

The Impact of Digitization on the Preservation of National Identity

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Abstract

This article aims to identify the impact of digitization on national identity, from the perspective of preserving cultural values and traditions of a nation. The continuous development of contemporary society has led to the emergence of the need to somehow preserve the most important elements of a people's culture, a fact that obviously also leads to the preservation of the national identity of that nation. Also, the paper aimed to analyze the effects of the concept of digitization worldwide, how its adoption has spread in almost all branches of activity and how an almost forced alignment of all nations to this phenomenon has been achieved in order to be able to stay connected to the latest information from all fields of activity.

At the same time, the paper aimed to identify the main ways in which digitization intervenes in the cultural process of a state and how it influences the foreign perception of the culture and traditions of that state.

The paper analyzes the degree of digitization existing at the national level in terms of the use of digital tools in the field of culture, but also their impact and importance on our national identity.

Keywords: *digitization, national identity, cultural values, traditions, people's culture, cultural process.*

JEL classification: *M 120, M 12, M 52, L 83*

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1. Introduction

The concept of digitization represents one of the most used concepts in today's reality, being used on a large scale, in almost all the world. Practically, this

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concept is used in most fields of activity, its usefulness being more than proven over time.

Regarding culture and national identity, digitization can play a particularly important role, also taking into account the emergence of the concept of globalization, which has a direct impact on the perspective of national identity. Globalization, digitization and national identity are concepts that cannot be separated. They are interconnected through information technology, which is developing every day.

2. Literature review

Regarding the concept of globalization, there are a multitude of definitions given by authors from various fields. Regarding the cultural field and the perspective of national identity, one of the definitions is given by Malcolm Waters, who believes that society in the context of globalization will lose its cultural arminization, where there will be elements of diversity but also of polycentrism and disorder (Gruia, L. A. et al., 2020). The same author, a supporter of the concept of globalization, further expresses his vision of the future regarding the cultural dimension of globalization, noting that the state and social borders that have an important role for society and culture will disappear. (Waters, M., p.5, 2001).

Here is that Waters created a definition of globalization from the perspective of the main influences it has on culture and national identity, namely the disappearance of the principle of territoriality as a principle that guarantees, from a physical point of view, at least for the time being, the identity culture of each state .

National identity refers to culture or civilization as a whole, representing the totality of interests, norms of coexistence but also beliefs that are adopted by a community of people (Ștefănescu S., Velicu A., pp. 16–17, 2006).

The concept of national identity has been analyzed over time by many authors, given its importance in the very existence of states at the individual level. In his work, entitled "Who are we? Challenges to the American national identity", the American Samuel Huntington mentions that all societies face existential threats that can cause them to disappear.

Despite these situations, societies have the ability to prolong the occurrence of those moments of decline, preventing this direction towards a new path of revitalization and renewal of identity (Huntington S., p. 8, 2005). Here is the importance of awareness of the preservation of national identity in terms of the existence of individual states, in the face of the "threat" of globalization (Cristache, N. et al., 2019).

Perhaps the best example of the impact of globalization on culture and national identity is the appearance of holidays that come from other cultures at the level of a national holiday or even the replacement of national holidays with similar but much more popular ones from other areas of the world, something generated by the influence of certain economically stronger states that have managed to extend their sphere of influence beyond the geographical space of which they are a part.

The replacement of some national holidays with some from other cultures can only have a negative impact on the preservation of the national identity of the respective state, through the loss of some values and traditions preserved over time, this also being true for our country.

3. Findings

The globalization phenomenon is spreading rapidly, through information technology and, implicitly, through digitization, covering almost all fields of activity. According to the definition given by some authors, the concept of digitization represents the transition from the classic format to the one in which it is systematized and endowed with automatic technological means, with the objective of improving the efficiency of the succession of work processes (Tănase et. all, 2018).

This process is extremely used in the field of culture, in the preservation of cultural heritage, by further using the digitization process, respectively by creating a digital version of a document, classic photograph, book, brochure, painting, etc., which allows the preservation this information in electronic format, which practically leads to the possibility of efficiently accessing this information in the future (Petrariu, R. I. et al., 2023). Perhaps the biggest advantage of this process is the fact that it becomes possible to access their digital format in the future, even if the physical/analog form deteriorates over time, as a result of the intervention of environmental factors.

