

Moving Boundary: A Virtual Museum of the Ethnic Groups

This museum doesn't exist in the real life, we will create it together

Maria Karadecheva

Regional History Museum in Plovdiv
m.karadecheva@gmail.com

Abstract. The virtual museum of ethnic groups “Moving boundary” is a proposition for dialogue on an important topic in today's world – ethnic coexistence. The project's goal is to make various resources (photos, documents, etc.) available for use by teachers, professors and students, thus forming and strengthening connections between educational institutions.

Keywords: Ethnic Groups, Laboratory, Exposition, Fund

1 Introduction

The period from 1878 until present day has been an uneasy time in Bulgaria, both in its public and political life. These two aspects of life have also been characterized by frequent changes, even catastrophies, typical for the Balkan region. This dynamic is reflected in the status, the real-life conditions and the makings of all the various ethnic groups, closely linked to the Bulgarians through centuries of coexistence. The extended study and comparison between different ethnicities is an extremely laborious process. It suggests various work-groups, made up of historians, sociologists, economists and cultural scientists. They have to put together all the bits of memory and recreate a living and factually correct picture of the everyday life of these different ethnic groups, as they live it today.

This project focuses on the religious coexistence between a number of ethnic groups in an ethnically diverse city. Knowledge in temple architecture, religious plates and books, holidays, rituals, taboos and norms of behavior in the religious life of the different ethnicities would make for a great chance in understanding and mutual acceptance.

2 The idea

The virtual museum of the ethnic groups project is called “Moving Boundary”. We can pull this boundary **close to us** (learning more and sympathizing to each other) or

we can **drive it back** (alienating ourselves even more). Making the boundaries between us surmountable or not is the result of one of these two choices.

The “Moving Boundary” virtual museum of ethnic groups is an idea showing how a municipal museum in an ethnically diverse city can prove to be a vital partner in the educational process of high school students and university graduates. Drawing on the basic museum principles it will have its own **exhibition** and **fund**. The virtual museum offers a creative laboratory for young researchers by **providing access** to digital images, exponents, photographs, documents and **information on where they are stored** and how they can be used.

The project’s holds a deep belief that engaging in first-hand knowledge on different ethnic groups in Bulgaria will eventually nurture tolerance. Ultimately, this point of view seeks confirmation in the field work and personal experience of the participants.

3 Project goals

Why use the museum as a partner?

- Because it views all issues as public in general and does not associate them with a specific group of people.
- Because it can help in learning more about the riches of diversity.
- Because it can encourage the acceptance of other people's opinions and practices.
- Because it evokes and teaches tolerance, and if we do not blame our problems on others, we will be able to recognize that the difference between us is in fact only in our minds.

The virtual museum:

- Will distinguish between truth and fiction, document and myth.
- Will show that “the Other” has the same right of existence and identity as we do and that knowing other people's culture, religion, way of life and finding the common ground, helps in overcoming all barriers.
- Will influence its visitors through the power of the original exponent.

4 Realization

The project is the result of the collaboration between the History Museum in Plovdiv, the Gerda Henkel Foundation, the Eustory Network and the Values Foundation. Its first field work was carried out throughout October 2010 in Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

Its online imprint is a website with main menus: **Exposition, Fund, Laboratory**.

The virtual museum seeks to emulate the structure of a real-life museum with its exposition, fund and laboratory as presented in the website:

- Exposition – contains images and texts on the current topic

- Fund – how and where to locate museum resources on the topic; detailed information on the objects themselves; a repository for images/texts for the use of students/teachers.
- Laboratory – showcases students’ and researchers’ work.

Exposition and **Fund** will host a number of digitalized materials – photographs, documents, original artifacts, as well as scientific papers, potentially useful in the learning process of students while they get to know the way of life, culture and religion of different ethnic groups. The **Laboratory** is meant to be the most creative part of the website. By using the materials from the Exposition and the Fund, young people will be able to submit their texts, photographs, movies and research projects in this open repository. That's the place where clichés and prejudices will be put to the test.

In 2010 the website of the project was launched at www.movingboundaries.org. The “Laboratory” section became a sandbox for the Eustory youth academy with subject “Between the East and the West – religious diversity in Bulgaria”. The academy was organized by the Values Foundation in association with Eustory and with the financial support of the Gerda Henkel Foundation.

All photographs on the www.movingboundaries.org website are courtesy of the History Museum of Plovdiv (except [utvar4.jpg](#), [utvar5.jpg](#), [utvar9.jpg](#), [utvar11.jpg](#) located in Exposition -> Religious Diversity -> Church Plates. The photos were taken from the “Bulgaria – diverse and united in the European community” exhibition from the National History Museum). All texts belong to their respecting owners - the participants in the October 2010 field work in Plovdiv, Bulgaria.