

**Constructing monuments and shaping social identity: The sociological meaning
of monuments, creating and dividing societies by establishing collective memory and
places of memory**

A case study of the Soviet Army monument in Sofia, Bulgaria

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Abstract

The following thesis explores the sociological significance of monuments in framing social identities, focusing on the field of monumentality and its correlation to sociology during the ages following the Second World War with a case study of the Soviet Army Monument in Sofia, Bulgaria. Monuments serve as a commemoration and historical site and are pivotal in establishing collective memory and delineating societal boundaries. This research employs a comprehensive literature review and a detailed case study in contribution to delving into the historical and ideological context of past tendencies endowed on sociological concepts to create and establish long-lasting social identity based on collective and social memory. This study investigates embedded debates surrounding the topic of the deconstruction of monuments based upon deep conflicting identities and societal division grounded in the past. The findings of this thesis uncover how monuments present a well-formed battleground for identity and memory if the history behind them has been foreshadowed and contested, with public debates rising while knowledge and awareness are absent. This absence of public, accessible history portrays a complex interplay between identity and historical narratives, highlighting a more significant issue of misinformation and the absence of historical relevance in public debates on monument preservation or deconstruction.

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INTRODUCTION:

Monuments play a significant role in shaping social identity, representing a dynamic and evolving symbol of historical commemorations and building blocks for collective memory. This thesis paper explores the sociological implications of monuments with a focus and case study on the Soviet Army Monument in Sofia, Bulgaria. The construction of monuments is considered a universal practice. However, with political landscapes evolving and new perspectives approaching, some monuments can become sources of contention, especially related to complicated historical epochs. Monuments commemorate pivotal figures and events by cementing and preserving historical narratives while shaping societal values, norms, and perceptions. The discussions on monument preservation or deconstruction raise many questions concerning the role of public art and public history and their effect on shaping national identity and collective memory. In the context of Bulgaria, the Soviet Army Monument in Sofia stands tall as a controversial symbol of Soviet Propaganda with the USSR's historical influence as well as the ongoing contemporary debates between the already divided post-communist society. This thesis paper explores the field of monumentality, public history, and concepts surrounding monuments and their pivotal role in establishing collective memory, places of memory, and collective social identity. With this designated exploration, the thesis then relates the findings and information to the case study of the Soviet Army Monument in Sofia, intending to debunk historical stigma and claim that history should be accessible if public debates concerning public spaces are resolved fairly. This thesis aims to answer the research question: Has the Soviet Army Monument in Sofia shaped social identity, and how can this be resolved for future instances? The hypothesis behind the monument is a direct influence on politics and society. The existing limitation is presented in the limited available scholarly

sources, mostly newsletter articles and TV broadcasts addressing the monument's role in shaping current social and political discourse, which may lack the scholarly rigor and depth required for such analysis. The paper's theoretical framework is grounded in Halbwachs' concept of collective memory and Bourdieu's theory for analysing the symbolic power of monuments in terms of influencing social hierarchies. Methodologically, the paper is bound on qualitative research based upon secondary sources, an archival and literature review, a case study of the Soviet Army monument, and a comparison with the one in Budapest. The preliminary findings of the paper suggest that the Soviet Army monument in Sofia has been a focal point for public and societal debates as well as identity and collective memory formation in Bulgaria. The paper highlights the battleground for historical narratives, the ongoing societal struggle to preserve the monument, and its social and political implications. This thesis paper contributes to the academic discourse on post-soviet monuments and the ongoing conflicting narratives of social identity and collective memory brought by those monuments by offering a new insight into the topic of how monuments influence collective memory and how debates around the topic can be looked into with the help of history and knowledge being more accessible.

CHAPTER 1:

Chapter 1.1: Classifying monuments and the concepts that accompany them

To delve deeper into the notion of propaganda assertion throughout the construction and deconstruction of monuments, one should first fully understand the definition, concept, theoretical approach, and meaning of monuments. The term "monument," according to the definition in the Oxford Dictionary, stands as an architectural or physically constructed site that emphasises, publicly reminds, and commemorates important events and individuals without relevance to the monument's size and appearance (Oxford Dictionary). The construction of monuments dates back to ancient times and various civilizations and societies throughout history, who were constructing monuments to commemorate events, figures, and leaders to establish symbols of both cultural and religious significance, strengthening social identity and belonging. When it comes to understanding monuments from a sociological and political viewpoint, the two researchers Federico Bellentani and Mario Panico the two researchers state that monuments are built to commemorate important events, individuals, and more, but how does one conclude who those dates and individuals could be important? The two authors delve deeper into the importance of monument design, placement, and representation of selected historical narratives and events, part of the shaping and constructing of social identity and social belonging through collective memory and identity (Bellentanu & Panico, 2016, pp. 28-29)

