

Everything in this world has a history, and so does each of us. The history of our life, the history of the family we come from, the history of our native land, where we grew up, the history of the craft that became our lifetime project. This history can be personal and official, local and global, experienced and studied, undocumented and thoroughly recorded.

How can we see that elusive moment when everyday life becomes history? How can we catch it, remember it, save it to come back to later, pass it on to our descendants? How can we compare different points of view regarding the same phenomenon or event? How and what lessons can we learn from yesteryear and how can they help us now or in the future?

How can we draw attention to the problems posed by extinction of the rich cultural and historical heritage, how can we integrate it into our daily life? How can we bring people together to address these challenges, how can we make them part of a community whose solutions depend on everyone? What can and should we do together to endow the prosperous future of our villages and cities with our historical past?

Together with our partners and participants in our projects and programs, we are doing our best to find answers to all these questions to make the history more understandable and its study more interesting.

HISTORY AND EDUCATION FOR YOUTH AND ADULTS



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PRIORITY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

While promoting the historical aspect in its activities and in the activities of its partners, DVV International Belarus pursues the following objectives:

- **Facilitating historical studies through research and project activities** irrespective of the kind of history, be it the history of families, local communities, country as a whole, the history of education or anything else. Indulging in under-studied chapters in history, raising your own research questions, comparing different points of view, talking to witnesses of the past are the core components of such studies. The topics can be very different. Here are a few of them: “Availability of Education to Young People in Post-War Belarus and Germany”, “Evolvement of Shchuchin Region and Piarist School Traditions”, “Through Legends and Tales to History of Religious Monuments”, “In Search of Lost Villages”, “School for Working Youth: Work and Study”.

- **Professional development of specialists**, teachers, exchange of best practices through development and holding of various topical workshops, forums, festivals, etc. Introduction to non-traditional forms and methods of studying historical data, e.g. methods of photographic documents analysis and interpretation, methods of collecting ethnographic materials and carrying out ethnographic expeditions, the methods of a conversation café and oral history, etc.

Oral history is the systematic collection of testimonies shared by living witnesses of the past. Oral history is not folklore, gossip, or rumours. Oral historians try to test their findings, analyse them and place them in a specific historical context. They are also interested in storing their findings for the benefit of future generations of scientists.

Oral history is dependent on human memory and oral skills. In oral history projects, the interviewee recalls events for the interviewer, who records these memories and creates a historical record.

History and Culture in Rural Development – Minsk: Propylei, 2014, p. 95 (popular science publication within the framework of the Living History of My Land project).

- **Using the collected historical knowledge in the cultural and economic development of regions**, settlements, local communities, **drawing attention to the preservation of local artefacts**. Vivid examples include creation of museums, exhibitions, tourist routes and excursions, revival of unique rituals and crafts, local culinary traditions and cuisine, and presentation of local residents' creative heritage.

- **Promoting the development of civic education, civic competencies and national** through implementation of historical initiatives. Awareness of their close ties with the local or professional communities, responsibility for preservation of the common heritage, collective decision-making, consolidation of ideas and efforts to address specific challenges are the main objectives of any cultural and historical project and program.

SUCCESS STORY

One village revival

“Disappearance of a Polesie village with its local dialect, traditions and crafts can be compared to disappearance of an entire planet.”

L. Bytsko, the Village Renaissance project coordinator

This is especially true for a village like Stoyly in the Brest region with its original culture and inhabitants. Like many other villages, it started fading away at the end of the previous century to finally have only one resident by 2007. However, that resident was worth a village! Nikolai Vasilievich Tarasyuk – a craftsman, woodcarver, creator of the so-called “wooden people”. The Memories of the Homeland museum he founded in 1994 holds a collection of small wooden figurines that make compositions reflecting different aspects of everyday and holiday life of common people, their joys and sorrows.

In 2014, the caring people decided to preserve the museum, as well as the memory of the village of Stoyly and its inhabitants, within the framework of the Village Renaissance project.¹ The wooden figurines were carefully restored. The material collected bit by bit in neighbouring villages and archives formed the basis of the historical and ethnographic map of the village, which depicts both the streets and houses of residents and themselves (in the carefully preserved photographs from their family albums).

In 2015, the folk master died at the age of 82. The village lost its last inhabitant... but did not die.

