

An Innovative Approach towards Preservation of Tangible Cultural Heritage Issues through the Lens of the Public Relations

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The preservation of cultural heritage has a long history and a vast theoretical background. Yet its current issues are more challenging and some of its contemporary approaches – more controversial. The biggest risk factors for the tangible heritage are war-related destruction, damage done by the intensified cultural tourism, demolition and inadequate treatment due to urban sprawl and infrastructural development, owners' reluctance to take proper and sufficient care for the monuments due to heavy administrative procedures, inconsistent laws and regulations coupled with high costs for maintenance and renovation.

These problems have a common denominator – the inability of the public and the stakeholders to recognize the importance of the tangible heritage as an external common memory, as a valuable testimony and material proof for past events. By analysing the current issues and the top-down nature of the legislation (both national and international) and the fact that most of the preservation actors and procedures are highly institutionalised, we believe this inability is rooted in the lack of available and sufficient public information about monuments under threat, especially those of local importance.

Thus we propose an innovative communication-based bottom-up preservation approach which would popularise architectural heritage with the methods of public relations and the tools of crisis communication. By addressing issues on the professional and nonprofessional level, by small personal interventions, by visualising the loss of the heritage fabric on local and national level we strive for raising an open and honest discussion about the future of built heritage as an irreplaceable bearer of information. We aim to raise awareness of the importance of everyday preservation, to educate a broader and more informed audience, to foster a higher sensitivity towards public memory issues, in order to pass our history and our memories to future generations.

Key words:

Bulgaria, heritage, public relations, management, preservation, bottom-up.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of cultural heritage has a long history and vast theoretical background interlinked with the development of the urban fabric. During the past century the protection of cultural heritage has seen a worldwide increase in the establishment of a legal framework encompassing charters, recommendations, guidelines and conventions (Fig. 1).

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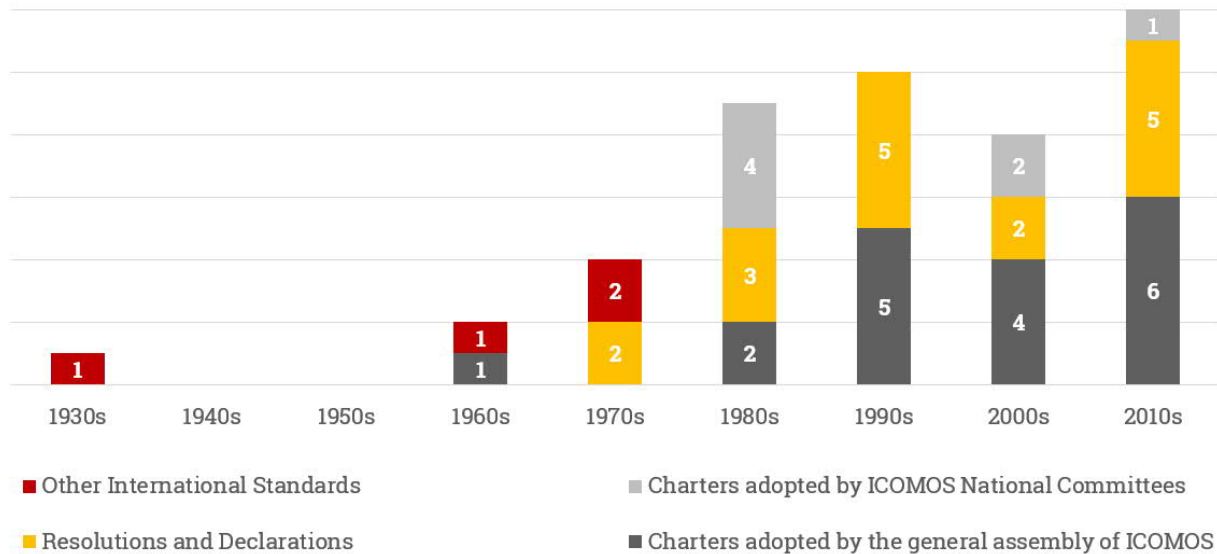


Fig. 1. Charters and other doctrinal texts developed or accepted by ICOMO¹, © N. Toleva-Nowak & W. Nowak

The biggest risks to the architectural heritage are war-related destruction [Stig Sørensen and Viejo Rose 2015], damages by intensified cultural tourism [Harrison 1994], air-pollution [Watt 2009], natural disasters [Meier et al. 2007], demolition of ruined monuments and/or their inadequate treatment, abandonment and intentional or unintentional structural collapse; accelerated urban/infrastructure sprawl and development [Agapiou et al. 2015] and urban quarters renovations, leading to the demolition of cultural heritage as it is often perceived as an obstacle to urban development. The common denominator for all these issues is the owners' inability or even reluctance to take suitable care for the monuments leading to their fast and irreversible physical deterioration and turning them into a hazard for the inhabitants and the public. Last, but not least, a huge setback for the proper preservation are the inconsistent laws and regulations, the long and heavy administrative procedures during the development of restoration and conservation projects, the specifics and the high costs for the urgent building fortification and consolidation works and renovation actions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The first broad public issues marking the beginning of the fight for the preservation of architectural cultural heritage was the attempt by Robert Redhead to demolish Clifford's Tower in York (UK) in 1596, which led to intense citizen protests [Cooper 1911]. Later the debate stirred around Viollet le Duc's and John Ruskin's [Ruskin 2013] contrasting concepts on preservation [Spurr 2012]. Three decades later William Morris proposed that a delicate balance in preservation based on daily care and minimum drastic interventions is needed in order to counteract the growing loss of authenticity [Morris 1877].

