

Cultural Institutions and Education in Bulgaria – Popularization of Programs with a Scientific and Research Project

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Abstract

Introduction: *The fundamental and leading role of science and education for the formation of values and behaviour, as well as for the acquisition of individual competences, is indisputable. Science education is referred to as the teaching of science to non-scientists, such as children, students, or adults within the general public. There are different definitions of the term “education”, which unanimously unite its main mission for the preservation and development of culture. Therefore, cultural institutions in the sense of the current legal framework in the country, along with the implementation of activities for the creation, dissemination, and preservation of cultural and historical values, should develop active educational initiatives through which to act as a mediator between preserved tradition and modernity. **The aim** of the research project “Research of contemporary educational programs of cultural institutions in Bulgaria” (contract: № KP-06-M35/3 from 18.12.2019), developed by a team from the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (Sofia, Bulgaria), led by Chief Assist. Sonya Spasova, PhD, is to study the various educational activities that are implemented in two of the organizations within the institutional system of cultural heritage – regional history museums and libraries in the country. So far, they have not been the subject of a comprehensive study to systematize and categorize the sustainable, long-term, and thematic educational programs they have implemented in recent years. **Results:** The study of good practices applied by the Bulgarian cultural institutions and their presentation to national and international scientific audience would help to enhance the prestige of Bulgaria as a country with rich cultural heritage, preserved traditions and active cultural and educational activities. This paper examines the project website, which serves as an information portal, as it provides links to educational programs and initiatives of all regional history museums and regional libraries in Bulgaria by territorial and thematic scope, as one of the main activities of the project is to promote the activities of these cultural institutions in order to reach the general public and show the other side of these institutions – as a place for entertainment in an educational environment.*

Keywords: educational initiatives, cultural institutions, regional library, regional history museum, Bulgaria, research project

1. Introduction

Cultural heritage is the legacy that we receive from the past, experience in the present, and transmit to future generations. Cultural Heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation,

including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions, and values. It is currently the subject of increasing popular and scholarly attention worldwide, and its conceptual scope is expanding. Most social scientists emphasize its functions for supporting ethnic, national, and elite interests but others point to its creative and counterhegemonic sides. [1] The basic idea of heritage education is to offer opportunities to engage in experiences to learn new concepts and skills. By directly experiencing or analysing cultural heritage, learners gain knowledge, intellectual skills, and a wider range of competences on issues such as cultural heritage maintenance or societal well-being. [2] Because of the role of cultural heritage and its inextricable link with education, the best way to learn about it is to “touch” it and this is possible thanks to cultural institutions such as museums, libraries, archives, etc. This is the goal of the research project on title: “Research of contemporary educational programs of cultural institutions in Bulgaria”, developed by team from the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies – Sofia, Bulgaria. The project examines museums and libraries as symbols of institutions preserving the rich national cultural heritage and the education strategies they implement. Learning in museums helps pupils understand the historical value of objects, respect diverse cultures and understand multiculturalism. Exploring museums gives students the ability to engage actively in the process of acquiring knowledge and to express thoughts and emotions. Effective use of museums can lead to multifaceted learning, development of critical thinking skills and acquisition of lifelong learning skills of 21st century. [3] Library offers the resources and encourages the thinking process, creativity, inquisitiveness and makes the learning more fruitful. [4]

2. Methodology

The goal of this paper is to present project website, which serves as an information portal, as it provides links to educational programs and initiatives of all regional history museums and regional libraries in Bulgaria by territorial and thematic scope, as one of the main activities of the project is to promote the activities of these cultural institutions in order to reach the general public and show the other side of these institutions – as a place for entertainment in an educational environment. The methodology for achieving the objective of the study and solving the set research tasks include the following specific methods: method of study and content analysis, comparative analysis; synthesis of the obtained information. A set of research methods is implemented to respond to the assigned tasks for the implementation of the project “Research of Contemporary Educational Programs of Cultural Institutions in Bulgaria”, including search, research and systematization of theoretical formulations related to education in museum and library environment; conducting a representative study based on quantitative and qualitative research methods (survey, interview) to present a current and comprehensive picture of the educational initiatives of specific cultural institutions; applying a systematic approach in the analysis of results.

3. Results

In the National Strategy for the Development of Scientific Research in the Republic of Bulgaria 2020, cultural heritage is listed as the fourth priority area for the period.

Museums and libraries, as a symbol of institutions for the preservation of the rich national cultural heritage, have for a purpose and activities of generating income coming to the state budget and modern approaches for attracting audiences should be sought.

One of the guidelines in this regard is the implementation of attractive educational

programs. In this case, the project will help to increase the systematic presentation of the studied qualitative characteristics of the educational programs applied in the national and regional museums and libraries in the country in a summary work.

According to published data from the National Statistical Institute in Bulgaria, 174 museums and 47 libraries function in 2018. Considering the possibilities available to the project team, it is envisaged that this study will cover institutions selected by territorial and thematic scope. The object of the study are national and regional museums and libraries in Bulgaria. The subject of the study is the educational initiatives that put into practice national and regional history museums and national and regional libraries, in the period from 2015, when the new Law on Pre-school and School Education was passed until the current 2019.

In order to ensure public awareness and transparency about the goals, objectives and expected results of the project, a website is created. Designing, maintaining, and updating it is a top priority in the project management activities.

