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## STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TO AND THOUGHTS ON NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

**Abstract:** *A nation's cultural and natural heritage is the wealth of the people it belongs to and one of the key elements for the creation of national identity and affirmation in the process of globalization. The aim of our study was to examine the attitudes, knowledge and thoughts of primary and secondary school students related to natural and cultural heritage. A total of 322 respondents from primary and secondary schools in Split-Dalmatia County, Šibenik-Knin County, and Zagreb County participated in the research. Our results indicate that secondary school students show better knowledge of cultural and natural heritage of their homeland and a higher degree of interest in learning about these contents than students in the final grades of primary school. Moreover, secondary school students more than primary school students recognize the value of attaching importance to these topics within the work of educational institutions and in various school subjects. In addition, secondary school students expressed a greater awareness of the importance of preserving cultural heritage and its connection with the development of the economy and the preservation of national identity compared to primary school students. No differences were found among students in terms of the impact of cultural heritage on encouraging their creativity, but it was shown that more frequent visits to archaeological institutions were associated with a higher interest in heritage-related content.*

**Keywords:** *identity, knowledge of heritage, protection*

### INTRODUCTION

The Croatian area is rich in diverse cultural heritage. In a multicultural world, cultural legacy – natural and cultural heritage can make the foundation of society's progress. The sustainable future of the people depends on the

attitudes of the young generations and their attitude and responsibility toward the cultural heritage they acquire through education.

The concept of cultural and natural heritage is multidimensional with different definitions trying to clarify it. The concept itself is being elaborated in many areas of scientific disciplines such as cultural anthropology, philosophy, political science, sociology and pedagogy. One of the definitions of heritage says the following: "Cultural heritage consists of: cultural landscape, historical units, individual buildings and movable heritage. We recognize its values as: age, historical, cultural and emotional values. The authenticity of historical structures is one of the fundamental values" (Maroević, 2001, p. 235). In addition to cultural heritage, Croatia is also proud of its natural heritage. It is emphasized that "heritage, in addition to cultural heritage, includes also natural heritage which according to the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage denotes natural features consisting of biological, geological and physical-geographical formations that are of outstanding global value from the standpoint of science, protection and the preservation of nature and natural beauty" (Kostović, 2015, p. 445) .

In addition to reflections on cultural heritage, the scientific literature introduces the notion of cultural goods: "Cultural goods are movable and immovable things of artistic, historical, paleontological, archaeological, anthropological and scientific significance; archaeological sites and archaeological zones, landscapes and their parts that testify to the human presence in space, and have artistic, historical and anthropological value; intangible forms and phenomena of human spiritual creation in the past, as well as documentation and bibliographic heritage and buildings, i.e. spaces in which cultural goods and documentation about them are permanently stored or exhibited" (Boljanović, 2011, p. 54). Although having similar meanings regarding the subject they describe, the terms cultural heritage and cultural good are not the same. Namely, cultural heritage refers to the social community and contributes to the common good, thus the term has a broader meaning. Cultural good conceptually determines tangible and intangible forms of property such as buildings, paintings, writings that affect identity, understanding and respect for the culture that produced the cultural good (Vuković, 2011).

Thus, heritage is associated with natural and cultural, spiritual and material goods in the broad context of giving meaning to the term itself. Heritage can be local, national, and sometimes due to its special meaning it can represent the heritage of all mankind. (Šošić, 2014) points out that the concept of heritage is layered and diverse and therefore its definition is associated with difficulties, so it is concluded that the concept of heritage is dynamic and that we can always consider it in the light of new meanings and values.

In the scientific literature, cultural heritage is discussed in different contexts about different types of heritage, such as social or economic, but also about

heritage as an important driver of social development and the possibilities of heritage in education and creative development of the individual in contact with heritage. Many authors emphasize the importance of heritage as a cultural common good of the local community, society and humanity and emphasize the importance of protecting cultural heritage (Boljanović, 2011; Cifrić, 2010; Cifrić and Trako Poljak, 2014; Maroević, 2001; Živković, 1996), while other authors they emphasize the development of identity through heritage values. Fulcher and Scott, 2011; Georgievski and Žoglev, 2014; Mendras, 2004; Reeves and Plets 2016; Vuković, 2011 connect heritage with the collective memory of the community, which is crucial for the preservation of the community.

