

CRISIS OF THE MEMORY – TWO MONUMENTS FROM THE SOCIALIST ERA TODAY

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Abstract:

The paper studies the fate of two landmark monuments of the socialist era – the memorial “1300 Years Bulgaria” and the “Buzludzha Monument” – their glorious past and sorrowful present. These are significant historical masterpieces of architecture and art from the second half of the 20th century. They were built to commemorate important events of Bulgarian history – the first one dedicated to the 1300th anniversary of the Bulgarian state and the second – the 90-year anniversary of the local formation of the socialist movement. However, when in the 1990s the political situation in the country changed, breaking with the past was frantically sought and these two monuments, branded as “socialist art” were abandoned and doomed to destruction.

This report is an attempt for a critical study of the way we remember and treasure our past. A semiotic analysis is made in order to examine the compositional characteristics, conceptual contents, semantic and emotional organization of the structural elements of the monuments. The aim is to highlight the artistic merits of the two projects, their communicative and interactive features and to clear their image of the ideological load. Thus, we strive to look objectively at the problem and to assess impartially the style paradigm with its specific artistic and aesthetic qualities.

Today these monuments get absolutely contradictory assessment by the public. The need to rethink their historical role and to start a discourse on the threat of destruction of the cultural heritage of our country is brought to the front. We argue that it is necessary to inform and educate the community on the problems of protection and preservation of the cultural values. Establishing criteria for aesthetic evaluation and formation of values, which is not subject to political bias and reflects the eternal and intransient values in architecture and art is imperative.

In conclusion it is summarized how through an intuitive way of engagement with the monument its resurrection for a new social life in the context of current conditions can be achieved.

1. Introduction

„Atop a 1441m peak in the raw, mountainous scenery of central Bulgaria, a saucer-shaped building stands like a watchtower... a vast ellipse of grey concrete that bulges from the summit. Its empty upper windows look like eye-sockets in an alien head. To its side, a steely turret juts from the ground, crowned with a mosaic of red glass in the shape of a star“. This quote is not taken from a science-fiction book or a screenplay for a futuristic film. With these words, Anita Isalska describes her first impressions of the “Buzludzha Monument” for the largest travel guides publisher “Lonely Planet”. [1] This is just one of the hundreds of monuments built during the totalitarian regime doomed to oblivion by the Bulgarian country and at the same time exciting great interest in foreigners. The monument, advertised as one of the “Best abandoned places in Europe” [2] in recent years has become a hot spot for adventurous tourists from around the world. I was filled with curiosity why foreigners travel

thousands of miles to see these monuments, while we pass by indifferently or categorically reject, even hate them as they invoke bad memories of past communist times. In this paper I chose to consider the fate of two landmark monuments of the socialist era, which today share a common destiny. One of them is the memorial “1300 Years Bulgaria” – dedicated to the 1300th anniversary of the Bulgarian state and the other – the “Buzludzha Monument” – built to celebrate the 90-year anniversary of the local formation of the socialist movement. Both monuments are significant historical masterpieces of architecture and art from the second half of the 20th century. However, when in the 1990^s the political situation in the country changed, breaking with the past was frantically sought and these two monuments, branded as “socialist art” were abandoned and doomed to destruction.

This report is an attempt for a critical study of the way we remember and treasure our past. Our thesis is that through art and architecture, can be constructed the knowledge of an era which is part of our history and cannot be deleted. The aim is through arts-based research to reveal the complex layers of meaning coded in the two monuments, to highlight their artistic merits, communicative and interactive features and to clear their image of the ideological load. A semiotic analysis is made in order to examine the compositional characteristics, conceptual contents, semantic and emotional organization of the structural elements of the monuments. We strive to look objectively at the problem and to assess impartially the style paradigm with its specific artistic and aesthetic qualities.