Morris' daily care proposal ensuring the survival of a building is reminiscent of the homeostasis and processes needed to keep an organism alive. The metaphor of the city as a living organism and the good maintenance practices are among the leading topics in the works of Plato (Timaeus), Aristotle (The Politics) and Vitruvius (De Architectura). Regarding the city as a living organism and contemplating the needs for its well-being, in the Medieval Ages, the work of Francesco di Giorgio Martini further develops the concept by representing not only the city as a whole, but also the individual building as a complex organism.

The biological metaphor may be the key to the "Theseus' ship paradox" in regard to cultural heritage preservation – a living organism changes its constituent cells many times over its lifetime, but the value lays in the functioning collection of parts and the complexity of the whole. The care-and-repair process is just as important as the structural

¹ data from <https://www.icomos.org/en/charters-and-other-doctrinal-texts>

and aesthetic integrity, and thus both the skills and the know-how for proper maintenance of a building constitute a vital part of its tangible and intangible value.

The bio-metaphor is particularly suitable when it comes to the built cultural heritage, due to the long and multi-layered evolution of the edifices. The longevity and the well-being of the monuments could be addressed similarly to the well-being of an individual by adapting Maslow's Pyramid of needs [Maslow 1943] – a classification system describing the universal individual and societal needs. By transcribing this social concept in the field of the architectural heritage, sustainable preservation and environmental practices could be achieved:

Table 1. Maslow's pyramid transcribing to the tangible heritage needs

	№	Maslow's pyramid of needs	Scope	Heritage's pyramid of needs	Achieved level of preservation
Basic needs	1.	Physiological needs: 1.1) Breathing; 1.2) Food; 1.3) Water; 1.4) Shelter; 1.5) Clothing; 1.6.)Sleep.	Basic/physiological needs for the survival of the subject.	Physical needs: daily, weekly, annual maintenance practices, inspections, cleaning, etc.	Ensuring the physical survival and structural integrity of the monument
	2.	Safety and security: 2.1) Health; 2.2) Employment 2.3) Property; 2.4) Family and social stability.	Safety needs	Safety needs: small repairs and renovations, ensuring the safety of the building, its proper condition	
Psychological needs	3.	Love and belonging: 3.1) Friendship; 3.2) Family; 3.3) Intimacy; 3.4) Sense of connection.	Social belonging and communal belonging: proper integration in the existing society	Conservation and restoration: accentuating the most valuable and most specific function and appearance of the monument in terms of its history and evolution	Securing the historical value authenticity – a valuable prerequisite for social importance and longevity of the monument
	4.	Self-esteem: 4.1) Confidence; 4.2.) Achievement; 4.3) Respect of others; 4.4) The need to be a unique individual 4.5) Meeting the ego needs	Esteem – proper development within the existing society and culture, feelings of accomplishment	Societal adaptation: achieving proper inclusion and function in contemporary life. Utilising the monument in its full potential in order for it to be useful for the community; to gain recognition and to keep the building alive	
Self-fulfillment needs	5.	Self-actualization: 5.1) Morality; 5.2) Creativity; 5.3) Spontaneity and acceptance; 5.4) Experience purpose;	Reaching the full potential of the individual/the monument in order to reach sustainable and fulfilling existence.	Sustainable preservation: reaching the full potential of the building and its role in contemporary urban life, which ensures its proper place, care and longevity.	Reaching sustainable preservation and ensuring the longevity and well-being of the monument

Following the Table above, the sustainable preservation, exploiting and exhibiting the full potential of the heritage cannot be achieved without satisfying the basic safety needs. The common denominator of most of the problems at the basic level in the process of the initial physical preservation of the heritage is rooted in the inability of the owners, the inhabitants and the stakeholders to understand the significance of the monument and its four major value aspects [McCaig 2013a]: evidential, historic, aesthetic, communal.

Thus, in the best interest of the users, owners and the community is bringing closer the heritage and the broad public. This principle of aligning mutual interests is the keystone in the practice of Public relations, and involves several tools like raising awareness, spreading easily assimilated information, involving the local community. By empowering the stakeholders, by giving them knowledge and proper tools to tackle the daily maintenance problems and to take suitable care of the monument by themselves, the first and most important steps towards sustainable preservation are being made.

AIM AND METHODOLOGY

The common denominator of most problems facing cultural heritage is the inability of the broad public and stakeholders to recognize the value of the built heritage as a precious material proof for past events, as a community

binder, as an element bringing aesthetics, vitality and diversity to the urban environment, enriching the spirit of the city, and creating versatile space and multi-layered environment. In order to tackle this, the authors propose an innovative communication-based bottom-up preservation approach for raising awareness among the broad public which has no understanding of the concept of preservation, engaging PR's methods of crisis communication. The methodology includes: problem analysis and assessment of the current architectural heritage issues in Bulgaria, creating a suitable communication strategy, elaborating monitoring parameters for the results and planning future steps. (Fig. 2)

