

Archaeological Site Stobensium, Macedonia

Applicative Study for Development of Community-
Centred Approach in the Operational Management of the
Site

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Introduction

The idea behind this text is to project a better administrative management model than the one existing, at the archaeological site Stobensium in Macedonia. I am completely aware that such tendency might not fully comply with the criteria set out for this course, as I find them quite technical to my professional allocation of knowledge in the field of what is considered as effective management of built heritage.

Judging within cultural contexts of belonging, I will try to identify and face certain problems, as well as positive experiences acquired, within the past six years, as an employee of the National Conservation Centre of Cultural Heritage (NKC) in Skopje, and as a person being greatly involved in issues concerning Stobensium and the strategies for its empowerment as a mental picture.

In other words, the methodological plot, in many regards is to be subjected to recognition of the specific nature of Stobensium and its surroundings, and to the idea of developing strategic priorities of different time scales, concerning research, protection, management and presentation of the site.

It is good to notice in this occasion, that there is an official process undergoing, of re-structuring the management constellations in regard to the site. Though I have very little info on the matter, and in many cases disagree with the known solutions offered, most sincerely I hope to contribute (at least theoretically), for changing the overall picture towards better...

Additionally, and what I consider even more important, is the tendency to contribute the democratisation of a reality, of an inherited state of mind, predominantly maintaining a centralised approach towards heritage designations and issues, and for which the core financial accountability, in many cases, stimulates corruptive attitudes in the sphere...

Abstract

The management of cultural heritage, as “**a management of change**”, affects the immediate designations of “*the heritage*” itself, but also its surroundings and cultural communities. Such greatly interconnected aptitude designates Stobensium nowadays, as a narrative in need of a compact, and self-sufficient administrative model of management, inter-disciplinary and expandable in its competences, and affirmative towards the universal humanistic values.

Featuring the era of late Roman period and first codifications of Christianity, Stobensium despite its uniqueness and magnitude of the

past times, above all, nowadays remains a poorly managed asset. The overall situation to a great extent influence the very processes of conservation and its quality. The problems seem to be of a system nature, and have been progressing within the last twenty to thirty years...

Introduction

Background

Stobensium: History, Location and Surroundings

The archaeological site Stobensium (also known as Stobi), is located in the central part of Macedonia. It is positioned between the rivers Vardar (Axios) and Crna (Erigon); (Figure 1), exactly at the flow of Crna to Vardar. It occupies some 18 hectares of land, and depending on the specific spot, its elevation varies between 15 and 20 metres above the sea level, whereas the approximate position coordinates are as follows: 41° 33' 08" N and 21° 58' 33" E.

Nowadays Stobensium is easy reachable by domestic and international roads. One of the major international motorways E-75 is passing by the site, along with the major railway line in Macedonia (north-south). Currently, there are at about 100.000 inhabitants in the radius of approximately some 30 km from the site (Figure 2), living in two rural, and three urban major municipalities. These are *Veles*, *Gradsko*, *Rosoman*, *Negotino*, and *Kavadarci*.

The first systematic excavations and conservation were undertaken between 1924 and 1933 by the Museum of Belgrade (Dr. V. Petkovic). The Serbian archaeologists discovered the remains of several public and private buildings, among them the ancient theatre. The other more noticeable expeditions took place between 1970 and 1980 as part of the then joint American-Yugoslav research project (J. Wiseman / B. Aleksova / Dj. Mano-Zissi). Since the independence of Macedonia, such expedition of greater proportions took place in 1991...

Stobensium had very important strategic position in military and commercial terms in the ancient times. Despite the fact that it was positioned at the crossing of two rivers, it also stood at the main road connecting the nearby valleys of the river Danube in the north, with the Aegean coast in the south (Figure 3).

Though the life in the city flourished in the early and middle Roman period, the recent excavations suggest that the first settlement existed as early as 7th and 6th centuries BC. It is very likely therefore, that the city was built in the Hellenistic period, not much before the rule of the Macedonian king Philip V.