When pinpointing this, it is hard to list the "first" monument to be ever built due to the extensive scope of history, historical remarks, diverse forms of monuments, and their

significance across various civilizations and cultures (Monuments of Victoria, n.d., para.1). One of the earliest known monuments ever constructed is the monumental architecture in present-day Turkey, Göbekli Tepe, dating back to around 9600 BCE (Jones, 2015). The monumental architecture served as a ceremonial site, consisting of massive stone pillars arranged in circles. The Göbekli Tepe is not traditionally considered a "monument" in the contemporary sense but demonstrates early, manufactured construction of an architectural, materialistic site that was constructed to emphasize the importance of ritualistic, religious, and commemorative structures in society (Bellentanu & Panico, 2016, pp. 30-31). Other civilizations such as ancient Mesopotamia, Rome, Greece, Egypt erected monuments that included temples, statues, obelisks, and triumphal arches with the same sense and ideology to establish a collective commemoration and strengthen social identity around their military victories, gods, rulers, and leaders as well as religious figures and significant to the civilization, events (Bellentanu & Panico, 2016, pp. 30-31). Those examples of early monumental architecture in human history represent the concept of monumentality and the establishment of commemorative structures, collective memory, and the creation of social and cultural identity, serving as a focal point for the existence and preservation of a nation. The outlook and structure of a monument have evolved ever since, with each millennium and civilization leaving a trace of the landscape and preserving their history for decades based on constructing architecture and artistic expression through monumental construction and monumental cities (Carpo, 2020).

Referring back to sociological theory with an emphasis on the works of Maurice Halbwachs on collective identity and memory from the book "The Collective Memory" in chapter four (Halbwachs, 1950, p.1), monuments are important sociological tools in the process

of constructing and perpetuating cultural heritage and shared narratives. In chapter four, Halbwachs states:

"The group not only transforms the space into which it has been inserted but also yields and adapts to its physical surroundings. It becomes enclosed within the framework it has built. The group's image of its external milieu and its stable relationships with this environment becomes paramount in the idea it forms of itself, permeating every element of its consciousness, moderating and governing its evolution."

Halbwachs's statement can be used as a groundwork for supporting the argument that monuments play a pivotal role in the formation of collective memory and collective identity with the creation of "Places of memory" or Andrzej Szpociński refers to the concept in his research as, "sites of remembering" as Pierre Nora never defined the notion of lieux de mémoire (Szpociński, 2016, p. 246). The concept was derived by Pierre Nora in his article *Mémoire collective*, and the concept refers to both monuments and historical archives, or any place representing memory to a social group. Nora's research focuses not on the definition but on the importance of recognition of materialistic and physical places and monuments which can promote the existence of the past in the present, alongside identity and collective memory derived and preserved by such places of memory (Szpociński 2016, p. 246). According to Maurice Halbwachs, collective identity, and memory can be described as a dynamic process that is being shaped in the process of social interpretations and interactions and cannot be described simply as the domain of historical facts. Professor Little from the University of Michigan describes monuments and their functions as anchors to memory, social and historical narratives, and values that are to be remembered for generations as they play a pivotal role in establishing a sense of public memory and a specific framework for its remembrance. This

framework is usually turned into a historical narrative specific to a group of people since it has embedded into a collective, shared identity and memory. Professor Little then states that monuments are a way for the public to express and advocate for their values and understandings of what is to be represented as their collective identity (Little, 2013, para. 5-6). Moreover, monuments stand as powerful symbols of individual and societal identity. For individuals and masses who identify with the narratives and values embodied by a monument, this monument could become a source of belonging, pride, and cultural affirmation. Monuments symbolise shared heritage and serve as focal points for community cohesion and solidarity. Some individuals can develop strong emotional attachments to a monument by viewing it as an important and everyday part of their identity and lives (Monuments of Victoria, n. d)

On the other hand, monuments can also provoke dissent and controversy among those who do not resonate with the narratives they represent. In this context, the sociological concept of "symbolic violence," proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, is particularly relevant (Smith, 2007, para. 1-3). Bourdieu argues that dominant groups use symbolic representations, such as monuments, to perpetuate their cultural hegemony and legitimize their authority. Monuments celebrating certain historical figures or events may marginalize alternative narratives and perspectives, reinforcing social divisions and perpetuating inequalities. However, it is essential to recognize that monuments are not static entities but sites of contestation and negotiation. They can be reinterpreted, reclaimed, or even removed in response to changing social dynamics and evolving collective memory.

Chapter 1.2: The Soviet Army Monument in Sofia, Bulgaria

The Soviet Army Monument in Sofia, Bulgaria, is another controversial propaganda constructed by the Socialist Party in Bulgaria to commemorate the unforgettable help from the USSR's Red Army. The Soviet Army monument, also called the Monument of the Occupation by the Red Army, is the tallest monument in Sofia, Bulgaria, and the second tallest in Bulgaria. After the deconstruction of the Red Army obelisk in Riga in 2022, the Soviet Army monument in Sofia is the tallest in Europe (Shpatov, 2023, para. 2-3). The monument differs from other Soviet Army monuments, such as the ones in Vienna and Berlin, with the notion for its construction not to honour the victory over Nazi Germany and the Red Army warriors who gave their lives for this victory but to be used as propaganda, physically expressing the idea that the totalitarian power has been established in Bulgaria. It is guaranteed by the Red Army's assistance in the country's occupation that it will last. Coincidentally, the monument was also built and opened to the public in 1954, which happens to be the year when the last standing resistance to the regime, the Goryan resistance movement, was liquidated (Shpatov, 2023, para. 5)

