

Christian monuments as a resource in cultural heritage and tourism education. Results from a research project

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Abstract. *The paper aims to present the results of field research conducted in different regions and municipalities in Bulgaria and related to the formation of local policies supporting the preservation and promotion of Orthodox Christian monuments. The main emphasis in the exposition is placed on examples of good practices for socialization of the Christian heritage with the active participation of the local population, as well as good practices from cross-border projects. The methods and approaches for integration of the results achieved by the field research in the education in cultural heritage and tourism have been presented. The relevance of the topic is determined by the insufficient knowledge of the local traditions and good practices for preservation, construction and promotion of the Christian monuments in Bulgaria, as part of the national cultural heritage. Methodology: A descriptive qualitative method was used in this research. We have also used combined methods for analysis and synthesis. The paper is part of the activities of the research project "Creating a model for Safeguarding, Socialization and Promotion of Christian Monuments in Bulgaria"- ДН 15/4 of 11.12.2017, with the financial support of the Bulgarian Science Fund with the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria.*

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1. Introduction

The relevance of the topic is determined by the insufficient knowledge of local traditions and good practices for preservation, construction and promotion of Christian monuments in Bulgaria as part of the national cultural heritage. Active actions in this direction by representatives of state and local authorities, representatives of cultural institutions, NGOs, private initiatives, etc. need research, analysis and publicity, which will enable to establish, research and summarize the various local policies and activities for the preservation of Orthodox churches. The purpose of this article is to present the results of field research in the project "Creating a Model for Safeguarding, Promotion and Socialization of Christian Churches in Bulgaria", supported by the National Science Fund at the Ministry of Education, DN 15/4 of 12/11/2017. The main research activity of the project is carried out in the form of field research in selected municipalities - Bolyarovo, Varna, Smolyan and Zlatograd. The criteria for selection of these pilot municipalities are consistent with the specifics of the Bulgarian cultural heritage, which is not concentrated only in large cities such as Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Burgas, but has its valuable (including global sites) in small towns, part from which they are far from major centers and do not have good road infrastructure. All this requires a new approach and the creation of a new model that can be applied in the work of local and state authorities, as well as the cultural institutions themselves.

2. Methodology

Research methods and techniques include field research and surveys, polls and in-depth interviews with stakeholder representatives, search and systematization of various bibliographic sources stored in library, community center, archive and museum collections of regional and local cultural institutions, statistics provided by churches, municipalities and cultural institutions. Priority in the methodology is the interdisciplinary nature of scientific research – combining basic research in the field of cultural heritage and the preservation of Orthodox religious monuments with experimental fieldwork in a real environment. The project also includes educational approaches with an emphasis on acquiring new knowledge and improving the quality of student education.

3. Working hypothesis

The working hypothesis is focused on the development of a new conceptual model for safeguarding, socialization and promotion of Christian Orthodox monuments in Bulgaria and their transformation into a resource for the development of cultural tourism. This hypothesis is based on the highlights of the functioning and protection of Christian monuments at the local level on the example of selected pilot sites and the experience of good practices. The aim is for the created theoretical model to be recognized by all stakeholders and applicable in practice. As pilot sites we have preliminarily focused on the Rhodopes, Smolyan region – the

villages along the Chaya River and around the town of Zlatograd, where there are many different Orthodox Christian monuments – cathedrals, monasteries, chapels. Other pilot sites that are in the focus of research are the municipality of Bolyarovo /border area such as the above municipality of Zlatograd/ and the municipality of Varna /approved destination for the development of various types of tourism/.

4. Results and discussion

During the first stage of the project, the research work was carried out on site in the pilot municipalities. In each of them, activities and policies common to the country and specific to the region were revealed, both to the local government and to the business and the population. Lasting contacts were held and working meetings were held with representatives of various institutions in the pilot municipalities, where the specific local problems of preserving the Christian cultural heritage and the activities for their preservation were discussed. Useful connections and contacts were established with representatives of the administration of the municipalities of Bolyarovo, Smolyan and Varna, with mayors and deputy mayors, the Regional Historical Museums in Varna and Smolyan, with representatives of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC) and individual citizens. Except with the deputy Mayors in charge of cultural heritage in the municipalities also held working meetings with business representatives and individual patriotic Bulgarians.

