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Heritage Education in North Macedonia and Classics: The Missing Link

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ABSTRACT

Although heritage plays important role in human development it faces challenges and threats. It is well known that one of the basic reasons for damage of heritage is the lack of heritage awareness and this on the other hand is closely related to the lack of appropriate education in schools.

The aim of this paper is to make an overview of the heritage education at primary and secondary schools in North Macedonia and discuss the role of classics as the missing link in fostering cultural and heritage awareness, and in particular the role of epigraphy not only as a tool for learning Latin or Greek, but also for introducing students at an early age to the value of cultural heritage and its preservation.

Key words: heritage, cultural heritage, heritage education, classics, epigraphy

Πάντες ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φύσει.
All men by nature desire to know.
Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 980a21

Heritage plays important role in human development, but nevertheless it continuously faces challenges and threats. It is well known that one of the basic reasons for damage of heritage is the lack of heritage awareness and this on the other hand is closely related to the lack of appropriate education in schools. The Republic of North Macedonia has unique natural heritage and rich cultural heritage from all periods of its history (Ancient, Byzantine, Ottoman, Socialist). The protection, care and management of its heritage however are continuously challenged. The case of the natural and cultural heritage of the Ohrid region, which has been on the UNESCO World Heritage list since 1979 and is now threatened to be reclassified as endangered site is particularly striking. The lack of heritage awareness both among the local population and the authorities has been recognized once again as a major problem and this consequently implies lack of efficient heritage education.

Is heritage education at primary and secondary schools useful and sufficient and what can be done to make it more efficient? The aim of this paper¹ is to make an overview of heritage education at primary and secondary schools in North Macedonia in its present state and discuss the role of classics in fostering cultural and heritage awareness and in particular the possibilities offered by epigraphy not only as a tool for learning Latin or Greek, but also for introducing students at an early age to the value of cultural heritage and its preservation.

Heritage and heritage education

The understanding of heritage education is closely related to the understanding of heritage and its role in society. There are many definitions of what heritage is, just as there are many discussions about its na-

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the International Conference "On the Cross-path of Cultural Ideas: Macedonia, the Balkans, Southeast Europe – heritage, management, resources " held in Ohrid (24-26.09.2019) and organized by the Faculty of Philosophy, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje and the National Gallery of Macedonia.

ture, meaning and role.² A comparison of just two of them gives a clear picture of the evolution of the understanding of heritage in the past decades without getting into the details of the existing scholarly work. In the UNESCO, *Draft-medium term plan (1990-1995)*, published in 1989, cultural heritage is defined as:

"... the entire corpus of material signs – either artistic or symbolic – handed on by the past to each culture and, therefore, to the whole of humankind. As a constituent part of the affirmation and enrichment of cultural identities, as a legacy belonging to all humankind, the cultural heritage gives each particular place its recognizable features and is the storehouse of human experience." (UNESCO, *Draft-medium term plan (1990-1995)*, 1989, 57).

On the other hand, in the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, adopted in Faro on 27.X.2005 cultural heritage is defined as:

"... a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time." (Council of Europe's Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, 2005, Art. 2).

Obviously the definition stipulated by the Faro Convention reflects much broader understanding of cultural heritage and puts emphasis on the values, which are considered relevant by a community and which are constantly evolving.³ Heritage today is not perceived just as an object, a static relic from the past, but rather as a dynamic phenomenon, a cultural process, "a range of activities that include remembering, commemoration, communicating and passing on knowledge and memories, asserting and expressing identity and social and cultural values and meanings" (Smith 2006, 44; 83). Accordingly, heritage education does not consist merely in passive visits to historic monuments or museums restricted to observation and acquiring knowledge about history, but is

² For more extended critical overview and discussion in terms of heritage discourse, see Smith (2006), 16-43; for an overview in terms of heritage studies, see Albert (2013), 9-12. Cf. also Kuutma (2011), 5-12.