In the field of education, cultural heritage is increasingly discussed in speech and writing, and the importance of preserving cultural heritage in fostering an understanding of the value of sustainable development is often emphasized in education. In educational practice, heritage-related contents have the purpose of promoting education for sustainable development (Čukelj, 2009). Childhood experiences play an important role in shaping an individual's attitudes, values and behaviors toward the environment (Kostović Vranješ and Jukić, 2011), making it important to spark student interest in the environment during their education. Here, it is vital to pay attention to what is valuable in that environment, and what actually represents the natural and cultural heritage of the people. In this spirit, it is emphasized that “in order to preserve the national heritage effectively, it is necessary to start with education for sustainable development from an early age and continuously implement it at all levels of formal education” (Kostović, 2015, p. 439). In education, natural and cultural heritage is especially interesting in the field of art pedagogy, where certain authors in the contact of students with heritage emphasize the development of students' creative potential (Brajčić and Kuščević, 2008; Kuščević, 2007; Kuščević, 2015; Pivac, 2016).

The cultural identity of Croatia, due to its specific history and geography, is characterized by a distinct regional diversity of natural and cultural heritage with different layers of natural and cultural heritage. In formal education it is thus necessary to provide interdisciplinary teaching about heritage linking different subjects. In this way, students build an image of Croatia's natural and cultural heritage that is important for economic progress, the development of student identity and awareness of the importance of preserving heritage as an important resource for the future. The scientific literature today also discusses the term of heritage literacy (Babić et al. , 2019). We see heritage literacy as an important type of literacy needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the education of children and youth, therefore we carried out this research to find out the attitudes and thoughts of students on this topic.

The aim of the research was to examine students' attitudes and thoughts about cultural heritage, i.e. with this research we want to explore whether

students are familiar with their heritage, whether they understand the value of heritage in economic development and identity development and whether they show interest in learning about heritage. Furthermore, with this paper we want to find out how education affects knowledge and attitudes about heritage, whether students know the importance of heritage preservation and whether heritage affects students' creative development.

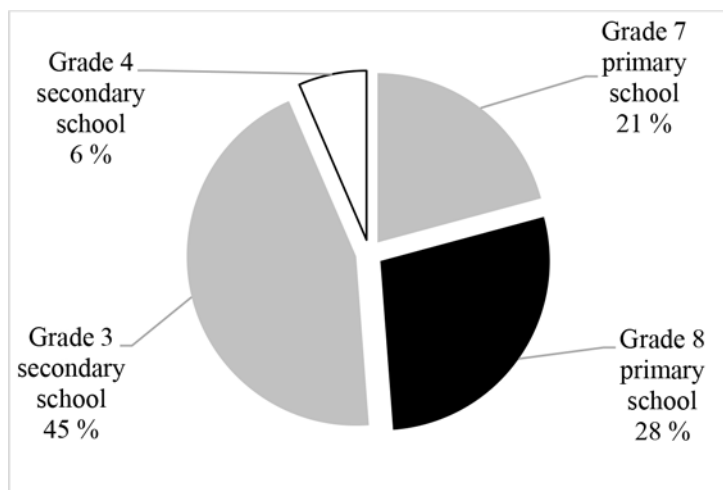
In this research, we asked the following research questions:

- Are students familiar with the heritage of their homeland?
- Do they show interest and motivation for learning about the contents related to cultural heritage?
- In the framework of educational work, is sufficient attention paid to the contents related to cultural heritage and in which subjects, and do students understand that this is important?
- Are students aware of the importance of preserving cultural heritage?
- Are they aware of the connection between economic development and the preservation and presentation of cultural heritage?
- Are students aware of the importance of cultural heritage in preserving the nation's identity?
- Does the contact with cultural heritage encourage students' creativity?
- Does visiting museums, galleries and archeological sites affect students' interest in knowing and experiencing heritage?