Meetings and interviews were held with the representatives of the municipal authorities (the mayors of the cities of Smolyan, Zlatograd, Varna, Bolyarovo), with the directors of regional historical museums (RHM-Smolyan, RHM-Varna; the curator of Aladzha Monastery); representatives of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (in Zlatograd and the surrounding villages, in Smolyan and the surrounding villages, in Varna); interviews with representatives of private business who contribute to the development, preservation and promotion of the Orthodox heritage of Bulgaria in the small border regions – Zlatograd and Bolyarovo in order to achieve the main objectives of the project. More details about the meetings and the researched sites can be seen on the project website - www.cho.unibit.bg.

The field research is directly related to the main goal – creating a model for safeguarding, socialization and promotion of Christian Orthodox monuments in Bulgaria, which will find practical application in the relevant parts of the regional and municipal strategic development plans. The Bulgarian good practices related to the protection, socialization and popularization of the Christian Orthodox monuments in the pilot municipalities, which are the basis for creating a working model, were studied in detail in the representative pilot municipalities.

The Bulgarian model for the safeguarding, socialization and promotion of Christian Orthodox monuments is based on the traditional caring attitude of the population towards them. This fact

was confirmed by the historical facts about the construction of the old temples in the country – through donations, selfless work, and more often than not – at the cost of life. There are many examples of such events, especially in the villages in Smolyan District – Pavelsko, Chokmanovo, Shiroka Laka and many others. [1, 2].

The historically established traditions for the protection of prayer houses in the country are still alive today. In many villages in the study areas, locals are rebuilding old, destroyed chapels and building new ones. There are many examples in all pilot municipalities – Varna, Smolyan, in the municipality of Bolyarovo. It is interesting to note that such initiatives are spontaneous and successful everywhere. Very often, with the help of the laity, supported by the local government, and often by the state and the BOC, large temples are repaired, buildings, icons and frescoes are maintained. The most indicative is the example of the repair and maintenance of the cathedral in the center of Varna, for the repair of which the funds are a donation from the state, municipality and citizens of the city.

The construction of new churches is another side of the Bulgarian model for the protection and preservation of Orthodox churches in the country.

Here we will share a small part of the field observations in the municipality of Varna. The municipal leadership of Varna works in very close cooperation with the BOC, and with the Holy Diocese of Varna and Veliko Preslav [3]. Together, the two important institutions are investing and implementing projects for the preservation and promotion of Orthodox churches located on its territory, as well as for the construction of new ones. Currently, the most important and largest project site is the newly built church “St. Procopius of Varna”. (to date, it has already been completed and illuminated – author’s note). The very active participation of the Bulgarian business, the local government, the state and individual representatives of the local population can be noticed in the activities for construction of new temples.

A special place in the field research is occupied by the analysis of the attitude of the Bulgarian business towards the protection and safeguarding of our religious heritage. Impressive is the church “St. Visarion Smolenski” in the center of Smolyan and the business-supported church “St. Procopius of Varna” in the city of Varna. These are the largest constructions, the result of the caring attitude to our Orthodox heritage by the Bulgarian business. There are smaller similar constructions in many different villages and towns in the studied areas.

The restoration of chapels also occupies a significant place in the field research. Here we will give an example from the border municipality of Zlatograd. The caring attitude of the citizens in Zlatograd towards the Orthodox churches deserves special admiration. Despite the fact that a large part of the population professes another religion, everyone, except for faith and age, cares about their Orthodox heritage. Chapel restoration activities are specific to this area. For example, the restoration of the chapel “St. Nedelya”, located not far from the city. The chapel was restored on the initiative of the Molevi family and the other citizens, on the idea and together with the then priest Father Atanas Arofski. It is located above the city, in the forest, and the citizens themselves have built a road there. With the permission of the municipality of Zlatograd, each family had the opportunity to build a "hut" around the chapel and spend their free time there. Many took advantage of the opportunity and now small "huts" (as the locals call them) are erected around the chapel. The chapel itself is very well maintained, the road to it, although steep, is in excellent condition. The whole space around the chapel has been renovated, there are places for rest, for children to play. There is water and electricity [4].

In most municipalities, the local government seeks to assist the local population and the BOC in preserving and multiplying Christian churches. In this respect, the attitude of the municipality of Bolyarovo is indicative, which actively participates in the restoration and construction of various temples on its territory. Bolyarovo Municipality is a crossroads of ancient civilizations, where ethnocultural processes take place from the northwest (Balkan Peninsula, Central and Western Europe) to the southeast

(Asia Minor and the Middle East) and vice versa. This determines the specificity and richness of the cultural heritage of this region, which is a reflection and result of centuries of history – 14 discovered archaeological sites, 5 ancient churches and 5 fortresses testify to a rich and ancient past, which the inhabitants of Bolyarovo are rightly proud of.

