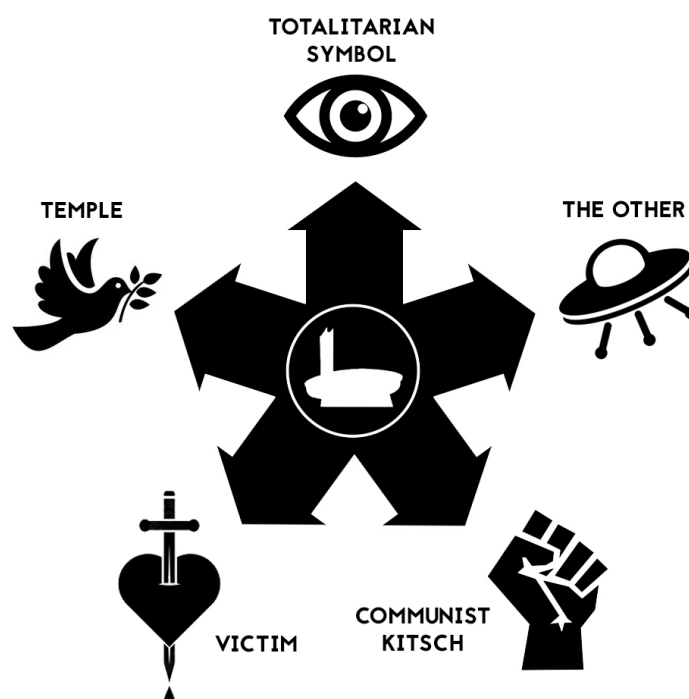


Figure 7: The netnography identifies five contemporary conceptualisations of the Buzludzha Memorial House.

8.2.1 *The Monument as Totalitarian Symbol*

This category of conceptualisations views the Buzludzha Memorial House as being emblematic of the regime that created it; an architectural symbol of totalitarianism, and specifically of 20th century Bulgarian totalitarianism as imposed by the Bulgarian Communist Party. Such conceptualisations may be positive or negative in association – depending on whether they see the ruin as an educational epitaph, or as a shadow and a lingering threat – but crucially these represent a historical, and political reading of the site.

The monument, once a heavily staffed, guarded and controlled building that stood as a symbol of the Party, was effectively democratised by its abandonment; allowing anyone to visit at any time, on their own terms, and to navigate and interpret that experience according to their own attitudes and perspectives. For some commentators the building took on sinister tones as a symbol of past totalitarianism: as a “huge, totalitarian propaganda gesture” (Popova, 2015); a “dying relic to the Balkans’ tragic communist past” in the form of a “perplexing concrete structure” capable of “inspiring an anxious excitement” as it “glares over the valley” (Salem, 2019); so that “a visit is more likely to inspire anti-communist sentiment than celebrate the wonder of socialism” (Foer, Thuras & Morton, 2016: 75). Commentors note, also, its power over the natural landscape: “In Shipka Pass, it’s hard to shake the sensation that you’re being watched. Atop a 1441-metre peak in the raw, mountainous scenery of central Bulgaria, a saucer-shaped building stands like a watchtower” (Isalska, 2016). In *A Guide to Communist Bulgaria*, the building is presented as an “anachronism,” and a “ghostly ruin,” “whose creators hardly imagined, not even in their darkest nightmares, the way it stands now.” The authors describe the annual gatherings of the BSP at Buzludzha Peak as “an event that gathers ageing public that indulges in outdated songs and fervent speeches,” concluding that the only people who visit the site now are “adventurers, nostalgic Socialists or inquisitive tourists” (Trankova & Georgieff, 2018). Conversely, Nikolova (2020, writing for the American socialist quarterly *Jacobin*) conceptualises the Buzludzha monument as a symbol of “democracy,” owing to the “involvement of large numbers of people in funding and working on the monument,” concluding:

“[The] renewed interest in Buzludzha and other abandoned socialist monuments has nevertheless helped to rekindle interest in the notion of public, common, and non-commercial infrastructure. Socialist architecture’s presence across the post-communist world reminds people that another world – however flawed – was once possible.”

One of the key factors that seems to underpin the difference in contemporary conceptualisations of the monument is the question of how the monument was funded; and subsequently, whether it can be better described as a democratic creation by the Bulgarian people, or as something that was imposed onto these people from above. According to Georgi Stoilov, the monument's architect:

“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 leva in total” (Stoilov, Appendix 3).

Nikolova (2020) builds on this premise to conceptualise the construction of this ‘people’s monument’ as an inherently ‘democratic’ effort. However, during this research project a number of Bulgarians of that generation reported that they remembered seeing ‘donations’ docked, without their consent, from their paycheques (see Chapter 6). Another said that those who declined to donate faced disapproval from their employers and colleagues, and a certain degree of social ostracization as a result. Accounts like these are widespread in Bulgaria, which has led some contemporary commentators to question whether these donations can really be described as having been ‘voluntary’ at all (for example Trankova & Georgieff, 2018). Ultimately, due to both the unavailability of documentary evidence and also the abstract, socio-temporal nature of some of these claims (i.e., perceived peer pressure, as remembered half a century later), it would be exceedingly difficult for anyone now to prove the case one way or the other, and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to try; but instead, the thesis simply notes that conceptualisations of the monument as *totalitarian* are as inherently subjective today as are the other conceptualisations of it that follow.

8.2.2 The Monument as Temple

Frequently in online discourse, the Buzludzha Memorial House is conceptualised as a “temple of communism” (for example: Lipton, 2014; Phipps, 2015; Ripamonti, 2016; Pankowiec, 2017; Reporter, 2020). Online commentators describe it in terms such as “one of the most mystical structures of world communism,” (Above Top Secret, 2020); or as “Communism’s Crumbling Cathedral” (Schmiedchen, 2018); an “abandoned temple of utopia,” (Todorov,

2020); or a “veritable cathedral to Bulgarian communism” (Panagopoulos, 2021a). According to Wim Schepers:

“Through its radical future orientation and its present state of dereliction, Buzludzha remains stranded in a twilight zone between past grandeur, future orientation and present desolation. This liminal, in-between status seems to elicit quasi-religious experiences in the monument’s visitors who frequently designate their encounters, in addition to their sense of otherworldliness and unreality, as mythical and infused with a spiritual dimension.” (Schepers, 2015)

Schepers goes on to cite the photographer Roman Veillon, who said of his visit:

“There is almost a religious atmosphere, as we were in a temple [...] But in the end it’s more an impression of peace that comes out of it, when you try to envision what it was like before it was abandoned, even if we can still feel the ghosts of some Soviet soldiers in the corridors!”

Schepers also cites a blogger, identified only as ‘Matt,’ who writes:

“Imagine your [sic.] going to a church with great fresco’s or paintings from a famous painter or your [sic.] at the Sistine Chapel and looking at the paintings from Da Vinci or Michelangelo. Buzludzha is like a church made for communists.” (both cited in Schepers, 2015)

Another photographer, Rebecca Litchfield, wrote of her own visit to Buzludzha: “This was one of those ethereal moments in life, the ones that will stick with you an entire lifetime” (Litchfield, 2014).

Such conceptualisations paint the experience of visiting the abandoned Buzludzha Memorial House as an almost spiritual experience, a comparison strengthened by the ‘sacral’ quality of the architectural space itself – which Minard (2018) notes (and as discussed previously), owed much to the inspiration Stoilov drew from earlier sites of religious significance, including Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, and the Thracian kings’ barrows that punctuated this landscape long before the first Bulgars arrived in Europe. As a ruin then, this ‘cathedral of communism’ perhaps provides the same bittersweet aesthetic and spiritually-infused liminality as those derelict Christian churches that became the subject of romantic paintings particularly in the 19th and early 20th centuries (see Chapter 3); though Panagopoulos (2021a) notes that the monument presented a uniquely *Bulgarian* form of sacrality, which served to tie the communist present with this land’s mythical/ancient past:

“The exquisite mosaics were comparable to the mosaics of emperors, mythical heroes and popular legends seen in Pompeii and Ravenna. The artistic style clearly echoes the frescoes of the nearby Thracian Tomb at Kazanluk: beyond – and possibly before – their ephemeral political meaning, the mosaics were the evidence of Bulgaria’s bonds with the ancient Thracian, Roman and Byzantine artistic heritage of the region.”

8.2.3 *The Monument as The Other*

One of the most common conceptualisations of the Buzludzha Memorial House today is as something strange, fear-inducing, alien or Other: a *spooky ruin*, or an abandoned flying saucer on the mountaintop. UFO comparisons are particularly common. Buzludzha has been described as a “ruined UFO” (Cheresheva, 2017), “Bulgaria’s ‘UFO’ monument” (Morton, 2017), “Bulgaria’s communist UFO” (Salem, 2019), “Bulgaria’s UFO” (Bradford & Salem, 2020), a “decaying ‘UFO’” (Panagopoulos, 2021a), and so on. Some commenters extend the metaphor to make explicit pop-culture references, for example: “wryly called ‘Bulgaria’s UFO’ [...] it’s beaming up increasing numbers of curious visitors. [...] It creates a *Starship Enterprise* silhouette in an otherwise wild and rugged part of Bulgaria” (Isalska, 2016); or “The abandoned building that looks like something out of Star Wars... and WAS home to a doomed Empire” (Davies, 2016). Though references to specific Western pop cultural properties are comparatively new, the idea of Buzludzha being conceptualised as an alien flying saucer actually goes back as early as the original design concept in the 1970s. In interview, the architect Stoilov commented on his inspirations: “This saucer, this intergalactic saucer echoed popular themes of the era – cosmic, flying saucers” (Stoilov, Appendix 3). Indeed, ever since its construction in Bulgaria the monument has commonly been referred to simply as ‘чинията,’ meaning *the saucer* (see for example Tsenkova, 2017; Stoilov, 2021; Panayotova, 2021; and so on). Though some still note how the surrounding landscape nevertheless retains the power to dwarf this otherworldly spectacle: “As though a tiny UFO has crash landed on top of the Central Balkan Mountains, the far-reaching valley below diminishes the clean retro-futurist saucer and tower even further. It is merely a blip of triviality to the overwhelming totality of the Bulgarian countryside” (Franc, 2014).

However, while UFO comparisons in general may be fundamental to the design of the Buzludzha Memorial House, since the Changes and the monument’s abandonment, what was once a familiar and humorous nickname for ‘the saucer’ has taken on more negative connotations, for example connected with ‘a doomed Empire.’ More *othering* contemporary

conceptualisations of Buzludzha recast the monument as a place of mystery, intrigue and even horror; for example, in 2019, Mark Grey's opera adaptation of *Frankenstein* was set at Buzludzha, with a stage design modelled on the monument's Ritual Hall, and the monument's name spelled out in Cyrillic letters above (Morten, 2019). In this portrayal the ruined monument served as the remote and sinister lair of Frankenstein's monster. In another case, in June 2018, a supervising location manager working for the BBC on the series *Doctor Who* contacted the researcher, looking for help acquiring official filming permissions for the Buzludzha Memorial House. Their intention was to feature the monument in an episode of the programme, where it would appear as a mysterious ancient ruin on an alien planet; ultimately though, the production would be filmed instead on location in South Africa, and the Afrikaans Language Monument subsequently appeared in a 2020 episode, presumably serving the same role for which Buzludzha had been considered (see Plate 73).



Plate 72: A stage production of *Frankenstein* uses the Buzludzha Memorial House's interior as inspiration for its scenery (source: Morten, 2019).



Plate 73: The Afrikaans Language Monument as featured in *Doctor Who*, in a role for which it is believed the Buzludzha Memorial House was also being considered (source: Chibnall & Stone, 2020).

In one case, the fictional conceptualisation of the monument as an ‘Other place’ of horror then in turn impacted on the physical location itself, and the subsequent visitor experience of many who came after. Sometime around 2012, the Bulgaria-based British author Jonathan Taylor wrote and released online an e-book, titled *Meat: Memoirs of A Psychopath*, which he described as a horror-comedy, and was set in part inside the Buzludzha Memorial House. As an organic promotional tactic for the book, Taylor created a makeshift shrine inside the real monument in 2013, listing on it the names of two fictional characters who meet their demise there in his story (ascertained from J. Taylor, personal communication, 5 July 2017). In the years that followed, Taylor maintained the shrine, and the veracity of the so-called ‘Buzludzha murders’ became a talking point amongst subsequent visitors to the site (including Franc, 2014; Bennetts, B., 2016; Bennetts, K., 2016), with one visitor describing the scene as such:

“I found myself in some sort of computer room and there I found a shrine to two French [urban explorers] murdered here on October 5, 2012. There was a crude wooden cross resting against the wall, holding a note remembering Achille Pinet, 23, and Marrok Brideau, 29 and their murder date. A former bunch of flowers decayed beside it, along with something in gift-paper. On a shelf above – a bible, the remains of a candle and a book of condolences, signed by the occasional visitor, mostly from English-speaking countries” (Berliner, 2013).



Plate 74: The ‘shrine’ in the bowels of Buzludzha (own photo: 26 May 2013) (left).
the book this urban myth was engineered to promote (source: amazon.com) (right).

Though it may be tempting to characterise such dark and horror-tinged conceptualisations as a uniquely Western/outsider approach to the monument, there are Bulgarians too who share this view of Buzludzha. See for example below (Section 8.2.6), the Bulgarian-made horror-themed video game *The Trap*; or consider, as detailed above, that amongst the first graffiti to appear inside Buzludzha was a text written in Bulgarian, that read ‘Here Begin Your Nightmares.’ More recently, the mountain did in fact become a place of some unexplained event of horror and intrigue... when in November 2021, a 34-year-old man was found naked, bound and gagged, “[tied] to a tree under Buzludzha – with a stab wound in the abdomen” (Darik, 2021). The victim was taken to a nearby hospital for emergency surgery, and the case is under ongoing investigation by the authorities.

8.2.4 *The Monument as Victim*

This category of conceptualisations refers to those which portray the ruined monument as a victim (of the Changes, of decommunisation, or of governmental inaction), and these sorts of

commentaries often lament the damage already done by looters, vandals, and by the elements, to Buzludzha's art and architecture. Panagopoulos (2021a) called the decaying monument a "beautifully wretched sight," and commented: "It felt as it'd been there for centuries, not decades, the victim of an apocalyptic event." For him, the damage caused to it seemed "to have gone beyond what might have been necessary to indicate the nation's severance with Communism." Panagopoulos relates the fate of Buzludzha to the work of Marina Abramovic, a Yugoslav artist who was daughter to two antifascist partisans, and who, in her interactive installation named *Rhythm 0* in 1974, stood naked in front of visitors, provided a tray full of 72 objects, and for a duration of 6 hours invited the public to use those objects on her as they pleased. The installation famously escalated to extreme situations, as McEvelley (2010) recalls:

"In the third hour all her clothes were cut from her with razor blades. In the fourth hour the same blades began to explore her skin. Her throat was slashed so someone could suck her blood. Various minor sexual assaults were carried out on her body. She was so committed to the piece that she would not have resisted rape or murder."

Abramovic's work provided an artistic perspective on an idea that had been explored post-World War II in infamous cases such as Milgram's electric shock experiment in 1963, or Zimbardo's Stanford prison experiment in 1971: the psychological dimensions of obedience to authority, and how hidden propensities for cruelty or harm might manifest even in ordinary-seeming participants under the right conditions. Therefore, the desecration of the Buzludzha Memorial House, by the people of post-communist Bulgaria, takes on deeper psychological significance for Panagopoulos (2021a):

"Freud saw violence as inherent to human nature, an animal instinct that's constantly repressed by the social and psychological mechanisms of civilised society. He argued that the only thing that's holding us back from behaving like animals, is the presence of laws, but also our own conscience, our sense of guilt. [...] But the moment we become unfettered by those powerful authorities, we are all prone to act on our 'pleasure principle' – our violent impulses."

Panagopoulos cites the breakdown of societal order portrayed in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* for reference too, as he draws comparison between the desecrated bodies of Buzludzha and Abramovic, concluding: "it is an attraction that is reluctant at first, and becomes more destructive as the monument becomes increasingly desolate and defaced, inviting further degradation." Panagopoulos further explores this idea by conceptualising the Buzludzha Memorial House as a surrogate 'Motherland monument' for Bulgaria; evoking the

towering material statues that the Soviets built as symbolic matriarchs in cities such as Kyiv (Ukraine), Stalingrad (now Volgograd, Russia), Yerevan (Armenia), Tbilisi (Georgia), and others. A number of smaller communist-era monuments in Bulgaria were named similarly to this Soviet tradition (see for example the Monument to Mother Bulgaria in Pleven, or the bust of Mother Bulgaria ensconced inside Georgi Stoilov's Pantheon to the Heroes of the Serbo-Bulgarian War, at Gurgulyat), though officially, Bulgaria never had a single, central 'Motherland' site. However, Panagopoulos reasons:

“[Buzludzha] has the curves and spaces of a motherly womb, and it stands at the birthplace of Bulgarian communism, the very uterus of Bulgarian nationhood. [...] Buzludzha was clearly, and will always be, Bulgaria's most complex and definitive Mother of a Nation monument” (Panagopoulos, 2021a).

The monument's architect, Georgi Stoilov, himself confirms the feminine character of Buzludzha, in contrast to the often more masculine works of architecture that characterised the era (Appendix 3). Thus, given the feminine and potentially material significance that Buzludzha holds in relation to ideas of Bulgarian nationhood, the Bulgarian people's contemporary rejection, abandonment and destruction of the monument, Panagopoulos explains as: “the projection of Bulgaria's love hate relationship with their own ‘mother,’ and everything she stands for. The collapse of the familiar patriarchy of communism in the 90s created a vacuum where all this formerly repressed, Oedipal drive to destroy what was once revered, has been collectively, and perhaps subconsciously projected at the monument.” He thus concludes: “Buzludzha is a monument that was erected to forever mirror Bulgaria – and forever it will.”

8.2.5 *The Monument as Communist Kitsch*

This final category of conceptualisations might as well have been called ‘de-conceptualisations,’ as it describes those uses of the monument's form that strip the design of specific context and meaning, to instead use the Buzludzha Memorial House as shorthand for expressing a detached notion of ‘communist kitsch.’ Whereas its use as a symbol of ‘totalitarianism’ (Section 8.2.1, above) saw Buzludzha conceptualised in relation to the Bulgarian Communist Party, and to a specific reading of a specific period in Bulgaria's history, as communist kitsch Buzludzha appears as a more generalised symbol of an era, a

token Cold War souvenir, thus becoming a detached example of what Chaubin (2011) called “CCCP: Cosmic Communist Constructions Photographed.”

There is a passage in *Chernobyl: A Stalkers' Guide* (Richter, 2020b: 133-134) which describes a visit to an abandoned kindergarten in the ‘ghost city’ of Pripjat, inside the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. The American poet Wayne Chambliss is exploring the building, and examining a clutter of children’s toys and other debris – “dolls, bears, and tricycles” – that remain from the building’s years of use, pre-1986. However, wave after wave of subsequent visitors have moved these items around, repositioning them for the sake of photography, or perhaps just entertainment, to create entirely new arrangements and compositions.

“Wayne is seeing this for the first time and as we plough through the decorative debris, he muses on the way these items have lost their original purpose, instead becoming building blocks in the expression of new ideas – raw material for making art, or shrines. ‘The ontological cages have sprung open. Everything is pure materiality,’ he says, stopping before a row of children’s blocks that have been lined up to spell ‘Chernobyl.’ ‘It’s like a cargo cult turned inside out.’”

In a similar way, Buzludzha’s commodification as communist kitsch treats the symbols and subjects of the monument – once promoted as irrefutable canon by the state – as malleable material with which to tell new stories. According to historian Adrien Minard, contemporary visitors to Buzludzha have explored the monument increasingly out of context, and the building itself (with its surviving Bulgarian-language text) began to lose its original meaning in the process, particularly for non-Bulgarians, perhaps suggesting that the “partial erasure of the significance of places could thus be the prelude to their pure and simple physical disappearance” (Minard, 2018). During the 2010s, the Buzludzha monument – abandoned and increasingly decayed, its condition visibly deteriorating even from month to month – became a ‘cool’ and ‘edgy’ backdrop for fashion shoots, skateboarding videos, and adverts for products like cars and sunglasses. Often in these uses the monument was shot in muted colours or in black and white, and from angles that accentuated its striking form, its sheer concrete walls, and the unmistakable communist stars that decorate its tower and Ritual Hall. Buzludzha was made to feel very much like the archetypal communist monument; but most of these uses didn’t even specify the country, let alone the name or context of the site.



Plate 75: Pop singer Rita Ora poses in the Buzludzha Memorial House in winter, for a music video (source: Kazanluk, 2021).

In February 2021, the British-Albanian pop singer Rita Ora released a music video shot inside the Buzludzha Memorial House in winter (Kazanluk, 2021). In the video, she is dressed in Albanian national costume inside this Bulgarian ‘people’s monument’: a reference to a sense of pan-Balkan identity? Or a comment on the shared experience of communist history, and the material legacy it left behind? More likely perhaps, in this video Buzludzha is symbolically torn out of its national context, to become instead the raw material of communist stereotype. In the years 1960-1980 Enver Hoxha’s communist government in Albania constructed more than 170,000 domed bunkers across the country, an extraordinary civil defence effort the remnants of which are still visible throughout Albania today. Perhaps Rita Ora chose Buzludzha – with its domed concrete shape, and located in an EU country with low corporate tax, low prices, and easy accessibility – as the most convenient visual metaphor with which to illustrate a distinctly Albanian experience. In September 2021, a song by Coldplay and BTS released with a video that depicts the two bands performing in a fantastical sci-fi totalitarian world where, according to introductory text, ‘music is forbidden’ (Coldplay, 2021). Behind the members of Coldplay appears a digitally created cityscape, of imposing concrete buildings splattered with colourful graffiti, maybe suggesting a visual metaphor for artful rebellion against a totalitarian state. The saucer-shaped building that forms the centrepiece of this backdrop is unmistakably modelled on the Buzludzha Memorial House (alongside another

iconic example of Brutalist architecture, the Alexandra and Ainsworth estate in London, designed by Neave Brown, 1968). In this context therefore, Buzludzha becomes a decontextualised symbol for generic urban dystopia.



Plate 76: The band Coldplay perform in front of a digital landscape inspired by the Buzludzha Memorial House (source: Coldplay, 2021).

Much of the contemporary graffiti at the site confirms this reduction to (sometimes commodified) communist kitsch. Graffiti appeared in 2014 across the monument's facade, reading 'Enjoy Communism' painted in the recognisable style of the Coca-Cola logo. In 2013 a group of British graffiti writers who call themselves 'The Lurkers' visited Buzludzha, and they sprayed the words 'Lurkers of the World Unite!' across a wall in the monument's Ritual Hall. Panagopoulos (2021a) notes how:

"The paraphrasing of the famous political slogan of Carl Marx's Communist Manifesto echoes the Bulgarian version of the Internationale displayed in Cyrillic lettering outside the monument. The Lurkers, however, don't appear to be a group that uses their graffiti art to broadcast a political message. They are a street art collective that capitalise on outwardly radical pop art, aiming to sell you a £60 (\$85) hoodie on their checkout. There is no protest here – just typical Communist-chic, Che Guevara tee style commercialization."

8.2.6 *Virtual Conceptualisations*

Many contemporary visitors to the Buzludzha Memorial House have noted a surreal, uncanny, or haunting quality to the place, particularly owing to the mismatch between the building's

extravagant design and original opulence, only to be experienced now in an extreme state of decay. The monument has in that way been described as “a real-life apocalyptic wasteland that would not be out of place in a video game” (Schmiedchen, 2018). Indeed, the monument has now featured as a location in numerous contemporary video games, and these virtual reconstructions, representing a range of different gaming genres, have allowed developers to re-conceptualise Buzludzha in various diverse and idiosyncratic forms.

The developer Andrei Indrikson in 2021 released *Buzludzha*: a detailed 3D model of the monument and its interior spaces, as they appeared in the 1980s, according to Stoilov’s original design. This virtual environment, which was created using Unreal Engine 4, was made available for other developers to purchase and use in their own games, with a description that reads: “Buzludzha is an iconic building in eastern Europe, a memorable environment ready to be used for exploration, atmospheric scenes or as a battle arena” (Indrikson, 2021). In this way Indrikson’s authentic reconstruction of the monument avoids making its own reconceptualisation, but offers the model for others to use in their own interpretation of this space.

The creators of *Buzludzha VR*, Todor Rusanov and Rafał Czarnowski, initially created their detailed virtual model of the monument for a university project, but later, in November 2019, they released it to the public as a game, with a number of new features added (*Buzludzha VR*, n.d.). Similar to the example above, *Buzludzha VR* uses detailed 3D modelling to recreate a realistic environment based on the interior of the monument. However, whereas Indrikson aimed to present the monument as it appeared during its years of use, Rusanov and Czarnowski have reimagined the monument in a contemporary style, with its political symbols removed, and the interior decorated in the style of a contemporary cultural venue. As such, their model – which is designed for users to explore and interact with using a virtual reality headset – presents an alternate future for the monument and demonstrates one way that the Buzludzha Memorial House might be reimagined and adapted for mainstream cultural use in the post-communist period.

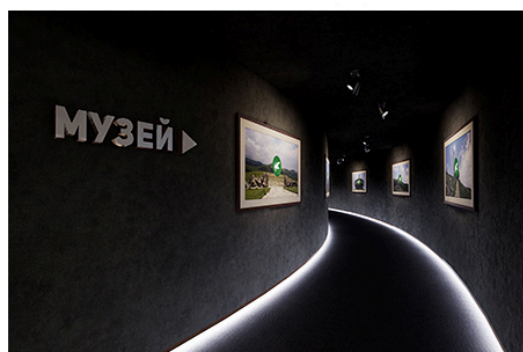
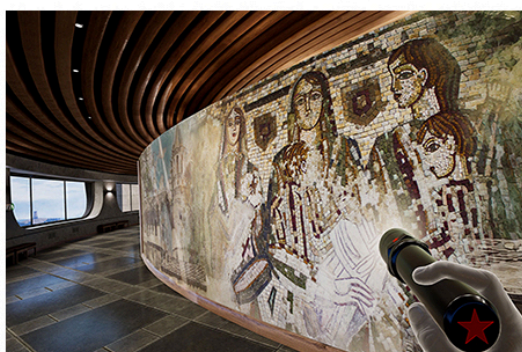
BUZLUDZHA (UNREAL ENGINE 4)

PC Version, Andrew Indrikson, 2021.



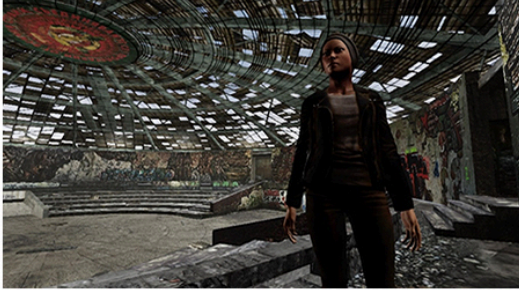
BUZLUDZHA VR

PC Version, Augmade Limited, 2016.



THE TRAP

PC Version, Bul Games, 2020.



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR

PC Version, Microsoft, 2020. [User created content]



JALOPY

PC Version, Minsk Works, 2016.



MINECRAFT

PC Version, Mojang Studios, 2011. [User created content]



Plates 77 & 78: Virtual conceptualisations of the Buzludzha Memorial House, as featured in a range of contemporary video games.

The Trap is an adventure-horror game released in November 2020 by the Bulgarian developers Bul Games. Like the two examples above, this game also features a detailed 3D model of the Buzludzha Memorial House and its interior. However, in this game the monument appears just as it is today: a mountaintop ruin, with crumbling mosaics, graffiti, and holes in the ceiling. In this form the fallen monument is conceptualised as an environment that provokes tension and terror, and it is stalked by horrific creatures that the player will need to fight or avoid (Steam, 2020).

A similarly contemporary model was created for *Microsoft Flight Simulator 2020*. This simulation game utilises real-world terrain maps, and though the Buzludzha Memorial House did not appear in the original release, a custom ‘mod’ created by the user Jeppeson2001 was made available to download in September 2021 and features a realistic 3D build of the monument based on a photogrammetry model captured by Andrea Spognetta (All Flight Mods, 2020). The *Flight Simulator* mod thereby conceptualises Buzludzha as a fixed landmark, a global positioning marker, acknowledging its factual presence on the mountain without adding either context or comment.

Jalopy is another game that utilises the Buzludzha Memorial House as a symbolic marker of place, appearing on the horizon above a forested mountain landscape. However, this conceptualisation of the monument by UK-based developer MinskWorks appears tinged with a certain degree of nostalgia. The game is set in the 1990s, and tasks players with travelling across Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Turkey in a car styled after the ‘Trabant 601,’ itself an automotive icon of the communist era. The storyline deals with the rise of capitalism, border smuggling and post-communist corruption, and in this context the whimsical, cartoonish conceptualisation of the monument frames it as an endearing symbol of what might, in comparison, be considered a simpler time (Steam, 2018).

The game *Minecraft* also features numerous interpretations of the Buzludzha Memorial House. In this open-form online multiplayer game, players are able to build their own worlds and structures for others to explore. In 2021 the total playable area inside the game was

estimated to have grown to the equivalent of approximately 3.6 billion square kilometres (Milakovic, 2021), and dotted across this democratic digital landscape, can be seen numerous instances of player-buildings either inspired by, or aiming to directly reproduce, the Buzludzha Memorial House (MinecraftRepro, 2020; Bilibili, 2021).

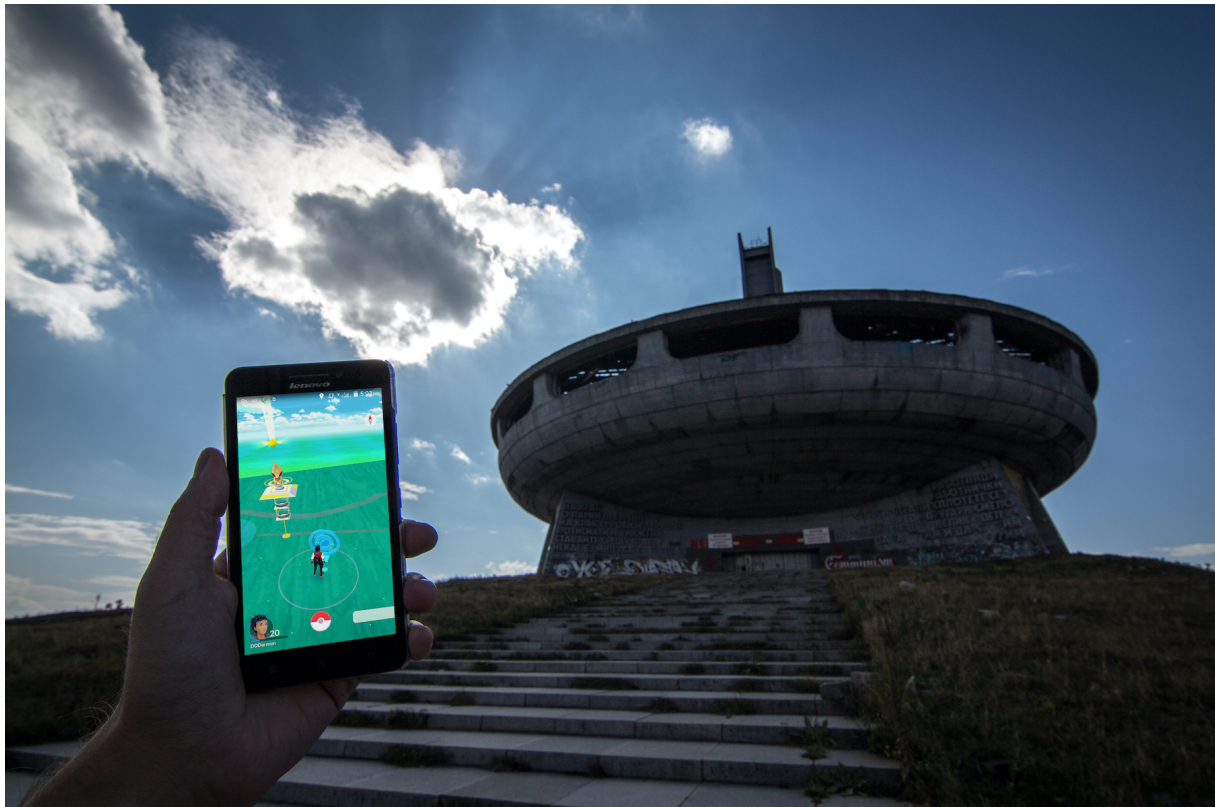


Plate 79: The author's smartphone recognises the Buzludzha Memorial House as a playable location within the augmented reality game *Pokémon Go* (own photo: 17 September 2016).

Finally, released in 2016, the mobile game *Pokémon Go* is another game that involves a massively multiplayer element, though this one uses augmented reality, via a smart phone's camera and screen, to locate its game elements in the real world. The result is that the game:

“...encourages a playful, abstract mode of interaction with public space; drifting without purpose, feeling for invisible vibrations on the virtual plain. It has players walking miles through unknown terrain to reach a mere scribble of graffiti, the kind of details that most people would pass without ever seeing. All of this feels profoundly psychogeographical” (Richter, 2016c).

The Buzludzha Memorial House is pinned to the game's world as a place of interest, with a total of four individual playable locations (two 'gyms' and two 'pokéstops') located on Buzludzha Peak. By crowdsourcing its map of locations, the game *Pokémon Go* therefore

bypasses approved national self-representations in favour of building a virtual world “Free from censorship [...] a democratised report on the country’s varied psychogeographical textures.” In conclusion:

“The game’s system of world-building had the effect of stripping away politics from what included some highly contested sites. It broke taboos, and valued objects of communist heritage with equal weight to more conventional attractions. If this is the start of a new trend in gaming – if future generations are to grow up experiencing the world through similar platforms – then it hints at a growing cultural shift towards the depoliticisation of 20th century ideological architecture, even in countries where that history is still now a subject of division” (Richter, 2016c).

8.2.7 *The Buzludzha Phenomenon*

The phenomenon of tourists (both domestic and foreign) visiting the Buzludzha Memorial House in its current, ruined state has become a topic of much discussion in the media, local and internationally, as well as becoming the subject of numerous books and short documentary videos. By examining numerous such reports, it is possible to highlight certain perceived characteristics and resultant conceptualisations of these Buzludzha visitors, which appear to be common throughout much of the media coverage. The following table shows a cross section of 12 different conceptualisations of Buzludzha tourists, published between the years 2017 and 2021.

“dark tourists” ... “attracted by death, sinister places and ruins”	Stoyanova, 2017
“thrill seekers and vandals”	Gergana Mikova, cited in Tsenkova, 2017
“photo-hungry urban explorers who have broken in illegally”	Corey, 2018
“adventurers, nostalgic Socialists or inquisitive tourists”	Trankova & Georgieff, 2018
“Orientalists, armed with cameras and supported by galleries and publishing contracts”	Kulić, 2018
“fans of atypical tourism” ... “often from Western Europe”	Minard, 2018
“fans of extreme experiences”	Bankova, 2018

“foreign explorers” ... “armed with cameras, and neo-colonial adventurism”	Vasileva, 2019
“intrepid travellers” ... “urban explorers from around the world”	Salem, 2019
“photographers, urban explorers and other curious travellers”	Happer, 2015
“selfie-hungry hikers and a few Communist mourners”	Nikolova, 2020
“‘urban explorers’ and fans of abandoned buildings in general”	Hohenhaus, 2021

Table 19: Conceptualisations of the tourists visiting Buzludzha, according to academics and journalists.

The quotes above come from a range of different and generally respected sources, including: works by Bulgarian academics and journalists; a statement from the Bulgarian politician currently responsible for making decisions for the site; from three architectural historians (one Western, the other two natives of Southeast Europe); from four published books (on the subjects of Buzludzha, Bulgaria’s communist heritage, abandoned buildings, and dark tourism, respectively); and from journalistic reports in the Western media (such as *CNN*, the *BBC*, and *Jacobin*). Eleven of the quotes above describe visitors to Buzludzha in particular, while the other one addresses visitors to *places like* Buzludzha in general. Between them, these quotes present a reasonably consistent profile of the people who visit Buzludzha today. While two commenters identify potential political motivations for a visit (“nostalgic Socialists” and “Communist mourners”), the rest suggest an apolitical foreign tourist who is motivated primarily by adventure, and the potential for photography. Two of the quotes paint this mode of travel as representing a form of either Orientalism or neo-colonialism. Five of the twelve quotes suggest that the ruined state of the monument is a key attraction in itself (including here the four who conceptualise visitors as ‘urban explorers’). Several of the quotes imply some element of *deviance* – visitors are “thrill seekers and vandals,” “attracted by death,” and “have broken in illegally” – or *narcissism* – in the case of “selfie-hungry hikers.” It is notable that the six quotes that come from Bulgarian commenters are universally the most negative in their appraisal of visitors to the site. Noteworthy also, is the fact that during this research, not a single media report could be found that conceptualised visitors as being motivated solely by an interest in (Modernist) architecture, and this fact marks a

significant difference in how the media conceptualises these visitors, compared to how tourists describe their own visits on self-reporting platforms such as *TripAdvisor*.

