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### „From a Specific Assignment to a Collective School Project”, „An Ethnic Kaleidoscope” and „An Interactive Map”

**Irina Minkova, Veselin Keremedchiev**

“Academic Nikola Obreshkov” Secondary School of Mathematics and Sciences, Razgrad  
E-mail: [vesker69@abv.bg](mailto:vesker69@abv.bg)

**Abstract:** A students' project describing and analyzing the diversity in the ethnic structure of the population in Bulgaria is presented to you. The students from XIId at “Academic Nikola Obreshkov” Secondary School of Mathematics and Sciences in Razgrad, specializing in Geography and Economics, have written, composed and edited a collection entitled “Kaleidoscope” as well as have been technical designers in its preparation. In order to enhance the visual aspect of the project they have created an interactive map, representing the regions densely populated by a particular ethnic group.

**Keywords:** ethnic group, reproduction, cultural identity.

#### **Introduction**

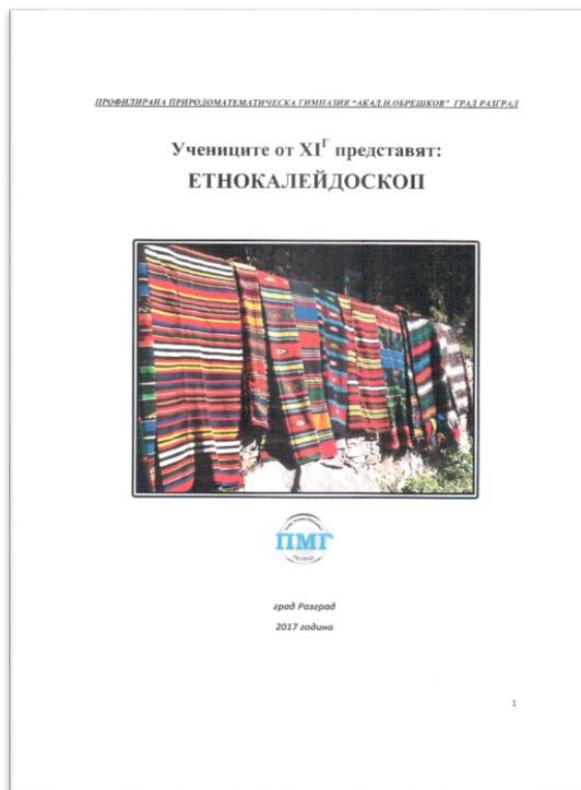
At the beginning of each school year the students at “Academic Nikola Obreshkov” Secondary School of Mathematics and Sciences in Razgrad, specializing in Geography and Economics, receive their individual and group assignments. The distribution of the different topics happens randomly.

#### **Discussion**

Taking into consideration the students' from XIId keen interest in Geography and their suggestions, the main focus have been placed on population structures in Bulgaria. The most debated topic was the ethnic structure along with the age, gender, confessional, educational and health structures of the population in the country. There were a number of arguments aimed at ‘shedding light’ on the issue of the ethnic structure of the population, among them insufficient information in Geography textbooks which often consisted of a single pie chart diagram. Our critical inspection on the issue was prompted by questioning the credibility of existing demographic analyses, 2011 census statistics, current dynamics, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural characteristics and migration necessities in Razgrad and the region [2]. One of the most important factors in the realization of our initiative was the students' experience and skill in finding and applying geographical information. They were divided in pairs and each pair had its

preferences; eventually, they drew lots. Eleven ethnic groups were drawn – Karakachan, Arab, Gipsy, Wallachian, Turkish, Greek, Albanian, Russian, Hebrew, Armenian and Circassian ethnic groups [4]. Each pair had to prepare an article and a photo, to create a cartographic index pointing to the densely populated by some particular ethnic group areas on a contour map.

The instructions on the preparation of the various articles included the following: first appearing and settling in historical perspective, number, religion, language, subsequent settling in different places, livelihood, clothing characteristics and features, traditional cuisine, manners, customs and culture. All articles, photos and maps were submitted in due time. Their presentation followed. It was evident from the first three or four articles that the students had worked very seriously, strenuously and proficiently.



**Figure 1.** Title page of the collection

It also became clear that the students had worked cooperatively because they had all used the same templet for their contour map. The association that could be made between the articles led to the decision that they should be compiled into a collection which we called “Ethnic Kaleidoscope“. Being followers of the maxim that simple things are most efficient, a spontaneous idea arose that we should put the individual maps one over another and use Power Point and some animation effects so that a live interactive map could be created. The students consulted their Information Technologies teacher, Engineer Irina Minkova, for technical realization; and, thus, our new Interactive map was “born” only within a week (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/84840627477/permalink/10155806728712478/>). A colour key was introduced for each group and a circle or an ellipse of the same colour were used to denote the densely populated regions on the map.

The following important conclusion were drawn:

- Ethnic groups settled in our country’s territory in different periods of history;
- The reasons for enormous groups’ migrations could have been various – lack of tolerance, religious intolerance, war, political and environmental reasons;
- Some of them led a nomadic lifestyle at the beginning but later in time they settled down;
- Some preferred cities while others – smaller settlements;
- Ethnic belonging did not necessarily involve religious belonging;
- Self-identification was the basic principle;

- Bulgarians tended to be tolerant despite the advent of extreme nationalistic movements;
- Cultural societies, community centres and places of worship and prayer were created; newspapers were issued; groups started participating in the country's politics;
- Some groups formed a significant part of the population of Bulgaria;
- Others had a strong regional impact on natural migration and reproduction indicators;
- Unique and distinctive crafts were practiced;
- They enriched cultural diversity [3].



**Figure 2.** Last slide of the interactive map

Thus, simple individual assignments suddenly transformed into a significant student project, in which they had the opportunity to be writers, editors, compilers and to technically support it. It is required from students to be studious, devoted, passionate and thorough in their work in order to achieve a good level of proficiency in their speciality. As far as didactics and methodology are concerned, analytic, statistical and cartographic methods were employed. The students were introduced to some specific branches of geography, e. g. demography and ethno-geography. The students were not only able to master and apply new cognitive skills such as synthesis, comparing and contrasting, and prediction but also to experience interdisciplinary relations between Information Technologies, Literature, History and Philosophy [5]. They have felt themselves as an essential part of society; they have experienced creative inspiration; they have accumulated knowledge. The town of Razgrad is a typical example of multiculturalism and the students, being involved in the preparation of such a collection, contributed to the construction of an objective estimation of the demographic situation in Bulgaria, raised tolerance and the understanding of 'the other', 'the different one', and teach the values of civilized societies.

### Conclusions

In conclusion, we offer you the motto of our collection: "All people are born free and equal in dignity and rights. All citizens shall be equal before the law. There shall be no privileges or restriction of rights on the grounds of their race, national or social origin, ethnic self-identity, sex, religion, education, opinion, political affiliation, personal or social status or property status" [1].

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