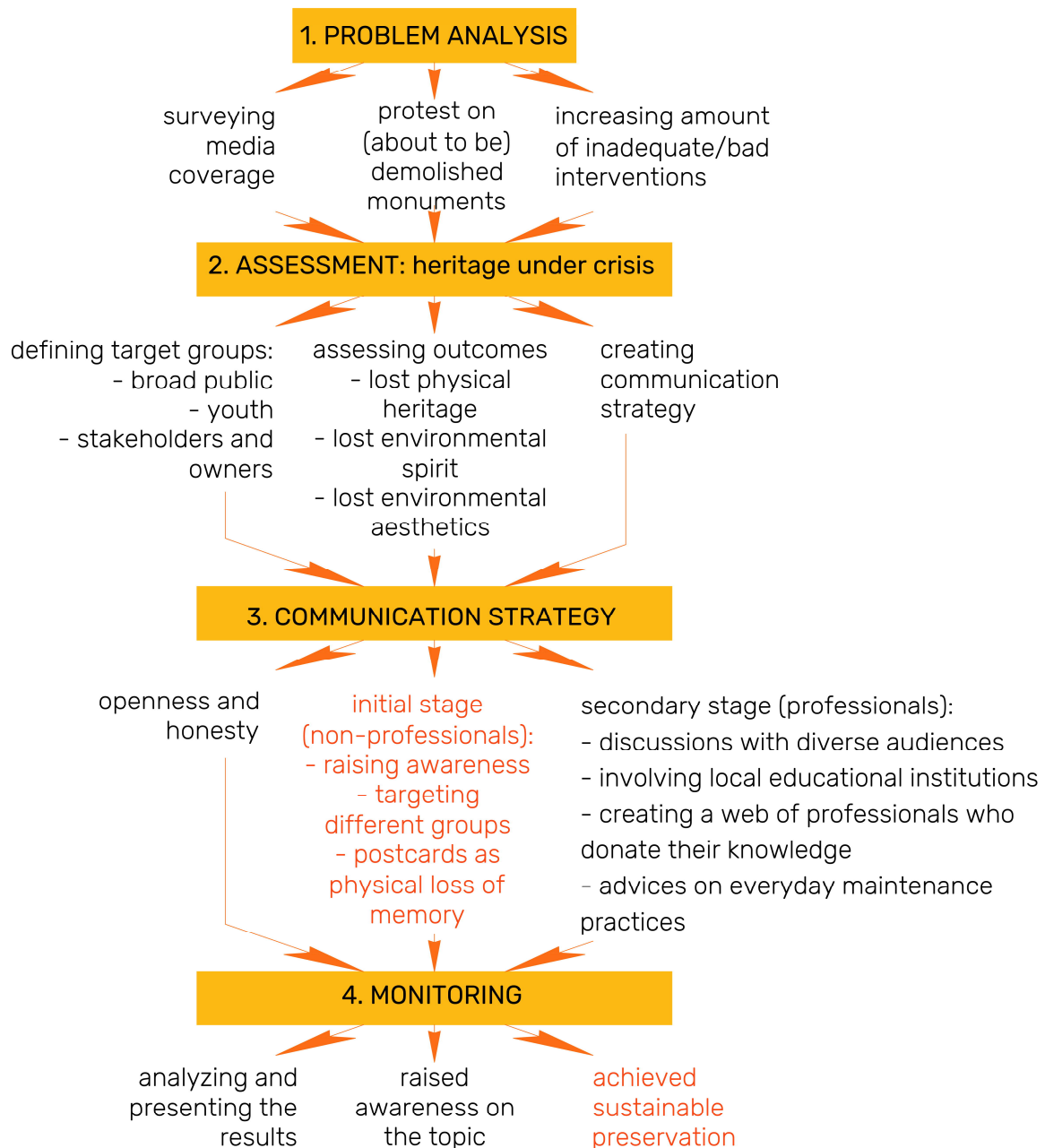


Fig. 2. Methodology, © N. Toleva-Nowak & W. Nowak

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Bulgaria has a diverse and rich cultural heritage with its 39,476 listed monuments of culture (Figs. 3a and 3b) according to Functional Analysis of Sectoral Policy in the Field of Protection and Presentation of the Immovable Cultural Heritage, implemented as a part of BG05SFOP001-2.001-0006 project „ Establishment of uniform rules for carrying out functional analyses of horizontal and sectoral policies “, financed by ESF “Good Governance”.

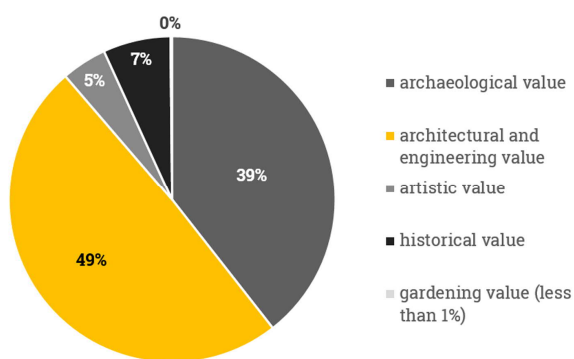


Fig. 3a. Types of listed monuments,
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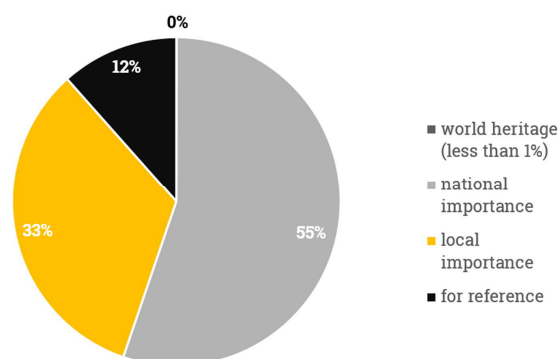


Fig. 3a. Listed monuments in terms of their value,
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Bulgaria has over 140 years of history of preservation of cultural heritage and the topic of preservation and care for the national cultural and historical heritage are enshrined in the Constitution (Article 23). It also states that everyone has the right to enjoy national and universal cultural values (Article 54). Overall, the process of preservation on a state level can be divided in 4 main periods. Svetoslav Georgiev suggests it may be divided into three main periods [Georgiev 2008], yet with Bulgaria joining the EU in 2007 and the resulting harmonization of the legislation, a fourth one is needed.

