

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS OF CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS IN BULGARIA – GOOD EXAMPLES IN THE CONDITIONS OF LOCKDOWN

S. Dimitrova, S. Spasova, S. Dusheva, P. Gindev

University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (BULGARIA)

Abstract

The rapid development of the Internet and social networks has broken the notion of geographical boundaries and all kinds of barriers to communication. In the last ten years, social networks have become an integral part of the daily life not only of young people, but also of all age groups in society. The easy contact with relatives, friends and colleagues; the rapid exchange of information; content sharing options; the availability of an easily accessible communication platform – all this has made social networks an irreplaceable resource for communication. In the beginning of 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the spread of COVID-19 as a pandemic, as the spread was rapid and at a fast pace covered across the globe, which was the cause of social isolation and people had to spend more time at home – to work from home and to find new ways to entertain.

From the end of 2019, a team of young scientists – students, PhD students and postdoctoral students from the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (Sofia, Bulgaria), are developing a research project 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. In connection with the goals and objectives of the project, the formulated object of research are the national and regional museums and libraries in the country and in particular their educational initiatives for the period 2019-2020.

Due to the global pandemic surrounding the new coronavirus, which covered the entire globe, all countries have imposed restrictive measures in a number of respects. This also affected the cultural institutions, which in order to continue to function and not to lose the audience, very quickly focused their activities in the online environment.

This paper presents the results of a research, aimed at the educational initiatives of some of the Bulgarian history museums and regional libraries, initiated and shared on social networks in the conditions of lockdown for the period 13 March – 13 May 2020. The aim of this paper is to present some good examples for innovative approaches in the field of non-formal education in the Internet environment.

Keywords: social networks, museum, libraries, non-formal education, COVID-19, lockdown.

1 INTRODUCTION

From the end of 2019, a team of young scientists, students, PhD students and postdoctoral students from the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (Sofia, Bulgaria), are developing a research project 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. In connection with the goals and objectives of the project, the formulated object of research are the national and regional museums and libraries in the country and in particular their educational initiatives for the period 2019-2020.

One of the aspects of the planned activities was to conduct a field study in selected cultural institutions in the country, related to interviewing management representatives and documenting good examples of educational initiatives in the museum and library environment. Unfortunately, the situation in 2020 had a negative impact in this regard and led to the need for a radical change in the activities of these institutions to reach target audiences.

By order № RD-01-124/13.03.2020 of the Minister of Health in Bulgaria, pursuant to Art. 63 of the Health Act and in connection with the complicating epidemic situation regarding the spread of COVID-19 in the country, all classes, and all extracurricular activities (studies, clubs, green schools, excursions, etc.) in schools and universities and in other educational institutions and organizations were suspended.

Distance learning has been introduced and all kinds of mass events have been stopped, including sports, cultural, entertainment and scientific events held in cinemas, theatres, concerts, museums, conferences, symposia, etc. [1]. At a later stage, some of the measures were dropped, but several restrictions and requirements were imposed for compliance with the anti-epidemiological measures (reduced attendance to 30% of the institution's capacity, observance of social distance from visitors, etc.) regarding the resumption of their work.

Educational programs implemented in museums and libraries are most often aimed at school-age children, with many schools in the country actively conducting extracurricular activities together with cultural institutions. The announcement of a lockdown and the transition to distance learning provokes many of these organizations to reach their audiences using modern information and communication technologies and the Internet.

The global pandemic related to COVID 19 has necessitated a change in the research methodology to meet the objectives of the research project presented above, namely, to reveal the current picture for 2020 in terms of educational initiatives of cultural institutions in Bulgaria.

2 METHODOLOGY

This paper presents the results of a research, aimed at the educational initiatives of some of the Bulgarian history museums and regional libraries, initiated and shared on social networks in the conditions of lockdown for the period 13 March – 13 May 2020. The aim of this paper is to present some good examples for innovative approaches in the field of non-formal education in the Internet environment.

There is one national history museum, one national library, 27 regional history museums and 27 regional libraries in Bulgaria. Due to their large total number, the educational initiatives for the indicated period of a part of them are presented here, in accordance with the applied methodology of the project. It considers the geographical location of the respective cultural institution, relative to the regional administrative division in the country, covering six planning areas, each of which includes from 4 to 5 regional cities.