To summarise, the above accounts can be synthesised to create a visitor profile as follows:

Aside from a small number of visitors expressing nostalgia for the communist regime, the majority of people who visit Buzludzha today are foreigners who come primarily in search of adventure, and for dramatic scenes to photograph. These people are attracted to the monument primarily due to its ruined condition, and they are also attracted to visit other ruined buildings too. Some come here to engage in what might be termed 'deviant travel' (including elements of lawlessness, trespass, vandalism, and death fetishism), and moreover these visits constitute a mode of travel that might be described as 'Orientalist' or 'neo-colonialist.'

However, this thesis proposes (and will subsequently test, using data from survey questionnaires, in the coming chapters) a different conceptualisation of these visitors: namely, that the primary motivating factor for Buzludzha tourism is the building's architectural value; and that when asked, a majority of foreign visitors will place architecture and design higher than factors such as adventure, or 'beautiful decay,' in evaluations of their motivation to visit.

8.3 Visitor Surveys

The survey phase of the research collected data from 316 respondents, between 11 September and 7 November 2018, all of them past visitors to the Buzludzha Memorial House. The list of 20 questions used in this survey can be seen in Chapter 7, while tabulated results from the surveys are featured in full in Appendix 4. The purpose of this following section is to begin making sense of those findings, and summarising the key trends. In this way the findings of the survey are not being treated here as quantitative data results, so much as presenting them as descriptive statistics from which patterns and themes might be seen to emerge. A number of open-form responses in the survey (where respondents were invited to answer questions in their own words) also allowed for the collection of a great deal of non-numerical, rich data, which will be brought into the discussion both in this chapter and the next. As indicated in the previous Methodology chapter, this survey data can be said to address four specific themes in

relation to the Buzludzha Memorial House, and so the following sections are structured accordingly.

1. The Visitors: a review of demographics and other practical questions concerning travel and tours, that between them answer the question: <i>Who visits Buzludzha?</i>
2. The Appeal: a look at the motivations of those visiting Buzludzha, considering their reasons for travel, their specific interests in relation to the site, and any similar places they may also have visited. This section focusses on the perceived value of the monument, addressing the question: <i>Why do people visit Buzludzha?</i>
3. The Experience: visitors describe their impressions of visiting the monument, and how they value the experience afterwards, thus addressing the question: <i>What is it like to visit Buzludzha?</i>
4. The Future: this grouping of results is focussed on the future of the monument, its potential for conservation, and, according to those visiting the site, what form such a preservation should take and whether they would be prepared to support it financially via on-site entry fees. These responses between them can be said to address the question: <i>What should be done with Buzludzha?</i>

Table 20: A thematic overview of the visitor survey results.

Each of these sections will analyse participant responses, as well as digging deeper into the numbers to present comparisons and relationships between groups and patterns of responses. These will be presented visually, in the form of charts and graphs. A brief commentary will follow the presentation of data for each of these respective themes, beginning the process of discussing what these findings show. (A deeper and more critical analysis of these findings will take place in the following chapter – Discussion & Implications – which will consider these findings in relation to the literature, and to the study as a whole.)

8.3.1 The Visitors

The key finding to the question ‘*Who visits Buzludzha?*’ was that the largest single demographic was British people over the age of 51.

● Under 20 ● 21-30 ● 31-40 ● 41-50 ● 51 and Over

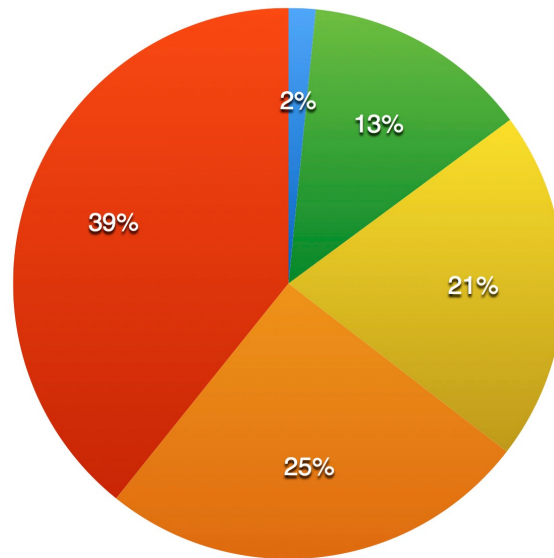


Figure 8: Visitors by age.

● UK ● Bulgaria ● USA ● Germany ● Netherlands ● Other

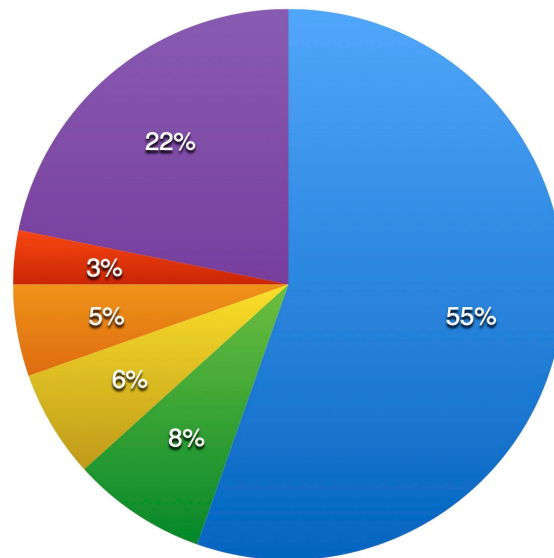


Figure 9: Visitors by nationality. ‘Other’ includes, in order of frequency: Romania, Italy, Belgium, Ireland, Australia, France, Canada, Austria, Denmark, Lithuania, New Zealand, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, Argentina, Belarus, Croatia, Czechia, Finland, Greece, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Ukraine.

The study found that Buzludzha appealed more to older age groups – with each ten-year group (*21-30 years old, 31-40 years old, etc.*) showing a higher visitor count than the previous. The largest age group to respond to the survey was visitors aged 51 and over.

These visitors included citizens of 34 different countries – from Mexico and Argentina, to Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia and New Zealand. Respondents were spread across five continents but the largest number came from the UK (55%, of whom 15% identified themselves as English, 5% Scottish and 1% Welsh, while the rest simply said ‘British’).

A total of 27% of respondents were residents of Bulgaria. British ex-pats made up the largest portion of these, at 77% of non-native Bulgaria residents. Bulgarians represented 13% of those respondents living in Bulgaria, followed by 2% each from the USA and Netherlands.

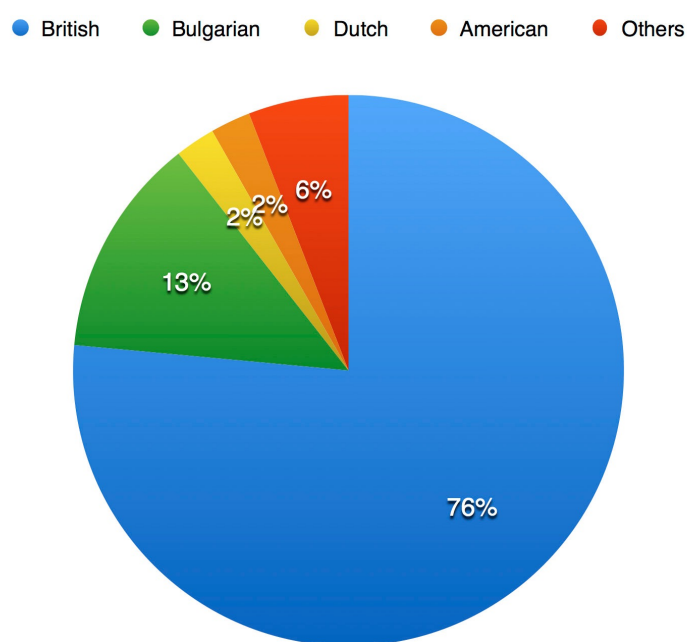


Figure 10: Bulgarian residents by nationality. ‘Others’ includes: Danish, French, Irish, Russian, Swiss.

Finally, the results showed that 71% of respondents had visited Buzludzha with friends or family, while only 1 in 10 took a tour.

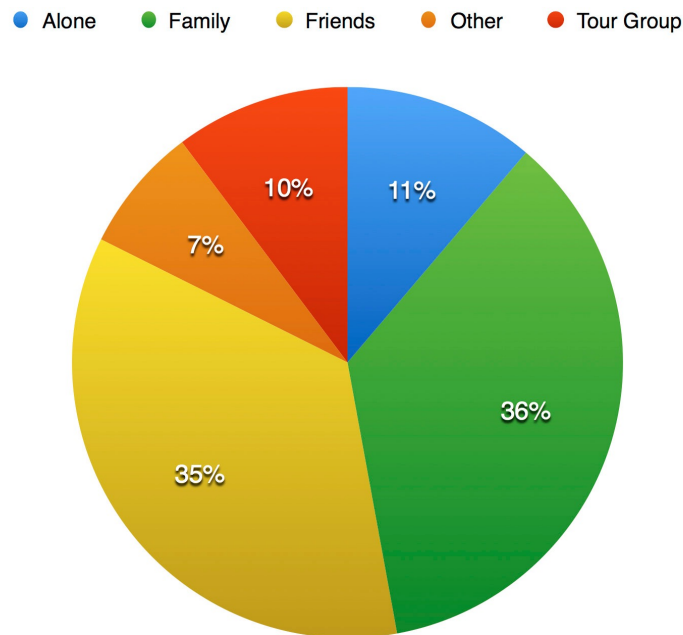


Figure 11: Responses to the question: Who did you go to Buzludzha with?

8.3.2 *Comment on ‘The Visitors’*

This survey was primarily interested in the experience of foreign (non-Bulgarian) visitors travelling to Buzludzha – people who are travelling from further away, who know less about the monument to start with, and who are bringing new money into Bulgaria. Should the monument be conserved, then that process will depend in large part on foreign interest and foreign money. While the Bulgarian perspective is of course incredibly important (and in some senses, the most important perspective), the focus of this part of the research was specifically on outside evaluation, tourism potential, and thus, foreign visitors. For that reason, the fact that only 25 Bulgarians completed the survey should not suggest that Bulgarians don’t have strong opinions on the matter. Rather, they have such strong opinions that 25 of them shared their thoughts on a survey aimed primarily at a different group (and some of those Bulgarian respondents gave highly insightful answers, as seen later).

Additionally, the fact that 55% of total responses came from British people should not necessarily imply that British people make up the majority of all visitors at Buzludzha. Rather, the results of this survey may skew slightly towards a more British demographic at least partly because it was published in English. For some visitors, reading questions and writing responses in English may have proven a barrier against participation. There are other

visible trends which suggest that this survey was often completed by groups of people within the same social circles. For example, ‘motorbike tourism’ is mentioned more than one might expect for a truly random sample of visitors. It should also be noted that of the 10% who travelled with a tour group, 19 of those respondents had been in tours led by the researcher (totalling roughly 6% of all respondents).

As a result, the range of participants tends to seem more organic than strictly random. Nevertheless these 316 participants gave a generally broad variety of answers, while sharing valuable insights into the Buzludzha tourist experience.

8.3.3 The Appeal

The key finding to the question ‘*Why do people visit Buzludzha?*’ was that architectural value was the highest-rated factor, while political sympathy was the lowest.

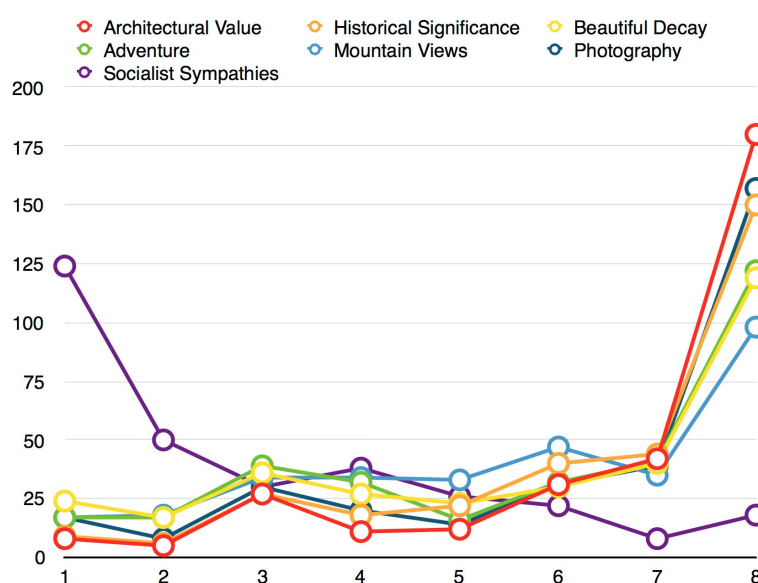


Figure 12: Various qualities of the monument scored 1-8 for their attractiveness to visitors.

Respondents were asked to score seven qualities of the monument from 1-8, according to their appeal (where a score of 1 was not very interesting, but 8 was a strong reason for visiting). These qualities were: *Architectural value*, *Historical significance*, *Beautiful decay*, *Adventure*, *Mountain views*, *Photography*, and *Socialist sympathies*. The first six of these scored similar

results, as can be seen from Fig 13 (each gaining around 100 or more full 8/8 scores). The monument's *Architectural value* was ranked highest of all as a reason for visiting.

The political aspect of the monument scored much lower however, as a motivating factor. On the graph above it can be seen drawing an almost inverted line, compared to the other options. The results of this survey therefore suggest that the majority of visitors to Buzludzha go there primarily for its architecture, history and potential for photography; that adventure, beautiful decay and the mountain views are important, though less-motivating factors; but most are not sympathetic to the monument's socialist message. It might therefore be suggested that these visitors enjoy the building *despite* – not because of – its former political associations.

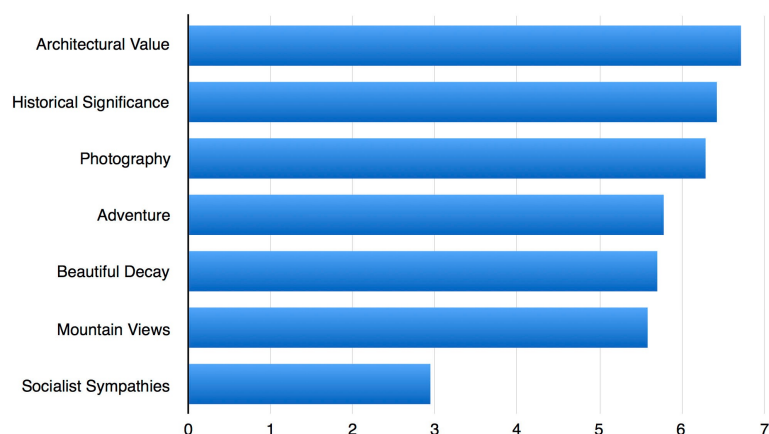


Figure 13: An average score out of 8, showing the attractiveness of various aspects of Buzludzha.

One question in the survey asked people how they had first heard about the monument. The answers *Online* and *Word of mouth* between them accounted for 80% of the total responses. It was also shown that a majority of visitors had only been to Buzludzha once. However, at the other end of the scale, the data suggests what looks like perhaps an addictive quality to repeated visits – more respondents had visited at least 20 times, than had visited 10-20 times.

One of the most interesting revelations of this survey was that 41% of respondents said Buzludzha was their main reason for visiting Bulgaria.

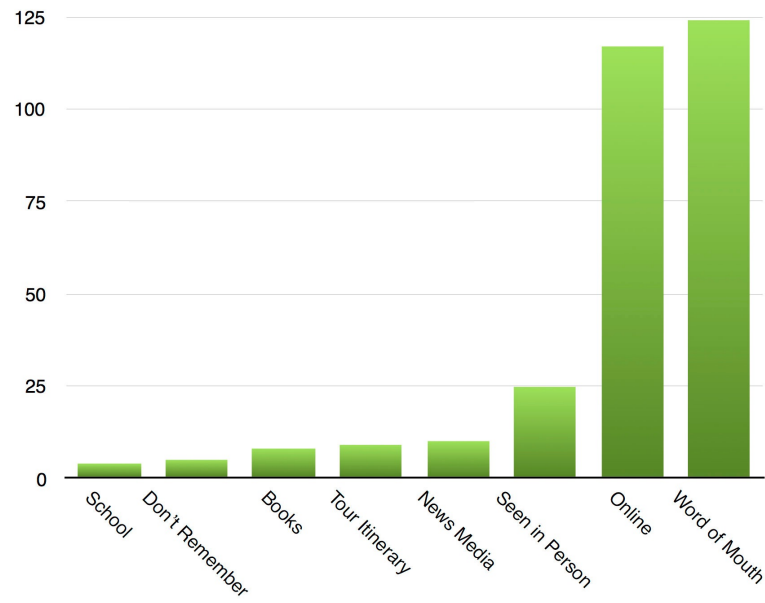


Figure 14: Responses to the question: How did you first hear about Buzludzha?

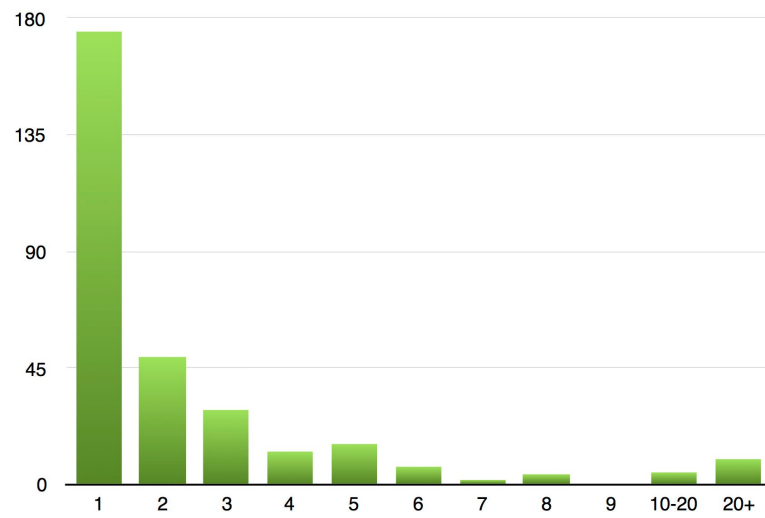


Figure 15: Responses to the question: How many times have you visited Buzludzha?

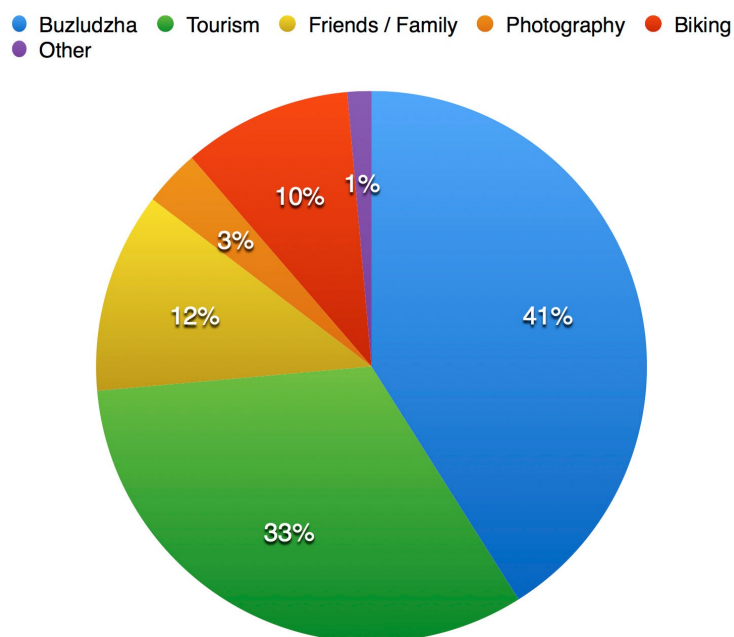


Figure 16: Main reason for visiting Bulgaria. ‘Other’: Business, Academic Research, Volunteering.

Excluding those who already lived in Bulgaria, 41% of the remaining respondents said they had travelled to Bulgaria primarily to see the Buzludzha Memorial House – compared to 33% who had visited the monument during a more conventional holiday, and 12% who were mainly here to visit friends or family.

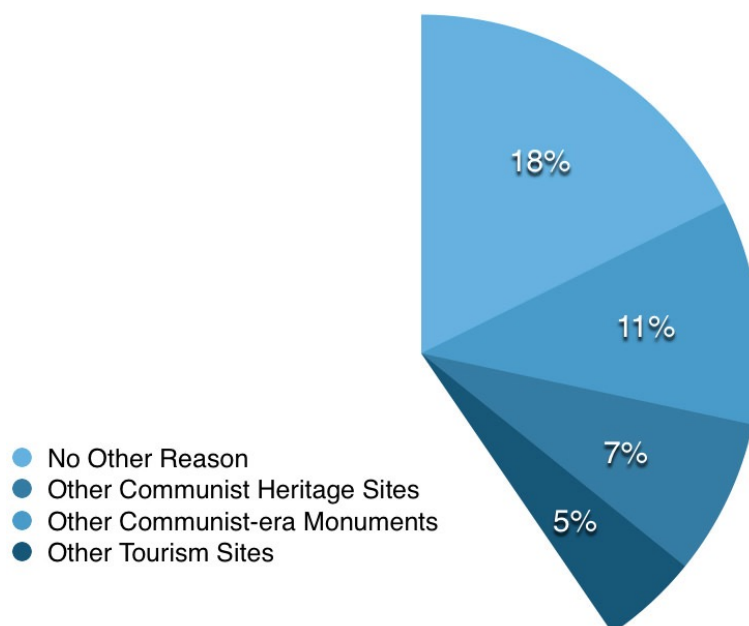


Figure 17: Secondary reason for visit, of those who came to Bulgaria primarily for Buzludzha.

‘Other’ includes: Shipka Monument, Rose Valley, Plovdiv, Veliko Turnovo, Biking.

Within the 41% of foreign respondents who named Buzludzha as their main travel motivation, 18% were also visiting other sites of communist heritage in Bulgaria. (Of these, 11% talked about communist heritage sites in general, while 7% specifically mentioned other monuments from the same period.) A smaller number (just 5%) also planned on visiting the country's more conventional tourist attractions – places like the Rose Valley, and the cities Plovdiv and Veliko Turnovo. Meanwhile, 18% of all non-resident respondents said they had come to Bulgaria to see Buzludzha, and nothing else.

8.3.4 *Comment on 'The Appeal'*

The results show that 41% of foreigners visiting Buzludzha came to Bulgaria primarily to see the monument. For one in five visitors, it was their only reason to be in Bulgaria, while only 5% were visiting Buzludzha alongside visits primarily to more conventional types of tourist attraction. This could be said to demonstrate quite a clear demand for specialised touristic experiences at Bulgaria's sites of communist heritage, and Modernist architectural heritage, and that those travelling for such experiences don't necessarily want to combine them with more conventional or generalised itineraries. Moreover, it shows that even without state promotion, tourists are already travelling a long way to see Bulgaria's Modernist architecture. The 18% of visitors who came just to see Buzludzha might have stayed for longer (and spent more money) in the country, if they knew that Bulgaria had other buildings and monuments that they might also find interesting. Though as per the discussion of Bulgaria's '100 Tourism Sites' in Chapter 5, it can be seen that the country generally does not promote such forms of tourism at present.

There is currently no precise data available on how many people visit Buzludzha. However, since the guard detail was posted at the monument in 2017, it has become easier to make an informed estimate. The Buzludzha guards report seeing typical numbers of around 100 people per day – sometimes well over 200, on a sunny weekend. The most reported in a single day (and not counting the BSP's annual gatherings, which can attract thousands of people) was more than 400 people. In winter, when the snow makes it harder to visit, the average number of visitors observed was more like 20 people per day. Across the whole year, the guard estimated that maybe half of the visitors observed were foreigners, and half Bulgarian. These numbers are only approximate, but it allows for a reasonable estimate. Assuming that for 8 months per year the monument gets 100 visitors per day (a conservative estimate), while for

the coldest four months, it gets 20 visitors per day, this totals 26,820 visitors in a year, averaging 73 per day. If roughly half of those are foreigners, then that's 13,410 foreign visitors per year.

The data gathered from this survey suggests that of all non-Bulgarian visitors to the monument (this time including non-Bulgarian residents of Bulgaria), around 26% are in the country primarily because of this monument. From the above estimate of 13,410 foreign visitors per year, that's almost 3,500 people who likely would not have come to Bulgaria if not for Buzludzha. If those 3,500 tourists each spent £250 during their stay in the country (a conservative estimate for a few nights' cheap accommodation, meals, public transport, and either a tour to the monument or else car hire and petrol costs), then the Buzludzha Memorial House, even as an unmanaged ruin, would already be contributing £875,000 to Bulgaria's tourism economy each year.

It must be stressed that these numbers are all estimates, though they are conservative estimates nonetheless. The local government was approached for more information, and with the suggestion of better data gathering on-site, though they declined to provide this for the purposes of this study. However, the above estimates can at least give an idea of the scale of Buzludzha tourism today: at a time when most visitors know they can't even go inside the building on arrival.

8.3.5 *The Experience*

The key finding to the question '*What is it like to visit Buzludzha?*' was that participants found visiting Buzludzha a sad, but rewarding experience.

This part of the survey dealt with the experience of visiting Buzludzha. When asked whether they had researched the monument's history before going, 79% of respondents said *Yes*. Another 13% researched Buzludzha only after visiting, while 8% did no research either before or after their visit.

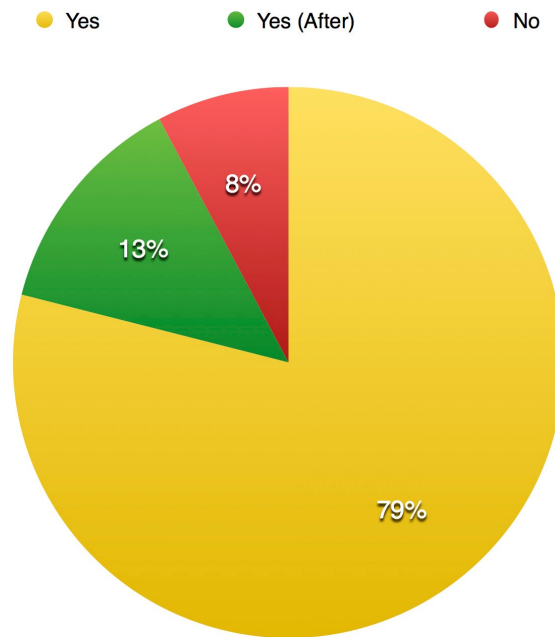


Figure 18: Responses to the question: Did you read about the monument's history before you visited?

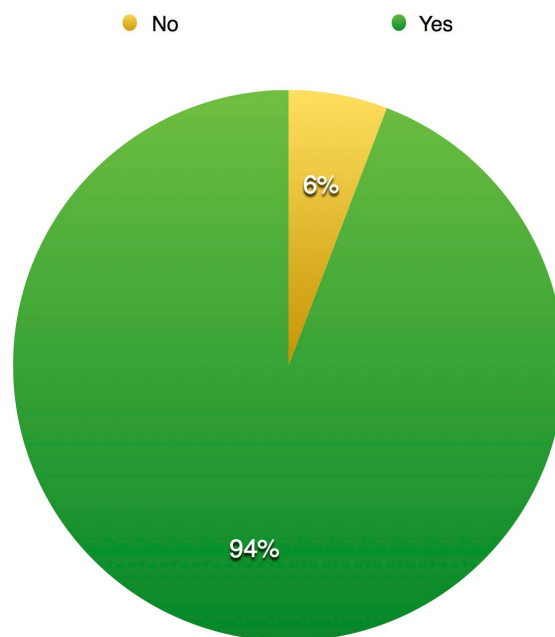


Figure 19: Responses to the question: Did the experience live up to your expectations?

Most people were impressed by what they saw – only 6% reported a disappointing experience. Of the 6% minority who reported a disappointing experience, 44% of those said it was because they hadn't been able to get inside the monument. The other 56% of this group had been inside, but were disappointed to see the monument's poor condition. Nevertheless, only 4 people in total said that they wouldn't be interested in visiting again.

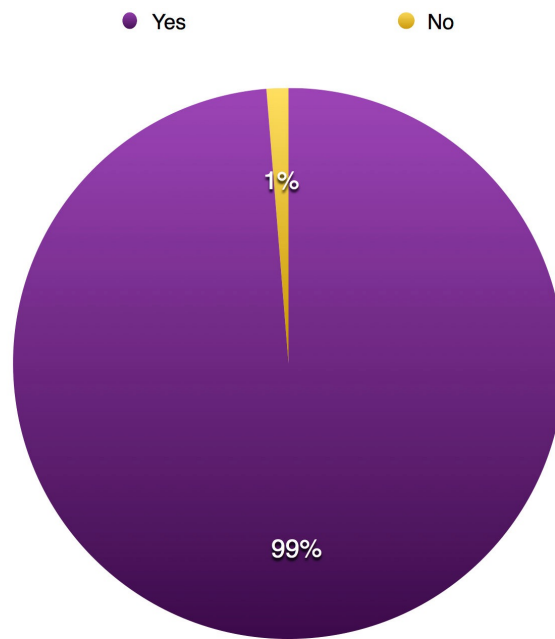


Figure 20: Responses to the question: Would you visit again, or recommend others to visit?

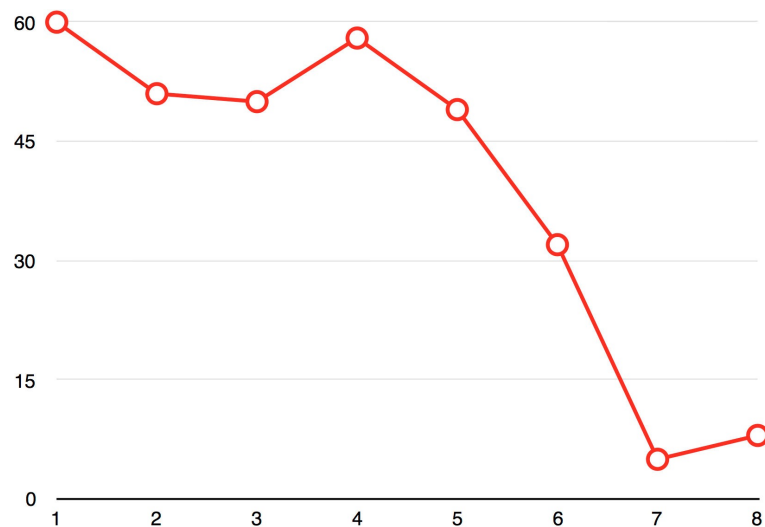


Figure 21: How 'dark' does Buzludzha feel? Rated from 1-8, with a mean score of 3.45.

The survey also asked visitors whether they would describe the experience of visiting Buzludzha as 'dark tourism' – inviting them to give a score out of 8, where 1 was not dark at all, and 8 was a place with severely dark or difficult themes. Their responses, as seen in the graph above, were mostly in the lower range of the 1-8 scale, with a mean average of 3.45. The majority of these visitors did not consider Buzludzha to be a particularly dark place, and

so did not conceptualise their own visits there as constituting dark tourism. When invited to share their feelings about the current state of the monument, 63% used the word ‘Sad.’



Figure 22: A word cloud displaying the words respondents used to describe their feelings about Buzludzha in its current state. Words appear larger according to their frequency.



Figure 23: The same word cloud after the word ‘Sad’ was removed from the data.

Out of 316 survey participants, 234 used strong, emotive words to describe their feelings. Answers ranged from a single word, to a full paragraph. Amongst them were comments such as the following.

Disgusted by the treatment of it.
Appalled [by] the public policy towards it.
I don't think it should be restored but preserved as it is. The ruined faces [of the] politicians speak of the historic moment.
Perfectly reflects socialism's results! [From your] neighbouring socialist country. [Shared by a Romanian respondent.]

I quite like the deterioration in an artistic way but would also hate to see the building die!
I wouldn't want to see it deteriorate any more, [but] I also don't think it should be fully restored.
I am angry, because our government and the people in it are not interested in the renovation of this gorgeous monument. I want to see it renovated, we should stop neglecting it.
Saddened that it's been left to decay, almost in the hope that it'll just go away.
[It is] depressing and seems to have gone past 'beautiful decay.'
Likely more impressive than if it was fully restored.
I like the decay but not the amount of graffiti.
Glad to hear it has a security detail.
It's perfect.

Table 21: A sample selection of responses to the question:
How do you feel about the current state of the monument?

Another question asked respondents to say, out of all the places they had ever been, which other place was the most like Buzludzha? This question was deliberately ambiguous. On the one hand, it could be argued that there is no place exactly 'like' Buzludzha, and accordingly, 58% of respondents said that Buzludzha was like no other place they had been to. The other 42% offered comparisons however, and these revealed a lot about how different visitors conceptualise the Buzludzha experience.

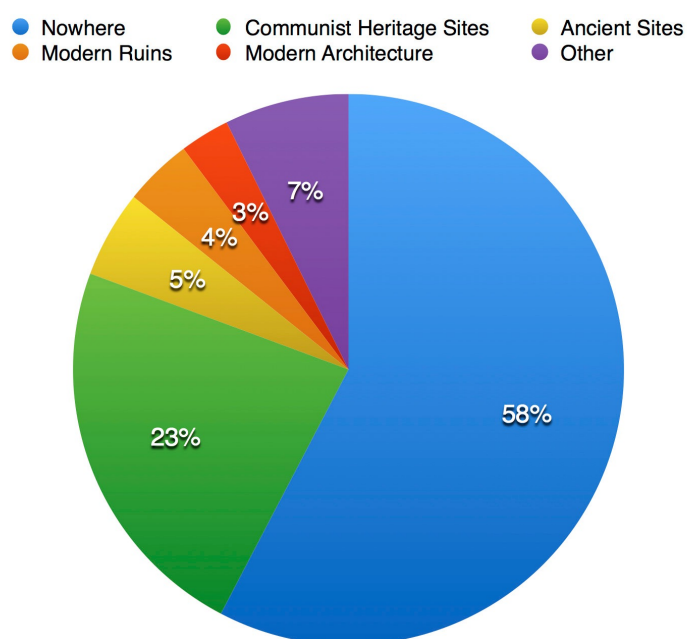


Figure 24: Of all the places you have ever been, which was the most like Buzludzha?

The largest group (23%) compared Buzludzha to other *Communist heritage sites*, and within this category, some notable mentions will be discussed below. Interestingly, 5% compared the monument to *Ancient sites*: for example, the Colosseum in Rome was mentioned in 4 responses; Chichen Itza and other pyramids of Mexico were mentioned 3 times; the Acropolis (Greece), Machu Picchu (Peru), and Angkor Wat (Cambodia) were all mentioned too. *Modern ruins* were mentioned by 4% of respondents: including various other places famous for their atmosphere of ‘beautiful decay’ (regardless of their original purpose, or politics). These comparisons included Michigan Central Station in Detroit, the Maunsell Sea Forts in the Thames not far from London, the abandoned Rubjerg Knude Lighthouse in Denmark and also Gunkanjima (Hashima Island), a famous derelict island off the coast of Japan. Not all comparisons were to ruins though. Some answers focussed more on Buzludzha’s architectural design, comparing it with other notable works of *Modern architecture*. These included: the Lloyds Halifax building in London; the Flying Saucer ride at Coney Island, New York; the UFO-shaped Institute of Information in Kyiv, Ukraine; the Slovak Radio Building in Bratislava (shaped like a giant inverted pyramid); the Nevigeser Wallfahrtsdom, a Brutalist church in Velbert, Germany, that was designed by Gottfried Böhm; as well as the saucer-shaped 112 Emergency Response Centre in Tbilisi, Georgia.

The *Other* group included a wide variety of sites that didn’t fit into any of the categories above. The US Pentagon, for instance, and a couple of Gothic cathedrals. There was Urquart Castle in Scotland, the so-called ‘Suicide Forest’ in Japan, and two sites in Spain: La Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, and also the Valle de los Caídos, a controversial Francoist memorial site with its own difficult heritage. Four answers in the *Other* category – two of them from Bulgarians – compared Buzludzha to the nearby Shipka Monument of Freedom. One respondent simply said: ‘A spaceship.’

