

## **SUSTAINABLE CONSERVATION SYSTEMS FOR PRESERVATION OF MONUMENTS, SITES IN THEIR SETTINGS**

*Staneva Hristina / Bulgarian*  
National Correspondent of the HEREIN Project  
Associated member of the ICVA

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This paper argues that an appropriate cultural policy and a relevant conservation system are productive factors for preserving the organic link between the monuments, sites and their settings while reflecting the dynamics of modern development. The conservation systems differ according to the specific cultural, social and economic environments, as well as the role of heritage as defined by the Government.

I will present to you the experience that we had in Bulgaria – a country that recently underwent the turbulent transition from fully state-owned to market economy – by focusing on the case study of Plovdiv as an example.

### **Relevant Background**

Bulgaria is situated on a unique cultural cross-road in South East Europe. Due to its location and diverse history a rich stratification of civilizations can be observed in our culture, ranging from pre-historic to modern times. On a territory with population of approximately 7 million people there are around 40 000 monuments, seven of them are included in the World heritage list and 1200 are classified as monuments of national importance.

Plovdiv is the second largest city in Bulgaria. Its historic core is currently considered for inclusion on the UNESCO list. In terms of history, Plovdiv is well known as one of the oldest cities in Europe and also one of the largest cities in the ancient world. Its vast and various heritage, created and moulded during the Hellenic, Roman, and medieval times, nurtured the emergence of an impressive vernacular architecture during the National Revival period (18-19 c), which is recognised as one of best representatives of the Balkan region (Fig.1, Fig.2).

### **Conservation system – development and trends**

Bulgaria began experiencing the transition from centralized to market economy in 1989. The political and the socio-economic climate have completely changed. The idea that the cultural heritage contained only cultural value had to be revised after the society moved to an entirely new set of values. The lack of agility of the old conservation system

was not able to respond to the new economic environment. The preservation of the vast heritage, which was entirely defined and subsidised by the State up to 1989, was seriously affected due the drastic decrease of funds, as well the lack of efficient incentives for activation of new funding sources. During the last 15 years the legislation referring to protection needs was not sufficiently updated; the management system remained centralized; and the correlation between conservation, territorial planning and environmental protection was not efficient. As a result certain risks still exist for the cultural heritage, particularly regarding the sites and their settings, due to the aggression of the “newly rich” social layers and the lack of mechanisms to resist it.

During the last several years Bulgaria was under preparation to join the European Union in 2007. Some harmonization of the statutory framework regarding cultural heritage with the European legislation has been made. Lately the protection of cultural heritage has been increasingly orientated to the objectives of sustainable development. Nowadays it is recognized that the heritage also constitutes an economic resource, which has to be used for sustainable development (mainly through cultural tourism).

On the basis of the above, the conservation policy is being linked to the activities in the area of town planning and environmental protection. The heritage protection is becoming a priority of the territorial planning policy. Attention is shifted towards new sites in need of protection – cultural landscapes, industrial heritage, cultural routes, etc. The described evolution of the approach is in line with the objectives of “integrated conservation”, a concept rooted in three European Conventions, ratified by Bulgaria, namely the Granada Convention on the Protection of the European Architectural heritage, the Convention of La Valetta on the Protection of the European Archaeological Heritage, and the Convention of Florence on the European Landscape.

All above mentioned changes are steps towards better protection of the monuments and sites together with their settings.

Section II: Vulnerabilities within the settings of monuments and sites:  
understanding the threats and defining appropriate responses

Section II : Identifier la vulnérabilité du cadre des monuments et des sites – Menaces et outils de prévention

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The case study of Plovdiv would be a good example to illustrate how the main sectors of the conservation system in Bulgaria contribute (or not) to the proper preservation of the site and its settings.

### 1 Legislation

Because of its high cultural and historic value, the Plovdiv historic core has achieved the highest legal protection under the Bulgarian legislation, named “Reserve” (1981). Although it has a 70-year history of conservation interest and a 50-year history of action, it was over the last two decades that the following four steps of legal protection were established(Fig.3).

1. individual sites in the Reserve have statutory protection as “single monuments of culture”;
2. the setting of each single monument is also protected;
3. the Reserve as an ensemble has a statutory protection as a “group monument of culture”
4. the Reserve was included as an integral part of another group monument of culture, named “Urban historic zone Philipopolis-Trimontium-Plovdiv”.