The object of research are the educational initiatives of cultural organizations (museums and libraries) from the South-Western area for planning in an online environment through the possibilities of the social network Facebook. According to data from Statista.com there were approximately 4,3 million Facebook users in Bulgaria as of December 2020, with 24% of those users being between 25 and 34 years of age and the source also notes that 48% of these users were male, and 52% were female [2]. The school-aged children, considering they can sign-up in Facebook aged 13 and up, were 4,2% [3]. In the end of 2019, the population of Bulgaria is 6,9 million people, which means that at least 62% of the Bulgarians are using Facebook [4]. Social networks and the behaviours, feelings, and traits they transmit are always present and always functioning, whether organizations are aware of this or not. This is proven by the fact that some institutions became aware of that in the mentioned period of isolation and lockdown.

3 RESULTS

The Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works in its published in 2019 "Socio-economic analysis of the regions in Bulgaria" reports an increase in visits to museums and libraries, which is largely due to the presence of "diverse, multifaceted and rich cultural heritage" in the country. But at the same time, there are major regional differences in terms of cultural institutions [5].

The Southwestern planning area in the Republic of Bulgaria includes four regional cities, including the capital Sofia. It finds positive trends in the development of the knowledge economy, innovation and high technology, research and the retention of the intellectual elite with more attractive opportunities for professional and personal realization of young people. Tourism is one of the priority sectors in the region due to the presence of cultural and natural values, traditions and potential for various forms and products, planned broad interaction between state and local authorities, tourism business, academic circles, media, NGOs and local communities and application of information and communication technologies [5].

3.1 Virtual educational initiatives of historical museums from the Southwest area

The official Facebook page of Kyustendil Regional History Museum was created on 13.11.2008 and has 3114 followers. A statement was issued on April 6, 2020, informing that in times of emergency, when the museum's physical contact with its audience is limited, they will make more use of social networks to maintain closeness to the audience. In successive posts, digital walks through the history of Kyustendil and its region will be published, offering online meetings with museum spaces and interesting exhibits from different eras [6].

In addition, the specialists from the museum periodically publish some interesting educational initiatives aimed at children. Such an example is the publication of April 9, which presents two archaeological artifacts dating from the Stone-Copper Age (V millennium BC). They are completely preserved, found in the area of Kyustendil and are called "objects with pits". The following is a detailed instruction, supported by photos, on how children can make copies of the artefacts and use them as a means of play. [7]

Educational videos titled "Game for children and adults" are periodically published on various topics: The game in antiquity; Measuring time in antiquity; Ancient art – cars and decorations; Letters, writing and old printing techniques. Some of them are accompanied by photo material with specific tasks to be performed and with detailed information about the date and type of the exhibit. [8] The relevant posts have a total of over eighty likes, as well as a number of comments and shares from visitors to the page.

The Facebook page of the Regional History Museum in the town of Pernik was created on 21.06.2010 and has more than 2100 followers. At the beginning of April 2020, the museum specialists share with their audience: "During the imposed quarantine due to COVID-19, we cannot accept you in the exhibition halls... To cheer you up in the days of social isolation, we will we present on our Facebook page videos, photos and fascinating tests about our cultural heritage – about the archaeological antiquity, history and ethnography in the Pernik area. We will be happy for you to write to us and share with us what objects and topics arouse your curiosity so that we can tell you about them. Be healthy!" [9]. This is followed by a periodical publication of a series of presentations presenting the emergence and development of Archeology as a science and the main archaeological sites studied by RHM-Pernik on various topics: (eg. "Archeology as a science"; presentation of traditional holidays: "Lazaritsa, Tsvetnitsa, Easter"; "Painted Easter Eggs"; "Shrine of Mount Athos" etc.)

The official Facebook page of the Regional History Museum – Sofia was created on 07.01.2018 and has over 2 910 followers. From March 21, 2020, the capital Regional History Museum – Sofia launched its special online series called "Sofia Puzzle". In the series "places are intertwined with facts, events, retro photos from the Museum's collection, as well as emblematic exhibits" [10]. The educational initiative for shooting videos, posting them on the museum's YouTube channel and sharing them on Facebook under the common name "Listen Bulgaroznayko" has started. This is happening together with the creator of the series – Victoria Petkova. The educational initiative includes stories from children's books about the Bulgarian traditions "Bulgaroznayko".

The Facebook page of the National History Museum was created on 12.09.2012 and has over 10 800 followers. In a shared publication from the official website of the museum on March 16, 2020, they were informed that "In connection with Order № RD-01-124/13.03.2020. of the Minister of Health and instructions of the Minister of Culture from 13.03.2020, all visits to the National History Museum and its branches are suspended [11]. Therefore, the museum offers a virtual 360-degree walk through its halls in extremely high quality. It was developed under a project funded by the Ministry of Culture in a competition session "The Museum as an Educational Environment". In the following days, virtual tours are published in the other branches of the museum – the Zemen Monastery "St. John the Theologian" and the Boyana Church "St. Nicholas and St. Panteleimon".