In the year 168 BC, the Romans conquered Macedonia, and divided it into four regions. Stobensium became administrative centre of the



Figure 1

Stobensium map. Contemporary situational reality

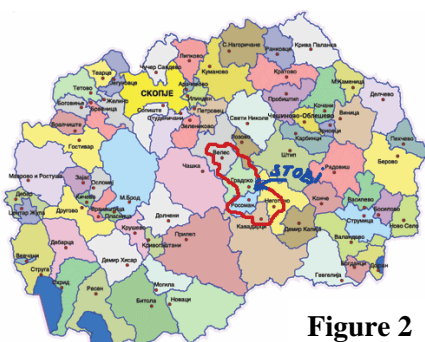


Figure 2

The designated area is represented with a red line.

Figure 3



The major roads in the ancient times in the territory of the Republic of Macedonia

third region Macedonia Salutaris. During the years, the city progressed and in 69 AD, it was promoted into a status of Municipium, where coins were minted bearing the inscription *Municipium Stobensium* (Figure 4).

The life in Stobensium flourished during the early and middle Roman period, and a number of monumental structures have been discovered. Among them, it is worth mentioning the theatre, several public baths, a number of palaces, worshipping sanctuaries, etc. In addition, numerous movable objects from this period were also found...

Stobensium continued with its development during the early Christianity. By the 325 AD, it became an important Episcopal centre, known for its bishop Budius, who attended the famous *First Ecumenical Council of Nicea*, where for the first time in history, the outlines of the uniform Christian doctrine were brought. During this period, many churches and baptisteries were built in Stobensium, specific in their architectural decoration, followed by mosaics, frescoes and stucco ornaments. The richness in architectonic solutions and interior organizations, witness the great prosperity Stobensium reached during these times.

In the late 4th century AD, the city had raised into a range of a *Diocese* seating an Archbishop, under whose authority were two additional units. The towns of Bargala and Zapara.

In the year 388 AD the Emperor Theodosius I, known as the last ruler of both the eastern and western Roman Empire, as well as for the fact of proclaiming the Christianity as official state religion, at the time visited Stobensium, and issued two edicts (laws) in which prohibited gathering of heretics and public discussion about the faith (Codex Theodosianus I / II).

To date Stobensium stands as one of the best researched archaeological sites in Macedonia. However, there is a lot more to be done in terms of archaeological investigation, and more importantly-conservation. Meanwhile, it is open to the public though the tourist infrastructure is at very low level of providing a sort of “mental security” to the potential visitors, while the knowledge-based narratives for the cultural communities, are almost non-existent.

Macedonia in the last decade, among many others, undertook legal reforms within the spheres of culture, and in particular the cultural heritage. The list of significant legal reforms also include the ones in the spheres of spatial planning and the local self-governance...

Though the *Law for Protection of Cultural Heritage* (2005)¹ marked a significant step forward in the sphere, its outcome mostly remains way to “technical” in its own terms, manifesting a strong tendency for a centralized approach as towards the designations of cultural heritage and the system for its overall management. In practice, the problems appear in the areas of institutional competences, the management of human and material resources, the definition of values and priorities,



Figure 4

but most importantly, in the perception of the human dimension of the designated heritage. Within all these constellations, Stobensium and the question of its operational management, happened to be the most vulnerable aspect of the post-communist societal transition in Macedonia, mapping the great failures in the system of protection, conservation and presentation of heritage.

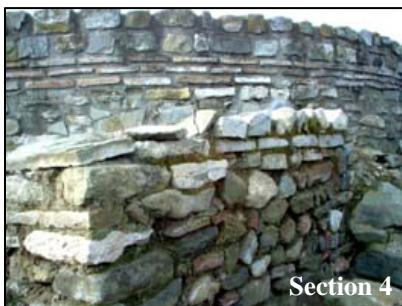
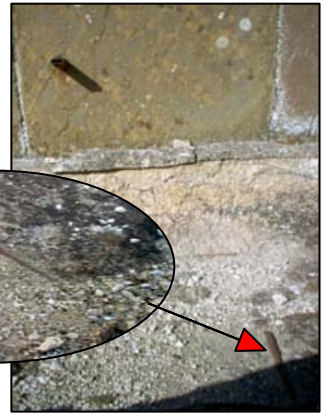
Stobensium; function, size, materials, status

Nowadays Stobensium remains a relic of the past times, which almost certainly, does not maintains the immediate functionality at its remains, (apart from the [Summer Theater Festival “Stobi”](#), when the audience is sitted at the remains of the ancient theatre).