The monument represents an era of controversy and propaganda. While historical remarks describe it to its fullest, the majority of Bulgarian citizens are not aware of the terror and disturbance the Red Army brought to Bulgaria. The Bulgarian professor and historian, Kelbecheva, has stated in multiple interviews and articles that Bulgaria is one of the only countries in the EU that has 185 monuments dedicated to the Red Army while there is no public history around the topic and the debates concerning the deconstruction and moving of those monuments to the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia, Bulgaria (BTV NEWS, 2024, para. 1). Professor Kelbecheva then has stated that the number of people that do not know the term occupation and the Red Army's actions in Bulgaria is higher than expected and there are many reasons for that such as the government's prohibition towards including this part of Bulgarian

history in History textbooks for both high schools and universities (BTV NEWS, 2024, para. 2). Most historical articles are based upon continuing the soviet propaganda with atrocious examples of other Red Army monuments such as the ones in Vienna, Budapest and Berlin but all those other monuments take place in countries and cities where there was a battle and the Red Army has significantly helped the other nation, while in Bulgaria there was no army but just an occupation that later brought the Soviet regime to Bulgaria (BTV NEWS, 2024, para. 1). Years of research and work concerning the debunking of Soviet history in Bulgaria, led professor Kelbecheva and her team of Svetoslav Ovcharov as director of the film, Svetla Tsotsorkova, as cameraman, producing the documentary movie "The Second Liberation" based on the entry of the Red Army into Bulgaria and the occupation of the country in September 1944. The documentary has won two nationally recognized movie awards with acceptance of the documentary as a reliable representation and use of national documents with the aim to demythologize Bulgarian history beyond ideological clichés and, therefore, put an end to propaganda (Vladimirova, 2022, para.1). All documents used in the documentary have been presented to the filming team and professor Kelbecheva by the national Bulgarian archives.

With the beginning of World War Two, Bulgaria and its ruler, Tsar Boris, proclaimed neutrality. However, the country's government was led by a Germanophile who sought closure to Germany during the conflict. Despite Bulgaria's vouch for neutrality, Bulgaria was later granted back the territory of Dobrudja under the new pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, forcing Romania to free the occupied Bulgarian territory (Britannica, 2024 para. 1). This act of territorial expansion strengthened Tsar Boris's desire to see Germany's victory and Bulgaria's expansion resulting in Boris's declaration of Bulgaria joining the Axis in 1941 (Britannica, 2024 para.3). Boris's decision for the country led to a rise of resistance by the Agrarian leaders backed up with multiple small-group sabotages and protests. It was then

estimated that about ten thousand people supported the resistance and participated in such protests, marking it as the most significant resistance movement in all allies with Germany. The Agrarian leaders, then defined as Soviet supporters, sought cooperation from other groups of opposition, which resulted in the establishment of the "Fatherland Front" in August 1943, gathering all opposition groups of left-wing Agrarians, communists, socialists, independent political figures, and Zveno. The influence of the opposition grew stronger with Germany's deterioration on the military front. Many expected Tsar Boris to break the alliance with Germany. However, politics turned in another direction with the tsar's death after a visit to Germany and with his son being too young to rule, a regency council formed by Filov, and a new government under Dobri Bozhilov, the remaining allegiance and loyalty to Germany. With the collapse of Germany, Bozhilov resigned, and his position was taken by the right-wing Ivan Bagrianov from the Agrarians, during whose governance Romania surrendered and cleared the way for the Soviet troops. Bulgaria decided to lose its alliance with Germany and proclaim neutrality, but it was rejected, leading to the resignation of Bagrianov and the replacement of Kosta Muraviev from the Agrarian Union in 1944. Shortly after the replacement of the prime minister, The Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria and entered the country, and Kimon Georgiev of Zveno became the new prime minister and pledged to an armistice with the Soviet Union, further establishing the Early Communist Era in Bulgaria, carried out by 1948 corresponding with the peace treaty among Allies and the Soviet troops had already occupied the country (Britannica, 2024 para. 5-9)

Since Bulgaria had already broken the alliance with Germany, pledged neutrality, and kept their neutrality towards the Soviet Union during the Second World War, there were around twenty thousand German soldiers on the country's territory. Despite having no specific reason for declaring war, the USSR declared war on Bulgaria on September 5th, 1944(Ovtcharov,