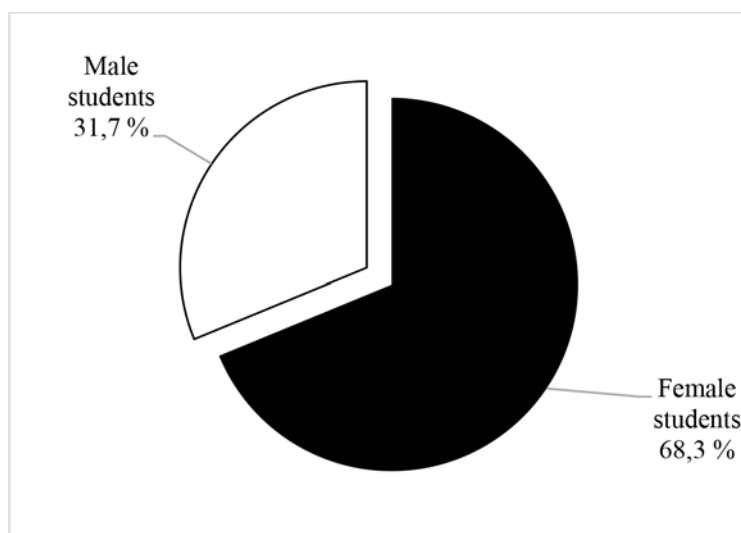
## **METHODOLOGY**

### **SAMPLE DESCRIPTION**

The study was conducted on a total of 322 female and male students in final grades of primary and secondary schools. The survey involved 49% female and male students attending primary school and 51% female and male students attending secondary school. In Graph 1 we can see the percentage showing representation of each grade while Graph 2 shows the percentage related to representation by gender.



**Graph 1.** Respondents by grade



**Graph 2.** Respondents by gender

## RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS AND RESEARCH PROCEDURE

To collect the data needed for the research, a survey questionnaire was created. In the first part, consisting of five questions, general descriptive data on participants (grade and gender) were collected. Also, we analyzed students' affinity for the contents related to cultural and natural heritage and exposure to information about them. The second part of the questionnaire consists of a total of 31 statements, with answers offered on a five-point Likert-type scale.

The task of the respondents was to express their degree of agreement with each statement by choosing one of the following options: 1 – I do not agree at all, 2 – I do not agree, 3 – I do not agree or disagree, 4 – I agree, 5 – I completely agree.

The items used were chosen due to the fact that they represent statements that are often related to heritage and can provide best answers to research questions. In order to avoid inconsistency in answering and to ensure a clear understanding of the questionnaire items, at the very beginning of the questionnaire we provided a definition of cultural and natural heritage: "Heritage is all natural and created cultural material and spiritual goods in a certain area, which certain community (society) inherits and has at its disposal. Heritage is a collective good that belongs (past, present and future) to us as much as we belong to it. Heritage is a historical and dynamic category and as such it is cumulative, therefore the heirs are left with what society assesses as valuable" (Cifrić, 2014, p. 11).

The questionnaire was distributed to primary and secondary school students in the Split-Dalmatia County, Šibenik-Knin County, and Zagreb County with the help of teachers and psychologists employed in the schools where the research was conducted. A small number of questionnaires were collected online, using Google forms, due to Covid-19 pandemic-induced schools closure. Participation was voluntary, and all participants were happy to participate in the research.

## DATA PROCESSING METHODS

The collected data were processed in the program IBM SPSS Statistics v.27. Within the data analysis and processing, frequencies ( $N$ ), arithmetic means ( $M$ ), and standard deviations ( $SD$ ) of individual items were calculated. T-tests were used to compare the average responses of primary and secondary school students, while the Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was used to examine the correlation of individual variables.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to develop awareness of the importance of cultural heritage, it is necessary to get to know it first at the local level, and then at the national level. By knowing the cultural and natural heritage of their homeland/region and Croatia as their country, students acquire basic knowledge about the environment in which they live, thus developing awareness of the importance of preserving heritage-related content that is a treasure of the people. Knowledge of Croatia's cultural and natural heritage and awareness of the importance of its protection should be an important part of school curricula in order for students to become interested in heritage and its contents and to raise their awareness of the importance of preserving heritage for the future.

As part of the research of students' attitudes and knowledge about cultural heritage, we were interested in whether students are familiar with the heritage of their homeland. To answer this research question, we analyzed the answers to the five questions shown in Table 1. The students' task was to express their agreement with an individual statement on a scale from 1 (I completely disagree) to 5 (I completely agree). Due to the formulation of the statements, it was necessary to inversely encode two items, which are written in the table in *italic*.

The average score at the level of the entire sample was  $M = 3.24$  ( $SD = 0.445$ ), which would mean that students attending both primary and secondary schools assess their knowledge of the contents related to natural and cultural heritage as average. Yet, there was a statistically significant difference between primary and secondary school students, since secondary school students gave higher answers on average ( $t = 3,657$ ;  $p < .001$ ). A higher result (arithmetic mean) in the table indicates more positive attitudes and thoughts about cultural heritage.

