

THE BULGARIAN WRITTEN HERITAGE AS A CULTURAL RESOURCE AND A DRIVER OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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Abstract: The Bulgarian written cultural heritage includes unique manuscripts, medieval literary monuments and archival funds, testifying to the spiritual and intellectual development of the Bulgarian people. This heritage not only reflects the cultural identity of the nation, but also provides a platform for the development of cultural tourism with a long-term sustainable effect. This article explores the Bulgarian written heritage not only as a national cultural treasure, but also as a strategic resource for the development of sustainable cultural tourism. Manuscript books and documents can be integrated into the tourism product through museums, libraries, archives, thematic routes and digital platforms. Good practices, the potential for cultural diplomacy and the contribution to local development are analyzed. Special attention is paid to the interrelationship between written cultural heritage and sustainable development, implemented through its preservation, educational initiatives and active community participation. The article focuses on the historical and cultural value of manuscripts and archives as factors determining the unique role of Bulgaria in European civilization. The importance of the preservation and restoration of manuscript and archival heritage is emphasized, while at the same time seeking a sustainable balance between preserving its authenticity and ensuring public access. The deficit of well-trained specialists and funding is noted, as well as the need for a transdisciplinary approach, including cultural studies, archival studies, information technologies and tourism planning. Bulgarian written heritage has enormous potential to be a bridge between the past and the future, while simultaneously contributing to cultural self-awareness and economic development through sustainable tourism. The authors call for the strategic integration of written heritage into public and private cultural policies based on long-term thinking and preservation. A long-term and coordinated vision based on inter-institutional cooperation, innovation and educational practices is needed. This publication is related to a research project: "Ecologically Sustainable Conservation Strategy for Written Heritage", contract No. KP-06-N90/6 of 10.12.2024, funded by the Scientific Research Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria, headed by Senior Assistant Professor PhD Eng. Iskra Tsvetanska.

Keywords: *written heritage, preservation, sustainable tourism.*

Field: Social sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

The Bulgarian written cultural heritage includes unique manuscripts, medieval literary monuments and archival funds, testifying to the spiritual and intellectual development of the Bulgarian people. This heritage not only reflects the cultural identity of the nation, but also provides a platform for the development of cultural tourism with a long-term sustainable effect.

This article aims to explore the potential of the Bulgarian written heritage as a resource for sustainable cultural tourism. At a time when tourism is increasingly oriented towards the preservation of cultural resources, the engagement of local communities and the creation of long-term value, the written heritage can be an asset that combines educational value, identity and economic potential. The emphasis is placed on the possibility of transforming cultural and historical sites and practices related to writing into sustainable tourism infrastructure.

The relevance of the topic is determined by the global context of seeking a balance between the preservation and use of the written cultural heritage. Organizations such as UNESCO and the European Union are increasingly focusing their attention on the sustainable management of cultural resources that are not subject to physical depletion, but are vulnerable due to lack of visibility, modernization and cultural transformations. In this sense, the Bulgarian written heritage offers opportunities for a new type of cultural experience – authentic, informative and engaging.

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2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology of the study includes an interdisciplinary approach that combines historical and cultural analysis with elements of the theory of sustainable development and cultural tourism. The main sources of information are scientific publications in the field of history, cultural heritage and tourism, documents of UNESCO and the European Union, as well as specific good practices from Bulgaria and other European countries. Data from cultural institutions, archives, educational programs and tourism initiatives related to the Bulgarian written heritage were also used.

3. RESULTS

Written heritage is an important part of cultural heritage, as it carries historical, linguistic and spiritual values, transmitted through generations. It goes beyond its purely historical significance and becomes a living cultural and educational tool, shaping cultural identity and providing a link between past and present.

Contemporary manifestations of written heritage include various institutions and initiatives: museums, monasteries with library collections, specialized libraries and archives, festivals dedicated to Old Bulgarian literature, as well as processes of digitization of old manuscripts and books. This creates opportunities for written heritage to be more accessible and interactive for a wide audience.