2. Monuments between past and present

Soon after the establishment of the socialist system in Bulgaria commenced the implementation of Lenin's plan¹ of “Monumental propaganda” which became a fundamental prerequisite for the flourishing state of monumental art in the country. The plan highlighted the role of monumental art and its impact on “mobilizing the moral, spiritual and physical strength of the people”, so it was aimed to participate actively and unswervingly in everyday life. The ethical and political norms of the time were dominating; trends were towards determining the general spirit of great deeds, heroism, unremitting labour, deep thoughts, strong patriotic and civic feelings of love for the country and the party, self-sacrifice for the prosperity of the community [3]. Art was considered to have an important social function as a propaganda tool for ideological and political education of the masses, praise and adherence to the ideas of the Communist Party, and this led to its subordination to the service of ideology and objectives of the ruling party. Through art the party conveyed ideas, raised moral goals, showed role models, inspired feelings of belonging to the social collective. The plan was executed decisively and was introduced as a permanent policy in the architectural design of the urban environment. Its execution was strictly controlled by the party and the state. Keen interest in architectural and sculptural monuments was observed as one of the most important components of the communist propaganda scheme. They were built in every town and village all over the country in order to immortalize and commemorate important historical figures and events through which was sought imposing of the new social order. These large-scale monuments demonstrated and validated the power of the ruling party; they became conveyors of the national history and the “great present” by idolizing the “heroic image” of guerrillas, workers, communists, fighters against fascism and capitalism [4, 5].

The paper will discuss two of the most emblematic monuments built according to the norms of socialist realism – a style dictating the creation of truthful, realistic and easily understandable by the broad masses works of art, socialist in content and national in form. The “Buzludzha monument” is the largest and most imposing monument ever built in

¹ Realization of Lenin's Plan of "Monumental Propaganda" was initiated with a decree issued by the Council of People's Commissars "On Republic's monuments" (sanctioned April 12, 1918)

Bulgaria. It was erected in 1981 to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the Buzludzha congress² which constituted the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party. In the spirit of the era of Communist propaganda, the construction of the monument turned into a highly patriotic, nationwide initiative involving the entire Bulgarian nation. Funds for the construction of the monument were raised by all citizens through organized charity campaigns, sale of stamps and volunteer work in the construction itself. The architectural design was made by a large team of authors, led by architect Georgi Stoilov. “Here is accomplished synthesis of architecture, monumental and fine arts on the largest scale in the country” [6]. The strong emotional impact is achieved through stimulus on all sensory channels aiming to form perception by generating spontaneous feelings, associations and images, and leaving a deep mark in the memory.

The second monument, which will be discussed in the paper, was unveiled the same year (1981) as part of one of the greatest cultural events in the new Bulgarian history – the extravagant celebrations of the 1300th anniversary of the creation of the Bulgarian state. Construction of impressive monuments played an important part in organizing the celebrations, which included a rich program of events in our country and abroad, the goal being not only to note the anniversary, but also to glorify communist government as the most successful in history and to propagate the prosperity Bulgaria was undergoing at that time. Author of the general concept of the monument “1300 years Bulgaria” was the sculptor Valentin Starchev, but the project involved many people including architect Alexander Barov (architectural design), architect Atanas Agura (landscape design) and engineer Milcho Braynov (constructive solutions and calculations). The monument was conceived as a part of the large complex “National Palace of Culture”, situated in the heart of the city.

Erected with great pathos as visual implementation of the ideological and emotional intensity of the period, after the change of the political paradigm in 1989 both monuments drifted too far away from their main role – “to remind future generations of the epic struggles of our people and the party for national liberation and social justice” [6]. In the context of a new political, social and economic organization, these and other monuments built during the socialist government were converted from symbols glorifying the heroic past, socialist revolution, the people and its bright future, into objects of hatred, reminiscent of the oppression and violation of freedom during the regime. Alike all post-communist states in the former Soviet bloc, in our country came a period of nihilistic negation of everything created during socialism which led to widespread removal and destruction of the symbols of the unwanted past. This process can be compared to the manner in which the party destroyed monuments of past periods when it came into power. On the other hand, those monuments that have been preserved ceased to function as such and were turned into ruins because of lack of understanding of their historic significance and the inability to allocate funds for maintenance and safeguarding. The Buzludzha building became an object of vandalism – windows and stained glass were broken, mosaics were dislodged, the copper roof sheathing and other construction elements were plundered, leading to a state of devastation and gradual self-destruction. The same forlorn fate is shared by the monument “1300 years Bulgaria”. Because of the short erection deadlines and poor quality of the construction, soon after the unveiling of the monument, tiles of the marble cladding began to fall while the lack of support and supervision after the political changes contributed further and accelerated the process of destruction.

² The constituent assembly the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party was held at the Buzludzha peak in Central Balkan Mountains – a place of historical significance for Bulgaria, since in 1868 the revolutionists led by Hadji Dimitar and Stefan Karadzha fought their last epic battle for the liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman yoke.