2021, 0:4:45). The Red Army was then sent to Bulgaria with a count of 258,000 soldiers with a letter sent to the Army's soldiers propagating to them that their duty is to now again Liberate Bulgaria. However, a good question could be about whom, since all German soldiers fled the country after the end of Bulgaria's alliance with Germany. At the same time, historians also claim that there were no fascist forces in Bulgaria(Ovtcharov, 2021, 0:6:46). This letter of commemoration of the past and inspiration of the new war can be considered as the beginning of the Soviet Army propaganda in Bulgaria, propaganda which roots the nation's oblivious belief that the Army was sent to liberate the country. Once the Red Army entered Bulgaria, on the night of 8-9th of September 1944, the Red Army, strictly under directions sent from Moscow, a coup took place in Sofia, overthrowing the government and assisting the establishment of a new one, chosen and controlled by the USSR and backed up by the Bulgarian communist party, "Otechestven front" (Ovtcharov, 2021). Plenty of cases against the Red Army arose later on in Bulgaria, claiming that the Red Army soldiers had raped, murdered, and attacked Bulgarians (Ovtcharov, 2021, 0:16:19). In October 1944, a Bulgarian delegation was sent to Moscow with the current Minister of Foreign Affairs from the party "Otechestven front," professor Petko Staynov to sign a peace treaty between Bulgaria the USSR and the allies, marking the minister's writing addressing the USSR governance claiming that Bulgaria wants to end this war against the USSR, thanking the Red Army for liberating Bulgaria and awaiting their judgement and therefore receive Bulgaria's sentence. Professor Staynov's writing officially stated that Bulgaria was grateful for the USSR's assistance, and later, by signing their peace treaty offer, he accepted the Soviet regime. After the violent change of governments on September 9th, 1944, the new government, with the help of the Red Army, began to physically destroy what was left of the previous governance of the Kingdom of Bulgaria when monuments and commemorations of the past governance were destroyed(Aleksandrov, 2023, para. 10). After a year, Georgi Dimitrov returned to Bulgaria after an exile of 22 years and officially

became the prime minister of Bulgaria and later declared the need for constructing a monument in the name of the Red Army which would commemorate the Army's act of liberating Bulgaria but also strengthen Bulgaria's socialist regime in a matter of establishing propaganda and stimulating the creation of collective memory and identity around the brutality of the events.(Britannica, 2024, para. 11). The memorial monument was constructed on the past grounds of the Tsar Garden, where fountains, gardens with flowers and children's playgrounds took place(Aleksandrov, 2023, para. 17). The construction of the monument was finalized in 1954 commemorating a decade after the Soviet Army's invasion during World War II (RFE/RL, 2023, para. 3). The dedication inscribed on the monument "To the Soviet Army liberators – from the grateful people of Bulgaria." has been vandalized many times and once smashed with a hammer by a 61-year-old as a matter of protest for the monument's existence in Sofia during the Russian invasion of Ukraine(RFE/RL, 2023, para.3).

There are many ongoing debates around the topic of removing the monument and placing it in the Museum of socialist art in Sofia, some of which concern people's argumentation towards the art and the artist of the monument suggesting that the monument shall be preserved and left where it is as it portrays a work of art from a particular historical era. This debate can be easily debunked with the application of one potent source of information written and published by the artist Lyubomir Dalchev himself, where he states that Bulgaria should not celebrate its occupation and slavery by the Soviet regime brought Bulgaria by unjust politicians and schemes (Aleksandrov, 2023, para. 19). Dalchev's son later states in a live interview with the Bulgarian National Television(Aleksandrov, 2023, para. 22):

"Паметникът идва от Политбюро. Не е свързан с борци против фашизма или Втората световна война. Няма тази връзка. Той се построява като пропаганда, когато те смятат България да стане съветска република. По този начин това е първата пропаганда като реклама на съветската република. Идват съветници от Москва, които помагат с правенето на скиците, каква да е темата на скулпторите и релефите.

Политбюро избира художници от Академията, които да го изпълнят. Композициите са директно диктувани от Политбюро и от съветските съветници. Той няма нищо общо с България и историята", каза синът на бележития български скулптор."

His statement proves the conspiracy and propaganda behind the construction of the monument, which is a pure necessity for strengthening the collective identity and collective memory of a nation that has fallen to the Soviet regime.

With the monument's construction in 1954, there has been no official documentation binding Bulgaria to take care of the monument and preserve it until August 4th, 1992, when the current and first non-communist elected president of Bulgaria from 1990 - 1997 welcomed and signed a pact with the Russian president Boris Elcin, concerning mutual benefit, exclusion of interference in internal affairs, respect for sovereignty, settling for friendly relations and cooperation between the two countries. The document featured each country's need to take necessary care and measures to preserve all values in their territory related to the culture and history of the other country(Mariqnska, 2022, para. 1-3).

