

SUSTAINABLE URBAN LIFE

1) My background:

- worked at the national archives of Bulgaria in the field of project management, international relations and publicity of the archives
- education in the field of international relations and political science
- in other words I am not trained as an archivist or a historian and my interest in the archives has always stemmed from a general curiosity about the interesting and curious documents that are preserved in their vast collections.

And because there are many people like me it seems appropriate that projects that could spur the interest of the general public in the archives will find a large audience. Moreover, if they are on topics of general interest, they could help improve the perception of the archives as antiquated, ineffective, cobweb covered institutions.

2) This is the motivation behind this particular project idea. The idea aims at creating an international Web 2.0 based platform that will reveal some of the gems hidden in the archives on a topic that is currently on everyone's watchlist, to use the modern lingo "a sexy topic": Sustainable Urban Life.

In a world with depleting resources and daily concerns about the state of the environment, citizens must re-think the ways in which they relate to it.

National archives can be a very valuable voice in the ongoing discussions because by sharing the documents preserved in their repositories, they can easily add a historical perspective to the issues, add expertise to the debate, and spur interesting debates about unexplored aspects of the topic.

3) The project envisions a modern, technically advanced platform that utilizes all suitable Web 2.0 applications – commenting, tagging, facebook, twitter, etc. for presenting the content.

Via questions, surveys and short texts about the presented materials, the web-site will prompt users to investigate problems and solutions related to the sustainability of urban centers and explain their meaning and significance.

Articles could be written for Wikipedia using the available content.

4) There are a few aspects of the topic that can be suggested right away with the presumption that they will be of interest to the general public:

- A) city sports: cycling, swimming, running
- B) urban gardens and green spaces
- C) mountain tourism

- D) local foods
- E) city planning
- F) Waste Management
- G) Kindergartens
- H) Hospitals

To illustrate just one of these above-mentioned aspects: local foods. Bulgaria is famous for its yogurt believed to be the power food behind the large number of 100-year old Bulgarians. The Bulgarian archives could offer materials regarding yogurt factories, recipes, photographs, articles and many other curious facts. Same goes for chocolate and I will not extrapolate as you probably are familiar with how chocolate crazed our society has become.

Why does this brief discussion fall in line with Sustainable Urban Life? Because it closely aligns with the call to Eat Local and Be Mindful of Farming Practices so prominent in today's societies.

Of course, these topics are not set in stone and a more careful selection of the criteria for digitizing documents could be developed – other topics could be added, time periods and what not? I am sure that you will have some valuable suggestions being experts of your national archival collections.

5) These and other such ideas become very alive in an international perspective – users of the platform will have access not only to information about, for example, Bulgaria's local yogurt and chocolate, but to the foods of other nations and will be prompted to assess the value of their cultural heritage. Moreover, the less economically developed countries of South-eastern Europe will be able to learn about the experience of their Western neighbors and pick up some of the good habits the latter acquired on the way. In addition, there are many content-based links among the information preserved in the different archives – for instance, the first cycling groups, large city gardens, and outdoor clubs in Bulgaria were started by Swiss citizens, who were hired by the Bulgarian government and came to Bulgaria. It will be interesting to trace and elaborate on the Swiss influence on the development of sustainable city life in Bulgaria via the documents. Hence, an international perspective could be another criteria for selecting content.

6) Target group: the project targets young people, who seldom use the resources offered by archives. In this sense the target group for this project is mid-twenty to mid-thirty internet and technology savvy computer users. Of course, everyone's contribution will be encouraged and welcomed, but it is they that are particularly targeted.

As already mentioned, the platform will “speak” in a language recognizable by the target group.

7) Who will the task force consist of?

Archivists

Curators of information and who will use the documents to write stories

Promotion team

Web-platform creators and support

8) The intended impact of the project is the following:

For Users:

- Initiation of a discussion;
- Improve citizen awareness of sustainable city life;
- Engender a sense of historicity among users.

For the Archives:

- Digitization of documents;
- Project participation;
- Improving the image of the archives
- Facilitate the global spread of knowledge by making interesting materials easily available online.

Well-aware that the Internet is full of interesting places to visit, it is evident that the launch of just another web-site will not be a highly remarkable thing in the online world. Still, the combination of the unique and interesting materials with the preeminence of the topic in today's world will lead to the success of the project.