But whereas one of the monuments is situated far in the mountain region and remains somewhat away from public polemics, the other – situated in the centre of the capital of Sofia, began to live a new life in bustling discussions about its future – whether to be restored, reconstructed, deconstructed or moved. Public opinion is divided into two confronting extremes, driven mostly by the political bias of both groups. One of them brand the hated monument as “totalitarian” and evoking bad memories of the communist regime, and find his presence unacceptable in the urban environment. The other regards the monument as a national cultural heritage and stand behind the position that it should be saved as a document of the era in which it was created. In both cases, however, the monument and its destiny evoke strong emotional responses and social unrest. Over a certain period of time public discussions and debates with the participation of citizens, representatives of the local authorities, intellectuals and professional experts (in 2006, 2008, 2012 and 2015) as well as pros and cons petitions (in 2012 and 2014) for removing the monument have been organized. For example, in 2014 a survey was conducted according to which 43% of Sofia citizens think that the monument must be removed and the place should be converted into park. 29% of the respondents believe that it should be removed and at its place another monument should be built, and only 25% believe that the monument should be preserved in its current form, cleaned up and strengthened [7]. Among the most frequently pointed out reasons for destruction is that “the monument is ugly”, without applying any constructive consideration of its aesthetic and architectural qualities, its compositional, artistic and stylistic solution, and the message it conveys. The negative assessments are dictated by the fact that unlike other monuments built at that time in accordance with the standards imposed by the socialist realism, the monument “1300 years Bulgaria” is avant-garde, modernist and misunderstood by the general public, and hence disliked and rejected. The author Valentin Starchev himself says of his work: *“People were accustomed to the old type of monuments – a pedestal and a figure of a certain person upon it. While here, architecture and sculpture resulted in a joint combination in space ... The architecture itself works together with the sculptures on the theme and it is a pedestal of the figures. Innovation after that was – architecture to be dynamic and to symbolize the idea of the monument.”* [8] Therefore, to differentiate from the clichéd perception of these monuments as “ideological”, “socialist” and “totalitarian”, we believe it is necessary to focus the analysis towards the compositional characteristics and structural elements which function as signs making possible the flow of information, as well as on their conceptual and emotional organization to achieve certain effects and impressions. In our opinion establishment of criteria for aesthetic evaluation and formation of values, which is not subject to political bias and reflects the eternal and intransient values in architecture and art is imperative.

3. The language of monuments – semiotics of their material image

The “Buzludza monument” tells the story of the communist party using a wide range of signs-symbols, addressed to all visitors’ senses. A solemn staircase leads towards the monument – at its bottom rise two sculptures of marble and steel, symbolizing floating revolutionary flags. Climbing on it one gets at the base of an elevated in the air grandiose concrete structure resembling a flying saucer. The official entrance welcomes with verses from “The International” and the “Workers’ march” written with embossed concrete letters on both sides. The composition of the building is designed in two contrasting volumes – domed ritual hall symbolizing an altar and a 70-meter high double vertical pillar symbolizing a communist flag. On top of it glow two unique in their scale ruby stars emitting red light visible from far away. The dome is unique not only for its size (60 m in diameter, 14,5 meters in height), but also for its engineering solution – corbel construction whose mass of 640 tons is resting only on three points at the concrete support. If the semantic message of the building is decoded, in its altar-shaped form we will find embodied the idea of a sacred edifice,

untouchable territory of the ubiquitous presence of the party in people's lives. The building can be interpreted as a sanctuary or a catalyst of the “sacred” party ideas in which the symbols of the Christian church have been replaced with symbols of the party. It is not accidental that the full name of the monument is “House-monument of the party” likewise the temple is a house of God. The way that party members walk to the peak can also be compared to a religious pilgrimage to a sacred place for the purpose of learning, enrichment and veneration. Like a religious temple the main celebration hall is crowned with a dome – iconic sign on the vault of heaven, conveying holiness and light. The perfect symmetrical shape of the circle on a subconscious level suggests the spiritual energy and beckons the visitor to be immersed in the experience. The building itself has functioned as a cathedral of communism where “the First Holy Communion” of pupils from across the country took place. During lavish ceremonies they have taken an oath of loyalty to become members of the youth party organizations.

