THE ROLE OF AUDIO AND VISUAL EXPRESSION STRATEGIES IN PRESERVING THE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF A NATION

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"The nation is a specific cultural object. It exists in and through the language we speak, the public symbols we acknoweledge, the history and literature we were taught in school, the music we listen to, the currency we use, the sporting activities we enjoy, and the news bulletins on the television.These cultural artefacts enable us to regonise that our way of life has an objective external existence, and constitute the social environment which we recognize as ours and in which we are at home" (Poole 1999:13).

Introduction

Culture is one of the fundamental areas of social existence and an immanent factor of identity and development of each and every state. It is an exceptionally specific and heterogeneous sphere that comprises all the material and spiritual values which have derived from the process of thinking and the human intervention in the environment and the society.

There is an entire specter of various meanings of the term culture that refer to diverse spheres and that treat different aspects of human life. For instance, the term business culture, academic or political cultures refer to an entire system of beliefs and practices that regulate the appropriate sphere of the human life.

Culture is articulated at various levels. At the level known as basic one, it is comprised in the language, its syntax, grammar and vocabulary.

Culture is also present in art, music, oral traditions, written literature, moral values and sublimity ideals. It is further encompassed in the rules and regulations and the norms of certain basic activities and social relations of the type where, how and who we socialize with, the way we rejoice, the way we experience and mourn death, how we treat our closest, our parents, our children, our neighbors in comparison to how we treat the unfamiliar people.

Culture shapes and structures the moral values, the contents of the human life and every kind of emotion associated with them.

Comprehended as a set of elements used by a certain group for its own identification, culture presents one of the key factors in the constitution process of the nation and its identity. According to Poole, our national culture provides a moment of self-recognition through which we both confirm our individual existence and become conscious of ourselves as having a collective existence.

Defining 'Nation' through Cultural Aspects

For a great number of contemporary theoreticians the concept of 'the imagined community' coined by anthropologist Benedict Anderson represents a starting point in their studies and analyses of the origin and existence of nations.

In his work Imagined Communities Benedict Anderson defines nation as an imagined community because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their

fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. The nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them -encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings- has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations (1998:19-21).

Eric Hobsbawm views tradition, memories, myths and legends as a common concoction in the function of nurturing the collective ego of certain social groups that subsequently a nation is built upon. He believes that the existence of cultural elites is of particilar importance to the creation of works in all fields of culture and pertaining to building the national identity. Nonetheless, he regards literature and language as exceptionally significant, because they all contribute to one nation to distinguish and experience itself as a individual entity.

Ernest Gellner, a social anthropologist, regarded as one of the most influential contemporary philosophers and a critic of the contemporary scientific thought, perceives the relevance and role of culture in the process of forming of any nation. His views on nation and nationalism have exerted tremendous influence on the contemporary politics and theory of multiculturalism, thus establishing him as one of the most vigorous theoreticians of the 1960's. At the very beginning of his work Nations and Nationalism Gellner ascertains the difficulty in defining the notion of 'nation' and pinpoints two, in his own words, provisional definitions:

1. Two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating.
2. Two men are of the same nation if and only if they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation. In other words, 'nations make the men'; nations are the artifacts of men's convictions and loyalties and solidarities. A mere category of persons (say, occupants of a given territory, or speakers of a given language, for example) becomes a nation if and when the members of the category firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of their shared membership of it (Gellner 1983).

Each of these two provisional definitions, the cultural and the voluntaristic, has some merit. Each of them singles out an element which is of real importance in the understanding of the notion of 'nation'. Gellner highlights willingness and culture as crucial elements in formation of nations.

Dominique Schnapper, assimilitating Gellner's views, believes that the sense of belonging, as one of the preconditions for formation of nations, derives from a rather long shared history, which according to him in most cases is either fully or partially coined. When it comes to building of collective identity (in this case national identity) she believes that the adoption of the abstract rights, such as human rights and observance of the state, is insufficient compared to the interiorization of the national tradition, which she regards as a genuine instigator of political mobilization.

It is noticeable that culture, perceived as a range of elements used by the group for the purpose of self-identification, becomes an indispensable segment of the current discussions

pertaining to nation. Numerous eminent experts dealing with the study of nation and process of nation formation, underline the role and relevance of culture in the so-called phase of national perception.

Thus, audio and visual strategies, as well as audiovisual collections play a significant role in preserving the culture and identity of a nation. The archives of audiovisual collections present treasury of one's cultural and national history and testimony for the existence of a particular nation and its culture. In this regard, the digitisation of those archives is of a significant importance in long term preservation of cultural heritage and in nurturing and passing on the cultural values and tradition.

Why Digitization of Cultural Heritage

We are leaving in the era of digital technologies which are already penetrated into the all aspects of our day-to-day life. The emergence of digital technologies changed the processes of accumulation, custody, recording and investigation of cultural heritage as well as the processes of disseminating this information. Digitisation refers to processes of converting the analogue signal and other data into computer-readable form i.e. in digital form. But, the process of digitisation of cultural heritage is defined as a process that encompasses a collection of activities: the application of digital information and communication technologies in common administrative processes such as documentation, security organization, protection, research and dissemination of information. This method can be applied in different forms such as sound, video, graphic, textual etc. Nevertheless, the result of digitisation of cultural heritage is digital information.

