

QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTEMPORARY MUSEUM EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

S. Spasova, S. Dimitrova

University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (BULGARIA)

Abstract

Education is no longer just about books and textbooks; it crosses the boundaries of school and university and builds new knowledge and skills in people with the help of various educational initiatives offered by cultural institutions.

This paper aims to present the results of a study of contemporary educational programs and initiatives in Bulgaria, conducted in regional history museums in the country. An experimental methodology was used, which aims to outline their main quantitative and qualitative characteristics according to predefined criteria.

A total of 186 proposed programs and educational initiatives were conducted for 2019 in 27 museums. The main conclusions of the analysis demonstrate the diversity of pedagogical approaches used for non-formal education in the museum environment, with the highest share (in 35% of cases) found different combinations of verbal, visual and practical methods in the form of talks, presentations, creative workshops, games, competitions, etc. To a large extent, these initiatives are related to specific sciences and scientific fields, such as history (29%), ethnography (21%), archaeology (12%) and are related to learning about both tangible and intangible regional cultural heritage. Inter-institutional cooperation in their implementation with schools, kindergartens and organizations from the non-governmental sector is also reported. The leading target group, to which these activities are oriented, is the one on educational grounds (44%), as they mostly refer to students from primary stage of education I-IV grade.

The research is part of a research project with Contract № KP-06-M35/3 from 18.12.2019 entitled: "Research of contemporary educational programs of cultural institutions in Bulgaria", funded by the National Science Fund, part of the Ministry of Education and Science and has for main goal to study the scientific problem, whether these programs lead to improving the quality of formal and non-formal education and the achievement of lasting knowledge among young people. A key element in the research is to establish the degree of interaction of cultural institutions with the school education system in the country. The results of the collected statistical data and the thematic analysis of the educational activities can be of benefit to the scientific community for specialists in the field of culturology, pedagogy, museology, cultural heritage, and other scientific fields.

Keywords: museums, Bulgaria, educational program, target groups, formal and non-formal education.

1 INTRODUCTION

The museum environment ensures the realization of the pedagogical process by assisting in the acquisition of new knowledge, the development of creative thinking and communication skills. Education is no longer just about books and textbooks; it crosses the boundaries of school and university and builds new knowledge and skills in people with the help of various educational initiatives offered by cultural institutions. We all notice that museums are changing. The development of information technologies has called into question the traditional model of museums and libraries. They are no longer just passive "learning spaces" for public access to "knowledge" as an exchange between teacher and trainee, or in this context a curator and visitor [1]. The application of current educational practices in the regional historical museums in Bulgaria is one of the aspects for successful implementation of the communicative museum policy. Educational methods serve not only to acquire new knowledge, but also to form a public museum consciousness and moral responsibility for cultural and historical values.

Museum pedagogy is the basis for the realization of the educational function of the museum and should be applied in cooperation with the school education system. The interaction should be based on a complex and effective partnership to support not only the assimilation of the learning content, but also to ensure the emotional-value and aesthetic development of the individual related to the cultural heritage. Museum Pedagogy considers the innovative developmental peculiarities of the modern

museum, where the unique subject-space environment is formed due to open cultural dialogue and interaction with art objects.

2 METHODOLOGY

The study aims to present summary data on educational programs and initiatives conducted in 27 regional historical museums in Bulgaria in 2019. The basis of the study is accessible and visible to visitors' information about them, published on the official websites of these institutions. In the presented results it is admissible to consider statistical deviations, but despite them the main tendencies in relation to the modern education in the museum environment in pre-selected directions stand out. They are related to the frequency of implementation, the pedagogical methods and forms used, as well as their relationship with certain sciences or scientific fields.

In this thematic aspect the educational programs applied in the regional historical museums are categorized in its two main directions: tangible (movable and immovable) and intangible cultural heritage and/or their combinations. Other element in the research is to establish the degree of interaction of cultural institutions with the school educational system in the country. For that goal, the designation of specific target groups to which a museum educational program is directed, according to the following criteria: Educational indication, Age sign, Family and kinship indication, Combination of indications. For each group, information is noted in detail (specific age group, or stage of training).

3 RESULTS

A total of 186 proposed programs and educational initiatives were conducted for 2019 in 27 museums. The main conclusions of the analysis demonstrate the diversity of pedagogical approaches used for non-formal education in the museum environment.