The most talented Bulgarian painters and sculptors contributed to the interior decoration. Entering the lobby, one is greeted by two embossed wall compositions depicting the most important events in the history of the party – “the birth of the party” in 1891 and the “Victory of 1944”. Artistic mosaics depicting in universal and symbolic images key moments in the history of the Communist Party and the building of socialism in Bulgaria were laid on the walls of the two concentric circles (interior and exterior) of the ritual hall. Here, a parallel can as well be made with the Christian church and the orthodox iconographic themes in it – images of saints, main events of the holy history, and finally the Last Judgment – the end of earth's history and the beginning of the next century. The images of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Dimitar Blagoev, Georgi Dimitrov and the party leader of that time Todor Zhivkov take central place in the mosaics while among the depicted themes are – “Struggles and the Victory of the Party”, “V Congress of the Communist Party”, “Socialist Reconstruction of Agriculture”, “April Communist Rise” etc. The composition ends with the interpretation of “Modern Bulgaria” presented by flight, centred by a group of children – the symbol of the future, surrounded by workers, intellectuals, women, cosmonauts – all of which represent the global image of the socialist Bulgarian society. The hammer and sickle – the main symbols of communism were placed in the centre of the dome, surrounded by the international appeal “*Workers of the world, unite!*” and concentric circles creating a sensation of infinity. Among the symbols embedded in the mosaics are noticed: flags³, fire flames⁴, human hands carrying different tools⁵, five-pointed red stars⁶, hammer and sickle⁷, stabbed dragon⁸, wheat-ears⁹, children¹⁰, wings¹¹, sun¹². [6, 8] All means of architectural and artistic composition are used purposefully to transmit ideas and advocate the power and the glory of the party. The impact has been achieved at all levels – physically, emotionally and intellectually. It is sought in each concept of the monument – from the first visual contact with the impressive size of the building memorializing the top like a crown of glory¹³, to the overall experience and

³ Symbol of victory and self-assertion

⁴ Symbol of the revolution

⁵ Symbol of action and socialist labour

⁶ Symbol of the communist movement and the solidarity of workers from the five continents

⁷ The hammer and sickle is conceived as symbol of communism and the party, bringing together the proletariat – agricultural and industrial workers. The hammer is also a symbol of the power of creation

⁸ Symbol of the evil capitalism and exploitation, stabbed by the red flag of victory

⁹ Symbol of the fertility of the native land

¹⁰ Symbol of the bright future of the developed socialist society

¹¹ Symbol of the flight of communist ideas

¹² Symbol of moment when the heroic principles shine at its brightness, the source of supreme riches

¹³ The resemblance of the building to a flying saucer is not coincidence. Bulgaria is a space nation – in 1979 the first astronaut was sent into space.

communication with the interpreted in shapes remarkable historical events of the Party, the luxurious materials used in the interior decoration (marble, stained glass, etc.), colour symbolism, inclusion of sound and light complementing the ambience of the complex, and the contrast between the concrete architecture and the natural landscape.

Let's analyse the other monument – “1300 years Bulgaria” and the main concepts behind its dominant geometric presence in the environment. The basic idea set in the composition “Past, Present and Future” was the theme of the competition for the design of the monument, organized by Lyudmila Zhivkova – Chairman of the Committee for Culture at that time. The author Valentin Starchev interpreted this theme in a dynamic composition consisting of three intersecting vertical structures and figural sculptures, designating significant moments in Bulgarian history. The sculpture group situated in the lowest part depicts ‘Tsar Simeon the Great and the Scholars’ – symbol of the so called Golden Age of Bulgaria – the period of progress and cultural prosperity during his rule. This composition is related to one of the inscriptions the monument *“March ahead, o revived people, to your future march ahead!”* – a quote from the hymn of Slavic culture and enlightenment. The second sculpture, ‘Pieta’ – an allegorical image of the grieving mother, is the epitome of the many victims Bulgaria gave in wars, slavery and rebellions as to survive over the centuries. Associated with the image are inscribed the words of the immortal poet and revolutionary Hristo Botev from his ballad “Hadji Dimitar”: *“He who falls in freedom’s fight, he does not die”*. ‘The Creator’ – the third and highest placed sculpture depicts the ordinary worker. The symbolism epitomized in the image of this artist-creator is that despite all the tribulations, difficulties, catastrophes and slavery, there are always workers and artists who revive the Bulgarian state, they work and fight for its cultural and economic upsurge. The sculpture is complemented with words by the national hero of Bulgaria, Apostle of Freedom Vasil Levski – *“Time is in us and we are in time”*. The overall structure of the 35-meter high monument is a spatial spiral, ending with a bird wing – a symbol of victory, the infinite human desire for perfection, and striving towards the bright future. The spiral is an ancient and universal symbol of eternal evolution and motion in life – life, death and rebirth. It successfully represents the 13-centuries long development of the Bulgarian state and its progress. The feeling of this upward growth is further emphasized by the rhythmic alternation of triangular shapes (symbol of the power of unification) deriving from the triangular base of the monument and developing in all the other elements that compose it in height. The alternating in a vertical gradation sculptural groups bond the architectural elements and give meaning of the memory of the travelled road through the images and the events they represent. Digging the monument below ground level is not an end in itself; it indicates the rise of Bulgaria after sovereignty has been lost twice in XI-XII and XV-XIX century. The design aims when one enters to take a look, the hanging over him sculptural figures with their scale transmit the grandeur of Bulgarian history [9].