Returning to the category of *Communist heritage sites* – the single largest category of comparisons – the most common responses can be broken down as follows.

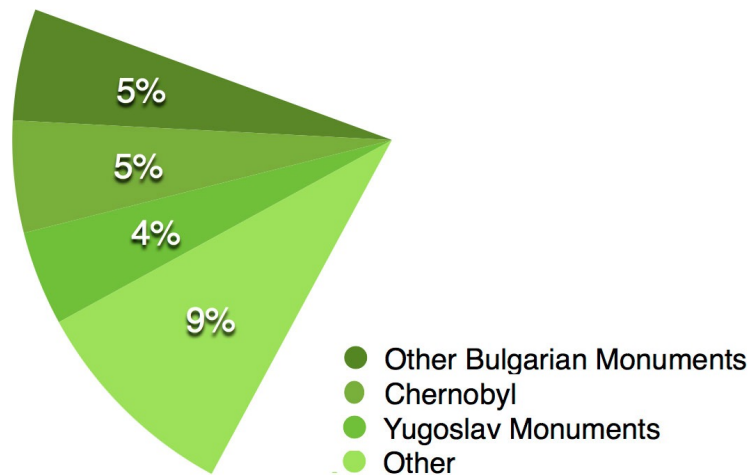


Figure 25: A closer look at communist heritage sites described as being ‘like’ Buzludzha.

Of the total respondents, 5% likened Buzludzha to other communist-era monuments in Bulgaria – with the memorial sites at Shumen, Varna and Stara Zagora receiving the most mentions (for more about these sites, see Appendix 2). Another 5% (or 12 people) compared Buzludzha to Chernobyl, and in particular, to the abandoned workers’ city of Pripyat. A further 4% mentioned the monuments of former Yugoslavia (previously discussed in Chapter 4). Of these, the abandoned memorial house at Petrova Gora, Croatia, was most prominent, with six mentions.

Other sites of communist heritage included: the old Soviet barracks outside Berlin; the Motherland Monument in Kyiv, Ukraine; the Mother Georgia monument in Tbilisi, Georgia; also in Tbilisi, the Ministry of Roads building; the Tirana Pyramid in Albania; three non-specific mentions of Havana, Cuba; three mentions of the Berlin Wall; several references to the colossal House of Parliament building in Bucharest, Romania; and one respondent who compared the experience of visiting Buzludzha to watching the 2003 film *Good Bye, Lenin!*

8.3.6 *Comment on ‘The Experience’*

Reading through the (sometimes quite lengthy) responses shared by visitors, there is an almost universal sense of frustration concerning Buzludzha’s current state of decay. But the fact that many visitors compared the building to globally treasured architectural wonders, speaks for the monument’s potential as a tourism destination, should it ever be preserved and managed as such. A large majority of visitors – 92% – made their own research into the

monument's history, which demonstrates a demand for the availability of accurate, reliable information on-site. These visitors want to know what they are looking at. While many appreciated the added atmosphere that the monument has earned through decades of decay, a significant portion of responses strongly condemned the appearance of contemporary graffiti. Therefore, it might be concluded that visitors want to be able to admire the original architecture and design, but many would prefer it didn't entirely lose the visual qualities that decay and abandonment have added to the building's appearance over the years (these decades of abandonment having now become a part of the monument's story). Visitors want information and history, but most are not looking to partake in dark tourism – so any exhibition that focussed too heavily on the crimes and victims of the former regime, for example, might be less preferable for Buzludzha's visitors, compared to archive photos of the construction project, design sketches, quotes from the architect, or other information associated with Buzludzha's specific architectural vision. Crucially, visitors said that the monument's architecture is its greatest value, to the point that many ranked it alongside some of the most celebrated buildings anywhere in the world.

8.3.7 *The Future*

The key finding to the question '*What should be done with Buzludzha?*' was that the strongest point of agreement amongst visitors was what *not* to do with Buzludzha.

When asked about the future of Buzludzha, respondents mostly agreed on what *shouldn't* happen; but opinions on what *should* happen were more divided. According to respondents, the worst outcome would be to *Demolish it* – around 300 people gave this option the lowest possible score (with a mean score of 1.15 out of 8). Behind that, both *Leave it to decay* (mean 1.87), and *Commercial use* (mean 2.17) were strongly discouraged, with a majority of respondents rating these options with the lowest possible score. The most popular suggestions were either a *Full restoration* (5.57), or a *Museum of Bulgaria* (5.80) – both of which received maximum scores from just under half the respondents. Preserving Buzludzha as a *Museum of socialism* (5.19), or giving it a *Partial restoration* (5.19), were the next most popular ideas.

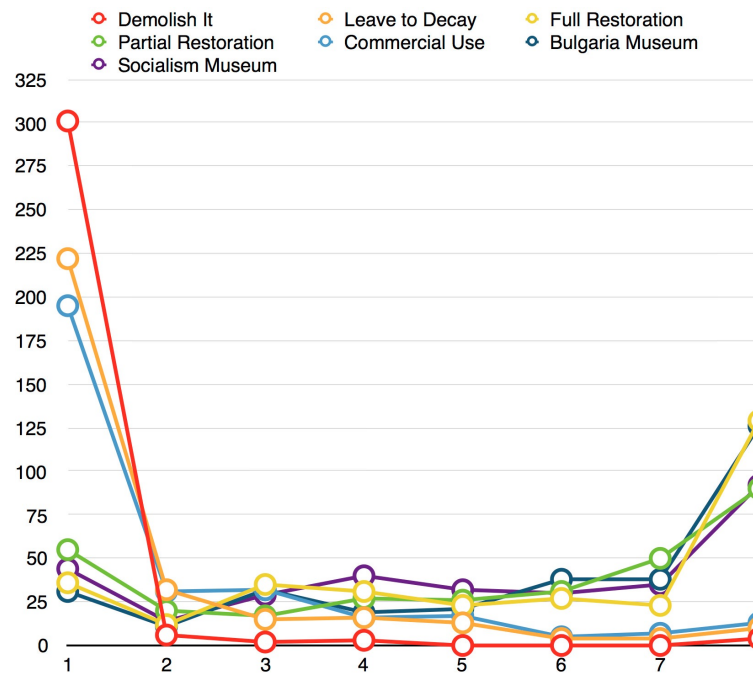


Figure 26: Potential outcomes for the Buzludzha Memorial House, rated from 1-8.

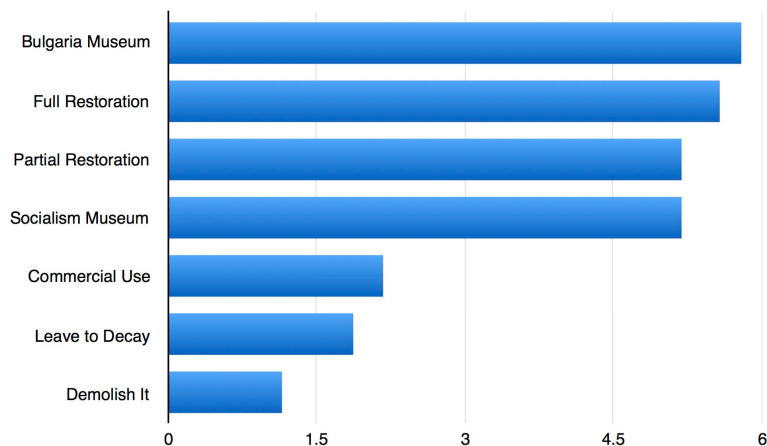


Figure 27: Average scores out of 8, given for various future uses of Buzludzha.

Only 51% of respondents said they were aware of any projects campaigning to conserve the Buzludzha Memorial House. This result was unexpected, considering the survey was largely promoted through a website dedicated to Buzludzha, and which also showcased a project campaigning for its conservation. However, as suggested above, many respondents seemed to have found the survey independently, or where it was shared through social groups, and this seems to be confirmed by this result. This also demonstrates that while the website had become a respected online source for information about the monument, there were many more

people visiting Buzludzha Peak who were still not aware of the website or project. In Bulgaria, however, the idea of conserving Buzludzha has been a matter of public debate for years, and amongst those respondents living in the country, a higher number answered that they were aware of such conversations – 71% of Bulgarian nationals expressed familiarity, compared to 63% of Bulgarian residents (of all nationalities).

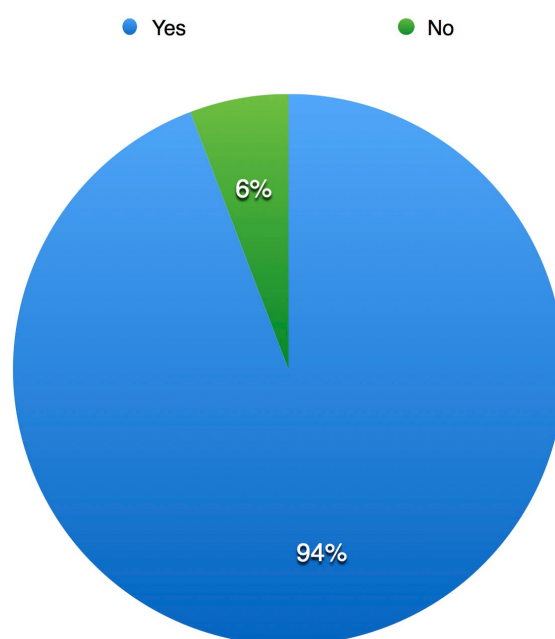


Figure 28: Responses to the question: If Buzludzha was preserved, would you be happy to pay an entry fee?

Another question asked whether people would be happy to pay an entry fee to Buzludzha, if the monument was preserved as a tourist attraction. Here, 94% said *Yes*. However, it should be noted that many people specified they would only be prepared to pay if the building was run as a non-profit; which is to say, they would contribute towards its maintenance, but not towards the private profit of its owners. “I would pay, but only if the money went back to the Bulgarian people and not to private enterprise,” wrote one visitor.

There were differences of opinion in how the site should best be managed. One respondent said they would only pay for entrance if the monument was not “surrounded by souvenir shops”; while another suggested that the entry fee should be kept as low as possible, by supplementing costs “via onsite gift shops and a cafe/restaurant.” One visitor said they wouldn’t pay to visit a preserved ruin, but only if the site was fully restored. Another argued the opposite: “If it was fully restored it would lose some of its appeal and maybe people

would pay less.” Some respondents suggested the price should be comparable to the typical entry fee for Bulgarian museums [roughly 5-10 BGN, or £2-4], while others suggested rates “in line with current ticket prices to other European cultural landmarks.” One visitor commented they would pay up to £25, explaining: “I have paid this much to look at an exhibit at Tate or MoMA.” One popular idea was to introduce tiered pricing rates. Many people suggested offering an affordable basic fee for entry, with numerous optional additions on top: for example, extra fees to climb the tower, or for guided tours, in addition to family and student discounts, plus a donation box. One respondent suggested a ‘Friends of Buzludzha’ campaign, whereby those who wanted to offer more support could sign up for larger contributions and receive benefits in return. There were 15 respondents (including only 2 Bulgarians) who said that Bulgarian visitors should either get free entry, or a reduced entry fee. “The Bulgarians already paid for this once, you shouldn’t charge them again!” wrote one American visitor. In general, though, Bulgarians were happy to pay – of the 25 who took this survey, 22 said they would pay to visit Buzludzha. “We pay £10-20 per cinema visit,” wrote one, “let’s pay for some architecture and culture too.” Another called for a transparent business model, while several Bulgarian respondents stressed the importance of ‘affordable prices,’ and that any profit raised should be invested back into the country. One Bulgarian visitor said they wouldn’t mind paying, but added that “trespassing is more interesting.”

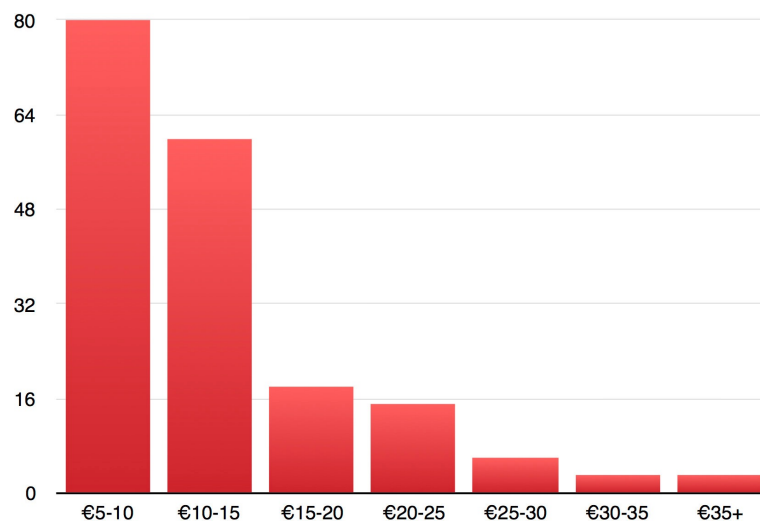


Figure 29: Perceived fair entry fee for Buzludzha, if preserved, in euros.
Mean average suggestion of €8.93 [£7.48].

Respondents were asked to suggest a fair entry fee for the Buzludzha Memorial House, if it were preserved as a tourist attraction. Their answers ranged from 1 Bulgarian lev, to 50 British pounds. After a few outliers were excluded (including hyperbolic answers such as: “right now, I’d pay \$100 for a look inside”), the mean average entry fee suggested was around €9, or £7.50.

Of those respondents who said *No* – they would not pay to visit Buzludzha – some gave political reasons. “Better if it was free, then everyone could visit and it would fit with its socialist background,” said one. Another respondent commented that entry fees would “go against everything that makes this monument unique.” Someone else pointed to the irony of having “capitalism finance the repair and then charge an entrance fee.” Even amongst people who disliked the idea of paying to enter, however, many still supported the idea of preservation, and a number of them encouraged the use of optional donation boxes so that each visitor could choose their own amount.

8.3.8 *Comment on ‘The Future’*

In Section 8.3.4, an estimate was made using daily visitor numbers reported by on-site security, that more than 26,000 people were visiting the Buzludzha Memorial House per year. If this number of visitors were each were paying the mean suggested entry fee of £7.50 (and 94% of respondents confirmed they would be happy to pay for entry), that would total a gross annual income of £195,000 in ticket sales. It might also be possible to raise more than that, through optional add-ons, donation boxes, souvenir sales and an on-site café (as some respondents suggested). Additionally, Section 8.3.3 showed that many respondents visited Bulgaria solely to go to Buzludzha, and the calculation was therefore made that, if this number of tourists each spent an average of £250 in the country, Buzludzha tourism would already be contributing something like £875,000 per year to Bulgaria’s economy. It should also be noted that these visitor numbers were observed at a time when the monument had recently been sealed shut, and almost all those arriving knew they wouldn’t be able to go inside the building itself. It might therefore be supposed that if the monument were made safe, kept warm in winter, and if it was endorsed by the Bulgarian state and advertised as an official tourist attraction, then these visitor numbers might rise significantly as a result. However – it is also possible that these survey respondents have understated the significance of seeing Buzludzha in its current, ruined state, and that, despite past visitors reporting a

desire to see the building conserved, the monument would nevertheless ultimately lose something of its current appeal, if it were managed and museumified. This is a complicated question, and it will be explored in depth over the course of the following chapter.

8.4 Chapter Summary

This Initial Findings & Discussion chapter has presented, summarised and discussed various of the findings collected during the research phase of this study. This included:

1. Scoping Exercise – Observations taken from a number of visits the researcher made to the Buzludzha Memorial House, commenting on the deteriorating state of the building between 2012 and 2019, the rising number of visitors, and the increasing appearance of graffiti and other acts of vandalism, as well as the installation of security systems first observed in September 2016.
2. Netnography – Summarising the various ways the monument has been conceptualised in contemporary (online) discourse, and finding that the Buzludzha Memorial House is today largely conceptualised according to one of five main archetypes: as a symbol of totalitarianism; as a temple or other sacred place; as an alien or otherworldly symbol of ‘the Other’; as a cultural and artistic victim of ‘the Changes’; and as a malleable visual and architectonic form, a commodity of communist kitsch. Particular note was paid to the increasing appearance of Buzludzha in video games, and in user-created virtual spaces.
3. Visitor Surveys – An overview of the results of the questionnaire phase of this study (full data from these 316 respondents appears in Appendix 4). In the sections above, these results were presented in visual form using graphs and charts, pointing towards a few emergent patterns and themes. The chapter found that visitors rated the monument’s architectural design as its most important value, and that few visitors felt sympathetic towards the building’s politics. The majority of these visitors had strong negative feelings about the current state of the monument, and believed that it should either be preserved in its semi-ruined state, or else restored to a condition closer to its original design. The majority said they would be happy to pay an entry fee should this happen, with the mean average fee suggested at £7.50.

In the following chapter – Discussion & Implications – these findings will be discussed more critically, also alongside the results of the scoping exercise (Appendix 2) and semi-structured interviews (Appendix 3), and then the combined findings of this study will be discussed in relation to the findings from the earlier literature chapters of Volume One, as this thesis moves towards drawing its final conclusions.

Chapter Nine

Discussion & Implications

“Even the run-down nature of the high-rise was a model of the world into which the future was carrying them, a landscape beyond technology where everything was either derelict or, more ambiguously, recombined in unexpected but more meaningful ways. Laing pondered this – sometimes he found it difficult not to believe that they were living in a future that had already taken place, and was now exhausted.”

High-Rise, J. G. Ballard

9.0 Introduction

This chapter will take the results previously presented in Chapter 8 (and in the case of the scoping exercise and semi-structured interviews, compiled in the Appendices), and develop these into a discussion that answers the key questions raised during the earlier literature review (Chapters 2-4). In order to logically structure the development of a discussion around the research, this chapter will:

- Reintroduce the Research Question of this thesis, and break it down into answerable questions.
- Revisit Chapters 2-4 of this thesis, so that significant questions arising from the literature can be addressed, discussed, and hopefully answered using the findings of the research. These chapters will be addressed in the order: Chapter 3 (Modes of (Dark) Engagement), Chapter 4 (The Eastward Gaze), and then finally Chapter 2 (Monumentalism).
- Revisit an idea introduced in the Introduction of this thesis, dealing with different approaches to the future of the Buzludzha Memorial House. Each of five potential outcomes will be discussed and evaluated in turn. Based on the research findings, this section then makes educated predictions concerning the future of the monument.
- Summarise the researcher's academic activism, with relation to the project to conserve the monument. This leads to a discussion of the current conservation outcomes, which will be evaluated in relation to the literature and research findings.
- Finally, the chapter will approach the Research Question, by asking what value the Buzludzha Memorial House can offer now for contemporary Bulgaria.

As noted in the methodology (Chapter 7), rather than presenting a stand-alone analysis of the semi-structured interview data resulting from the third research phase of this study, the decision was made instead to use those interview transcripts as a source of rich data with which to illustrate, support, or interrogate the themes arising from the literature reviewed in Volume One. For clarity though, and to clearly demonstrate the original contributions of this study, material being drawn in this way from the semi-structured interviews will be presented in this chapter contained within text boxes, that add original commentary on the topics being considered. (Full transcripts of these interviews can be found in Appendix 3.)

9.1 Framing the Discussion

9.1.1 The Research Question

This thesis set out to answer the following Research Question:

In what ways can the Buzludzha Memorial House – a monument built to celebrate the communist movement – provide value in post-communist Bulgaria?

In order to answer such a question, it is necessary first to establish a number of related definitions and understandings. The following subsections will therefore now establish: what the value of a monument *can* be; and exactly who is visiting the Buzludzha Memorial House nowadays.

9.1.2 The Value of a Monument

Speaking of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, in Berlin, Hatherley (2017) asked: “If the memorial isn’t intended to induce some sort of solemnity or respect, what could it possibly be for?” What this thesis has demonstrated, is that in addition to serving the role of providing spaces for memory and respectful solemnity, such memorials are also sometimes useful for: establishing the identity of the state that builds them; providing places for the development of shared community; and also, as focal points for historical education (see Section 2.2). In this way, a single memorial might have different kinds of value for a whole range of varied value groups within the local community. Specifically, this thesis has found that the Buzludzha Memorial House, in its role as a monument, offers (or has offered) value to five different social groups, which will now be defined in order to discuss these groups and their interests in relation to the research. The relationship between these groups, and the monument, can be conceptualised using the following model.

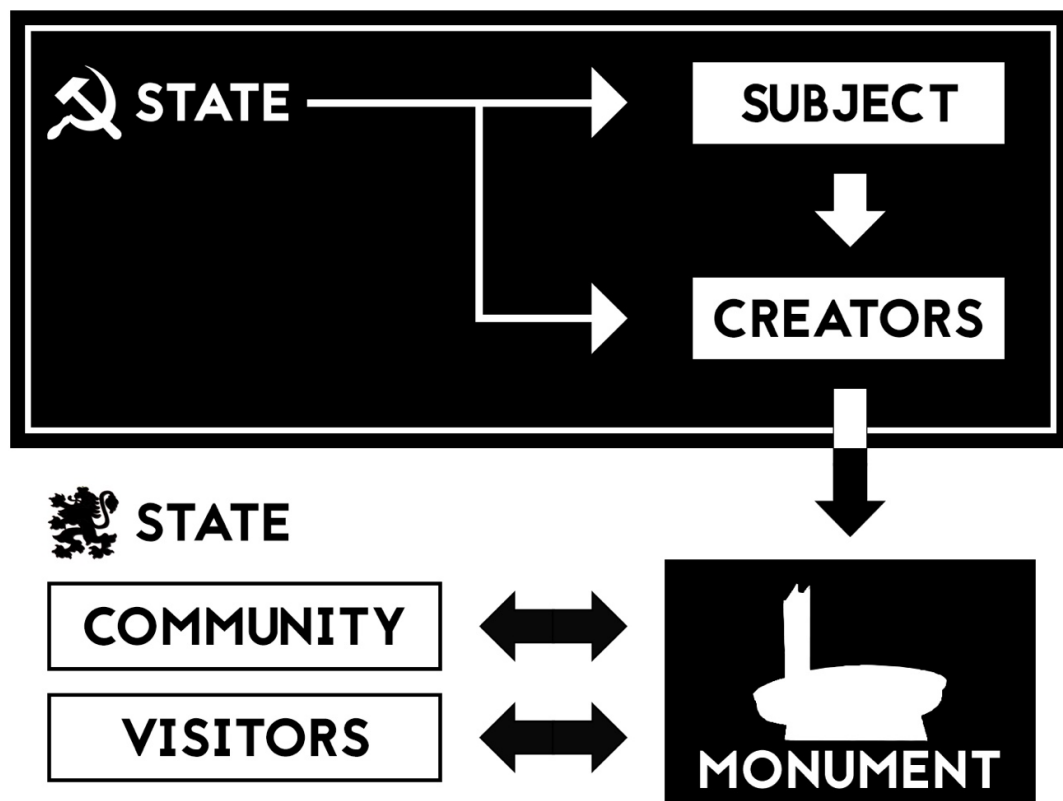


Figure 30: The relative value groups related to the monument over time.

The model is divided into two time periods, reflecting the changing role of the State: in the upper portion, the (communist) state exerts control over the other named groups and their relationships; in the lower portion, the (democratic) state has a looser and less controlling connection to the processes being demonstrated. Each of the five groups here (Subject, Creators, State, Community, and Visitors) has a value stake in the monument, as follows:

Subject: those persons being memorialised, either literally or symbolically. The Buzludzha Memorial House commemorates three historic events that happened at this location, each with larger national implications: the 1868 battle between Bulgarian revolutionaries and occupying Ottoman forces (symbolic more generally of the nation's struggle for independence and self-determination in the 19th century); the 1944 conflict between antifascist partisans and state-backed fascist forces (symbolic of the national antifascist movement); and the secret congress in 1891 that established the Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers' Party, a forerunner to the Bulgarian Communist Party. Therefore, the *Subject* of this monument can be said to be those people fighting for an independent and/or socialist Bulgaria.

Creators: those who worked on the monument, its architects, artists, engineers and labours, a team who numbered in the thousands during the years of the monument's creation, and who subsequently see their own labours reflected in the site. Some creatives who worked on the monument are still alive, and in other cases, their family survive and consider the monument as their legacy. As with the designation of a subject matter, this value group was also a matter determined under communist-era state control.

Former State: the political body that commissioned the monument, approved its design and content, and recruited the architects and artists who would work on it. As illustrated in the model above, this group maintains influence over the preceding two groups. It is a group that no longer exists today, although its influence can still be clearly felt at the site, through the deployment of political symbols, commemorative mosaics, and portraits of its historic leaders. By contemporary Bulgarian law, this former state is now ruled to have constituted an illegal political regime; and so the current state, and any contemporary conservation that were to happen at the monument, must thereby discredit the former state as a valid contemporary stakeholder in the site. To what degree that former state influenced the other two communist-era value groups remains a matter of debate today, though it could be concluded that the Buzludzha Memorial House could not have come into existence were it not for the very specific cultural, political and economic situations of the era, all of which were under the direct and exclusive control of the former state. It was the State that created and maintained the definition of Buzludzha as a monument to Bulgarian independence (by way of socialism), and now that this State no longer exists, such readings are no longer the only readings of the building to be permitted.

[NB. The lead architect of the Buzludzha Memorial House, Georgi Stoilov, has been interviewed for this research project, and his perspectives might be considered as representative of all three of the value groups above. He fought as an antifascist partisan during World War II, and so is a member of the Subject group being memorialised; he later went into politics, serving as mayor of Sofia, then Minister of Architecture and Public Works, and was a member of the political inner circle of the State, the Politburo; at Buzludzha Peak, he designed the monument and oversaw its creation, to be remembered as the most prominent of the Creators who worked on it. Stoilov's perspectives therefore can be considered as

good indication of the former, pre-1989 approach to conceptualising the Buzludzha Memorial House.]

The lower portion of the model illustrates two contemporary value groups, each of which has a reciprocal value relationship with the monument; the monument passes down certain intrinsic values to them, but they in turn, in today's democratic Bulgaria, have the freedom to reconceptualise the monument, and reframe it (in public or media discourse, through art, literature and journalism, or by vandalism, explorations and other on-site interventions) within their own new value systems.

Contemporary State: depicted here with the Bulgarian lion crest, is the de facto owner of the monument, but currently neither ascribes value to the site (through recognition with 'monument' status, organised visits and tourism, or any other means), nor appears to derive any value from it. Thus, it is shown on the model as being disconnected from the monument.

Community: the inheritors of the monument. This might be considered from a micro level (the citizens of Kazanluk municipality), to the macro, globalist level (reconceptualising the monument as a national heritage site, or even as one of 'Europe's Seven Most Endangered Heritage Sites'). For the purpose of this thesis however, Community will be considered as referring to the Bulgarian people. While the former groups of Subject and Creators are increasingly now a matter of history, the contemporary group of Community includes their inheritors – Bulgarian socialists and antifascists, as well as any surviving artists, architects, engineers and labourers who worked on the site, as well as their descendants. This group therefore can be seen as including a synthesis of those that came before, and will necessarily have complicated value relationships with the site.

Visitors: those foreigners (and Bulgarians) who feel no personal connection to or investment in the site, and thus are able to engage with it through the more detached, apolitical and time-specific lens of touristic visits. These people do not *live* with Buzludzha; they might visit this place one summer, think about it for a while, and then visit somewhere completely different on their next trip. Nevertheless, tourism has great potential for raising awareness as well as bringing in financial resources that might be used in potential conservation or memorialisation processes, and so this value group is an important one to consider.

This study has chosen to focus its research on the value attributed to the Buzludzha Memorial House by those in the Visitors group. Not only because this group remains the least studied to date, but because it is believed that this group, being international in nature, would have a significant effect on the contextual reframing of the monument and its value. Should the monument ever be preserved as an official heritage site, this group would also then become the most reliable regular income for such a project, and so understanding the motivations of this group would be crucial in any effort to effectively ‘save’ the Buzludzha Memorial House. However, any effort to preserve the monument would also need to be done in respectful accordance with the attitudes and values of the monument’s heirs, defined here as the local Community group. Therefore, the following section uses the research data to create an initial profile of the foreign visitors who travel to Buzludzha today, but this will also be considered in relation to local perspectives, as interpreted via the scoping exercise (Appendix 2), and other various sources, to present an overview of contemporary Bulgarian relationships with the country’s sites of communist heritage.

9.1.3 Who Visits Buzludzha?

Prior to this research, little was known about the contemporary visitors travelling to sites of socialist heritage in Southeast Europe – in general – or about the visitors going to the Buzludzha Memorial House in Bulgaria – in particular. Various authors, journalists and academics have conceptualised these people in different ways. In the netnography in Chapter 8, a wide range of different accounts were considered, reviewed, and synthesised, to create a generalised visitor profile:

Aside from a small number of visitors expressing nostalgia for the communist regime, the majority of people who visit Buzludzha today are foreigners who come primarily in search of adventure, and for dramatic scenes to photograph. These people are attracted to the monument primarily due to its ruined condition, and they are also attracted to visit other ruined buildings too. Some come here to engage in what might be termed ‘deviant travel’ (including elements of lawlessness, trespass, and death fetishism), and moreover these visits constitute a mode of travel that might be described as ‘Orientalism’ or ‘neo-colonialism.’

This profiling was done based on subjective assessment however, and might therefore be said to also potentially reflect the underlying worldviews or biases of those giving these classifications. None of these assessments was informed by self-reporting on the part of these

visitors, either by way of questionnaires or interviews, but this current research is able to now provide data against which to evaluate these claims. First, it will help to break the above statement into testable variables.

Who visits Buzludzha?	Foreigners
For what purpose?	Adventure, photography
What quality do they value?	Ruined condition
Modes of engagement	Dark tourism, urban exploration, ‘deviant travel’
Other interests	Visiting other ruined sites
Potential issues	Orientalism, neo-colonialism

Table 22: A summary of typical media conceptualisations of those who visit Buzludzha.

This study has specifically focussed on foreign visitors, though some Bulgarian respondents did still submit responses anyway. The question of subjective value was answered in Question 4 of the survey, which asked ‘What made you want to visit Buzludzha?’; and invited respondents to give scores out of 8 for the options: *Architectural value*, *Historical significance*, *Beautiful decay*, *Having an adventure*, *Mountain views*, *Photographic appeal*, and *Sympathy for the socialist movement*.

As shown again in the netnography in Chapter 8, commenters have asserted that ‘Adventure’ and ‘Photography’ were the primary draws for foreign visitors. However, if their research has not included site visits or surveys amongst former visitors, and has been limited solely to browsing online – for example, on photography sharing sites or adventure blogs – then it is natural that these commenters would ascribe disproportionate weight to the perceived values of Adventure and Photography. By comparison, it might reasonably be suggested that those who visit Buzludzha for quiet reflection, or personal architectural appreciation, don’t all necessarily write about or share the experience online. It is the belief of this researcher that any research into visitor motivations that is limited solely to online self-reporting is by nature going to include only a certain type of visitors, and quite possibly an unrepresentative sample of the total number of visitors. Accordingly, this study has attempted to go deeper by conducting survey research with a broad range of past visitors to the site, and based on the resultant data the following comments can be made in response to the assertions highlighted in Table 22 above.

Who visits Buzludzha?

Reports based on observation by site security at the Buzludzha Memorial House suggest that roughly 50% of visitors are foreigners. The other 50% are Bulgarian citizens.

For what purpose?

The factors of *Adventure* and *Photography*, as predicted by commenters, were both rated by survey respondents as significant values of the site – with mean scores of 5.79 and 6.29 out of 8, respectively. However, the greatest value of the site according to these visitors were the factors of *Architectural value* (mean 6.72) and *Historical significance* (mean 6.43), which were both rated, on average, as being of greater value than either *Adventure* or *Photography*.

What quality do they value?

The widespread assertion that visitors were drawn to the site primarily for its ruinous quality was simply not supported by the survey responses. Visitors rated the factor of *Beautiful decay* in fifth place out of seven potential values of the site (with a mean score of 5.70 out of 8), while in response to Question 16, which asked what visitors thought should be done with the site, the most popular proposed outcomes involved either conservation as a *Museum of Bulgaria* (mean 5.80) or a *Full restoration* (mean 5.57) – both options which would render the building no longer a ruin. The options of leaving the monument abandoned were the least popular outcomes proposed, with *Leave it to decay* scored at 1.87, and *Demolish it* scoring 1.15. Even the proposal of conserving the monument in a semi-ruined state – a *Partial restoration* – was less popular than more conventional conservation options, ranking in third-equal place with a score of 5.19 out of 8. Therefore, while many respondents did note the significant aesthetic appeal of seeing this building as a ruin, this research is able to demonstrate that the ruined condition of the monument is not – as has been suggested in the literature – the primary draw for these visitors.

The final three assertions in Table 22 above will be further explored in the following sections; namely addressing the modes in which visitors engage with the site (Section 9.2), how they perceive Buzludzha in relation to other sites of (abandoned or ruined) communist heritage (Section 9.4), and whether these engagements can be generalised as representing instances of Orientalism and/or neo-colonialism (Section 9.3).

9.2 Modes of (Dark) Engagement, Revisited

Chapter 3 of this thesis dealt with the ways in which contemporary visitors engage with sites of difficult heritage. In the process, it introduced a number of concepts, including ‘dark tourism,’ ‘heterotopia,’ ‘psychogeography’ and ‘urban exploration.’ These topics are now investigated in turn, using data from the research.

9.2.1 *Buzludzha as Dark Tourism*

In Chapter 3, *dark tourism* was defined as the “act of travel and visitation to sites, attractions, and exhibitions which have real or created death, suffering, or the seemingly macabre as a main theme” (Stone, 2005). Moreover, it was suggested that this represented “a practice that reveals larger anxieties about industrial, scientific, and political progress. In other words, visiting certain sights was a way to visualise the dangerous consequences of new technologies and ideologies” (Hartmann, Lennon, Reynolds, Rice, Rosenbaum & Stone, 2018). It was further suggested that in its contemporary practice, “[dark] tourism has become established as a specialist focus for tourism research and has been used to discuss the wider fascination we appear to have with our own mortality and the fate of others” (Hartmann, Lennon, Reynolds, Rice, Rosenbaum & Stone, 2018). It was said that dark tourism serves as a method for “domesticating death in a secularised world” (Korstanje, 2011).

Whereas many of the other communist-era monuments that stand across Bulgaria commemorate places of World War II-era battles and massacres, thus presenting death, suffering, and remembrance as their primary themes (see Appendix 2), the Buzludzha Memorial House is conceptually and thematically broader in its focus. It looks to the future, a ‘Monument of the People,’ standing as “the symbolic ritual hall of a timeless society: an intergalactic pantheon with its roots in antiquity and its future reaching onwards to the stars” (Richter, 2017). Death is not absent from the monument’s story, however. The Buzludzha monument commemorates the founding of the Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers’ Party, on this spot in 1891 – but it also remembers the Bulgarian national hero Hadzhi Dimitur who was mortally wounded at Buzludzha Peak in 1868; and later, antifascist conflict at this site. The first monument was erected to commemorate this site in 1898, and the peak proved so popular as a destination for pilgrims that in 1936, an overnight lodge was built to accommodate them. These three historical events were subsequently memorialised in the trio of Buzludzha monuments, installed around the peak in 1961 (see Chapter 6), and all three

events became significant themes in the 1981 Buzludzha Memorial House too, so that the final monument might be said to represent a place of social pilgrimage commemorating not only the original vision of the Bulgarian socialists, but also the deadly trials and sacrifices they would overcome on the path to realising that vision. In that sense, even by its original design, the Buzludzha Memorial House was always an attraction that incorporated some degree of dark tourism in its visitor experience. In his opening speech before the monument, on 23 August 1981, Todor Zhivkov himself stressed the themes of sacrifice that underlined the significance of this location, urging visitors “to bow down before the feats and the deeds of those who came before; those who lived on this land and gave everything they had to their nation.”