3.1 Summary results for frequency of implementation and applied pedagogical approaches

The study identifies the existence of two main sustainable categories of educational programs. The first ones are held all year round and are related to the permanent exposition of the museum. They have the highest share – 49%. The others of this type are characterized by periodicity and are related to the traditional holiday calendar, as well as by celebrations of significant dates in the Bulgarian history. Periodic educational programs are also related to leisure time (mostly for students), such as “Weekend at the Museum” [2] and “Vacation – Summer at the Museum” [3].

In addition to the permanent programs, there is a tendency to conduct one-time educational initiatives, which most often relate to organized student visits together with schools in the region. (Fig.1)

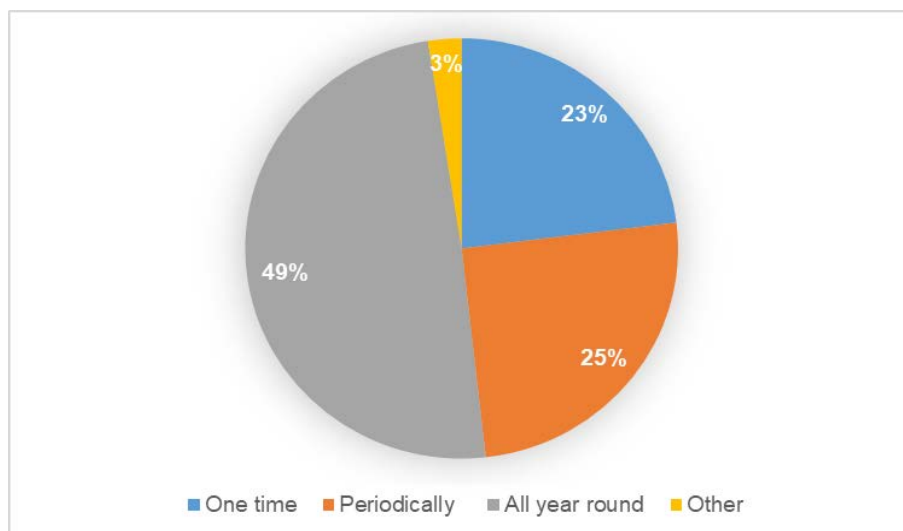


Figure 1. Relative share of museum educational programs and initiatives according to the frequency of their holding.

The applied educational methods according to the source of information is related to are the next direction, which are as follows: Verbal (story, talk, lesson) – 23%; Visual (observation, demonstration) – 3 %; Practical (exercises, practical classes) – 34 %. With a small lead, but with the highest share are those that combine different methods, which in most cases combine verbal with practical activities. Their variability regarding the specific forms of educational activities is extremely diverse, and the following activities can be indicated. Conversation; Lesson; Presentation; Atelier/seminar/workshop; Game; Competition. There are cases where a combination of the listed methods is used. (Fig.2)

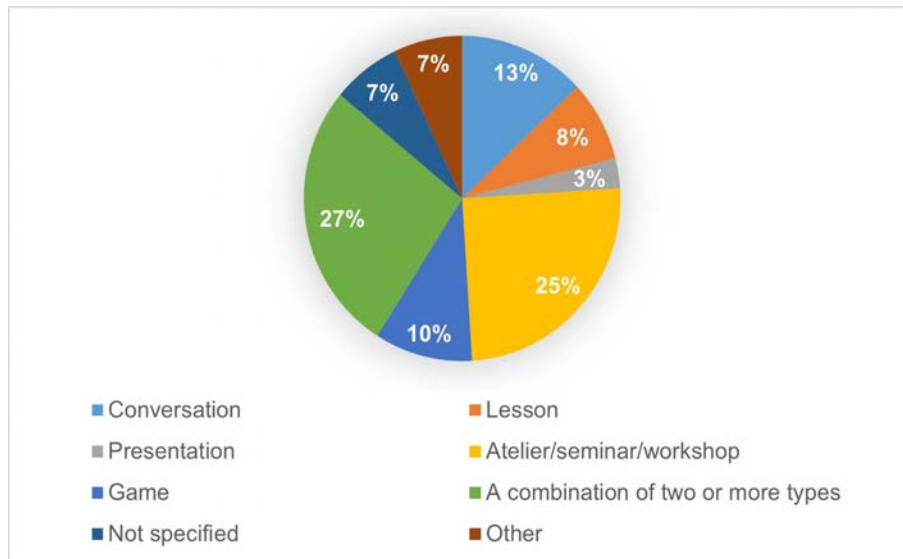


Figure 2. Relative share of educational methods

In the category “Other” stand out interesting activities, such as: photo competition with an exhibition; visits to the sites of cultural and historical heritage in the district; viewing an exhibition, collecting, and processing materials of famous families in the city, after which the participants arrange an exhibition, etc. In cases where a competition is organized in the museum, it is always combined with other forms of educational activities.

