



## **Educational Tourism in Bulgaria: New Research Project**

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### **Abstract**

*The intersection points in the interaction of three state management systems, namely: cultural heritage, education, tourism in Bulgaria, has so far not been the subject of a complex study. Each of these systems is managed by state institutions that have a high degree of overlapping funding and responsibilities. This paper presents a new research project entitled "Research of opportunities for the implementation and development of educational tourism in Bulgaria: Cultural heritage in support of formal education", that in 2023 won the Competition for financial support of basic research projects, organized by the Bulgarian National Science Fund, part of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria, Contract № KP-06-N75/17 from 15.12.2023, led by Chief Assist. Sonya Spasova, PhD. The goals and results of the project are presented. The set goals of the project proposal include, in addition to the study of international good practices and the analysis of published scientific studies on the subject, conducting field studies (surveys, interviews, photo-documentation of selected objects that directly correspond to school education and the development of tourism in Bulgaria), also publishing a monograph and a teaching aid. The object of research is educational tourism in Bulgaria. The subject of research are pre-selected sites of national cultural heritage as a potential for the development of educational tourism in the country, with the aim of increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of formal education in Bulgaria. It is envisaged that the selection of objects will be categorized into three historical eras: Antiquity, Middle Ages, Bulgarian Revival. The methods and approaches envisaged include: a survey of published literature on the subject; conducting field studies (surveys, interviews, photo, and video documentation), analyses and synthesis of regulatory documents.*

**Keywords:** *Research project, Cultural Tourism, Cultural Heritage, Education*

### **1. Introduction**

Educational tourism is an intersection where the principles of continuity and accessibility of education and tourism find their practical realization. The goals and tasks of the present 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 science, history, sociology, pedagogy, museology, etc. In the process of the study, the formulation of criteria and the application of a complex approach to the study of the educational aspects of tourism in interaction with the national cultural heritage system are envisaged.

### **2. Timeliness and relevance of scientific problems addressed by the project**

The intersection area in the interaction of three state management systems, namely: cultural heritage, education, tourism in Bulgaria, has so far not been the subject of a complex study. Each of these systems is managed by state institutions that have a high degree of overlapping funding and responsibilities. The research and discovery of a methodology regarding their qualitative and effective coordination of activities that correspond to the satisfaction of the direct needs of society is feasible by applying a scientific-research approach. The planned activities of the project proposal aim to explore these relationships, research, and propose concrete methods as principles for basic dependencies in inter-institutional cooperation.

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The innovative approach adopted in the activities of the current project is the purchase of a drone, with which to document pre-selected cultural heritage sites and to outline educational tourist routes in support of school education, based on some academic disciplines (I - XIII grade). The



recorded video materials will be published fully accessible to Internet users and shared on some of the most popular social networks and on the official website of the project.

Educational tourism research plays an important role in understanding and improving this type of tourism, as well as in determining its impacts and potential challenges. Here are some of the main aspects and topics that are explored in the context of educational tourism:

- Motivation and interests of tourists: Research can be aimed at understanding the motivations and interests of people who choose educational tourism. What motivates them to learn and explore new places. What are their expectations and preferences.
- Impact on the educational process: Research can examine how educational tourism affects the learning and development of participants. This includes an analysis of how travel enriches tourists' knowledge and experience.
- Economic and social impacts: Research can analyse the economic and social impacts of educational tourism on destinations. What is the economic impact of increased visits to museums, universities, and other educational institutions. What are the social benefits and challenges for local communities.
- Sustainable tourism: Research can focus on the ways in which educational tourism can be directed towards sustainable development. How can tourist footprints on the environment and cultural resources be reduced.
- Educational programs and approaches: Research can focus on the effectiveness of educational programs and teaching methods used in educational tourism.
- Destination Marketing and Management: Research can analyse the marketing strategies and management of destinations in educational tourism. How are tourists seeking educational experiences attracted and managed.
- Trends and innovations: Educational tourism research can also follow trends and innovations related to the development of new educational experiences and technological solutions. Opportunities to link the cultural heritage, tourism and education systems are often categorized as bilateral but not tripartite cooperation.

