

„HOME AT CHISINAU” CAMP: STRENGTHENING NATIONAL CULTURAL IDENTITY AND EUROPEAN VALUES AMONG DIASPORA CHILDREN THROUGH DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT VIA LIBRARIES

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Abstract: In the context of increasing migration, preserving cultural identity among diaspora children of the Republic of Moldova becomes an opportunity for connection and continuity. This study presents the outcomes of the first edition of the online educational camp „Acasă la Chişinău” (e.g., „Home at Chisinau”), initiated during July 14th–25th 2025 by the „B.P. Hasdeu” Municipal Library (ML) in Chisinau, and supported by the Chisinau City Hall. The program was designed to reconnect 26 children aged 6–12 from the diaspora from France, Germany, Italy, Romania, Spain, and the UK. The program applied a child-centered, interdisciplinary methodology, combining live Zoom sessions, with educational videos, creative workshops, linguistic exercises, and virtual tours. Activities were developed collaboratively by librarians, writers, museum specialists, artists, and craftspeople, assisted by a team of librarians. It included 44 activities, such as meetings with cultural representatives, language and local cultural heritage lessons, puppet theatre and gastronomy workshops, as well as interactive games. The educational content was placed on a dedicated online platform, that focused to children’s language skills and actively involved parents and/or grandparents in the learning process. Results indicated a strong positive impact on participants, including improved Romanian language skills, increased awareness of local cultural heritage, and practical experience of European values such as inclusion and mutual respect. The program also enhanced community engagement and digital outreach, reaching over 3,000 page visits and receiving media coverage.

Keywords: diaspora, European values, intercultural education, heritage, online camp, public library, Chisinau
JEL Classification: I21, I25, Z10, Z18

Introduction

In the current context of migration and globalization, preserving cultural identity is becoming a challenge for children in the diaspora (Allakhverdov, 2024). Community traditions and values, as well as language, are at risk of fading away in the face of new cultural realities (Weir, 2019). Aware of this phenomenon and the imperative need to keep alive the connection between the new generations of citizens of the Republic of Moldova and their spiritual heritage, the ML launched the first edition of the online camp „Home at Chisinau” in July 2025 - an innovative educational program designed as a connection between the diaspora and local values, but also as a framework for promoting European principles.

This initiative aimed to reconnect children from the diaspora with the Romanian language, culture, folk traditions, and history of the city of Chişinău, while promoting tolerance, inclusion, freedom of expression, and active participation - fundamental values of the European Union. The camp activities were designed as interactive experiences: Romanian language and history lessons, creative workshops with folk artists, meetings with writers, knowledge and digital exploration games, online cultural tours, and intercultural dialogue sessions. In line with the objectives of the

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National Program “Diaspora” 2024–2028, which emphasizes strengthening ties with Moldovan citizens abroad, preserving cultural identity, and facilitating knowledge transfer between generations (Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2023), the „Acasă la Chişinău” online educational camp illustrates a concrete example of how such policy priorities can be operationalized at the local level.

The project leveraged the library's resources, from the expertise of librarians to its collections and digital platforms, and integrated valuable collaborations with local cultural partners: artists, educators, historians, and promoters of national heritage. Using a modern methodology adapted to the age and reality of children abroad, the camp created a dynamic, accessible, and inclusive virtual space where active participation, free expression, and appreciation of diversity were encouraged.

At the same time, the „Home at Chisinau” program reflected the library's commitment to contributing to the strengthening of European cohesion through intercultural education, intergenerational dialogue, and the formation of a responsible civic consciousness inspired by the principles of the European Union. Through the activities carried out, children learned to value both their cultural heritage and the spirit of unity in diversity that characterizes Europe.

Methodology: forms and methods of activity

The program was built on an interdisciplinary and inclusive approach, centered on the child and oriented towards intercultural dialogue, capitalizing on both national cultural heritage and the principles of contemporary European pedagogy. The „Home at Chisinau” camp was designed by a multidisciplinary team from the ML, involving librarians, writers, museum curators, visual artists, folk artists, historians, and specialists in non-formal education, who collaborated to create an interactive, accessible, and attractive program for children from the diaspora. The online camp „Home at Chisinau” was held with the support and active involvement of institutional and cultural partners who contributed to the quality and attractiveness of the program. The Chisinau City Hall, through Deputy Mayor Angela Cutasevici, supported the promotion of the initiative, and the General Directorate for Culture and Cultural Heritage facilitated access to valuable resources about the city's heritage. The ML, together with the teams from the Program Development Department, the Evaluation and Monitoring Department, the Memory of Chişinău Department, the Information Technology Department, and the Communication Department, coordinated all activities, mobilizing teams of librarians and specialists to create interactive materials.

The activities were structured into 10 live sessions on the Zoom platform, each lasting 2 hours. These sessions combined various modern educational methods: visual presentations, interactive exercises, linguistic and creative games, thematic challenges, storytelling, and intercultural dialogues. In addition to the live sessions, participants had access to educational videos made especially for the camp, virtual tours of museums and iconic places in Chişinău, craft workshops, introductory lessons on traditional clothing, national symbols, the history of the Romanian language, and holiday traditions.

The innovative element was the integration of social media as platforms for dissemination and engagement: posts, video collages, participants' impressions, and moments from the activities were published regularly, accompanied by messages promoting European values and cultural identity. The local media also covered the project, amplifying its visibility and impact in the community. Participants were selected based on a public call launched through the communication channels of the library and its partners in the diaspora. In the end, the camp brought together 26 children aged between 6 and 12 from France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Romania – a diversity that fostered intercultural exchange and a sense of belonging to common European values.