**Table 1.** Average results of self-assessments of primary ( $N = 157$ ) and secondary ( $N = 165$ ) school students of their knowledge of cultural and natural heritage

statements	primary school		secondary school	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I am very well familiar with the cultural and natural heritage of Croatia.	2.94	1.004	3.17	0.801
Cultural and natural heritage is not interesting to me, but I know the basic heritage-related contents.	3.06	1.205	3.12	1.139
I am familiar only with some contents related to the cultural and natural heritage of Croatia.	2.81	1.051	2.87	1.001
I am familiar only with cultural and natural heritage of Split-Dalmatia County.	3.35	1.114	3.66	1.015
I am more familiar with the cultural and natural heritage of Split-Dalmatia County than heritage of other parts of Croatia.	3.61	1.191	3.84	1.139
<b>In total</b>	3.15	0.429	3.33	0.444

*Legend.* *M* = arithmetic mean; *SD* = standard deviation

This is especially noticeable in the difference of average answers to the statement *I am familiar only with cultural and natural heritage of Split-Dalmatia County* ( $t = 2.614$ ;  $p = .009$ ), which indicates that secondary school students are

still more familiar with the heritage of other regions of the Republic of Croatia than primary school students, who know their homeland/region better. It is also interesting to note that a statistically significant difference is observed between secondary school and primary school students, but also male and female students, in average agreement with the statement *I am very well familiar with the cultural and natural heritage of Croatia*. Namely, it seems that secondary school students have a better opinion about their knowledge of cultural and natural heritage ( $t = 2.311$ ;  $p = .021$ ) than students in the final grades of primary school. The same trend is observed in gender differences, as male students on average expressed more agreement with the above statement than female students ( $t = -2.343$ ;  $p = .020$ ).

The obtained result is logical and expected in the wake of the didactic principle: from the known to the unknown, from closer to further. Accordingly, students first acquire the knowledge of the cultural and natural heritage of their homeland/region, and then gradually get to know the cultural and natural heritage of the homeland micro-region and the cultural heritage of their country (De Zan, 2005). We can conclude that older students through curricula of different subjects could, logically, through several years of education better acquire the knowledge related to heritage.

Another question that interested us in this research was whether students show interest and motivation for learning about the content related to cultural heritage. We received an explanation by analyzing the average answer to the question *To what extent are you interested in learning about the content related to cultural and natural heritage?*, where the task of the participants was to choose one of the five options offered on a Likert-type scale (1 – I am not interested at all; 5 – I am very interested). On average, students in this study express a moderate degree of interest in the cultural and natural heritage of Croatia ( $M = 3.19$ ;  $SD = 1.020$ ), with secondary school students still showing slightly higher interest than primary school students (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Average results of the level of interest of primary (N = 157) and secondary (N = 165) school students for the content related to cultural and natural heritage

statements	primary school		secondary school	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
To what extent are you interested in learning about the content related to cultural and natural heritage?	2.99	1.115	3.39	0.881
	$t = 3.587$		$p < .001$	

*Legend.* M = arithmetic mean; SD = standard deviation; t = t-test result



Motivation and interest influence human behavior and encourage positive curiosity in behavior and action in many areas of life. Lack of motivation and interest is one of the problems in the education of children and youth. Sternberg and Williams (2009) point out that motivation represents an inner strength, which according to them is a personal mental ability that helps individuals achieve the goals they have set. Cognitive processes and motivation play a central role in human learning (Bandura, 1977). Motivation is one of the most important factors in the process of learning and making academic achievement (Alderman, 2004). Therefore, we cannot ignore the importance of interest and motivation in acquiring the learning content. One of the reasons for the general weakening of motivation for learning is the fact that students do not consider the acquisition of the set learning content their goals (Razum, 2003). Learning objectives should be clarified to students, including learning about cultural and natural heritage, in order to stimulate intrinsic motivation in students. In this context we can mention the three types of motivation: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to actions that an individual likes to undertake and that she/he finds interesting, while extrinsic motivation refers to actions that are triggered by external factors, such as rewarding outcomes. Amotivation is referred to as a state of disinterest in participation (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

The results of the research show that students are only moderately interested in heritage, thus in quality interaction with students we should work on developing the motivation and interest of students so that students could gladly, easily and with interest acquire the content related to heritage. Through quality and appropriate education, teachers are able to create a basis for the development of intrinsic motivation in students, which will best improve their motivation to learn in order to increase students' interest in natural and cultural heritage.