The first period encompasses the years from the Liberation (1878) up to the “World War II” (WWII) and relates to the first laws and regulations on cultural heritage management (Provisional rules for scientific and literary enterprises 1888, Law on the Search for Antiquities and for the Support of Scientific and Literary Enterprises 1890, Antiquities Act 1911, Ordinance-law for the preservation of ancient buildings in settlements 1936). They protect historical richness in their diversity (both tangible and intangible) and set the boundaries of the institutional system for preservation.

The second period starts after the end of WWII and lasts up to 1990 with the fall of the Socialist regime. During that period all the regulations and institutions are dismissed and a new structure takes place – The National Institute for Monuments of Culture (1957), which covers all cultural preservation and management policies and practices.

The third period (1990-2008) is characterized by the decentralization of the rights and the responsibilities and involvement of different actors in the conservation process – other state, municipal structures, institutions and public actors, designers, etc.

The fourth period (after 2009) after the EU accession and the harmonization of legislation, the Law on Cultural Monuments and Museums (1967) is repealed and the Law on Cultural Heritage (2009) enters into force, which currently has 12 amendments (Fig. 4).

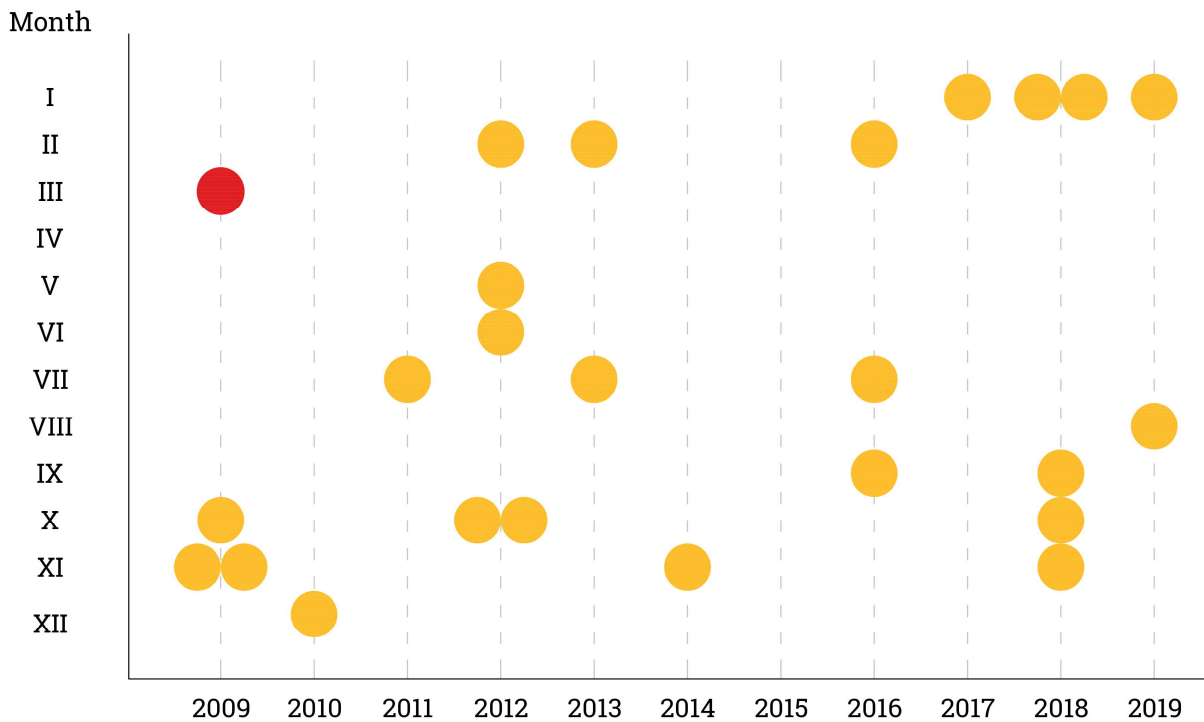


Fig. 4. Changes in the Law on Cultural Heritage from its publishing up to August 2019,
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According to an audit report on the implementation of the “Conservation and Maintenance of Architectural Heritage Sites in the Urban Environment for the Period 01.01.2015 to 30.06.2018. ” from February 2019, the identified problems are mainly related to the impaired coordination between the conservation bodies, the lack of sufficient administrative capacity, gaps in the existing rules as well as a number of laws on the protection of cultural heritage that are based on or cite non-existing, phantom regulations. It is worth noting that the report itself is also top-down and does not allow for the involvement of non-institutional partners. Unfortunately, in the final recommendations to this report, the burden of conservation efforts is once again placed on the state or municipal structures, while also reinforcing restrictive measures on other stakeholders.