Contemporary debates and public protests portray the societal division that the monument has brought to Bulgaria with the propaganda it stands for and the many years of establishing and fueling collective memory and identity in society, which can be seen as a concept impacting both sides of the debate. The Russian invasion of Ukraine awoke the debate once again with a political assertion of the document signed with Russia in 1992. The debate was shortly turned around with argumentation that article 14 in the treaty states that the two countries are supposed to take proper care of all values related to Russia's culture and history, suggesting that Bulgaria should first ask for Russia's permission when it comes to any decision towards the monument's future. Iliyan Vasilev, Bulgarian ambassador of Bulgaria to Russia

until 2006, suggests that awaiting approval for the monument's move is an excuse from the regional and government since it is unrealistic to expect any positive outcome(Santova, 2022). Later, the lawyer, Petar Slavov, turned the attention towards the act of moving the monument and not demolishing it, which can be interpreted by the treaty as Bulgaria's actions to preserve the monument, proving that the decision of the monument's fate belongs to the country of Bulgaria and its government since the monument is defined as propaganda and evidence show that there is no tomb beneath it, leaving the decision and debate purely to politics which have been influenced by both parties of the divided society, supporters and opponents of the monument's removal. (Santova, 2022, para. 7). Consequently, shortly after in December 2023, the Bulgarian government agreed upon the deconstruction and moving of the monument in the soviet art museum in Sofia (Свободна Европа, 2023, para. 1). The deconstruction of the monument was then approached by a live broadcast commentary by the Russian spokeswoman for the foreign ministry, Maria Zakharova, with a statement defining the barbaric actions of Bulgaria with no justification proving for Bulgaria once again taking the wrong side of history(Свободна Европа, 2023, para. 1-3).

CHAPTER 2:

Chapter 2.1: Law behind monument preservation

There is no universal law binding countries and their nation to preserve, reconstruct, or deconstruct monuments, but such actions are typically governed by national policies and laws, including peace treaties and in-bound treaties binding a nation to commemorate and preserve monuments signifying another country's assistance in achieving freedom, providing help, . It is, therefore, essential to delve deeper into monument recognition, protection, preservation, and public and cultural perception of a monument to understand contemporary debates and protests.

The UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage took place in 1972, and a recent briefing in March 2016 defines a cultural heritage that should be preserved and protected during an ongoing armed conflict as 'the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations' (Pasikowska-Schnass, 2016, p.2). The destruction of such cultural heritages is therefore determined by UNESCO as a war crime, and therefore, such actions should be distinguished and examined to prove if the destruction has been intentional, unintentional, human-made hazard, or a natural disaster. Earlier conventions, such as the 1899 Hague Convention and the following Treaty signed in 1935, bind countries to Protect Scientific and Artistic Institutions as well as Historical Monuments. With the advancement of such agreements and treaties, as well as past and present war conflicts, the Hague Convention determined a legal framework for

identifying cultural property and further protecting and preserving laws. (Pasikowska-Schnass, 2016, p.2-3). The definition of such cultural heritages:

"(a) movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people, such as monuments of architecture, art or history, whether religious or secular; archaeological sites; groups of buildings which, as a whole, are of historical or artistic interest; works of art; manuscripts, books and other objects of artistic, historical or archaeological interest; as well as scientific collections and important collections of books or archives or of reproductions of the property defined above;

(b) buildings whose primary and practical purpose is to preserve or exhibit the movable cultural property defined in sub-paragraph (a), such as museums, large libraries and depositories of archives, and refuges intended to shelter, in the event of armed conflict, the movable cultural property defined in sub-paragraph (a);"

(UNESCO, n.d.)(Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, p.10).

The definition quoted above has been discussed and adopted during the Hague Conference and written down as an agreement between all parties that took part in the diplomatic document, "The Final Act," signed on 14 May 1954 in The Hague, Netherlands, with an entry into force starting from 7 August 1956.

The Soviet Army monument in Sofia, Bulgaria, was not declared a "cultural property" during the Hague Convention despite Bulgaria's entry into the state party list of the convention, with a joining date of 9 October 1958. (UNESCO, n.d.) Since the convention itself is based upon the idea of protecting "cultural property" during armed conflicts but also assigns importance and value to monuments considered of great importance to a country's nation, leading to each state party of the convention deciding if a monument should be listed as a "cultural property". This example of the monument's dissociation from being a "cultural property" and Bulgaria's choice not to declare the Soviet Army monument as a "cultural property" to preserve the monument in case of armed conflicts as well as occupation could be a proof of the monument's lack of importance, or at least a declared one upon the convention.

Other countries, such as Hungary, are bound by an intergovernmental agreement between them and the USSR as well as the USSR's direct successor, the Russian Federation, which until now has persisted for the monument to stand tall in Liberty Square, located in Budapest (The Budapest Times, 2022). The opposition party, Jobbik, stood up with a parliamentary proposition, aiming to raise awareness towards the controversial Soviet military monument, which is located in Liberty Square. Lukács' direction of appeal illustrates the incompatibility of the monument with Russia disregarding all sense of freedom and justice while also mocking the Hungarian revolution of 1956 towards Josef Stalin's rule (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024). The Hungarian Revolution, which took place in 1956, marked its role with the controversial yet influential assistance of Imre Nagy, former prime minister of Hungary, during the uprising against the Soviet regime (DW, 2018). Nagy's part in the uprising led to his execution by the communist party, and later, in 1996, a statue of the politician was placed at the Martyr's Square, between the Parliament of Budapest and Freedom Square, with a design symbolizing the walk towards freedom (Eckholm, 2014). The current prime minister of Hungary has asserted a relationship with the Russian president, Vladimir Putin (BBC, 2018, para. 7), resulting in his intentions to revise Hungary's past by moving the statue of Imre Nagy to a less prominent location in the city and far from Freedom square and the parliament (DW, 2018, para. 2). The plans for re-doing the square where Imre Nagy's statue was located is to reconstruct and reproduce the outlook of the capital with its pre-World War Two display, recreating a monument, constructed during the rule of Admiral Miklos Horthy, an anti-semitic, pro-Nazi, former head of state in Hungary until 1944, (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024, para.1)(DW, 2018)(BBC, 2018). Such political actions, specifically considering Viktor Orban's close relationship with Vladimir Putin and his standpoint, reforming, replacing, and revising history concerning the past Soviet regime enforced by Russia, can be examined as a