Digital transformation represents one of the mega trends registered at global level, which leads to significant reforms in all fields, by introducing innovative information and communication technology solutions, with the aim of optimizing the services offered to citizens (Lappi et al., , pp.159-196, 2019), this being one among the main advantages of this process.

The methodology used in this article is based on the qualitative method (Şandor, S. D., 2013). Thus, the main ways in which digitization was carried out at the level of cultural heritage and the impact of this method were analyzed, in order to identify the consequences from the perspective of cultural heritage preservation and, implicitly, the protection of national identity.

Also, a series of internet platforms and servers were identified and accessed, from the online environment, which host information about the Romanian and universal cultural heritage through the storage spaces. In this sense, the way in which they work and how the information that is entered within these platforms can be practically accessed was analyzed, but also the impact that they can have on the preservation of national identity was observed (Petrariu, R. I.,et al., 2023). The most important component of preserving the national identity of a nation is the cultural heritage. This is relevant, because it has a major impact on the elements of national identity. A number of institutions, such as museums, libraries, etc., are responsible for the conservation and interpretation of these data (Băjenaru et. al, pp. 217-230, 2019).

In particular, within specialized studies, they have a vital role in the development of the Romanian people, practically representing their identity (Gavrilă et al., 2019). The financing of the cultural field in the last 5 years in Romania was made from the state budget, the results being presented in Figure 1 below:

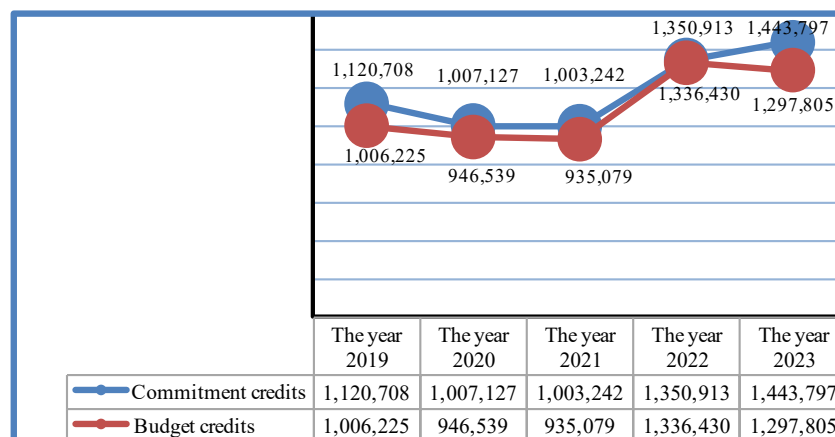


Figura 1. Financing of the Romanian cultural field in the period 2019-2023 (thousands of lei)

Source: Ministry of Finance, <https://mfinante.gov.ro/domenii/buget>

From the analysis of the data presented in Figure 1, it follows that Romania has allocated significant amounts to the financing of the cultural field. However, there is a slight decrease in funding for this field during the COVID 19 pandemic, respectively in 2020 and 2021 (when budget resources were prioritized for preventing and combating the pandemic), followed by an increase in funding in the following period, respectively the years 2022 and 2023, which practically meant a return to the state of normality in terms of activity in this field.

Regarding the existing strategies in the cultural field, in our country there are a number of initiatives in this sense. At the level of the Ministry of Culture, the "E-culture: Digital Library of Romania" project was started for the digitization of the mobile cultural project, with the aim of creating the Digital Library of Romania (<https://culturalia.ro/>), which practically represents a part of the Digital Library European – Europeana, previously described, in which approximately 608,519 institutions from Romania participate that provide information in digital format.

