

Walk into Tranquillity

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Abstract: Sofia Sveta Gora literally translated as 'The Holy Mountain of Sofia' is a cluster of monasteries surrounding the capital of Bulgaria. One of them, St. Mary Magdalene, is the object of a case study for heritage management. For a third consecutive year at the monastery are conducted excavations. An early-Christian basilica from 4th c. AD is discovered, spectacular in size, dominating the surrounding area from the peak of a hill. The next planned stage is conservation and socialization of the site. The focal point of the project relies on establishing public relations among interested groups (stakeholders). A management tool called 'stakeholder matrix', distributes them in different groups based on two related criteria – *Power* and *Interest*. Key stakeholders are the municipality, providing administrative capacity, and the local community, which benefits from preserving authentic traditions. Dynamic stakeholder is the group of university students / young scientists, who participate in workshops guided by specialists, resulting in gaining and developing specific skills and knowledge. Other interested groups are the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and tour operators. As a result of the tool, during the process of heritage preservation, a better communication and understanding among the stakeholders has been established.

Keywords: Stakeholder, heritage management, monastery, socialization, civic engagement.

Sofia Sveta Gora

The Monasteries around Sofia

The Context

The surroundings of Bulgarian capital – Sofia – hide unique cultural heritage. There are more than 40 Orthodox monasteries, integrated within the mountainous landscape, named 'Sofia Sveta Gora'. This is literally translated as 'The Holly Mountain of Sofia' (Fig. 1). The monasteries are tangible prove for a millennial Christian tradition on these territories, continuing without interruption. The first monasteries are dated back to the medieval ages, at the time of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (13th c.), though there are earlier traces of monastic life there. All monasteries are particularly impressive by a rich synthesis of architecture, ecclesiastical art, and tranquillity. They represent built traditions which are a mix of renowned international examples and vernacular details. All are following one model of organization. They are a collection of small scale buildings, harmoniously hidden into the natural surroundings, where the most significant building is the church. It is always highlighted, not by scale or material, nor by detail or color but by position. It is either centrally placed, on a higher hill, near the edge of cliff or in another remarkable configuration with the natural surroundings.

The Sofia Master Plan

This heritage is recognized and considered in the master plan of Sofia. There, the borders of a future theme park are outlined. It is bearing the name again 'Sofia Sveta Gora', and it is dedicated to cultural tourism. The main goal is to extend the cultural program from the center of the capital city to its surroundings. To include the entire region in one diverse system of significant places.

