

## YOUNG HISTORIAN SCHOOL ORGANIZED BY THE CENTER OF SOCIAL AND HUMANISTIC INFORMATICS AT BALTIC FEDERAL UNIVERSITY

*Elena V. Baranova, Angelina V. Saenko*

Baltic Federal University named after I. KANT, Kaliningrad, Russia  
e-mail: EBaranova@kantiana.ru, angelinasenko08@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *Young Historian School conducted on the basis of the Baltic Federal University named after I. Kant (Kaliningrad) delivers subject for this article. The main goal of the event was acquaintance with historian's skills, research stages, historical sources, and new information methods of humanitarian knowledge, as well as studying ways of presentation of historical knowledge in public space. The School programme included three areas: oral, visual and public history. All these subjects were interconnected with each other, and were supposed to show the students what a historical source is, and how one can work with it in the modern digital space. Participants of the School were 30 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grade schoolchildren. Initially positioned as an educational platform for future students of history, the School went beyond these limits, becoming a modern event in the digital humanities.*

**Keywords:** *Digital Humanities, interdisciplinary research, public history, visual history, school education.*

The digital turn in humanities that occurred in recent decades was a response to technological challenges that transform the modern information society. New approaches and methods developed in subject-oriented information technologies, and recently institutionalized as Digital Humanities, radically expand the scope of competences of the humanities specialist. According to recent studies, this branch of knowledge remains largely elitist, as it requires the involvement of rare interdisciplinary specialists, modern laboratory equipment and support of the corresponding research infrastructure for the implementation of large-scale projects. But, on the other hand, educational institutions receive serious competitive advantages, primarily reputational ones, both at the regional and international levels. After all, experts in the field of digital humanities are not only in great demand by science and media, but also realize their scientific and creative potential primarily within public projects. In addition, the novelty of the subject provides the opportunity to quickly develop compatible curricula, opening up new prospects for integration of Russian and European educational systems in the humanities.

The Center for Social and Humanistic Informatics was formed by the order of the Rector of the Baltic Federal University No. 752 of August 11, 2014. The basic structure, which included the center, was the Institute of Humanities. The center's activities are diversified and interdisciplinary in nature. One of the tasks of the Center is the dissemination and support of computer literacy, the dissemination of digital skills, stimulating the study and popularization of the tools, necessary for interdisciplinary research. The main target audience in the educational projects of the Center was initially the scientific staff and teachers of higher education institutions. So, the Center implements the programmes of advanced training in the subjects "Information technologies in the humanities", "Content analysis of historical texts", "Geoinformation systems in humanities and social sciences".

During the expansion of the Center's contacts, the circle of people interested in educational projects has expanded. First of all, Kaliningrad schools became connected to a number of projects ("People's Album" - digital family photo archive, "Kaliningrad truth" - base of digitized regional press). At the same time, the idea of Young Historian School was originated — an educational platform with the main purpose to communicate historian's skills, and research stages, how to work with historical sources and use modern information technologies, and to explore ways of presenting historical knowledge to the public.

The School programme included three areas: oral, visual and public history. All these subjects were interconnected with each other, and were supposed to show the students what a historical source is, and how one can work with it in the modern digital space. Participants of the School were 30 7th-9th grade schoolchildren.

Studies were built on the basis of classical lecture classes, master classes from leading specialists, as well as interactive classes and excursions. It is worth noting, that the Young Historian School was originally aimed at communicating interdisciplinary approaches to historical knowledge. So, the lecture block in addition to history teachers was conducted by sociologists and culture experts. The main theme for all research groups was the history of Kaliningrad in the Soviet era. The topic was addressed in three areas, in which students were able to get acquainted with digital projects implemented at the Baltic Federal University, named after I. Kant.