Such in-depth understanding of the symbolism woven into the architecture and artistic works of both monuments makes clear that these are universal symbols and although they were used to impose the ideas of the communist party, each of the works not only keeps the memory of the era in which it was created but also has high artistic value. It is quite wrong to ignore these objective values, nihilistically deny everything built during communism and incited by the negative opinion of the period to lobby for demolition. It is necessary to consider the monument in a politically neutral way. Indeed, such is the attitude of the representatives of the generation which grew up after the fall of the communist regime. They do not have the prejudices of their parents, judge objectively the merits of the monuments and feel excited about their architectural and artistic qualities. Take for example what Nikola Mihov, author of the photographic book *“Forget Your Past – Communist-era Monuments in Bulgaria”* says: *“1300 years Bulgaria” monument does not belong only to the two hostile*

groups, but also to the people who come after them. We are the third generation, and the monuments are as traces of extinct dinosaur that everyone can interpret for themselves. Long ago they have sung their ideological song and should be preserved accurately as a contradictory symbol of the regime and the society that created them.” [10] It is our belief that society should be provoked to rediscover history and become intuitively engaged and interpret the cultural message of the monuments in a new manner with contemporary means. Taking into account the radically conflicting assessments, dictated primarily by opposing and overwhelming political bias, combined with the lack of any architectural and artistic culture, the need for a campaign for interactive education is obvious. Acquisition of the necessary literacy is possible only through knowledge conforming to the specifics of the different age groups and social strata. This will become a prerequisite for the formation of a value system regarding the cultural memory and national identity.

4. First steps in memory preservation through interactivity

Mediators of the idea that both monuments could become subject of new value interpretation – original visual guides and transmitters of history for present and future generations, are exactly the young people. They strive to break the boundaries of the ideological burden and search for new forms of expression of the role and function of the monuments. In the next section several positive projects that propose new trends for the preservation of the monuments will be presented. They breathe new life into the monuments and allow using their values in present conditions.

24-year-old architect Dora Ivanova developed the project “*Buzludza – the Memory of Time*” as a graduation project at the Technical University of Berlin in 2014. According to her, the monument has a huge potential and with a minimal architectural and functional intervention the architectural masterpiece could emotionally narrate the long and crucial Bulgarian history in a synthesized and integral review. Her concept consists of a tour of the monument differentiated into two timelines – horizontal and vertical. The horizontal tour takes place in the interior of the domed structure, and chronologically traces Bulgarian history from today back to the creation of the state. In the central hall cleaning of existing marble slabs and additional fitting of 400 comfortable seats is planned. Thus, the space could be used for events such as concerts, film-shows, discussions and various performances. The names of honoured Bulgarians in the sport, science and art sphere will be inscribed on the seats and this will give information about the recent history of Bulgaria since 1989 till today. Mosaics on the periphery of the hall are well preserved and they will tell the story of the socialist period. The missing 20% will be complemented by two-dimensional wire sculptures which will show the contours of the missing images to facilitate visitors to restore mentally the ruined places and better understand the big picture. The corridor between the inner and the outer circle is dedicated to the fate of the Bulgarians during the Ottoman rule. The walls will be left in their present dilapidated state, and black floor and ceiling will be added, creating a dark and long tunnel. Devastation, darkness and limitations of space will enhance the emotional perception of this bad period. On each of the 16 columns in the outer circle, images of significant Bulgarian rulers of the First and Second Bulgarian state will be placed. The window-panes are positioned on the inside of the concrete structure in order to create a feeling of show case behind which the building itself becomes a part of the exhibits of the museum. The vertical tour commences in the basement and continues along the 70-meter high pylon, telling the country's history in sequence from prehistory till today. The series of three halls in the basement are designed correspondingly to prehistory (till 1200 BC), the Thracians (1200BC–100 AD), and the Proto-Bulgarians and the Slavs (100–681). Each subsequent hall has larger space, consistent with the importance of the period. Respectively, the last one is the largest and here the story ends with the foundation of the Bulgarian state. The tour continues with a