way to take sides and strengthen the relationship between the two countries. Such political stanzas lead to open debates and protests concerning moving current monuments and statues with the idea of establishing and enforcing collective identity. Alpár Kató, writing for "Daily News Hungary," quotes the Hungarian politician, member of the Democratic Coalition and the European Parliament, Csaba Molnár:

"the statue was a memento of the power of the people and the nation that will not tolerate tyranny." (Kató, 2018, para. 5)

The ruling party's decision to move the monument despite the nation's objective and word. This political decision to remove the statue portrays how vulnerable statues, monuments, and cultural property can be in a post-Soviet country ruled by politicians favoring their past occupation. In Hungary's case, politics favor the unjust oppression inserted by Russia until this day, proving that no social or juridical agreement for the preservation of post-Soviet propaganda is needed if politicians of a particular country still have deep-rooted sympathies and friendship with their past occupation. Relating the case to the Soviet Army monument in Sofia, Hungary, just like Bulgaria, has been left with bitter feelings concerning the Red Army's presence in their country as reports show similar activity as in Bulgaria during the Red Army occupation. Boris Slutsky, a Russian poet who traveled among sides with the Red Army, wrote in his memoir "Things that Happened" that rape was enjoyed by Hungarian women marking the mass rape and terror caused by the Red Army in Hungary, which was not drawn attention to after the Second World War and was further denied by soviet supporters (Mark, 2005,p. 134). Western authors, such as Anthony Bevor's Berlin: The Downfall, published in 1945, have written stories of the Red Army soldiers, describing them as being out of control, drunken rapists, committing violence and spreading terror. Once history becomes public and more accessible, just as presented in the following chapter 2.2, referencing the Public History

movement, historical information can be a possible solution to many public debates surrounding the topic of public spaces and monument preservation or deconstruction.

Chapter 2.2: How does the notion of constructing and deconstructing monuments relate to the end movement of "Public History"?

The notion of constructing new monuments and deconstructing existing historical monuments has been an ongoing subject for debate worldwide, with reflection towards complexities arising from topics such as collective memory, societal values, and cultural heritage belonging. When researching the Soviet Army monument, one can grasp that there is almost no official or historically accurate interpretation of the monument during a public debate. The concepts presented in Chapter 1.1 are missing concepts while debunking the Soviet Army monument in Sofia, Bulgaria. Such an approach towards the monument can be the work of continuously shaping societal and political questions in the country. This complex debate requires deeper investigation on the topic, human use and reliance on monuments, history, and the past, and their mutual end product of creating a social belonging and collective memory.

According to the Slovak Academy of Sciences researcher, Jan Bakos, in the article *Monuments and Ideologies*, part of the journal *Human Affairs*, the cult of historical monuments is attributed to inborn human tendencies and societal pressure. The author suggests that monuments grasp onto a significant stance for human consciousness because of the innate reliance on memory, connecting it with the past and the already existing social identity of one, but primarily emphasise the fear of losing identity. Bakos describes monuments as modern toolkits for creating and safeguarding social identity through their sole existence (Bakos, 2023,

p. 106). Then Bakos states that it could be the modern variation of it which was brought up by historical causes such as nationalism and historicism, conventionally portraying the brutality behind industrialism, highlighting the need for cultural preservation as well as stimulating and preserving collective memory and identity (Bakos, 2023, p. 106). Bakos explores the contrasting view of monuments, their history, and purposes by applying a perspective influenced by Hegelian philosophy, which he shifts towards finding sense in the debate by portraying monument construction as a progression from ignorance towards wisdom, emphasising the need for the application of rather more scientific towards understanding monument preservation, declaring past mistakes, stemming from the lack of knowledge.

On the other hand, the relativistic interpretation of monument concepts declares their existence as constantly evolving and subjective, which reflects ongoing struggles to reach ideals and values. Therefore, Bakos states that monuments can be powerful tools for shaping and reshaping ideology and collective memory, adopted from the past with an interest in use in the present, building the future. This perspective emphasises monument preservation's dynamic and alternating nature (Bakos, 2023, p. 107). Bakos's study on the topic of monuments portrays monuments as evolving symbols of collective memory and identity. It is an excellent groundwork for further examination of how society interacts with such symbols and how they can be used as powerful social, cultural, and political tools that are portrayed in the case study of the Soviet Army monument in Sofia, Bulgaria in terms of the ongoing debates around its deconstruction and the societal and political division that has been created in the country (DW, 2023, para.1).