For the purpose of this study the “*technical*” as previously noted, will not be strictly focused upon the processes of conservation and its management but, once again, *the management understood as a process of empowering the narrative of Stobensium*. It is a synchronized and multi-competence process, boosting the dynamics of diversive expressionism and social functionalities, of the very “heritage” itself...

To this end, approaching the question of developing an administrative model to comply with such particular virtues for effective operational management of the site, remains the core objective of this study.

Being designated as one of the most significant archaeological sites in Macedonia, which witnessed continuous attention in the past decades from the national authorities, Stobensium nowadays most immediately suffers the carelessness of our-time transitional heroes, the bad conservation practices and the institutional failures to anticipate its human dimension. The question of conservation and its quality is obviously problematic enough, as it is not difficult to notice, at first sight (*Sections 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5*).



Stobensium is protected heritage of first category, by the national classification. By governmental proclamation, in 2001 the overall management of the site was transferred from the local *Museum of the city of Veles*, to the *National Conservation Centre of Cultural Heritage, NKC* (then known as National Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments - RZZSK). The reason for such action was rather pragmatic. At the time, a major project worth 105.700 Euros for an upgrade of tourist infrastructure was undergoing, financed by the *PHARE Cultural Development Programme* of the European Union. Due to the lack of professional resources of the local museum (a problem which generally stands for all the institutions in the field), the authority was transferred at national level institution, namely the NKC.



Section 6

The funds from the PHARE Programme helped in fencing the site, as well as some of the following (*Section 6*):

- A placement of two information boards, with a plan of the site at each entrance (bilingual);
- Placing separate bilingual boards of short information at each object;
- Two bungalows to serve as souvenir-shop premises;
- Preparation and publishing of 10.000 bilingual information leaflets about the site;
- Purchasing and installment of surveillance equipment, etc.

Immediately, and as the project progressed, the then National Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments formed a special internal department (*Sector for Management of Cultural Heritage*), whose primary task was to develop and execute activities for *a better promotion of the site for cultural, educational and scientific exploitation*. Furthermore, the tasks of the unit included providing logistics in terms of locating *potential donors* willing to finance activities concerning conservation and archaeological research. The *international cooperation* was another dimension of the agenda, with ambitions for future expansion of the scope as towards different sites. In its nine months of existence, the Sector achieved noticeable results, without any significant supplements from the annual budget. Unfortunately, due to political reasons, its work was officially terminated after the general elections at the end of the 2002, and as the new political and management structure got in charge. By its short period of existence, full of enthusiastic and dynamic work, a sort of recognition came later in early 2004, when a major investment of 158.000 USD came in form of a *Visitors' Centre* (*Section 7*), which was to be further improving the tourist infrastructure at the site. Nowadays, almost four years later, it is officially a state property

(NKC), despite the fact that the projected agendas of its function, to date, failed to be met and maintained by the top management executives at the NKC. It is run by a local private company, having a tenancy agreement with the NKC.

Certainly, Stobensium nowadays urgently needs an ***Integrated Protection, Conservation and Management Plan***. But first and foremost, there is a need to create a situational reality where the questions of *democratic capacities* and *institutional knowledge transfers*, will excessively constitute the whole new backbone of “the new deal”...

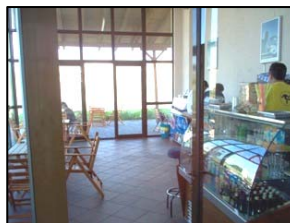
Its outcomes in practice, find the perfect means to enhancing the overall communication processes in-between the parties involved, and upon which the narrative of Stobensium, hypothetically speaking, inspires a further community action.