At the regional level, there is a section on cultural heritage in the regional development plans, but it is broad and quantitative in nature, only listing the number and type of objects, with no comments on the property ownership structure and no in-depth analysis of their condition and problems affecting conservation measures. In 3 out of 265 municipalities in Bulgaria (Sofia, Plovdiv, Gabrovo) that have developed a cultural strategy (Dobrova, N., 2018. Стратегии за развитие на културата като възможност за българските общини. Известия на Съюза на учените - Варна. Серия Икономически науки , 7(1), pp.145-153.) there is again only broad quantitative data on immovable cultural heritage. There is no focus on the problems, strategies and opportunities for adequate protection and promotion and the involvement of owners and other interested parties.

According to Miroslav Krastev this top-down centralization and institutionalization of the decision-making process leads to disassociation between the stakeholders and the broad public and the heritage itself, and fortifies the perception that the State is the only actor in the process of preservation [Krastev 2016]. He also suggests incorporating the concept of “participatory governance” in the management process, which is a leading topic in the European Agenda for Culture: Work Plan for Culture 2015-2018 [Krastev 2015; Kabakov 2018]. Yet this principle implies a strong knowledge and understanding about the basic values and principles of the cultural heritage. Overall, there is a striking lack of studies, surveys and attempts on the bottom-up approach towards preservation of cultural heritage in Bulgaria.

In order to trace the understanding and the involvement of the broad public in Bulgaria with the problems of the cultural heritage, a survey in the online media coverage was implemented. The survey included covering news about

monuments demolished by fire, arson, negligence, bad interventions or conscious demolition in favour of new modern buildings, lawsuits about ownership, controversial decisions about the value of the monument, discussions and protests on the future of archaeological remnants and other listed buildings and monuments, public discussions and presentations on key projects concerning cultural heritage, as well as protests against the demolition or impending demolition of listed buildings.

The first online articles dated back to 2003 with news for a listed building demolished in a fire. As seen in Fig. 5, the trend of buildings demolished or severely damaged in a fire is increasing, reaching its peak in 2016. Another worrying trend is the number of demolished or self-collapsed buildings and its peak almost doubling in 2017. On the other hand, the reaction of the public (mainly specialists and people with acute interest in the field of cultural heritage) increased after the intensification of those trends, which leads to the conclusion that an even broader information campaign on the significance of the cultural heritage and its understanding is needed. Also, these news mostly reflect the problems with the listed buildings of national importance. For the monuments with lower protection, there is hardly any news coverage, rendering the following graph as just the tip of the iceberg:

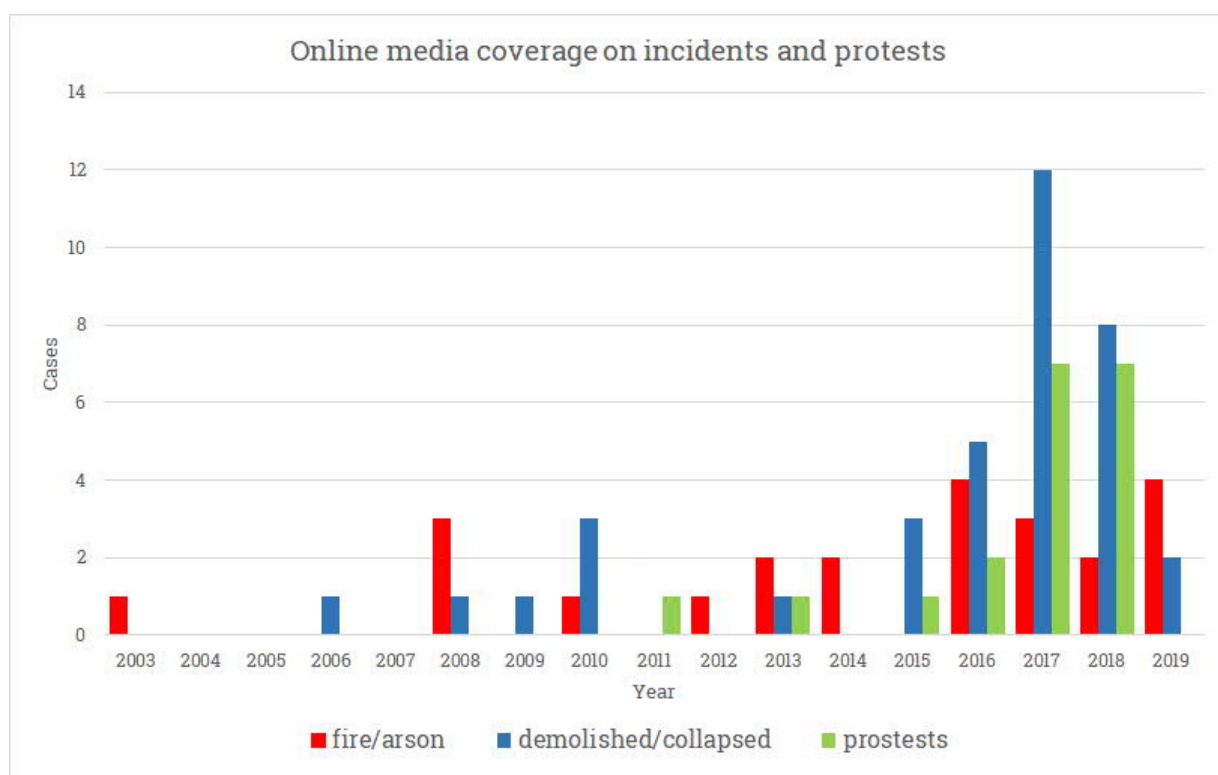


Fig. 5. Online media coverage of incidents or protests and discussions on cultural heritage demolitions and collapses (up to February 2019), © N. Toleva-Nowak & W. Nowak

Another major factor is that most of the listed buildings are privately owned, and a huge percent of them have a shared ownership among more than 10 owners, which hampers the decision process for any repair or restoration even further.

