

## **OPINION**

**on the Dissertation of Vesela Vasileva Georgieva**

### **DIGITALIZATION AS A FACTOR FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUSEUMS IN BULGARIA**

For the Awarding of the Educational and Scientific Degree of "Doctor" in the Professional

Field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences

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*Digitalization*, as the process of converting the content of a physical medium into digital format, resulting in the creation of so-called digitized materials, is not new in Bulgaria and could even be described as widely deployed, especially when discussing the projects and intentions for digitalization related to various standards of execution. However, the outcomes of this process are not as promising, particularly when sought in the field of culture and, more specifically, cultural heritage. In this respect, museums as cultural institutions are indicative of both the challenges of digitalizing cultural heritage and the prospects for development that the discussed process offers, provided that they are understood and recognized both by cultural policy-makers and by museum professionals.

Placed in this context, the dissertation theme "Digitalization as a Factor for the Development of Museums in Bulgaria" has an interdisciplinary nature and provides information for reflection on the ongoing processes in the field of culture and, specifically, cultural heritage. According to the author, the relevance of the topic stems from the "accelerated development of information and communication technologies" and the integration of digitalization in museums at "levels of exhibitions, organization, storage, and socialization of cultural heritage" (p. 8 of the Synopsis). The COVID-19 pandemic further catalyzes this situation by making

digitalization a primary factor for change and development in Bulgarian museums, making Vesela Georgieva's dissertation an urgent and significant topic for research.

*The structure of the dissertation* consists of an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion, spanning 251 pages. It includes a section on the contributory moments, a bibliography with 164 titles (of which 104 are in Bulgarian and 60 in English), as well as 49 figures.

*The object of the study*—the museums in Bulgaria—are analyzed with the aim of determining "to what extent digitalization is a factor in the development of museums in Bulgaria." The dissertation examines "several levels: legislative, managerial, organizational, communicative, and marketing" (p. 8 of the Autoreferat). The objectives and tasks are correctly set to lead to the formulation of a working hypothesis, more specifically, that "digitalization is an important factor for the development of museum affairs in terms of legal, regulatory, managerial, technological, technical, and marketing levels" (p. 10 of the Autoreferat).

In *the first chapter*, a theoretical overview of museums in Bulgaria is provided, presenting the main concepts related to the undertaken study, aligned with its boundaries and scope. The presentation of concepts is in line with the Cultural Heritage Act adopted in 2009, discussing the primary functions and social significance of museums, especially their "integration" into the processes of digitalization with an emphasis on "the role of technologies, culture, tourism, and science" for their development. However, the author's different prioritization of the museum's primary functions, compared to the usual understanding of museum professionals regarding the preservation of cultural values, is noteworthy. The dissertation presents "the main goal (of the museums, note by I.K.) as the popularization of the cultural heritage they conserve, and not least, attracting visitors" (p. 13 of the Autoreferat). This stance requires further argumentation and remains insufficiently developed in the dissertation.

In *the second chapter*, the essence of digitalization, digital technologies and standards, and digital access to museums and cultural heritage are explored to identify various problematic factors. As a result of the analysis, it is concluded that in Bulgaria, there is a "need for an in-depth understanding of digitalization in the museum environment" (p. 16 of the Synopsis). The results achieved in the first and second chapters, such as the development and proposal of criteria, thematic areas, and sub-areas, will subsequently be used in the approval of a methodology for digitalization in Bulgarian museums.

In *the third chapter*, the results of the approved methodology are presented, achieved through an analysis of museum websites based on an empirical study dedicated to the

managerial and technological aspects of digitalization in Bulgarian museums. The questionnaire was organized into 5 groups, addressed to various relevant cultural institutions from the 265 municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria. "Out of the total number of questionnaires sent, responses were received from 52, which represents 50.5% of all respondents" (p. 16 of the Autoreferat). The analysis of the results outlines the current problems and challenges, such as improving the regulatory framework governing digitalization processes, increasing funding, training specialists, improving the material base, and technological provision. However, many of the identified problems are only highlighted without proposing specific solutions to the situation. For example, regarding the professional training of specialists, it was noted that "there is a need to include them in specialized training to enhance digital skills and competencies in the field of digitalization and/or to provide additional digitalization experts who would be responsible for implementing the process at a professional level" (p. 22 of the Autoreferat). However, it lacks an "answer" as to who should organize and finance the proposed specialized training, how they could contribute to the career development of the respective specialists, and other similar questions that would allow the implementation of specific policies and measures for digitalization in Bulgarian museums.

In the Conclusion, an overview of the achieved results and drawn conclusions is provided, along with an analysis of the prospects for the development of digitalization in museums. This part reiterates the identified problems in the dissertation to reach the summarizing conclusion that "despite the identified problems and deficits, there is an increasing interest and support for the efforts of specialists, both at the local and national levels, to promote innovation and sustainable development of digitalization in the museum sector in Bulgaria" (p. 22 of the Autoreferat). The synopsis accurately reflects the research results of the dissertation and the contributions of the study.

Despite some identified deficits and recommendations given, the dissertation has the qualities to be successfully defended, which gives me sufficient reason to vote "for" awarding Vesela Vasileva Georgieva the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor".

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