Digitization and restoration of old manuscripts are among the key contemporary practices for the preservation of written heritage. These processes are carried out with increasing attention to environmental aspects and sustainable methods. As Georgiev notes, ecological approaches in restoration include the use of environmentally friendly materials and techniques that minimize the harmful impact on the environment and the archives themselves (Georgiev, 2021). This practice contributes to long-term preservation and at the same time supports the concept of sustainable cultural heritage. The digitization of written memory not only facilitates access to it, but also provides opportunities for interdisciplinary research and innovation. Modern digital technologies allow the creation of interactive platforms and virtual exhibitions that enrich the research and educational environment, while stimulating broad public engagement and preservation of cultural heritage in Bulgaria (Stefanov & Stoyanov, 2022). The digitization of manuscript heritage is a key process for its preservation and accessibility. As Hristova points out, contemporary practices are developing in Bulgaria that combine traditional archival methods with modern digital technologies, ensuring not only the preservation of materials, but also their wide dissemination through online platforms. These processes expand opportunities for scientific research and educational initiatives, while supporting the sustainability of cultural heritage (Hristova, 2019).

Opportunities for education through culture are particularly significant. Educational routes, workshops and exhibitions allow participants to actively engage in the process of learning about the history and significance of Bulgarian writing. Draganov emphasizes that educational tourism represents a kind of synthesis in which the ideas of continuity and accessibility are put into practice, both in the field of education and in tourism (Draganov, 2025). This not only enriches the tourist experience, but also stimulates intercultural dialogue and promotes the sustainable preservation of cultural heritage. Ivanova also notes that the integration of cultural heritage with educational tourism creates important opportunities for raising awareness and involving younger generations in the preservation of national identity (Ivanova, 2022). There are many good analyses based on large-scale international studies on the topic, which allows for a large European comparative perspective (Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2021).

Sustainable tourism is defined as tourism that meets the economic, social and environmental needs of both present and future generations. It aims for balanced development that supports the local economy, preserves the cultural and natural environment and includes local communities. Written heritage contributes to the affirmation of local identity and traditions, and the inclusion of local communities. In addition, it provides a platform for socio-economic development through tourism that engages local residents as bearers of culture and active participants in the processes of preservation and promotion. As Stoyanova points out, cultural heritage is a driver of sustainable development, creating opportunities for the local community not only to preserve its identity, but also to stimulate social and economic activity. Written heritage, with its unique spiritual and historical value, can be the center of sustainable tourism initiatives that support educational, cultural and economic processes in the regions (Stoyanova, 2020).

Cultural routes and monasteries that preserve both architectural and written heritage play a particularly important role in sustainable tourism. Sharlanova notes that Orthodox churches preserve the collective memory of the community, functioning as "places of memory" laden with deep emotional meaning, which contribute to the construction and consolidation of national identity (Sharlanova, 2021). Kirilova

also emphasizes the potential of these sites to attract tourists interested in spiritual and cultural history, while supporting the development of local communities and promoting the preservation of cultural values through sustainable forms of tourism (Kirilova, 2021).

4. DISCUSSIONS

The Bulgarian written heritage is not only a fundamental element of the national cultural identity, but also a valuable resource with potential for sustainable development of cultural tourism. In modern conditions, written memory can be activated as a cultural resource through various forms – museums, digital archives, festivals, educational routes, workshops and cultural events. Sustainable tourism, which focuses on social responsibility, cultural diversity and the participation of local communities, provides an opportunity for this heritage to be not only preserved, but also experienced and passed on to future generations.

Cultural tourism based on written heritage encourages empathy for the spiritual roots of the community and the preservation of the local cultural fabric (Ilieva & Maroudas, 2017). Successful examples from Bulgaria and abroad show that the combination of written cultural memory and tourist experience can create a model for local development, in which communities not only receive economic benefits, but also establish themselves as guardians of spiritual and historical values. In order for this potential to be realized in the long term, targeted efforts are needed in several directions: development of policies for the preservation and promotion of written heritage, educational initiatives for young people, public-private partnerships and innovations through digitization. Organizing exhibitions that present Bulgarian manuscripts and books abroad promotes the exchange of cultural information, the rapprochement of different cultures and understanding at a global level. Participation in international conferences and symposia on topics related to written heritage allows Bulgarian scholars and researchers to share their discoveries and learn from the experience of their colleagues from other countries, as well as recommendations for the development of policies, educational initiatives and sustainable models aimed at activating written cultural heritage as a driver of sustainable tourism.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Bulgarian written cultural heritage, created with the mission to enlighten and unite, can today serve as a bridge between the past and the future, and has the potential to become a sustainable cultural resource that not only preserves the connection with the past, but also contributes to future development through cultural tourism. A strategic vision based on inter-institutional cooperation, innovation and educational practices is needed.

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