Also, the heavy, expensive and complex administrative procedures often push the owners towards conscious negligence, leaving the monument to decay beyond repair or even collapse, in order to create a *tabula rasa* for new investments and to substitute the monument with a new building, mimicking (often unsuccessfully) the original one. A common practice is to leave the roof damaged (or damage it on purpose) and wait for a few winters for the wood to rot and collapse and thus to be rendered dangerous for the community and up for demolition.

These factors, along with the increasing amount of inadequate or bad interventions in the cultural fabric due to private initiatives (inadequate measures for energy efficiency, false reconstruction and improper add-ons onto

existing buildings, unsuccessful restorations with poor quality, etc.) that were observed during field surveys has led to the final assessment that the cultural heritage in Bulgaria is in a state of crisis (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Monument in decay, © N. Toleva-Nowak

In conclusion, various legislations, including much of the international charters and instruments, have a strong top-down character. By this forced institutionalization of the value of the monument, by taking a leading part in every initiative and by the highly restrictive nature of the laws and regulation, the main burden and responsibility for the preservation of the monument is transferred to the owner, without any financial or other form of support from the state. This is especially problematic for monuments of local importance (representing 45 % of all monuments in Bulgaria) because they are mostly private property, predominantly in desirable locations. The hard economic situation and a series of economic crises have a direct impact on the state of the architectural heritage. As a result, even petitions are being drawn up to remove a UNESCO World Heritage Site (Nessebar City) because the local community perceives the restrictions only as an economic disadvantage.

Thus, we believe that a new bottom-up approach in preservation is needed and attracting the owners and the stakeholders as partners is crucial. For this, we need them to fully comprehend the value behind the heritage. In order to raise awareness and achieve better understanding of the problems, a definition of the addressed target groups is needed. Four main segments were defined: youth (mostly students from special schools such as the Professional High School of Interior Architecture and Woodworking and the Professional High School in Architecture Construction and Geodesy), owners of the buildings with particular historic or aesthetic value for the urban environment, stakeholders with particular investment interest in the field of real estates in historic quarters, and the broad public of non-specialists with no particular interest in cultural heritage issues.

Only on this solid ground a future interdisciplinary and inter-institutionary debate can be fostered.

CREATING A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

For each and every target group a unique communication strategy is used, accentuating a main feature, closest to the audience group – i.e. the loss of interesting and versatile communal spaces, the loss of physical memory of one's personal memories, the missed opportunity of developing integral project and the loss of environmental spirit and urban aesthetics. On the other hand, the target audiences must not feel accused of being negligent about their property. They must feel as a vital and active part of a dialogue in which their voice is heard and their concerns are taken into account. Thus, instead of feeling helpless, they feel empowered and even more eager to step up. These main factors informed the PR-based communication strategy.

The communication strategy addresses these issues on a professional and nonprofessional level by small personal interventions, by raising an open and honest discussion, by presenting the true complex and multi-layered value of the built heritage (especially the monuments of local importance) as an irreplaceable external memory and bearer of information. It is developed in two main stages. The initial stage is based on reaching the non-professionals and raising awareness among the defined target groups. As a conversation starter a unique postcard is used. It represents the loss of the cultural heritage fabric as carved in the fabric of the paper. The most severely damaged parts of the façade are shown as holes, and the ones that are in intense process of decay are carved as a hatch, rendering the façade of the monument as extremely delicate and fragile (Fig. 7a). This tactile feeling of something too brittle is strengthened by the fact, that the back-side of the postcard becomes unusable – the holes in the fabric obstruct its main purpose as information bearer (Fig. 7b), or makes it unreadable (Fig. 7c). Thus, by a simple perforated postcard with a picture of the monument at risk, the owner, the inhabitant or the other stakeholders feel the loss of the building fabric as a loss of a person's private memories.



Fig. 7a. Postcard as a conversation starter, © W. Nowak



Fig. 7b. MEMENTO MEI POSTCARD: representing the physical loss of urban memory, rendering one's personal memories unusable and lost, © W. Nowak

So far the concept for a postcard used as conversation starter gives unexpectedly good results. Often before any questions are asked, people share stories and their personal experience with their own houses, to give ample insights and details about the struggles they have been through in the process of communication with the co-owners, tenants, administration, designers, etc. Each conversation enriches the understanding of other problematic aspects prior to any repair or reconstruction.