In publications by authors such as Irena Emilova, Elenita Velikova, etc., the issue is considered from an economic point of view and the dimensions for the tourism industry in the sectors engaged in their direct practical service. [1] Associate Professor Velikov and Assist. Stoyanova analyse the role of the tour guide activity, as well as the methodology of implementation and for making a quality tourist product. Publications that make a concrete connection between cultural heritage and tourism are also found in the field of research. As an example, a monograph album entitled "Tourism and Cultural Heritage" was released. [2]

Educational tourism is a type of tourism that focuses on educational and cultural goals, providing opportunities to enrich the knowledge, develop skills and expand the cultural horizons of tourists. This type of tourism often includes visits to educational institutions, museums, exhibitions, archaeological sites, historical sites, nature reserves and other places of interest related to science, history, art, nature, and culture.

One of the key aspects of educational tourism is the opportunity to learn and enrich knowledge while traveling. Tourists can learn about the history and culture of a place, understand its traditions and customs, explore local flora and fauna, or learn about local scientific achievements and innovations.

Educational tourism has many advantages, such as promoting the educational process, helping to preserve cultural heritage, and promoting sustainable development. It can also be inspiring and motivating for people to continue learning and developing throughout their lives. Educational tourism can be expressed in various forms, such as field trips, lectures, courses, workshops, and even long-term educational programs that include stays in different regions and countries. This type of tourism is often popular with students, teachers, researchers, and anyone who values education and cultural exchange.

In modern literature, educational tourism is interpreted differently. One of the first definitions was given by Zorin I.V. and Kvartalnov V.A. The authors define educational tourism as tourist trips and excursions for the purpose of training, satisfying curiosity and other cognitive interests. They clarify the purpose and tasks of the educational tours, calling them informative, carried out to fulfil the tasks determined by the educational programs of the educational institutions. [3]

### **3. Project objectives, hypotheses, and approaches for accomplishment of project objectives**

The study of the potential of qualitative and effective interrelationships between basic spheres, which directly influence the development of modern democratic societies, is a leading factor for the



application of current and innovative methods regarding their updating and their promotion to the improvement of economic, social, and cultural relations. The present project proposal aims to explore opportunities for interaction between three state management systems that have real points of contact in this regard.

The **object** of research is educational tourism in Bulgaria.

The **subject** of research are pre-selected sites of national cultural heritage as a potential for the development of educational tourism in the country, with the aim of increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of formal education in Bulgaria. It is envisaged that the selection of objects will be categorized into three historical eras: Antiquity, Middle Ages, Bulgarian Revival.

The **methods** and approaches envisaged include: a survey of published literature on the subject; conducting field studies (surveys, interviews, photo, and video documentation), analyses and synthesis of regulatory documents.

The **objectives** of the project are relevant in several directions:

1. Study of the regional and institutional potential as a resource for increasing the quality of education with the active participation of cultural institutions in the country.
2. Conducting field studies.
3. Shooting with a drone the most emblematic objects from three historical eras and publishing them on social networks and on the Internet.

The following **tasks** are planned for the fulfilment of the goals thus set:

1. Carrying out a review of the literature on the topic.
2. Processing of statistical data on the institutional resource and potential for implementation of educational tourist routes in the country.
3. Documentation and editing of the video material.
4. Processing and systematization of the results.

The **expected results** of conducting the research refer to:

1. The socialization of the national cultural heritage.
2. Increasing the quality of formal education in the country.
3. Implementation of scientific and theoretical relations between three state spheres: cultural heritage - tourism – education.

It is planned to apply a complex of research methods with which to respond to the tasks set for the implementation of the project. Namely: search, study and systematization of theoretical statements related to educational tourism and its relationship with various institutions; conducting a representative study based on quantitative and qualitative research methods (survey, interview) to present an up-to-date and comprehensive picture regarding the development of educational initiatives and extracurricular activities; applying a systematic approach in the analysis of the results.

In accordance with the rapid development of our information and communication technologies and the role of the Internet for sharing information, field work with photo and video documentation of basic objects of cultural heritage, which directly correspond to the educational content of some subjects of the school education system in the country, is planned.

#### 4. Conclusions

The goals set for the project are also related to the guidelines for supporting scientific research, defined in the Law on the Promotion of Scientific Research – ZNNI (Bulgarian history, language, culture and national identity; solving problems in the field of economy, education, social processes, etc.) and corresponds to the set goals for sustainable development under the Horizon Europe program of the European Union in the field of scientific research and innovation for the period 2021-2027. 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. [4]

The research undertaken in the current project is a continuation of studies that were carried out in another scientific 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. [5]

Part of the applied methodology for researching the educational function of cultural heritage [6] will also be adapted to the current study to clarify the characteristics and interactions between education, cultural heritage, and tourism.





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