The next question we sought to answer in the research concerned the role of academic education in attaching importance to the topic of cultural and natural heritage. Namely, we were interested in whether enough attention is paid to the content related to cultural heritage and in which school subjects, and whether students understand that this is important. During school education, one of the important goals of teaching should be to prepare students for life in their social and natural environment, which is full of diverse content. It is for this reason that teaching process should be flexible, interdisciplinary and connected to real life (Jensen, 2003). The curricula of primary and secondary schools presuppose linking learning outcomes within the content of different subjects, and the outcomes of cross-curricular topics also enable the connection of different contents related to natural and cultural heritage.

The answer to this question was determined by analyzing the average responses to the six statements listed in Table 3. Similarly to the first case (and other research objectives that follow), the task of the participants was to express their agreement with each of the statements on a scale from 1 (I completely disagree) to 5 (I completely agree). The average score was  $M = 3.21$  ( $SD = 0.618$ ), but again a statistically significant difference in scores was observed between secondary school and primary school students.

**Table 3.** Average results of self-assessments of primary (N = 157) and secondary (N = 165) school students of the importance of cultural and natural heritage topics in education

statements	primary school		secondary school	
	M	SD	M	SD
At school I learned a lot about cultural and natural heritage and its value.	3.48	1.047	3.58	0.995
At school I learned a lot about the importance of cultural and natural heritage and its preservation.	3.47	1.113	3.57	0.989
I learned the most about cultural and natural heritage in Croatian language classes and/or history classes.	3.29	1.110	3.59	1.120
I learned the most about cultural and natural heritage in religious education classes.	2.31	1.090	1.95	0.987
I learned the most about cultural and natural heritage in art classes (art culture, music culture).	2.54	1.212	3.56	1.078
Awareness of cultural and natural heritage and heritage protection needs to be nurtured already in preschool institutions.	3.43	1.210	3.76	1.154
<b>In total</b>	3.08	0.616	3.34	0.596

*Legend.* M = arithmetic mean; SD = standard deviation

On average, secondary school students expressed more agreement with the above statements than primary school students ( $t = 3,707$ ;  $p < .001$ ). However, it is interesting to note the reverse direction of the difference in the responses to the statement concerning religious education classes. Namely, although both groups mark the lowest score at this statement in the entire questionnaire, indicating that students learn less about cultural and natural heritage during religious education classes than during other classes or from other sources of information, religious education seems to be somewhat more significant in teaching these topics in primary than secondary school ( $t = -3.060$ ;  $p = .002$ ).

The research of the knowledge of heritage-related content involving primary school students in Šibenik-Knin County and the presence of heritage-related content in music and art classes indicated the neglect of heritage-related content in education in general, and especially in art education. In other words, the results of this research showed that young people do not know enough about

the heritage in the area where they live (Dobrota and Kušćević 2008). The value of cultural heritage and the need for its long-term preservation and protection are unquestionable in all developed societies of the modern world. Without preserved cultural heritage, one cannot speak of culture, history, collective memory and identity, of a nation as a whole and of each of its members.

Regarding the topic of attaching importance to cultural heritage, we were also interested in the extent to which students are aware of the importance of its preservation. To answer this question, we analyzed the average responses to the six statements presented in the table below. It was necessary to reverse encode one of the items, which is written in Table 4 in *italics*.

**Table 4.** Average results of self-assessments of primary (N = 157) and secondary (N = 165) school students of the importance of preserving cultural and natural heritage

statements	primary school		secondary school	
	M	SD	M	SD
Awareness of cultural and natural heritage and heritage protection needs to be nurtured already in preschool institutions.	3.43	1.210	3.76	1.154
The protection of cultural and natural heritage is only possible if everyone in society is aware of the importance of heritage.	3.64	1.132	4.11	0.884
Care for cultural and natural heritage should concern all people living in a certain country.	3.98	1.141	4.30	0.899
Our cultural and natural heritage is not sufficiently protected.	3.51	1.084	3.76	1.059
People are aware that they are destroying cultural and natural heritage, but they do not care about that.	3.92	1.086	3.85	0.926
I am not at all interested in the problems of destroying cultural and natural heritage, let the experts take care of that.	3.80	1.192	4.04	0.993
<b>In total</b>	3.71	0.719	3.97	0.639

*Legend.* M = arithmetic mean; SD = standard deviation

Responsible heritage management presupposes protection and conservation, i.e. preservation of cultural and natural goods. Heritage certainly cannot survive without heirs and their awareness of the importance of heritage preservation. The relationship toward cultural and natural heritage is a relationship with the past, present and future. In the present, heritage belongs to everyone, which includes the right to use, but also the obligation and duty to preserve heritage. The protection of cultural and natural heritage has become especially important in the context of sustainable development (Maroević, 2001). Globalization and the intensive development of tourism create a threat to the natural and cultural heritage, which is why today natural and cultural heritage is increasingly being considered in the context of sustainable development.