In the days just before Easter, an initiative was launched aimed at the Facebook audience, entitled "What is it" for guessing riddles, which are an integral part of oral folklore and national intangible cultural heritage. High activity in the answers and comments to the individual posts stands out. The organizers share the motives for this initiative, formulating them as follows: "We decided that in the flow of information that floods us every minute, especially now, spending more time at home and in front of monitors of computers, tablets, phones and other new technologies, we can encourage you to find the answers to the riddles we have prepared for you. Every Tuesday and Thursday we will ask you a riddle, and the next day we will publish the correct answer in a comment. Reward: personal satisfaction from the guessed answer, virtual praise from us, lots of smiles (also virtual for now) and a lot of useful work for our brain cells [12].

The Facebook page of the Regional History museum – Blagoevgrad was created on 25.09.2014 and has over 6 500 followers. Among the first publications for the period is the announcement of the interruption of all events and the suspension of work with visitors. [13] In the next publication they share a video from the Facebook page of the Municipality of Blagoevgrad – Culture's, which presents a virtual tour of the museum's exhibitions. [14]

3.2 Virtual educational initiatives of regional libraries from the Southwest area

The Facebook page of the Regional Library “Emanuil Popdimitrov” – Kyustendil was created on 05.05.2020, i.e. shortly before the re-opening for visitors to museums and libraries. In the period until 13.05.2020 they have presented on their account new titles, part of the fund, using #Книгитекоитонисвързват (Books that connects us) and #StayHome at every post. On May 11, they present nine books for libraries and librarians. By January 2021, the Facebook page already had over 1 300 followers. [15]

The Facebook page of the Regional Library “Svetoslav Minkov” – Pernik was created on 30.06.2010. In the specified period there are only 3 publications, showing quite low activity. The first two posts are about announcing the beginning of the lockdown. The third is from 22 April 2020 stating: “... Although the library has stopped serving readers since the beginning of the state of emergency, the institution has taken care of its visitors online. Librarians invite their youngest readers to a virtual guest in the library through the presentation “Interesting stories about the greatest storytellers”. The presentation is uploaded on the library's website... The other presentation, also uploaded on the library's website is about the patron of the regional library – the writer Svetoslav Minkov. It is called “Let's remember the man with X-ray eyes – Svetoslav Minkov” and is on the occasion of 118 years since the birth of one of the most original Bulgarian writers”. The post has 25 likes, 1 comment and 10 shares. The page has about 730 followers as of January 2021. [16]

The Facebook page of the Sofia Library – Children's Department was created on 13.12.2016 and has over 3 900 followers as of January 2021. The first post on the page for the period includes an appeal for strict observance of the measures and a photo from the summer reading room in Borisova Gradina. [17] In the following publications can be seen photos of parts of the collection, both of the Sofia Library and the Children's Department in particular, such as the children's newspaper "Sparrow", but also works by foreign authors such as "Decameron" by Giovanni Boccaccio, "War Diaries, 1939–1945" by Astrid Lindgren et al. Subsequent publications include illustrations of Pippi Longstocking, The Adventures of Luccio, The Adventures of Pinocchio and more. [18] The renewal of the album “Writers” with photos and biographies of Gianni Rodari, Roald Dahl and others continues. [19] On the occasion of April 2 – Children's Book Day, a photo was published of the Children's Department with a wish for the readers, which collected 212 likes, 13 comments and 19 shares. [20] Following is a post that contains an inquiry from a reader: “With the permission of our reader, we publish their inquiry here. We are looking for a book that matches the following description: “We are looking for a children's book that deals with the subject of death. Unfortunately, we do not remember the title and author, only the cover. Monochrome, light cover with two creatures, one longer than height, standing alone at the top of the cover”. [21] Following is a post for the resumption of the “Fairy Tale Hour” initiative, but in a virtual format: “Dear readers, as you well remember, we held the "Fairy Tale Hour" every Saturday from 11.00. Very often the fairy tales were read by mothers and fathers volunteers. It occurred to us that nothing prevents this tradition from being continued virtually. You can send us videos of how you read to your children or how children read to you. With your permission we can publish them here on our page”, as the publication was met with 85 likes, 5 comments and 10 shares. The initiative is well received and gathers followers who join it, and some, in addition to telling stories, even illustrate them in a video. Posts are tagged with hashtag. [22] The compilation of a virtual cookbook with recipes from children's books begins, in which readers can send their cooking specialties. In mid-April, the challenge for a photo with hashtag (Alone with your library) begins, as those who send the most artistic and original photo works, receive books with autographs from famous Bulgarian authors. In honour of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Valeri Petrov, a competition is organized for drawings illustrating works of the author, previously published on the page. On May 2, 2020, the first online meeting of the Artichoke Readers' Club was organized. The last publication of the period is about the reopening of the library. [23]

