

OPINION

for a procedure for acquiring educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in
professional area 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences
(Information Search Systems)

for the dissertational thesis: “Digitalisation as a Factor for the Development of
Museums in Bulgaria”
with author Vesela Vasileva Georgieva
and advisor Prof. D.Sc. Ivanka Mavrodieva

by Assoc. Prof. Petko Hristov, Ph.D.

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Vesela Georgieva’s dissertational thesis offers us an interdisciplinary model for the study of an avant-garde and particularly relevant process for the Bulgarian museums today – digitalisation and virtual exhibiting of tangible cultural values, as well as inclusion of museums in the educational process and research activity by means of modern digital technologies. The choice of topic is relevant because digitalisation in museums is already visibly lagging behind that in other public institutions, such as libraries and archives, despite the ascertainment that “*digitalisation is considered a key factor for the successful development of museums in Bulgaria*” (p. 228). The research shows that among the museum community in Bulgaria there is a growing interest and support for digitalisation, but also that “*in the particular museums in the country, digitalisation is carried out within projects and/or through self-financing*” (p. 226), which necessitates sustainable national management cultural policies to ensure a long-term vision for the benefits of digitalisation at the national level and the preparation of a national strategy for the implementation of digitalisation processes in Bulgarian museums. And since the historical memory of a people and the narrative about it presented in the Museum is among the fundamental elements of any national identity, the research undertaken by Vesela Georgieva poses important questions and challenges to science and society, some of which she tries to answer in the dissertation.

The study is national in scope and involves research of the implementation of the digitalisation processes in national, regional and municipal museums in the country. For the purposes of the study, a detailed questionnaire was prepared, composed of 36 questions (of which 35 were open-ended) divided into five blocs. A total of 52 respondents, representatives of 33 museums in Bulgaria, participated voluntarily in the survey, with the largest share of respondents being representatives of 16 different regional museums from 16 cities in the country. The information collected from the respondents was processed using content analysis. A series of field interviews were also conducted, which deepened some of the study's findings.

The dissertation comprises 251 pages and consists of an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. A list of the contributions, a list of the literature used and 49 figures are also presented, and the Appendix (with a volume of 79 pages) includes several sections, among which an up-to-date table with the museums in Bulgaria, the questionnaire for the empirical study on the management and technological aspects of the digitalisation in the museums in Bulgaria and the results based on approved research methodology.

In the **introductory part**, the doctoral candidate presents the object and subject, the goals, tasks and methods of the research. The main goal of the analysis of digitalisation processes in museums is formulated in several directions – presentation of exhibits and collections through the use of digital marketing tools for the promotion of cultural values, provision of alternative public access to museums through virtual exhibitions and the use of modern technology and programs, as well as the involvement of museums in educational and research activities.

The first two chapters of the dissertation work are theoretical and dedicated to the modern theories in museology and to the theoretical parameters of the digitalisation process. The **first chapter**, divided into three parts, analyses and presents the main functions, role and significance of museums as institutions of memory, examined in the first place from the point of view of the established Bulgarian legislative system. In addition to the analysis of the legal framework, a

classification of the museums in the country is also presented, as well as the types of museum expositions. The traditional, educational, socio-cultural and communicative functions of museums are reviewed. In this part of the dissertation, the analysis of the role of technology, culture, tourism and science in the development of museums in the context of the modern digital age makes a good impression.

The **second chapter** is devoted to the analysis of the theoretical and legal framework of the digitalisation process, specifically related to museums as places of cultural memory. At the beginning, a number of concepts related to digitalisation are specified, and the preference for the term “digitalization” over the other widely used term “digitisation” is justified. The pan-European and Bulgarian legal framework of digitalisation at the European and national level are examined, the doctoral candidate analysing the legal and normative parameters of the process. The main part of this chapter provides a detailed overview of the technological context, infrastructure and stages in the digitalisation process. Some of the main digitalisation standards in the field of cultural heritage are presented. And despite the conclusion of the doctoral candidate that in the European scientific and cultural space there is a consensus regarding the nature and requirements for the implementation of digitalisation as a process carried out in museum institutions, the problems with digital accessibility in Bulgarian museums are clearly indicated.

The **third chapter** of this dissertation thesis presents the results of an empirical study conducted through semi-structured interviews with representatives of the national, regional and municipal museums in the country, holding management positions, specialists in ICT and digitalisation, and experts in the field of museology. The questionnaire used covers various aspects related to digitalisation, including legal framework and administrative regulations, specifics of the work in museums, digitalisation, use of modern technological means, software, etc.; it aims to establish the significance, perception and application of digitalisation

in museums in Bulgaria. This particular study and its results are the real contribution of Vesela Georgieva's dissertation thesis.

The research conducted leads to several main conclusions. Despite the already accumulated experience among museum employees, though at an initial stage, and a formed set of digital databases, the research of the doctoral student shows the uneven rates of digitalisation in museums in the country compared to the large national museums in the capital. As reasons, the doctoral candidate points out the insufficient funding and the lack of professionally trained personnel in this field, but not only. The lack of uniform national guidelines, standards, strategies, etc. in the field of digitalisation of cultural heritage, with the increased role and importance of museums and their informative, educational, popularizing, research and communication functions, leads to the lack of central (national) funding of digitalisation processes in museums. The conclusion is that serious actions and investments are needed, especially at the national level, in the field of museums (p. 226). This and other ascertainments of the study are also important from a practical point of view, as recommendations to the respective managements of the museum work at the national and regional level.

The **concluding part** presents the conclusions of the study.

Vesela Georgieva gives three publications in scientific collections of St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo and Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", with which she fulfils the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in Republic of Bulgaria and the regulations for its application. The verification report prepared by the advisor Prof. D.Sc. Ivanka Mavrodieva-Georgieva shows that the research is original and there is no evidence of plagiarism. I consent to the contributions of the study formulated by the doctoral candidate. The abstract corresponds to the content of the dissertation thesis.

The procedure corresponds to the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Application, as well as the internal

Regulations for the Terms and Conditions for Acquiring Academic Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

Therefore, I have good reasons to propose to the respected Academic Jury to award the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in professional area 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Information Search Systems) to Vesela Vasileva Georgieva for the dissertation thesis “*Digitalisation as a Factor for the Development of Museums in Bulgaria*” and I will vote “yes” for that.

April 2, 2024

Sofia

(Assoc. Prof. Petko Hristov, Ph.D.)