³ Sciacchitano (2018), 8; Logan (2007), 66.

rather an experience, a learning event which includes seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, moving, and exploring (Lambert 1996, 32-33). It is about everything that happens, that is done in relation to heritage. It does not mean only to teach about the resource itself, but to utilize historic resources as a tool for teaching about history, geography, math, art, languages, science, economics (Lambert 1996, 27-28). It is also considered as an efficient tool for acquiring key (core) competences: language acquisition; skills and knowledge on science and technology; personal and social skills; entrepreneurship; cultural expression; digital and learning competence (Van Lakerveld – Gussen 2011, 15-21).

The dynamic approach to heritage education puts emphasis on the production of knowledge and on multiperspectivity.⁴ Students discover, analyze, and produce their own knowledge by adding new information and new dimensions to knowledge they already possess. They are stimulated to explain the past from different perspectives and thus become themselves meaning makers, active participants in the process of heritage making.⁵

Heritage education at primary and secondary schools in North Macedonia

An examination of the curricula and syllabi⁶ shows that heritage education in terms of teaching about tangible and intangible heritage resources is fairly well integrated in the primary and secondary education in North Macedonia. Topics related to world heritage and specifically the cultural heritage of North Macedonia are included in the syllabi for *Society /History and Society*, obligatory subject for the students from first to fifth grade in the primary education and in the syllabi for *History, Geography, Language and literature, Arts*, obligatory subjects for all students both in primary and secondary education. Moreover, there are particular subjects such as *Our fatherland* and *Exploring the homeland* offered as optional courses to all seventh, eight and ninth grade primary school students or subjects such as *Cultural and historical heritage* and *Cul-*

⁴ Lambert (1996), 35; Vroemen (2017), 25-26.

⁵ Vroemen (2017), 25,31-32, 57; Sciacchitano (2018), 9.

⁶ Available: <https://www.bro.gov.mk>.

tural tourism included only in the curriculum of the *Secondary Vocational School for Tourism and Catering*. As to the classical heritage, i.e. the Graeco-Roman antiquity all primary schools students are offered an optional course: *The Classical culture in the European civilization* in the sixth grade, whereas secondary school students, but only in the gymnasiums, are offered, again optionally, courses in *Classical languages: Latin and Ancient Greek*. The curricula and syllabi for the primary and secondary education also comprise project activities, which may refer to cultural heritage. The curricula and syllabi however barely include anything about protection and preservation of cultural heritage (Nacev – Veselinov 2016, 267-269).

Schools have the opportunity to organize extracurricular activities, which may include visits to cultural heritage sites and museums as well as to participate in the cultural heritage initiatives of the European Commission and develop their own projects and collaborations with other schools in North Macedonia and abroad through the Erasmus+ eTwinning platform.⁷ There are also the educational programmes of the Cultural Heritage Protection Office (body within the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of North Macedonia), of the museums, to the extent that museums have such programmes and the activities of the NGOs working in the area of preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. NGO's develop their projects with funding from the Government or the municipalities or from the European Commission or other international organizations.

The number of students involved in heritage activities is growing every year. But, in reality and in practice, if at all and to what extent heritage education is available to school children and whether heritage education is just teaching about heritage resources or heritage resources are utilized for teaching about different disciplines and acquiring key com-

⁷ Information about successful school activities and projects can be found at the official website of the Erasmus+ programme, Erasmus+ project results: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects_en. For the participation of the students and their Latin language teacher H. Kosovska from the secondary school Dobri Daskalov, Kavadarci, North Macedonia in the international Erasmus+ project HELP (Heritage Education Learning Programme), see <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplu-project-details/#project/2018-1-PT01-KA229-047493> and <https://twinspace.etwinning.net/73747/home>.

petences, depends on each school and the willingness of each teacher. Some schools and teachers thoroughly implement the obligations arising from the curricula and use well the available funding possibilities to develop various projects and extracurricular activities related to heritage. Others do not carry out any such activities whatsoever and moreover neglect the mandatory obligations arising from the curricula.