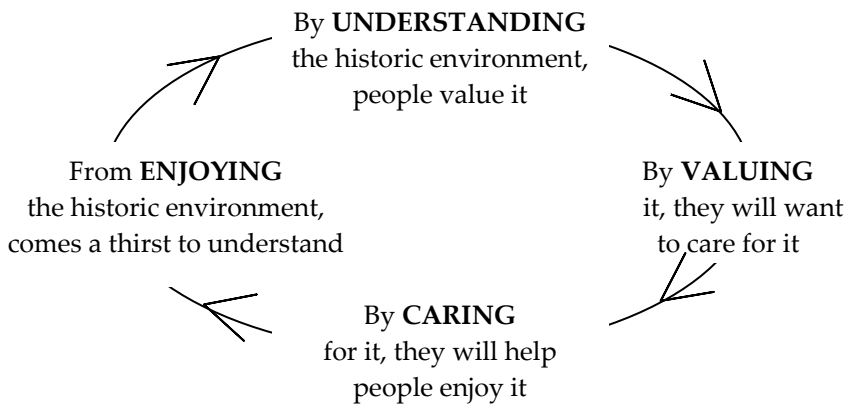
In a reality of many misfunctionalities to date, it is not an exaggeration, to notice the inadequate level of social interaction within Stobensium. A market category, specific and demanding for the most part, which if taken unseriously into projections of revitalization of cultural heritage, easily turns into a state of incomplete actions, and single-sided approaches, sufficiently lacking amount of public feedback.

Though such negative tendencies extensively came as a result of objective reasons (being for the most part an unavoidable feature within the post-communist recovery of the Macedonian society), one cannot fully diverse from the human factor and the exercised subjectivity over designations of Stobensium. Manifested throughout practices of unrealistic exclusivity, while following, the personal rather than collective interests, such patterns only helped maintaining the *status quo* situation, affecting the wider conceptualizations of Stobensium.



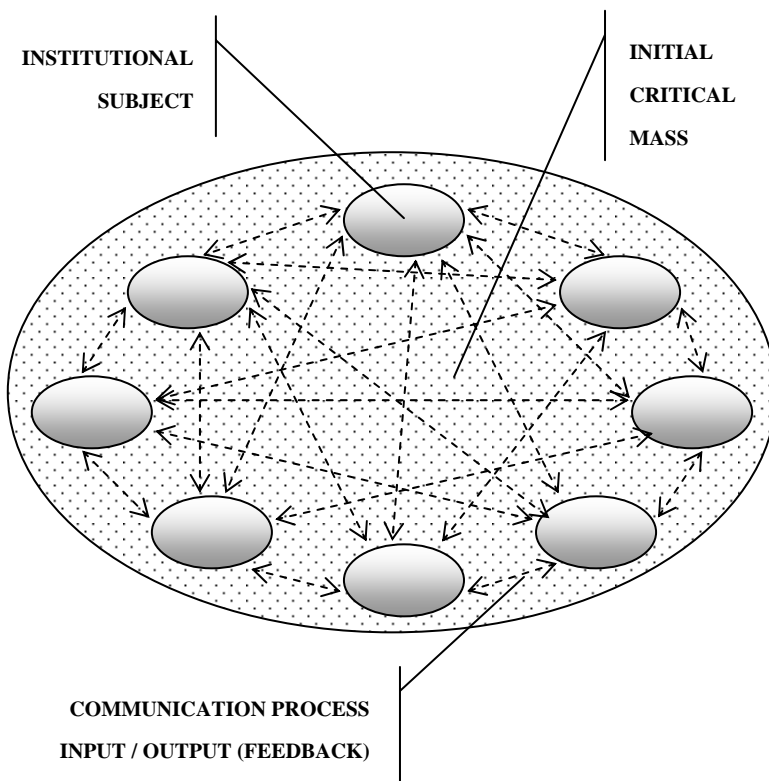
Section 7





Situation 1: The heritage cycle scheme

On the contrary, and as a complete opposite of the situational reality concerning Stobensium, I will acknowledge the so-called *heritage cycle scheme*, being developed by the English Heritage (*Situation 1*). I am at the opinion that it represents a very comprehensive supply, as towards the further development of this study, and the question of operational management of Stobensium.