The camp provided each child with a safe and stimulating environment for expression, exploration, and learning, emphasizing active participation, open dialogue, and encouraging curiosity about their own cultural roots. At the same time, the methodology fostered the

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development of social and cultural skills, critical thinking, and sensitivity to diversity – essential qualities for the European citizens.

Experience: from knowledge to experimentation

The online camp „Home at Chisinau” was a complex and interactive experience, offering participants 44 structured activities designed to stimulate both cultural knowledge and personal development in children. The activities were diverse and balanced, including: 13 meetings with personalities from Chisinau's cultural life, 10 creative workshops, 11 interactive games, 4 anagram sessions, and 6 lessons on linguistic inclusion.

The children actively participated, often accompanied by their parents or grandparents, in activities that combined learning with play and communication with creativity. Among the most appreciated were the Romanian language lessons, accompanied by pronunciation exercises, designed to facilitate reconnection with the mother tongue in a friendly and motivating way. The craft workshops, led by folk artist Olesia Enache, introduced participants to the world of traditional symbols and the art of sewing, stimulating curiosity and manual dexterity.

A special moment was the puppet theatre performance based on the legend of Chişinău, presented by the actors of the „Guguţa” Municipal Theater, guided by the director of the institution, Gabriela Lungu – an activity that combined artistic value with the transmission of local memory in a form accessible to children. Other activities included exploring the urban and ecological heritage of Chişinău through virtual tours and online visits to museums, provided by library colleagues and museographer Alexandra Vasiliev from the Chişinău Electric Transport Museum. An unforgettable visit to the Zoo, organized live by director Roman Creţu, as well as traditional gastronomy workshops with journalist Traian Stoianov, who invited children to discover the tastes of Bessarabian childhood, ensured the children's curiosity, by preparing the salad called „Chişinau salad”.

Meetings with writers Iulian Filip, Claudia Partole, Maria Pilchin, Victoria Fonari, and others provided an opportunity for authentic dialogue about literature, reading, and identity, and through the „Memory of Chişinău” section, children had access to thematic virtual tours and video materials that promoted the culture and history of Chişinău. All activities were delivered through a combination of methods – live Zoom sessions, videos, interactive games, hands-on activities, that were tailored to both the language level and interests of the participants. This adaptability allowed each child to feel included, encouraged, and connected to a common cultural universe, despite the geographical distance. The experience was intense, emotional, and enthusiastic, strengthening the bonds between children in the diaspora and the cultural and linguistic values of the Republic of Moldova.

Impact and results

The online camp „Home at Chisinau” had a significant impact on both direct participants and the wider community, demonstrating the value of such educational and cultural initiatives in the context of the diaspora. One of the most important effects was the strengthening of the children's cultural identity through the rediscovery of Chişinău's heritage, familiarization with national symbols, and practicing the Romanian language in authentic and attractive contexts. The children learned not only through formal lessons, but also through games, stories, dialogue, and creative engagement, regaining a sense of belonging to the culture and values of Moldova.

The camp promoted, in a natural and applied way, fundamental European values such as inclusion, diversity, and mutual respect. The activities were designed to cultivate empathy, collaboration, and openness towards others, reflecting the spirit of modern education based on active participation and respect for multiple identities.

Another important result was the creation of a safe, empathetic virtual space tailored to the emotional and educational needs of children in the diaspora. The camp format provided stability, rhythm, and opportunities for interaction, contributing to the development of self-confidence and

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a sense of inclusion. Similarly, the visibility of the program was amplified through consistent media coverage and online platforms. The camp was promoted through articles and announcements on news portals and television stations such as Diez, Realitatea TV, Știri.md and News.yam.md, Vocea Basarabiei, IPN, which helped draw attention both within the country and among the diaspora.

The active involvement of the community was essential. Parents and grandparents appreciated the camp program not only for its rich content and professional delivery, but also for its relevance to the needs of children raised outside the Republic of Moldova. The feedback received highlighted satisfaction with the quality of the activities and the positive emotional impact on participants. Feedback from parents:

„We would like to thank the organizers of the „Home at Chisinau”Camp for giving our children the opportunity to participate in interactive, creative, and very interesting activities! The children were extremely satisfied!!! At the end of August, when we come home, we will gladly visit the ML! Have a wonderful summer!!! With respect, the Roșcovanu family”.

„Dear Ms. Maria, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts for the professionalism, empathy, and patience with which you guided the children through this wonderful experience, Home at Chisinau. You have managed to create a special bond with the little ones and convey information with warmth and passion. Elina was delighted and has great admiration for you. We are grateful for everything and hope to see you again soon! With appreciation, The Sirbu Family from Germany.”

The camp also enjoyed high visibility in the public sphere. The camp's official website recorded over 3,000 visits, and the activities were constantly covered in the national media and on social networks. This coverage contributed to the recognition of the initiative as an example of good practice in promoting cultural and European values through the library.

Conclusions

The online camp „Home at Chisinau” has convincingly demonstrated that cultural education and the promotion of European values can be effectively achieved through digital means, combined with pedagogical creativity and inter-institutional collaboration. The program succeeded in bringing together children from the diaspora and Chișinău in an empathetic, accessible, and valuable learning space, where heritage, language, and cultural identity were transmitted through modern and interactive methods.

This project has become an example of good practice in terms of involving the diaspora in short-term educational and cultural processes, contributing to the strengthening of the national and European identity of the younger generation. Participants were encouraged to reflect on common European values, freely express their thoughts, and connect emotionally with Moldovan culture.

Through this initiative, the ML reaffirms its status as a strategic cultural actor, a facilitator of community cohesion, and an active promoter of intercultural dialogue. The „Home at Chisinau” camp demonstrated that the library can become a link between communities, generations, and cultures, thus strengthening its mission in a democratic and inclusive society.

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