“Sustainable development in the protection of cultural heritage is controlled development, limited so as not to cause its degradation. It presupposes knowledge of heritage resources, their exploitation to certain limits and limiting development in order to preserve them” (Maroević, 2001, p. 235). Without solidarity between cultural and heritage institutions and various public institutions, heritage protection would be difficult because the degree of protection depends on the broader sociological context and the importance that society attaches to the protection of natural and cultural resources. The level of society's awareness of heritage protection also depends on the sensitivity to the contents related to heritage, which should be influenced by the planned actions to raise awareness of heritage. Heritage protection should be promoted by raising awareness and questioning the responsibilities of all from an early age in order to reach better solutions in the protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage and ultimately to raise awareness of its impact on sustainable development.

Both primary and secondary school students generally agree on the importance of preserving natural and cultural heritage, but the average answer to this question is slightly higher than in previous cases ( $M = 3.84$ ;  $SD = 0.690$ ) and again there is a difference between secondary and primary school students. Secondary school students express significantly more agreement with the statements regarding the importance of preserving cultural heritage ( $t = 3,399$ ;  $p < .001$ ). This fact is most pronounced for the statements concerning the role of the individual: *Protection of cultural and natural heritage is only possible if everyone in a society is aware of the importance of heritage* ( $t = 4.126$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and *Care for cultural and natural heritage should concern all people living in a certain country* ( $t = 2,769$ ;  $p = .006$ ).

A similar trend can be seen in answering the following question, whether students are aware of the connection between economic development and preservation and presentation of cultural heritage, given that heritage in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an important prerequisite for national and economic development of society as a whole. Therefore, we analyzed the answers to the following five

statements in the questionnaire, which are shown in Table 5. Due to the formulation of the statement, it was necessary to reverse the coding of the last item, therefore it is written in *italics* in the table.

**Table 5.** Average results of self-assessments of primary (N = 157) and secondary (N = 165) school students of the connection between cultural heritage and the national economy

statements	primary school		secondary school	
	M	SD	M	SD
Natural and cultural heritage can make an important part of society's development.	3.68	1.127	4.22	0.856
Natural and cultural heritage is a prerequisite for the development of society in the future.	3.54	1.077	3.82	1.020
Tourist development of the homeland depends on cultural and natural heritage.	3.93	1.007	4.07	0.989
The economic development of the homeland depends on cultural and natural heritage.	3.45	1.065	3.56	1.061
Natural and cultural heritage is irrelevant to society and its development.	3.69	1.180	4.04	1.123
<b>In total</b>	3.66	0.763	3.94	0.672

*Legend.* M = arithmetic mean; SD = standard deviation

The average score to these questions was  $M = 3.80$  ( $SD = 0.731$ ), with again a statistically significant difference in the answers between secondary school and primary school students ( $t = 3.521$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Secondary school students seem to understand more clearly the importance of natural and cultural heritage in the development of society than primary school students, as they particularly express more agreement with the statement *Natural and cultural heritage can make an important part of society's development* ( $t = 4,827$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

In the challenges of the modern age, heritage is becoming a resource of the future, making it important to develop an active relationship with heritage. Heritage must not be just a memory of the past and heritage-related activities cannot involve only heritage protection, although heritage protection is a significant social issue. Cultural and natural heritage can strengthen national economic development, so this aspect of heritage cannot be neglected in the education of children and youth but should be continuously highlighted in education systems. Tourism, as one of the drivers of the national economy, focuses

mainly on two types of tourism economy and uses their resources, namely cultural and natural resources (Gredičak, 2008). We can conclude that secondary school students, given they are older, better understand social relations and the importance of natural and cultural heritage in the development of the national economy.

The following research question was aimed at examining students' awareness of the importance of cultural heritage in preserving the nation's identity. Cultural and natural heritage and various cultural traditions related to society influence the national feeling of the people of that society. This influences the creation of the social national identity. "National identity is one of the collective identities and represents the self-reflection of the national community, its answer to the questions of who the members of that community are, what their narratives, history, current reality and perspective are" (Babić, 2018, p. 179).