A serious obstacle in providing heritage education in schools in North Macedonia is the lack of opportunities for professional development of teachers. Specialized teacher trainings on heritage education are not organized on a regular basis neither by the Ministry of Education and Science nor by the Bureau for Development of Education. The Association of Classical Philologists "Antika" on two occasions, developed and implemented projects that offered expertise and training on the use of classical heritage in classroom for secondary school teachers. But, in the first project only classical philologists, teachers of Latin participated and in the second teachers from just one high school in Skopje.⁸

There are no university study programmes nor particular courses dedicated to heritage education in North Macedonia. A study pro-

⁸ The first project, *Docendo discimus, Development and Implementation of Master Studies in Didactics of Classical Languages*, 2005-2007, was developed and implemented by the Institute of Classical Studies, Faculty of Philosophy, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje, the Association of Classical Philologists "Antika" and the Department of Classics, University of Neuchâtel. Within this project two training workshops were held for secondary school teachers of Latin language and at the end of the project a collection of team members' presentations and participants' essays was published. See Dimovska, V. et al. (eds.) (2008), *Docendo discimus. Development and Implementation of Master Studies in Didactics of Classical Language*, Systasis Special Edition No. 1, available: <https://www.systasis.org/index.php/en/special-editions>.

The second project, *Hermes: Guide for High School Journey through Antiquity*, 2019-2020, was developed and implemented by the Association of Classical Philologists "Antika" and "Josip Broz Tito" High School. In the first year of this project a teacher training workshop on the use of cultural heritage in classroom was organized for a small group of teachers engaged in teaching Latin, Macedonian language and literature, History and Arts in the high school "Josip Broz Tito" in Skopje. In the second year a web page was created (hermes.org.mk), designed to serve as a resource on classical heritage and heritage education for teachers, students and general public.

gramme in Cultural Heritage Management and Protection is available at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje beginning this year. But the curriculum of this study programme does not comprise any course related to heritage education.

Another obstacle for the heritage education in primary and secondary schools is the fact that the digital resources on heritage education available for teachers and students are still mostly in foreign languages.⁹ In the past two years due to COVID 19 pandemic schools remained closed for long periods of time and classes were held online. Teachers and schools were therefore forced to create digital resources for educational purposes. The pandemic also forced museums, galleries and archaeological sites to expand their offer of virtual presentations of heritage resources. Nevertheless, digital resources on heritage suitable for primary and secondary school students in Macedonian, Albanian or in any of the other languages spoken by ethnic groups native to North Macedonia are still insufficient.

The primary education in North Macedonia is currently undergoing a major education reform, which will be followed by a similar reform of the secondary education in near future. For the purposes of the primary education reform a Concept¹⁰ was adopted in March 2021 and as of September 2021, new curricula for the first and fourth grade are in use. The number of subjects has been reduced, some of the subjects related to heritage education, such as *History*, *Society* and *Geography* have been integrated into one subject *Society / History and Society* and some of them, such as *Our fatherland*, *Exploring the homeland* and *The Classical culture in the European civilization* have been removed from the curricula. But this does not mean that heritage education itself was reduced or removed from the curricula. On the contrary, the integration of subjects primarily aims at bringing interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary teaching into classrooms, and this certainly implies more efficient use of heritage resources

⁹ The web page hermes.org.mk (see Note 7) is a pioneer effort in the area of heritage education. The content of this digital resource needs to be expanded and further developed in future. Needless to say, its financial sustainability is a major problem.

¹⁰ Available at <https://mon.gov.mk/category/?id=2066>.

to teach various disciplines. Furthermore, teachers and schools are now free to offer students elective subjects of their own choice following students' interests and depending on the available human and other resources in the schools. Thus, teachers can either continue teaching the existing elective subjects related to heritage education with improved syllabi or introduce new ones that have never been taught before. Finally, the reform puts significant emphasis on the extracurricular activities, which are now mandatory for the schools and these activities whether short-term or long-term must address student competences observing strictly the National Standards for students in primary education¹¹. This is also a chance to introduce heritage education in school curricula following the latest trends in heritage studies.

In conclusion, heritage education is not missing from primary and secondary schools in North Macedonia, nor are missing opportunities for development of more useful and more efficient heritage education. What is missing is classics as a key factor in developing holistic approach to heritage and heritage education. In its present state, heritage education in primary and secondary schools is insufficient and a large number of students are still not offered heritage activities of any kind. The government and its institutions are not providing the necessary impetus for schools and teachers to transform any opportunity into reality. Classical philologists are involved in teaching about classical heritage but their role in heritage education needs to be reexamined and expanded.