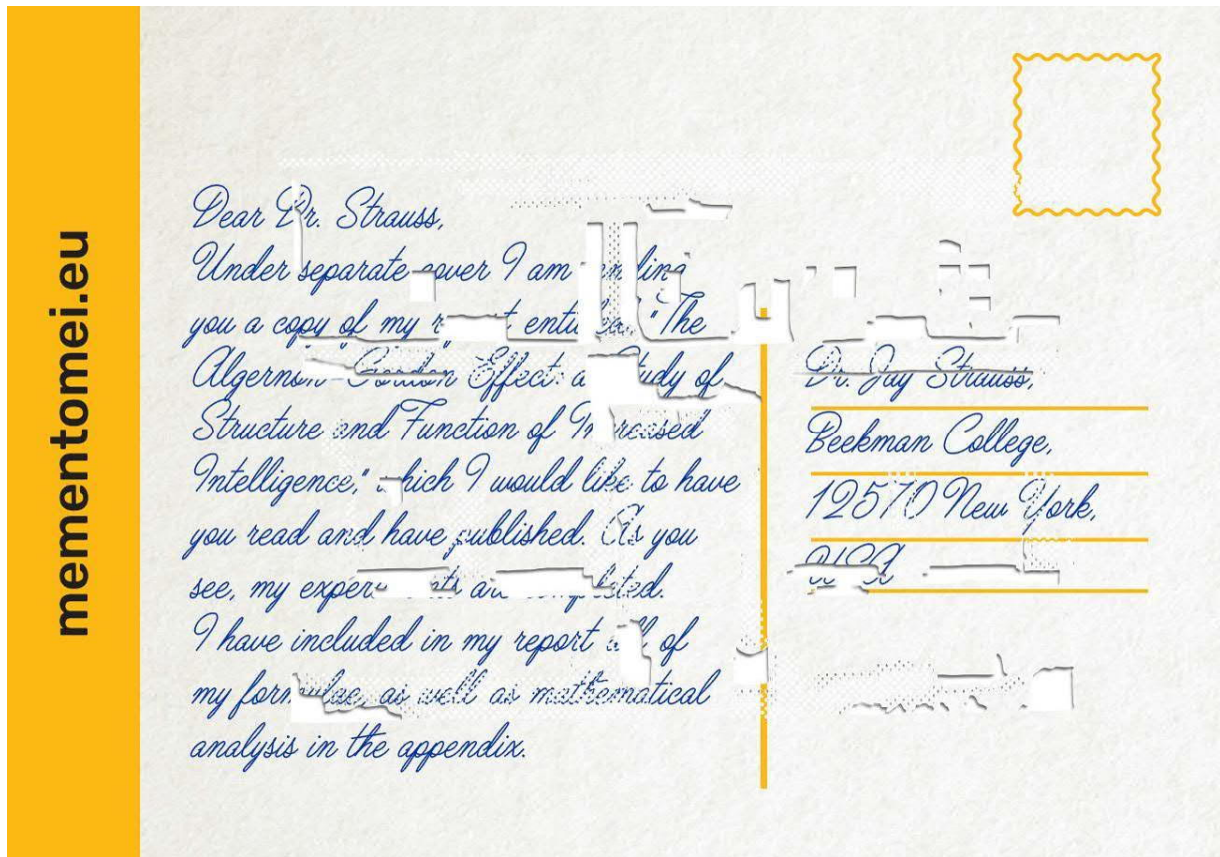


Fig. 7c. Postcard rendering the loss of person's memories, © W. Nowak

The Secondary stage of the communication strategy includes architects, designers, researchers, craftsmen, artisans, workers, along with discussions with diverse audiences. Another key aspect is the involvement of local educational institutions by training students (the soon-to-be artisans) in the specifics of the preservation and in the values of the cultural heritage and its importance for the evolution of a society. Along with that, creating an open network of professionals willing to donate their knowledge and expertise in the process of education and raising awareness on how to take proper care of an old building, as well as to give tidbits of advice on daily, weekly, monthly and annual maintenance practices in order to reduce the need and the cost of urgent conservation and restoration works will be created. The platform includes information about the necessary daily engagement from owners, inhabitants and stakeholders, gives directions for regular inspections and timely and long-lasting care and actions, in order to involve and empower the users of the monument, who are mostly non-specialists and with no particular interest or knowledge about the preservation of cultural heritage. These maintenance and gentle repairs are an economically efficient and sustainable practice, greatly reducing the cost and the need for urgent and expensive future restoration works [McCaig 2013b].

CONCLUSION: MONITORING RESULTS AND FUTURE STEPS

The next step includes the monitoring of the project by analysing and sharing the results in the open platform. The raised awareness on the topic of the cultural heritage significance and the need of its preservation will be measured. The act of the monitoring is a valuable addition to the sustainable preservation practices, further revealing hidden specifics and daily struggles.

By visualizing the effects of the compromised fabric of the cultural heritage as erased pieces of people's own personal fragile memories, we stress on the importance of everyday preservation and proper practices, while building broader and more informed audiences. As part of the monitoring process we introduced to the broad public a map tracing all demolished, about to be demolished buildings, monuments damaged or lost in fire, good and bad

examples and heritage in risk of loss of authenticity². The map keeps track of all protests, conferences and discussions. By making the gathered information public and inviting the viewers to send suggestions we are growing a significant database which spread out of the regional level of the town of Plovdiv and moved on national level and set a ground for a broader discussion (Fig. 8a).