Although this legislative protection clearly matches the value of the monument, alone it is not sufficient. We have to keep in mind that the acting Law of Monuments of Culture and Museums, dated back from 1969, was amended number of times, but is still not consistent with the present-day doctrine of conservation. The legislation still is not transformed from restrictive to a stimulating one. Sufficient incentives to motivate owners to maintain and restore the heritage still do not exist.

### 2 Administration

The administration system has not changed a great deal since 1989. Still the Ministry of Culture administrates and supervises the preservation of the monuments of culture. The District administration, which is a state structure, enforces the governmental policy by coordinating the preservation activities with the local bodies of the executive power and exercising supervision over monuments of culture on the territory of the district that are owned by the state. The local self-government bodies, the Municipalities, take part in the preservation of the immovable monuments, which are municipal property and scattered on their territory. There are rare cases (Plovdiv is one out of the existing three) when specialized municipal units have been established for management, supervision and control over the preservation of Reserves and the activities carried out in them. In that particular case it is a positive factor towards the preservation of built heritage.

### 3 Finance

The financing mechanism for the restoration and conservation activities is established also in two levels – national and local. The Government ensured sufficient subsidies till 1990. They reached their peak in the period 1976-1986. Almost half of the monument (out of 196) was restored and 80% of the immovable heritage was entirely documented. In 1979 Plovdiv was granted the European gold medal for “exceptional achievements in the preservation of the European building culture”.

The economical difficulties of the state during the last 15 years affected to a great extent the preservation of the Reserve. At present the state subsidies for the reserve are 120 - 200 times less than two decades ago. The owners are not able to take the heavy burden of conservation and maintenance, leave their houses or just turn them into profitable commercial sites with all risks for their cultural value. In recent times some great monuments of culture have been destroyed and/or discredited.

The strategy for financing preservation at local level is focused both on management mechanisms and on seeking new sources of finance.

Given these circumstances the international support is a vital part of the effort to preserve Plovdiv cultural heritage. On the top of the list of these excellences is the financial aid of around 1 000 000 US\$, granted by Japanese government through the UNESCO Trust Fund. It happened thanks to the enormous effort of ICOMOS/Japan with the co-operation of ICOMOS/Bulgaria and Plovdiv Municipality. Positive examples are the funding from the Chamber of Craftsmen in Koblenz, Germany and the European Union through UNDP (Fig.4).

### 4 Management

The preservation of immovable heritage in Bulgaria is identified, planned and controlled at two levels– national and local. There are some achievements towards improving the management system in the light of decentralization and better coordination among the main partners in the system. Some improvements in the light of the modern view on protection as a collective process of participants-partners have been made in regards to the fulfilment of conservation objectives.

Until 1990 the main initiative for the implementation of the architectural and art conservation belonged to the State. Since then the private sector has gradually stepped in. A system for controlled assignment of conservation activities and acceptance of the conservation activities after their completion has been established. Still, due to lack of

Section II: Vulnerabilities within the settings of monuments and sites:  
understanding the threats and defining appropriate responses

Section II : Identifier la vulnérabilité du cadre des monuments et des sites – Menaces et outils de prévention

---

licensing of specialized implementers of conservation activities, some risks relating to the final results remain existent.

Regarding Plovdiv it was in 1969 when a special organization with enough functional capacity (present Ancient Plovdiv Municipal Institute) was established for the management of the Reserve. In Plovdiv (as shown at the Organisation chart, fig...) the management is structured by: state institutions; the regional administration; and the municipality with its specialised bodies

Good instruments for a proper management are the General Urban Management Plans and the Ancient Plovdiv Management Plans. In 2000 the Building Development Plan of Ancient Plovdiv was adopted, accomplished according to the Special Rules and Standards. It was done in compliance with the new Territorial Development Act and in response to the requirements of the integrated conservation. In 2002 the Municipality developed a Plan for Sustainable Development of the Reserve and a Strategy for its utilization and management(Fig.5).

## **Conclusions**

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The drastic changes of the society that came with the transition period in Bulgaria impacted the quality of the conservation of our cultural heritage. Unfortunately the major risks recently are much more linked to human activities, rather than natural processes of destruction. The different authorities, responsible for conservation of the heritage, are not able to deal effectively with the aggressive behaviour of businesses, focused on the near future.

In such circumstances the utmost concern for the Bulgarian professionals in the field of conservation is the cultural policy of the country, which should encompass the protection of cultural heritage as a top priority and provide sustainable conservation systems for preserving monuments and sites in their settings. This is the way to preserve the national identity and thus enrich our common cultural diversity.

