



THE ROLE OF HISTORIC SITES IN SHAPING INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY

EL PAPEL DE LOS SITIOS HISTÓRICOS EN LA CONFIGURACIÓN DE LA EDUCACIÓN INTERCULTURAL: UN ESTUDIO DE CASO

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ABSTRACT

The image of the past in the consciousness of the population is a social construct that is constituted by a multitude of narratives derived from a variety of sources. Within the context of the school history curriculum, a particular emphasis is placed on introducing schoolchildren to physical locations that serve as sites of memory. The metaphor of 'places of memory' is an invaluable analytical tool for the study of social memory. The article examines the distinctive characteristics and consequences of the population's engagement with sites of memory during the educational process, with a particular focus on two case studies: the historical reserves of Sviyazhsk and Bolgar, which have been designated as UNESCO cultural heritage sites. The findings indicate that the experience of visiting places of memory referring to different regional, ethnic and confessional cultures during school education not only forms an image of the past, but also creates a strong conviction about the ancient traditions of peaceful intercultural education in the republic and the importance of their preservation in the present. The study explores the role of memory sites in shaping students' social and cultural perceptions, integrating historical experience into education. It highlights the significance of heritage sites in teaching history, fostering intercultural interaction, and regional identity.

Keywords:

School education, ethnicity, confession, places of memory, social memory, intercultural education.

RESUMEN

La imagen del pasado en la conciencia de la población es una construcción social constituida por una multitud de narraciones derivadas de diversas fuentes. En el contexto de los programas escolares de historia, se hace especial hincapié en presentar a los escolares lugares físicos que sirven de sitios de memoria. La metáfora de los «lugares de la memoria» es una herramienta analítica inestimable para el estudio de la memoria social. El artículo examina las características distintivas y las consecuencias del compromiso de la población con los lugares de memoria durante el proceso educativo, con especial atención a dos estudios de caso: las reservas históricas de Sviyazhsk y Bolgar, designadas patrimonio cultural de la UNESCO. Los resultados indican que la experiencia de visitar lugares de memoria referidos a diferentes culturas regionales, étnicas y confesionales durante la educación escolar no sólo forma una imagen del pasado, sino que también crea una fuerte convicción sobre las antiguas tradiciones de educación intercultural pacífica en la república y la importancia de su preservación en el presente.



El estudio explora el papel de los lugares de memoria en la formación de las percepciones sociales y culturales de los alumnos, integrando la experiencia histórica en la educación. Destaca la importancia de los sitios patrimoniales en la enseñanza de la historia, el fomento de la interacción intercultural y la identidad regional.

Palabras clave:

Educación escolar, etnia, confesión, lugares de memoria, memoria social, educación intercultural.

INTRODUCTION

The representation of the past, in one form or another, serves as a means of elucidating and legitimising the events of the present. The content of social memory serves as the foundation for the growth of tourism, with the concept of heritage preservation and the advancement of diverse forms of identity as key drivers (Booth, 2008). The common past, or the idea of it, serves as the foundation for the formation of national and regional identity, as well as the nuances of intercultural interaction. Frequently, the image of the past held by the general population is a social construct, shaped by a multitude of narratives drawn from a diverse array of sources (Assmann, 2008; Altanian, 2017).

These sources are often the media, the family and the individual's environment, but one of the most persistent and influential channels for shaping perceptions of the past is school education (Rothberg, 2010). The course is a comprehensive historical survey that encompasses all members of society, providing a detailed account of the human experience across time (Macgilchrist et al., 2015).

The content of history textbooks, the beliefs and freedom of teachers, and the activities organised to introduce students to the historical context are of significant importance within this process (Karimova et al., 2022; Lipen, 2022). In accordance with contemporary memory studies, historical monuments and, in general, physical artefacts of the past constitute a significant element in the formation of historical representations (Freeman et al., 2013; Nechukhaeva, 2021).

