

Students' Digital Archive at the State University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, Sofia

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Abstract. The paper describes the creation and content of the digital archive of photographs, films and materials from fieldwork (interviews, surveys, and observations) of students from the Information Funds of the Cultural and Historical Heritage program at the State University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, Sofia, Bulgaria. The text discusses the educational opportunities of the archive, and the plans for publishing it as CD and for conversion into an electronic archive on the Internet.

Keywords: Digital Archive, Students, Handbook, Bulgaria

1 Introduction

The idea of creating a students' digital archive at the State University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (SULSIT) in Sofia arose in 2005. Then I started teaching the "Social History of Bulgaria" course in the Information Funds of the Cultural and Historical Heritage program (IFCHH). It trains students to understand, detect, analyze and preserve the cultural heritage of small and large social groups. Social history fundamentally relies on alternative sources, which include photographs and oral interviews. This led the examination and evaluation of knowledge, skills and competencies of students not only in the traditional way, but through interactive methods – fieldwork, surveys, and interviews. The very first lecture students are given several tasks. The first is to trace their family archive and to select photographs on various topics relating to small groups, digitize them, bind them in a multimedia presentation and write a comment on them. The second is to conduct an oral interview (standardized or life story) with the appropriate respondent, to record it, and also to analyze. The third task is compiling a family tree in which to track and analyze generational relationships and influences.

Experience with the "Social History of Bulgaria" course was further developed during the last 2 years. In the courses "History of the Religious Denominations", "History of religions", and "Holiday Calendar" training process includes not only lecture classes, but also fieldwork (group and individual), mostly in churches, prayer places, and cultural institutions.

Good shares in the foundation of the SULSUT students' digital archive have the graduates of the Cultural Heritage Department that had defended lots of bachelor's and master's theses.

2 The Students' Fieldwork

Students very actively and deliberately seek out, select and digitize the traces of the past - either within their families and clans, or in religious institutions. They turn to their ancestors and the religious leaders directly or by mail, make special trips and meetings, and carry out participant observations and surveys with relatives, fellow citizens, neighborhood people or believers. In the few cases, when their own family archives are missing (due to destruction, loss, etc.), students seek archival materials and photos of their relatives, friends and colleagues.

Students encounter few obstacles in search of respondents and in interviews with them: postponements or declinations, technical problems in recording conversations. They willingly and without fear telling their life stories and provide the necessary clarifications on the images. They construct their own biographies, represent them to their heirs and are themselves participants in the research process. This communication of generations actually becomes a channel for communication and cultural condition for the transmission of values, experiences and ideas. Students most often target video documents (photographs) of small groups like family or clan. There are numerous wedding photographs reflecting the specifics of the age, location and social environment. Students comment clothing as a social marker and organizing the wedding feast, make parallels between successful weddings in the 1940s, the 1970s, and today. Photos provide an excellent opportunity for students to exercise their skills for identifying, dating and analysis of the social environment; social hierarchies and norms.

Many photographs are related to neighborhood communities. They were made during the holiday (fair, meetings, at Christmas) and agricultural work. They most often show aspects of youth culture and a vivid testimony to the processes of urbanization.

Educational small social groups are also subject to interest. Here photos of students from primary and secondary schools are collected to show them in formal and informal activities. Many are valuable series of photographs of work groups. They cover a long period (from the 1930s to the 1980s) and focus on workers from different enterprises (rubber, paper, tobacco, and machine) and co-operative farmers. Workers were filmed in a working environment or celebrating. The photos allow verifying their origin (formal or casual), commenting on the role of propaganda and working conditions in the second half of the 20th century.

Various images represent interest groups. Here dominate the sport (of cyclists, footballers and tennis players), but there are also revolutionary bands, dance groups, choirs, mountaineering associations and others.

The images cover also the large social groups. The photos portrayed the so-called youth culture before and after the World War II, provide places where generations communicate, showing the lives of different classes and strata (middle class, peasants, working class). The social construction of gender is presented too.

