CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL HERITAGE IN VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS. CREATION OF VIRTUAL LEARNING COLLECTIONS

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to presents some of the experiences resulting from the creation of virtual learning collection of materials for theoretical and practical students training in the field of Cultural Heritage. The specific objectives are targeted primarily at students and involve: the acquisition of theoretical and practical knowledge and skills for identification, documentation and classification of types and categories of heritage, getting new knowledge about historical events and places that are unique for Europe's diversity of cultures. This activity is part of the research project “Models of Cultural Heritage Socialization in a Smart City” (ДН05/3, 14/12/2016), implemented by the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, funded by the Scientific Research Fund with the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria. The working hypothesis is based on the need to introduce innovative methods on teaching and learning in the system of university education in our country in the field of cultural heritage.

Based on its teaching and research experience in the field of cultural heritage and on examples of good practices, the research team developed a thematic project which became the foundation for creating a software program for an academic virtual collection "Cultural and Historical Heritage". The methodology contains three main steps: collecting and systematizing a database; creating a thematic concept; structuring the main sections. Emphasis is placed on topics that address contemporary cultural policies, the expanding structure of the types of cultural heritage, sustainable development, issues of socialization, cultural corridors and cultural tourism, the harmonization of the legislative framework, cultural heritage at risk. The virtual academic resource is structured into two main sections. The first includes collection of a bibliographic database for publications - books, articles and documents. The second section includes: photo materials, photo annotations, field studies. The thematic structure consist academic collections on: Cultural Policy; Institutions - archives, museums, libraries; Archaeological Heritage (including Thracian heritage); Architectural Heritage, urban spaces and ensembles; Documentary and Literary heritage; Documents - conventions, recommendations, declarations, expert reports from international organizations.

The following can be listed as the fastest achieved results: increased interest, awareness and access of students to materials diverse in subject, form and content; inclusion of new educational content and interactive forms of training in the academic process. It is expected that the presented model will contribute to raising the quality of education and training of students and to the wider use of visual materials and multimedia products in the research and teaching activities.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, University education, Research Project.

1 INTRODUCTION

The University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (ULSIT) is a leading university in Bulgaria for training specialists in the field of cultural and historical heritage. ULSIT conducts training in undergraduate programs in the specialty of Information Funds of Cultural and Historical Heritage and Information Resources of Tourism, and a Master degree in Cultural and Historical Heritage in Contemorary Information Environment and Protection of Cultural and Historical Heritage in Bulgaria. ULSIT is also a recognized academic centre for scientific research in the field of public policy for cultural heritage, its preservation and protection. The modern educational policy of ULSIT aims to stimulate the interdisciplinary nature of scientific research and initiatives in the field of heritage. One of the our university projects which we currently implementing is on: "Models of cultural heritage socialization in a "smart city"". This research project is supported through the National Science Fund of Ministry of Education and Science of Republic of Bulgaria. The project is a collaboration between the functioning in the structure of our University of Institute for Research, organization and management of cultural heritage and the UNESCO Inter Department on ICT in library science, education and cultural
heritage where past experience of these research units in the implementation of innovative training and conduct interdisciplinary research has a place. Working on this project, therefore, we would like to contribute to the creation of best practices and conditions for mobility of research, particularly in the field of cultural and historical heritage and their commitment to teaching and training. The second reason relates to the fact that after the launch of EU enlargement in 2004, cultural heritage has been highlighted as priority in European policies for preservation of European cultural diversity. The meaning of the concepts ‘collective memory’, ‘cultural memory’, ‘intercultural education and upbringing’, ‘European cultural heritage’ has been extended. The third reason relates to the access to updated scientific information in electronic format, which is extremely important for contemporary development of research in international scientific exchange and communication as well as for the purposes of university education. When choosing of thematic area is also considered the report of the European Commission „Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe”, (Brussels, 22.7.2014) which has placed a focus on research and innovation [1].

Our research goals are generally focused around two areas. In the field of teaching and research - to achieve an integrated system for interdisciplinary research, teaching, theoretical and practical training, covering groups of: undergraduates and postgraduates; PhD students and assistant professors; professors, associate professors and research groups; research and museum institutions. To stimulate research related to the socialization of cultural heritage, digitization, cultural corridors and cultural tourism, European cultural policies. In the formation of perceptions and ideas of collective and cultural memory to support the learning process with visual and multimedia products offering interactive forms of training such as experiential learning.

The aim of this paper is to presents some of the experiences resulting from the creation of virtual learning collection of materials for theoretical and practical students training in the field of Cultural Heritage. The specific objectives are targeted primarily at students and involve: the acquisition of theoretical and practical knowledge and skills for identification, documentation and classification of types and categories of heritage, getting new knowledge about historical events and places that are unique for Europe’s diversity of cultures.

The working hypothesis is based on the need to introduce innovative methods on teaching and learning in the system of university education in our country in the field of cultural heritage.

2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology contains three main steps: collecting and systematizing a database; creating a thematic concept; structuring the main sections. Emphasis is placed on topics that address contemporary cultural policies, the expanding structure of the types of cultural heritage, sustainable development, issues of socialization, cultural corridors and cultural tourism, the harmonization of the legislative framework, cultural heritage at risk. The virtual academic resource is structured into two main sections. The first includes collection of a bibliographic database for publications - books, articles and documents. The second section includes: photo materials, photo annotations, field studies. The thematic structure consist academic collections on: Cultural Policy; Institutions - archives, museums, libraries; Archaeological Heritage (including Thracian heritage); Architectural Heritage, urban spaces and ensembles; Documents - conventions, recommendations, declarations, expert reports from international organizations. The project has educational approaches focusing on acquire new knowledge and improve the quality of students' education. In the experimental activities and research to achieve these research goals also are involved students in "Information Funds of cultural heritage", "Information resources of tourism", "Computer Science" and graduated bachelors and masters graduates of UNIBIT who have a career in institutions such as museums and libraries.