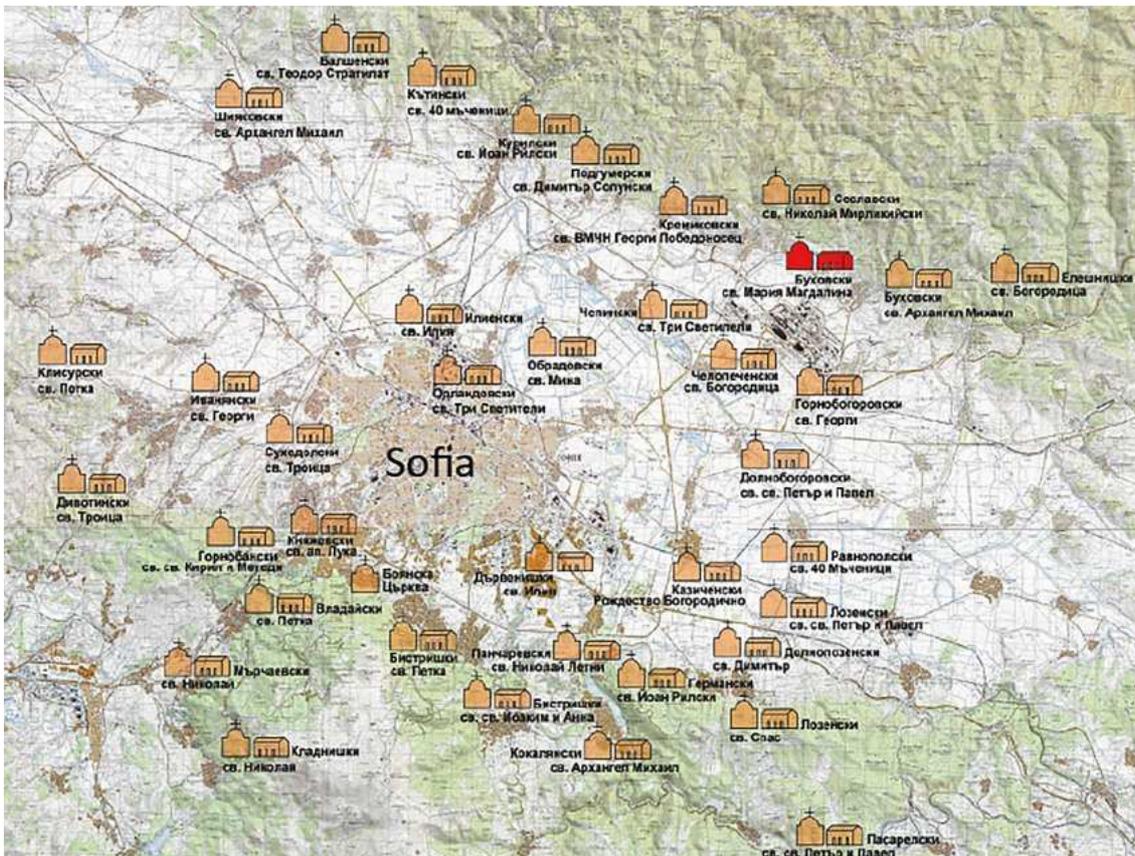


Fig. 1 – The Monasteries of The Sofia Sveta Gora. The case study is marked in red. (Copyright: arch. Petar Petrov)

Buhovo's Monastery 'St. Mary Magdalene'

Monastery History

The case study project, presented here, is one of these monasteries. Its name is 'St. Mary Magdalene'. It is located in the close vicinity of one small town – Buhovo, which is part of the Sofia municipality. The monastery has been established in the end of the 19th c. shortly after the Bulgarian Liberation from Ottoman Rule. It is very humble, with small church and a few non-impressive wooden communal buildings. However it is laying over a much earlier Christian sacred place, long have been forgotten there.

Archaeological Excavations

In the summer of 2013, the archaeologist Snejana Gorianova (NIAM-BAS¹) started excavations at the site of Buhovo's monastery, based on earlier records of building traces. The research has uncovered an early-Christian basilica, dated back to the 4th c. AD. It is one apse, three aisle structure, with narthex, and exonarthex, edged with two square structures (often referred as 'towers'). At the South-East corner there is another square space, interpreted as baptistery or martyrium. The whole length of the basilica is 41m by 17m. The ratio of aisles to the nave is 1:3:1 (Fig. 2) Compared to other temples from the same period, this is a fairly large one, resembling a bishops' cathedral. The basilica is discovered only in substructure. Almost no architectural details have been found or decorative elements either. There is a newer church (19th c.) Laying on the apse, over the bima². The church is partly constructed of stone (taken from the basilica) and partly from wood. Both the position and the material re-used, are considered as a poetical expression of the continuity of the faith through centuries.