The website is structured as follows:

- Page “Home”;
- Page “About the project”.
 - Page “Declaration”;
 - Page “Mission”;
 - Page “Goals and Tasks”;
 - Page “Expected Results”.
- Page “Team”;
- Page “News”;
- Page “Institutions”.
 - Page “About ULSIT”;
 - Page “About Bulgarian National Science Fund”.
- Page “Resources”.
 - Page “Publications”;
 - Page “Museum and Libraries”;
 - Page “Interactive Map”.
- Page “Gallery”;
- Page “Contacts”.

As part of the website is created a database (Page “Museums and Libraries”) that aims to provide visitors with easy access to information about the educational programs of cultural institutions in Bulgaria, selected by territorial and thematic scope. These are the National History Museum, the National Library “St. Cyril and Methodius”, as well as all regional history museums and libraries in the country. For this purpose, the institutions are systematized in six areas:

- Southwest area – including Blagoevgrad, Kyustendil, Pernik, Sofia.
- South Central area – including Kardzhali, Pazardzhik, Plovdiv, Smolyan, Haskovo.
- Southeast area – including Stara Zagora, Sliven, Yambol, Burgas.
- Northeast area – including Varna, Dobrich, Targovishte, Shumen.
- North Central area – including Veliko Tarnovo, Gabrovo, Razgrad, Ruse, Silistra.
- Northwest area – including Vidin, Vratsa, Montana, Pleven, Lovech.

They comply with the requirements of the common classification of territorial units for statistical purposes, applied in the European Union. For each institution is published a direct link to the offered educational programs (if available), as well as to their official page on the social network “Facebook”.

Sofia

- **National History Museum** – Information about educational programs ([here](#)) and facebook page ([here](#))
- **Regional History Museum** – Information about educational programs ([here](#)) and facebook page ([here](#))
- **National Library „St. St. Cyril and Methodius“** – Lack of information about educational initiatives; official website of the institution ([here](#)) and facebook page ([here](#))
- **Sofia Library** – Information about the educational programs ([here](#)) and facebook page ([here](#))

SOUTH CENTRAL AREA

Kardzhali

- **Regional History Museum** – Lack of information about educational initiatives; official website of the institution ([here](#)) and facebook page ([here](#))
- **Regional Library „Nikola Yonkov Vaptsarov“** – Information about the educational programs ([here](#)) and facebook page ([here](#))

Fig. 1. Museums and Libraries Database, available at <https://educulture.unibit.bg/museums-and-libraries/>

As another result of the project activities is an Interactive Map, in which users could find information about the educational programs of cultural institutions in Bulgaria, selected by territorial and thematic scope. This may also directly correspond to the school education system for the selection and enrichment of extracurricular educational activities. The interactive map again marks the regional history museums and regional libraries in the six areas. The pins of the regional libraries are blue, and pins of the regional history museums are red. The National History Museums is marked in yellow and the National Library in green – both located in Sofia. The interactive map offers information about each of the examined cultural institutions, which includes:

- a link to the institution’s website and in particular to educational programs and initiatives;
- what target groups they are aimed at;
- link to a Facebook page;
- contacts – phone and email.

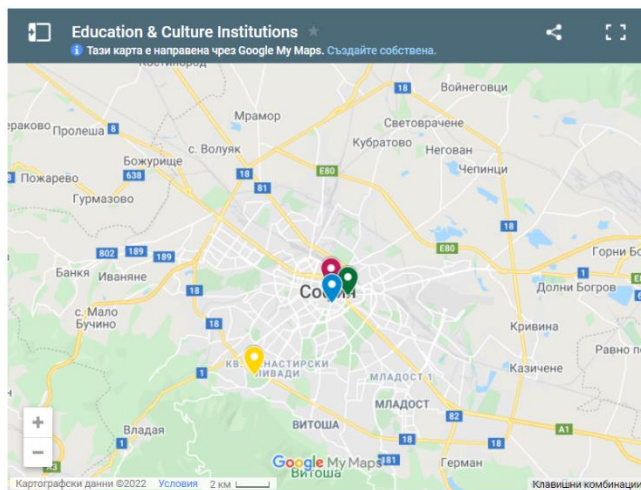


Fig. 2. Interactive map, available at <https://educulture.unibit.bg/en/resources-2/interactive-map/>

The results of the statistics data collected, and the thematic analysis of the educational activities is from benefit to the scientific community for professionals in the fields of cultural studies, pedagogy, museology, bibliography, cultural heritage, and other scientific fields, as free access to this information will be made available on the project's website. This may also be a basis for the development of further scientific research that will directly support the development of formal and non-formal education in museum and library environments. The parallel exploration of museums and libraries by region will also support interinstitutional cooperation in this regard.

4. Conclusions

Besides providing economic gain, cultural heritage preservation protects local and national identity and pride and reminds people of their common history and progress.

Moreover, it increases wellbeing: people report 'higher levels of well-being and life satisfaction' when there is a specific place that they feel deeply connected to. [5] In the classroom, educators can present information to students many ways, whether via lecture, video, or readings. Field trips can not only entertain, but they also serve as a supplement for material discussed in class. Physically surrounded by elements that they have previously been taught allows students to connect the visual with their class experiences. When both iterations of the same information are merged, a complete understanding of the subject matter is more easily achieved by the student, allowing them to successfully further their education. [6] The presentation of these cultural institutions and their educational activities to national and international scientific audience would help to enhance the prestige of Bulgaria as a country with rich cultural heritage, preserved traditions and active cultural and educational activities. Promoting their activities and presenting them in a convenient format for the end user (parent, student, etc.) will further increase their attendance and show their interactive side.

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

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