## **Abstract**

This paper argues that an appropriate cultural policy and a relevant conservation system are productive factors for preserving the organic link between the monuments and their settings while reflecting the dynamics of modern development.

An advanced legislation should ensure correlation between conservation, territorial planning and environmental protection and thus would safeguard the monuments and their surroundings. The laws and regulations should be stimulating, rather than restrictive, in order to promote local interest in the process.

The administration, supervision and control over the activities carried out on the monuments, settings and contiguous zones are more successful through close coordination between central and local, formal and informal bodies.

The strategy for financing preservation could be efficient if focused on seeking new sources, such as controlled cultural tourism.

The management of cultural resources is deemed to ensure the interaction between conservation and sustainable development while preserving the cultural continuity and the integrity of the sites and their settings.

A concisely presented case study of Plovdiv could illustrate the impacts of the current conservation system in Bulgaria. At present a joint project between ICOMOS-Bulgaria and ICOMOS-Japan is in progress on the particular site. Such cooperation is unprecedented in ICOMOS society.

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Fig. 1 View of Ancient Plovdiv Reserve



Fig. 2 Representative of Plovdiv Revival architecture

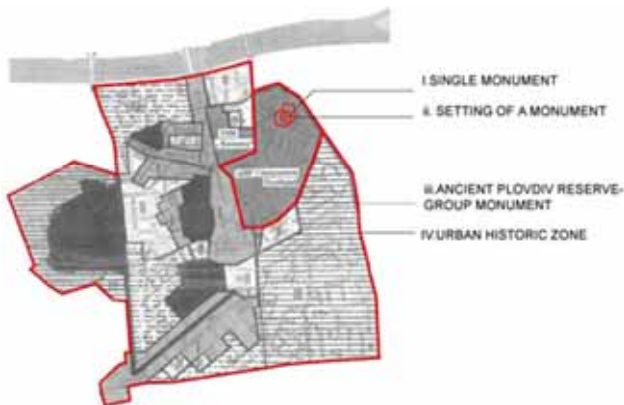


Fig. 3 Ancient Plovdiv Reserve – Legal Protection

(organisation chart)

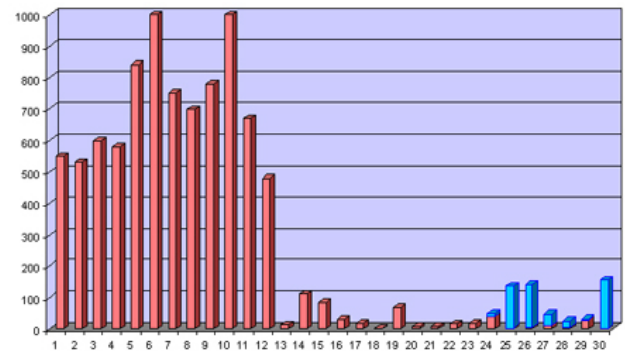


Fig. 4 BUDGET OF ANCIENT PLOVDIV RESERVE 1976-2005

National subsidies for the Reserve  
 International support

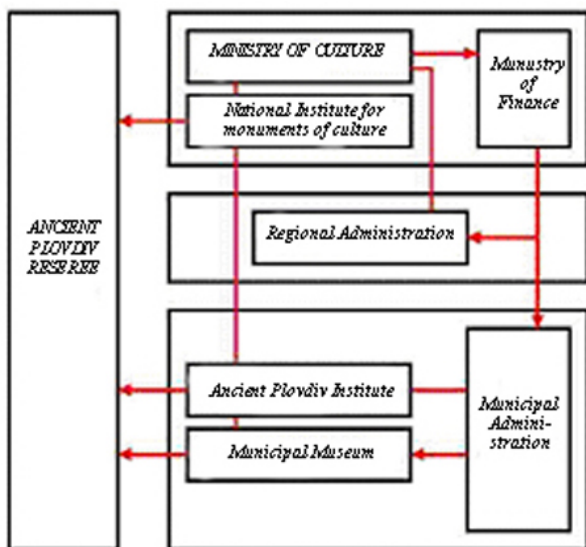


Fig. 5 Ancient Plovdiv Reserve – management

Section II: Vulnerabilities within the settings of monuments and sites:  
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Section II : Identifier la vulnérabilité du cadre des monuments et des sites – Menaces et outils de prévention

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