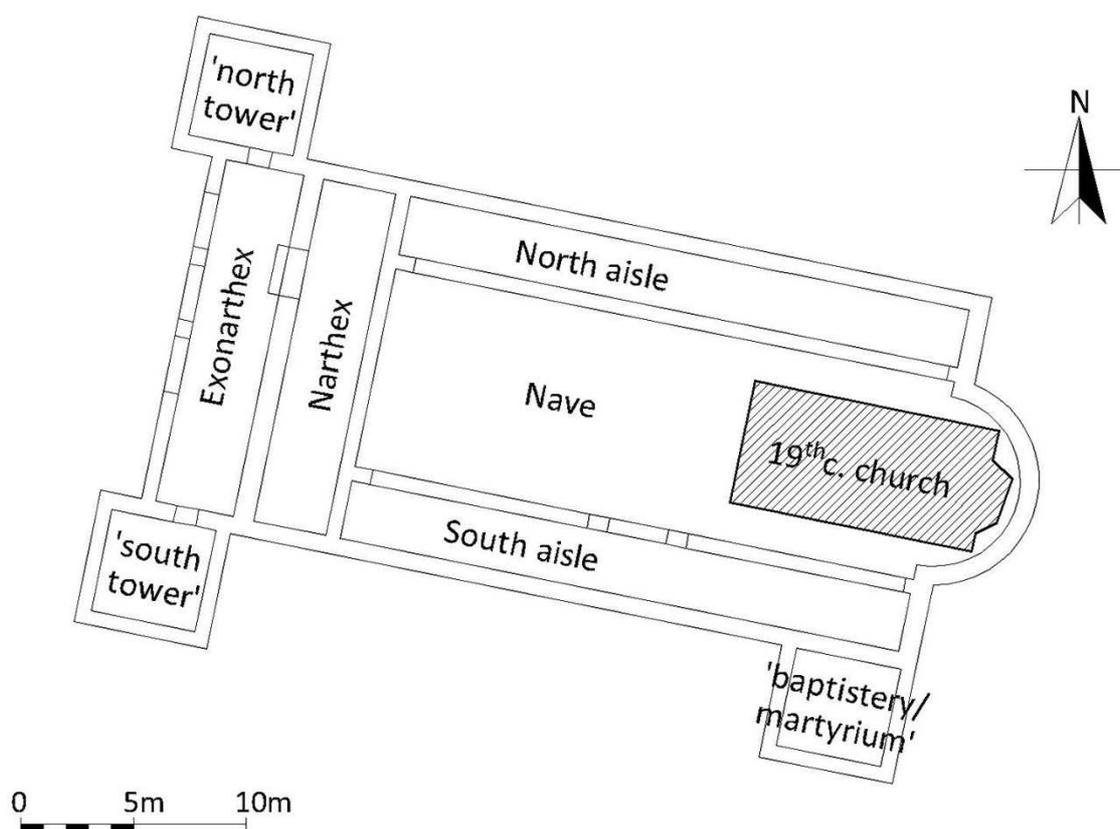


Fig. 2 – Superposition of the Early-Christian basilica and the late church from the 19th c. (Copyright: arch. Petar Petrov)

¹ The National Institute of Archaeology with Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

² An elevated platform for ceremonial use. Usually it is approached by one or several steps, however in this instance it is on the same level of the floor.

Stakeholder Matrix Tool

Tool Manual

Civic Engagement

A team of architects in collaboration with the archaeologists are managing the conservation and further socialization of Buhovo's monastery. Central attention is given to the benefits from an active civic engagement. The project adopts the concept that the socialization of historical sites lays, first and foremost, in the hands of the local communities, rather than in a general care-takers. The process of decision-making in the contemporary society is decentralized. It cannot be driven by one force, especially in the field of heritage preservation, where there are various actors which have complex relations. Socialization in order to be meaningful and lasting, deals with experience from *within* the communities. I further note here the difference between building *for* the people and *with* the people according to the architect Giancarlo De Carlo:

if we plan 'with' people, consensus remains permanently open ... In the case of planning 'for', the act of planning remains forever authoritarian and repressive, however liberal the initial intentions. In the case of planning 'with', the act becomes liberating and democratic, stimulating a multiple and continuous participation. (CARLO, 2005)

I am going to describe next, in detail, the tool that reflects the above stated concept. It is called 'Stakeholder Matrix'. This is not an uncommon method of management complex projects. There is an entire discipline known as 'stakeholder management' which central goal is to provide the tools for winning *support* from the others, to engage the right people in the right way in a project. It is in use widely in the business and entrepreneur 'soils', however in the case study presented here, the matrix has been implemented to a heritage preservation challenge. Running such project, the team has acknowledged that it has wide impact over many people of different backgrounds. It helps to understand who are the critics and blockers and who are the supporters and advocates.

Benefits

Here I am going to list a few benefits from applying this tool. (1) Various groups of interest are encouraged to meet and interact. Often they have conflicting view angles and competing goals. Knowing these details is a precious input data for the planners. The project could be shaped and re-shaped at an early stage. Furthermore, this will result in greater inclusion of the stakeholders and crafting sense of belonging. (2) There are powerful stakeholders in such projects like a municipality or government. Winning their support could lead to winning more resources. They could be not only financial, but information, logistics, advertisement and other forceful assets of any success. (3) Better understanding among everybody involved about the benefits of the project and the socialization concept. This is especially strong if the communication is frequent and encouraged. In moments of difficulty, when necessary, the stakeholders can support the planning team and encourage them. (4) The planners/managers are able to predict the people's reaction and to anticipate their feedback. Thus it is possible to plan actions and to draw scenarios.