The Ministry of Culture developed the Institutional Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Culture for the period 2024-2027 whose first objective is the protection and valorization of cultural heritage, through the allocation of budget credits, as can be seen in Figure 2:

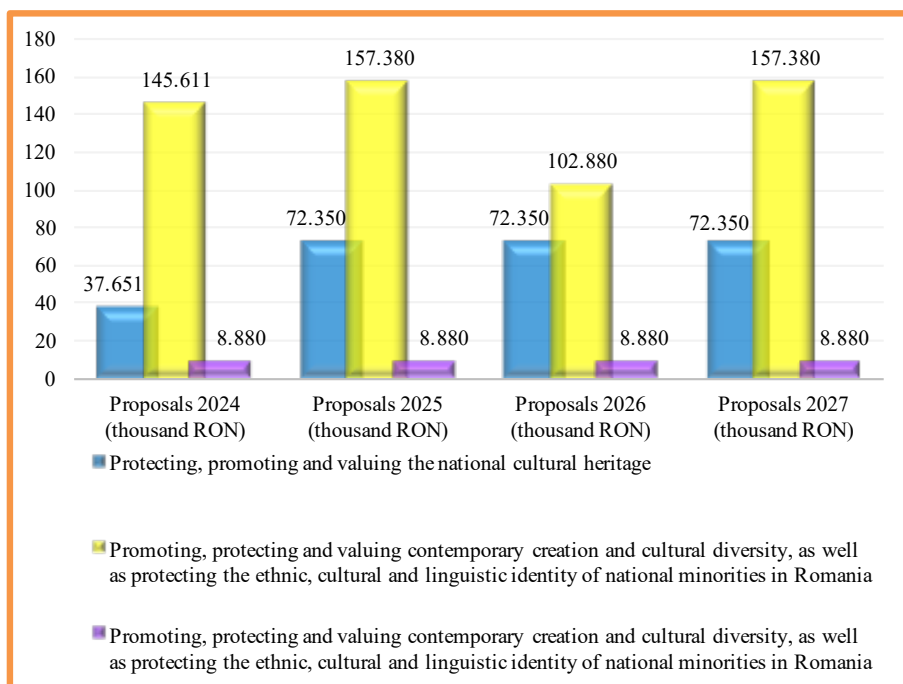


Figure 2. The allocation of budget credits related to the three programs of Objective 1: Protecting and promoting cultural heritage, contemporary creation and cultural diversity, as well as protecting the ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity of national minorities in Romania

Source: Ministry of Culture, The institutional strategic plan
http://www.cultura.ro/sites/default/files/inline-files/FINAL_PSI%20Ministerul%20Culturii%202024%202027.pdf.

According to the data presented in Figure 2, it can be seen that the largest amount of budget credits allocated by the Ministry of Culture for the period 2024-2027 goes to the field of cultural creation and diversity, as well as to the protection of ethnic and cultural identity, far more than the amount of budget credits allocated to the promotion and promotion of Romanian culture abroad. These allocations of financial resources indicate a concern of the Romanian state for this field and, implicitly, the awareness of the importance of the field of culture in terms of preserving national identity. As was mentioned before, the preservation of cultural heritage is a particularly important aspect, but most of the time the costs of maintaining works of art and literary works in physical/analog format involve high costs, which can result in irreparable degradation of them, when no specially allocated funds are provided for this purpose.

Thus, the digitization process brings with it the undeniable advantage of the possibility of keeping them for an unlimited time, a fact that obviously leads to

the preservation of the heritage in good conditions, and implicitly to the preservation of the national identity of a state.

Following the analysis, a number of web platforms were identified that were created with the aim of preserving the literary heritage in electronic format, as can be seen in Table 1 below:

**The main characteristics of some web platforms
for online preservation of literary heritage**

Table 1

Nr. crt.	PLATFORM NAME	Geographical Location	FEATURES AND CONTENT
1	EUROPEANA	UE	<input type="checkbox"/> Sections: Art, Archaeology, Photography, Maps and Geography, Books, Music, Newspapers, Fashion, Sports, Science. <input type="checkbox"/> Content: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31,564,468 images; • 24,619,323 texts; • 623,757 sound files; • 366,614 video files, 6003 3D type files.
2	MANUSCRIPTORIUM	Czech Republic	<input type="checkbox"/> It is linked to the Europeana platform. It offers the possibility of accessing literary/historical works online in digital format and creating your own collection. <input type="checkbox"/> Content: Image files
3	ENCICLOPEDIA BRITANNICA	Over 150 countries/80 languages	<input type="checkbox"/> Development is done digitally only at present. It has a history of over 250 years. Areas: history, science and technology, geography, animals, video, art and culture, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Content: Video files and image and text files.
4	GALLICA	French Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5,804,640 articles and magazines; • 1,774,522 images, 5585 video files; • 857,741 books. Content: Printed documents, image files, text files, manuscripts, maps.
5	WORLD DIGITAL LIBRARY	Worldwide/66 languages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5,945,102 files available online; <input type="checkbox"/> Content: images, text, audio, video.

