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## Cultural Vouchers as a Tool for Stimulating Cultural Consumption and Spiritual and Moral Development of Youth and Children

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**Abstract.** In order to stimulate the spiritual and moral development of youth and children in many countries, a relatively new tool was used – a cultural voucher, which is the subject of this study. The purpose of the article is to identify the features of cultural vouchers in different countries, and based on international experience, to find ways of improvement of their use in the Republic of Moldova. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were carried out: a review of international experience in the use of cultural vouchers, a legal analysis of the Moldovan legislation on cultural vouchers and an analysis of the evolution of indicators related to the field of culture, as a rationale for the introduction of cultural vouchers in Moldova. The following research methods were used to realize these tasks: the analysis of legislation, literature review and methods of induction and deduction. The results of the study showed that cultural vouchers in different countries differ in value, the age of its beneficiaries, the range of cultural products and services covered by the voucher, the frequency of payment, and the presence or absence of distribution of payments. In the Republic of Moldova, in recent years, a decline in indicators related to cultural consumption has been revealed, which motivated the introduction of cultural vouchers as a countermeasure against these alarming trends. Since Moldova is just starting to use cultural vouchers, it is necessary to improve the legislation regarding their use.

**Keywords:** cultural vouchers, youth, children, support measure, cultural consumption.

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## Культурные ваучеры как инструмент для стимулирования культурного потребления и духовно-нравственного становления молодежи и детей

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**Аннотация.** Для стимулирования духовно-нравственного становления молодежи и детей во многих странах был использован относительно новый инструмент – культурный ваучер, который и является предметом данного исследования. Целью статьи является выявление особенностей культурных ваучеров в разных странах, и основываясь на международном опыте, поиск путей улучшения их использования в Республике Молдова. Для реализации этой цели были выполнены следующие задачи: обзор международного опыта применения культурных ваучеров, правовой анализ молдавского законодательства о культурных ваучерах и анализ эволюции показателей, относящихся к сфере культуры, как обоснование внедрения культурных ваучеров в Молдове. Для реализации этих задач использовались следующие методы исследования: анализ законодательства, обзор литературы, методы индукции и дедукции. Результаты исследования показали, что культурные ваучеры в разных странах различаются по стоимости, возрасту его получателей, по спектру культурных продуктов и услуг, на которые распространяется ваучер, по периодичности оплаты и наличия или отсутствия распределения платежей. В Республике Молдова, в последние годы, было выявлено снижение показателей, связанных с культурным потреблением, что мотивировало введение культурных ваучеров в качестве меры противодействия этим тревожным тенденциям. Поскольку Молдова только начинает применять культурные ваучеры, необходимо усовершенствовать законодательство касательно их применения.

**Ключевые слова:** культурные ваучеры, молодежь, дети, мера поддержки, культурное потребление.

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## Introduction

Culture is an undeniable part of human society. It preserves and transmits knowledge, creates values and symbols, cultivates human character, strengthens social relationships, creates new needs and also contributes to the economy. Our era is characterized by the pervasiveness of mass culture which is oriented towards the majority of people, which would imply that there must be increased accessibility to the benefit of cultural products and services. The sphere of culture represents 3.1% from the global GDP and 6.2% from all jobs.

From the 2005 year the value of exports of the cultural goods and services has increased by 2 times up to 389.1 billion USD in 2019 [1]. The growth of cultural sector depends also on a high access to culture for masses of people. Therefore, measures to increase access to cultural goods and services are necessary. Since children and youth are groups of people that are at their first years of entering the cultural sphere, a special attention is given to them [2][3].

## Adopting cultural vouchers: international experience

In order to stimulate cultural consumption among youth and/or children in some countries was introduced a tool called «cultural voucher». The cultural voucher, in general, involves a financial instrument intended to be used to benefit from cultural products and services. In particular, the term «cultural voucher» can be defined differently depending on the type of regulatory and issuing entity and the spectrum of its beneficiaries. In the working definition of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, the cultural voucher represents a state contribution that improves access to culture for primary and secondary school pupils and

their pedagogues. In the case of the Brazilian Ministry of Culture, the cultural voucher is a tool for obtaining cultural products and services within a partnership of the Brazilian Federal Government with businesses for the benefit of Brazilian workers who have formal employment contracts. In the Republic of Moldova, the cultural voucher is to be issued by houses of culture after being legally adopted as one of the innovative instruments intended to be applied for youth. In South Korea the cultural voucher is a popular online payment method in the form of a rechargeable electronic card for cultural products and services. As can be seen from these examples, the beneficiaries of cultural vouchers can be children/pupils, youth, employees, they can be issued at the initiative of a state institution or an enterprise.