The efforts of the initiative group yielded an open air of the carvers called “Following the Paths of M. Tarasyuk” and a vernissage of creative works, both held in memory of the folk master. A year later, a group of like-minded people founded the Village Renaissance Cultural and Educational Centre, which implemented 7 projects and held more than 30 events in 4 years.

There is currently a closed pavilion in the territory of the centre used to host various cultural and educational events. It transforms depending on the type and the topic of the event, e.g. workshop, seminar, lecture, performance, concert. The kitchen within allows holding events that include traditional Belarusian dishes and national dishes of other countries. The adjacent territory fits museum exhibits and folk craft workshops. The doors of the centre are open to everyone: residents and guests from nearby settlements, tourists, students – everyone who is interested in traditional culture and crafts.

And what about the village? The village started to revive slowly, even though there are still few actual residents there; all the houses are sold out, and more and more voices are being heard here and there: those of its residents, summer residents, tourists, guests and students participating in the centre's events.

I would like to believe that there will be more and more revived villages in Belarus, while the example of local initiatives will inspire others.



¹ Implemented within the framework of the Living History of My Village project in 2012–2014.



PARTNERS AND OUTCOMES

Our long-standing, committed partners in the history area include:

Youth Public Association “Historica”, Belarusian State Archive of Films, Photographs and Sound Recordings, Central City Library named after Yanka Kupala, the Krayaznauchaya Gazeta newspaper, experts of the European College of Liberal Arts in Belarus, as well as about 40 state and public organizations and educational, social, cultural institutions from various regions of Belarus;

National Institute of Education, State Educational Institution “Brest Regional Institute for Education Development”, State Educational Institution “Vitebsk Regional Institute for Education Development”, State Educational Institution “Gomel Regional Institute for Education Development”, State Educational Institution “Grodno Regional Institute for Education Development”, State Educational Institution “Minsk Regional Institute for Education Development”, State Educational Institution “Minsk City Institute for Education Development”, Educational Institution “Mogilev State Regional Institute for Education Development”;

Körber Foundation (Germany), EUSTORY International Network, Folk High School of the district of Cham (Germany).

In 2010–2019, we and our partners managed to:

- **Organize and conduct several historical competitions and research projects**, including the competition “History of 20th Century in Adult Education”, the project “Belarusian School in Cham: from Chances to Right to Education” (with the support of the German foundation “Remembrance, Responsibility and Future”). During 2012–2014, a large-scale partnership project “Living History of My Village” was implemented, aiming at development of rural areas through the use of elements of local culture, history and the potential of nature (with the support of the European Union). The international youth competition “Behind the Scenes: From Family History to Community History” was held twice (within the framework of the project “History Competitions in Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine”, with the support of the German Federal Foreign Office). More than 240 schoolchildren, students, young specialists took part in it during its two rounds, assisted by about 180 curators (educators, teachers, parents).

- **Implement more than 25 local mini-projects** aimed at **studying and preserving local history and culture**, at supporting and developing local historical and cultural initiatives, at involving the tangible and intangible heritage of rural regions in their development.

In 2014, one of these initiatives from the village of Vygonoschi (Brest region) received an award from the European Association for the Education of Adults (the Grundtvig Award) for its Vygonoshchanskaya Fortress project (implemented within the framework of the Living History of My Village project).



www.eaea.org

The European Association for the Education of Adults (<https://eaea.org>) holds the annual Grundtvig Competition to celebrate the achievements of adult education organizations and initiatives that foster new ideas, partnerships and working methods.

The initiative group of the Vygonoshchanskaya Fortress project received a prestigious European award in the category “Initiatives to Preserve the Memory of the First World War”. The award ceremony took place within the framework of the International Conference “Memory for the Future” held in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) on 13–14 November 2014.

- **Publish a number of methodological and popular science articles**, including: “Deliverables of the First Historical Competition for Youth” (with the works of the winners); “History and Culture in Rural Development” (with resource materials on working with oral history, examples of cultural and historical projects aimed at the development of rural regions); “Vygonoschi in the Great War” (including little-known facts and events of the First World War that took place in the area of the Oginski Canal); “In Search of History” (including demonstration of the experience in conducting oral historical research by state institutions, cultural institutions and public associations of the Republic of Belarus). All these materials, as well as other publications can be found on the website of DVV International Belarus in the Publications section (www.dvv-international.org.ua/ru/belarus/publikacii).



www.dvv-international.org.ua/ru/belarus/publikacii