Steps

The matrix distributes the stakeholders in different groups based on two related criteria: *Power* and *Interest*. The fore is about the ability of these groups to influence the project, while the latter describes the motives of influence. The first step to the tool is an identification process of the potential interested groups. It starts with a brainstorming of which they might be. Central criteria, to guide the process, are: people who are anyhow affected by the work; who have power and influence; who have an interest in successful or unsuccessful conclusion. One important note here is that stakeholders are both individual people and institutions. When formulating a stakeholder as institution / organization, there is involved an additional step – to identify the right individuals who are concerned with this *particular* project. Then, the next step is the evaluation process of their power, interest, and influence. Note here that this influence is not always positive! Some of the stakeholders might have the power not only to advance, but to *block* the entire effort. This must be taken into an account. The interest could vary from strong determination to none. The final step is to distribute them into the matrix and to develop relevant strategy for every quadrant.

Quadrants

The two criteria (Power and Interest) formulate four quadrants, associated with different strategies:

(High Power; High Interest) These are the most important stakeholders. They are the main co-producers of the project. The planning team must fully engage with them, analyze their feedback, and make the most in order to keep them satisfied. It is vital to get understanding about who they are and how they will react, how exactly to engage them, and which are the best communication channels. Directly communicating with them is suggested. People are usually open to share their view point. This approach also respects other's opinion, which is the first step toward building a relationship of trust and participation.

(High Power; Low Interest) These are also important stakeholders, because of the power to influence. The planning team should invest effort to communicate with them, but not too much, because they are less interested, therefore they can easily get bored with the team's message. The best strategy is to keep them satisfied.

(Low Power; High Interest) These stakeholders are precious group. They could be very reliable support to the projects. They are likely to be important in the elaboration and evaluation of the project details. The best strategy is to keep them properly informed about the various stages. It is important to talk to them regularly to ensure that no grand issues or disagreements are arising.

(Low Power; Low Interest) These are interested groups which seem at the first glance to be of no importance at all. Somehow disengaged to the process. However, assumption like this could be misleading. At any moment, stakeholders in this quadrant could show greater interest in the project or become a source of power and influence. The best strategy is to monitor them regularly. At the initial stage of the matrix-analyze, however, the planning team may not provide excessive communication with them.

Case Study of Buhovo

Municipality

In the project of Buhovo's monastery revitalization are engaged two levels of administrative authorities: the local municipality of town of Buhovo and the central municipality of Sofia-city. This means that there are two levels of interest and power, represented by two mayors. The local one is interested in making a place for recreation and repose of its citizens as well as establishing better conditions for traditional festivals and celebrations which are held on the site. The interest of the central municipality is more abstract and detached from the everydayness. It is focused on the development of the region and the formulation of the theme park. According to the mayor of Sofia, Yordanka Fandakova, the 'Sofia Sveta Gora' is going to become a popular tourist destination, revealing cultural diversity of the region. She is actively promoting this idea by naming one of the newly constructed underground stations with the same name. Both levels of authority have strong desire to facilitate any project further. They support by providing administrative capacity. Curiously one department of the Sofia municipality 'Inspectorate' is directly engaged in the preservation process from its beginning. Employs there are helping the excavations as voluntary workers, and with logistic support.

University students (young scientists)

There is a distinction between students of architecture, who are involved in a heritage preservation internship, and students of archaeology who are on their regular summer school programs. Both groups are highly interested in gaining hands-on experience under the guidance of specialists. They benefit from meeting together and shearing knowledge of different expertise (Fig. 3). This is especially important for the architecture students, for whom archaeology is still an unknown and rather exotic discipline. Although this is a dynamic group, it has no power to influence the project.



Fig. 3 – Architecture and archaeology students are taking part in excavations. (Copyright: arch. Petar Petrov)

Local community

These are the people who live in town of Buhovo. Again it is not a homogeneous group. There are several sub-fractions. One is the church board, which is maintaining the monastery and is organizing various events there. They are particularly active and influential. Other sub-fraction are the people who are the regular participants in celebrations (Fig. 4). Also guests from neighboring villages could be added in this group, who

sporadically visit the Buhovo's' monastery. Despite being constituted of different parts, the local community is a very demanding and proud interested group.