The connection between culture and identity as well as identity issues at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are becoming increasingly relevant in social theory and practice (Georgievski and Žoglev, 2014). Globalization processes are becoming necessary and unstoppable phenomena of the modern world that are manifested in social changes, which is also reflected in the field of culture. Society and culture are interconnected because culture actually presents the life of a society with its beliefs, ideas, symbols, politics, art, education. Thus, the culture of an individual nation crystallizes its core, that is, it defines its identity. With the globalization of society in the modern world, traditional strongholds are disintegrating, and the identities that have been strongholds for people in the past for the thinking of themselves and the community are losing their previous meaning (Babić, 2018). In the era of globalization, the question of identity is becoming an essential issue in order to preserve the peculiarities of societies that are becoming part of the global world. Nations with small populations and small territories must be aware of how globalization is destroying their identity. Small nations become unaware of their own identity and accept someone else's identity, which puts small nations in danger of disappearing.

In Croatia, in addition to the majority Croatian population, there are also few ethnic minorities. Some of the national minorities are Italians, Roma, Serbs and Bosniaks, and the minorities themselves are dispersed in different cities, regions and counties of Croatia, and differ in religion, cultural organization and tradition they have inherited. Educational institutions should work systematically to develop students' awareness and pride of belonging to their own people, but they must also educate younger generations about various forms of extremism, whether national, ethnic or religious. Burai points out that it is in school that the basics of socially responsible behavior are taught in a democratic society where individuals should be aware of their culture, values and traditions, but also tolerant of the other and different (Burai, 2016).

The answer to the question about the importance of cultural heritage in preserving national identity was obtained by analyzing the average answers of students to the five statements shown in Table 6. The average score to these statements was  $M = 4.04$  ( $SD = 0.825$ ), which is the highest average answer in the questionnaire, from which we can conclude that students are aware of the importance of cultural and natural heritage for national identity. This awareness seems to grow with age and education, since secondary school students express a statistically significantly higher agreement with all five statements compared to primary school students ( $t = 4.385$ ;  $p < .001$ ). We can conclude that students are aware of the importance of national natural and cultural heritage because they allow our people to be recognizable in the world, but can also be a bridge to get to know other cultures.

**Table 6.** Average results of self-assessments of primary ( $N = 157$ ) and secondary ( $N = 165$ ) school students of the importance of cultural heritage in preserving national identity

statements	primary school		secondary school	
	M	SD	M	SD
Today, when we live in a time of globalization, we must take great care of national heritage goods.	3.82	1.049	4.13	0.912
Natural and cultural heritage enables our people to be recognizable in the world.	3.97	1.077	4.33	0.926
Natural and cultural heritage can be a bridge to getting to know other cultures.	3.74	1.093	4.02	0.975
It is important to know the cultural and natural heritage of your people.	3.93	1.139	4.35	0.810
Natural and cultural heritage is important in preserving national identity.	3.72	1.113	4.30	0.939
<b>In total</b>	<b>3.83</b>	<b>0.882</b>	<b>4.23</b>	<b>0.718</b>

*Legend.* M = arithmetic mean; SD = standard deviation

We could not find research discussing cultural heritage and identity related to students' opinion. In a study that examined the attitudes of fifth-year students of the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb, about possible goals and tasks that can be achieved by learning about cultural heritage "Most of the surveyed students believe that such content could influence the development of love for the homeland among students, but also increase their interests and responsibilities for cultural heritage in general as well as for society and the

culture that surrounds them. Moreover, most students see the need to use such content to develop students' intercultural competencies and positive attitude toward members of other cultures" (Vasilj and Letina 2019, pp. 22–23).

Creative interpretation of heritage is one of the important requirements of the modern age. Heritage can very successfully stimulate the creative development of students, and cultural and natural heritage can be used as a source for inspiration and creation especially in art classes. Therefore, the last five statements in the questionnaire were intended to examine whether contact with cultural heritage affects the stimulation of students' creativity. The questions we asked the students were as follows: *In communicating with cultural and natural heritage they can develop their creativity. Through cultural and natural heritage, people show the realization of their creativity. I like to express my creativity in art in the wake of cultural and natural heritage (art, music, heritage as a literary stimulus). Natural and cultural heritage does not encourage me to express myself creatively. Cultural and natural heritage always allows me to show my creativity.* The average response was  $M = 3.21$  ( $SD = 0.817$ ), but there was no statistically significant difference in the responses of secondary and primary school students. We can conclude that heritage should be better used as an incentive for creative expression of students in both primary and secondary school.