3.2 Connection of museum educational programs and initiatives with some scientific fields and categories of cultural heritage

The regional historical museums in Bulgaria have rich collections with cultural values from all historical epochs from antiquity to modern times. These include not only artifacts and relics, but also documentary archives and specialized library collections. Museums also develop active scientific research. Preservation of cultural heritage is a systematic process of search, study, identification, documentation, registration, conservation, restoration, and socialization. Hence, protection of cultural heritage presents a system of measures ensuring its preservation in the Interest of Society [4]. Therefore, these resources are used as a source for educational activities that relate to several major scientific fields. According to the specific description of the studied initiatives, the ones that prevail to the highest degree were specified. Of course, the leading science is historical (in 29% of cases), and archaeology ranks third with a share of 12%, almost on a par with the scientific field of local history with 11%. Regional museums operate in two or more municipalities [5], so they have an extremely important role to play in preserving and promoting the local cultural heritage.

An interesting finding, due to the fact that museums are mostly associated with the tangible movable cultural heritage is that in the studied educational programs and initiatives in second place with a share of 21% determines their relationship with the ethnography of Bulgaria. This scientific field has a direct bearing on the customs, traditions, beliefs, way of life and crafts that are an element of the intangible cultural heritage [6]. As a result, it can be determined that the museum environment has an exceptional role in its preservation and promotion, especially among the younger generation. Examples related to architecture, geography, biology, theology, and museology are also found. The relative share of museum educational programs and initiatives to the different categories of cultural heritage (CH) can be seen from Figure 3.

3.3 Organizational and institutional aspect. Target groups

Inter-institutional cooperation in the field of museum education is important and a systematic state policy in this direction should be implemented. One of the examples that support this statement is the conduct of extracurricular activities in a museum environment. Logically, the analysis of the results shows that the highest degree of regional museums is visited by schools in the region. However, to what extent these visits support the quality of formal education remains to be analysed. If a museum program is aimed at formal (institutional) education at school or university, it should meet the set educational goals at the level of specific curricula and educational standards.

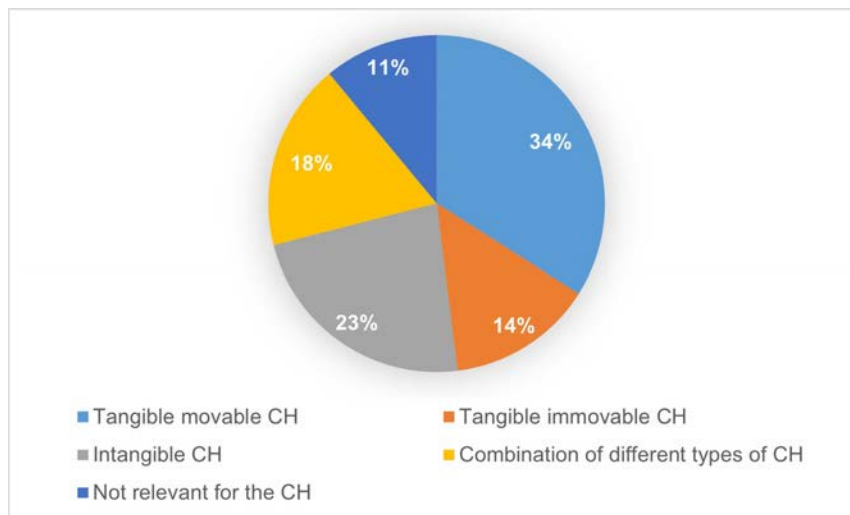


Figure 3. Relative share of museum educational programs and initiatives to the different categories of cultural heritage

One aspect of this research is to provide the designation of specific target groups to which a museum educational program is directed, according to the following criteria: Educational indication (45%), Age sign (19%), Family and kinship indication (0%), Combination of indications (22%). In 12% of cases no target group is specified. For each group, information is noted in detail (specific age group, or stage of training). According to the current legislation in Bulgaria, school education has two main levels – primary and secondary, divided into several stages [7]. Given this classification, the study found that according to its description, the highest share of museum programs is directed to the initial stage from I to IV grade (27%). In 13% of the cases there are also activities for children from the preschool education system. However, very few of these initiatives are related to the junior high school (9%) and high school (4%) stages, which cover the period of study from V to XII grade. In only 2% of cases, information is found on programs aimed at people with special educational needs.