Fig. 4 – Celebration in front of the late 19th c. church. (Copyright: arch. Petar Petrov)

Bulgarian Orthodox Church

The monastery is under the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. The priest who is in charge here, is one prominent member of the clerical hierarchy of the Sofia Diocese. This is sign of high level of power, however the church is not much active toward the project and shows little interest. Yet, this is one small monastery, which stands in the far periphery of clergy attention.

Tour Operators.

The tour operators, specializing in cultural tourism, are neither powerful group nor interested in the project. Cultural routes following significant Orthodox places exist nearby Sofia and they could be turned into successful tourist product, targeted to individuals or small groups. So far, the tour operators have not recognized this opportunity and their overall position toward the Sofia Sveta Gora is distant and weak.

With the identified interested groups above, the stakeholder matrix for Buhovo's monastery is constructed (Fig. 5). It is a good way of visualizing all strategic factors (with potential to boost or to put on hold the project realization) and various managing strategies.

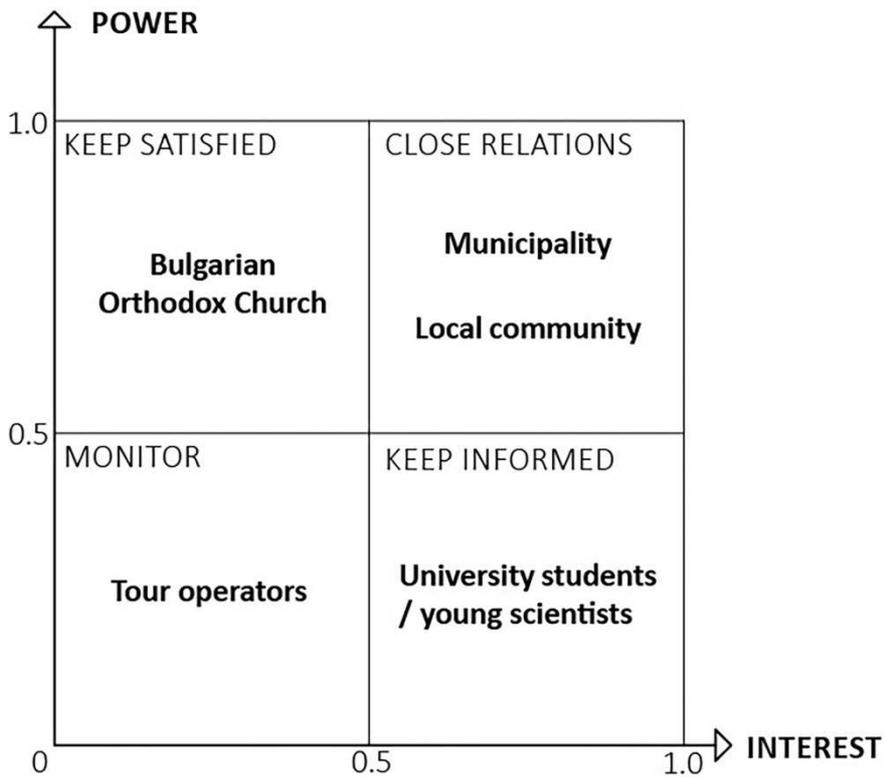


Fig. 5 – Stakeholder Matrix for project of Socialization of Buhovo's monastery 'St. Mary Magdalene' (Copyright: arch. Petar Petrov)

Evaluation

Interaction between singular stakeholders

The management team has discovered that the project was not affected only by the singular stakeholders separately but also by the interaction between them. For example most of the locals are elderly people who have been enormously happy to communicate with the university students. They spent time in informal discussions renewing relationship between generations, passing on memories and knowledge. This was helpful to the management by providing addition information about how locals understand this site and in what roles they see themselves. Representatives from the Bulgarian Orthodox Church have the opportunity to discuss land property issues with the municipality, which so far had been constantly postponed. Also the local church board gained recognition by the clergy and status of trust for further initiatives.

Results and Contribution

Main Results

The main result is achieving inclusion of wide range of stakeholders in the process of preservation and into the further socialization. Better communication and understanding among the stakeholders have been reached. Side result is the involvement of the newbies and young scientists in a project with visible effects.

Role Model

The monastery of 'St. Mary Magdalene' is one positive model in the field of conservation of immovable cultural heritage in Bulgaria. It stands out with a clear management plan. It takes into an account local needs; supports traditions and customs, and align this with the municipality policy for cultural tourism. It is an example of using heritage as resource for development.

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