Classics: the missing link in heritage education

Classics is the study of Ancient Greece and Rome and is therefore fundamental to Graeco-Roman heritage education in terms of teaching about heritage resources. But classics is also important for the study of European heritage of the periods following the fall of Greek and Roman civilizations because classical antiquity made huge impact on European culture and western civilization. Almost every aspect of our modern life is affected by the ideas and concepts conceived or developed in Ancient Greece and Rome. It is impossible to understand and interpret contemporary institutions without understanding their classical roots. Even the

¹¹ Available at <https://mon.gov.mk/content/?id=3806>.

terms *cultural* and *heritage* refer to classical antiquity and to explain them one has to know elementary Latin. The same is necessary for other terms related to heritage education or other fields of education: *museum, library, theatre, architecture, art, religion, mythology*. Classics is therefore of key importance for teaching about heritage resources and cultures and needless to say education in general.

Classics gives students new perspectives to everyday life and contemporary issues and so helps them understand the value of cultural heritage for society and why it is important to be preserved. Consequently, it can help turning heritage education into experience, a learning event and that is how it contributes to the successful use of heritage as a tool to teach about other disciplines as well.

There is increasing evidence that classical subjects (classical languages or culture /civilization) support development of key competences (language skills in the first place, but also improved literacy, critical thinking, personal expression) and raise student achievements. Pupils engaged in studying Latin or other aspects of Classics at primary and secondary level of education are more confident to progress to higher education and achieve success. Acquiring key competences is another aspect of heritage education to which classics can make significant contribution.

Finally, and most importantly, classics is multidisciplinary and holistic in its essence. It incorporates archaeology, history, geography, literature, arts, law, economy, medicine, sports, religion, mythology, philosophy, science, architecture, gender and queer studies. Examining and interpreting any particular aspect of the classical antiquity is impossible without applying a holistic approach i.e. without taking into consideration all other relevant aspects. Understanding written sources requires insight into the nature of material remains and vice versa understanding material remains depends on the interpretation of written sources. Heritage is traditionally classified as tangible and intangible, but tangible and intangible are always inter-twined. Tangible heritage is a result of and reflects intangible heritage (beliefs, customs, practices, tradition, knowledge, language). Intangible heritage exists in relation to tangible artifacts. Understanding and interpreting any type of cultural heritage requires holistic approach and that is why classics is indispensable for efficient and useful heritage education. It adds value to the multiper-

spectivity necessary for the students to become themselves meaning makers and active participants in the process of heritage making.

Having all this in mind it is clear that integrating classics into heritage education is extremely important for a country like North Macedonia. Primarily because teaching about the rich local Classical and Byzantine cultural heritage needs to be improved and the awareness about its importance and preservation raised. But also because of the need to improve teaching about European heritage resources in general and make the use of these resources in teaching about every other field of knowledge, culture and science more efficient and successful.

Having an archaeological site with a theatre or amphitheatre in the vicinity is a rare and unique opportunity for students to learn *in situ* about theatre and drama, what was it like 2000 years ago and how it is performed today. But the true experience, the learning event for the students can be provided only if the teacher has the discipline specific knowledge, and when it comes to ancient theatre and drama that is classics in the first place. The teacher needs to be a classical philologist or if not, to have taken courses in ancient drama or to have had specific teacher training.¹²

The very famous figure of the Maenad of Tetovo (6th cent. B.C.), the bronze dancer is an important artifact from early antiquity testifying about the history of the region and its cultural relations. It was featured on the obverse of the 5000 denars banknote issued in 1996 by the National Bank of Republic of Macedonia. Its name and image are used to denote products, places, institutions. Teaching students about its meaning and significance is a perfect opportunity to introduce them to ancient history, mythology and religion, and moreover to more recent local history, culture, economy of the city of Tetovo and North Macedonia. Including in the story, relevant passages of Plutarchus, verses of Euripidus' play *Bacchae* and even verses of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* accompanied

¹² A great example of how to use ancient site to revive ancient drama and create artistic and learning event comes from Bitola, where final year students of the gymnasium "Josip Broz Tito" prepared the play "Prometheus Bound" under the supervision of their Latin teacher Sofija Bejkovska, and performed it in the Ancient theatre of Heraclea Lyncestis in June 2021. Students also created a short movie "Sisyphus' eyes" that was shown in the same theatre. See:

<https://gimnazija-jbt-bitola.edu.mk/одбележување-на-патрониот-празник-на/>

with representations of Maenads in ancient and contemporary art, will certainly make students' experience even more vivid and memorable. But again, a discipline specific knowledge is required to fulfil this task, the expertise of a classical philologist.