There are mixed opinions on whether contemporary visits to Buzludzha could be said to constitute a practice of dark tourism. According to Stone’s (2006) ‘dark tourism spectrum,’ Buzludzha might be considered in its original design to represent a ‘dark conflict site,’ as it memorialised a place of real death and sacrifice. In contemporary visitation, when consumed by tourists as a fallen symbol of the former regime, within a conceptual framework of knowledge and understanding that identifies Communist Bulgaria as one of a number of ‘dark regimes’ (Hohenhaus, 2010), the monument becomes akin to a ‘dark shrine.’ The categories of ‘dark conflict sites’ and ‘dark shrines’ both lay towards the darker end of Stone’s ‘shades of darkness’ spectrum. Stone identified those ‘darker’ sites as showing the characteristics of *higher political influence and ideology*, being *history centric*, having *perceived authentic product interpretation*, and *location authenticity*, while presenting a *shorter time scale to the event*, and *lower tourism infrastructure* – all of which statements are true for the Buzludzha visitor experience today (Stone, 2006). Peter Hohenhaus, who runs the website ‘Dark Tourism’ (<http://www.dark-tourism.com>), scored Buzludzha 9 out of 10 on his ‘darkometer,’ thus placing it on the same level as noted dark tourism sites such as the September 11 Memorial and Museum in New York, or the Buchenwald Concentration Camp in Germany, and calling it: “without any doubt one the most stunning dark-tourism destinations on the planet” (Hohenhaus, 2012). In the netnography in Chapter 8, it was shown how both foreign and domestic commenters would sometimes conceptualise the monument in dark terms also, presenting it as a place of historic suffering, as a symbol of totalitarianism, or even as a place of real or imagined horror.

However, in the survey research, Question 20 asked ‘How dark does Buzludzha feel to you?’ – with respondents asked to give a score from 1 to 8, where 8 was an extremely dark destination. Only 8 respondents out of 316 scored it a full 8 points, while 60 gave it the lowest possible score of 1. The mean score was 3.45 out of 8, which suggests contemporary foreign visitors do not consider this to be a particularly dark destination. Rather, the data suggest, foreign visitors today are more likely to celebrate the monument’s pioneering architecture than they are to dwell on any perceived darkness of its past.

Adrien Minard commented that he did not recognise any dark associations, as Buzludzha was in his mind “not linked with death, suffering or catastrophes.” Rather, it focussed on the achievements of communism, and therefore Minard suggests it is better defined as a “red nostalgia destination.” However, Minard does also note how the monument might have dark associations for others, and particularly for Bulgarian people – when he comments that Buzludzha is part of a communist legacy that is “still often associated with labour camps and repression in the collective mind” (Appendix 3)

It is this factor of ‘association’ which is key to the question of whether Buzludzha might be considered a dark destination today. Commenters within Bulgaria have noted that sites of communist heritage – such as Buzludzha – do show potential for being managed as places of dark tourism consumption (Nikolova, 2014; Mileva, 2018); and the Bulgarian press already labels those foreign visitors going to Buzludzha as ‘dark tourists’ (Stoyanova, 2017; Nikolova, 2021), even though, as the survey showed, most visitors do not self-identify as such. For Bulgarians, the monument is linked to a political ideology that is subject to very personal associations, and for some, it still symbolises memories of historic trauma and suffering. For example, one Bulgarian interviewee in the scoping exercise, Vanya, commented:

“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” (Appendix 2).

The Buzludzha Memorial House, in its contemporary form, might thus be usefully conceptualised as a site of subjective, culturally-rooted darkness – for example within frameworks of ‘difficult heritage’ (Logan & Reeves, 2009), as ‘heritage that hurts’ (Sather-Wagstaff, 2011), or as a symbol of ‘displaced heritage’ (Roberts & Stone, 2014). Moreover, it might be suggested that the experience of visiting is ‘darker’ for Bulgarians – who on the whole have greater knowledge of, and associations with, the past being represented by the monument – than it is for foreign tourists.

Chapter 3 of this thesis went on to suggest different modalities within the practice of dark tourism, differentiating between, on the one hand, “well-defined packaged-up sites of dark tourism (e.g. massacre sites, morbid museums or memorials to tragedy) at which it is almost impossible for a visitor not *to be doing* dark tourism,” and on the other, “free-range dark tourism, where the *darkness* is less explicit and those passing through the space may be so-called dark tourists or not, according to a very personal system of pre-conditioning, knowledge and perceptions” (Morten, Stone & Jarratt, 2018). These two different forms of dark tourism were given the suggested titles of ‘Foucauldian dark tourism’ and ‘Debordian dark tourism,’ respectively. Considered within this framework, it might be said that Buzludzha in its original form, as a state-managed memorial house where visitors were told curated stories about historic death and sacrifice along the path to building Bulgarian socialism, the monument acted as a site of Foucauldian dark tourism; whereas now that the monument has been torn from its former political context, and has been left abandoned, unmanaged, and absent of any curated information to guide the visitor experience, the place instead opens itself up to an infinite number of subjective interpretations, which are formed as a product of each individual visitor’s own prior knowledge and associations, and the monument thus becomes a place of Debordian dark tourism.

Ultimately, this mismatch between foreign and domestic perspectives of ‘darkness’ in the case of Buzludzha recalls what Vladana Putnik Prica said of war memorials in Yugoslavia: “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). It might therefore be concluded that it would be preferable for more foreign visitors to start thinking about the potential ‘dark’ interpretations of the Buzludzha Memorial House. Outsider evaluations of the monument rank its architecture and appearance as its most valuable qualities (according to

survey results), while not recognising the site as being a place of any particular darkness. However, without the balancing consideration of what the monument was built to represent, in addition to what it actually represents to many Bulgarian people today, there is a danger of such visual-oriented conceptualisations becoming mere ‘concrete clickbait’ (Hatherley, 2016).

9.2.2 *Buzludzha as Heterotopia*

Chapter 3 also introduced the concept of ‘heterotopias,’ which were defined as places and institutions that interrupt the apparent continuity and normality of ordinary everyday space (Foucault 1967a [1984]). Examples were given of both the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone and the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, which were assessed against the six-point definition offered by Foucault. In the case of Buzludzha, the monument has taken two very different forms and roles in the periods of time before and after its abandonment. Therefore, this section will now look at Buzludzha the same way and making consideration of both its pre-1989 and post-1989 states.

Principles of Heterotopia	Buzludzha pre-1989	Buzludzha post-1989
1. Universal across cultures	An exclusive museum space, like Foucault’s examples of the museum or library as heterotopia.	A modern ruin, an inverted reflection of contemporary politics and architecture, as appear in places around the world.
2. Changing roles over time	See Buzludzha post-1989.	See Buzludzha pre-1989.
3. Juxtapose multiple spatial ideas	As a memorial house the building showcased events and places from across the country’s socialist history.	The ruin is taken to represent Bulgarian communism, Soviet communism, and the international Brutalist architecture style.
4. Locked to a specific slice of time	Time did not move in the museum, during its years of use Buzludzha was a static representation of outside time.	As a ruin, Buzludzha offers a reflected image of the communist empire in decline... and for many Bulgarians, a symbol of the ‘Changes.’
5. Both isolated and penetrable	Open to the public, and free of charge, but can only be visited in a certain way, with a guide, and by following a predetermined route around the building.	During its peak post-abandonment tourism years, visitors would ignore keep-out signs to enter the building. When entrances were sealed, they crossed that barrier via holes and windows.
6. An illusion of the space outside	Buzludzha was decorated with mosaic-rendered scenes of Bulgarian domestic life and places of socialist victory.	Buzludzha is one of many ruined buildings, and ruined monuments, across Bulgaria and the broader post-communist world. Yet it is so iconic, that it has become symbolic of all.

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Table 23: The Buzludzha Memorial House as heterotopia.

The conclusion of this study therefore is that the Buzludzha Memorial House, both before and after its abandonment and the onset of decay, could be considered a highly heterotopic space; with Foucault’s second principle, which suggested how heterotopias could serve different roles and functions over time, applying particularly to the changing nature of the site through these different phases of its life (Foucault 1967b). Topinka (2010: 56) noted that heterotopias are universal, “although the forms they take are heterogeneous” from one culture to the next; and so further to this the thesis proposes that the forms heterotopias take may indeed also be heterogenous from one *regime* to the next.

Support for this heterotopic reading of the monument is found in the interviews too. In 2015, the researcher Caroline Trotman organised an event at the site that she called “a time-specific exploration” – explaining this concept as being “like a photo, snapshot of something, it’s temporarily unique.” This resonates with Foucault’s fourth principle of the heterotopia, that it is a place with heterochronous characteristics. A similar idea emerged during the interview with Les Johnstone, when he commented on Buzludzha’s changing qualities over time: “The building is deteriorating so it’s always different on each visit.” Johnstone also comments on the apparent breakdown of the social rules and expectations applied to normal topic space when he explores ruins such as the contemporary Buzludzha Memorial House, commenting: “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” (Appendix 3).

Again, these anecdotal observations suggest the perceived atmosphere and world of an ‘Other place,’ or heterotopia. Indeed, even contemporary graffiti within the monument seems to draw attention to its otherworldly, dreamlike, or post-apocalyptic qualities, suggesting a place outside of normal space: ‘Here Begin Your Nightmares,’ reads one piece written in Bulgarian, observed in April 2012; while a more recent graffiti, spotted in March 2016, identifies Buzludzha as ‘the Bulgarian Chernobyl,’ thus drawing comparison with another noted heterotopia (Stone, 2013). Shterev similarly draws the comparison: “My feeling was that we were in an abandoned temple of utopia, located in the ‘Zone’ of the Strugatsky brothers” (cited in Todorov, 2020); thus, identifying the experience of visiting Buzludzha with one of

literature's most iconic heterotopias, the 'Zone' of the Strugatskys' *Roadside Picnic*, and Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, which itself has long held associations with the real Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (see for example Richter, 2020b).



Plate 80: Graffiti in Buzludzha's Ritual Hall reads 'the Bulgarian Chernobyl' (own photo: 31 March 2016).

9.2.3 *Buzludzha as Urban Exploration*

Urban exploration was defined in Chapter 3 as “a cultural practice of exploring derelict, closed and normally inaccessible built environments” (Garrett, 2010). The Buzludzha Memorial House, during its height of popularity amongst tourists in the mid-2010s (see Chapter 6) was a derelict building, and officially closed to visitors – thus allowing that those who did go inside might be described as ‘urban explorers.’ Indeed, the netnography phase of this study (Chapter 8) found that many commentators do conceptualise contemporary visitors to Buzludzha as such, describing them as: “photo-hungry urban explorers who have broken in illegally” (Corey, 2018); “urban explorers from around the world” (Salem, 2019); “photographers, urban explorers and other curious travellers” (Happer, 2015); and “‘urban explorers’ and fans of abandoned buildings in general” (Hohenhaus, 2021). Indeed, within these interactions it is possible also to observe the three ‘modes’ of urban exploration, as previously identified in Section 3.5.1: *embodiment*, or ‘place hacking’ (Garrett, 2010);

preservationism, or ‘technological memorialisation’ (Lindsay, 2010); and *image-making*, or the production of ‘ruin porn’ (Greco, 2012; De Silva, 2014; Lyons, 2017). More specifically, visitor images of Buzludzha follow in the larger observed trend of ruin photography within post-communist space (Rann, 2014; Kulić, 2018).

One of this study’s interviewees, Les Johnstone, is a British photographer who self-identifies as an urban explorer, and he discusses the appeal that Buzludzha has within this community as providing an opportunity “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.” It is interesting to note that for Johnstone, the appeal is not limited to the place – but also for the community which meets in its ruins, so that the monument itself becomes something like a *clubhouse*. He goes on: “In the urban exploring community it’s a bit of a Mecca, I feel that it belongs to me, and my fellow urban explorers.” This sense of ownership, he says, results “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.” The lawlessness then is a part of the appeal – for urban explorers like Johnstone, visiting Buzludzha is an opportunity to step outside of societal norms and the perceived regulations of shared public space (Appendix 3).

In a discussion of ‘urban exploration’ and ruin photography in Detroit, Doucet and Philp (2016) previously noted how “[there] is a distinct neo-colonialist streak to these projects,” and Kulić (2018) further located this neo-colonialist element within the Western visitation of (ruined) sites of communist heritage in Southeast Europe. When Johnstone comments of the Buzludzha Memorial House, “I feel that it belongs to me, and my fellow urban explorers,” this might therefore be read as confirmation of such a colonialist perspective, though in Johnstone’s testimony this is also tempered by a degree of self-awareness, and sensitivity to a context larger than his own frame of reference. As he notes: “this building has a huge historical and cultural significance for Bulgaria [...] signifying good or bad times depending on your opinion of that ideology.” This aspect of the site, he acknowledges, is “something I’m not a part of at all,” explaining: “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” (Appendix 3).

Commenters reviewed in the netnography further suggest that the ruined condition of the building is one of its draws. For this reason, both the interview and survey questions of this study asked whether visitors would be likely to continue coming in such numbers if the building was restored or otherwise made safer and more streamlined to visit (an action which would be essential for any official tourism venue to be established, though which might detract from the ‘urban exploration’ appeal of visiting the building as a ruin).

When asked if Buzludzha would receive more visitors if it was made safe, the interviewee Adrien Minard doesn’t believe so. He says: “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” (Appendix 3). He is therefore suggesting that ruination, and the freedom to transgress, explore, or create new, unstructured readings, is an essential component of the monument’s current appeal. In other words: “The conscientious explorer [...] seeks to create a relationship with the past, to produce a history that’s not been museumised or curated by experts” (Edensor cited in Greco, 2012).

The building’s architect, Georgi Stoilov, also notes the potential tourist appeal of the monument as a ruin, though he considers this state to be overall of less value compared to a fully restored monument: “Decay certainly plays a role here... but you should have seen it before, it was absolutely fantastic.”

The developers of the game *Buzludzha VR* similarly feel that the monument’s appeal goes deeper than just contemporary ruin fascination: while Czarnowski notes the appeal of exploring the abandoned monument for “thrill seekers” and “urban explorers,” Rusanov adds that he has also seen “a lot of families, parents with their children going to visit the monument. [...] Parents showing it to their children and you can see the excitement, the children being fascinated by the architecture.”

The interviewee Andrew Lawler notes that “the ruinous ‘quality’ is a strong attraction.” However, he also points out how “this kind of attraction of a site is unsustainable.” Lawler gives three reasons for this: firstly, “‘Ruin’ sites become ‘cleansed’ through continuous visits (paths are worn, mementoes are taken, etc.)”; secondly, ruined attractions “lose their

‘exclusivity’ as more and more people visit such sites and they become better-known [leading] to a wane in interest”; and finally, he observes that the “decay may become so severe that a site becomes dangerous or is destroyed.” Therefore, he reasons, this “becomes an issue for conservators: How can a site be preserved as an ‘authentic ruin’?” Because once the authorities get involved, improving access and safety and management plans, “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.” Though ultimately, Lawler doesn’t see this as a reason not to conserve the building – because “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.” Therefore, while there’s no guarantee that the current level of interest would continue post-conservation, he reasons that it likely wouldn’t continue forever anyway if the building were not conserved (Appendix 3).

The survey phase of this research asked past visitors to the site how they felt about its ruined condition. While the visual appeal of Buzludzha as a ruin has been widely noted, as stated above in Section 9.1.3, survey respondents were generally more enthusiastic about proposals that restored the monument as a non-ruined site. This seems to suggest that even if visitors are engaging with the site now in a mode of illegal tourism that could be described as ‘urban exploration,’ this is not, in fact, what the majority of contemporary visitors want Buzludzha tourism to look like. Indeed, in Question 4 of the survey, which dealt with the perceived values of the site, its ruinous nature was ranked as being of lesser value than other factors such as its architecture and history. Only 15 respondents (fewer than 5%) mentioned the term ‘urban exploration,’ or its popular abbreviated form ‘urbex’ (for example, either as a reason for visiting, or in noting the site’s various values) in their open-form responses. It might therefore be concluded that even if these visitors could be said to be engaging in urban exploration at present, most of them are only doing so because that is the only way the building could currently be accessed. Indeed, the strongest responses from these so-called ‘urban explorers’ called for the monument to be restored, and 94% said that they would be happy to pay an entry fee if it supported such action.

The results also showed a distinction between different types of visitors at the site. Whereas the netnography showed how commenters had traditionally painted all Buzludzha’s illicit visitors in broad strokes (for example, as “thrill seekers and vandals” – in Tsenkova, 2017), an overwhelming number of those surveyed reported feeling ‘sad’ at the current ruined condition

of the monument, and described the Bulgarian state's treatment of the site as 'shameful.' Many made particular note of their disappointment with the increasing spread of graffiti.

Johnstone also mentioned the graffiti, and he differentiated between acts of wanton vandalism, and those other pieces of graffiti which had the effect of "adding political comment to this place, such as the 'Never forget your past' quote above the main door." This latter piece, he elaborated, "acted as a strong signifier of what the building and its decay is about," and thus "adds to the political and social view of what the place represents." On the other hand, Johnstone said that some other graffiti (such as the 'Enjoy Communism' slogan) seemed to be "more self-indulgent of the artist" and failed to "take into account the context of the place." (A similar distinction was previously made in Chapter 8, noting how authentic local expressions of graffiti had over the years given way to graffiti by foreigners, that reframed the monument more as a universal and decontextualised place of 'communist kitsch.')

Johnstone subsequently qualified his comments with a recognition of his own gaze – "Maybe this is because I'm a photographer and I think it spoils the shots of the building" – before conceding: "I guess the graffiti artists are taking ownership of it the same way us photographers and urban explorers do" (Appendix 3).

The BBC (who characterised their own interest as *architectural appreciation*) were able to gain legally approved access to Buzludzha in 2018 owing to their prestige and brand recognition (and possibly also having made a financial donation), and they subsequently in their video report framed all previous visitors as "photo hungry urban explorers who have broken in" (Corey, 2018). In light of the data however, this might perhaps be read as a somewhat naïve and/or elitist statement, as it seems that most of those who visited before would in fact have preferred to do it the BBC's way too, if only they had the means to make that happen. The BBC's statement reads even as somewhat potentially offensive, in fact, when one considers that approximately 50% of those curious visitors (according to reports from on-site security guards) were Bulgarian natives, and thus the original financers (or their descendants) and the rightful owners of this heritage.

Therefore, this study concludes that the Buzludzha Memorial House is a site of great interest and appeal, both for natives and foreigners, which will continue to attract curious visitors so long as it exists in some form. While commenters are not necessarily wrong to describe contemporary visitors as 'urban explorers' – and indeed, amongst those visitors are some who

already self-identify as such – it is largely the result of inaction on the part of the Bulgarian state that contemporary visits can only take the form of ‘ruin exploration’; and the survey results show that many of those contemporary ‘urban explorers’ would actually prefer to be engaging in – and even helping to fund – a different mode of tourism at this site, if only those other conditions were provided by site management. All of this seems to further justify the proposal of using the term ‘architecture tourism’ for these people instead – as suggested in Chapter 3 – to describe a mode of tourism which, from the traveller’s perspective, it has been shown is often neither attracted to ‘darkness,’ nor particularly drawn to the site for its ruinous qualities. The next section will now discuss the political dimensions of this tourism activity – to establish how much common ground there is between the notions of ‘architecture tourism’ and ‘communist heritage tourism.’

9.3 The Eastward Gaze, Revisited

Chapter 4 of this thesis discussed the ways in which visitors from other countries and cultures interact with sites of communist heritage in Southeast Europe. It introduced concepts such as ‘the tourist gaze’ (Urry, 1990), ‘deviant globalisation’ (Gilman, 2011), ‘Orientalism’ (Said, 1979) and ‘Balkanism’ (Todorova, 1994), and discussed these in relation to the case of war memorials in former Yugoslavia, in particular, and to the noted recent international interest in the architecture of post-communist space, in general. In the following section these ideas are now revisited, and evaluated in relation to the findings of this study.

9.3.1 *Orientalising Buzludzha*

It has been said that foreigners “find it attractive to approach communist monuments as archaeologists who discover some lost civilization” (Pisker, 2018), and that such interactions constitute a form of “neo-Orientalism,” the effect of which is that “rather than becoming identifiable in their own right, socialist buildings have only become further integrated into the economy of digital images, with the same anonymous detachment that ignores both their original meaning and their artistic merit” (Kulić, 2018). Particular consideration was given to two articles by academics from the ex-Yugoslav region – ‘The Spomenik Effect’ (Horvatinčić, 2012) and ‘Orientalising Socialism’ (Kulić, 2018) – which between them outlined a number of key issues these authors perceived in the way contemporary Western

visitors approached sites of communist heritage in post-communist space. The chapter subsequently summarised these points, as follows.

1	Monuments are decontextualised from their narratives by the (primarily) Western gaze
2	The online sharing of images has the effect of spreading historical inaccuracies.
3	Western visitors attach and spread exoticising language to describe the monuments.
4	Visitors have little sympathy for the (socialist) political messaging of such sites.
5	Tourists visit primarily for the purposes of adventure and photography.
6	These tourists visit other sites of post-communist heritage too.
7	Visitors conceptualise such monuments as being symbolic of a ‘failed’ regime.

Table 24: Principles defining Western Orientalism at sites of communist heritage in Southeast Europe (adapted from a summary of Horvatinčić, 2012, and Kulić, 2018.)

This chapter will now discuss and evaluate these points with relation to the Buzludzha Memorial House, using the data gathered in the research phase. (Kulić also proposed that *No good has come of this process*, though this evaluation is something that will be answered, more generally, later in the chapter.)

1. Monuments are decontextualised from their narratives by the (primarily) Western gaze.

Firstly, Kulić suggests that the contemporary interest in sites of communist architectural heritage in Southeast Europe is a predominantly Western phenomenon, and indeed, this East-West paradigm is fundamental to his argument that these interactions constitute an example of Orientalism or neo-colonialism. In the case of Buzludzha: while this is something that this study – and indeed, any study to date – is still unable to demonstrate conclusively, anecdotal evidence from security at the site reports that foreigners account for only approximately 50% of visitors; and given the interest from foreign visitors living in regions not considered to be part of the Western world (the survey received respondents from Romania, Lithuania, Russia, Belarus, Croatia, Czechia, Kyrgyzstan and Malaysia, for example), it might be concluded that Western foreign visitors account for likely less than 50% of the total visitor number to the abandoned monument. Certainly, in the researcher’s own experience of visiting the monument, the demographic makeup of visitors onsite has always seemed notably eclectic in terms of languages and nationalities.

The further suggestion that these visitors have less interest in learning about the history of such sites is addressed, in the case of Buzludzha, by the results from Question 7 of the survey, which asked: ‘Did you read about the monument’s history before (or after) you visited?’ A majority, 79%, said they had made efforts to learn about the site’s history before visiting. Of those that didn’t, a further 13% of the total visitors would go on to research it after getting home. Only 8% of respondents (24 visitors) said they had not researched the monument’s history at all. Therefore, the suggestion that contemporary visitors to Buzludzha show little interest in learning about the monument’s history is simply not supported by the findings of this study.

2. The online sharing of images has the effect of spreading historical inaccuracies.

Horvatinčić suggested that the widespread sharing of images of communist heritage sites online, in the form of an aesthetic commodity popularised in particular via social media, often had the effect of including and thus widely broadcasting historical inaccuracies. Noted examples included the practice of labelling monuments in Yugoslavia as ‘Soviet’ (O’Neill, 2020), or claiming that all Yugoslav monuments had been commissioned by Tito himself (Tratnjek, 2011), which Horvatinčić (2012) noted “is not only wrong, but casts a completely different shadow on the nature of commemorative cultural policy in Yugoslavia.”

This phenomenon has been well noted during the course of this study. For example, when images of the Buzludzha Memorial House first entered the global public consciousness with the viral spread of Allen’s (2012) photo-essay, his accompanying text included numerous errors (including a misspelling of the architect’s name and an incorrect phonetic guide to the pronunciation of the monument’s name), both of which were then widely copied and perpetuated online. Another example is the Italian-run photography website which describes monuments in Bulgaria as ‘spomenici,’ erroneously applying the popularised Serbo-Croat-Bosnian word for *monument* in place of the Bulgarian word, ‘pametnici,’ and could thus be said to imply a reductive, and arguably Orientalist approach towards understanding and representing the region and its variety of cultures and languages (Zanni, 2017). There is a widespread tendency also for the Buzludzha Memorial House to be conceptualised as a ‘Soviet’ place, despite the architect’s insistence that “this is *not* a Soviet monument. It is completely free from that association. [...] Buzludzha does not have anything to do with the Soviet Union” (Stoilov, Appendix 3).

However, it might also be noted that many Bulgarian people today refer to that period of their own history retrospectively as the ‘Soviet era,’ and they describe its architecture as being ‘Soviet’ – sometimes, but not always, in a dismissive and negative way. Numerous examples of this can be seen in the scoping exercise, for example, the elderly man in Plovdiv who described the city’s monument to Bulgarian antifascists as: “just stupid. It’s here, but it really doesn’t belong here... there’s nothing Bulgarian about this. It’s a Soviet thing. [...] It’s nothing of ours” (Appendix 2). Furthermore, it can be seen that not only Western or foreign publications, but domestic publications too, are responsible for the widespread sharing of inaccuracies. The Bulgarian-produced book *A Guide to Communist Bulgaria* (Trankova & Georgieff, 2020), for example, included numerous notable errors, and no references or bibliography, in its negative and subjective (not to mention American-sponsored) appraisal of the heritage of Bulgarian communism (see Chapter 5). More broadly then, this situation might be said to reflect a domestic climate of what Horvatinčić (2012) calls “invisibility and ignorance,” resulting from a “lack of political will, intellectual reluctance or deliberate political neglect when it comes to antifascist legacy and symbols of the former Communist regime.”

A final example – regrettably – comes from the author’s own experience. In 2012, the first article the author wrote about the Buzludzha Memorial House was originally titled ‘Bulgaria’s Communist Headquarters’ (Richter, 2012a). This was intended as a figure of speech; and the article that followed, over the course of 2,000 words, detailed the actual historic uses and roles of the building, not as a literal *HQ* but rather symbolically so, as a “memorial house,” and “the symbolic architectural centrepiece of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria.” However, that article was subsequently shared and referenced a great many times, and in some instances its figurative title was taken to be literal, with some subsequent commenters interpreting that Buzludzha had served as an actual administrative ‘headquarters’ building for the regime. (On noting this effect, the author revised the original article, removing any ambiguity or figurative speech, and has since continued to avoid ambiguity in other writing on the subject.) Overall, this episode demonstrates the potential for inaccuracies to spread through online discourse, and particularly under the following four conditions:

1. A lack of any official narrative provided by the state, or by site management teams.
2. A lack of consensus amongst local people as to how such sites should be perceived, named, or discussed.

3. The relative unavailability, in many cases, of information in English, thus ascribing potentially unearned authority to the first people to begin sharing such information with global audiences. (Speaking personally, having been the first writer to cover numerous such places in the English language, in some cases I felt I was being treated as an authority on places simply for having *seen* them – whereas if commenters had searched the internet in local languages, they might have found a wealth of actual expert research.)
4. Perhaps also a lack of investment on the part of those sharing or resharing work on the subject. Likely in some instances, the writers or editors of online content are simply looking for a token line of text, a title or a caption, with which to label the images they are sharing. Not everyone who shares the images will be invested in checking and comparing multiple sources, reading full articles to understand context and nuance, and so on.

Point 3 above could arguably be said to reflect a dimension of Orientalism, in the way that Western accounts seem to quickly dominate the conversation, even ahead of decades of published research in local languages. Point 4 could similarly reflect a degree of Orientalism, though it also speaks to more general issues with the question of accuracy in online information sharing (for example in parallel to issues such as ‘fake news’ and ‘clickbait’), which is an important conversation, though beyond the scope of this thesis. Points 1 and 2 above could not be said to be a product of Orientalism though, as they are problems relating to the representation and discussion of communist heritage at a domestic level – a theme that will be explored more in the following sections.

3. Western visitors attach and spread exoticising language to describe the monuments.

As the netnography in Chapter 8 showed, foreign accounts of the monument have certainly played a role in spreading exoticising language, conceptualising the Buzludzha Memorial House as a symbol of totalitarianism, or as a strange and alien object atop the mountain, that seemingly fell there as if from outer space.

In Chapter 4, a similar conversation was reviewed in the case of Yugoslav war memorials. Lawler, for example, was very aware of how war memorials in Southeast Europe had been “fetishised [...] over the past decade” (Appendix 3). On the one hand, Hatherley (2017) speaks for many who believe these monuments should be treated as history first, not

(adaptable) art, when he says: “The transformation into space-age kitsch of the antifascist memorials of the former Yugoslavia [...] seems to me utterly grotesque.” However, it has been shown that in many cases, such transformations are actually the work of local people (see for instance the post-Yugoslav art collages of Zoran Cardula; the transformation of the Odessa Lenin monument into Darth Vader, by a Ukrainian artist; or Nikola Mihov’s ‘ReForget Your Past’ project, which critiques and even ridicules communist heritage in Bulgaria; all discussed in Chapter 4). Day comments on the Yugoslav sites: “One of the wonderful things about these monuments is that they were deliberately designed to be otherworldly. They were intended at their inception to be surreal and impressive [...] complaining that these spectacular things are treated as spectacular does a disservice to the architects and designers” (from personal communication: see Chapter 4). In the case of Buzludzha, such exoticising language was in use long before foreigners were largely even aware of the monument. In Bulgarian the monument is often colloquially referred to as ‘chinyata,’ meaning *the saucer*, and speaking of his original design inspirations, Stoilov notes: “This saucer, this intergalactic saucer echoed popular themes of the era – cosmic, flying saucers” (Stoilov, Appendix 3). Therefore, any contemporary interpretations of Buzludzha as appearing like a ‘UFO,’ or some form of ‘space-age kitsch,’ are very much the intention of the monument’s designer (and though it goes beyond the precise focus of this study, the researcher further proposes that the same might be equally true for the work of Yugoslav memorial architects).



Plate 81: A Lenin statue in Odessa, Ukraine, has been converted by a local artist into a likeness of Darth Vader (source: Atlas Obscura, n.d.).

The model in Figure 30 above discussed value groups in relation to the Buzludzha Memorial House. It identified the State, the Subject, and the Creators of a monument, as being different social groups who each have a stake in the final monument. It can also be seen that the creators of communist monuments sometimes followed new artistic paths following the collapse of communism. For example, the 1999 Monument to the Victims of Communism, in Sofia, was created by the architects Atanas Todorov and Dimitur Krustev, both of whom had previously worked on ideological sites and memorials for the Bulgarian Communist Party (Pamet BG, n.d.); while the Serbian sculptor Svetomir Arsić-Basara designed partisan memorials for the nominally atheist Yugoslav state as early as the 1960s, but began creating more notably religious-themed art in the post-Yugoslav period (Niebyl, 2016h). Therefore, it could be said that the creators, and the commissioners, of historical monuments may have essentially different, though sometimes overlapping, interests: one party is aiming to memorialise history or broadcast a particular message, the other is making art and in some cases might simply be a ‘chisel for hire.’ Today, following the breakdown of the states that commissioned these monuments, and due also to the absence of any official information provided onsite (as is the case at many sites of abandoned heritage, as Buzludzha was during

the 2010s), it is inevitable that the artistic dimension of the work becomes more prominent than its former official purpose. It might further be asked, whether the extravagant design choices in some of these memorial sites might have therefore ultimately failed them: as Garcevic (2021) commented, on the use of the Monument to the Founders of the Bulgarian State in an advert for BMW cars: “As sad, infuriating and tacky as this is, it goes to show that the fatal flaw of those making these monuments is that they failed [to] produce believers.” Ergo, such monuments were no longer able to fulfil their purposes, once separated from the state that had previously promoted and enforced ‘correct’ readings and interpretations; instead, all that remains now is art.

This thesis concludes then that foreign visitors, or processes of Orientalism in general, are not the primary agents responsible for ‘exoticising’ communist monuments such as the Buzludzha Memorial House. Many such objects were always intended to appear exotic by design, but this was originally scaffolded within a political and social structure that provided context, information, and managed visitor experiences. The design raised questions; the visitor experience then answered them. It is the breakdown of that local structure which allows the exotic images to then depart from their context, and this division is difficult to heal until the communities who own the heritage are able to present a consensus and structured answers again, in the form of official narratives, websites, or onsite information panels. But ultimately, that perceived exoticism might nevertheless be celebrated as an artistic triumph, even while working to recontextualise it within historical narratives: as Prica says, “We should try to make [locals] 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).

4. Visitors have little sympathy for the (socialist) political messaging of such sites.

Question 4 of the survey asked visitors about their motivations for travelling to Buzludzha, and one of the options given to be ranked was *Sympathy for the socialist movement*. This scored lowest out of the seven options (with a mean score of 2.94 out of 8), and so while not conclusive, this does tend to support the suggestion that those visiting Buzludzha today are generally not inclined towards socialist perspectives.

5. Tourists visit primarily for the purposes of adventure and photography.

As discussed above, in section 9.1.3, the factors of *Adventure* and *Photography* were both attractive values of the site according to those visiting today – however, they were not the primary draws, having been rated on average as being less appealing than that site’s *Architectural value* and *Historical significance*.

Les Johnstone, a self-identified ‘urban explorer,’ did confirm the significance of such factors though: “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” (emphasis added). He noted also, how those visual representations serve to draw in others: “I enjoy taking people with me for their first visit who I might have inspired with my own photographs and tales of the adventure.”

Minard suggested three factors motivating visits to Buzludzha. First, he ranks social media as a significant motivator – noting that online, “pictures of spectacular sites are perfectly fit to raise immediate interest and can be easily shared.” Additionally, though, he notes a global shift in interest towards the region: “growing public curiosity about the eastern margins of Europe in a context characterised by new tensions between Russia and the Occident.” Finally, Minard describes how contemporary tastes are naturally moving towards “a certain postmodern mood,” having himself noticed: “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.” He concludes that: “Buzludzha, with its ruined sci-fi shape, embodies the failure of such hopes and thus perfectly matches with our present dead-end situation.” Moreover, Minard notes that the increased interest in Buzludzha cannot be separated from “the brutalist fashion and the current taste for concrete” as a global trend (see also Chapter 4, and Kulić, 2018). Minard suspects that this may even relate to a large generational trend in changing tourism tastes: “a new way of travelling 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 they travel abroad.” Minard describes the result as a blossoming market in “alternative heritage.”

Regarding the growing interest in the monument, Czarnowski believes it’s possible that projects like *Buzludzha VR* have helped to drive interest in the site, though ultimately, he believes that many factors are likely involved. Rusanov adds: “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.” Whereas now, “it’s much more accessible than it used to be.”

Lawler agrees that social media has played a significant role in causing an “explosion” of interest, though he credits other factors too. Firstly, he notes that global tourism patterns are changing, and in particular suggests an effect of “Middle East and many African countries that have been relatively accessible [...] becoming less attractive to younger adventurous tourists – largely for safety and economic reasons,” and thus causing a shift towards tourism in Southeast Europe instead. Additionally, however, he notes that many “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.” Moreover, Lawler doesn’t believe that targeted communist heritage tourism in particular is on the rise, but rather, any increased number of visitors is a natural result of how “the number of tourists in and of itself is increasing.” Based on his own observations, and reports he has received from colleagues in the region, Lawler suggest that recent years have seen no significant increase in ‘monument tourism,’ at least in Bosnia & Herzegovina, where his work is based. “I don’t have any stats that could support or refute either view,” he concludes (Appendix 3).

6. These tourists visit other sites of post-communist heritage too.

According to the findings of the visitor survey, those travelling to Buzludzha from other countries were very often entering Bulgaria for this purpose alone – 41% said that visiting Buzludzha was their primary reason for travelling to Bulgaria, and 18% said it was their only reason. This suggests that for many visitors, Buzludzha is not conceptualised as a communist heritage attraction so much as perhaps posing a unique and worthwhile tourism experience in itself. Only 18% of respondents said that they were visiting Buzludzha as part of a larger tour of communist heritage sites in Bulgaria (compared to 5%, who were visiting alongside more conventional tourism destinations). And while a majority of visitors said they had nevertheless seen other sites of communist heritage during their trip, this perhaps doesn’t say much in itself, as numerous such sites are passed along the road to Buzludzha anyway.

Question 11 of the survey also presented some interesting findings, in relation to this question. It asked: ‘Of all the places you have ever been, which was the most like Buzludzha?’ The purpose of this question was to find out how visitors conceptualise the site,

and 58% of them said that Buzludzha was like nowhere else they had been – further supporting the ‘uniqueness’ proposal above. Of the remainder, 23% compared the monument to other sites of communist heritage (interestingly, Chernobyl, and various Yugoslav memorials, were the most frequently named amongst these). A further 5% compared the Buzludzha Memorial House to sites of ancient heritage, 4% to famous modern ruins, and 3% to celebrated sites of Modernist architecture. Therefore, if only 23% are conceptualising the monument according to its political dimensions, it might be reasoned that the other 77% are not conceptualising Buzludzha as a political site at all, but rather, on more phenomenological terms.