Situation 2: A presumption over an effective process of communication

Additionally, the *Situation 2* represents an “ideal” overview of the communication processes regarding Stobensium and its institutional subjects. It is worth to mention in this case that it is a hypothetical situation that surely deserves attention for further improvements...

The *institutional subjects* in this particular case, could be well recognized (but not limited to) the three major urban municipalities, plus the two rural, as well as the national authorities in the fields of protection, conservation and presentation of heritage. This institutional network has all the preconditions to be developing an effective communication process, at all levels and between the various questions designated. If one assumes that such situational reality is a case, it is than very likely that something known as *initial critical mass* will be developing...

The initial critical mass theoretically will be the first step towards dedication for developing a greater executive powers in regard to Stobensium and a better management of its social, cultural and economic resources. The initial critical mass also, could be well perceived as a nus-product of the interrelated activities of the institutional subjects, which throughout a well organized and coordinated policy, immediately influence its creation and upgrade. Prospectively, the main benefit in this case will be a better form of

critical perception and placement of Stobensium as a whole, into the individuals' system of values.

In what way the further development and structuring of the initial critical mass will be progressing, is very much a question of maintaining the quality of communication process, the coordination of actions, the human and material resources being at disposal, as well as the clear manifestation of political will for a qualitatively better improvements in relation to the site.

In addition, and working with the official data on the number of visits for the year 2005 (*Table 1*)², the conclusions imply that the course of structuring the process of capacity building within Stobensium's immediate surroundings at foremost, is way too far from being acknowledged, and not to even mention the imbalance, and the lack of any serious projections for strategic growth as part of the idea for empowering the narrative of Stobensium.

Table 1. A Number and types of visits in Stobensium for 2005

Month	<i>Kids</i>	<i>Adults</i>	<i>Foreigners</i>	<i>Sub Total</i>
January	/	25	5	30
February	10	15	7	32
March	42	50	60	152
April	350	250	51	651
May	820	282	210	1312
June	510	394	251	1155
July	10	250	111	371
August	30	188	200	418
September	350	114	171	635
October	180	80	56	316
November	20	49	62	131
December	/	31	18	46
TOTAL:	2322	1728	1199	5249
Percentage:	44.22 %	33 %	22.78%	

As for the already mentioned, there is a great requirement to find a balance between the professional community, practicing an attitude of exclusivity over every possible domain of engagement, and the locals who are completely alienated to the site, and whose certain objections sound just reasonable enough. A very important element to be considered in this case, is the aspect of developing an *active dimension of cooperative practices*, between the professionals in the field, and the local communities. It is a fact that there have been very few joint cooperative actions, basically lacking a greater societal dimension and impact.

In practice, these activities proved to be predominantly inconsistent and not sufficiently transparent. Mostly initiated by foreign donors, these remained reserved as an absolute individual asset for the existing practitioners of administrative powers in the sphere of heritage protection. Ultimately, almost none of them exposed any predetermined strategies for recognition and transfer of knowledge and practices...



Analysis

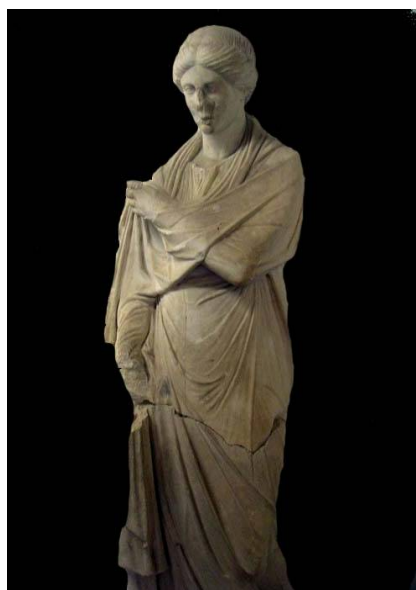
Stobensium: The Cultural and Historical Values of the Site

Stobensium represents a multi-faceted and resourceful site featuring the periods of late antiquity and the early Christianity. Its values could be arranged in many categories, and each one picturing a remarkable division of data concerning the overall human development. Starting from the age value and knowing the fact that one is dealing with immediate designations of an early-European civilization, is the first challenge to be faced upon...