In the case of Republic of Moldova, experts from the Ministry of Culture, together with a few non-governmental organizations started recently the collaboration in creating the vision and the policy framework for the launch of the «Creative Moldova» National Program that aims to develop a competitive, inclusive and sustainable creative economy, generating social, economic and environmental benefits. The program should boost the development of the creative industries in the country and will position the Republic of Moldova as a center (hub) of creative services and products, crea-tech (creative technologies), innovative and high-quality cultural actions [4]. The program is oriented on the export of creative services, to integrate the Moldovan cultural product in the international circuit. This is important for the works worthy of being auctioned, exhibited at fairs, galleries and on famous stages, for the stimulation of Moldova's creative talent and its intelligent use [5][6].

As part of «Creative Moldova» National Program recently, the term «cultural voucher» was introduced in the legislation of the Republic of Moldova as a digital ticket, with a monetary equivalent accounted for in the beneficiary's virtual account, non-transferable, which ensures access to cultural services and products offered by service providers, as well as the term «house of culture» as a cultural organization, with or without legal personality, which carries out activities in the field of culture, provides cultural services, initiates cultural projects and aims to satisfy the cultural interests of the community. People who have reached the age of 18 can become holders of the cultural voucher. The holder can benefit from cultural services based on the cultural voucher during only 12 months from the moment of obtaining it.

At the same time, the financing of expenses related to the granting of cultural vouchers is carried out within the limits of the budget allocations approved by the annual budget law. Houses of culture can be created by the specialized central public administration authority, local public administration authorities and by public institutions. The types of culture houses, the way of organization and administration, as well as of carrying out their activity, but also the mechanism and way of granting and using cultural vouchers are to be established in a regulation approved by the Government. Cultural vouchers are to be put into circulation starting from 2023. Therefore, all these aims to facilitate the access of young people to cultural services and to make the management of cultural institutions more efficient through the implementation of the «cultural voucher» national program.

As arguments for the justification of the application of this program, are a series of negative trends in the integration of young

people in cultural life and in the support of cultural institutions. According to the data of the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, the index of cultural consumption in the period 2015–2020 decreased by 20.1%.

The number of theatergoers per 1000 inhabitants decreased 2.8 times in the years 2016–2021 (from 156 to 56) (*Fig. 1*). In theaters, the number of spectators decreased from 433 thousand in 2016 to 146 thousand in 2021, or by about 3 times (*Fig. 2*).

In libraries, the number of visits decreased from 8191.73 thousand in 2016 to 4851.60 thousand in 2021 or by 40.8%. The number of books and magazines released by the libraries to readers decreased from 15669.98 thousand to 7980.70 thousand or by 49.1%. In museums, the number of visits decreased from 0.8 million in 2016 to 0.5 million in 2021, and the number of visits per 1000 inhabitants – from 288 to 192 or by 33.3%. The number of moviegoers from 2016 to 2021 decreased by 38.4% or from 425 to 262 thousand. It should be noted that the major drop in the number of visits to cultural institutions in 2020 was due to the answer to COVID-19 pandemic's first year through government strict restrictions on one hand and on the other hand, people's own decision to avoid crowds. The slight return of indicators in 2021 didn't reverse the already decreasing pre-pandemic trend.

Republic of Moldova is one of the few European countries, which does not have a national plan to support and encourage the participation of children and youth in cultural activities and artistic events. From the previous experience of implementing cultural policies for young people, there is an insufficiency of the measures taken to stimulate the involvement of children and young people in cultural activities, which leads to the reduction of educational skills