7. Visitors conceptualise such monuments as being symbolic of a ‘failed’ regime.

Kulić (2018) suggested that one symptom of the Orientalist approach to communist heritage involved these sites being conceptualised as symbols of a failed regime, and as a general negative reflection on the socialist movement. However, Rann (2014) offers the counterpoint:

“[The] rise of western photographs of eastern ruins cannot be ascribed – at least not exclusively – to a desire to gloat over the decomposing corpse of its former Communist enemy. In the first place, it’s about supply and demand: the decay of the prodigious building projects of the Soviet Union has left a lot of impressive ruins lying around – magnificent mega-structures that now seem almost impossible.”

Based on the findings above, which suggest that contemporary visitors to Buzludzha are *mostly* not (intentionally) doing communist heritage tourism, and *mostly* don’t conceptualise the site as symbolic of its politics, this thesis therefore tends to agree with Rann. The building is extraordinary – and it seems, that alone is enough to drive tourists here.

Trotman also disagrees with the suggestion that Western visitors to Buzludzha are reinforcing Cold War narratives (*We won; Communism is dead*), arguing instead how the experience of visiting was able to close, rather than widen, perceived ideological and social gaps:

“[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. [...] 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” (Appendix 3).

In this way Trotman suggests that the explorations ultimately have a humanising, and revealing, rather than an *othering* effect.

This might also explain onsite observations – the fact that Buzludzha as a ruin retains so much appeal and curiosity for Bulgarian visitors too – and particularly younger Bulgarians. Besides which, it might be noted that even while a visitor might conceptualise a monument as being symbolic of ‘a failed regime,’ that doesn’t mean that they also connect this with the failure of any *specific* regime or ideology – indeed, if Kulić is correct that contemporary representations of these monuments remove them from their socialist context, then perhaps these interactions cannot also constitute a targeted critique of socialism. That is to suggest, such places are not being perceived accurately according to the politics that created them, but instead as if belonging to some abstract, and vaguely defined ‘lost civilisation’ (Pisker, 2018). The survey results support this – less than a quarter of respondents conceptualised Buzludzha as being similar to other sites of communist heritage. Therefore, this thesis must ultimately lean more towards Kulić’s suggestion of *complete* decontextualization, and as a result, away from his notion that ruined monuments are conceptualised as being symbolic of the failure of specific regimes, or more broadly, the ‘failure of socialism.’

9.3.2 How to Visit Buzludzha

Concluding on the above, this thesis has found that the ‘Western gaze’ is not the primary force responsible for decontextualising monuments such as Buzludzha, and nor is it the primary force in the exoticisation of such places today. Rather, domestic political changes have already served to rob such places of their original context, and monuments that were always designed to be in some way sensational, then increasingly become reduced to these sensational visuals alone when they are no longer managed or contextualised by the communities that own them. Western visitors travel to such places for more than just adventure and photography, and while they are not typically visiting for reasons of political sympathy with the movements that created such monuments, they do more often than not have an interest in learning about the history. It was said that foreigners “find it attractive to approach communist monuments as archaeologists who discover some lost civilization” (Pisker, 2018); however, after surveying more than 300 such foreigners, what this study has found is that they generally find this dynamic to be ‘sad,’ not ‘attractive,’ and they would prefer *not* to be visiting communist monuments in this way. Asked about the Buzludzha

Memorial House, most foreign visitors want to see Bulgaria restore it, and furthermore, say they would be glad to financially support such action in the form of entry fees or donation boxes. It is only due to local state inaction that these foreigners are left no option but to approach Buzludzha ‘as archaeologists who discover some lost civilization.’

Moreover, this thesis has noted a certain tendency amongst commenters in Southeast Europe to be more likely to blame this phenomenon on Western visitors. The netnography in Chapter 8 presented various academic and journalistic conceptualisations of the tourists who visit the Buzludzha Memorial House, and a trend can be seen whereby local commenters tend to make the most negative assessments of these tourists. Whereas Western commenters call these visitors “fans of atypical tourism” (Minard, 2018), “intrepid travellers” (Salem, 2019), “curious travellers” (Happer, 2015), or “fans of abandoned buildings in general” (Hohenhaus, 2021), in work by Bulgarian authors they are rather seen as “thrill seekers and vandals” (Tsenkova, 2017), “foreign explorers [...] armed with cameras, and neo-colonial adventurism” (Vasileva, 2019), and “selfie-hungry hikers” (Nikolova, 2020), who are “attracted by death, sinister places and ruins” (Stoyanova, 2017). Perhaps this tendency might be explained as a manifestation of the ‘local gaze’ (Urry & Larsen, 2011), which “strikes back” at the tourist gaze “and positions the self-proclaimed traveller as voyeuristic gazer” (Larsen, 2014: 5).

Charges of ‘neo-colonialism’ and ‘Orientalism’ have become a popular response to evaluating the interest that Western visitors show in sites of former communist heritage in the region. However, this study must conclude that monuments very often are, by their nature, designed to draw attention, or evoke curiosity. Many, during the communist period, were built to be sensational. If visitors today find themselves drawn to these sites, moved by them, and talk about them in sensational language, all this might be read simply as an indication that the original designs had succeeded. If visitors today experience these sites out of context, or fail to comprehend the true meaning and significance of the history being memorialised, it might be reasoned that the complete lack of any tourism infrastructure or contextual information provided onsite (as is the case at Buzludzha, and at many other communist-era monuments in the region), plays a fairly major role in this. But the conservation and management of such sites first requires local consensus – an agreement on how such sites should be treated and discussed – which in many post-communist countries is still a long way from happening. In the meantime, it is easier to criticise foreign tourists for being curious at sites designed to evoke curiosity; and for remaining uninformed at places that provide no information.

Of course, that is not to say that Orientalism doesn't play a significant role in many cases. With no official narrative or context provided to tourists, many fall back on modes of representation that certainly adhere to what might be described as an Orientalist or neo-colonialist approach. This is frequently reflected in 'conqueror' or 'explorer' narratives, in the simplification or homogenisation of local cultures, and in some cases, generally insensitive or disrespectful treatments of the subject matter; such as when Valley Eyewear in 2018 shot an advert for their sunglasses in front of the monument to the victims of the Jasenovac Concentration Camp, and later claimed "[we] didn't know it was a death camp at the time," despite the existence of a fully operational onsite museum dedicated to educating visitors about the fate of the camp's tens of thousands of victims (Herrero, 2018; BBC, 2018). However, many such sites – the majority in fact – do not have onsite museums, or provide such context to visitors, and so while Orientalism might be noted as a factor in these exchanges, this thesis cannot find support for it being the *cause* of such problematic interactions in the case of Buzludzha.

Works such as 'Orientalising Socialism' (Kulić, 2018) focus largely on the East-West dynamic of foreign interpretations of communist heritage sites in post-communist space. But what this work fails to address, is that anti-communist sentiment is far from a Western invention. Rather, some of the staunchest critics of Southeast Europe's former communist governments can be found today in the regions of Southeast Europe. While there are valid cases to be made for how a Western tourism climate encourages local people to repackage their own history and cultures for touristic Western consumption, to suggest that this is *all* that is happening – i.e., to pursue an argument of 'internationalised Orientalism' on the part of local people – would be to deny the very clear existence and validity of strongly divided local opinion and debate on the subject. And indeed, in many cases the decontextualisation of domestic monuments can be seen to be *led* by domestic citizens and domestic media. At Buzludzha, the first damage done to the monument in the 1990s was done by Bulgarian anti-communists, and the first graffiti was written in Bulgarian (see Chapter 6). In Plovdiv, it was Bulgarian location teams who proposed dressing an antifascist memorial tomb in swastika flags, to appear in a film as a stand-in for Nazi architecture (see Chapter 5); and it was Bulgarian politicians who approved and likely profited from that idea. Bulgaria's communist heritage sites could be said to have reached a point (like the Mostar Partisan Cemetery in Bosnia & Herzegovina) where they are "too loaded with meaning to be left alone and too charged with emotion to be protected" (Mackic & Bogdanović, 2015).

Additionally, there are also more proactive domestic threats to sites of communist heritage, politically motivated and manifesting in what Djureinović calls “anti-communist memory politics and historical revisionism” (cited in Korchňak, 2021).

Furthermore, not only does this argument seem to presuppose a homogeneity of thought on the part of local communities – which simply is not there – but it appears to be built on the presupposition that all of these monuments *deserve* to be kept according to their original context and message. However, as Waters and Russell (2012) caution: “monuments need to be viewed critically both domestically and abroad in order to gain a better understanding of the cultural implications historic structures have on the collective memory of a nation”; because “there is always agenda in design” (Vukičević, 2020). In some ways it is difficult to generalise between Yugoslav war memorials and the Buzludzha Memorial House; the former having been designed to remember the dead, in a country that practised a more moderate, progressive form of socialism; while on the other hand, Buzludzha was a monument built to celebrate communism, under what is widely considered to have been a comparatively more repressive and totalitarian regime. However, in both cases these monuments were constructed as statements of nationhood by single-party governments in nations where perceived enemies of the state were imprisoned in political labour camps, such as Goli Otok in Yugoslavia, or at Belene in Bulgaria. Today, to present such sites uncritically, or without the addition of pluralist counterpoints, would be to deny the perspectives of those natives whose families had less favourable experiences of the history in question (numerous examples can be seen in Appendix 2). Therefore, if contemporary conservation campaigns are to be successful, they ought to consider more pluralist approaches to the heritage, so that the entire breadth of cultural experience and memory might be better represented. To continue to treat these monuments the same, without allowing criticism or re-evaluation according to the shared values of the modern era, would reflect a position locally perceived as aligning with that of the former regime(s).

In Appendix 3, Niebyl notes the ideological qualities that still often underpin scholarship on the subject of communist heritage in Southeast Europe, commenting:

“A lot of people like Lawler [also interviewed in Appendix 3] 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.”

On the other hand, he notes how sites that were “problematic to the narrative of the party” were often “marginalised.” Thus, Niebyl’s position is that:

“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 [memorials] 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.”

In this way, while it might be observed that Hatherley (2016; 2017) stresses the importance of preserving the original, unchanged message of communist monuments in post-communist countries, it is perhaps not insignificant that elsewhere, he also self-identifies as a “Communist with a small ‘c’” (Mawhood, 2015).

Even from an apolitical perspective however, it may be noted that such non-pluralist approaches to contested heritage would likely also prove to be self-defeating in the end, as this will inevitably meet resistance locally, whether that be from passive observers and commenters, or those taking more agency to intervene (from vandals and graffiti artists, through to politicians and other decision-makers).

In Chapter 4, this thesis asked: ‘in light of the larger picture, does this then suggest that a more universal model is required that goes beyond the traditional narrative of West-East Orientalist and Balkanist narratives?’ This thesis now answers that a new model is indeed required. The issue of decontextualised (mis)appropriation of communist architecture in contemporary discourse – what Kulić called ‘Orientalising Socialism’ – is not exactly an East-West problem akin to ‘Orientalism’ or ‘Balkanism,’ but rather, in many cases can be seen to be at root a domestic phenomenon in which a plurality of local voices de- and re-contextualise the symbols of the past according to the plurality of their own perspectives and experiences of that past. The landscape that Western tourists approach, and gaze on, therefore, was already incredibly complicated, and fraught with conflicting and contradictory interpretations, before they arrived (and indeed, in some cases, then further complicated matters...).

Kulić (2018) suggested that Westerners, not locals, were responsible for the decontextualization of communist architecture in Southeast Europe, and that those Westerners primarily visit such places to enjoy an experience of perceived adventure while being less interested in learning about their history or artistic significance. What this study has seemed to find, conversely, is that in many cases it was local people who began the process of decontextualization, while the Westerners who visit claim to do so primarily for the values of history and art. However, it is yet possible that this data is misleading. Todorova (1994) talked about ‘internalised Balkanism,’ and in this way it might be said that local people who decontextualise their own communist heritage do so in accordance with pre-internalised ‘Western values.’ Meanwhile, this study’s survey respondents might not be entirely accurate in their self-reporting, as there could be an effect of wanting to appear more wholesome or noble in their interests – and thus deliberately ranking *art* and *history* as being more interesting to them than simply *having an adventure*. As Hymes (1981) wryly noted of ethnographic methods, “[some] social research seems incredibly to assume that what there is to find out can be found out by asking.” However, it is beyond the research tools of this study to establish such (perhaps even subconscious) processes on the part of visitors, and so the researcher therefore chooses not to second-guess the available findings, but rather to adopt the simplest conclusion:

While Orientalism theory provides a valuable tool with which to assess the contemporary Western treatment of sites of communist heritage in post-communist space, due to the frequency with which local people can be seen to be misnaming, mistreating and mismanaging sites of communist heritage in their own countries, Orientalism alone, as a principle of East-West interaction, is not sufficient to explain the situation. It may account, only, for how foreigners then approach (and sometimes, further complicate) situations which had already become problematic or contested within purely domestic circles.

9.3.3 The Virtual Consumption of Buzludzha

Previously, Section 4.9 of this thesis discussed the ‘virtual consumption of communist heritage,’ and asked whether new technologies such as AR or VR might present new solutions to the problems associated with the preservation and presentation of communist heritage in post-communist space; even whether such virtual conceptualisations might work in the same sense as a ‘counter-monument,’ updating the message of contested sites through

contemporary pluralism, without necessitating physical changes or modifications to the material heritage in question. Examples were considered which had involved the creation of educational experiences in virtual reality spaces modelled on both the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (*Chernobyl VR Project* by The Farm 51, 2016), and the Berlin Wall (*Berlin Wall VR* by Newseum, 2017). The results in the case of Chernobyl were said to present an “interesting blend of gaming, educational software, and documentary filmmaking,” which showed promise as “the history book of the future” (Evangelho, 2016). *Berlin Wall VR* demonstrated pluralist approaches by allowing users to “experience the divided city from the perspectives of suppressed Germans and the East German and Soviet guards” (Museum Revolution, n.d.), in a way that “helps people really experience important points in history” (Feingold, 2017), and therefore suggested that such virtual experiences dealing with sites of difficult heritage “can become the beginning of conversations that can trigger transformation over time” and “allow a space for different personal narratives to emerge” (Georgieva, 2017). The section then summarised the potential benefits of a virtual approach to difficult heritage conservation, noting that such formats had the ability:

1. To show a place or an artefact as it appeared in a previous condition.
2. To recreate a specific time and context in history.
3. To be presented in a way that educates sensitively and showcases pluralist perspectives.
4. To be offered remotely, thereby increasing reach and minimising traffic onsite.
5. To achieve all the above without physically changing the site itself.

Finally, it was noted that the last point above was particularly relevant in sites of communist heritage located in countries where social and political values had significantly changed, or where decommunisation laws had been passed, and thus, the real-life reconstruction of said sites (for example, rebuilding the Berlin Wall or re-erecting monuments to Lenin) might otherwise prove problematic.

In Chapter 8 of this thesis, the netnography looked at various virtual reconstructions of the Buzludzha Memorial House. While the monument today has been described as “a real-life apocalyptic wasteland that would not be out of place in a video game” (Schmiedchen, 2018), it was seen that a wide range of alternate interpretations of the monument also become possible within virtual worlds. Examples were considered in which the Buzludzha Memorial House was conceptualised as a place of horror (*The Trap* by Bul Games, 2020), of socialist

nostalgia (*Jalopy* by MinskWorks, 2018), and as a global landmark (in user content created for *Microsoft Flight Simulator 2020*). Of particularly note was *Buzludzha VR*, a 2019 release that not only recreates an architecturally accurate model of the Buzludzha Memorial House which visitors may then explore and interact with through the medium of virtual reality, but it also imbues the virtual monument with the layers of history, so that multiple versions and multiple eras of the building might be discovered. During the research phase of this study, an interview was conducted with Todor Rusanov and Rafał Czarnowski, the creators of the virtual reality game/explorable environment *Buzludzha VR* (full transcript in Appendix 3).

Rusanov and Czarnowski began working on their virtual recreation of Buzludzha in 2015, visiting the monument in June that year to collect thorough and detailed measurements. Initially this project was conducted for their university dissertations, though it would become an ongoing personal project that was eventually released for public retail in 2019. They developed a prototype model between January and April 2016 and then in the space of two years they presented their virtual experience to more than 600 people, as they gathered feedback, including meeting with various architects both in Bulgaria and the UK. One of these architects was Georgi Stoilov, the creator of the Buzludzha Memorial House, who initially found the virtual experience confusing. Rusanov says: “He was sure that we were showing him footage of the monument when we were outside. And then when we got inside, he was like: *Okay, it’s not really like this. How is it done? What happened here?*” Czarnowski explains: “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.” Stoilov was ultimately very impressed with the project though: “He loved it, and he got really emotional as well.”

The *Buzludzha VR* environment recreates the memorial house on a 1-to-1 scale, beginning the experience from the bottom of the path leading up to the monument, so that users could not only experience the monument up close, but also experience the dramatic approach to it, as real-life visitors do. Inside the monument’s Ritual Hall, in place of the socialist mosaics, appear images of Bulgarian national landmarks, each of which is accompanied by an ‘info point,’ which users can touch to hear more information about that location. The virtual environment also incorporates a museum section, where users can view archive and contemporary photographs of the building, as well as listening to historical audio files. Significantly, the monument is reimagined in a contemporary style and decor, with all its

political elements removed. Czarnowski conceptualises this as “a potential future” for the monument, demonstrating how “it could be restored and brought back to life for a different kind of purpose,” suggesting potential “as a space for events, for a concert hall for example, for an exhibition space, a gallery and panoramic corridor.” He doesn’t believe it is realistic that a conserved Buzludzha Memorial House “would be restored to its previous glory,” but instead, the version of the monument presented in *Buzludzha VR* is something that these developers “honestly believe could be achieved in real life.” The result is what Rusanov calls: “a venue that drives conversation,” and Czarnowski conceptualises as an approach of “building on top of the history... instead of forgetting about it.”

For Rusanov, the value of Buzludzha lies not in its political dimension, but rather the artistic and architectural achievement of its construction, irrespective of the politics that inspired it: “Once you get on top of the hill, you don’t really think about the communist party or the history of the monument [...] To build such a huge structure on top of a mountain that’s like 1,400 metres high... The effort that went into building this structure, that’s the fascinating part about it.” He notes how: “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.”

Czarnowski doesn’t believe it’s possible to ever depoliticise the monument entirely – “the history is always going to be there” – but this political dimension can perhaps be domesticated and contained: “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.” Rusanov adds how this historical aspect will always be part of the monument’s appeal: “You can really feel the ghosts of the past, but that’s another reason why people will go and visit.” The *Buzludzha VR* proposal therefore incorporates elements of a pluralist approach, in that it not only presents a new vision for the monument, but it also allows users to revisit the monument’s past.

Czarnowski explains how the VR experience was designed to incorporate the original socialist mosaics as “a secondary layer” hidden beneath the new murals in the Ritual Hall, which users can discover through interaction, as Rusanov notes: “grab a flashlight in virtual reality and shine it onto the wall, and you will reveal the layer underneath the panoramas [...] you will be able to see parts of the [original] mosaics.”

Virtual reality also has great potential for helping people to visualise concepts and designs that might be otherwise difficult to imagine; a quality which is highly relevant in the case of proposing a new purpose or use for a monument that has historically been associated with one particular ideology and visual style. Rusanov notes how some people believe a communist monument simply cannot be rehabilitated, or conserved in a way that is both acceptable and useful for a post-communist society; such people have told him “it’s a nice idea but [...] it used to be a communist monument, so there is no way it can exist in the 21st century.” However, he explains how quickly these people change their minds after experiencing the reconceptualised monument in *Buzludzha VR*: “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.” In this way he notes the power of immersive VR for allowing people to experience and understand new possibilities Appendix 3).

The case of *Buzludzha VR* presents one intriguing future possibility for the real Buzludzha Memorial House, as a virtual experience like this might also be provided in an augmented reality format; that is to say, with historical layers superimposed over the real monument, so that visitors to the site might be able to travel between these various versions of the monument. Such a solution would mean that instead of restoring controversial political art in a country where decommunisation laws and other cultural factors make such work highly controversial:

“...the building could instead be frozen in its current, semi-ruined state – but provide visitors with augmented reality headsets that allow them to inhabit a virtual reconstruction of the memorial house in its heyday. Tourists would hop from 2020 to 1981 at the flick of a switch. Such a solution would offer a rare glimpse into history, recreating the monument’s original design at a fraction of the cost of a full restoration. But it would also make a feature of the building’s subsequent ruin, now a matter of historical fact” (Richter, 2020d).

Alternatively, rather than loaning out AR headsets, another option could be to provide the augmented reality experience in the form of a downloadable app, which users could then view through the screen of a smart phone (thus working in much the same way as the game *Pokémon Go* – discussed in Chapter 8). These tourists would then simply need to point their phones towards a wall, to see time rolled back to 1981 on their screens. In these ways, technology may yet provide innovative solutions to the problem of communist heritage in

post-communist space. Like the fascist relief in Bolzano, Italy, now augmented with the LED projection of a quote by Hannah Arendt to create a kind of technological counter-monument (discussed in Chapter 2), inside the Ritual Hall of Buzludzha:

“Digital models and light projections could present counter messages and alternative perspectives over the rhetoric of the former regime. The Buzludzha experience could educate visitors, showing not just the dream that communism advertised, but also exploring the lived experience of communism as Bulgarian people remember it.”

Furthermore, due to its physically non-intrusive nature, such a solution would be non-permanent, which means that:

“[Some] future day, if and when Bulgaria reaches the point that the subject of communism is no longer taboo (and should the nation so desire it), a detailed digital model might also form the basis of a blueprint for a faithful reconstruction of Stoilov’s 1981 memorial design” (Richter, 2020d).

The original design for the Buzludzha Memorial House was chosen as the result of an open design competition. A similarly democratic approach might be appropriate now, in deciding the future of the ‘people’s monument.’ Asked if they would consider submitting their ideas for use in a real-world conservation project, Czarnowski confirmed their interest, noting: “our idea, our concept is already out in the open. Anyone can see it online. We’ve already received emails and messages from people [...] saying this should be done, we should go with this idea to turn the monument into something like this.”

9.4 Monumentalism, Revisited

Chapter 2 of this thesis dealt with the role of communist monuments, and their legacy in the post-communist world. It introduced some of the problems connected with mediating contradictory memorial messages, and the use of techniques such as counter-monuments to provide pluralistic interpretations of historical sites. The literature discussed in this chapter suggested that monuments “serve as tangible reminders of the past, but also in the case of those monuments and memorials erected today, tell us something about our particular time and place in history” (Percoco, 1998: 48). Furthermore, “studying the reception of monuments over time can reveal a great deal about the shifts in cultural values during periods of history,” though it should also be noted that “monuments need to be viewed critically” (Waters & Russell, 2012). Further, the chapter discussed the architectural styles of Modernism, and

Brutalism (for example: Banham, 2011 [1955]) – of which the Buzludzha Memorial House is a globally noted example – and it introduced conversations around notions of ‘building utopia,’ and ‘ideological architecture,’ to which the following section now turns.

9.4.1 *Buzludzha as Ideological Architecture*

One of the key questions in the study of ideological architecture is whether such sites, in a modern context, should be viewed first as ideology or as art. This question was put to interviewees during the research phase of this study.

There was agreement here between Minard and Lawler, both of whom said that both interpretations were equally relevant. According to Minard, “its ideological scope is too often ignored by people who just appreciate its ‘aesthetic’ brutalist value.” He believed that this imbalance in favour of architectural representations was at least 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.” He concluded, “the power of images entails an oblivion of history.”

Lawler also agreed with both interpretations, though he stressed that Buzludzha was encoded more richly with ideology than are some of the region’s other monuments: “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.” In its subject matter, he suggested that it also differed from more typical memorials that commemorated specific historical events or conflicts – many of which he noted had been ‘fetishised’ in the media, though due to their clearly stated memorial functions, “should be seen (and respected) as such first and foremost, rather than as either works of art or ideological agents.”

Additionally, interviewees were asked whether ideological sites were able to be adapted, in order to serve new purposes. When asked if such a site could be repurposed to serve a new role, Minard noted that it could, “sadly” – as this was not necessarily desirable. His logic is perhaps revealed by his comment that this can happen once such sites are “considered valuable for the market of tourism industry,” which would imply the new purpose he was

picturing was as a commoditised tourism site. Lawler was more optimistic here, suggesting that it was possible to do such things respectfully. He explains: “This is primarily the case with museums, which need to be flexible (to a certain degree) in what they exhibit.” This, he explains, is due to the condition that they are “established or re-purposed with the primary intent of establishing a narrative of a given historical event.” That is to say, presumably, that their new purpose remains true to the original message of the site. The greatest problem facing this particular monument, Minard believes, will be finding “a consensus between Bulgarian political parties concerning the future of Buzludzha.”

Lawler does note however that Buzludzha poses a “unique example,” primarily owing to two characteristics which are atypical for a memorial heritage site: first that it was “built in an isolated location,” and secondly that it “is primarily a usable space” (that is to say a venue, as opposed to a simpler structure serving a purely memorial purpose). For Lawler, these points raise the question of how Buzludzha could become a “sustainable space” without resorting to the need for either “shipping people on organised visits from other tourism centres in Bulgaria for day trips,” or “implementing visitor fees that price out the local population” (Appendix 3).

9.4.2 *Bulgaria’s Other Monuments*

Regardless of the future of the Buzludzha Memorial House, it should be noted that this single building remains just one example of the thousands of communist memorial sites dotted across Bulgaria today. Even during the course of this study, focussed on Buzludzha, another significant communist-era monument was destroyed in 2017 – the Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria in Sofia, a monument built in the same year, a similar architectural style, and celebrating the same general themes that Buzludzha enshrines (see Chapter 5). The cost of conserving and maintaining (and indeed, the original cost to construct) this many ideological monuments is simply impossible without a concerted political will to do so combined with the coordinated resources made available by, for example, political systems that feature a single ruling party with command over a controlled and centralised economy. Therefore, many or even most of Bulgaria’s communist memorial sites will inevitably face continued decline (and as that reaches terminal states, in some cases, state-sanctioned removal) in the future, and while a successful conservation of the Buzludzha Memorial House would certainly provide a model for how the conservation of such now-controversial heritage might be done, the

chances of a democratic, capitalist government in an unaffluent post-communist country being able to marshal the will and funds to restore and maintain hundreds, even thousands of pro-communist monuments, and particularly when roughly half the voting populace don't want them to, is effectively zero. If Buzludzha survives, it will survive as an orphan: the most iconic preserved example of a larger movement in Bulgarian ideological art and architecture that once existed but has mostly now been lost. Like the lone Thracian tomb at nearby Kazanluk, it will be a single material trace of a historic empire that once covered all these lands with its monuments.

That's not to say that none of Bulgaria's other surviving communist memorial sites could, or ought to be preserved for their heritage value. However, as documented by the scoping exercise (see Appendix 2), amongst Buzludzha's contemporaries and cousins are monuments presenting a diverse range of styles, themes and ideas, which result in a spectrum of monuments that are in greater or lesser demand now, and present greater or lesser degrees of ideological conflict in relation to their contemporary post-communist social context.

In the interest of structuring a conversation about the factors that might affect the conservation or rehabilitation of this broad and diverse body of political and national monumental art, this thesis now proposes a model against which such controversial heritage sites might be evaluated.

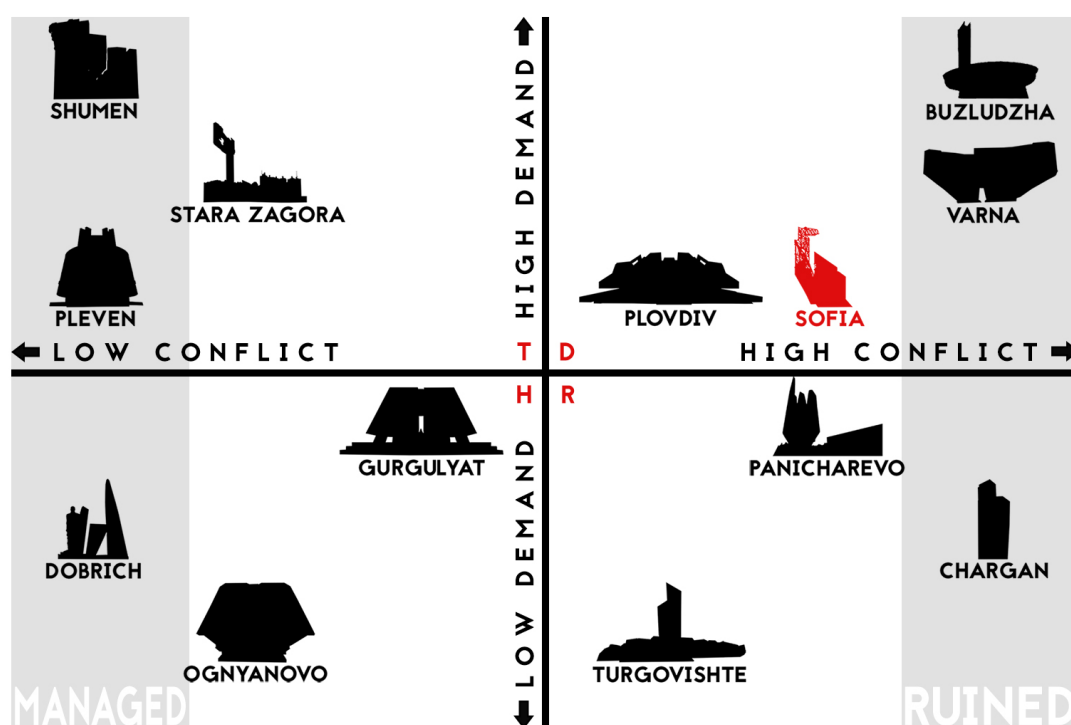


Figure 31: Demand-Conflict model for assessing the relative risks faced by sites of difficult communist heritage.

The model above plots various communist-era monuments in Bulgaria (numerous of them featured also in the scoping exercise) on axes labelled according to *Demand* and *Conflict*. Here, *Demand* – along the y-axis – is defined according to the apparent appeal each site has for visitors. A site with high *Demand* is one which visitors (either domestic or foreign) will go out of their way to see. The sites with the very highest *Demand* might even motivate foreigners to visit the country for this place alone. The sites with lower values for *Demand* are less frequently visited, and the very lowest may not even be noticed by those local people who pass them every day (a phenomenon observed repeatedly over the course of the scoping exercise). Along the x-axis, *Conflict* is a reflection of how problematic each site is perceived as being in its contemporary post-communist context. The presence of overt communist symbols on a monument will typically place it across the line to the right; whereas monuments of the communist period that commemorated pre-communist events (such as the ancient khans or the 19th century liberation from Ottoman rule) will in many cases find themselves on the left. The sites that today experience the lowest degree of *Conflict* (at the far left) are in some cases managed either as local heritage sites or, if the *Demand* is sufficient,

even promoted as tourist attractions. The places with the highest *Conflict* (at the far right) have in numerous cases been allowed to fall into ruin. Many of the country's high-conflict sites have already been destroyed or otherwise removed, such as the Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria, in Sofia, which was demolished in 2017 and appears here marked in red.

Arranging the sites in this way allows for them to be grouped according to four clearly defined quadrants. These are labelled and defined as follows:

Tourism (T): sites that are high *Demand* and low *Conflict*. These are places which confirm contemporary notions of Bulgarian national identity, and which additionally are shown to offer value and interest to visitors. All three of the examples plotted in this quadrant on the model above also appear on the modern '100 Tourist Sites of Bulgaria' list (see Chapter 5), despite ostensibly being 'communist monuments.'

Heritage (H): sites that are low *Demand* and low *Conflict*. These are places such as war memorials which present no symbolic contradiction in their modern context, though are not sufficiently grand, unique or striking to become significant tourism attractions. They nevertheless survive, in some cases are managed or maintained, and exist as sites of local heritage value.

Debate (D): sites that are high *Demand* and high *Conflict*. Places that are both politically controversial (often with overtly communist titles, symbolism or dedications), as well as sparking tourism demand (a result of their size, unique design, and sometimes also combined with highly visible locations), nowadays become the subject of heated national debate. They demonstrate potential for touristification, but while advertising messages that contradict the prevailing national sentiment. Actions taken to demolish or remove sites in this quadrant are often met with protest and media coverage.

Risk (R): sites that are low *Demand* and high *Conflict*. These places are often just as controversial as those in the quadrant above, though they are perceived as having less value for visitors, reduced visual appeal, or else are simply less visible, less documented, or harder to reach. This category is here considered to be at the highest risk, because when they are removed it usually occurs quietly, as the result of local action (either public, for example by vandalism, or else at the level of regional government), and without either national coverage

or any notable protest. Countless such sites have already disappeared since ‘the Changes.’

The model above is not perfect, but is proposed rather as a framework for future investigation. For example, one current shortcoming of the model is that the example points have been plotted here according to subjective evaluations by the author. A more robust version of the model might introduce a standardised scale, with sites plotted according to a numerical value. For example, a system such as the following might be applied:

Score	Demand (y-axis)	Conflict (x-axis)
3	Tourists visit the country just to see this place.	A volatile place, the subject of politicised vandalism and calls for demolition.
2	Tourists will travel to a specific city or region just to see this.	Sparks frustration and negative feelings, attracts political graffiti.
1	Tourists will go out of their way to see this.	Features symbols or dedications that contradict modern state values.
-1	Primarily only locals visit this place on purpose.	A well-liked place, kept clean and cared for by locals.
-2	Evidence of only occasional visitors to the site.	A recognised site of local or national heritage significance.
-3	Seldom visited, overgrown, or otherwise inaccessible.	A cherished heritage site, promoted by the state as a tourism destination.

Table 25: A potential key for the scaling of scores on a Demand-Conflict model.

Additionally, a more developed model might also take other factors into consideration – such as: architectural style and construction materials (e.g., is a marble monument more likely to be appreciated now than a concrete one?); visibility of site (e.g., are the effects more rapid or pronounced for a monument in a city centre, compared to one in a remote area?); size of monument (e.g., do larger, more elaborate constructions face greater risk – or a slower rate of change?); artistic content (e.g., do effects vary relative to the perceived artistic value of the monument, such as those featuring mosaics compared to those with plain concrete surfaces?).

Ultimately, this study has focussed on the Buzludzha Memorial House because it is a noteworthy example of the broader movement, and through its contemporary international fame, combined with the realistic conversation around its potential conservation as a heritage

site, it has become a tangible focal point within Bulgaria's conversation with its past; nevertheless, it is but one object that has become representative of the plight faced by thousands more, and there is incredible scope for future research to broaden its focus, for example by evaluating the conservation potential of a wider range of sites using tools such as the model proposed above.

9.4.3 Relationship to Monument Debates Worldwide

Finally, this thesis invites the question as to whether a model like that above might be usefully applied, in future research, to sites of conflicted monumental heritage elsewhere; that being to other places of post-communist heritage, or else, to the parallel conversations around monuments related to different dark and/or contentious histories – such as Britain's monuments to slave-traders, or Confederate monuments in the US (conversations that were previously introduced in Chapter 2). It is debateable whether such parallels can even be reliably or reasonably drawn, with the specific memorial themes being so far removed from one another in ideological terms; as Hatherley (2016) noted in his criticism of the 'Two Totalitarianisms' model implied by the ATRIUM project: "Monuments built by the Nazis stand alongside those built by and for their victims. It is comparable to placing a photo of Yad Vashem alongside images of Albert Speer's Zeppelinfeld, as if they were the same thing." No doubt, Hatherley and other similarly-minded commentators would strongly object to the idea of any parallel being found between the plight of monuments to socialists, and monuments to slave owners. Nevertheless, other commenters do seem to perceive parallels between these conversations. For example, in 2017 the author was commissioned to write an article for the New York-based website *Mental Floss*, on the subject of communist memorial sites in Europe. However, the online publication of the article was then delayed by six months, with the site's editor offering the explanation:

"As you may know, the news in the US this week is almost entirely around Confederate monuments being torn down. Given that it's such a political flashpoint, I think it's probably best to hold this one for a little while. (Sadly, I feel like no matter what we do the less-nuanced commentators will see this as an argument in favour of preserving monuments as art in general – whether it's Stalin or Robert E. Lee.)" (B. Lovejoy, personal communication, 16 August 2017).

One of this study's interviewees, the American monument researcher Donald Niebyl, specifically drew the comparison himself:

“I think reckless destruction of history, no matter what history it is, whether it’s [American] 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, [it] 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.”