The municipality is located in the border areas of Bulgaria - its southeastern part borders the Republic of Turkey. It is known that for various historical reasons, an ethnic Bulgarian population lives on the other side of the border. The clearest evidence are the temples in the town of Kirklareli and the town of Edime, which are active, they are taken care of not only by the local Christians, but also by the Bulgarian state, patriotic Bulgarians, cultural and educational institutions. Within the cross-border cooperation, the municipality of Elhovo and the municipality of Bolyarovo hold various events and activities that illustrate the good neighborly relations. Here the possibilities of the Program for cross-border cooperation between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Turkey are used to the maximum, especially for the Orthodox churches left on the territory of Turkey [5]. The development of projects under the European programs for development of municipalities and rural areas, which include temples, is also a very effective policy.

Last but not least, the active position of the Bulgarian population in terms of their religious heritage of local and national importance should be noted. During the field research, meetings and talks were held with dozens of residents who cared for and maintained chapels and temples. In almost all cases, caring for the temple or chapel was seen as a family honor and duty.

In order to promote the goals, tasks and results of the project activity, a project website has been created, located on the ULSIT website. - www.cho.unibit.bg. For its creation, a thematic structure was developed, containing menus, submenus, information texts. It publishes information about the project – goals, results, gallery, publications on the project, issues, etc., and this information is updated according to the stage development of the project.

5. Conclusions and summary

One of the main priority areas of the project research is the popularization of Orthodox churches in places, at regional and national level. In the process of conducting field research on the project in the pilot municipalities of Varna, Smolyan, Zlatograd and Bolyarovo were established quite stable patterns, which with their effectiveness and efficiency give grounds to derive a common model for the promotion of Orthodox churches. In this model the main subjects are:

- BOC,
- the state with its cultural institutions,
- local authorities,
- businesses,
- and individual citizens outside the above groups.

Each of these entities is active, and very often they work in sync with the others.

The promotion and socialization of Orthodox churches in the country is a rather complex and complicated process. In this regard, there is an active participation of the population and municipal authorities. In every settlement the temple holiday is the biggest local holiday celebrated not only by the locals, but also by many guests. Naturally, the temple is a major place of interest. Very often in connection with the celebration of the holiday the municipality allocates funds for small current repairs.

Another very important form of promotion and socialization of temples is their inclusion in tourist routes. However, if we look in more detail which of the Bulgarian churches and monasteries are subject to cultural tourism, we will find that these are the large and famous monasteries – Rila, Bachkovo, Troyan and other famous churches in Sofia, Veliko Tarnovo, Plovdiv, the “Golden Church” – part of the National Historical and Archaeological Reserve Veliko Preslav, as well as churches in other cities, which are deservedly objects of constant tourist interest. Many temples remain away from the tourist routes and their

uniqueness, historical and cultural significance for the specific region and for our country remain unknown to tourists.

Apart from being historical monuments, Orthodox churches can also be the subject of organized religious and pilgrimage tourism. Such organized trips are offered not only for purely religious purposes. They provide an opportunity for tourists to join the local history as part of the general Bulgarian, as well as the beauty of nature. The end result of religiously motivated tourism is the enrichment of our tourism industry with new, atypical to date resources for use.

The achieved results and the developed scientific products are integrated in the educational process and create conditions for encouraging the exchange of scientific and practical experience between educational, scientific and cultural institutions.

The areas of application of the results are related to the information environment for stimulating interdisciplinary research and improving the quality of education in the field of cultural heritage.

The achieved results and the developed scientific products are applicable for updating the curricula and programs in the specialties in ULSIT – “Cultural Tourism” and “Cultural and Historical Heritage” in the Bachelor’s degree and “Historical Heritage and Cultural Institutions” in the Master’s degree. The scientific results achieved by the implementation of the project are also integrated in the developed new master’s program “Heritage and Museums in the Information Environment”, which started in the academic year 2020-2021.

The work on the implementation of the scientific project “Creating a model of Safeguarding, Socialization and Promotion of Christian Monuments in Bulgaria”, which includes specific field research in pilot municipalities – Varna, Smolyan and Bolyarovo Municipality showed that in our country there are many Orthodox temples that deserve to be studied not only as cult monuments and architectural landmarks, but also as an object of constant care of the local population, municipal authorities, BOC and business for their maintenance, restoration and multiplication.

6. References

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