The easier it gets for a reader to get information, the easier it can be for an individual to encounter fake or polarised news, written just in a way to capture the reader's eye and

eventually build up onto the individual's partaking in an "echo chamber" fulfilled with information suitable for the individual's thinking (EUI, 2023, para.3). It is essential for one to acknowledge the existence of misinformation as well as the need of an individual's interest, capability and interest in a specific topic for an individually traced research to begin, meaning that one who is not interested in a topic might never want to either encounter the topic or get to know more of it. The following subchapter can play a significant role in addressing possible solutions for dealing with historical information and its relevance when it comes to debunking and acknowledging the history behind The Soviet Army monument in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Thomas Cauvin, an associate professor specializing in public history at the Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C²DH), explores the topic of monument preservation from another perspective, focusing on the public's approach and action in the debate itself as well as the counter-active public participation. Thomas Cauvin states in his article "A Public History of Monuments" that many questions arise, such as who should be commemorated and represented as a monument in spaces open to the public as well as who should be competent to decide if a monument is to exist or to be removed in terms of being demolished or displaced to another location such as art museum (Cauvin, 2022, p.8). In "A Textbook by Practice," Cauvin quotes the historian Ronald Grele, famous for his work on the correlation between public history and oral history, with his statement that from the beginning, the study and work of a historian was a public act with each historian serving a different public with an outlook towards the importance of exploring the history behind historians and their aim throughout the ages with a role in the public space (Cauvin, 2016, p. 2). From this statement, one can assimilate the importance of history in the public space and its aim to educate and publicly deliver relevant information after the rise of scientific history during the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, with a quest to implement objectivity and professional methodology

which was based upon primary sources, historicism, and factual analysis. The inventor of the term, Robert Kelley, defined public history as the act of practising history outside of the classroom away from academia, connecting historians from academia and accrediting historians from outside academia (Cauvin, 2016, pp. 10-11). Conversely, as defined by the University of Technology Sydney, the aim of public history and public historians is to approach, analyse, and spread history for public audiences and, with their help, the intention of engaging with broader communities and raising awareness for the preservation of culture, history and the importance of history being accessible to the public (UTS.edu).

Cauvin discusses how public history's aim is to focus on the production of history in terms of monuments approaching engagement, accessibility, and participation, which can directly influence publicly-led debates around the topic of contested monuments. He states that public history should be approached to debunk historical factuality and accuracy when executing decision-making upon deconstruction of removal of monuments from public spaces as such decisions relate to the monument's symbolism and message, which can encourage exclusion or stand for controversial past (Cauvin, 2022, p.8). The term, public history, was developed in the United States in the 1970s (Cauvin, 2016, pp. 3-26) as a field in historical studies to expand definitions such as actors, space, and the process of history-making. The movement's aim is to explore beyond academia and apply historical research and methodology in order to unfold a side of history reaching toward the conservation of historical heritage, archiving, and oral history, as well as the public's interpretation of history.