Then on the perceived problems of drawing such a comparison, he notes:

“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” (Niebyl, Appendix 3).

This current study is neither equipped nor qualified to ‘wade into those waters,’ as Niebyl puts it, and so no comment can here be made on whether robust parallels might be drawn between the contemporary treatment of controversial monuments, regardless of their subject matter and context; nevertheless, the question of whether universal models might be found that help to explain and mediate such conversations remains, and it is highlighted here as a potential avenue for other research to explore.

9.5 The Future of Buzludzha

9.5.1 Five Perspectives

The introduction to this thesis outlined four perspectives on the future of Buzludzha:

1. Complete demolition as a symbolic anti-communist action;
2. An authentic restoration as a socialist monument;
3. An apolitical new use, and commercialisation for tourism;
4. Inaction, non-discussion, and a continued state of ruin.

Nikolova (2020) identified the first two options, destruction and restoration, as relating to a political spectrum from right-wing to left-wing perspectives. Commercial adaptation, she suggested, was a reflection of a capitalist approach to the monument, while a continuation of the building's current neglect, with no official conversation nor conservation, conforms with what has been the Bulgarian government's approach to date – a policy of avoidance, and what Vukov (2012) describes as a state of “institutionalised amnesia.”

The survey research conducted with visitors to the site invited them to rank seven different options for the monument's future (see Appendix 4).

1. Demolish it
2. Leave it to decay
3. Full restoration
4. Preservation in a semi-ruined state
5. Commercial use (e.g., a hotel or casino)
6. Museum of Bulgaria
7. Museum of Socialism

Here, the options of *destruction*, *full restoration* and *inaction* remain, while the previously proposed perspective of *apolitical adaptation* has been expanded to four different forms that this might take: including full commercialisation as a hotel or casino, or two differently themed museum options. Ultimately, point 4 above could be applied in conjunction with any of points 5-7; for example, as a hotel that maintains a (now controlled and stylised) atmosphere of natural decay (see for example the popularity of ‘ruin bars’ in Budapest, Hungary, discussed in Chapter 3) – through to museum designs that deliberately incorporate and maintain a visual reminder of the monument's three decades of abandonment. The idea of ‘preservation in a semi-ruined state’ therefore does not reflect one specific outcome for the monument, so much as it defines one characteristic that could be applied to numerous different preservation options. In terms of political outlook, there is also perhaps little difference implicated by the options of a museum either focussed on the country, or on its socialist past; after all, a museum of communism/socialism could take many forms, depending on the politics of those who curate and manage it: ranging from the state-approved ‘Red Tourism’ treatment of communist heritage in China, to the rather more negative portrayal of communist history in Budapest's ‘House of Terror’ (see Chapter 4). The creation of a

museum, as an act in itself, is still not a definitive representation of any single perspective on how the heritage in question should be treated. Therefore, perhaps there is just one important political distinction to be made between outcomes 4-7 above: should the restored building be privately owned and make a profit, or should it be adapted for a new use for non-financial reasons?

As a result, this chapter now identifies five distinct (and in some ways, political) perspectives on the future outcome of the Buzludzha Memorial House, namely: to forget, destroy, sell, restore or adapt it. These are presented visually in Figure 32. This section now presents a general conversation on the ‘best’ and ‘worst’ outcomes amongst these, as reported by interviewees and survey respondents; before analysing each of these five perspectives in turn, discussing relative prices, pros and cons, as well as which literature or sources seem to support each idea.

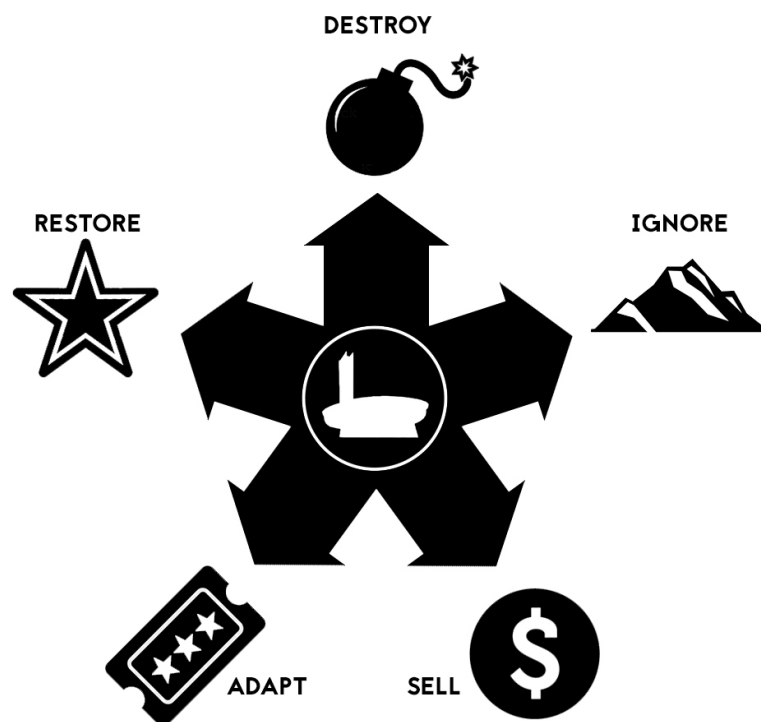


Figure 32: Five perspectives on the future of the Buzludzha Memorial House.

9.5.2 *Best- and Worst-Case Scenarios*

The research conducted using semi-structured interviews showed some agreement amongst interviewees regarding what were considered to be the best and worst outcomes for the monument.

The best outcome, according to Minard, was “a restoration of the roof and the reconstitution of the most deteriorated mosaics, with no new function at all,” as in his mind the building was already “self-sufficient as a ‘lieu de mémoire.’” In this way his perspectives conform to the *Restore* option on the model above. He believed that this minimal level of intervention was necessary in order to preserve what he considered to be one of the most valuable qualities of the place, that being its atmosphere of “emptiness” and “sacrality.” Such a preservation, he concluded, could present the monument as a fixed historical point, as an “abandoned temple dedicated to communism, just like a Roman sanctuary or a pharaonic tomb.”

For Lawler, the best outcome also took the form of the purest possible format: involving “stabilization of the monument, involving a full and careful conservation project, followed up by a long-term management, conservation and condition monitoring plan.” Again, this suggests the *Restore* option on the model, and though Lawler was also open to elements of adaptation (so long as any such project made no “irreversible interventions” to the monument), he made it clear that the monument should remain a monument – expressing strong discouragement for the idea of adapting it into a ‘museum of socialism,’ for example (Appendix 3).

Survey respondents rated Buzludzha’s *Architectural value* and *Historical significance* as being its most significant qualities, and as per the survey results, the most popular proposals for its future involved authentic conservation – either a full conservation to revert the monument to its original design, or to preserve it as a ‘Museum of Bulgaria.’ Interestingly, the latter option was considered more attractive by survey respondents than was the proposal of a ‘Museum of Socialism,’ perhaps suggesting a preference for something less politically focussed and more aimed at celebrating the full history of the country that built this monument – which was, after all, the original ostensible purpose of the monument, though manifested albeit through the lens of the Bulgarian Communist Party. The idea of ‘freezing’ Buzludzha as a semi-ruined attraction, something that Minard seems to suggest at in his responses above where he talks about conducting only the bare minimum of work to secure

the site against the elements, was generally popular amongst survey respondents, though it didn't garner the same enthusiasm as the idea of a full restoration; with 90 respondents giving 8 points to the semi-ruin proposal compared to 129 giving the maximum score to a full restoration.

There was agreement, also, between what research respondents identified as being the worst-case scenario for Buzludzha – with the options of either full commercialisation or continued abandonment generally eliciting the strongest responses. A full 95% of survey respondents (301 visitors) gave the proposal of destroying the monument the lowest possible score, and 70% (222 visitors) gave the minimum approval score to the proposal of leaving the monument to continued decay. Overall, mean averages show that these two options were considered the worst possible outcomes according to survey respondents, with demolition scoring a mean of 1.15 out of 8, and continued abandonment scoring 1.87. These were closely followed by the proposal of adapting the monument for commercial use, which earned a mean score of 2.17 (all other outcomes received mean scores above 5.0). Whereas respondents were generally unanimous in voting against demolition or abandonment though, the idea of commercial adaptation was a little more divisive, with 62% of respondents (195 visitors) giving it the lowest score, but other responses showing a relatively even spread of higher scores.

For Minard, commercialisation was the worst possible outcome for the monument. He argued strongly against any kind of “transformation into a commercial business, like a luxury hotel or a restaurant,” because this would represent “the total opposite of its original meaning.” Perhaps this is an ideological statement, as Minard also commented the true value of places like Buzludzha was their ability to “help to comprehend past ideologies and alternative ways of thinking” – therefore, by this logic it follows that if Buzludzha were ‘co-opted by capitalism,’ it would negate one of the key values of the place (Appendix 3).

The fact that Minard singles out commercialisation, over destruction, as the worst outcome for the monument was uncommon, though not an entirely unique response judging by survey respondents, of whom 9 people (3%) said they would sooner see Buzludzha destroyed, than turned into a commercial venue such as a hotel or casino. (It is interesting to note, those same 3% of respondents typically also gave higher scores to the question asking them whether they felt sympathy for the socialist philosophies of the site.)

According to Czarnowski, the best outcome for the monument “is definitely preserving it, even restoring it,” to avoid the very real possibility of the decaying monument becoming “a complete ruin”; an outcome which he notes would be “basically irreversible.” The worst approach therefore, for Czarnowski, is continued abandonment and “letting it deteriorate on its own.” The two developers of *Buzludzha VR* believe that any new conceptualisation of the Buzludzha Memorial House should still remember the historical events that the building was designed to commemorate; as Czarnowski explains: “that’s all part of the history. I don’t think that should be forgotten [...] why it was built, where it was built.” Rusanov believes that a re-invigorated monument could serve various potential purposes: “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.” (As such, it can be seen that this Bulgarian interviewee proposes a very different ‘best case scenario’ to Minard, a French historian and Buzludzha expert, who believes this should *not* become a functional space).

Lawler gave a similar response, though he added the condition of “continued decay and eventual destruction” in addition to any “large-scale ‘restoration’ plan that sees irreversible interventions undertaken which destroy the monument’s integrity.” Lawler’s use of the word ‘integrity’ here could be taken two ways; structural or ideological. Though in practical terms, it would make no sense for a commercial project such as a hotel to carry out work which undermined the structural integrity of its own building, and so instead perhaps Lawler’s use of the word could be said to suggest something similar to Minard’s comment, regarding conservation approaches that contradicted the original purpose and meaning of the monument. (For example, a hotel project that used the building’s concrete exterior for its value as Brutalist kitsch, but stripped out the socialist mosaics inside to replace them with modern interior fittings.) (Appendix 3)

To summarise, there was some general agreement between survey and interview respondents regarding what would be the best and worst case future uses of the Buzludzha monument: the best scenario being a restoration of the monument, in some form that prevented further decay, and while respondents were not unanimous in exactly what function this future venue should have, it was widely agreed that the project should preserve all material heritage that still survives at the site while making no significant new adaptations or interventions beyond what is necessary for its continued survival. The worst possible outcomes, in general, were those

that involved (or permitted, or hastened) either the outright destruction of the monument, or preservation in any commercialised form that could be perceived as undermining what the monument once stood for.

9.5.3 *Ignore the Monument*

From 1990 until the late 2010s, the policy of the Bulgarian government has been to ignore the Buzludzha Memorial House. This is an approach that Vukov (2012) called ‘institutionalised amnesia,’ which he reasoned was the result of the nation’s unwillingness to deal with its communist heritage, and reflected a lack of resolution to the period of post-communist transition. In practical terms the cost of this approach is minimal, the lowest of all five options, and indeed for a long time amounted to zero expenditure – when the monument was left entirely abandoned on the mountaintop. However, during the 2010s the monument began to become more visible worldwide, largely due to its popularity on social media, and this escalated to the point where hundreds of people per day were travelling to the peak. After this point, complete inaction on the part of the government no longer had the effect of minimising discussion – because the discussion was already happening, tourists were reporting on their visits, and each significant new step in the building’s decay was broadcast around the world. Managerial inaction, therefore, was in fact adding fuel to the discussion by this point. Additionally, the risk grew that someday a visitor to the monument may be significantly hurt or killed inside the ruin.

As Ivanova commented: “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” (Appendix 3).

Such an incident would have likely made international news, and thus would have had very much the opposite effect of any policy of wilful ignorance or denial. Therefore, in order to effectively continue ignoring the monument, it became necessary at a certain point to start keeping visitors out, and accordingly, in 2018 the government invested roughly 3,000 BGN [£1,280] into more securely sealing the monument as well as installing a security booth staffed by a round-the-clock guard detail (Hristov, 2018). Ivanova suggested that such interventions were necessary to keep tourists safe; others have said it was to protect the mosaics inside the monument from tourists; though it is arguable that the same action could

have simply reflected a will on the part of the government to maintain the same policy of avoidance it had so far adopted for the previous three decades. Indeed, it should be noted that for several years, the monument's entrances were sealed while the mosaics inside remained open to the sky above, which suggests that preserving the monument itself was not the main consideration behind the initial decision to seal it. As the monument's architect wryly commented in 2018: "They are securing it so that no one can get in to fix it" (Stoilov, Appendix 3).

As discussed in section 9.6.2, this option of continuing to ignore the monument was rated as the second-least desirable outcome by survey respondents, who, when asked to rate their approval, scored it a mean of 1.87 out of 8.

9.5.4 Destroy the Monument

In 1999, and against the wishes of two-thirds of the city's residents, the Bulgarian government made the decision to demolish (using bulldozers and dynamite) the mausoleum of former communist leader Georgi Dimitrov in the centre of Sofia (see Chapter 5). This action has been described by many as having been a symbolic gesture against the former communist regime (indeed it was conducted at the same time as a large-scale nationwide 'decommunisation' process initiated under Ivan Kostov, a West-leaning, pro-EU, pro-NATO, prime minister who had previously conceptualised the mausoleum as a 'symbol of totalitarianism'). Georgi Stoilov believes that this same government was responsible for beginning the destruction of Buzludzha in the late 1990s:

"The destruction was primarily caused by the government of that time. When Ivan Kostov became prime minister, he dismantled the whole country [...] Naturally, much of this was done out of spite toward the previous regime. [...] He sent organised bands from the UDF [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" (Stoilov, Appendix 3)

In 2017, Sofia City Council demolished another symbol of communism, the former Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria (Chapter 5). Meanwhile, across the country, many hundreds of smaller and less prominent symbols of the former regime (from monuments to mosaic art) have been quietly removed or dismantled over recent decades, and since 2016, these actions have been endorsed as compliance with the country's new 'decommunisation'

laws. Many Bulgarians – including numerous voices in positions of power – believe that the Buzludzha Memorial House, as perhaps the ultimate symbol of Bulgarian communism – should be destroyed as well. This perspective is exemplified in the words of the former Regional Governor of Stara Zagora Province, the previous decision-maker for the site, who in communication with the researcher in 2015 described the monument as a “concrete eyesore” and expressed his desire to see it destroyed (Appendix 1). Stoilov also comments on what he perceives as the Bulgarian government’s underlying desire to see the monument fade away: “They are securing it so that no one can get in to fix it” (Appendix 3). Today, calls to demolish the monument can frequently be seen in the comments sections beneath news stories about Buzludzha in the Bulgarian media.

The cost of this approach is not insignificant, however. No source has yet proposed an actual cost for the demolition of the Buzludzha Memorial House, and so to answer this question, the researcher requested hypothetical and approximate quotations from three different demolition firms in Sofia. These companies were given the dimensions of the building, its location, altitude, road access details and distance from nearby towns, and the specification that the structure consisted of 70,000 tonnes of concrete, and 3,000 tonnes of steel, with a main body accompanied by a 70-metre tower. One company declined to comment on this (admittedly somewhat unusual) query, though the other two were able to give approximate indications for the cost of such a job.

Based on the weights for the monument as given above (and using the online conversion calculator at <https://www.aqua-calc.com>), it was found that the total volume of rubble produced by the demolition of the Buzludzha Memorial House would amount to approximately 29,400 cubic metres of concrete and 390 cubic metres of steel, or 29,790 cubic metres altogether – somewhat more in fact, allowing for pipes, cabling, the ceiling structure, insulation cladding, marble panelling, broken machinery, air vents, and so on. (For comparison, 30,000 cubic metres is roughly equivalent to a stack of 750 twenty-foot shipping containers.) The company Hidrostroy offers bulldozer hire at 1,500 BGN [£640] per 8 hours, during which time 50 cubic metres of waste rubble can be moved. At that rate, Buzludzha’s rubble would take 600 bulldozer-days (requiring one bulldozer for almost two years, or a four-month job for a team of six). The cost of rubble removal would come to 900,000 BGN [approximately £383,000]. While they couldn’t give a quote for the demolition itself (noting the extraordinary circumstances and challenges of this site, necessitating extensive onsite

surveying before a quotation could be prepared), they were able to say demolition would cost somewhat more than the waste clearance, thus putting the total cost in the region of £1 million upwards (Hidrostroy, personal communication, 13 December 2021). The other demolition firm approached, Kurti BG, quoted a price of approximately 270 BGN [£115] per tonne, for a manual demolition and subsequent removal of waste. Assuming a total weight for Buzludzha – including 70,000 tonnes concrete, 3,000 tonnes steel, and other various materials – of at least 75,000 tonnes (roughly equivalent to 500 regular houses, or three times heavier than the Statue of Liberty – via <http://www.themeasureofthings.com>), this gives a total price for the monument's manual demolition and removal as 20,250,000 BGN [£8.6 million] (Kurti BG, personal communication, 13 December 2021).

The variance between these figures – £1 million versus £8.6 million – reflects the sheer complexity of the challenge. Different demolition techniques (such as explosives, cranes, or hydro-demolition tools) would represent very different costs. Additionally, the issues of site access, staffing and facilities, health and safety precautions, and even potentially arranging a temporary evacuation of homes and hotels situated further down the mountainside, all add significant further complications, and as Hidrostroy noted, a formal conversation around price could not even begin until an extensive site survey had been completed. Nevertheless, what this exercise demonstrates, based on information from two different firms, is that the demolition of the Buzludzha Memorial House would be an extremely challenging task with a total price in the range of *millions of pounds*.

Therefore, to remove the monument altogether would actually represent a significant investment on the part of the government, and the total cost would be not incomparable to the cost of a partial conservation of the site. This study found that the outright demolition of the monument was one of the most strongly-opposed proposals for its futures. The visitor survey found destruction to be overall the least popular option, with 95% of respondents giving it the lowest possible score. Interviewees also described this as one of the worst things that could happen. Although some Bulgarians are quite vocal about the notion of 'blowing up Buzludzha,' largely their comments seem to be obvious to the cost of such an action. For example, on the award of the \$185,000 [£135,000] Getty grant in 2018, one commenter suggested "we should use this money to blow up the monument, and spend the rest on schools" (comment on a since-deleted post on US Embassy Sofia, n.d.); though what the research above demonstrates is that it would likely have taken ten such grants to be able to

afford a demolition project on this scale. Crucially though, if Bulgaria did ever pursue a policy of demolishing the monument, it would be doing so at its own cost, rather than with financial support from foreign organisations (which are largely unanimous in the importance of conserving Buzludzha). It might therefore be suggested that in absolute financial terms, the option of destroying the monument would in fact be the most expensive of all options for Bulgaria as a country.

It is not impossible that the Bulgarian state could still pursue this option. In the short term there would be outrage, internationally, although much like the conversations around the Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov or the Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria, this would in time fade from public discourse and the media, to be largely continued only in academic circles. Eventually a new leader and government would come in, this act would become part of the outgoing president's legacy, and the blame for the loss of Buzludzha would become an abstract historical question. However, it is the cost and complexity of such a task that make it almost unfeasible, and as such, the state is much more likely to continue tolerating or ignoring the monument, than to invest so heavily in its outright destruction. Fisher (2009) noted how capitalism was able to consume the symbols of other ideologies, by allotting them value within its own 'system of equivalence,' and thereby it need not be so fervent in its iconoclasm (or de-territorialisation) as other historical-ideological systems have often been. By that logic, this thesis reasons that a non-capitalistic government would be more likely than a capitalist one to invest such an amount into the destruction of a competing symbol: a future right-wing Bulgarian totalitarian state might someday justify spending millions on the destruction of a communist monument... but a capitalist and nominally democratic government is more likely to instead seek a new way to ignore it, to reframe it, or to attempt to profit from it.

9.5.5 *Sell the Monument*

The option described here as 'selling' the monument constitutes any outcome which involves the monument being adapted into a site for generating profit. This could take the form of the government giving the monument to a private company to manage, in return for money (literally selling the monument), or else the Bulgarian government themselves using the monument's well-known appearance and status in order to run a profit-generating business inside (metaphorically selling the monument). In practice, the latter approach might not look so different to the National Palace of Culture (NDK) in Sofia, a large-scale communist-era

construction that was originally designed as a place supporting a particular ideology (by showcasing communist-approved culture, with exhibition and cinema halls, theatres, and conference spaces), but is nowadays partitioned into event spaces for hire, in addition to providing long-term rental premises for foreign firms such as Costa Coffee.

Amongst survey respondents, the idea of commercialising the Buzludzha Memorial House received little support, with the option ranking third-least popular after demolition and continued abandonment. However, scores were not so unanimous here as they were for the latter two options, with 13% of respondents (42 visitors) giving a score of 5 or above to the proposal of commercialising the building. More broadly there is some support for such an approach to be taken at Buzludzha. Hannes D’Haese – a Belgian artist and gallerist who is cited in Chapter 8 – commented:

“[The] only way to get the government onboard [...] is to make it into a museum of modern art [...] Modern art is capitalism and thus the opposite of the communist regime [...] The (capitalist) museum of modern art would show what communism was and that this new museum is the future in contrast to communism which has always failed” (H. D’Haese, personal communication, 10 May 2017).

The proposal effectively posits that commercialisation of the monument is the most effective way to control and manage the building’s inherent ideological value within today’s capitalist reality.

Such an approach offers some benefits to the state:

- The cost of work is theoretically negated, as, so long as the business is successful, it would be offset by incoming profit.
- Allowing a private company to purchase and develop the site would see Buzludzha reinvigorated at a net profit for the Bulgarian government, rather than a net loss. With the pressure to turn a profit, any company taking the building on would be strongly incentivised to restore the building to the point that it no longer faces continued decay.
- If the government were to manage the business themselves, there would be potential to recoup via profits any initial outlay spent on redevelopment.

However, there are a number of issues here too. The large cost of the work would likely need to be recouped via ticket sales, which would incentivise the development of the site into a

more exclusive attraction, for example, a luxury hotel or other venue, which would have the effect of excluding many would-be visitors. The example of Battersea Power Station in London comes to mind – once considered as a work of community architecture, the so-called ‘Temple of Power,’ but which nowadays has been developed into high-end luxury apartments that retail for as much as £8.2 million. For many ‘Buzludzha fans,’ this kind of outcome at the monument would have the same effect as its destruction. Lawler (Appendix 3) points out that locals must not be priced out of the monument, and numerous survey respondents make particular mention that Bulgarians should never have to pay for entry to Buzludzha, having already funded its construction.

Either way, this option is unlikely – if not impossible – to ever come about. Firstly, the Bulgarian government themselves are very unlikely to ever develop the monument into a profitable venue. They have consistently shown a strong effort to distance themselves from the symbols of communism, and Buzludzha is so widely regarded as symbolic of the former regime, that it could never be universally perceived as being free of those associations. Even taken purely pragmatically, it is not the most useful place to operate a venue – given the remote location, three hours’ drive from the nearest airport, and with roads that frequently face the challenge of being blocked by heavy snow in winter – and given the enormity of the work that would need to be completed first in order to operate a business there. By comparison, the cost of building a new venue instead, somewhere closer to main roads, transport routes and cities, is likely to be far lower than that of renovating Buzludzha and adapting it for new use. If any business were to develop a hotel, casino, or other profit-making venue at the monument therefore, then it will only be because the monument’s identity, appearance and history were perceived by them to be a positive factor.

However – in 2011, when the Bulgarian Socialist Party were pursuing the rights to the monument, the government passed a law that dictated state properties could only be given to private companies or other groups for a period of 10 years, after which ownership would revert to the state (Chapter 6). With this law in effect, it means that any private company who leased the monument from the government would need to invest a large amount of money into restoring the ruin, making it useable, but then would still lose ownership of it again after the 10-year period had passed. The effect of this law is that the government always maintains ultimate control of the site – the same as the situation at the Museum of Socialist Art, which as noted by Guentcheva (2012), has never been granted autonomy as a business but is instead

managed by the state as a branch of the Ministry of Culture. In this way, Guentcheva says, the government could close the museum at any time without notice if it ever became politically problematic for them. The prediction of this study therefore, is that in line with their consistent approach towards other sites of communist heritage in the country, the Bulgarian government will never cede control of Buzludzha – a powerful national and communist symbol – to any private company; and following with their established approach of avoiding discussion of the communist past, neither will this particular government pursue any plan of developing the monument for new alternative uses themselves.

9.5.6 *Restore the Monument*

Another approach would be to restore the monument, in full integrity, to its original form. Though its message cannot help but be changed by history – this would now be a monument to communism in a country that is no longer communist – there are many commenters who believe that this approach, of authentically restoring the monument with no new purpose, no adaptation, no commercialisation and no significant changes made to its structure, contents, or message, would be the most preferable. This was the best possible outcome as noted by the interviewees Minard and Lawler, while of the survey respondents, 41% (129 visitors) gave the option of *Full restoration* the maximum score, ranking this second-highest overall out of all the options presented to them. This option would also have the greatest cost of all five, (presumably significantly) in excess of the €7.5 million [£6.2 million] plus taxes suggested for a partial conservation, by the Europa Nostra Technical Report (Aymerich, 2018).

There are two key reasons why this option is very unlikely to ever happen, however. Firstly, the cost – the monument has so far managed to raise \$245,000 [£180,000] after years of campaigning. To raise millions more would be difficult, and there is currently no indication where such a sum might be found. Additionally, whoever finances such a large project would most likely expect some power in determining the outcome of the monument, which means this significant investor would need to be open to the idea of investing millions into a monument that could be perceived as glorifying the communist movement. Outside of the ruling communist parties of the 20th century, there aren't many historical examples of communists having that kind of capital to invest – and those potential investors that do have such money now, are more likely to disagree with the ideas of communism.

Or, as the game developer Czarnowski puts it: “It’s going to be a political suicide for [whichever] foreign investor that is actually going to touch a communist monument. That’s not something that might play nicely.” And besides, he notes, “there are more pressing matters [in Bulgaria] 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” (Appendix 3).

The other, perhaps more fundamental reason why the Buzludzha Memorial House is unlikely to see a full restoration, is because the current Bulgarian government would almost certainly not allow it. Iconoclasm against communist symbols has very much been a part of the Bulgarian state brand in recent decades (see Chapter 5), and so, even to permit an authentic restoration of the Buzludzha Memorial House, would be to go against the values and ideologies that the state has consistently projected to date.

Moreover, what this study has found, is that sites of communist-era ideological architecture simply cannot be preserved with their original meaning intact in the post-communist world. In the case of Buzludzha, if preservation campaigners were to wait for the country’s democratic approval to restore it in its original form, as a monument to communist thought, the building’s artwork would have been forever lost in the meantime. A partial conservation – preventing further damage by the elements – need not necessarily rule out a more complete and authentic restoration effort at a later date. Such buildings can be adapted or reinvigorated; see for comparison the case of Hagia Sofia, in Section 2.9: a religious building whose architecture and design Minard (2018) notes was potentially also an influence for the Buzludzha Memorial House, and which has served over the years as a church, a mosque, a museum, and then a mosque again. The Pantheon in Ruse is another example – a communist memorial house built over the site of a former chapel, and which itself was dedicated to the church in the post-communist period with the addition of a Christian cross affixed to its dome, and Orthodox icons hung alongside the statues of revolutionaries that decorate its marble-lined interiors (see Section 5.4).

One perhaps significant observation is this: any work of ideological architecture remains a potentially potent symbol, even though it may, through touristification and museumification, lay dormant for periods of time. The rededication of the Hagia Sofia as a mosque was a powerful symbolic move by Turkey’s Muslim populist government. Similarly, a carefully

conserved Buzludzha Memorial House would be ripe for re-activation as an active political symbol should Bulgarian politics ever swing sufficiently far back towards the left. Perhaps such concerns underpin the logic of the many anti-communist Bulgarians today who advocate that the monument should be bulldozed, dynamited, or otherwise outright destroyed: as they believe such action may prevent the movement from coming back (like the 13th century Bulgarians who staked corpses into the grave, to prevent the deceased from returning as vampires).

Ultimately, this study concludes that so long as the building is not structurally changed, or demolished, it will always retain the potential to be reinvigorated in its original form and role at a later date. But conversely, the argument for full, authentic restoration, in the short term (while Bulgaria is yet to reach a consensus on the question of its communist past and heritage), would lead only to a destructive stalemate.

9.5.7 Adapt the Monument

An ‘adaptation’ of the Buzludzha Memorial House would be any conservation approach which aimed to preserve the monument as a non-profit venue, but without restoring it precisely to its original 1981 design. For example, one option that has been widely discussed is the idea of ‘freezing’ the monument’s state of decay, and preventing it from getting worse, but while maintaining some elements of that decay aesthetic in the final presentation of the site (similar to the idea of ‘ruin bars,’ mentioned in Chapter 3). This is the model which has been proposed in the Europa Nostra technical report for the Buzludzha Memorial House, which details a process of conservation focussed only on essential actions to restore the building’s ceiling and windows, making it waterproof, and preserving the remaining mosaics inside: and suggests a total budget of €7.5 million [£6.2 million] plus taxes for the work (Aymerich, 2018). This money, it proposes, might be available from the European Investment Fund.

In the survey questionnaire, respondents were asked to rate a number of different proposals for the monument’s future, and two of these involved some form of non-commercial adaptation – either transforming the building into a ‘Museum of Bulgaria,’ or a ‘Museum of Socialism.’ However, on reflection, perhaps these options are ultimately still open to some degree of interpretation. After all, the Bulgarian communists who created the Buzludzha Memorial House intended it to serve, effectively, as a ‘Museum of Bulgaria’ in which the

nation's history was retold albeit through a socialist lens. A different regime might create a very different 'Museum of Bulgaria.' On the other hand, a 'Museum of Socialism' could be created and managed either by socialists, or by anti-socialists and with quite different outcomes in either case (compare, for example, the Museum of Communism in Prague, discussed in Chapter 4, with the Museum of the Chinese Communist Party in Beijing, China, which as educational venues take entirely opposite ideological stances on a similar subject matter). Therefore, it cannot be concluded that either a 'Museum of Bulgaria' or a 'Museum of Socialism' are fixed and definable uses, as either of these is still very much subject to the ideology of those managing and funding the site. In the survey, respondents rated the proposal of a 'Museum of Bulgaria' with 5.80 points out of 8 and a 'Museum of Socialism' with 5.19 points. However, if both were to be considered together, under the umbrella proposal of a 'non-commercial museum adaptation' of the site, then the mean of these two options gives 5.50 out of 8, which then makes this the second most popular option, behind the proposal of a full and authentic restoration (5.57). An interesting observation perhaps, though the numbers are close enough to be arguably not a significant indicator. Suffice to say at least, that the proposal of some kind of non-commercial adaptation received on the whole a *similar* level of approval to a full restoration of the monument, and was amongst the most popular outcomes offered.

Minard commented further on how any museum adaptation of the site would inevitably be subject to the ideology of those managing it, and he stressed the importance that such a project should aim to provide a sense of balance between differing perspectives on the socialist past. The best way to do this, he suggested, would be a museum that "presents the different dimensions of the communist experience, but is not focused solely on repressive politics or terror." However, he maintains that this would not be the best future use of the Buzludzha Memorial House, which he believes should have "no new function at all."

The game developer Todor Rusanov believes that the idea of turning Buzludzha into a museum about Bulgarian history in general, is potentially problematic: "turning the communist headquarters into symbol of Bulgarian history, it's controversial." For that reason, Rusanov's and Czarnowski's *Buzludzha VR* project "decided to stay in the middle," and proposes maintaining the monument as a museum only to its own history. The developers also note the potential challenges associated with any such project. Czarnowski explains that

“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.” However, Czarnowski also notes how such proposals are dependent on government approval, which simply might not be forthcoming: “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.” Rusanov adds: “I would say that the government would try to keep distance from [the topic of] Buzludzha because it’s so controversial. If you say something that doesn’t meet the expectation of the population, things might go wrong, very wrong.”

Lawler is also cautious, stating that he is strongly opposed to the idea of Buzludzha becoming a museum. He gives three reasons: firstly, the monument is “too isolated to attract sufficiently high numbers of visitors to be sustainable or to benefit any communities within the vicinity”; secondly, he asks “who would be responsible for the curation of such a museum”; and thirdly he has concerns as to “how such an initiative would be funded.” On the latter point he asks how such a project could sustain itself, without resorting to “shipping people on organised visits from other tourism centres in Bulgaria for day trips,” or “implementing visitor fees that price out the local population.” Lawler goes on to note the widely-reported corruption within the Bulgarian government (see Chapter 5), and particularly “Bulgaria’s history of mispending EU money.” Additionally, he points to “the EU’s recent attempts to redefine all forms of ‘totalitarianism’ as equal” (an issue already discussed in Chapter 4). This combination of a reframed political interpretation, administered via a state known for misappropriating incoming funds, he describes as a “recipe for disaster” (Appendix 3).

9.5.8 *Buzludzha Today*

Finally, this section looks at Buzludzha today – now that conservation work has begun – and asks whether the current status quo may yet still conform to Foucault’s proposal for the heterotopia. At time of writing, the monument is no longer accessible to the public. The entrances are sealed, the door is locked, a guard is posted around the clock, while video cameras inside transmit a live feed to Sofia. It might therefore be said that the Buzludzha Memorial House has now entered a new, fourth phase of its life.

Phase One [1974-1981]	Construction site, staffed by architects, artists, engineers and labourers, many of them civilian volunteers.
Phase Two [1981-1990]	Memorial house, open to the public by appointment for guided tours.
Phase Three [1995-2017]	A ruin, officially off-limits, but in practice open to all who visit.
Phase Four [2019-present]	Conservation site, strictly secured and accessible only to conservation workers and pre-approved journalists.

Table 26: Four phases of Buzludzha over time.

In its current, fourth phase of existence, the Buzludzha Memorial House still appears to conform to Foucault's (1967a [1984]) six principles of the heterotopia.

Principles of Heterotopia	Buzludzha Today
1. Universal across cultures	The closed conservation site – similar to archaeological digs, or construction sites, across the world.
2. Changing roles over time	See Buzludzha's phases 1-3, as per Table 23.
3. Juxtaposes multiple spatial ideas	An international project brings conservation specialists from various foreign universities together in one space.
4. Locked to a specific slice of time	Focussed on halting the effects of decay over time, instead aiming to 'freeze' the monument in a semi-ruined state.
5. Both isolated and penetrable	Cannot be entered except by approval of the state, forming a barrier that distinguishes space inside from space outside.
6. An illusion of the space outside	Conservation of mosaics which illustrate symbolic images of Bulgarian society under communism, using techniques pioneered at other conservation sites around the world.

Table 27: Buzludzha today as heterotopia.

So – what should happen next with the Buzludzha Memorial House?

If the country is still undecided, then perhaps the most democratic approach would be to pursue a course of action that leaves as many alternative options as possible still open. For example, the *Destroy* option, detailed above, would render the *Adapt*, *Sell* and *Restore* options

impossible. The *Ignore* option would lead towards a similar situation too, over a long enough time period – and while the outer structure of the monument has been shown to be sound (according to structural surveys carried out in 2019 – see Chapter 6), the elaborate interior mosaics were seen to be rapidly disintegrating, as observed from one site visit to the next during the course of this study (see Section 8.1.2). The *Sell* option also limits the freedom of future choice, as its various forms may involve anything from a transfer of ownership, to significant interventions affecting the interior spaces. Therefore, until Bulgaria is able to reach a consensus on the future of the monument – something the country still seems to be a long way from achieving – the most democratic action in the meantime would be to halt the decay, seal the monument against the elements, and thus buy Buzludzha some more time. Beyond that, it is impossible to say for sure what the future of the Buzludzha Memorial House looks like. However, having analysed the literature alongside new data emerging from this research process, it is possible to make a few reasonable predictions. It is therefore the conclusion of this thesis that:

The monument will not (at least under the current government) be commercialised, fully restored, or destroyed. Until now, the preferred approach taken by the owners of the monument was to avoid bringing attention to it. Unless the state has had a dramatic change of heart, it will likely continue to pursue this policy, as best as possible. Up until the 2010s, the best way to avoid this conversation was simply to do nothing. However, after the monument began to grow famous around the world, and people started visiting in their thousands, the best way to avoid conversation was to close its doors. In more recent years there has been a growing awareness of Buzludzha as being a site at risk – helped along by the recognition of Buzludzha as one of Europe’s most endangered heritage sites by Europa Nostra, in 2018 (See Appendix 1). Following this development, if the state still wanted to pursue a policy of “institutionalised amnesia” (Vukov, 2012), the most effective approach would be by allowing conservation work to start, thus appearing to be doing the ‘right’ thing, while also closing the monument to new visitors.

