

RESEARCH OF CONTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS OF CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS IN BULGARIA: NEW RESEARCH PROJECT

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Abstract

Cultural heritage belongs to the past, but it is also of great social importance in the present, especially with its educational function. The fundamental and leading role of education for the formation of values and behaviour, as well as for the acquisition of individual competences, is indisputable. There are different definitions of the term “education” that unanimously unite its core mission to preserve and develop culture. Therefore, cultural institutions within the meaning of the current legal framework in the country, in addition to carrying out activities to create, disseminate and preserve cultural and historical values, should develop active educational initiatives to fulfil their role as a mediator between the preserved tradition and the present. It is also one of the mechanisms for achieving the current education goals related to its sustainable development.

Museum educational programs as a specific interdisciplinary museum product offering a wealth of ideas and forms, as well as a variety of topics and methods of work, are a subject of a study by various scientists. Innovative approaches related to the educational function of cultural heritage have been the subject of research, mainly in the field of museum pedagogy and some specialists in general pedagogy and teaching methods in various academic subjects.

This paper presents new research project entitled “Research of Contemporary Educational Programs of Cultural Institutions in Bulgaria“, won in 2019 Competition for Financial Support for Projects of Junior Basic Researchers and Postdocs, organized by the Bulgarian National Science Fund, part of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria, Contract № KP-06-M35/3 from 18.12.2019, led by Assist. Sonya Spasova, PhD. The scientific methods, expected results and goals of the project are presented.

The subject of the project are the educational initiatives that put into practice national and regional history museums and national and regional libraries, in the period 2019-2020. The scientific problem will be examined whether these programs increase the quality of formal and non-formal education and the achievement of lasting knowledge in young people. A key element of the project is to determine the degree of interaction of cultural institutions with the school system in the country.

The goals and objectives of this paper and the project are based on the systematic development of the scientific-theoretical concept of cultural heritage as an interdisciplinary phenomenon bordering on a number of other close and related sciences, such as: cultural studies, history, sociology, pedagogy, museology, etc. The study process envisages the formulation of criteria and the implementation of a comprehensive approach to research the educational function of cultural institutions.

Keywords: education, museum, cultural institutions, cultural studies, research project.

1 INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage belongs to the past, but it is also of great social importance in the present, especially with its educational function. The fundamental and leading role of education for the formation of values and behaviour, as well as for the acquisition of individual competences, is indisputable. There are different definitions of the term “education” that unanimously unite its core mission to preserve and develop culture. Therefore, cultural institutions within the meaning of the current legal framework in the country, in addition to carrying out activities to create, disseminate and preserve cultural and historical values, should develop active educational initiatives to fulfil their role as a mediator between the preserved tradition and the present. It is also one of the mechanisms for achieving the current education goals related to its sustainable development [1], [2].

As museums are rooted in history and happenings or artefacts of the past, it has been a difficult task for them to stay current with the emerging technologies of today.

According to the Information Register of cultural organizations and institutes under Art. 14, para. 4 of the Law on Protection and Development of Culture (as of 30.06.2019) more than 1600 institutions operate in the country. Their large number and variety of thematic areas of activity require the setting of boundaries in the current study and a focus on those organizations that directly correspond with the cultural heritage system. The leading museum institutions are those whose main activity is to research, preserve and present cultural and historical values with a cognitive, educational and aesthetic purpose. Today, museum pedagogy occupies an increasingly important place in the practical activity of museums, which is developing in an integrative field of knowledge, bordering on museology, pedagogy, psychology, sociology and cultural studies. Museums correspond to varying degrees with pedagogical science and practice and with the cultural and educational space as a whole.

According to the International Council of Museums (ICOM), there are currently 55,000 museums worldwide. Washington D.C in the USA is one specific area that is a hub for museums, housing the likes of the National Air and Space Museum, the National Gallery of Art, and the National Museum of Natural history. Many of these museums are free, which is beneficial to schools that are cost-conscious and may not be able to afford admission costs [12].

Another major element of the cultural heritage system is the libraries that preserve the rich national literary heritage. Library institutions provide resources and services through various channels of communication, meeting the educational, information and personal development needs of individuals and groups. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) formulates in its Public Library Manifesto (1994) their primary function: "to support individual and formal education as well as self-education at all levels".

2 METHODOLOGY

It is envisaged that a set of research methods will be implemented to respond to the assigned tasks for the implementation of the project "Research of Contemporary Educational Programs of Cultural Institutions in Bulgaria", won in 2019 Competition for Financial Support for Projects of Junior Basic Researchers and Postdocs, organized by the Bulgarian National Science Fund, part of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria, Contract № KP-06-M35/3 from 18.12.2019, led by Assist. Sonya Spasova, PhD. And to be more precisely: 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 GOALS AND EXPECTED RESULTS IMPLEMENTED IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

In the National Strategy for the Development of Scientific Researches 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 [3].