Memory is beginning to be considered within the framework of 'memory places' and 'memory landscape' (Winter, 2010). The concept of 'places of memory' is particularly indebted to the ideas of Nora (1989), whereby the objectification of memory reaches its limits. In the context of social transformations, the concept of the 'theatre of memory', which previously represented a comprehensive representation of the world, is superseded by an infinite number of individual 'places of memory'. The individual's sense of uncertainty about their identity gives rise to a

compulsion to engage in the act of remembering or recalling themselves. A member of society directs their attention towards artefacts of external reality, as these serve to prove the existence of the past and thus encourage remembrance. This interpretation excludes reference to other manifestations of memory that are not objectivised, and it also ignores the fact that memory is a malleable and changeable phenomenon. The past is presented as a series of definitive truths that have been fixed in social memory, which is expressed in objects and places. Nevertheless, despite the aforementioned limitations of P. Nora's concept, the very metaphor of 'places of memory' is highly useful. It is employed not only to refer to a physical monument that fixes the memory of the past, but also to analyse tangible and intangible cultural products (e.g. books, plays, regular events, etc.). In this text, the term 'place of memory' is employed in this manner.

The narrowing of the understanding of culture as a limited, specific social sphere in the analysis of memory is also reflected in the typology of cultural memory proposed by Etkind (2004), distinguishes between two categories of cultural memory: the 'soft' category, which encompasses books, discourses, and texts, and the 'hard' category, which includes monuments, museums, and other tangible forms of cultural heritage. Nevertheless, the concept of culture can be interpreted in a more expansive manner, extending beyond its conventional definition as a singular social institution (Katkova & Mekka, 2022; Ukolova, 2022; Alimova et al., 2023). Instead, it can be conceived as a comprehensive category encompassing all that is created by humanity. This includes not only tangible products of human endeavour but also the intricate web of socio-political structures that shape our societies, the multifaceted expressions of spirituality, the diverse spectrum of human experiences and the manifold forms of human activity.

In this context, the representations of the past, the methods of engaging with it, and the cultural practices associated with it, reflect the cultural norms and values of a particular society. Additionally, cultural memory encompasses various symbolic practices, including rituals, anniversaries, and other forms of commemoration (Withers, 1996).

In the field of regional history, which is the focus of this study, it is pertinent to consider the relationship between the formation of historical ideas through interaction with places of memory in the framework of school education. In order to illustrate this point, we will examine two key historical monuments of the multicultural region: the Bulgarian Historical and Architectural Museum-Reserve and the State Historical, Architectural and Art Museum Hail Island Sviyazhsk. The active parallel work on the creation and promotion of historical and cultural reserves of Sviyazhsk

and Bolgar is a distinctive feature of Tatarstan as a multi-cultural region. It serves as a demonstration of the practice of tolerance of the republic's leadership.

The reserve in Bulgaria represents the historical legacy of the ancestors of the modern Tatars, while the museum complex in Sviyazhsk commemorates the heritage of the Russian Tatars of Tatarstan. The significance of the Bulgarian period is emphasised, both in cultural, religious and tourist terms, and in relation to the political sphere. This is evidenced by references in the official portals of the republic's government and articles in regional media about the reserves. The concurrent development of Bolgar and Sviyazhsk is depicted as an organic continuation of the traditions of peaceful coexistence between the two religions (Islam and Orthodoxy), which have a historical foundation. This is a subject that is covered in the majority of additional educational excursions for schoolchildren as part of their curriculum.

It can be argued that Sviyazhsk Island-grad Sviyazhsk and Great Bolgar are the most significant historical sites in the Republic of Tatarstan, around which many practices of historical memory actualisation in the region are concentrated.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The article employs a multi-method approach, utilising materials from regional media publications devoted to the historical heritage of the Republic of Tatarstan. This is complemented by a series of expert interviews with specialists involved in the processes of constructing and transmitting images of the past of the Republic of Tatarstan. These include archaeologists, professional historians, museum workers, guides, local historians, representatives of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic, cultural workers and artists. In total, 36 individuals were interviewed. Additionally, the perspectives of museum visitors were also considered. This included visitors to the museum-reserves Hail Island Sviyazhsk and Velikiy Bolgar, with a total of 33 individuals participating in this aspect of the study. Hail Island Sviyazhsk and Velikiy Bolgar represent the most significant historical landmarks of the Republic of Tatarstan, and are the focal points of numerous practices pertaining to the actualisation of historical memory in the region.

The construction of historical narratives in the republic does not occur solely in relation to these two sites. Rather, these cases are saturated with actualisation practices (including those that are institutionalised) in culture, education, science, as well as in tourism and religious life. This allows us to study the strategies and mechanisms of social actors at different levels regarding the construction

of the image of the past and its actualisation in connection with ethnic identity and ethnic and cultural policy.