Source: Europeana, <https://www.europeana.eu/ro>, accessed in 2024,
 Manuscriptorium, <https://www.manuscriptorium.com/>, accessed in 2024, Britannica,
<https://www.britannica.com/>, accessed in 2024,
 Gallica, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/>, accessed in 2024,
 World Digital Library, <https://www.loc.gov/>, accessed in 2024.

Thousands of pages can be written about the effects of digitization and digitization worldwide. Some authors consider the digitization process as the third industrial revolution, and digitization as the fourth such revolution (Vrana J. Singh R., 2021).

The rapid spread of this phenomenon had many advantages around the world, among them the speed with which information in digital format came to be accessed by a larger number of users. Moreover, currently the degree of digitization of a state also best highlights its development stage, i.e. the higher the degree of digitization in that state, the more it is considered to be developed, due to the efficiency and speed with which some processes and activities are carried out at the level of the public administration, but also in the other fields.

Cyber security risks are also a disadvantage. The goal of digitization in this sense was not only to preserve the cultural heritage, but also to promote it and ensure the wide access of foreign citizens to the national culture and customs of a state. The continuous evolution of information technology has led to the development of several types of tools, starting from digitization (use of the binary 1 and 0 system), digitalization (transformation of information from physical/analog format to digital format), artificial intelligence (ability to imitate human functions: reasoning, creativity, learning, etc.), augmented reality (field of realities virtual, which allows the overlay of 3D virtual objects in a real environment), virtual reality (the ability of computer technology to perfectly simulate a reality).

All these techniques used effectively at the state level can allow effective cultural promotion at the international level, which brings with it countless benefits, including financial ones, by attracting an increased number of tourists who will want to see and in reality everything that is transposed in the virtual world. For a better understanding of the interaction and use of technology, a graphic representation of the interconnection of the main elements of mobile, immovable, material and digital heritage with the latest generation technological tools was created, after as can be seen in figure 3 below:

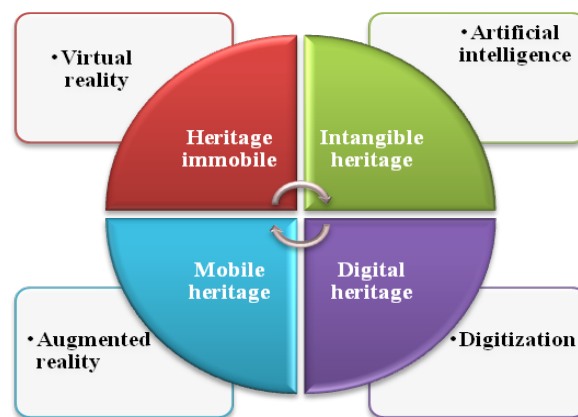


Figure 3. Ways of using technology in the preservation of cultural heritage

Source: Authors' own research.