In this research, in addition to students' interest in the topic of heritage, we were interested in whether visiting museums, galleries and archeological sites affects students' interest in knowing and experiencing heritage. We were also interested in how often students visit the listed facilities. The research showed that most students point out they visit such institutions once a year (53.7%), and only a small number of them (5. %) do so five or more times a year. We compared this result with the result of the research done by Kuščević et al. in 2009. In the mentioned research, it was determined that students visit museums and galleries extremely rarely. Museums and galleries were often visited by only 5.6% of students, sometimes 36.6%, and 57.8% of students never went to a museum or art gallery or art exhibitions. Compared to 2009, now almost half of the surveyed students go to these institutions once a year.

In order to examine the relationship between frequency and interest in heritage content, we calculated the Pearson correlation coefficient between the two variables, i.e. the answers to the questions (*How often do you visit museums, galleries or archeological sites to learn about cultural heritage content?* and *To what extent are you interested in learning about the content related to cultural and natural heritage?*). The results indicate the existence of a statistically significant moderate and positive correlation ( $r = .480$ ;  $p < .001$ ). In other words, more frequent visits to institutions such as museums, galleries and archeological sites are associated with a greater interest in learning about cultural and natural heritage.



## CONCLUSION

Respect for cultural and natural heritage is a civilizational achievement and a question of social responsibility, and certainly a question of the necessity of the survival of our people in the modern world. Nowadays, we can discuss heritage from different points of view, which includes identity, sustainable development, creativity, heritage preservation, and economic development. The modern school curriculum recognizes the importance and value of heritage-related content in the education of children and the young and includes the content of natural and cultural heritage in various subjects.

In this research, we gained an insight into the attitudes and thoughts of students related to natural and cultural heritage. By analyzing the data, we notice that secondary school students have a better opinion about their knowledge of cultural and natural heritage ( $t = 2.311$ ;  $p = .021$ ) than students in the final grades of primary school. We found a similar result in gender differences, as male students on average agreed more with the statement than female students ( $t = -2,343$ ;  $p = .020$ ). The average results of the level of interest of primary and secondary school students in the contents of cultural and natural heritage indicate that on average students in this study express a medium level of interest in cultural and natural heritage of Croatia ( $M = 3.19$ ;  $SD = 1.020$ ), whereby secondary school students show more interest than primary school students.

Secondary school students better recognize the value of natural and cultural heritage within the work of educational institutions in various subjects, but primary school students express a greater influence of religious education in acquiring knowledge about heritage compared to secondary school students. Both secondary school and primary school students generally agree when it comes to statements related to the importance of preserving natural and cultural heritage. However, secondary school students express significantly more agreement with the statements concerning heritage protection ( $t = 3.399$ ;  $p < .001$ ), which is especially seen in the statements that emphasize the importance of social responsibility, and they think more about heritage preservation as a sociological concept involving the responsibility of an individual but also of all people.

The average results of primary and secondary school students' assessments of the importance of cultural heritage in preserving national identity indicate that students are extremely aware of the value of cultural heritage in preserving national identity. In this research, we found that students' awareness grows with age and education. Secondary school students express a statistically significantly higher agreement with all five statements related to natural and cultural heritage and national identity compared to primary school students ( $t = 4.385$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

Natural and cultural heritage should be better used for creative expression of students through different subjects. Research has shown that both younger

and older students are not too motivated to creatively express themselves using heritage content. By analyzing the results, we found that students are not particularly interested in visiting different cultural institutions and that more than half of students (53.7 %) visit these institutions only once a year. A deeper analysis of the results revealed the existence of a statistically significant positive correlation ( $r = .480$ ;  $p < .001$ ) in the analysis of the responses of students attending cultural institutions. More frequent visits to cultural institutions are associated with greater interest of students for the contents of cultural and natural heritage.

The results obtained in this study contribute to the research related to the study of cultural and natural heritage in the field of education. Today, the student becomes an active participant in the educational process, therefore students' thoughts, experiences and attitudes should contribute to critical reflection on heritage-related content in compulsory education. Future research is recommended to include assessments, attitudes and reflections of teachers and professors on natural and cultural heritage in order to raise awareness of the dialogue framework of heritage in different areas of society development through the different views of participants involved in heritage education. We hope that this research will encourage thinking about heritage as an investment into the future.

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