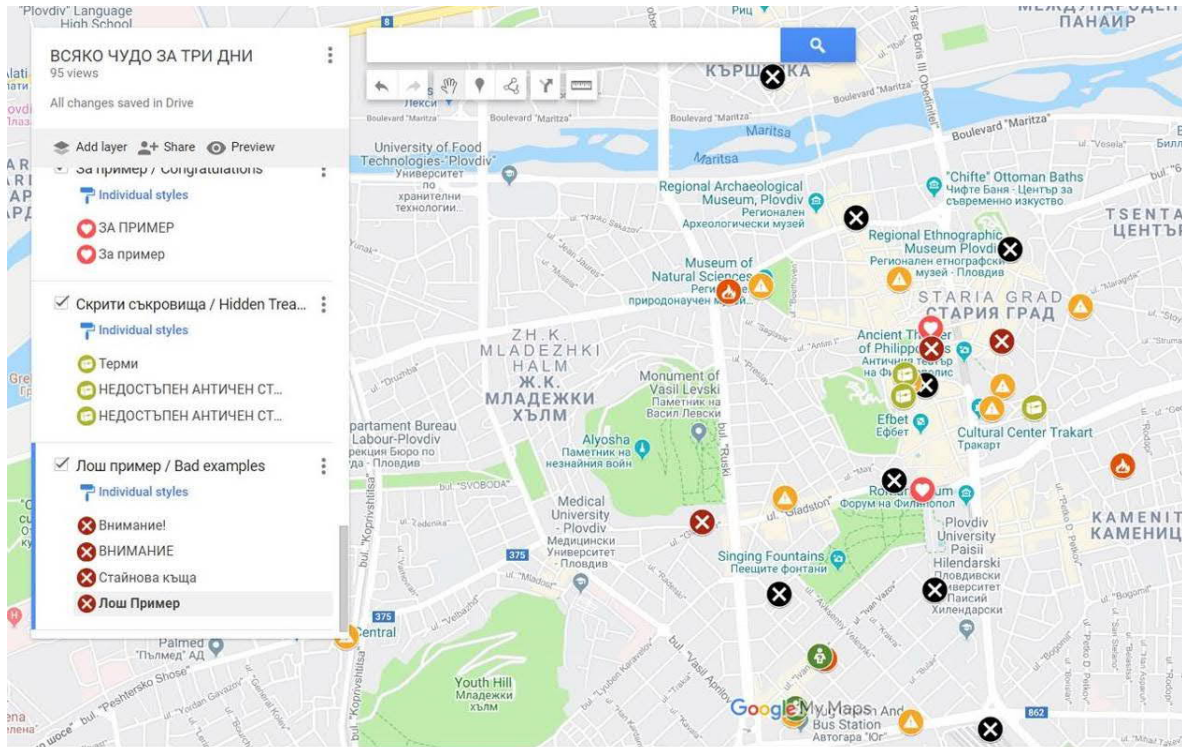


Fig. 8a. Map: demolished heritage, heritage in risk, good and bad examples of preservation (Local level), © N. Toleva-Nowak & W. Nowak

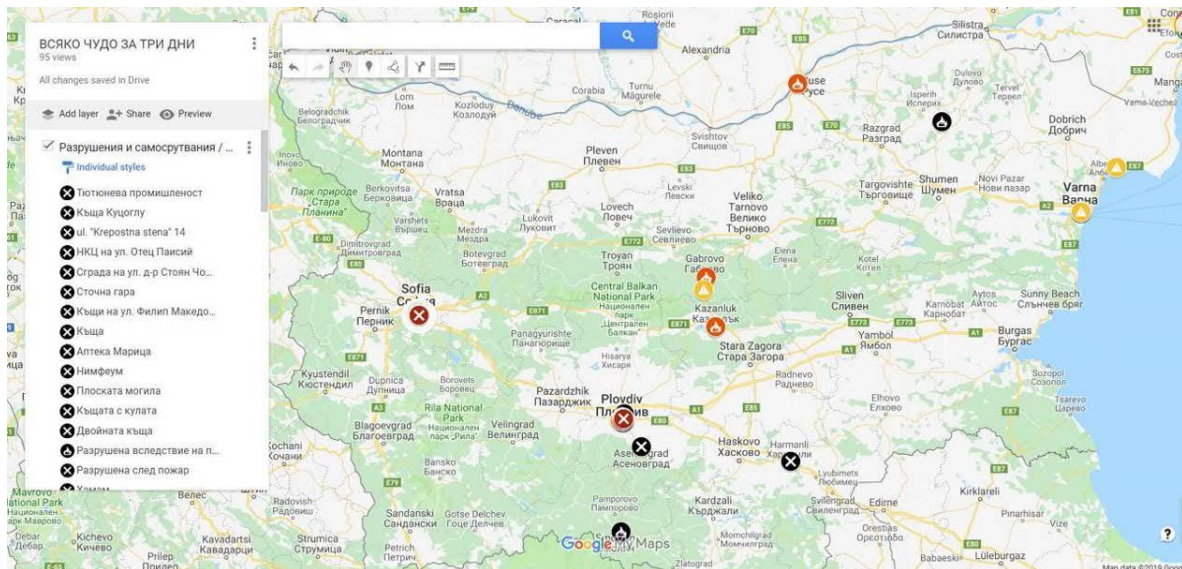


Fig. 8b. Map: demolished heritage, heritage in risk, good and bad examples of preservation (National level), © N. Toleva-Nowak & W. Nowak

² <https://bit.ly/30t3QWv>

The map has enjoyed a good public effect and we have received good feedback and suggestions to add particular monuments in risk to it. The concept of visualizing the additive character of deteriorating heritage – both in one edifice and on the level of a map, increases significantly the awareness across the public and raises more concern than the discussion of an individual case of a demolished/lost monument. Future steps include an online platform that will facilitate discussions of common problems, providing information about laws and regulations and their inconsistencies, and showing how easily executable daily maintenance, gentle repairs and suitable regular care are crucial for the monument's well-being and may delay or even substitute expensive urgent interventions. By expanding the online platform we hope to involve local educational institutions and professional schools and to create a web of professionals who donate their knowledge and prove that preservation is a daily, knowledge-based, not necessarily expensive process. Thus, by achieving higher sensitivity towards cultural heritage issues we still have the chance to pass our history and memories to future generations.

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