Regarding the use of information technology in its various forms in order to preserve cultural heritage, this can be done in various ways, depending on the type of information that is to be preserved, starting from the use of digitization, up to virtual reality (what it can be successfully used in tourism or regarding museums, archaeological sites, historical monuments, etc.). Regarding virtual reality, it could be successfully used regarding the virtual tour of historical buildings, archaeological sites, gardens, parks, historical monuments, architectural ensembles, urban/rural sites, cultural landscapes, etc., a fact that proved to be a real success during the COVID 19 pandemic. The advantages of using these methods of preserving cultural heritage were perhaps best observed during the COVID 19 pandemic, when the freedom of movement of the population was limited, with the aim of avoiding the spread of SARS-Cov2 virus infections. Although, in practice, physical access to cultural heritage was impossible, however, thanks to digitization, access to cultural information was achieved in digital format. Practically, the perception of the interested parties regarding the state's national culture and its traditions also depends on the quality of this digitization process. From our point of view, the digitization (in the case of books, films, photo galleries, exhibitions, etc.) and the adoption of artificial intelligence tools especially in terms of intangible heritage (stories, sayings, songs, popular games, popular customs, traditional holidays, folk costumes) would represent the most effective way to promote a culture internationally. The use of augmented reality in terms of mobile heritage can combine the digital world with the physical one, which can allow the user to visualize digital elements integrated into reality. As for Romania, our country has made significant progress in terms of digitization, being practically a progress made also thanks to existing policies at the European level and which had to be implemented in our country as well. Thus, at the national level, the Authority for the Digitization of Romania was established, which was created in 2020 with the aim of digital transformation at the level of Romanian society, public institutions in the public sector being only one of the components that are in full digital transformation process. This authority has successfully engaged in the digitization process at the level of all ministries in our country, including in the field of culture, where 8 major projects have been completed to date. Thus, in 2023, the Authority for the Digitization of Romania managed to identify the best practices regarding the digitization of the national cultural heritage, and on the other hand, formulating some recommendations regarding the elaboration of national policies regarding the digitization of the national cultural heritage in Romania. The analysis includes good practices identified in Hungary, Estonia, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Italy, as well as a series of conclusions regarding the use of good practices in the case of Romania. The Romanian cultural heritage website (<https://cimec.ro/>) also operates at the national level, being the main access portal to digital information on Romanian cultural heritage. At the same time, there is currently a collaboration initiative between the National Heritage Institute and Global Digital Heritage (GDH), a non-profit organization based in the United States of America.

Collaboration that aims to digitize and preserve a part of the Romanian cultural heritage, through the use of advanced techniques, such as terrestrial and aerial photography, ground scanning, 3D objects have already been created that further allow an interactive reproduction of the objects for which this was done. The aim of the initiative is to develop the capacity of digital product editing, digital archiving, video editing, digital content distribution, the main aim of the initiative being to increase the capacity of digital production and distribution, including digital archiving. This is currently enhanced by the possibility of our country accessing European funds for digitization, in all fields, including the field of culture, where the digitization of cultural heritage can have extremely beneficial effects in terms of both the effective preservation of cultural heritage and preserving the national identity of the Romanian state.

4. Conclusions

The cultural heritage of a state basically represents the mark of cultural identity at the local and regional level. A responsible society concerned with the preservation of national identity will always proceed to identify, preserve and valorize those assets that constitute cultural heritage, in all its forms, being aware of the fact that this contributes to the resistance, as a nation, in the face of the phenomenon of globalization. Obviously, well-preserved and especially well-promoted cultural heritage turns from an opportunity from a tourist point of view into a real financial resource for the respective state, so digitalization contributes fully to this, by allowing access to an unlimited number of users of electronic promotion platforms, the main consequence of this being the development of the respective region/state (as is the case of Israel, very well promoted as a tourist and which achieves significant income from this activity).

The digitalization of cultural heritage is an extremely important component in terms of cultural heritage preservation, including from the perspective of its inventory. There is no need to mention its many advantages in terms of the general public's access to these invaluable resources, but also in cases where some assets within the national heritage are no longer accessible due to their damage or even destruction. The evolution of information technology has led to the development of effective tools in all fields, including the cultural field, a phenomenon that has been amplified and accelerated by globalization, its benefits being more than obvious. The use of artificial intelligence, augmented reality, but also virtual reality in the cultural field is just the beginning of digital development in this field. Romania, as a member state of the European Union, can be considered privileged in terms of the opportunities it has, especially in the context of the possibility of accessing European funds in order to develop the capacity to digitize its own cultural heritage, given the special interest shown by the European Union in the development and promotion of the European cultural heritage. Practically, our country should use this opportunity, with the huge benefits that the preservation of cultural heritage entails in the preservation of national identity.

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