Stobensium witnessed and contributed some of the most important periods in the history of human kind. These were undoubtedly connected to the development of Christianity as a doctrine and a way of practicing the power inside the new religion...

Artistically, the site also depicts visualizations of ancient divinities picturing precisely the social developments at the time. Architectural structuralities, are surely another significant element for attention along with the depictions of nature at the mosaics.

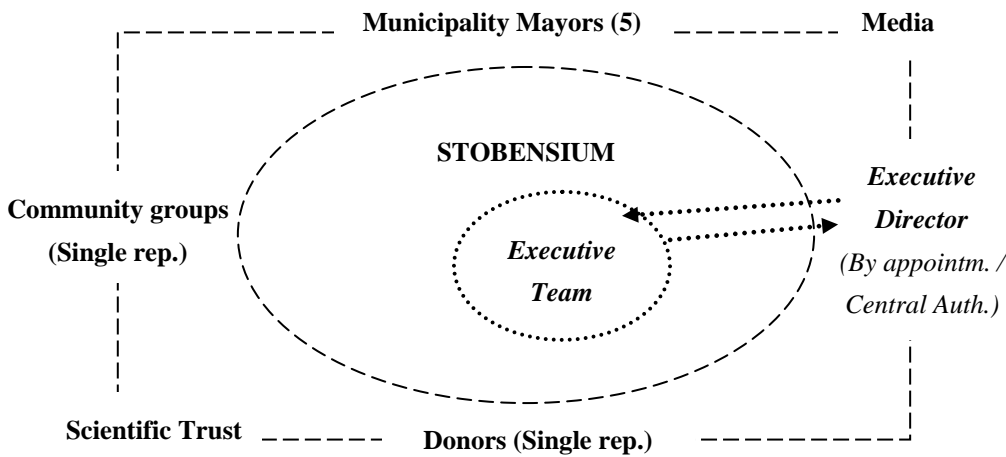
Above all, the site also strongly pictures the local identity and one could spent a lot of lines working out the many particularities of significance that Stobensium features. This study however does not go into that direction, but instead is focused upon the notion of *rediscovering the values*, and the question of effectively managing such process in regard to Stobensium. The organizational transfer of knowledge (and values) is actually the most painful question that needs full attention...



Proposal

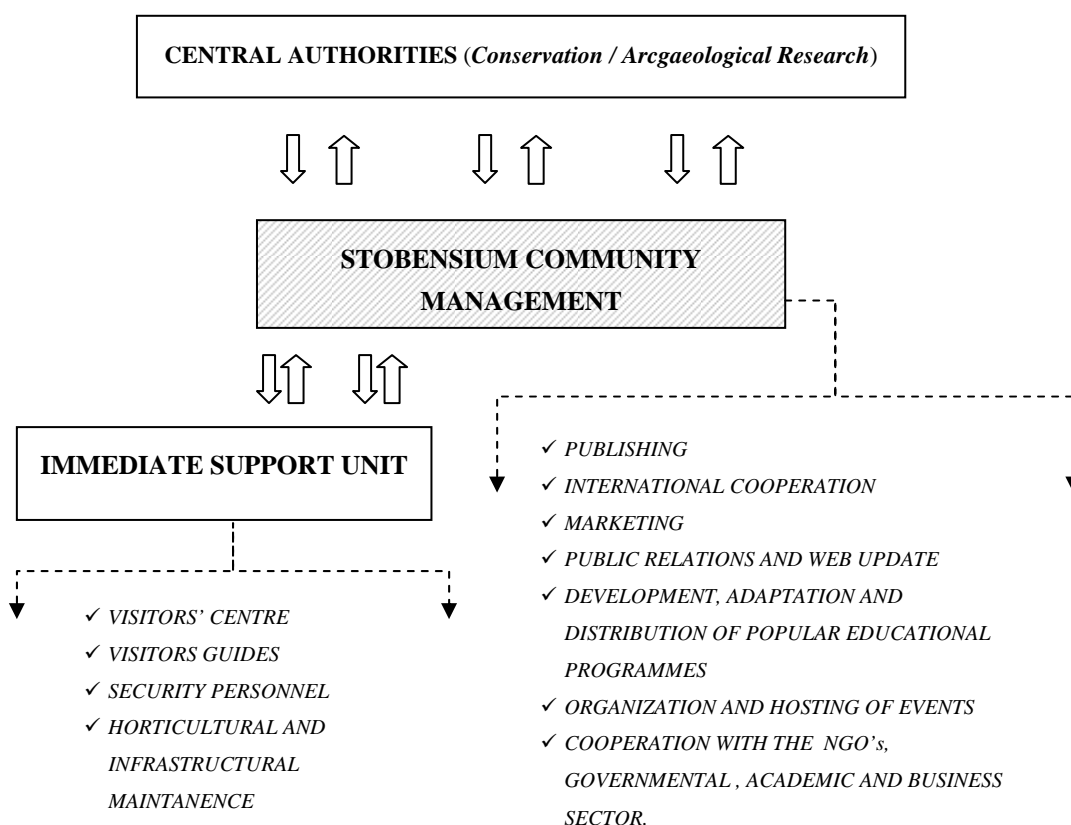
Basically, and as previously mentioned the idea behind this text is to identify the most optimal solution for an administrative organizational structure at Stobensium, being community focused, and developing an interactive component of the day-to-day management of the site. The idea behind this paradigm is that once accepted, it grants e.g. the potential donors or various community groups a time-limited entitlement to anticipate in decision-making processes concerning the operational management of the site, and ideally on the merits of civic engagement around Stobensium, or the eventual financial contributions donated. Such channelled decision making, will stimulate participatory practice and enthusiasm, whereas the qualitative contributory engagement will be one of the major virtues to be considered.