The first area was called "Oral History". Oral history is a social technology of studying the history of a society and a particular person through the lens of a biographical story (conversation), deliberately recorded by the interested person and the listener with the help of technical means. Oral history has been disciplined, has gained fame and scope in the second half of the twentieth century [1]. Within the framework of this area, schoolchildren studied the archive of the memories of the first settlers, stored in a digitized form in the State Archives of the Kaliningrad region. They also got acquainted with the work of the department dealing with the translation of archive files into a "digit". For students, a practical lesson was held in the Media Center of the BFU named after I. Kant, where they saw the creation of such media projects as "Living Literature", "Science in a Minute", "Live Phraseology", etc.

Before an independent practical part of the work, the students listened to a lecture on the basics of interviewing.

As part of the practical work, children were given the task to develop a matrix of questions for interviewing relatives on the topic "History of Kaliningrad in the Soviet era". The practical task caused a different reaction, on the one hand, the process of interviewing close people seemed very interesting to the students, they noted that the conversation provided new knowledge not only about the history of the region, but also unknown details of family history. On the other hand, the students noted frequent inaccuracies in the information reported, secrecy in answering certain questions. In general, the task received a positive evaluation, it was on the basis of summary interviews that the schoolchildren developed the project "Soviet Kaliningrad through the eyes of its residents".

The second group of the "Visual History" School was interconnected with the project CSGI "People's Album". Starting in 2016, the Center for Social and Humanistic Informatics is implementing a project, aimed at collecting and digitizing photographs of Soviet everyday life from family and public archives of residents of the Kaliningrad region. Currently, the archive contains about 1500 photos. For attribution of each picture, a description order was developed, including: the name, the names of the persons depicted in the photo, the place (usually up to the street), and the attribution.

During group work, students received theoretical and practical knowledge of visual sources and their significance in studying history. In the Art Gallery of Kaliningrad region they were able to see pictures of the Soviet period and study the prevailing subjects. The practical task included two stages. At first one, students worked with postcards of the Kaliningrad region in the 1950s-1980s. Based on the collection, a database was developed. It contains, on the one hand, the characteristics given on the reverse side of the postcard: circulation, publishing house, commentary (description of the postcard), lithography (censorship), year of publication, price. But the most interesting are the images, printed on the obverse side (object, purpose, availability of people, objects of municipal services). The next task for children was to work with the "People's Album": searching for photos from family archives, their attribution, digitization, downloading to the project site. Methods of "visual turning", which were mastered by a group of schoolchildren, allow to consider the official city photo not as a document, reflecting a real situation, but as means of reproducing the ideal reality. Such images were a powerful instrument of forming expectations, demonstrating the desired state of things, supporting local identity. The analysis of the images and plots of the family photo archives and specific postcards of the city, the restoration of certain areas of which lasted more than ten years, enabled the students to get a deep insight into the formation of the Soviet cultural space in the Kaliningrad region.

The third group worked in the area of "Public History". Public or popular history is a relatively new field of historical knowledge. The object of public history lies in the public space. Historical knowledge, being necessary for the existence of

society, inevitably attracts the interest of wide sections of the population. However, often, a natural interest, combined with a non-professional approach, generates many falsifications and myths. Faced with this problem, the community of historians responded with the emergence of a new field – that of public history. The National Council for Public History of the United States (NCPH) defines the concept of public history as "Public history is a movement, methodology, and approach that promotes the collaborative study and practice of history; its practitioners embrace a mission to make their special insights accessible and useful to the public "[2].

This largely explains the choice of this subject for communicating to the target group. The accessible language of popular history makes it possible for secondary school students to easily learn material, the appeal of practitioners to a wide audience attracts the interest of students, who are accustomed to constantly change the focus of their attention, and a large number of ways to interact with the audience opens up the opportunity to master the skills of presenting information.

