

THE RESEARCH ON CULTURE, YOUTH AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN LATVIA

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INTRODUCTION

Under the European Union's framework programme for Research and Innovation "Horizon 2020", Daugavpils University (Latvia) participated in the project "Cultural Heritage and Identities of Europe's Future" (CHIEF) coordinated by Aston University (UK). The project was implemented in nine countries: Georgia, Croatia, India, the UK, Latvia, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey and Germany.

The main research question was how young people acquire knowledge of cultural heritage in all its diverse forms and contexts (at educational institutions, in non-formal settings, in the family, among peers and in heritage institutions) and whether the acquired knowledge enhances youth participation in cultural activities.

Researchers involved in the project were experts from different backgrounds: sociology, youth studies, cultural anthropology, political science and religious studies. This provided an opportunity to compile an extensive overview of young people's understanding of culture and their engagement in cultural activities in six EU and three Asian countries where qualitative and quantitative data were collected and ethnographic case studies were carried out. In the CHIEF project countries, more than 10 thousand young people have been surveyed, 540 students and 80 teachers, as well as 234 family members representing different generations have been interviewed and ethnographic case studies have been carried out in 18 museums and 36 formal and non-formal youth groups.

WHAT DID WE INVESTIGATE WHEN INTERVIEWING YOUNG PEOPLE AT SCHOOLS?

Modern schools have to meet new requirements, which involve laying the foundations for a future society in which people would be ready to adapt to changing labour market conditions, would be socially and civically active, responsible, as well as able to boost competitiveness of their country. To achieve this, wide-ranging reforms directly affecting cultural education are ongoing in the Latvian education system at all levels.

Young people acquire knowledge of cultural heritage both during lessons as a regular part of the curriculum and during extra-curricular activities, which they particularly appreciate, pointing out that visits to museums and excursions equip them with new cultural skills and competences. During interviews with students and teachers conducted at schools in Riga, Daugavpils and Daugavpils district, it was observed that young people are open to traditions of other cultures. However, they confessed that they are sometimes prejudiced against certain ethnic or social groups, e.g. the Roma and immigrants.

The sense of young people's belonging, the formation of which was prioritised in policy documents of different levels and education standards, was one of the most pressing research topics of the project. Despite effects of globalisation, it is important for young people to preserve the local, ethnic and national culture, to which their sense of belonging is stronger than that of belonging to Europe.

Youth cultural literacy in the capital city of Riga is different from that in other parts of Latvia. Programmes similar to the "Latvian School Bag" would therefore need to be introduced. They would help to prevent the socially determined inequalities hindering access to cultural products and would put all young people on an equal footing in terms of participation. Support should be given, in particular, to music and art schools, interest clubs and youth organisations, since they offer alternative options of cultural education and recreation, thus reducing the potential adverse effects of a degraded social environment, as well as enhance development of young people's talents and creativity.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN SHAPING YOUTH CULTURAL IDENTITY?

The family as a social institution is a pillar that shapes and regulates a person's sense of belonging, socialisation experience, cultural norms and spiritual values. Intergenerational qualitative research carried out in families was aimed at identifying mechanisms of inheriting traditions and behavioural patterns, as well as at identifying the factors that encourage families to gain knowledge of cultural heritage and discourage them from doing so.

Universal and Christian values, experience of the traditional culture inherited from ancestors, including the virtue of work, care for relatives and responsibility for the next generations, are important

for families in Latvia. Deteriorating quality of life, emigration and difficulties to reconcile work and family life widen the gap between generations and reduce opportunities of young people to inherit values and virtues, as well as to take over traditions and acquire new cultural skills.

To ensure the preservation of cultural heritage, social sustainability of families needs to be protected. The experience gained through interaction between generations fosters involvement in regional, national and international social processes, as well as reduces fragmentation of values and ensures the formation of an inclusive identity in the long term.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE PROCESS OF ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE?

The young people interviewed in museums highlighted that their view of cultural heritage is different from that of the older generation and its aesthetic criteria, e.g. young people in Daugavpils were excited about the contemporary art objects located in the city, whereas older city dwellers took a dislike to them. For historical reasons, parents of today's youth are unprepared for perceptions of contemporary art, and their knowledge of the 20th century Latvian cultural history is poor. However, it is parents who have been the first ones to stimulate young people's interest in culture by encouraging them to join creative groups. Although young people try to dissociate themselves from the older generation, they acknowledged that cultural events, exploration of the kin's history, participation in the kin's gatherings and trips serve as a uniting factor.

To strengthen integrity of the Latvian society and ensure transmission of cultural traditions, interaction opportunities between generations in the field of culture should be expanded. Consideration should be given to the introduction of a new national programme, e.g. "Family Holidays", which could support the engagement of families in investigating the history of Latvia and acquiring knowledge of cultural heritage.

WHERE ARE THE PROJECT RESULTS AVAILABLE?

The research results are available to education experts and those of cultural heritage preservation, policy makers and youth professionals to facilitate the formation of inclusive cultural heritage and cultural identity in Europe and elsewhere in the world. Following the analysis and comparison of data obtained in nine countries, researchers published reports on the website of the CHIEF project: <http://chiefprojecteu.com/>

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