panoramic lift revealing not only spectacular views over the ridge of the Balkan Mountains, but also offering chronological overview of our history from 681 till 1944 represented simply by the names of all Bulgarian rulers and the years of their rule inscribed along the height of the tower. On top of it, the space between the two 12-meter stars expands and the elevator enters the 'ruby hall', presenting socialism in an emotional manner – the stars are massive and impressive, but at the same time the ruby glass is broken. The period of transition after 1989 is interpreted with an extension of the floor with a glass platform. Stepping on it visitors feel fear and uncertainty – both characteristic of this period. The tour ends at an outdoor terrace with glass railing on the top level. The 360° panorama offers breath-taking views over modern Bulgaria and returns visitors back to reality and the present. When the weather is clear, the view from the terrace extends over more than 100 km, spanning the ridge of The Balkan Mountains, the Danube Plain and Thracian Valley, but in cloudy days the “present” can be misty, but still opened to new horizons. Besides offering an original idea the young architect is working actively to promote her concept to institutions, architects and stakeholders. She is organizing a number of exhibitions and conferences, including a round table on “Modern heritage at risk” held in February 2016 in the European Parliament. Furthermore, she launched the “Project Buzludza” foundation to raise funds for the realization of her project. [11]

And while Buzludza is awaiting its renewal according Dora Ivanova’s vision, this is already happening in the virtual reality. The idea comes from the Bulgarian Todor Rusanov and the Pole Rafal Czarnowski – students at Napier University, Edinburgh. Their project is a virtual reality experience using ground-breaking VR technology. They transform the Buzludza monument in a multifunctional recreation complex with a concert hall, a museum and a panoramic corridor. In the virtual reality symbols of the communist system are replaced – the star with a lion, the slogans at the entrance with the Bulgarian anthem. *“For us, this monument is not something related to the politics of a particular time in Bulgarian history, it is an architectural fact which should have its future in time,”* said Todor Rusanov. Entering the building, one gets in a luxurious room with a reception and a cafe. A lift takes to the second level and an amphitheatrical hall with 400 seats and a grand piano in the centre. Windows reveal realistic view of the surrounding landscape. The corridors exhibit pictures of different landmarks in Bulgaria and with a single click visitors can learn more about them. The inner corridor houses a museum of the monument with photographs representing its current state [12,13].

Experiments to revive “1300 years Bulgaria” monument in Sofia using modern technological tools have also been made. For example, in 2013 “Transformatori” association organized the “Revision” competition for audio-visual transformation of the monument with 3d mapping. The aim was to provoke young artists to re-evaluate the monument in its urban and historical context and to translate it in present days. The event involved nine participants and creative teams, who offered their novel interpretations of the specific geometry of monument’s surfaces, converting them into evocative and attractive interactive displays. Besides creative exploration of this new media, young artists provoked reflection on the future fate of the monument, and although for a single night they breathed new life in it with their projects – ‘MEMORYal or noMEMORYal’, ‘The Memory of Monuments’, ‘De’mode’, ‘Unite Our Dreams’, ‘From Demolition to Creation’, ‘Sky and Earth’, ‘Birds’, ‘Steam Factory’, ‘pART OF THE HEART’.