Ethnic and religious communities are the subject of continued interest by the graduates. They conduct interviews, take pictures in the fieldwork, do interviews with believers, and seek documents for the protection of religious heritage.

The digital archive consists of two oral interviews, filmed by video. The respondents were of different sex, origin, education and career (an aircraft mechanic and a saleswoman), but their life stories draw general narrative of a generation who lived through social transformation after the World War II. Life stories of these people can serve as a model for future fieldwork of students.

3 Handbook "Students' Digital Archive of Religious Heritage"

Over the past five years in the Cultural Heritage Department more than 20 graduate theses were defended on history, conservation and preservation of cultural heritage of religious denominations in Bulgaria. They explored problems of Orthodox churches and monasteries in Sofia and Sofia region, in Pernik and Pernik region, in Sliven, and in Bansko; of prayer places, churches and cultural institutions of the Armenians (in Plovdiv, Sliven, Rousse, and Sofia), of the Catholics (in Sofia and Bardarski Geran village), of the Protestants (in Sofia, Sliven, and Hristo Botev district in Sofia), and of the Jews (in Sofia).

During the fieldwork, the graduates made a number of interviews with clergy and members of church boards, interviews with believers, carried out participant observations and videotaping, tracked down archival documents and old photographs.

During the 2011-2012 students from of the IFCHH program, the "Press Communications" program, and of "Library Studies and Bibliography" program conducted an intensive extracurricular fieldwork. It took place both in Sofia and in Pazardjik, e.g. at the Catholic Apostolic Exarchate, at the Central Synagogue, at the Banya Bashi Mosque, at the Armenian Apostolic Church "Surp Stepanos", at the Cathedral Orthodox Church "Assumption of the Virgin", at the protestant church "New Grace", and at the Central Sofia Cemetery.

These visits were reflected in a number of photographs and multimedia presentations. All the results of students' fieldwork will be included in an electronic book called "Students' Digital Archive of Religious Heritage". It will be published by "Za bukвите - O pismeneh" Publishing House in the end of 2012. Unless collection of the best achievements of students' research, it will be designed to become a handbook for students in the future would like to dealing with such fieldwork.

4 Conclusions

Individual work is an established method of screening and assessment in higher education. Its use in the "Social History of Bulgaria", "History of the Religious Denominations", "History of Religions", and "Holiday Calendar" courses aim to form practical skills of students in SULSIT.

Turning to family archives and to archives of religious institutions, to oral memories of previous generations and of religious leaders, students simultaneously learn to

seek, gather, process and summarize information from authentic sources. They become part of the storage and transmission of cultural memory and cultural heritage. [2; 3; 4]

Digitization of the discovered photographs is a form of their conservation and protection as authentic sources, but also a way to exercise students' skills in the information technologies (the processes of scanning, formatting, save images and their incorporation into multimedia presentations). Writing a comment and conferencing with the teacher and peers developed skills in written and oral expression, and in team work.

The collected fieldwork materials over the past seven years establish a digital archive. Now it now contains 374 CDs and 39 DVDs. They are arranged alphabetically by surname of the students. Guides by school years, by subjects, by year, and by subject of the photographs had been prepared. Thematic index includes sections such as: family, clan, territorial communities, professional groups, groups on the ground of common interests, and educational groups. We plan it will grow into a web archive after being posted on the website of the Faculty of Library Studies and Cultural Heritage at the SULSIT. So it will become accessible and useful for historians and for future alumni of the SULSIT. It is also possible to link the digital archive collections to other portals and virtual libraries in Bulgaria and abroad.

Creating such a web and digital archive of documents from private archives would additional activity in the implementing the Concept for the protection of literary and cultural heritage, the efforts of state institutions (the Bulgarian Academy of Science, the St. St. Cyril and Methodius National Library, and some regional libraries) [1; 5], and in large-scale in the EUROPEANA initiative.

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