The reasons for digitisation of cultural heritage are the following:

- Protection of the original copy;
- Improving the accessibility to the contents of the originals;
- Presentation of our cultural heritage before the domestic and international public by appropriately designed web pages and portals;
- Fostering the diversity of services, such as distributed searching for contents in virtually integrated documentation centers, cooperative processing in digital buildings and inter-institutional exchange of metadata about digital buildings;
- Using digital copies for supplementing Institution funds;
- Greater accessibility to technical data and documentation for analysis, research and conservation purposes and for the sake of prevention, maintenance and physical protection of cultural heritage;
- Connection to other compatible information systems (GIS, BIS, etc.).

Despite the acknoweledged importance of the processes of digitisation of cultural heritage and several addopted documents within the European Institutions, there is, in generale, no clear policy on digital preservation. In its recently launched intergrated approach of long-term preservation and access of digital cultural heritage and scientific knowledge, European Commission emphasized the urgent necessity of digitisation in the European countries conditioned by their relatively backward situation in comparison with Asia and USA. As a main reason for this situation the European Commission pointed out the absence of strategy on cultural heritage digitization.

Even in the countries from the European Union, the expertise of specialists working in the field of digitisation is gained mostly by individual practice. When a young researcher has the

chance to become a part of an experienced group, he/she would gain necessary skills to work on a good quality. Otherwise, many institutions establish small-scale projects learning basically from pitfalls. This tendency is not a positive one, because it results in the production of scattered resources which could not be interconnected (Dobreva and Ikonomov 2004:205).

Overview of the Macedonian Experience

In the Republic of Macedonia -like in the most of the European Member States- there is no national strategy of digitisation of cultural heritage yet, but there some independent examples of good practice in digitisation. One of those examples is the activity of the Institute for Research and Archiving of Music (IRAM). This Institute was established by prof. Dimitrje Buzarovski in 2000 and its main objective is digitisation of cultural heritage. Dietrich Schüller -IFAP Vice- President and audiovisual archive specialist, listed the IRAM Institute among the first five digital archives in Europe.

Activities of IRAM:

- Digitization of analog audio and video recordings, scores, photo and other graphic materials
- Audio and video recordings from concerts and other cultural events
- Documentary videos
- International conferences and presentations
- Web site
- Publishing of DVDs, CDs, books, posters and other promotion materials
- Maintenance of 4 studios for digital audio/video recording, editing and postproduction IRAM activities were financially supported and sponsored by 3 EU Tempus projects, 1 SCOPES project, Fulbright visiting professors in Macedonia and the enthusiasm of UKIM FM professors and students

1) Digitization of analog audio and video recordings, scores, photo and other graphic materials

IRAM Archive possesses:
- over 23.000 audio minutes of digital audio (232.84 GB 44.1 KHz/16 bit)
- over 40 hours of digital video (576.17 GB standard definition)
- over 2.000 photos
- over 700 transcriptions

a) Audio and transcriptions collections

Firfov Collection (1362 folk songs and dances), Firfov Transcription Collection (383 transcriptions from Macedonian folk songs), Badev Collection (359 songs),Vidoeski collection (3.600 minutes speech material, Macedonian dialects, folk tales, customs etc.), Brzanov collection (songs, speech and other materials, 68 transcriptions), Turkish makams and usuls (319 transcriptions), Penusliski collection (3.300 minutes speech material, songs, presentation of folk instruments, Macedonian dialects, folk tales, customs etc.)

b) Audio and video recordings from concerts and other cultural events

85 audio recordings from concerts, 3 videos from the concerts, Yeni Yol (Turkish folklore) video, 5 Documentary videos (Gjorgji Donevski, Bapchorki, Kosturchanki, Kalistrat Zografski, Tempus in Macedonia), 7 IRAM Chronicle movies with 138 short documentary videos

2) International conferences and presentations

15 International conferences with the following titles:
- Contemporary Trends in Musicology and Ethnomusicology
- Cultural Policy and Music Education
- Reflections on Macedonian Music - Past and Future
- Presentations (in Europe and the US)

3) Web site http://mmc.edu.mk

a) IRAM digital library of musicological and ethnomusicological books, textbooks and papers

3 books by Prof. Dr. D. Buzarovski (History of Aesthetics of Music, introduction into Analysis of Musical Piece, The Basics of the Digital Archiving of the Sound), a book by prof. Dr. Tome Manchev (The Motion - Essential Element in the Symphonic Works), a book by Vladan Velkov Evgenij Ladislav Palfi The (Un)forgotten Genius, over 200 papers from IRAM International conferences master's thesis and doctoral dissertations defended at UKIM FM.

b) Information about composers, performers, musicologists and ethnomusicologists

c) Internet Student Radio

(100 programs with more than 150 hours audio)

d) IRAM video Chronicle

(138 short movies)

Conclusion

UNESCO's Information for All Programme (IFAP) has identified the need to raise awareness of the importance of information preservation as one of the strategic goals. According to the information preservation specialists who participated in the IFAP Thematic Debate in Paris at the Bibliothèque nationale de France on 3 April 2007, the digital heritage will disappear in 10 years (or earlier) without its active preservation. Over 80% of the world's audiovisual collections referring to cultural and linguistic diversity are not in professional care. The preservation specialists claim that digitisation on its own is not preservation; preservation of digital content requires constant and ongoing attention forever as an indispensable pre-requisite for enabling the world's citizens to access information.

Digital collections are available and accessible to a large number of interested target groups: the domestic and international expert and wider public. They represent an exceptionally important tool for the purpose of raising the awareness concerning the cultural heritage at a national or local level, for educational purposes at all levels as well as significantly contributing to the overall development of mankind.

Thus, the digitisation of cultural heritage should become an indivisible part of governmental cultural policies, which implies existence of a thoughtful political action aimed at specific goals and tasks that are to be realized by means of appropriate measures, instruments and practices.

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