“Transformatori” association initiated one more competition for ideas how to use the monument in a novel way and how it could remain part of Sofia urban environment without demolishing it. The competition was looking for conceptual ideas, aiming to draw the attention towards the problems around the monument and the possibilities for unfolding its

true potential. Several of the proposals envisioned the monument as a skate-park, others as a music space for DJ parties, a stage for various cultural events, a Gallery of Modern Art, a youth centre, a climbing wall, an outdoor cinema, even a giant beaver. The project awarded the first prize transformed the monument into a ‘space’ for creativity. The author Nikolai Ivanov wanted his project to solve two pressing problems in recent years – the state of the “1300 years Bulgaria” monument and at the same time the lack of exhibition space for contemporary Bulgarian art. The MMALL (Museum of Modern Art for All) explored the idea of negative space, interpreting the existing structure of the monument and turning it into an empty space surrounded by the architecture of a new museum, in which the built-in monument would become its first permanent exhibition. Second prize was awarded to Mariana Sarbova and Gergana Tileva who offered the reconstruction of the monument to be completed through modern media tools. As a result it becomes a multidimensional urban screen for digital videos. In this way the monument will flow into the urban memory by enlivening the urban space around and its transformation into a stage for diverse types of urban activities. “How not to forget 1300 in 30” was the project that won the third place with authors Sava Kislyakov and Tsvetozar Petkov. They restore the monument by preserving the density of the visible concrete and extending the structure with translucent glass panels. They design recreation and communication zones thus retaining the recently created tradition of organizing graffiti art exhibitions at the place [14].

5. Conclusion

It is obvious that the new generation which is not ideologically burdened evaluate impartially the artistic merits of the monuments from the socialist era. Their insights transform our knowledge and understanding of these monuments and can be used to create positive change in the attitudes of society and to form a new visual culture of Bulgarian citizens of all generations. Through art not only social change can be generated, but also knowledge for past epochs can be constructed. This knowledge can be irretrievably lost if its material carriers – the monuments are demolished. And our half-destroyed monuments continue powerfully to impress and excite people. In order to materialise the projects into practice and to create new cultural routes within the frames of international cultural and historical networks, the public opinion should be unified. This can be done only through education and rethinking of the intransient architectural and artistic values of the monuments. They should never be treated as ideological objects whereas the knowledge generated through arts-based research can initiate change in the social interaction with these monuments and serve as a source of new experiences. Lastly, I will conclude with quotations from the world’s largest travel site TripAdvisor regarding the monuments in Bulgaria:

“Breathtaking view, deep history – must go!”

“Simply mind blowing piece of history..... Go out of your way to see this before it is destroyed”

“Out of time”

“Totally Unique”

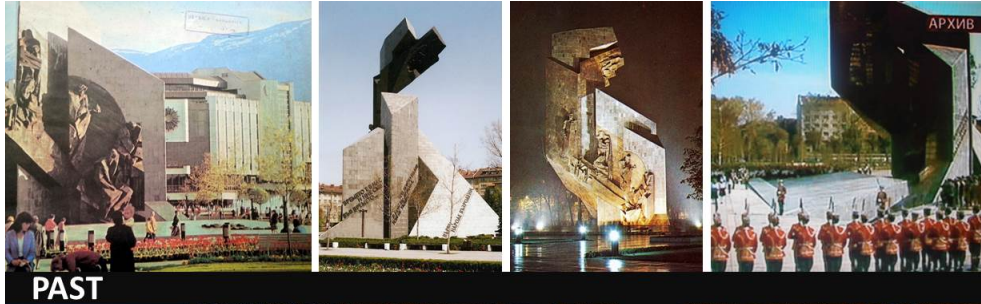
“Utterly surreal and fascinating”

“Unmissable. Eerie. Creepy. Historically significant. ”

“Guaranteed unique experience!!!”

“Unique and strange- a hidden Bulgarian gem”

“A must see!”



PAST



PRESENT



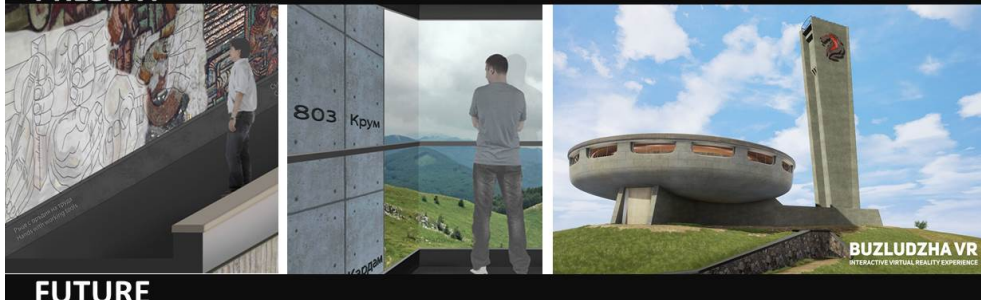
FUTURE



PAST



PRESENT



FUTURE

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