Within the framework of this area, the students got acquainted with various ways of transforming scientific practices into an accessible form like historical reconstruction, info graphics and excursion activities. The first practical issue was acquaintance with the historical reconstruction. Reconstructing the image of the past (costumes, weapons, household items), reenactors constantly turn to historical sources as means of obtaining information about lost objects. Acquaintance with the basics of historical reconstruction took place in two forms — a lecture from a historical reconstruction participant and an excursion to the Weapons Museum of the Kaliningrad branch of the St. Petersburg University of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Within the Public History block, students have mastered the basics of historical infographics. Being able to attract more attention than text, infographics make it possible to compactly organize large amounts of information. For the students, the topic "Kaliningrad and space" was chosen, which each group realized in its own concept of infographics. Through a practical task of creating infographics, schoolchildren mastered the stages of writing research work. After choosing the topic, the students turned to the viewing of sources and literature, at the same time, getting acquainted with the principles of work in the scientific library. From the general array of data, each group selected for its work several of the most significant facts. The task was assigned to the students: the selected fact should be brief (easily perceived by the viewer) and capacious (reflect the essential features of the selected object). Thus, the student acquires and trains the skills of working with the text, reveals the main information, presents the information in a convenient and understandable form. The second stage of the work consisted in the development of software for creating infographics.

One of the forms of interaction with the public is a direct story about the history - an excursion. The participants of the "Popular History" direction were tasked with developing a touristic route and make a tour. The choice of the topic was connected with the development of infographics, the excursion was called "Follow the

astronauts". The work consisted both of revealing information about the object, and in determining the most interesting facts, planning the story to preserve the attention of listeners. The last "station" in the excursion was a visit to the Cosmonautics Museum in Lyceum No. 23, where cosmonaut Y.V. Romanenko studied.

The result of the work of all three groups was the presentation of projects at the youth conference of schoolchildren and students, dedicated to the anniversary of the BFU. To estimate the efficiency of the Young Historian School, an online questionnaire was developed, and posted on the web site anketolog.ru [3]. The majority of respondents highly valued the organization of the School (excellent - 63%, good - 36%, bad - 0%). See Table 1.

*Table 1. The results of the answers to the question: "Evaluate the organization of the Young Historian School"*

<b>Response alternatives</b>	<b>Number of answers</b>	<b>Perce nts</b>
Excellent. I could always find information about what was happening	7	63,64 %
Good. Sometimes I did not have enough information, but all in all I could get it	4	36,36 %
Bad. I did not understand what was happening and there was no way to find out	0	0,00%

When assessing the educational program, the majority (72%) noted, that they easily mastered the new information, 60% expressed confidence, that they would apply the acquired knowledge and skills acquired at the School, and 30% said probably.

In a separate block of questions, respondents were asked to rate the educational and excursion programs from 1 to 10. More than half of the respondents (55%) put the highest score to educational part. The excursion program was also valued quite high (45% gave 9 points), however 3 out of 11 respondents rated the excursion program quite low - 3 points. This reflects the need for a more dynamic programme for schoolchildren.

In the questionnaire, two open-ended questions. To the question: "What negative experience did you make?" The overwhelming majority answered, that they did not. The answers to the question "What would you improve?" were interesting. So, two people wanted to intensify the excursion program, one student expressed a desire to increase the amount of practical hours, and another - to start classes later.

Summing up, it can be concluded that there is a need to increase the time for practical exercises, to expand the excursion program and to draw the attention of students to the ways and possibilities of applying the skills acquired in the school. It should be noted, that the majority of students (89%) would like to take part in such a work next year.

Speaking about the practical results of the School, it is worth noting the extreme attention of educational institutions to events of this kind, where students not

only get acquainted with the forms of the educational process in a higher scientific institution, but also get practical skills in working with new information technologies.

Initially positioned as an event for prospective history students, the School went beyond these limits, becoming a platform for mastering techniques and developing projects in the field of digital humanities. The school has become an event that putted together different units of the the Humanities Institute (Center for Social and Humanistic Informatics, Media Center, Sociological Laboratory for Analysis, Modeling and Forecasting of Risks) as well as city's educational and cultural institutions (State Archives of the Kaliningrad region, Art Gallery, Museum of Astronautics, Museum of weapons of the Kaliningrad branch of the St. Petersburg University of the Ministry of Internal Affairs). The success of the project, the interest from the side of University leaders and schools encourage us to make such projects on a regular basis.

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