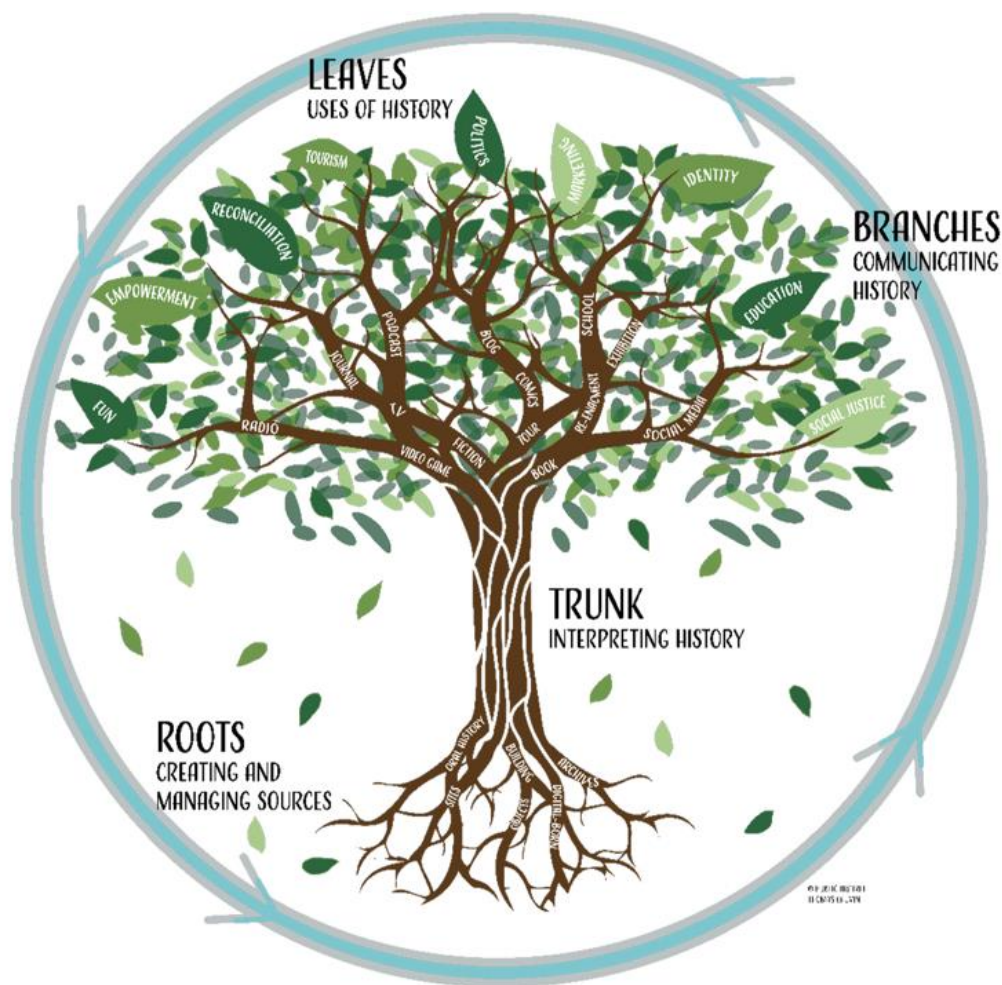


Figure 1: The Public His'Tree (Cauvin, 2023, p.11)

Figure 1 from T. Cauvin's article "A Public History of Monuments" represents the aims of the public history movement, which are solely to establish historical reasoning while including the participation of the public and their engagement. The process described in Figure 1 illustrates four interconnected parts of a field, consisting of the roots, representing the act of creating and managing historical sources, the trunk serving as the analytical and interpretational tool of the sources, and the branches as the presenter of historical sources and interpretations to the audience (Cauvin, 2022, pp. 12-14). Representing the branches and their many leaves can be done through various ways of communication, such as monuments, exhibitions or

podcasts in order to make it accessible while also educational and informative. The structure of the Public HisTree allows monuments as a medium to fit into as they serve society by being historical sources that are examined by the public as subjects and symbols, diversifying and establishing dynamic public discourse (Cauvin, 2022, pp. 12-14). The movement of Public History is an example of how history and historical knowledge can be modified in order for it to be more accessible and engaging with the intention of it becoming public, which could lead to solving political and social debates around historical landmarks and their existence or demolition based on the public's ability to reason and take action with an already existing knowledge of historical sites and monuments.

Asserting the Public History movement in countries such as Bulgaria could be a possible solution when dealing with misinformation, fake news, and lack of knowledge presented both individually and by the masses coming from governmental and political action in prohibiting the debunking of historical information and the use of historically relevant and accurate facts. Such application of history in a more public manner does not have to come from the government-appointed decisions but can also be provided by Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which can, therefore, research, debunk historical insights and facts and then share them. In this scenario, the action of an NGO could be a solution in transforming history into public history and making it easier to resolve public debates based on historical accuracy.

Conclusion

The Soviet Army Monument, also called the Red Army Occupation monument, serves as a focal point in exploring the complex interplay between social identity, collective memory and monuments. The case study is compelling and ongoing making it interesting to unfold and examine. This thesis paper has delved deeper into the topic of monuments and their role as more than commemoration sites with deeply embedded sociological concepts and theoretical approach that shapes them as active agents in shaping societal and historical narratives, fueling ideological constructs. The literature review presented in the thesis as well as the case study of the Soviet Army monument in Sofia with a small comparison to another case study in Budapest, this research portrays the multifaceted role of Soviet Army monuments in post-soviet countries to reinforce socialist ideology while establishing societal divisions and maintaining historical narratives and societal division. Soviet Army monuments such as the one in Sofia, Bulgaria were built with intentions to propagate a specific ideology belonging to the soviet regime and the strategic view of cementing and legitimising the regime's power and ideology through a physical public propaganda.

This research reveals that the role of the Soviet Army Monument in Sofia extends beyond the concept of historical accuracy and its commemorative functions with a notion of relevance towards already established and cemented social identities preventing societal reconciliation with the complex past of the country. One of the most significant findings of this research is the importance of access to relevant knowledge and the accessibility of history and public knowledge. Further the research illustrates that the absence of historical narratives and misinformation has led to polarised and unsolved public debates. Therefore by fostering a more public and accessible history, the public can engage in more nuanced discussion based on

historical landmarks and their present symbolism and value to society. The case study of the Soviet Army Monument is one of the many research projects based on Soviet monuments and their essence. The case study is indicative of a broader issue accompanying Soviet monuments depicting their role in contemporary political and social discourses. Further exploration of this case study could be placed upon involving comparative analyses of other Soviet monuments across Europe depicting different narratives that they have fostered with the aim of debunking misconceptions and myths of Soviet-era history. This approach can further support the establishment of public history and therefore foster an environment where history could play the role of an instrumental tool for guidance in societal progression and is not just perceived as past facts.

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