3.1 Object and Subject of the research project

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 2019-2020. The scientific problem will be examined whether these programs increase the quality of formal and non-formal education and the achievement of lasting knowledge in young people. A key element of the study is to determine the degree of interaction of cultural institutions with the school system in the country.

3.2 Goals and Tasks

The goals and objectives of this study are based on the systematic development of the scientific-theoretical concept of cultural heritage as an interdisciplinary phenomenon bordering on a number of other close and related sciences, such as: cultural studies, history, sociology, pedagogy, museology, etc. The study process envisages the formulation of criteria and the implementation of a comprehensive approach to research the educational function of cultural institutions.

The purpose of the project proposal is to explore the diverse educational activities that are being implemented into two of the organizations within the institutional system of cultural heritage – museums and libraries in the country. Until now, they have not been a subject of a comprehensive study to systematize and categorize the sustainable, long-term and thematic educational programs they have implemented in recent years.

This gives reason the following main tasks to be formulated in the project proposal:

- 1 Searching, researching and systematizing theoretical statements related to education in museum and library environments.
- 2 Secondary processing of statistics data on conducting educational initiatives of cultural institutions in the period 2019-2020.
- 3 Conducting a representative study based on quantitative and qualitative research methods to present an up-to-date and comprehensive picture of cultural institutions' educational initiatives.
- 4 Conducting analysis and systematization of the results; formulation of basic theoretical assumptions for enhancing the quality of interinstitutional cooperation and educational initiatives.

The following basic hypotheses are pre-formulated in the development of the project proposal:

- 1 Cultural institutions' educational initiatives are a basic factor for the sustainable development of education as a whole.
- 2 The dynamic processes in today's information society and the rapid spread of new technologies necessitate innovative methodological and pedagogical approaches to improve the quality of education.
- 3 National and regional museums and libraries have an indispensable resource for integrating cultural heritage into the system of formal and non-formal education.

3.3 Plan for realization

The main activities of the project include participation in national and international scientific forums in the country and abroad, in order to ensure the presentation and promotion of the research results. The team members are expected to prepare publications in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in world-renowned scientific information databases, as well as in non-refereed peer-reviewed collective volumes, which will explicitly acknowledge the financial support of the Bulgarian National Science Fund for the implementation of the studies. Students and PhD students will also have the opportunity to participate in various seminars and conferences organized by ULSIT, where they can present independent scientific developments on the topic of the project.

In order to ensure public awareness and transparency of the goals, objectives and expected results, a website is envisaged. Designing, maintaining and updating it will be a top priority in project management activities. It is envisaged to create an interactive map on the project site, which will present the up-to-date information about the educational programs in cultural institutions in all regional cities in the country by thematic and quantitative indicators. The final project activities envisage the publication of summary information from the researches and analyses carried out. The access to the site will be free and unlimited [4-9].

3.4 Expected Results

The results of the statistics data collected and the thematic analysis of the educational activities will be of 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.

The results will be published on the studied qualitative and quantitative characteristics of the educational programs, implemented at NHM, CMNL, regional history museums and regional libraries in the country.

The results of the conducted researches can serve to create a lecture course “Educational Programs of Cultural Institutions” in which the most recent trends in this respect will be presented to the students’ society.

The expected results of the project are aimed at building an information database with up-to-date information on the implemented educational programs of cultural organizations by territorial and thematic scope. An interactive map will be created, published on the official website of the project, which will allow a wide range of users to quickly, easily and conveniently, through the global network, navigate where and in what educational initiatives they can participate. This may also directly correspond to the school education system for the selection and enrichment of extracurricular educational activities.

4 CONCLUSIONS

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. On the other hand, the study will also identify some gaps in this regard, which could support the regional development of cultural and educational infrastructure in the country.

Through the results obtained, the research team will contribute to raising the role of the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (ULSIT) in the field of cultural and educational scientific and research activity.

Museum educational programs as a specific interdisciplinary museum product offering a wealth of ideas and forms, as well as a variety of topics and methods of work, are the subject of study by various scientists. Innovative approaches related to the educational function of cultural heritage have been the subject of research, mainly in the field of museum pedagogy and some specialists in general pedagogy and teaching methods in various academic subjects.

There are many reasons for choosing museum education, including:

- Museums teach critical thinking, empathy, and other generally important skills and values.
- Trips to museums help get kids excited about school subjects.
- Museums teach subject-specific content and skills.
- Museums expand the general world knowledge of students.
- Museum visits increase students’ cultural capital; in turn, school groups help museums reach non-traditional museum goers [13].

The role of libraries in the formation of a knowledge-based society and lifelong learning has been formulated by a number of specialists and library experts in the country, as well as in numerous regulatory documents. Educational strategies and innovative educational approaches in libraries are also being studied by scientists at the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (ULSIT) [10], [11].

This project seeks to integrate these studies to formulate specific recommendations for the interaction between museums and libraries, on the one hand, and the school system, on the other.

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