The main page of Sofia Library was created on 05.05.2011 and has over 13 100 followers. The announcement with closing the library gets 39 likes, 7 comments and 21 shares. [24] The following publications include photos from the project “Bulgarian Literary Classics” implemented by the Institute of Literature at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in partnership with the National Literary Museum and the Sofia Library. It collects, systematizes and digitally preserves the cultural heritage of 13

Bulgarian literary classics: Petko R. Slaveykov, Ivan Vazov, Mihalaki Georgiev, Pencho P. Slaveykov, Peyo Yavorov, Elin Pelin, Nikolay Liliev, Hristo Smirnenski, Asen Raztsvetnikov, Elisaveta Bagryana, Nikola Vaptsarov, Fani Popova-Mutafova and Dimitar Dimov. [25] The following initiative is well-responded and all publications are tagged with #AtSchoolWithSofiaLibrary: "In support of education and in support of our young readers, we present the "Geographical Atlas of Public Schools" from 1906. The publication is part of the "Literary Heritage" fund of the Sofia Library. The team of Sofia Library asks you – stay at home and study with us!" [26] The following publications include another posts with different photos, both the same #. Inspired by the forced isolation, the Sofia Library took the initiative "Poetry without quarantine": Today in the section "Poetry without quarantine" we offer you the message and the new poem by Nikolay Milchev. Tomorrow you can expect the poetic work of Marin Bodakov." [27]

The official Facebook page of the Regional Library "Dimitar Talev" – Blagoevgrad was established on 19.09.2013 and has over 1 400 followers. They take part in the national reading marathon initiative: "The event is dedicated to: International Children's Book Day – April 2, International Book and Copyright Day – April 23, We have the following proposal to you, dear young and old lovers of reading. In these days of forcibly restricting going out and walking outside, all of you will surely spend more hours reading. Now is the time to join the Reading Marathon #ReadersHome. Participate as: read aloud a page from your favorite book or poem; share a favorite book, characters or quote. We are waiting for your videos, photos, drawings and posts..." [28] On the occasion of Easter, they offer instructions for painting eggs with wax and red beets, showing their creations. [29] At the end of April 2020, the initiative began to share video cards with its employees, thus marking May 11 – the day of the librarian. [30] In their publication they share about the start of the project for digital collection "Blagoevgrad – the road to today": "We collect and expect all your photos and cards related to our hometown. They can be documented: buildings, streets, labor collectives, city celebrations and events to be preserved for history. Let's be united and take together the collective historical photo of the city and its inhabitants, because we have been and will remain!", as the post collected 49 likes and 14 shares. [31]

4 CONCLUSIONS

The rapid development of the Internet and social networks has broken the notion of geographical boundaries and all kinds of barriers to communication. In the last ten years, social networks have become an integral part of the daily life not only of young people, but also of all age groups in society. The easy contact with relatives, friends and colleagues; the rapid exchange of information; content sharing options; the availability of an easily accessible communication platform – all this has made social networks an irreplaceable resource for communication. In the beginning of 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the spread of COVID-19 as a pandemic, as the spread was rapid and at a fast pace covered across the globe, which was the cause of social isolation and people had to spend more time at home – to work from home and to find new ways to entertain.

This thesis is confirmed by the conducted research – there is an increased activity of the publications on Facebook of all the studied educational initiatives of cultural institutions in the conditions of lockdown. The purpose of this paper was to present good practices in this regard. On the positive side, it can be interpreted that some of the museums and libraries create their own pages in the social network precisely because of their discontinued work on site and the need to engage audiences through the Internet and virtual communication with users. This is one of the examples that can be cited as progress in their activities in terms of their more active presence in the Internet environment and promotion of their exhibitions, funds and educational initiatives.