Furthermore, the study is based on the findings of a representative survey of the population of the Republic of Tatarstan (n=2510 individuals, multi-stage sampling, with quotas based on region of residence, gender, age, ethnic and confessional self-identification). The survey was conducted using a formalised questionnaire, with preliminary testing on a pilot group of respondents to ensure the reliability and validity of the instrument. The data from the survey was processed using a combination of coding and the creation of a unified data set, which was then subjected to statistical analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Intercultural education is an educational approach that seeks to promote inclusion and respect among people of different cultures. It is based on the recognition of cultural diversity as a value. In a globalized and multicultural world, intercultural education is important to prepare students to live and work in society.

Intercultural education is an educational approach based on the fact that we live in an increasingly diverse society, where different ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural groups coexist and interact with each other. For this reason, it is founded on values such as equality, freedom, respect, justice, democracy, and human dignity (Rivera Ríos et al., 2020).

The mission of intercultural education is none other than to help students discover their own identity, who they are, and where they come from, while simultaneously familiarizing themselves with the knowledge, experiences, and perspectives of other cultures present in the classroom through their peers.

All of this contributes to the creation of an inclusive and integrative educational environment.

Some key aspects of intercultural education include:

- Valuing diversity: Cultural diversity is recognized as an enriching resource for society.
- Intercultural dialogue: The exchange of ideas, knowledge, and experiences between people of different cultures is encouraged, while promoting mutual understanding and peaceful conflict resolution.
- Respect and tolerance: Respect for cultural differences and tolerance of differing opinions and practices are fostered.
- Incorporating cultural knowledge: Relevant aspects of the different cultures present in the community are

included in the educational curriculum with the intention of avoiding an exclusively Eurocentric perspective.

- Developing intercultural skills: Students are expected to acquire skills to interact effectively with people from different cultures, such as empathy, intercultural communication, and conflict resolution.

Examples of activities to promote interculturality in the classroom

Today, many schools and institutes have ceased to be institutions dedicated solely to imparting academic knowledge and are now more active in participating in society. To this end, they have chosen to base their students' education on basic values and the principles of intercultural education, so that it is useful both inside and outside the classroom.

This educational model aims to make children and young people see that they live in a culturally plural society; to eliminate prejudices and stereotypes from their perceptions; to instill values such as respect, tolerance, and empathy; and to encourage them to understand the causes of phenomena such as migration and discrimination, among other concepts.

While the school integration policies implemented by educational centers and the introduction of intercultural content in the teaching units of different subjects are a good starting point, the truth is that they are not enough. These actions remain within a very theoretical, very conceptual framework. It's necessary to educate students beyond the cognitive level, but also at the moral, social, and emotional levels.

And how? Well, by organizing more practical, more engaging, and more realistic activities, so that students become aware that a situation of inequality and/or discrimination can affect anyone, whether in their immediate surroundings or even themselves, at any time. These are not isolated incidents and are not always due to cultural reasons (ethnic origin, religion, language, etc.). They can also be due to other issues such as social class, disability, gender, or sexual identity.

Some examples of these types of activities to promote intercultural education are:

- Group dynamics.
- Role-playing techniques.
- Communication and active listening exercises.
- Framing situations that require conflict resolution.
- Debates and moral dilemmas.

It is important that this approach to inclusive education be a long-term process and not just actions or events that occur occasionally.

In the context of social memory construction and transmission, the concept of memory channels provides a useful framework for understanding both the methods of transmission and the extent to which they are institutionalized (Altanian, 2017). The transmission of representations of the past can occur through a variety of channels, including education, media, events, and cultural elements, among others. The specific objectives of different channels of transmission vary. For example, J. Olick posits that both museums and politicians' speeches serve as conduits for the transmission of memory, yet they exert disparate influences and construct divergent representations of the past. The museum is not merely a physical space; it is also a social construct, comprising a relationship between the institution, the content, and the visitor (Olick, 2009).

Concurrently, the means and channels of transmission are a type of relation, not static and isolated structures. Additionally, J. Olick introduces the categories of genres and profiles of the recall process. These categories are also related to the significance of the context and situation of the reproduction of social memory, thereby emphasizing once again that the formation of representations of the past is a continuous process, influenced by numerous factors and characteristic of many fields (Olick & Robbins, 1998).