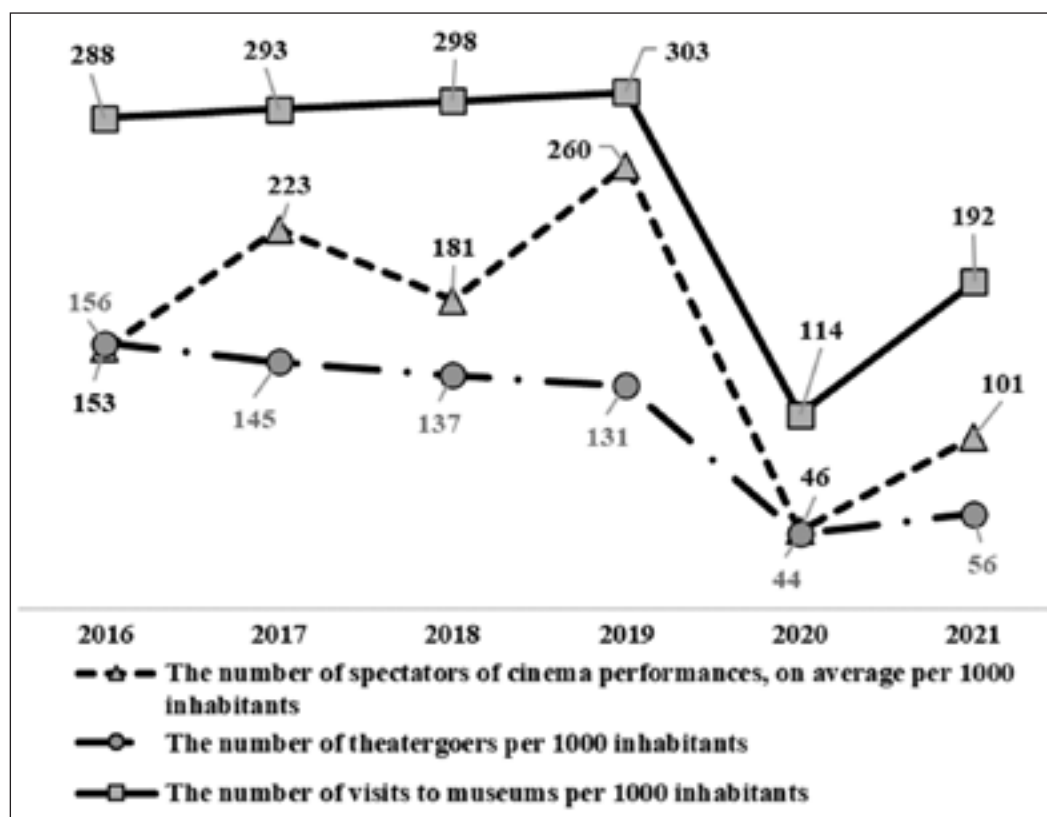


Fig. 1. The number of visits to museums, theatergoers, spectators of cinema performances on average, in the Republic of Moldova – per 1000 inhabitants, persons  
 Source: Created by the author based on the data from National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova [7]

and the stagnation of their intellectual progress. The purpose of implementing the program of cultural vouchers in Moldova is to improve young people's access to cultural services and products throughout the country, participation in the cultural field and increasing social cohesion, promoting and developing cultural values, improving the cultural offer, increasing the transparency of the financing of cultural activities, encouraging consumption and cultural mobility.

Nevertheless, the law regarding cultural vouchers does not make clear the conditions for granting the cultural voucher, the categories of beneficiaries, the types of cultural services/products, the types of cultural institutions that can provide the

cultural services/products, the validity period of the voucher. The legislative initiative also provides for the introduction of the legal definition of «House of Culture». The government has to develop a regulation, to establish the normative framework for the creation, activity, form of organization and administration of the culture houses. In the Republic of Moldova, over 1200 houses of culture are active. It is necessary to specify the circle of people who will benefit from the rights conferred by the cultural voucher. According to Moldovan legislation regarding youth, a young person is considered a person between the ages of 14 and 35 years, but a person is considered a child from the moment of birth until the age of 18. From the presented version of