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] Single information portal, Accessed 14 December, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://coronavirus.bg/bg/175>
- [2] Facebook users in Bulgaria, Accessed 07 January, 2021. Retrieved from: // <https://www.statista.com/statistics/805460/facebook-users-bulgaria/>
- [3] Facebook users in Bulgaria, Accessed 07 January, 2021. Retrieved from: // <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-bulgaria/2020/12>
- [4] Population of the Republic of Bulgaria. Data from the National statistical institute, Accessed 07 January, 2021. Retrieved from: https://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/pressreleases/Population2019_XE8MEZL.pdf
- [5] Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, Socio-economic analysis of the regions in Bulgaria: Part 3, 2019, Accessed 18 November, 2020. Retrieved from: <http://bgregio.eu>
- [6] Facebook page of the Regional history museum Kyustendil, Accessed 20 November, 2020 Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/RegionalenistoricheskimuzeyKyustendil/posts/10157350118832896>
- [7] Facebook page of the Regional history museum Kyustendil, Accessed 20 November, 2020 Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/RegionalenistoricheskimuzeyKyustendil/posts/10157359859447896>
- [8] Facebook page of the Regional history museum Kyustendil, 18 December, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/RegionalenistoricheskimuzeyKyustendil/posts/10157463426592896>
- [9] Facebook page of the Regional history museum Pernik, Accessed 18 December, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/museumpernik/photos/a.143465149001732/3731882323493312/?type=3&theater>
- [10] Facebook page of the Regional history museum Sofia, Accessed 18 December, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/regionalhistorymuseumsofia/posts/631798267602089>
- [11] National History museum, Accessed 21 December, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://historymuseum.org/bg/news/preustanovjavat-se-vsichki-poseshtenija-v-nim-i-filialite-mu/?fbclid=IwAR3CZLvaPw8IBkRr5PVN1lv6dc7xDKqe5IT70ceagbEbGtnj4vd2zYBa1yg>
- [12] Facebook page of the National history museum, Accessed 21 December, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/NationalMuseumOfHistoryBulgaria/posts/2502520079848986>
- [13] Facebook page pf the National History museum Blagoevgrad, Accessed 28 December, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/rimblagoevgrad/photos/a.845471978805237/3094890850529994/>
- [14] Facebook page pf the National History museum Blagoevgrad, Accessed 28 December, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/rimblagoevgrad/posts/3207723079246770>
- [15] Facebook page of the Regional Library Kyustendil, Accessed 18 December, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/librarykustendil/posts/115015666873494>
- [16] Facebook page of the Regional Library Pernik, Accessed 18 December, 2020. Retrieved from: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=3413107978718652&id=134700739892742
- [17] Facebook page of the Sofia Library – Children’s Department, Accessed 29 December, 2020. Retrieved from: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=866844080425739&id=218140545296099
- [18] Facebook page of the Sofia Library – Children’s Department, Accessed 29 December, 2020. Retrieved from: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=873934789716668&id=218140545296099
- [19] Facebook page of the Sofia Library – Children’s Department, Accessed 29 December, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/218140545296099/photos/a.772126573230824/875337499576397/>

- [20] Facebook page of the Sofia Library – Children’s Department, Accessed 29 December, 2020. Retrieved from: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=879809039129243&id=218140545296099
- [21] Facebook page of the Sofia Library – Children’s Department, Accessed 30 December, 2020. Retrieved from: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=880534299056717&id=218140545296099
- [22] Facebook page of the Sofia Library – Children’s Department, Accessed 30 December, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/218140545296099/photos/a.220943615015792/881991198911027/>
- [23] Facebook page of the Sofia Library – Children’s Department, Accessed 30 December, 2020. Retrieved from: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=899440990499381&id=218140545296099
- [24] Facebook page of the Sofia Library, Accessed 30 December, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/stolichna.biblioteka/posts/2836546253120084>
- [25] Facebook page of the Sofia Library, Accessed 04 January, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/stolichna.biblioteka/posts/2836546253120084>
- [26] Facebook page of the Sofia Library, Accessed 04 January, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/stolichna.biblioteka/posts/2860994500675259>
- [27] Facebook page of the Sofia Library, Accessed 04 January, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/stolichna.biblioteka/posts/2874967725944603>
- [28] Facebook page of Regional Library Blagoevgrad, Accessed 05 January, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/regliblagoevgrad/posts/1544171895734907>
- [29] Facebook page of Regional Library Blagoevgrad, Accessed 05 January, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/regliblagoevgrad/posts/1555864911232272>
- [30] Facebook page of Regional Library Blagoevgrad, Accessed 05 January, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/regliblagoevgrad/posts/1566819993470097>
- [31] Facebook page of Regional Library Blagoevgrad, Accessed 06 January, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/regliblagoevgrad/posts/1567649760053787>