It is imagined as a quite flexible model (*Situation 3*), where the principles of subsidiarity between the central authorities and the other subjects, will be fundamentals as towards the idea of overall community development.



Situation 3: Administrative model for a community – centered operational management of the site

In addition, the following (*Situation 4*) represents the likely divisionism and relations, as towards the activities in Stobensium. The highlighted unit (*Stobensium Community Management*) is the one, whose activities need to be essentially distinguished as towards the subject matter of interest. Each of the units constituting this administrative triad has clearly positioned scope of interest, that will ultimately lead to a better and more effective executable performances.



Situation 4: Hypothetical situation on the scope of activities of the three administrative units, concerning Stobensium

Method

The execution of this plan will neither take considerable amount of time nor finances. It is easy to be accomplished (at least structurally), as already there is a sufficient human base to carry out the tasks. The interviews conducted with the administration of the local municipalities, witnessed a great enthusiasm at first, though as the idea progressed in its elaboration, they remained sceptical and willing not to go any further unless particular instructions received from the higher instances of administrative power.

A great deal of information I got was from the employees and the archives of the organization I work for, the National Conservation Centre of Cultural Heritage – NKC. They mostly remained sceptical about the idea, complaining mostly on the insufficient funds received by the Ministry of Culture, as to carry out further research and conservation. The antagonist rhetorics prevailed over the questions of legal authority concerning certain functions...

Results/Current Status of the Work

As far as I am concerned, the project has been completed. Out of my experience around Stobensium, I have learned that Macedonian authorities in the sphere of heritage protection still struggle to set the right priorities, and change the old habits.

Discussion & Conclusions

The basic problem I was facing with, was the one that very few of my interviewees were in a position to freely speak out his/her mind, and give some very useful insights from historical perspective on the matters concerning Stobensium. Though to a greater extent I recognized these as pretty subjective, at the end, these conversations proved to be pretty useful...

As I personally believe that the things are pretty much centralized and authoritarian in the sphere at this moment, I found it pretty hard to obtain any official information on the future projections for Stobensium. The information on its undergoing re-structuring as a separate administrative unit, was mostly obtained through the media, which almost every time launched subjective conclusions, and not always corresponding with the actual truth.

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Appendix 1

¹ Previously used: A law from 1974, from the times when Macedonia was a federal part of Yugoslavia.

² An average of 15-20% on the total number of visits should be added, as these happen on other bases, and partially or not at all, enter into the annual calculative balances (a festival of ancient drama / academic visits / other events).