Maenad of Tetovo, 6th cent. B.C.



5000 denars banknote, 1996

Classics needs to be incorporated in all aspects of heritage education, not just in the process of preparing lectures and events. A major problem is the fact that school teachers very often do not have any training nor specific knowledge required to read and use written sources

about classical antiquity. Classical languages and other written source-based courses on classical antiquity are obligatory only in the study programmes of the Institute of Classical Studies. In the study programmes offered at the Institutes of History, Archaeology, History of Art, Philosophy these courses are just optional. At the Faculty of Pedagogy they are not offered at all. This issue should be addressed by making changes in university curricula and by developing appropriate teacher trainings. Another problem is that classics and the expertise of classical philologists most often is not taken into consideration when creating policies on heritage and heritage education.

Speaking stones: bringing epigraphy into classrooms

Any archaeological site or any piece of tangible heritage can be utilized to teach, but the epigraphic monuments are of special kind. They are the speaking stones. Unlike the other forms of tangible heritage that needs to be related to other existing written sources in order to be interpreted, inscriptions are a written source themselves. Epigraphic monuments therefore are useful resource for the teachers of Latin and Greek and can help them bring grammar alive, but they also offer many other possibilities for exploring the past and providing useful heritage education. An excursion to an archaeological site or a museum, where inscriptions are on exhibit (in North Macedonia inscriptions can be found literally on the street) can become an experience of doing the job of an epigrapher. Students can engage into the process of documenting the inscription by making a sketch or a photography, recognizing the letters, making a transcription and transliteration of the text and finally translating it and interpreting it.¹³

¹³ A case of successful use of epigraphy to teach Latin in a primary school in Slovenia is presented in a paper by A. Ragolič. See Ragolič (2014), 205-220. Training workshops on the use of local inscriptions to teach have been held on two occasions within the projects organized by the Association "Antika", see Note 7 and also Džukeska (2008), 37-43. As a result, some of the Latin teachers in North Macedonia started to use epigraphy to teach Latin in secondary schools and have already gained experience.



Collection of stone inscriptions from the region of Skopje (Ancient Scupi) in front of the Museum of the City of Skopje

As the job of an epigrapher is by its nature multidisciplinary the experience of reading and interpreting an inscription can be easily transformed into a lesson in history, geography, history of art, archaeology, even literature and philosophy because some of the inscriptions contain verses. In the 21st century an event dedicated to inscriptions can also be a lesson in digital technology, bearing in mind the latest developments and trends in digital epigraphy. Finally, students can discuss how epigraphic monuments can be preserved and how they can be promoted as a valuable cultural heritage.

Conclusion

The heritage education in North Macedonia in its present state requires significant improvement and classics can contribute to make it more efficient and useful. Because of its essence and because of its multidisciplinary nature classics is fundamental to fostering cultural and heritage awareness. The possibilities offered by epigraphy to teach children at an early age about the importance and value of monuments and their preservation are unique. But in order to exploit the full potential of classics in heritage education, its role in primary, secondary and higher education must be seriously reexamined and expanded. Of particular importance is to include classical subjects into university heritage study

programmes and teacher training study programmes and workshops. The role of Latin language teachers in schools should also be reexamined. Bearing in mind the fact that teachers engaged in other disciplines lack appropriate knowledge on classical subjects, a collaboration between classical philologists and other teachers in regard of heritage education is necessary and it should be stimulated by all means. And every opportunity to create heritage activities in which students will learn and have fun should be seized. Because if something can give us the pleasure of learning, then it is worth to be preserved.

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