At present the monument is closed, no unauthorised visitors may enter, and subsequently no new stories and photos are appearing on social media. This has cost the government nothing, and they benefit from some positive recognition for hypothetically allowing conservation to happen. But the conservation project has so far received just \$245,000 [£180,000] of the total estimate of €7.5 million [£6.2 million] plus taxes required for a conservation (Aymerich,

2018). Therefore, this current situation is both the most democratic outcome possible (leaving the maximum number of alternative options open), but it is also the path that in the short term best supports a policy of ignoring the monument, as it avoids controversy, and minimises access to and coverage of the site. Online interest in the search term ‘Buzludzha’ peaked in July 2014, and it has seen a gradual decrease in interest since, never regaining the volume of searches that the monument was receiving during the years when it was abandoned and (unofficially) open to visitors (see Plate 82).

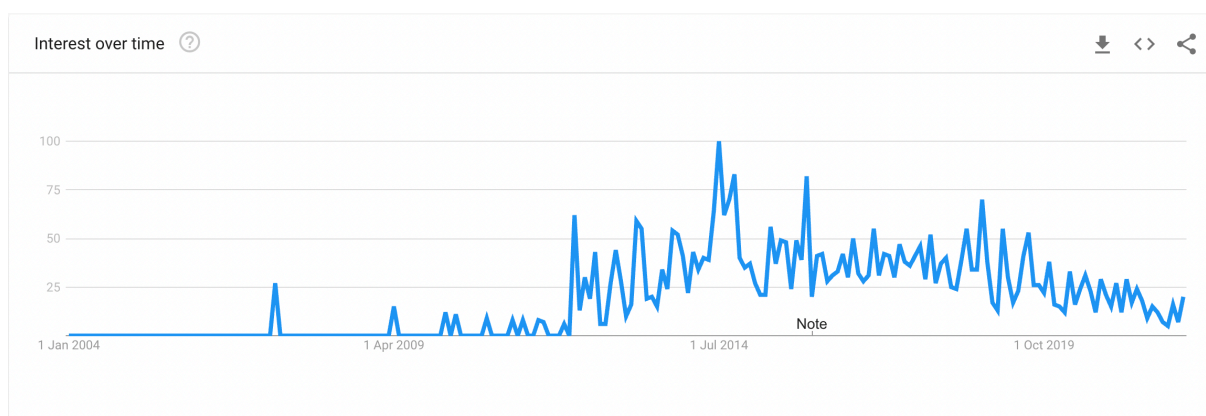


Plate 82: Online search traffic for the term ‘Buzludzha’ between 2004 and 2021.

Data source: Google Trends (<https://www.google.com/trends>)

It is still possible that further funding will be found, to complete the work and open a ‘Buzludzha museum.’ Or at the other extreme, this current situation may end up stretching into a form of prolonged limbo for the monument; its mosaics saved from further decay, but not accessible to be appreciated by the public. The latter scenario would seem to be the most desirable outcome for the Bulgarian government, at least as that government is characterised by Bulgarian academics such as Vukov (2012), Guentcheva (2012), Nikolova (2020) and others. Though it might also be reasonably suggested that if funding was found for the remaining amount, then any government which had shown a “history of misspending EU money” (Lawler, Appendix 3) may wish in that case to become more involved in the process, and in ‘managing’ those funds itself.

This section ends by making the prediction that it will be many years before the Buzludzha Memorial House is opened to the public as a museum (if indeed it ever happens). It will be a good thing if the mosaics are saved, to be appreciated again in future. Though it might not be

this generation who get the opportunity to do so, and Buzludzha might never again see the volume of visitors that it received either in the 1980s, or the 2010s.

9.6 Academic Activism: The Buzludzha Project

The beginning of conservation work at the Buzludzha Memorial House was not anticipated when this research project began. This thesis was originally expected to take the form of a study of a static, abandoned building – and it would discuss purely hypothetical future approaches to conservation. Instead, and partly through the results of the researcher’s own academic activism and collaborative work with the Bulgarian architect Dora Ivanova (see Appendix 1), the subject of this thesis has itself changed over the course of research, leading to a much more complex – but rewarding – discussion. As a result of having participated in a successful campaign for conservation, the researcher is now able to propose a model illustrating how that result came about.

9.6.1 A Model for Conservation Campaigning

In the model in Figure 33, the perceived *Value* of the monument feeds into *Local discourse* – conceived here as a communication loop between the *Public*, the *Media*, and the *State*, in which each party effects, and is affected by, one another. However, only one of these parties – the *State*, who in this case remain the owners of the building – is able to approve a progression to the next stage of the model. On either side of the monument are panels representing conservation efforts, or interventions, in the form of *Domestic action* and *Foreign action*.

Domestic action has included exhibitions and conferences (for example, such as those organised by Ivanova over the years), (domestic) expert opinion (in the form of positive architectural and artistic appraisals of the site by respected professionals), lobbying (such as, for example, Ivanova’s petitions and proposals to the Bulgarian government), and finally, onsite events – such as the 2017 ‘Buzludzha Rock Festival,’ the 2019 artistic intervention by the ‘Nonuments’ group, or the annual BSP gatherings at Buzludzha, all of which have the effect of normalising the site as a place of contemporary gatherings, and thereby, of enduring cultural significance.

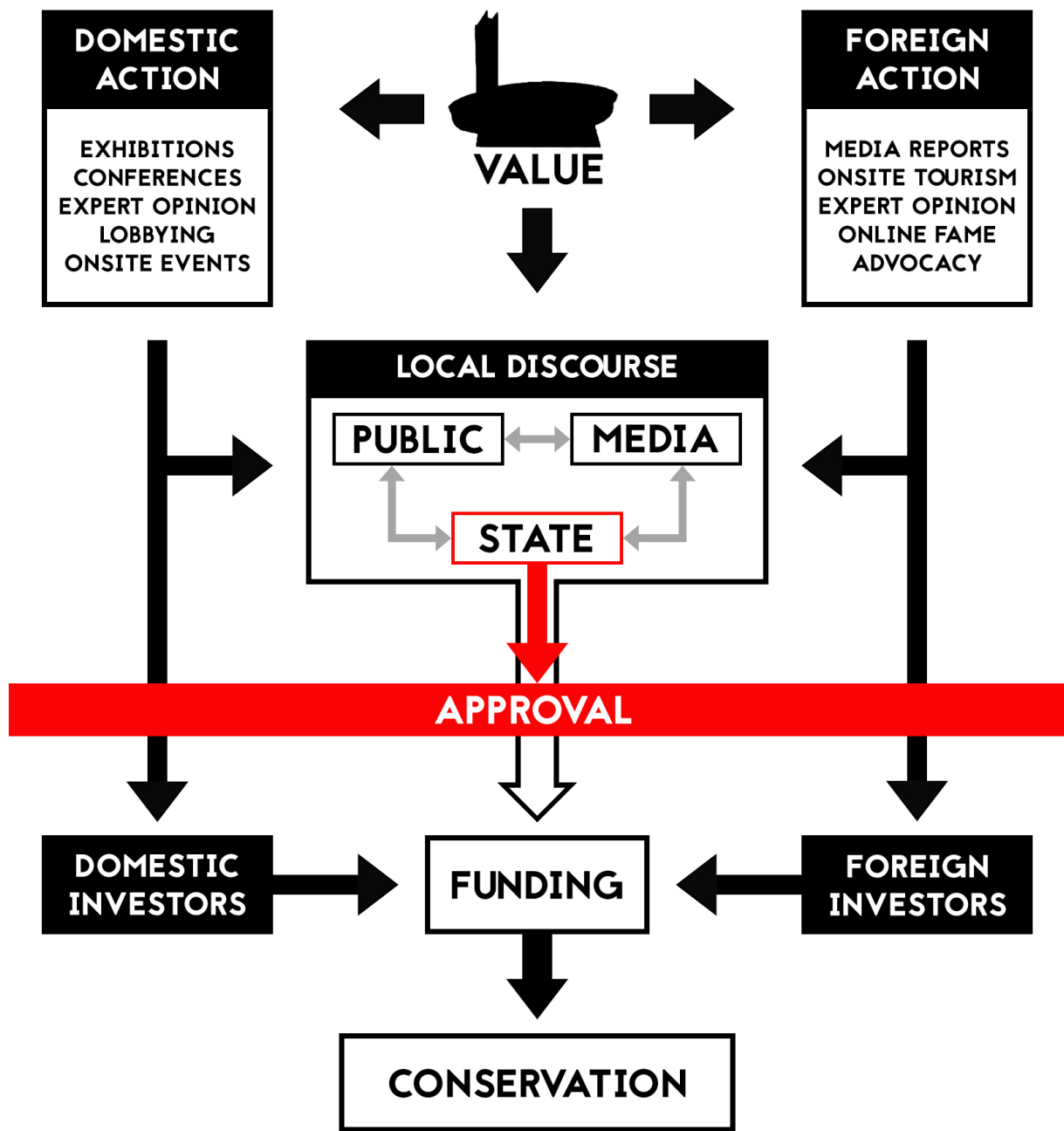


Figure 33: How Buzludzha was saved – a model for conservation campaigning.

Foreign action here is defined with the examples of media reports, onsite tourism, (foreign) expert opinion, online fame, and advocacy groups, processes by which it was increasingly demonstrated that the site was perceived by outsiders as having an intrinsic value. Some elements of this *Foreign action* happened of their own accord, such as the viral online sharing of images of the monument, and resultant media interest; while other elements were

deliberately pushed via campaigning efforts, such as the researcher's own writing on the subject for international platforms, press releases and interview statements, the researcher's work in the development and promotion of educational tourism to the monument, and perhaps most importantly (at least in terms of converting this interest into forward momentum), the provision of a dedicated website for the monument, through which all of this international interest could then be channelled towards positive action. Applications to advocacy groups such as Europa Nostra also came as the result of such campaigning efforts, and brought with them greater reach and authority for the project.

Both *Domestic action*, and *Foreign action*, are observed by and feed back into the *Local discourse*. Reports of positive appraisal from outside support the argument that the site has objective value, and encourage its re-evaluation by those who hold negative feelings towards it; while growing tourism interest makes it increasingly clear that the site could be used for the benefit of the local and national economy. Then, once the *State* has decided that the *Value* is sufficient to merit further action, *Approval* is granted for the next stage. In Buzludzha's case, a marked change in this situation was seen with the arrival of the new decision-maker, the regional governor of Stara Zagora province Gergana Mikova, in May 2017. (As noted in Appendix 1, her predecessor, contacted as part of this study in 2015, had commented that he believed the monument should be destroyed.) Mikova's decision to grant access to the monument for engineers and work teams (though offered nevertheless with some conditions) is what 'unlocked' the *Approval* barrier and allowed events to move to the next stage of the model.

Local discourse regarding the monument remains unsettled to date. Work teams have been given permission to access the Buzludzha Memorial House, but it remains the property of the state, and has still not been recognised with 'monument' status by the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture. Within the country, there remain many vocal critics of both the idea of conserving communist heritage in general, and also, of the involvement of Getty, an American organisation, in particular (see Chapter 6). If *Local discourse* were ever to shift in the direction of overwhelming support for conservation, then as demonstrated on the model, funding for such work might one day come from the *State* itself. For the time being though, funding must be found elsewhere, namely via *Domestic investors* and *Foreign investors*. Typically, these investors are found and inspired by way of *Domestic action* and *Foreign action* respectively (with *Domestic investors* likely to be influenced more in their decisions by

the local media and public sentiment, whereas *Foreign investors*, such as the Getty Foundation, have little connection with domestic goings-on in Bulgaria and rather are more likely to be inspired by international press, advocacy groups, and English-language websites).

Lastly, once *Approval* is granted and *Funding* is found, *Conservation* can begin. Though it remains important to note, that this is still only the beginning of a long conservation journey. To date, the Getty Foundation has made one grant of \$185,000 [£135,000] in 2019, for the creation of a Conservation and Management Plan, and another grant of \$60,000 [£45,000] in 2020, specifically for work on conserving the mosaics. However, even the most conservative estimates for the total cost of the conservation of the Buzludzha Memorial House run into millions, if not tens of millions of dollars, and so, while the results detailed here might be considered a historic change in the fortunes of the building, representing the very first conservation efforts to be made since Buzludzha was abandoned three decades ago, they nevertheless mark only the first chapter in the long story still to come.

In the case of the Buzludzha Memorial House, *Value*, as identified on the model above, was embodied in the form of a specific project proposal. While the abstract and conversational evaluation of the site already proved noteworthy (or indeed, controversial) enough to trigger many of the subsequent stages of the model without any campaigner input (*Local discourse*, often related to media reports, onsite events, onsite tourism, and so on), after a certain point it became instrumental to be able to show a project proposal that offered a clear vision for how that *Value* might be (re)conceptualised. The existence of a project proposal gave local media something new and timely to talk about, and it gave foreign advocacy groups a specific proposal to discuss. Ultimately, though, Ivanova and Fawcus's 2018 'Buzludzha Museum' proposal (see Appendix 1) was always just a hypothetical option – a visualisation of what *could* be done, for the sake of starting a dialogue. This proposal was removed from the website shortly after the Getty Foundation became involved, with the suggestion raised instead of welcoming a range of different design proposals for the future of the site.

9.6.2 Evaluating the Project

Of all the communist-era monuments in Bulgaria worthy of conservation, the Buzludzha Memorial House was both the best and the worst one to start with. It could be considered the best, because it is such a large and widely recognised symbol of Bulgaria's late socialist

architecture both domestically and abroad; it utilised public donations to fund its construction, meaning that here more than at any other site of communist heritage in the country, the citizens of Bulgaria feel a very real investment in the site; and furthermore, while many similar sites around the country feature elaborate mosaics, *or* striking Modernist architecture, *or* extravagant interior spaces, *or* dramatic locations and views, Buzludzha is able to boast all of these characteristics in one site, and in this way it serves quite effectively as a symbol for the best qualities of Bulgaria's communist-era monument-making. However, Buzludzha might be considered as the worst place to attempt such a high-profile conservation campaign, because: its remote mountaintop location makes everything more difficult, from conducting physical work, to maintaining the site against the elements, and subsequently to attracting visitors if and when the site should be reopened to the public; the investment that Bulgarians feel in the site means that everything here is more personal – and while a successful project might feel like a national cause, similarly, any criticism or resistance to the project are just as likely to be more heartfelt and passionate as a result of this sense of ownership; it is also a monument that chiefly commemorates an ideology, not any one particular historical event or place, and this then makes it a harder sell in post-communist Bulgaria than would have been the case if it were, for example, a national war memorial being conserved; of all the thousands of neglected communist heritage sites in the country, Buzludzha is almost certainly going to be the most expensive and difficult one to conserve owing to the complexity of the building and its art; and finally, the high profile of Buzludzha means that whatever happens here, is going to be widely reported and discussed throughout the country: there is no trial run, no opportunity to test methods at a less visible and less controversial site, and as a result any failure or mistakes made in this highly publicised conservation attempt are liable to have a negative effect on how other such projects are viewed in future (*What's the point*, critics will say, *Remember what happened at Buzludzha*). For these reasons the attempted conservation of the Buzludzha Memorial House could be considered a very high-stakes gambit in the conversation about Bulgaria's communist heritage in general.

Chapter 4 of this thesis proposed a three-point system for evaluating the management of communist heritage sites in post-communist space, assessing the approaches taken in relation to the factors of *Authenticity*, *Accountability*, and *Accessibility*. This section now returns to that model – the 'Three As' – and applies it to a critical evaluation of the Buzludzha Project.

9.6.3 *Authenticity (The People's Monument... Brought to You by Getty)*

Authenticity was defined in this context as a measure of how well a heritage site reflects the diverse and sometimes divisive perspectives on history held by members of the society that owns that heritage, and pluralism in contemporary representations of the past was recommended as being the most effective way to “move beyond the settling of scores in the past and towards a respectful recognition and acknowledgement of historical difference” (Kattago, 2009).

As detailed in Chapter 6, at the suggestion of architect Georgi Stoilov, the construction of the Buzludzha Memorial House was funded entirely by public donations. It was very much conceived as the ‘people’s monument.’ Accordingly, entry was free, and during its years of use millions of Bulgarian people made the pilgrimage to Buzludzha Peak. This sense of ownership continued into the transition era following ‘the Changes’: many impoverished Bulgarian people, who felt they had been wronged by the communist system, returned to the peak to recoup their investment in the form of stripped marble, steel and copper. The monument is now legally considered the property of the Bulgarian government, and there has been no referendum or public poll on what the Bulgarian people want to do with it. A great many, however, still feel it belongs to them. The involvement of the American Getty Foundation in the project has therefore been a subject of some controversy in Bulgaria; and even amongst those who hope for the monument to be preserved, there is still apparent a certain degree of resignation for the way in which that appears to be happening. Kulić (2018) wrote that “even when it deserves attention, the architectural heritage of socialism appears to be worth knowing only as a Western art project”; and in her article titled ‘The Americans and Buzludzha,’ Vasileva (2019) agrees:

“now in our country, when one of the most respected international foundations for the preservation of architectural modernism in the world has de facto officially recognised the architectural qualities of the Memorial House of the Bulgarian Communist Party on Buzludzha [Peak], the tone of the debate has changed. It turns out that when the assessment of one’s own heritage comes from outside, well-packaged as a ‘Western’ project, Eastern Europeans are much more likely to accept multiple interpretations of their own past.”

There appears to be a delicate balance to be maintained here – on the one hand, it is suggested by Vasileva that a Western framing of the monument’s value leads to greater appreciation of the site’s objective quality amongst locals. However, in her evaluation of the Museum of

Communism in Prague, Bukovská (2020) noted how the Western framing of the exhibits there engendered a sense of disenfranchisement and ‘scepticism’ in locals, and as a result the site saw far more interest from foreign visitors.

However, ideologically, the involvement of Getty is significant beyond just the fact that they’re foreigners. Chapter 6 explored how the Getty Trust was “an institution created out of thin air in order to spend Getty’s money in conformity with US tax laws,” thus an inherently capitalist organism, that was made possible “by a tax system that lets rich Americans off the hook if they donate money to art, and in moral terms puts statues before people” (Norman, 1992). As such, it might be fair to reason that the corporate ideology of Getty is the very polar opposite of socialism.

Beginning in 2019, as per the terms laid out in the Getty Foundation’s grant award letter, this foreign organisation was quick to assume editorial control over the narrative surrounding the project: advising that they would take the lead in dealing with complaints and protests; as well as stating that any content written about the monument or conservation project, by any organisation or individual involved, would need to be approved by Getty before it could be published (Appendix 1). Additionally, the importance of appeasing the Getty Foundation’s shareholders was stressed as being a key consideration in the framing of any public conversation about the project. As a result, by the power of their financial investment, it might be asked whether Getty’s shareholders now control a greater stake in the monument’s future than does the average Bulgarian citizen; and it would seem a safe assumption that Getty Foundation shareholders are people who do not hold favourable views of communism. This raises the question: supposing Bulgaria did have a referendum on the future of the Buzludzha Memorial House, and a majority of the country decided that they wanted the monument to be *restored* (as a symbolic temple glorifying the successes of the socialist movement and its triumph over capitalism); would a Getty-backed project be prepared, or able, to honour that wish? If Bulgarians decided that they had been better off under communism, could a Getty-led team permit that to be the message of the restored monument? Rather, that the narrative of the conservation project now depends on the approval of Getty’s PR team, who in turn are answerable to Getty’s shareholders, presents a situation going forwards which seems to automatically preclude certain possible futures for the site. Indeed, it might be questioned whether a truly pluralist approach to discussing the monument’s history is even possible under such an arrangement.

9.6.4 Accountability (*The House Always Wins*)

The *Accountability* of a heritage management plan was previously defined as the degree to which it offers transparency and fluidity in answering to the changing needs and values of the society that owns the heritage. Vukov (2012) stresses the importance of public discussion around sites of communist heritage in Bulgaria, in the interest of maintaining transparency and to avoid falling into what he calls a “top-down approach in interpreting the communist epoch.” Corruption and profiteering, it was shown in the case of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, is the enemy of Accountability and transparency.

Chapter 5 reviewed literature on Bulgaria that found the country showed a “deep ambivalence about democracy,” resulting from “the amnesia of Bulgarians about their Communist past, and apathy about their democratic present” (Brunwasser, 2009). Bulgaria has been described as “Europe’s most corrupt country” (Kuebler, 2016), and it was noted that “Enrichment by dishonest means has become a part of the Bulgarian transition and that has been absorbed by the young generation [...] This is an important part of trauma of the transition” (in Brunwasser, 2009). According to contemporary research, Bulgaria and other post-communist countries show “very different standards for respecting intellectual property rights” (Nalepa, 2016), and numerous studies into academic plagiarism ranked Bulgaria amongst the worst offenders surveyed (for example, Heitman & Litewka, 2011; Foltýnek & Čech, 2012). It has been suggested that this is in part due to the belief “that cheaters get away with it” (Chankova, 2017), and Bulgarian law has traditionally not strongly policed the idea of intellectual property rights or plagiarism, though this is something that is seen to be changing in the country: not least marked by the creation of new anti-plagiarism legislation in 2018 (BTA, 2018). Further, it has been noted that such differences in academic cultures and values might result in a scenario where it becomes “hard to harmonise academic standards across Europe” (Heitman & Litewka, 2011).

During the course of my involvement with this project, I unfortunately experienced numerous incidents which made it clear that the current Buzludzha Project is not immune to those problems suggested above; and when I stepped away from the project in April 2020, it was because I had grown disillusioned and disappointed with the way it was being managed. As noted in Appendix 1, even after I left, I continued to see the unauthorised and miscredited use

of my work, a matter I eventually had to settle with the help of lawyers in order to protect the originality of this very thesis. My Bulgarian contacts and colleagues who were aware of these various issues did not express surprise, however, but to the contrary, numerous of them identified it as being very typical of a more widespread problem they perceived as afflicting their country. One Bulgarian friend, when I told him that someone else had taken the credit for five years of my work, commented: ‘I guess you can call yourself a true Bulgarian now.’

Even in 2018, Donald Niebyl predicted that when working on such a high-profile site as Buzludzha, there were likely to be issues related to the ownership and credit of work:

“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” (Niebyl, Appendix 3).

One possible way to explain these issues, is in relation to the social reality that the monument now finds itself in. When the Buzludzha Memorial House was created, under communism, huge teams of volunteer workers committed themselves to the project for no personal gain other than participating in what they believed was a greater good; a national achievement. One interviewee in the scoping exercise – Konstantin – had as a youth participated in the construction of the Monument to the Founders of the Bulgarian State, at Shumen, and he remembers:

“[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. [...] 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” (Appendix 2).

Today, Buzludzha is located within a socio-political landscape that replaces the importance of community with capital. Those approaching Buzludzha today don’t just come to contribute towards a greater good for the Bulgarian people, but rather, they also draw benefit out. The heritage organisations now involved with Buzludzha, gain benefit from attaching their name to this world-famous building. (They’ve occasionally been credited also for work that they

didn't do – see Appendix 1). The Getty Trust, meanwhile, gets wealthier through the process of donating (Chapter 6); if they didn't give this money to *someone*, they'd have to pay taxes instead, at a higher rate.

Ultimately, however, all of these organisations can only even access the monument with the permission of the state, who remain the owners of the Buzludzha Memorial House. This poses a number of problems for the project. It has been shown that the Bulgarian government's approach to sites of communist heritage is one that favours “institutionalised amnesia,” and an avoidance of uncomfortable conversations about the past (Vukov, 2012). Historically they have pursued this approach through a policy of hiding or removing heritage of the communist era as soon as it becomes problematic – including the demolition of both the Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov (BBC, 1999), and the Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria (Novinite, 2017a). Meanwhile, the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia was managed as a subsidiary beneath the state-owned National Art Gallery, “so that if and when the museum becomes threatening to the political power it could be easily and quickly shut down” (Guentcheva, 2012). The Bulgarian government currently holds the Buzludzha Memorial House in this same kind of grip, and even since the first Getty grant was awarded, the local decision-maker has threatened to derail the entire project by preventing all access to the monument (Appendix 1). Moreover, so long as the government own the monument, there will always remain the possibility that they could halt all work and close the site to conservation overnight. All it would take is an election, and the appointment of a new leader with strong anti-Buzludzha feelings, for a lot of the progress so far to be undone.

Additionally, there is the issue of potential profiteering. It has been suggested that the Bulgarian government has a tendency for misappropriating incoming funds, so should more money be forthcoming, for example, the €7.5 million [£6.2 million] plus taxes that would be required for a full conservation (according to Aymerich, 2018), then it becomes increasingly likely that such a government might want to find a way to receive and manage those funds itself. These issues suggest parallels to the process that occurred at Chernobyl – a case which demonstrated how a corrupt government will seek to control any profits, while forcing private companies to operate according to a corrupt system. However, the companies that do manage to operate successfully under such a system then run the risk of later being removed themselves, should the government reform and attempt to tackle the issue of corruption. Certainly, it demonstrates the fragility of any project associated with sites of controversial

political heritage in a landscape where politics are still prone to dramatic shifts and changes. In 2017, Ivanova herself noted how quickly the project grew political:

“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” (Ivanova, Appendix 3).

Meanwhile, sponsors like the Getty Foundation, as outsiders to this culture, and to whom the project has deliberately minimised any mention of the ongoing local controversy, likely do not appreciate just how politically delicate the entire situation is. Getty’s approach to this difficult heritage has been to (paraphrasing personal communications): *trust that grantees will follow through and deliver the project according to how it was outlined in the grant application*. However, it might be said that this approach depends an awful lot on trust, in a place that has been described as “Europe’s most corrupt country” (Kuebler, 2016), and whose society remains deeply divided in their attitudes towards the heritage in question (for example Daraktchiev, 2009; Brunwasser, 2009).

9.6.5 Accessibility (*May the Pathways to Buzludzha Never Fall into Disrepair*)

As has been noted already, *Accessibility* will always be a difficult consideration in the case of the Buzludzha Memorial House. At the opening ceremony in 1981, Todor Zhivkov declared: “Let the pathways leading here – to the legendary Buzludzha Peak [...] never fall into disrepair.” However, following the Changes in 1989 they *did* fall into disrepair, and additionally, in winter months, they become harder still with frequent heavy snowfalls. The northern road up the mountain in particular can often become entirely blocked, and can be marked as closed for months at a time. Today there are a handful of hotels located just south of the monument, and the presence of these businesses means the southern road is typically better salted, in addition to the benefit of being on the ‘sunny side’ of the mountain. However, the final stretch to the monument, above those hotels, is still sometimes simply inaccessible. On one group tour the author led in 2017, the bus couldn’t pass beyond this point and the group made the final ascent to the peak on foot, scrambling up the snow-covered side of the

mountain (see Plate 83). Lawler comments on the difficult location of the monument, being “built in an isolated location,” despite this being “primarily a usable space,” that wants to be filled by people. As a result, he questions how this could ever become a “sustainable space” without “shipping people on organised visits from other tourism centres in Bulgaria for day trips.”



Plate 83: In January 2017, the mountain roads blocked by snowdrifts, the author leads an international tour group on foot up the side of Buzludzha Peak (own photo: 27 January 2017).

In summer the approach to Buzludzha is less treacherous, though it still lies some 20 kilometres from the nearest town with hotels and restaurants, and 60 kilometres from the nearest city, Stara Zagora, that is large enough to have direct road and rail connections to the airports either in Sofia or along the Black Sea. During the years the author ran a website dedicated to the monument, the most frequent type of message received from site users were those asking for advice on how to get to Buzludzha; eventually necessitating the creation of a dedicated page advising on options for private tours, car hire services, or the various combinations of public transport and taxis required to get to the top of the mountain. Since work began on conserving the mosaics in 2020, the local council has undertaken some efforts to improve the condition of Buzludzha’s mountain roads; and certainly, if the monument were

ever to reopen to the public again, the management would no doubt make a regular habit of salting those roads. Yet the geographical problem still remains, that Buzludzha is just not a convenient place to reach.

During its original years of use in the 1980s, visitors were shipped to the monument *en masse*. Coaches ferried children up the mountain on school trips, while factories, offices and other workplaces similarly commissioned large vehicles for organised group visits. It was said that every Bulgarian should see Buzludzha – not least since they helped pay for it – so that visits were encouraged, facilitated, and managed by the state. It is doubtful that any new conservation project will subsidise visits to the site in the same way though, and so it seems inevitable that Buzludzha will never again see the volume of visits it received in the 1980s. It remains to be seen, also, if a touristified Buzludzha can even attract sufficient visitors to fund its own existence. In Bulgaria, the least affluent country in the EU, once Bulgarians need to independently fund their own visits to the monument, it might be asked how many of them actually will; and in that case, what good a restored Buzludzha Memorial House actually does for the country in the end, anyway.

9.7 The Haunting of Buzludzha Peak

In 2015, the earliest version of this study was built around the following Research Question.

To what extent does the visitor economy preserve sites of difficult heritage within post-communist space; and in so doing, what role does 'dark tourism' play in offering channels of political legacy and reconciliation?

Some answers might now be proposed as follows.

When asked whether tourism to Buzludzha could potentially help to facilitate some form of reconciliation between Bulgaria and its past, Minard noted that “at first glance, such tourism does not play a major role in a reconciliation process of memory.” However, he then reports having seen a change over time, as the monument became better-known internationally, and this in turn prompted renewed conversations amongst the “Bulgarian authorities and media.” Additionally, he notes how “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 eventual result of this is that Minard foresees how a reappraised monument “could generate a different vision of the communist past (still often associated with labour camps and repression in the collective mind).” This point clearly echoes the idea expressed by Vasileva (2019), that: “when the assessment of one’s own heritage comes from outside, well-packaged as a ‘Western’ project, Eastern Europeans are much more likely to accept multiple interpretations of their own past.”

Lawler initially finds this question of national reconciliation through communist heritage tourism to be “impossible to answer.” Ultimately, in his opinion, site visits are less influential on tourists than the information that they receive through other channels. He suggests that: “non-domestic tourists’ opinions are more heavily formed and influenced by what they read, watch, and are told than by visits to such sites.” Meanwhile for domestic tourists, “it’s not the visits themselves that influence opinions, rather the way information is presented to them.” By example Lawler suggests formal channels of information through institutions, as well as informal channels that include family, community, friends and the media. Ultimately, Lawler suggests that one cannot evaluate any positive effect until the relationship between visitors and these sites improves. In that way, he suggests that the question of how these sites can best cater to visitors is being posed “the wrong way round” – instead of sites of memorial heritage having to cater to visitors, he believes that policy should focus on “educating visitors as to the best way to treat them.” At memorial sites he has researched in Bosnia & Herzegovina, Lawler explains that he has seen proof of “souvenir hunting,” “graffiti,” “littering,” “camping and campfires.” Evidence suggests to him that much of this was being done by foreigners, which to his mind reflects a “neo-colonialist attitude from visitors, whereby locals’ monuments are there to cater to their needs.” Lawler proposes that the solution is to “educate people about behaving around war memorials and other sites of significance as if they were in their own country.” For example, he suggests providing such information by way of on-site signage, or leaflets made available at travel depots, hotels, hostels, museums and tourist information centres. While this point supports the previous suggestion (for example by Kulić, 2018 and Vasileva, 2019) that visitors to communist heritage sites in Southeast Europe engage in modes of travel fraught with ‘neo-colonialist’ overtones, Lawler’s point also offers reinforcement for another idea – that the information necessary to correctly frame these sites, and to dictate how foreigners ought to behave, in many cases simply isn’t being provided by the authorities responsible for them. Therefore, in response to the question above, it might be

concluded that reconciliation through communist heritage tourism is not an impossible prospect – but it can only happen once such tourism is recognised, structured, and managed by the state.

More telling still, was the comment from Todor Rusanov, one of the creators of *Buzludzha VR*, on the idea of Buzludzha serving as a place of reconciliation: “it would be really difficult to push this concept forward [...] Even to explain to people why they need something like this.” In other words, the current lack of consensus amongst the people of Bulgaria as to what to do with the country’s communist heritage, extends to the point that there is a lack of consensus even on whether such conversations need to happen, or if it is perhaps simply better to ‘Forget Your Past’ – as one graffiti slogan at the monument once read (Appendix 3).

Therefore, this thesis now concludes that the Buzludzha Memorial House cannot provide reconciliation to the country – because the monument is more a reflection of the country, than it is an influence on it. Speaking about whether or not the Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria should be allowed to remain in the centre of Sofia, Popov (2008) wrote:

“Today, the [monument] is a phenomenon precisely because a quarter-century after its creation, it more accurately represents what Bulgaria is – arrogant, illogical, smug, talkative, chaotic, confused, a self-destructive structure. [...] I have always thought that the monument should be removed without much fuss, or be drastically remade. Today, however, I think that after taking the necessary precautions, the monument should be left as it is, without any interference... until Bulgaria has changed enough to deserve another monument.”

This statement is found to be doubly true with regards to Buzludzha, a monument that was designed to represent *the People* in their historic struggle for self-determination, yet since has become a physical manifestation of the competing forces of post-communist iconoclasm, ‘institutionalised amnesia,’ and tentative capitalist reterritorialization within the country. According to Saunders (2018):

“[Dealing] with the past in a responsible manner is often a slow and arduous process, and one that cannot be solved through the simple erection or destruction of a material structure. Indeed, rather than embodying collective memory, such structures serve as sites of interaction, discussion and meaning-making. [...] monuments and memorials are perhaps best understood as a starting point – not an end point – for a society’s engagement with its past.”

In the case of Buzludzha, the discussion around the monument's potential conservation is not an end point to the country's conversation with its past, but rather, represents the start point for a contemporary discussion with Bulgarian heritage.

The notion has been proposed that the Buzludzha Memorial House could be 'depoliticised': that the monument could potentially be adapted, to reflect new political realities – for example, the architect Stoilov believes that his monument has a certain degree of ideological flexibility, and agreed with an assessment of the structure as a “a universal vessel,” and that the monument was “more suited to being repurposed than perhaps any other monument in Bulgaria.” He notes: “all of Buzludzha's architectural elements, except the star, have the potential to be universal. The star, however, is symbolic of communism.” Stoilov therefore proposes:

“[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” (Stoilov, Appendix 3).

In this way, Stoilov conceptualises Buzludzha as a monument of Bulgaria, not a monument to communism, and moreover as one that might change and evolve alongside the country it serves; ‘V krak s vremeto’ (*In pace with the times*), just like graffiti artists wrote over Sofia's Monument to the Soviet Army in 2011 (Lazarova, 2011).

The *Buzludzha VR* project demonstrates another way the monument's form can become a vessel for new cultural realities. In this virtual version of the monument, no political symbols are visible and the shape has been transposed, instead, to reflect a contemporary reimagining of this ‘universal’ architecture. Yet, even this virtual version carries inside it traces of the past: shine a virtual torch onto the walls of *Buzludzha VR*, to reveal socialist mosaics beneath the contemporary murals. In a similar way, the Hagia Sofia was museumified for 86 years, but its potent cultural symbol as a mosque was never truly lost, enabling it to be rededicated as a place of worship in 2020. (TRT World, 2020).

At Buzludzha, it is more than just the decorations that make this a potent and inherently political symbol. The scale of the monument, its location, and its external shape are all very specific to a particular mindset, and these things about it can never be changed. It is a smooth

concrete saucer, a sci-fi symbol of the future, accompanied by a symbolic flag, planted at the top of a mountain in the heart of the country, gazing down over Bulgaria in all directions. Such an object could never be made unpolitical. As Vukičević (2020) says: “there is always agenda in design. All architecture conveys meaning, whether intentionally or not.” However, the political framing of the monument, it has been shown, could be altered perhaps and ultimately, Buzludzha will amplify whatever message is put into it. If it is destroyed, then that empty peak will echo a new message across the plains. Or if it became an Amazon fulfilment centre, equipped with a fleet of drones flying packages out in all directions across Bulgaria, then just as surely, it would become a monument to the global empire of Jeff Bezos. The idea that a political symbol can be depoliticised is inherently misguided. It can only be adapted, co-opted, baptised into a new political context... and the context surrounding Buzludzha now is far from being devoid of politics, but rather, the current project and landscape is rife with its own new political dimensions.