The Kazan survey indicates that one of the most significant sources of historical perceptions is travelling to historical sites. Therefore, it is worthwhile to consider separately such a part of the memory policy of the Bulgar heritage of Tatarstan as reference to physical evidence of the antiquity and significance of the Bulgar heritage of Tatarstan. The most common strategy is in the spheres of tourism and school education. Consequently, the representations and perceptions of the past presented on the territory of a monument are regarded as ancient and authentic, despite the fact that the academic community holds a different view: "those objects that are now being restored ... they are all from an earlier period. There's nothing left from the thirteenth century, except maybe tombstones. And everything else is underground. But at the moment the reserve is still perceived as a heritage of the 13th century" (historian, university teacher, Tatar).

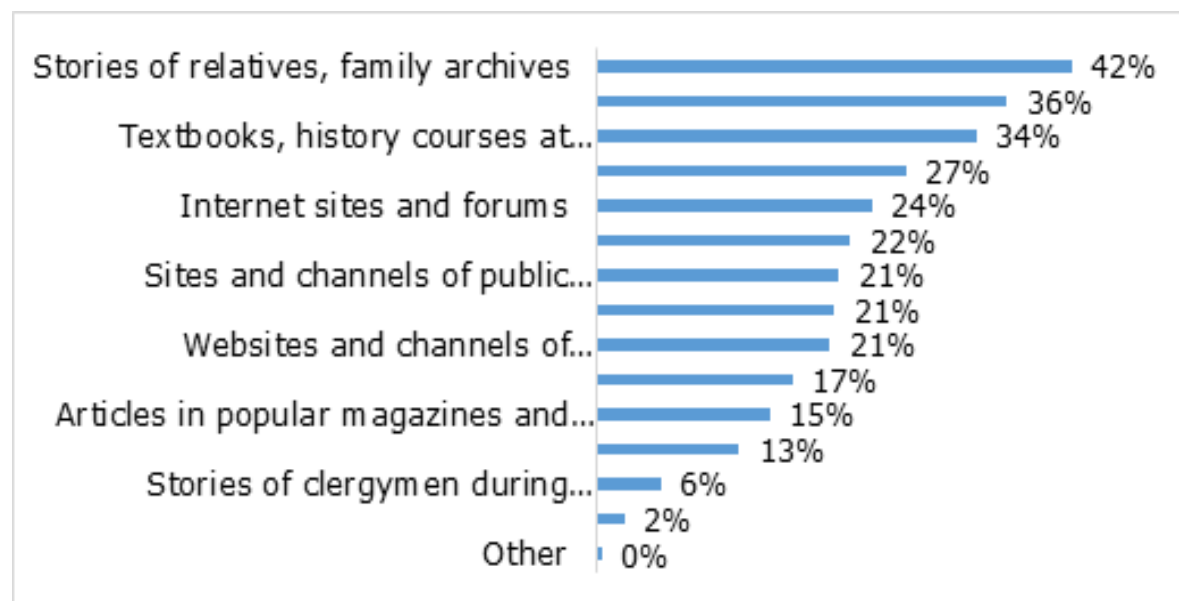
As the experts interviewed for this study note, for school-children, as the intended audience of memory policy, the presence of physical objects that can be seen and touched plays an important role in enhancing the emotional impact of the visit. The Bolgar archaeological monument appears to serve as a compensatory element in the absence of ancient monuments in Kazan, the designated

tourist centre of Tatarstan: there is something to show and tell children: there is architecture there, nowhere else: neither in Tatarstan, nor in Kazan, medieval antiquity (guide, a Tatar).

Physical objects - monuments and artefacts - are what the image of the region's past and tourist interest in it is built around: 'To feel history, even a shop window, is much more interesting than reading a book' (museum researcher, Russian). However, this technique also works within the framework of transmitting images of the republic's past through education, schoolchildren of the republic are more often organised to visit Bulgar monuments: 'To see something real for any person is more interesting. And just a story, he will just say, I'll open a book' (history teacher, Tatar).

The data of the mass survey of the republic's residents confirm that travelling to historical places is one of the most important sources of knowledge about the history of the region (Figure 1).