3 RESULTS

Based on its teaching and research experience in the field of cultural heritage and on examples of good practices, our team developed a thematic project which became the foundation for creating a software program for an academic virtual collection "Cultural and Historical Heritage". At the preliminary stage of collection and systematization of the materials, the profile of Bulgaria in the European Information Network for Cultural Heritage [2] and the types and categories of heritage included in the National Cultural Heritage Act, as well as the book "Cultural and Historical Heritage of Bulgaria. Priorities of State Policy" [2] are used as a basis.

The virtual academic resource is structured into two main sections.
The first includes published materials and documentation - bibliographic data and texts of books and scientific publications in the field of cultural and historical heritage. The academic database presents modern scientific publications, theoretical and practical works created after 2004. Emphasis is placed on topics that address contemporary cultural policies, the expanding structure of the types of cultural heritage, sustainable development, issues of socialization, cultural corridors and cultural tourism, the harmonization of the legislative framework, cultural heritage at risk. A detailed bibliographic study was carried out on the project, showing that at the national level the largest part of the research includes topics related to the conservation of archaeological and architectural heritage, the problems of cultural heritage protection and management, museum activities, intangible heritage. Regarding the socialization of the heritage, publications focusing on integrated management of cultural and natural heritage, cultural tourism, architectural heritage problems at risk, and preservation of central urban areas dominate. Another, much less part of the research, are focused on technological issues of digitization of the heritage, but to date at national level there are almost no interdisciplinary studies related to new models of cultural heritage socialization. That is why the project initiated the collection of a bibliographic database for publications - books, articles and documents of international organizations (UNESCO, Council of Europe), printed in English and other European languages.

Several thematic studies were also carried out within the project: Current issues on the application of information and communication technologies (ICT) in cultural heritage education and training [3]; The role of UNESCO and the Council of Europe and also of international non-governmental organizations on the use of ICT in cultural heritage education and its socialization [4]; Preservation of archives in 21st century. The role of the new Information technologies [5].

The second section of the virtual academic resource includes: photo materials, photo annotations, field studies. These materials are collected by students, postgraduate students and PhD students in the course of the academic process of teaching and during practical training in summer student workshops. \textit{MУЗЕИТЕ} In the pilot version of the learning collection priority is given to the subjects taught in the educational and qualification degree Bachelor in Information Collections of Cultural and Historical Heritage at SULSIT – ‘Cultural Policy and Cultural Heritage’, ‘State Policy of the Cultural and Historical Heritage of Bulgaria’, ‘History of Bulgarian Cultural Institutions’, ‘Architecture of Bulgarian cities’, ‘Urban Spaces and Ensembles’ [6]. In subsequent stages of the project the structure is expected to be expanded in the following thematic directions: Archaeological Heritage, Church Heritage, Intangible Heritage, Monuments of Events and People.

The project developed a holographic virtual reality system. The innovative product makes it possible to present in an attractive way valuable exhibits and collections of the Bulgarian cultural heritage. The hologram system is successfully used for the scientific tasks of the project. Three of the young scientists – members of the project team have been trained to work with the system and with the necessary programs to make holographic projections. The hologram system is placed in the ULSIT Library and Information Center and has free access to students and lecturers. The system is already being used in the students learning process and enhances the quality of teaching methods in the field of cultural heritage and information technology.

The preparation of the academic digital collection, its structure and the type of educational materials were widely publicized among students, lecturers and experts in museum institutions. At the launch of the pilot version of the teaching collection, students demonstrated keen interest as well as their willingness to participate. The following can be listed as the fastest achieved results: increased interest, awareness and access of students to materials diverse in subject, form and content; inclusion of new educational content and interactive forms of training in the academic process; wider application of ICT in teaching and research and promotion of its interdisciplinary nature. In the course of our work on the academic digital collection the following major difficulties and weaknesses were observed. Materials in Bulgarian language predominate in the collection at present and this implies a narrow range of users. The introduction of information menus for current events and initiatives is forthcoming. These activities suggest the existence of a permanent qualified team, responsible for the systematization of this kind of information, for uploading it on a web site and carrying out its constant updating and upgrading.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Virtual learning environment: Creates opportunities for constant contact and communication between students, teachers, researchers and specialists working in cultural institutions; Contributes to awareness of collective cultural memory of common European heritage; Creates opportunities for
including ICT in the process of learning and promoting interactive forms of learning. Undoubtedly, the development of the IT application process for cultural heritage socialization will lead to a growing number of younger generations being interested in cultural heritage. For them, the use of modern IT is leading in the search for information.

We hope that the activities of our project and the results achieved will contribute to the improvement of the quality of the students’ education and to the broader application of the information technologies in the research and teaching activities in the field of cultural heritage. The academic virtual collection model presented here is in the process of continuous development and expansion of the structure, of completing and systematizing the heterogeneous information. In terms of the presented information the research team do not claim to have achieved their task thoroughly. With the implementation of the project we hope to contribute to the creation of information environment for stimulating contemporary subjects of interdisciplinary researches and to increase educational integration in the field of cultural and historical heritage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are very grateful to the National Science Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria for funding this research. We are also very grateful to the following institutions that have provided us with co-operation in the project activities: National Military History Museum, the National Library “St. St. Cyril and Methodius”, the National History Museum, the Regional History Museum in Shumen city.

REFERENCES