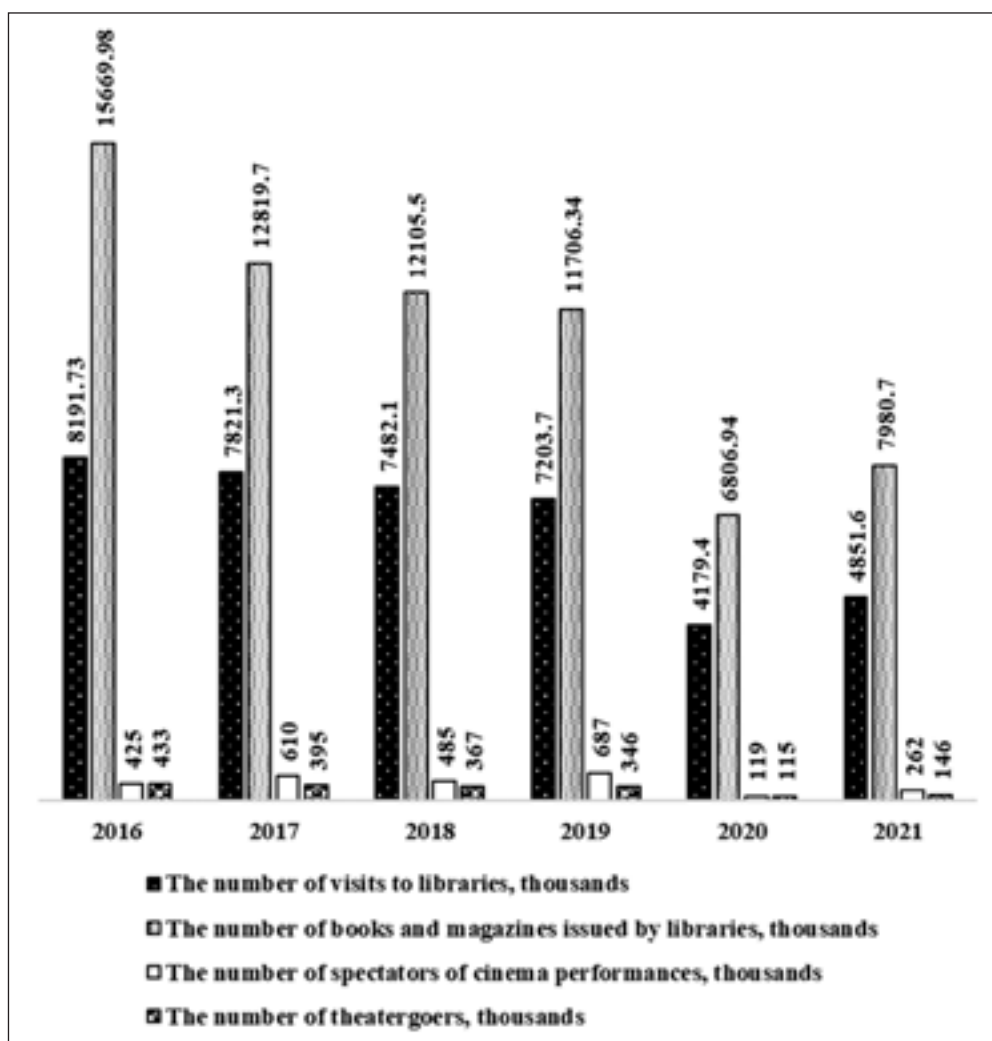


Fig. 2. The number of visits to libraries, books and magazines issued by libraries, spectators of cinema performances, theatergoers in the Republic of Moldova, thousands of people

Source: Created by the author based on the data from National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova [7]

law, it would appear that people between the ages of 14 and 35 benefit from cultural vouchers. The realization of the proposed legislative solution will require financial expenses from the state budget; however, no budget expenditure can be approved without establishing the source of funding. The informative note provides the source of funding for the year 2022, namely, in the budget of the Ministry of Culture for the year 2022, budgetary allocations in the

amount of 10000.00 thousand MDL (or circa 32491.47 thousand RUB) are provided for the implementation of the provisions of the law. Therefore, it is necessary to revise the content of the informative note for the law by including the source of financial coverage for the implementation of the provisions of the proposed project starting in 2023. The legislative solution proposes that from September 2022, every young person, upon reaching the age of 18, will receive 1000 MDL

(or circa 3248.32 RUB) on the government account for the procurement of cultural products and services. Also, the cultural vouchers are intended for young people (18 years or older), but children of school age can be included here, too, for example, for theater plays for children, for tourist trips, clubs with cultural activities, etc.

There are other countries where a similar measure as the cultural voucher was already implemented, like Brazil, Slovak Republic, Spain, France, Italy. The comparative analysis of the European legislation regarding the support of education and involvement in cultural activities of the youth offers examples of effective practices, worthy of following. States like France and Italy offer support for integrated education by providing students with cultural vouchers or its analogues (coupons, tickets, etc.) which they can use to purchase books, concert and cinema tickets.