Fig. 1: Sources of knowledge about the history of the region (multiple-choice question)



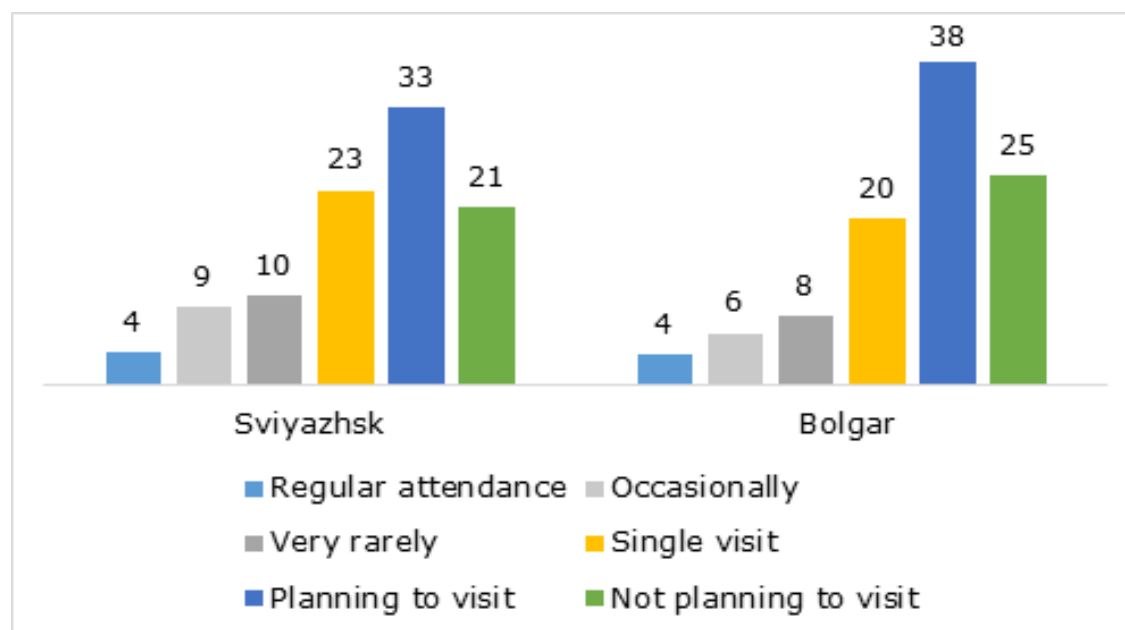
Fuente: Elaboración de autores

Accordingly, the most prevalent source of information regarding the history of the region is the personal narratives of individuals with whom the respondents are acquainted (42% of survey participants). Nevertheless, a significant proportion of respondents (36%) also identified visits to historical locations, which could be regarded as sites of memory, as a key source of information. It is crucial to establish a clear correlation between the perceived significance of places of memory as a source of knowledge about regional history and a general interest in the region's past. The average figure for the sample is that places of memory are an important source of information for 36% of respondents. However, for those who are interested in the history of the republic, places of memory are a more popular source of information about the past, with an average of 45% of respondents indicating this. Conversely, no such correlation is observed with regard to other sources of information about the past.

In response to the question of what factors may contribute to heightened interest in the history of the region, a quarter of respondents selected the option "A lot of interesting monuments, museums, etc."

The data obtained from the questionnaires and interviews conducted on a larger scale also corroborate the assertion that the Bolgar and Sviyazhsk monuments serve as significant sites for the formation of collective memory and the cultivation of interest in regional history. Consequently, 46% of Tatarstan residents have visited the island-city of Sviyazhsk at least once, while a further 33% have not yet visited the monument but intend to do so. With regard to the Bulgarian Historical and Architectural Museum-Reserve, 37% of respondents have visited it at least once, while a further 38% have not yet visited but intend to do so (Figure 2).

Fig. 2: Experience of visiting memory sites at the regional level (as a percentage of the total number of respondents).



Fuente: Elaboración de autores

Concurrently, during the previous visit, 14-16% of respondents visited these locations of memory as part of their academic studies with their respective school classes. For younger respondents (those under the age of 25), this proportion is notably higher, accounting for 30% of visits. Collectively, the interview data illustrate that visiting locations of memory during one's educational pursuits, particularly during the school-age years, represents a significant aspect of the residents of the Republic's lived experiences: at the age of 10, I probably learnt about it because we were taken on excursions at school (female, 21 years old).