Educational programs aimed at higher education are associated with the conduct of student internships, for which, however, public information cannot always be found. Modern higher education quality standards put at the forefront the necessity for a change in the benchmarks of traditional learning technology. Instead of the standard directions of the didactic process, aimed at the formation of knowledge, skills and habits, the priority of the modernized education system has become the development of competences such as a dynamic set of knowledge, abilities, and values necessary for effective professional, social activity and personal development of university students in higher education institutions. [8]

What the study finds, and which could be considered as a shortcoming in determining the target group on educational grounds, is that 26% of museum programs note that they are aimed at the general category of “students”. A similar trend is found in the age groups – in 49% of cases, they are referred to the generalizing concept of “children”. It is advisable to consider the curriculum for the respective stage, as well as the characteristics of the psychological and physiological development of different age groups, so that museum educational activities can be specified, attract specific audiences, and support formal and non-formal education.

The Lifelong Learning Strategy adopted in Bulgaria in 2014 recognizes the need to apply an educational approach that helps adults to continuously develop as enterprising individuals. Lifelong learning can

enhance our understanding of the world around us, provide us with more and better opportunities and improve our quality of life. There are two main reasons for learning throughout life: for personal development and for professional development. The measures taken in Bulgaria are related to the creation of an educational environment that enables adults, regardless of their personal, social, or economic situation, to acquire, enrich and develop throughout their life's specific skills and key competencies necessary for their employability. [9] One of the conditions for achieving the goals thus formulated is to ensure that all learners acquire knowledge and skills about cultural diversity and the contribution of culture to the sustainable development of society. Regional historical museums have an irreplaceable resource in this regard. Unfortunately, the current study does not find museum educational programs specifically targeted at groups in early adulthood (20-40 years), adulthood (41-65 years) or maturity (65+ years). It is advisable to make reforms in this regard.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Promoting CHH through information technologies is an extremely working formula for the proper use of technology in the process of perceiving and learning about Bulgarian cultural heritage. The use of all that technology offer is the right way to preserve and promote CHH. The importance of cultural heritage in terms of the application of current innovative methods in pedagogical and didactic terms is indisputable. Within the UN – UNESCO and the EU, cultural heritage is a basic factor for the formation of policy not only for intercultural integration, but also for sustainable development of individual countries through effective and efficient socialization of cultural values. One of the main priorities in the activities of these organizations is the creation of valid and guaranteed conditions for the development of education and upbringing based on socialization and promotion of heritage. Regional history museums can support these processes.

The main conclusions of the conducted study report good practices in terms of diversity both thematically and in the application of innovative and attractive pedagogical approaches to conducting museum educational programs and initiatives. However, it is necessary to specify the criteria for determining the target groups to which they are aimed to achieve better results in terms of formal and non-formal education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would not be possible without the financial assistance of the following project: “Research of contemporary educational programs of cultural institutions in Bulgaria”, financed by National Science Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria with Contract № KP-06-M35/3 from 18.12.2019, led by Assist. Sonya Spasova, PhD.

For more information: Official website of the project – <https://educulture.unibit.bg/>; Facebook page – <https://www.facebook.com/eduCulturebg>

REFERENCES

- [1] Peteva, I., Trenchev, I., Traykov, M., Mavrevski, R., 2020. The application of object-oriented programming and game engine to promote cultural and historical heritage. Proceedings of EDULEARN20 Conference, ISBN: 978-84-09-17979-4, pp. 0733-0740
- [2] Official website Regional Museum of History – Stara Zagora. Retrieved from URL. <https://www.rimstz.eu>
- [3] Official website Regional Museum of History – Sofia. Retrieved from URL. <https://sofiahistorymuseum.bg/bg/obrazovatelni-programi/vakancij-v-muzej>
- [4] Peteva, I., Denchev, S., Trenchev, I., 2019. Mixed reality as new opportunity in the preservation and promotion of the cultural and historical heritage. 11th International Conference on Education and New Learning Technologies, pp. 2451-2456
- [5] Cultural Heritage Act // SP, № 19, 13.03.2009.
- [6] Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. UNESCO 2003.
- [7] Pre-school and School Education Act // SP, № 79, 13.10.2015.

- [8] K. Mincheva, P. Mukanova, S. Eftimova. Scientific, Educational and Cultural Social Dialogue Between Teachers and Students in the University Environment. // EDULearn20, 12-th International Conference on Education and New Learning Technologies, Palma / Spain, 6-7 July 2020, p. 2855-2861.
- [9] National Strategy for Lifelong Learning for the Period 2014 – 2020 // Decision № 12 of the Council of Ministers of 10.01.2014