Buzludzha cannot be depoliticised, simply because any incoming project will inevitably bring its own politics with it. Fisher (2009) described our current socio-political climate as ‘capitalist realism,’ and observed how capitalism is able to consume and adopt the symbols of other ideological systems simply by allotting them value as capital within its own ‘system of equivalence.’ Whereas Deleuze and Guattari (1983) talked of conscious processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, Fisher’s all-consuming capitalist realism is presented as being less focussed and deliberate, more inevitable, and spreading like a virus. He gave the example of the British Museum, as an agent of this consuming capitalism; “where you see objects torn from their lifeworlds and assembled as if on the deck of some Predator spacecraft.” However, there are also strong parallels here to how Lewis (1998) described the Getty Centre in Los Angeles, as a place where “the art sits in discrete containers, much like a corporate collection in a carefully manicured boardroom.” (An interesting future study could make an architectural comparison of the two buildings – Buzludzha and the Getty, both Modernist constructions on raised-altitude promontories, yet built as symbols of opposite ideologies.) Similarly, also, at Buzludzha now, ‘the art sits in discrete containers’... its elaborate mosaics now covered by temporary shelters, which it has been stated will not be removed until the ceiling is first fixed, at an estimated cost of 5 million BGN [£2.1 million]. Thus, the mosaics are saved, theoretically, but have become a kind of ‘hidden heritage’; they have gone from being admired by thousands of visitors, as they decayed, to being admired by no one, as they are preserved.

Perhaps the Getty Centre is in fact an even better illustration of Fisher's point, than his own example of the British Museum. Zuboff (2015) previously located Lacan's idea of the 'big Other' within capitalist surveillance and data collection systems, citing companies such as Facebook, Apple and Google; though really such principles of control are not inherently unique to the capitalist world (see for example East Germany, the modern Chinese Communist Party, or the 'Big Brother' of George Orwell's *1984*). Perhaps it might be argued that the Getty Trust is a purer expression of the big Other within capitalism, being a new type of organism, only possible under capitalist reality: "an institution created out of thin air in order to spend Getty's money in conformity with US tax laws. [...] it has not come into existence to meet any obvious need – except to spend the legacy" (Norman, 1992). Whereas Facebook, Apple and Google have more tangible structures and leadership figures, Getty, as a nebulous collection of interlinked business entities created to manage and grow the fortune of a dead-and-buried billionaire, might be a closer expression of a big Other that: "can never be encountered in itself; instead, we only ever confront its stand-ins" (Fisher, 2009: 44). In terms of ideological management, the Buzludzha Memorial House might be said to have therefore passed from the hands of one big Other (the Bulgarian Communist Party), to the next. As if this symbol is so hot, so heavy, that only the strongest manifestation of power under any given system is able to handle it. This, therefore, is the cursed legacy of communist monument mania – the widespread construction of "the kind of monuments built by people who were blind to the possibility of their own eventual downfall" (Richter, 2018a) – buildings that are not useful, that are not comfortable, that are incredibly expensive to maintain: a material legacy that struggles to find the means or motive to survive under any subsequent system.

When Vukov (2012) described a "top-down approach in interpreting the communist epoch," he was talking about *government*; but now, a decade later, we undoubtedly live in an era that sees corporations growing more powerful than presidents.

What value can the monument have in such a context? When "Buzludzha, with its ruined sci-fi shape, embodies the failure of [the former society's future-utopian] hopes and thus perfectly matches with our present dead-end situation" (Minard, Appendix 3). In interview, Caroline Trotman said: "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.” Minard similarly notes: “such vestiges help to comprehend past ideologies and alternative ways of thinking.”

Buzludzha *does* have objective value as art – something more and more Bulgarians are now beginning to appreciate, in part as a result of outside expert assessment (Vasileva, 2019). But for it to have cultural relevance again for Bulgarian people, for this art to *connect*, it needs to represent the full plurality of Bulgarian experiences. It should celebrate the artistry and craftsmanship of the original design; but also, to reveal something of the post-communist struggle too, the decay, the abandonment and the looting, which are all now part of the monument’s story. However, Buzludzha cannot give reconciliation to Bulgaria, if Bulgaria is not ready for that; and absorbed into capitalism’s ‘system of equivalence,’ Buzludzha is more likely to exist now as an expensive piece of art on top of a mountain, no longer truly the ‘people’s monument.’ Nikolova (2020) defined the perspective calling for the monument’s restoration as a *socialist* attitude, though it might now be argued that actual socialism would give a higher priority to first addressing the social problems causing Bulgaria to be ranked as “the most unhappy country in the EU” (Harris, 2015). Fixing an expensive monument which limited numbers of Bulgarians will ever get to see, in a country where many live in poverty, or without access to schools, healthcare, or other basic human rights, is not the definition of socialism. (Indeed, the initial project to construct such a monument in the first place could hardly in retrospect be called a socialist action, given that the country was at that time already facing economic struggles.)

If the monument is a ‘universal’ vessel whose message can be changed (as Stoilov claims), and a position is reached when its new decision-makers are anti-communists, does it follow then that Buzludzha could even become an anti-communist monument? There is certainly precedent for this – consider the cases discussed in Chapter 4, of the anti-communist messaging at the Prague Museum of Communism, or Budapest’s House of Terror; or in Section 2.6, the case of the Motherland Monument in Kyiv, whose museum has been reconceptualised, post decommunisation, no longer as a pro-Soviet space, but now as an anti-Russian one. For all this though, Buzludzha will never be able to detach entirely from its communist past, and as the case of the Hagia Sofia shows, such places retain the power to someday still be reinvigorated. As such, Buzludzha will always be a monument that shows the possibility of an alternative to contemporary capitalist realism; as Dobraszczyk (2010) observed of Chernobyl, it becomes a place that might “challenge existing certainties and provide liberating alternatives.” Buzludzha Peak is haunted today by the ghost of a lost future;

but Minard claimed that the ruined monument can “help to comprehend past ideologies and alternative ways of thinking,” and was a reminder of “the period when capitalism was challenged by alternative models.” Trotman called it a “powerful visual symbol that has the ability to trigger thought and mnemonic movement,” and which “could intra-connect the old binary system of the Cold War” (Appendix 3). Nikolova (2020) ultimately found that the continued existence of communist heritage sites such as Buzludzha “reminds people that another world – however flawed – was once possible.”

Perhaps for some Bulgarian people, Buzludzha already provided an experience of reconciliation. During the 2010s, while the media (both international and domestic) focussed chiefly on the phenomenon of foreign visitors to the site, on-site security guards reported that roughly 50 percent of those visitors were Bulgarian nationals (an observation that is certainly supported by the researcher’s own visits to the monument over the years; indeed, on many visits, there were *only* Bulgarian people visiting the monument). Inasmuch as the ruined Buzludzha Memorial House was ever able to provide reconciliation to Bulgarians, this thesis proposes that it was during this period of ‘democratic decay’ that it happened – when tens of thousands of Bulgarian people were free to enter the building as they chose; to confront the symbols of the previous order on their own terms; to marvel at the artwork, or to draw vulgar graffiti over the faces of former dictators; and to realise that “the big Other was not that different from us after all” (Trotman, Appendix 3).

In life, it was the ‘people’s monument.’ In death, it became a place of democratic and authentic encounters within a once-sequestered place of power. Now that democratic era has come to an end though, and the monument is once again sealed against all but state-approved visitors. Any future visitor experience at Buzludzha, in the current political climate, is liable to present a form of Foucauldian touristic consumption whereby visitors are told carefully scripted versions of the monument’s history, framed within ideological perspectives approved by the contemporary Bulgarian government, the EU, and the American Getty Trust’s shareholders. Visits will be scaffolded within ‘safe’ readings of the monument’s art and legacy. Yet there still remains one avenue for the democratic consumption and investigation of Buzludzha, as a symbol of everything it can stand for: in virtual worlds, as shown in Chapter 8, users have the democratic power to create, reimagine and reframe according to their own life-worlds and perspectives. Even though the material heritage of communism may today be so big, so difficult, that it can only be physically managed by agencies that will also

seek to ‘cleanse’ it of some of the meanings it once stood for, the increasingly democratic and accessible worlds of virtual creation present infinite possibilities for the consumption of such heritage conversations; and it is in this realm, in pluralist digital conversations and conceptualisations, not through any “top-down approach in interpreting the communist epoch” (Vukov, 2012), that young Bulgarians are more likely to eventually find their reconciliation with the country’s difficult past.

9.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the findings of the study in depth, and has considered what implications it may have in relation to the literature reviewed in Volume One. The chapter began by revisiting the research question, and establishing what value a monument *can* have to a society. It also summarised the findings from the visitor survey (Chapter 8) to address the most fundamental question concerning contemporary Buzludzha tourism: who are these tourists, where do they come from, and what are they doing on Buzludzha Peak? It found that most come looking for an ‘authentic’ brush with history, and that these international travellers valued architecture higher than any other factor.

The chapter then revisited Chapters 3, 4 and 2 of this thesis (in that order), highlighting questions that arose in the literature review, and answering them using both the descriptive statistics resulting from 300 visitor surveys (Chapter 8), and the rich data obtained through interviews with experts and stakeholders (Appendix 3). It was found that while visits to the Buzludzha Memorial House might reasonably be defined as either ‘dark tourism,’ or ‘urban exploration,’ the tourists themselves do not generally make these associations; indeed, most don’t consider this to be a particularly ‘dark’ destination, while similarly, a majority would rather pay for tickets to a conserved memorial house, than to have to enter it, as a ruin, in any mode of engagement that might be described as ‘urban exploration.’ The political dimensions of the building were ranked to be of lesser value to visitors than its architectural quality, and so the chapter concluded that ‘architecture tourism’ is a better descriptor for these visitors. In a conversation on the subject of Orientalism, this chapter found some support for previous suggestions that those visiting Buzludzha in particular, and sites of communist heritage in post-communist space in general, were engaging in modes of engagement that might be considered as having Orientalist or neo-colonial dimensions. However, particularly in a consideration of how such places have been seen to be decontextualised, and sensationalised

in (particularly online) contemporary representations, the chapter found that Orientalism alone was not sufficient to explain the phenomenon, but rather, domestic treatments of such places typically played a fundamental role in how they are semantically pre-packed for presentation to the tourist gaze. In the case of Buzludzha, many of these issues, the chapter found, can be noted within purely domestic discourse about the monument. Finally, this section considered the Buzludzha Memorial House as a work of ideological architecture, and it discussed its relationship to other sites of communist heritage in Bulgaria – proposing a model of *Risk* and *Demand*, as a way to categorise these places as sites of contested heritage.

Section 9.5 was concerned with the future, and it identified, explored and critically evaluated five different potential outcomes for the Buzludzha Memorial House; namely to ignore, destroy, sell, restore or adapt the monument. The likely positive and negative results of each outcome were considered, as well as relative costs, and various organisations, commentators and decision-makers were identified as being either for or against certain outcomes. Drawing on the findings from the netnography, interviews, and visitor surveys, it was demonstrated that a majority of those visiting Buzludzha today want to see an authentic restoration of the monument to its original form. Museumification – including new adaptation as a national or educational venue – or preservation in a managed, semi-ruined form, were also popular proposals, though not as universally favoured as restoration. Such adaptation did also raise numerous notable concerns – including that such a new venue might not handle the ideological significance and political history of the site in a suitably pluralistic and representative way. The least popular outcome(s) for the monument, was either its outright destruction, or any kind of ongoing negligence and decline.

Section 9.6 discussed the researcher's own academic activism, as explored in Appendix 1, and it proposed a model showing how a conservation campaign was able to bring about a historic change in the fortune of the monument, leading to the first on-site conservation work to begin. Subsequently, this section took a critical look at the project so far, and it assessed it according to the model for communist heritage management proposed in Chapter 4, which introduced a model based on factors of Authenticity, Accountability and Accessibility.

Finally, the chapter drew conclusions based on the above sections, and indeed, in reflection on the thesis as a whole. It returned to ideas from Chapter 2, about hauntology, capitalist realism and the big Other, as it attempted to make sense of the fate of this communist monument in

post-communist space; and it critically evaluated the notion of ‘depoliticisation,’ ultimately finding that the Buzludzha Memorial House was at its most democratic during its period of unguarded decay; but that the closure of the monument, in line with new conservation work beginning, represented a return towards a heterotopic status as an inaccessible site of ‘hidden heritage.’ In the following chapter, these concluding thoughts will now be formalised into a thesis statement, that aims to definitively answer the research question.

Chapter Ten

Conclusion

“Neither by the public, nor by those who have the care of public monuments, is the true meaning of the word restoration understood. It means the most total destruction which a building can suffer: a destruction out of which no remnants can be gathered: a destruction accompanied with false description of the thing destroyed. Do not let us deceive ourselves in this important matter; it is impossible, as impossible as to raise the dead, to restore anything that has ever been great or beautiful in architecture.”

The Lamp of Memory, John Ruskin

“Some things are more precious because they don’t last long.”

The Picture of Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde

10.0 Introduction

In this final chapter, the thesis will draw together the conclusions of the previous chapter, based on the results of a multidisciplinary research project, in order to offer a definitive answer to the Research Question posed in the Introduction to this thesis. Additionally, the chapter will reflect on the research process and its results as a whole – evaluating how well the study has been able to address its aims and objectives, and looking at what original contribution the work has been able to make to the field. The chapter will critically assess any shortcomings or limitations of the study, and it will suggest worthwhile avenues for future research to pursue.

10.1 Answering the Research Question

This thesis set out to answer the Research Question:

In what ways can the Buzludzha Memorial House – a monument built to celebrate the communist movement – provide value in post-communist Bulgaria?

Following on from the literature review, and the completion and analysis of the scoping exercise, netnography, 316 quantitative survey questions with past visitors to the site and additionally eight interviews (formal, informal, and semi-structured) with experts and stakeholders, this thesis can conclude:

The Buzludzha Memorial House today has incredible value as a site of cultural heritage, even beyond the borders of Bulgaria – it is not only the finest example of Socialist-modernist ideological architecture in Bulgaria, but should be noted as a significant site of world architecture. The monument is able to offer significant material value as a tourism destination, owing to the strong draw it has on visitors from around the world. That these visitors show an eagerness to pay for the experience, and that many already visit Bulgaria solely to see Buzludzha, demonstrates that as a revived tourism destination, the monument could be considered an asset to the country's economy. Whether or not the monument can ever become as popular again as it was in the 1980s, or the 2010s, remains to be seen – because so much of the unique appeal of this monument in its abandoned state was related to the lack of management and the solitude. The resultant experience of seeing such a powerful political

symbol in that state had a profound effect both on those visitors who had grown up under communist governments, and also for those who did not. A museum-adapted version of this experience simply cannot offer the same quality or value that many of those visitors describe, though it may succeed at drawing in new crowds from elsewhere by providing improved access, safety, promotion and facilities at the site. Additionally – the scale of the necessary conservation project, the relative lack of funds, combined with the continued lack of enthusiasm from both the government, and also from a sizeable portion of the Bulgarian population, added to concerns regarding the incoming ideologies and approaches of new site sponsors and management, would suggest that any conservation attempt will be slow, fraught with difficulties (many of them political in nature), and may yet never see completion. Regardless, the monument was built to serve as a symbol, and even in the post-communist era it retains a significant degree of symbolic value; engendering positive, negative or indifferent interpretations from visitors, as a product in many cases of their own political orientation and experience with relation to the former regime(s). Buzludzha was very much a product of the regime that built it, and while it may be theoretically possible to adapt the building for new use (such as a museum) in a different type of society, its design and location do not naturally equip it for being self-sufficient under capitalist democracy – and furthermore, the notion that it would ever be possible to ‘depoliticise’ this monument is misguided, as architecture will always remain inherently political. Buzludzha survives quite effectively though, as a symbol of Bulgaria and of the condition of Bulgarian society: in that the state of Buzludzha reflects the ultimate test of the country’s ability to make peace with its own past. As a result, tourism to Buzludzha is not likely to be a cause of reconciliation happening between Bulgaria and its communist past, but rather, Bulgaria must first reconcile itself before the Buzludzha Memorial House can be treated as an object of national value.

Therefore, the thesis statement is:

The Buzludzha Memorial House, while increasingly recognised for its material heritage value, is for now ultimately most valuable to Bulgaria as a mirror reflecting the state of the country’s conversation with its past, while also serving as a reminder that other ways are possible.



Plate 84: Mosaic detail inside Buzludzha's Ritual Hall (own photo: 21 October 2017).

10.2 Significance and Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study provided the first data ever collected to describe the demographics, motivations, interests and subjective value systems of those foreigners visiting sites of communist heritage in post-communist space. These findings are significant, in general, because the phenomenon has already been discussed at length in the literature over the past decade – and yet those prior discussions tended to make assumptions when it came to establishing *why* exactly the phenomenon was occurring. Based on the findings at Buzludzha, this study was able to draw reliable conclusions on why foreign tourists were drawn here (then by extension, and according to many visitor accounts, also to other such places in the broader region), but it also found that most would prefer to see the monument restored. Therefore, while the decay was an attraction for them, they generally valued the heritage itself over their subjective experience. Specifically, in the case of Buzludzha, this study was able to show suggested entry fees that visitors would be prepared to pay.

Within Bulgaria, the study found that ultimately the country would not see direct benefit from the restoration of a monument such as the Buzludzha Memorial House. For such benefit to be felt in political and cultural terms, the monument would need to be open to embracing pluralist perspectives on the past. However, this seems difficult to achieve when the site is owned by a state who have been shown to avoid such conversations, and the conservation project itself has introduced political ideologies quite different to those that saw the monument built. Meanwhile, any economic advantage earned via tourism to the site would likely be absorbed either by the exorbitant cost of restoring and then maintaining the site, or else, if the many accusations of corruption levelled against the Bulgarian government were true, then (following in the example of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone in Ukraine) it is likely that state or private companies would position themselves to profit from the site as soon as it was shown to be lucrative. Rather, the study concluded that monuments such as Buzludzha cannot lead the processes of post-communist transition, but the way such heritage is treated can rather be read as a resultant indicator of political and social progress along that path.

In relation to the larger overarching conversation of difficult post-communist heritage, this study found that virtual technology offers a solution with great future potential. The medium naturally lends itself to pluralist perspectives, and particularly in cases where certain symbols may cause distress, contention, or even have been ruled as illegal, a virtual visitor experience allows the past to be reconstructed without controversy. It was additionally noted that the increasingly low bar for virtual creation, as the technology becomes ever more widespread and simplified, makes the medium more democratic all the time.

10.3 Assessing the Aims and Objectives

In the Introduction chapter, it was proposed that this study would be designed to address the following research aim and objectives.

Research Aim	To critically examine and assess whether and how the Buzludzha Memorial House's perceived heritage value might allow it to provide utility and worth in contemporary post-communist Bulgaria.
Research Objectives	1. To critically assess contemporary Buzludzha tourism through a lens of academic scholarship using theories on dark tourism, ruins and heterotopias

	<p>2. To critically evaluate what value the monument retains today that is separate from its now-defunct role as a political emblem.</p> <p>3. To consider how such value might continue to be appreciated in post-communist Bulgaria, and if indeed such a thing is possible, or desired.</p>
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Table 28: Research aim and objectives.

This study has successfully met its Research Aim, having made a thorough examination of the phenomenon of contemporary Buzludzha tourists; and it answers the aim by stating that foreign interest, and the subjective value foreigners place in the site, the more it is reported and the more authoritative are the sources that report it, can lead to a domestic reframing of the heritage; but to fully overcome its controversial associations domestically would also likely take work on the part of the state. In response to the first Research Objective, this study has provided rich results which speak to, and in some cases have been shown to advance conversations in all of these three fields. The second objective has been met by providing a detailed profile of the perceived value of the monument today, considering both domestic and foreign perspectives, in conceptualisations of the monument other than that as a defunct political symbol. Finally, the third Research Objective was met by suggesting and informing approaches to managing the difficult heritage in the post-communist world, and through application to a real-life conservation effort, these approaches have been demonstrated to be sound and offer great potential for further future application in similar such cases.

10.4 Contributions of the Study

The Introduction to this study predicted that it would make the following contributions.

Original Contribution
<p>1. The existing research on Bulgaria's communist-era memorial heritage will be summarised, some of these findings appearing in English for the first time ever, and it will be added to with previously unknown figures on visitors numbers and potential tourism revenues;</p>

2. The general tourism literature that exists for Bulgaria specifically, and Eastern Europe in general, will be added to with research about tourism to communist-era memorial heritage sites, a significant stream of touristic activity in these countries which has been heretofore overlooked by much of the literature;
3. And finally, for the larger canon of work on international dark tourism, this study offers to develop new research into a fringe area that has previously not received a great deal of attention, but yet might help to better an overall picture of dark tourism activity in Europe, and worldwide.

Table 29: Original contributions of the study.

As dark tourism scholarship, this study has served to explore a location that has as yet been largely overlooked by international work on the subject, considering the situation of communist memorials in post-communist space as a kind of dark tourism attraction. However, in their unmanaged state, following regime changes, it was found that these places offered little in the way of scripted or managed tourism experiences, leading to a situation where the perceived darkness of a place was a product of personal meaning-making. This led to the proposal of two new lenses through which dark tourism experiences might be considered, namely ‘Foucauldian dark tourism’ and ‘Debordian dark tourism.’

As heritage scholarship looking at the communist heritage of Southeast Europe, the study contributes new data to the conversation in the form of self-reported motives and perspectives from tourists visiting these places. With this information, the study found some support for the existing theories put forward by previous scholarship, though it also countered some of the previous work suggesting instead that other models might be more useful. Moreover, it identified ‘communist heritage tourism,’ and ‘architecture tourism,’ as being sometimes-related, but ultimately different travel motivations, by showing that many of those visiting sites of notorious communist heritage today are in fact, according to self-reports, simply there for the architecture. Likewise, though tourism to Buzludzha has been described by commentators as representing a kind of ‘dark tourism’ or ‘urban exploration,’ self-reports suggest that in more cases than not, these factors are not what motivates tourists, and such terms do not reflect the phenomenological experiences these tourists have. Therefore, the thesis proposes ‘architecture tourism’ – as a post-modernist and apolitical tourism mode,

focussed on design, over any perceived darkness, or politics, or ruination – as an interesting topic for further future research in itself.

From the perspective of English-language scholarship, this study also shows original contribution in the degree to which it makes use of Bulgarian-language sources and media. Academics such as Horvatinčić (2012) have previously noted how foreigners approached sites of memorial significance in Southeast Europe as if they were mysterious, unexplained and alien objects... when in reality, a great deal of scholarship might already have been published on the subject, in local languages. A trend the researcher has noticed (and which has since become something of a personal pet hate), is when Western writers or media platforms describing sites of heritage ‘abroad’ use phrases such as: *its history has since been lost to the mists of time*; when in reality, the information is almost always there, somewhere, in regional libraries, in oral memory, or oftentimes available simply by searching the internet in the local language. Therefore, this study has aimed to remove the barrier of language, by treating English- and Bulgarian-language sources with equal weight, whether they be books, articles, news reports or social media posts, and as such, this thesis presents the Bulgarian perspective on communist heritage in general, and on Buzludzha in particular, in greater depth and nuance than English-speakers are likely to have encountered elsewhere.

Regarding the Buzludzha Memorial House itself, this study contains the largest body of scholarship on the monument ever to be written in English, and it contributes valuable new information about the monument’s past, its present, and its potential futures. Indeed, the body of work produced about the monument by the researcher during these years has been so prolific and influential, that it has helped to shape the evolving conversation as a whole; the researcher’s work being cited throughout the mainstream media, in articles and reports, featured on two influential websites about the monument, as well as the monument’s *Wikipedia* page (which the author took control of, and largely rewrote, with more detailed and accurate information, in 2016); it appears also in conservation materials, brochures, architectural proposals and technical reports, including in documents and press releases published by Europa Nostra and the Getty Foundation, two of the largest heritage organisations in the world. The downside of this, is that it has at times caused what might be described as something of a ‘Bootstrap Paradox’ – many of the sources I have tried to cite for information about the monument, on inspection, are themselves already citing my work, in some form, as a source. Even in the case of more subtle details, from the commonly agreed

construction price of the monument, to the specific English-language translations adopted for terms like ‘Ritual Hall,’ to estimates for annual visitor numbers; and including also the perspectives of Georgi Stoilov, the architect, whose interview with me was published online, and has now been widely shared and quoted, being treated by many as something of a historical document in itself; throughout the broader conversation on Buzludzha today, for better or worse, everywhere I hear echoes of my own voice.

Finally, in practical terms the study has made the hugely significant contribution of having helped to begin the work of actually conserving the Buzludzha Memorial House. Such an outcome seemed almost impossible at the time this study began, in 2015, though the Academic Activism that the researcher pursued during these years, in tandem with ever-deepening research into the monument and those who visit it, led to and informed a conservation campaign able to learn from the successes and failures of various approaches to communist heritage around the world, and ultimately resulted in the award of a first conservation grant for the monument and the beginning of the first action to be taken towards saving it.

10.5 Limitations of the Study

A number of limitations were noted over the course of the study, which will be explored in turn now.

Sample size. The original design for this study specified that the questionnaire be completed by 100 respondents. Ultimately, the form was shared and distributed beyond what was anticipated, and more than 300 respondents completed it. However, this is still a relatively small sample size, from which to extrapolate the behaviours and motivations of the tens of thousands of people who have visited the Buzludzha Memorial House since its abandonment.

The demographic spread of respondents does also appear to be heavily skewed towards the UK, with 76% of respondents (175 visitors) reporting British nationality. It might be expected that the study would show a predominant lean towards respondents from English-speaking countries – given that the survey, its questions, and the associated online promotion of the survey was all presented in the English language. However, other anglophonic nations were more modestly representing in the demographics (including 20 respondents from the US, 6

from Ireland, 5 from Australia, and 3 from Canada). One reason the UK may be over-represented in the survey, is because not only is the research presented in the English language, but additionally UK tourists can travel to Bulgaria more easily than can Australian or Canadian tourists, for example. However, it is also likely that these demographics have been affected in some ways by the processes through which the researcher, and survey respondents, have shared and promoted links to the survey – as will be further discussed below.

In an idealised situation, the questionnaire would have been made available translated into a number of different languages to cater to a broader demographic of visitors. It is believed that a larger, broader sample may have allowed yet more frames for interesting and worthwhile comparison; for example, posing questions such as ‘How do visitors from post-communist countries view the monument, as opposed to those visitors from countries that never experienced communism?’

While this study specifically focussed on the experience and self-reported perspectives of non-native visitors to the Buzludzha Memorial House (i.e., those doing international tourism), at least as interesting if not more would be a study that focussed purely on the Bulgarian experience, and on the perspectives of Bulgarian visitors to the site. As the primary inheritors of Buzludzha, this data would be essential to any project that hoped to establish the best future use and management approaches for the site. However, this current research chose to focus on the foreigner experience, not only because it allows for an analysis of tourism potential, but also in recognition of the researcher’s own lack of fluency in the Bulgarian language; it was believed that the researcher would not be linguistically qualified to offer a deep analysis of the themes and thoughts emerging from questionnaire comments and feedback written solely in Bulgarian. To conclude, the relative lack of Bulgarian voices is perhaps not so much a limitation of this particular study, as a very clear priority for future research.

Owing to the way the questionnaire was presumably shared, for example amongst friends or within closed online groups, it might also be reasoned that the sample skewed towards groups of like-minded people, rather than being a truly random sample. In this way, another approach that was considered – distributing paper questionnaires to physical visitors on-site – may have provided a more diverse cross-section.

Similarly, many respondents to the survey reported that they had visited the monument on one of the researcher's own tours. Therefore, what they know of the monument may well be shaped at least in part by what the researcher had previously told them about it, including, potentially, the researcher's own subjective reflections and interpretations. Moreover, the researcher has written so much on the subject of Buzludzha now – from articles and blog posts, to tour listings and itineraries, to large parts of the monument's Wikipedia entry, conservation websites, architectural proposals, and in official documents such as the researcher's contributions to the Europa Nostra Technical Report – that at this stage it would be very difficult for anyone to research the subject of Buzludzha without inadvertently consuming the researcher's own work on the subject.

The researcher also notes that his own close relationship to the subject of the research may, at times, have been both an advantage and a disadvantage. This proximity certainly conferred some unusual access to interviewees, to information, and to observing and participating in the inner mechanics of a conservation campaign whose processes were largely not reported to the public, nor available to other researchers working in this field from outsider perspectives; however, on the other hand, the researcher has also found himself growing emotionally invested in the project over the years, and to a degree where the researcher could certainly have been said to prefer certain outcomes for the monument over others being suggested as options. Though every effort has been made to conduct research (particularly interviews and surveys) in a strictly unbiased way that implies no particular preference to one outcome or response over any other, the researcher cannot reasonably rule out the potential for unconscious bias having had effect on his own decisions at times. This close attachment to the subject matter could also be said to have negatively affected the researcher's own mental health on occasions, and certainly, the problems associated with the conservation efforts would not have played an insignificant role in the researcher's own hospitalisation, in winter 2019, for a stress-related health condition.

Additionally, the researcher notes that the data gathered in this study proved to be perhaps more than was strictly useful. The research data produced included 53 recorded conversations with local people at 32 sites of communist heritage across Bulgaria, lengthy transcripts and many hours of audio from semi-structured interviews with eight stakeholders and experts, and a 20-question survey completed by 316 respondents; the latter including multi-part questions and many open forms allowing for individual answers that sometimes spread across multiple

paragraphs of text. Analysing this data was a lot of work, and perhaps, the volume of data gathered was in fact surplus to requirements. If this were redone, the survey would be reconceptualised with more multiple-choice questions and fewer opportunities for respondents to offer their own open-form answers. The result of this research was a great deal of rich data, from which to confidently draw a number of interesting conclusions. But it is the researcher's belief, with hindsight, that similar results might have been achieved as a result of working more efficiently with a smaller data pool.

The researcher notes that many of the models and theories featured in the chapters above have emerged only after the practical phase of research was conducted – and so remain untested. However, perhaps this could be said to instead lend itself to the next section, on proposals for future research.

Finally, another point to consider is whether or not survey responses can be considered truly accurate as representations of motive. There is a stigma around 'Orientalism' – therefore survey respondents could perhaps be motivated to misrepresent their own reasons for going to the monument. However, an investigation of unconscious or hidden motivations would have been simply beyond the capacity of the research tools used in this study.

10.6 Questions for Further Research

While this study has been able to draw a number of fairly solid conclusions, there remains much potential for further research to look at other aspects of the Buzludzha Memorial House and its place in contemporary Bulgaria; as well as applying models and concepts from this study to see how well these ideas map onto the circumstances surrounding sites of communist heritage in other countries. Here are a number of avenues where further research could yet prove illuminating.

The Bulgarian perspective. The decision was made in this study to focus primarily on outside assessments of Buzludzha – looking at the experiences of foreign tourists to the site, as well as talking to many stakeholders who were not themselves Bulgarians. This decision was made partly from the intent of looking at tourism potential, but also because it made sense for the researcher to conduct research in a language with which he was fluent. An important direction for further research, and one that has as yet not been explored to any

satisfactory degree, is asking Bulgarian people, in Bulgarian, these same sorts of questions about the value and future of the Buzludzha Memorial House. Ultimately, whatever happens with the monument, it needs to be Bulgaria's choice – and as yet, the people of Bulgaria have not been asked this question in any satisfactory or comprehensive way.

Communist monuments as sacred sites. This idea was introduced in section X.X, where a brief case was made suggesting that in many instances, communist-era memorial sites replaced the former role of churches and other temples in society. There is great potential to develop this idea further, and relatively little written about this idea in the existing literature. The researcher has already presented one conference paper on this theme, but the potential remains for more dedicated research into this question in future, particularly if it can incorporate a wider range of sites across the post-communist world.

Debordian v. Foucauldian modes of dark tourism. This idea was presented in Chapter 3, and also featured as a chapter of the Palgrave Handbook of Dark Tourism Studies (Morten, Stone & Jarratt, 2018). However, the potential remains to test, and even perhaps further develop, the idea at a wider range of sites.

Communist heritage – Demand and Risk model. In section 9.5.4, a model was introduced showing the relative values of demand and conflict relating to various sites of communist heritage across Bulgaria. It is humbly suggested that this model may provide a useful way of looking at such places in other countries, too. It should be tested though, and further developed, in future research.

Conservation process model. A model presented in section 9.7 illustrated the processes that have been involved in the campaign for conserving the Buzludzha Memorial House. It would be very interesting for future research to test whether these are universal processes, and to perhaps test the model against other cases of conserving difficult heritage. Should the model prove sufficiently sturdy, it may also prove a useful tool in planning such efforts.

Virtual heritage conservation. One of the most interesting themes to emerge from this study has been the growing potential for digital media to provide heritage experiences. In previous chapters it has been shown how virtual reality environments have been created to offer phenomenological experiences of times and places in history, including the Chernobyl

Exclusion Zone, the Berlin Wall, and the Buzludzha Memorial House. It was also noted how digital reconstructions of said places might also have the benefit of bypassing the issues faced by physical heritage sites in response to material costs, symbolism, or in the case of communist heritage, the rules imposed by decommunisation laws. In 2018, the researcher collaborated on a proposal for the future of the Buzludzha Memorial House, which was inspired by those examples above to use augmented reality in a similar way, and that proposal was widely praised, including being well received by the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture. Therefore, there is clearly great potential in this idea, and the digital memorialisation of heritage in virtual forms is likely to become ever more promising, as the related technology develops, and lowers in price, becoming more accessible to wider audiences. It will be fascinating to watch how this emergent field evolves, and as such, there is tremendous potential for valuable new research in this area.

Longitudinal study of Buzludzha. This study has been able to observe a fascinating snapshot of time in Buzludzha's history – from its rise in popularity (and perhaps notoriety) as a ruined and abandoned site of communist heritage, to the site's official closure as the first conservation work tentatively begins. However, Buzludzha's story is far from over and there is tremendous scope for further research to follow the ongoing project from this point, perhaps also in the process testing some of the predictions made in this current study.

10.7 Personal Reflection

This document is the most challenging thing I have ever created, and a couple of times over the last seven years, I thought it might actually kill me. I am happy to report that it did not. But I am no longer the same person that I was when it began. I have grown in confidence, and resilience, and determination as well. I am certainly more knowledgeable now, but with that, wiser too, I hope. I have learned a lot of lessons, and a few of them the hard way.

I have traditionally been better at starting jobs than finishing them. So, completing this thesis feels cathartic: and it has tested me in more ways than I thought possible. From reading, annotating, organising and referencing a library's worth of academic and historical texts, to conducting interviews, and surveys, and managing – then visualising – sprawling spreadsheets of data. I have had to get good at project management over a seven-year period, and while presenting my research to groups was hard at first, it's something I've gradually grown into in

time. Hardest of all though, was the process of synthesising all these multifarious sources into one coherent narrative at the end.

During these years, I have been completely immersed in the subject of communist heritage – including my writing, tours, and campaigning work, plus countless research trips up mountains or into exclusion zones – in addition to the specific research activities set out in this study’s methodology. But for me these other activities have never felt like distractions, so much as opportunities to look at the same questions from an incredible variety of perspectives. And while this study logs a logical, linear route through all that experience, following the trajectory of one remarkable place in a state of transition, ultimately this thesis feels like the distillation of everything I’ve seen, heard, learned, and done in a decade.

Looking back, I believe I was guilty of a certain kind of neo-colonialist zeal when I arrived in Bulgaria. Fresh off the plane, I started looking around, spotting problems, and thinking up ways I could fix them. As if no Bulgarian ever thought of that before. But I have since learned that generational problems require generational solutions; not a plaster. Most of all, Bulgaria has taught me patience. Nevertheless, through my own small contribution, I’d like to imagine I left the country just a tiny bit better off than I found it. In turn, this experience has certainly improved me, and I hope I can now apply all these lessons to my work ahead.



Plate 85: Detail of Cyrillic text decorating the façade of the Buzludzha Memorial House (own photo: 26 May 2013).

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