Secondly, visiting places of memory is somewhat opposed to the 'boring' study of the history of the region in the school classroom: 'You are crammed with this history of Tatarstan almost from kindergarten. It's a question of whether you like the subject or not. But a trip is always interesting and memorable' (male, 25 years old).

The official status of monuments is also important for respondents: 'Well, in general, Sviyazhsk and Bolgary are among the most significant cultural and historical sights of Tatarstan. If I'm not mistaken, both cities were included in the UNESCO World Heritage List' (female, 26 years old).

The experience of visiting places of memory that represent various regional, ethnic, and confessional cultures during one's schooling not only shapes one's understanding of the past but also fosters a long-lasting belief in the enduring traditions of peaceful intercultural coexistence in the country and the significance of preserving these traditions in the present.

For example, within school education, the Bulgarian past is also used as a source of ideas about tolerance and tolerance of differences, which are worthy of being equalled: 'Now one of them says to another "narrow-eyed". I explain: do you know where such facial types come from? Do you realise that there was assimilation? Here are the borders of the Golden Horde in 1243 and the territory of Volga Bulgaria. They must understand all this. And the one who called names, then he himself says - you are exactly the same, we are all like that here. I always emphasise this: Volga Bulgaria is our origins' (teacher, Tatar).

It is noteworthy that 82% of respondents concur that a visit to Bolgar and Sviyazhsk should be incorporated into the weekend activities schedule for schoolchildren and students in Tatarstan.

It is therefore evident that the existence of tangible artefacts which encapsulate the memories of the past, even if they are merely reconstructions, is indispensable for the portrayal of historical accounts concerning the interconnection between historical heritage and contemporary Tatarstan. At the same time, physical places of memory are the basis for

a special, emotion-filled perception: on the spot a person begins to perceive differently (tour guide, Tatar).

It can be argued that the creation of places of memory, through which the past is reconstructed, constitutes a significant aspect of memory politics, the study of a region's history and the formation of local identity.

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CONCLUSIONS

It is noteworthy that the primary sources of information about the past are the channels whose content is shaped by memory policy. These are the institutionalized channels that form the image of the past in cultural memory, including education, museums, mass media, and tourist memory sites. This indicates that memory policy strategies designed to construct the content of the region's cultural memory have a significant reach. The distribution of responses indicates that eight out of the twelve types of information sources were mentioned by at least a fifth of respondents as sources of their own representations of the past. This suggests that the majority of respondents selected four or five source options. The significance of multiple channels in shaping historical representations suggests that social memory can be conceptualized as a domain where individuals are simultaneously exposed to diverse strategies of memory politics through various channels.

The recollection and construction of the past are shaped in a manner that aligns with the contemporary needs of the group in a given situation. This process may also be referred to as the actualization of the past (Brubaker, 2009). The politics of memory, which encompasses the construction of specific historical representations, serves to shape and perpetuate perceptions of the boundaries and distinctive characteristics of particular ethnic groups and the region as a whole. The most significant source of such work with the past is school education.

The concept of social memory and its constituent elements are not inherently objective in their intrinsic form. However, they become objectified when they are represented as 'places of memory', as texts, as institutions and practices, and in other forms at the cultural and communicative levels. The politics of memory is shaped by social memory, yet it also generates and perpetuates it, giving form to both enduring and evolving representations of the past in relation to the prevailing social context (through the cultural level of memory to a greater extent).

In the context of social memory, the significance and worth of an object are not primarily determined by the historical facts associated with it, but rather by the manner in which these facts are interpreted. The construction of a new object and the bestowal upon it of symbolic content associated with the 'ancient' and 'primordial' can result in the creation of a symbolic construct that will effectively 'work' in accordance with the objectives of a specific memory policy strategy. Places of memory, particularly physical objects that represent the past, serve as a potent instrument for substantiating the veracity of any account of the past and for shaping attitudes towards regional identity in the present. Consequently, the experience of visiting places of memory that represent diverse regional ethnic and confessional cultures during one's education not only fosters an understanding of the past but also instills a profound belief in the enduring traditions of harmonious intercultural coexistence within the republic and the vital necessity of them.

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