In Brazil the culture voucher program is oriented towards workers, but their experience is still useful in our case, because a part of workforce are young people. In 2013, the Workers' Culture Program - Cultural Voucher (Programa de Cultura do Trabalhador - Vale Cultura) was adopted in Brazil. This program has three goals: to provide access to cultural products and services; to encourage visiting artistic and cultural places and to encourage participation in cultural and artistic events and performances. This measure is of a financial nature and has a national scope. The Cultural Voucher is a partnership of the Brazilian Federal Government with businesses, aimed at benefiting Brazilian workers who have formal employment contracts. The Brazilian worker receives a prepaid magnetic card with a monthly credit of 50.00 R\$ (circa 9.71 USD). The amount, which is cumulative

and has no expiry date, can be used to purchase tickets to theatres, cinemas, museums, shows, circuses, to buy CDs, DVDs, books, magazines and newspapers or to pay monthly subscriptions to courses and cultural workshops throughout the country. The cultural voucher must be provided to the worker who receives up to 5 monthly minimum wages. Workers with an income higher than 5 minimum wages can receive the cultural voucher, provided that all employees with the income of less than 5 monthly minimum wages of the respective enterprise are guaranteed to receive the cultural voucher.

In 2016 the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic introduced the subsidy system of culture vouchers. A cultural voucher is a financial voucher worth 4 EUR that is valid for one calendar year and is a special contribution from the state for a pupil and teacher employed full-time or part-time in a primary or secondary school, which can be used to visit cultural events and activities. Their role is to support the relationship of children and youth and their teachers to cultural values; to create conditions for the active participation of cultural institutions in the upbringing and education of school youth; to support competition between cultural institutions with the aim of increasing the quality of their activities; to support the addressability and transparency of state subsidies to cultural institutions based on the real interest of citizens in their services (not based on the individual assessment of officials and various commissions); to overview children's and youth's interest in culture and to monitor the attendance of cultural institutions by this age category.

In Spain teenagers who turn 18 in 2022 have to receive a voucher of 400 EUR called Youth Cultural Bonus to buy books, concert

and cinema tickets and other cultural products and activities [8]. Close to 500000 young people from all over Spain will be able to benefit from this aid. The objective of the bonus is threefold: to offer those who turn 18 an economic boost to discover and enjoy culture, in all its disciplines; to generate consumption habits of cultural products among youth; and thirdly, to revitalize and energize the cultural sector in Spain, heavily hit during the pandemic. The youth cultural bonus is divided into three sections, to encourage discovery and access to various cultural expressions: 200 EUR for live arts, cultural heritage and audiovisual arts. For example, tickets and subscriptions for performing arts, live music, cinema, museums, libraries, exhibitions and scenic, literary, musical or audiovisual festivals; 100 EUR for cultural products on physical support: books; magazines, newspapers, or other periodicals; video games, sheet music, records, CD, DVD or Blu-ray; 100 EUR for digital or online consumption: subscriptions and rentals to platforms, musical, reading or audio reading, or audiovisual, purchase of audiobooks, purchase of digital books (e-books), subscription to download multimedia files (podcasts), online video game subscriptions, digital press subscriptions, magazines or other periodicals. The 400 EUR can be used during the 12 months following its granting the Youth Cultural Bonus.

Italy gives a birthday present to all its citizens when they turn 18 a 500 EUR individual and nominative cultural voucher [9]. The measure was inserted within the 2021 Budget Law and only the beneficiary can spend within the national territory for: books; music courses; theater courses; foreign language courses; admission tickets to museums, exhibitions and cultural events, monuments, galleries,

archaeological areas, natural parks; discs; subscriptions to periodical newspapers (both in paper and electronic format); tickets for theatrical and cinematographic performances and live performances; audiovisual publishing products. Only those who were born in 2002 and then turned 18 in 2020 can benefit from it. Furthermore, applicants must be resident in the national territory and if they are non-EU citizens, they must be in possession of regular residence permit. Retailers, physical or online, who intend to accept the voucher as a form of payment must join a special platform. There are no spending limits for a single purchase, but multiple units of the same good or service cannot be purchased, for example: multiple tickets for the same show or multiple copies of the same book.

In France, the «Culture pass» program represents a smartphone application as a credit service for the cultural sector. It brings together local cultural proposals and digital offers (books, concerts, theatres, museums, music lessons, digital subscriptions, etc.). Since January 2022 young people aged 15, 16 and 17 have been eligible for the Culture pass. For the French youth of 15-18 years old this allows them to have access to the application on which they have a credit of 20 to 300 EUR to discover and book directly on the application cultural offers. On the one hand, the cultural structures publish – according to their desires and according to the list of eligible activities within the framework of the Culture pass - cultural offers (material goods, digital goods or cultural events), free or paid. Users benefit from the cultural proposals published on the application and the web-application by professionals thanks to their credit of 20 EUR (if they are 15 years old), 30 EUR (if they are 16 and 17 years old), 300 EUR (if they are 18 years old) [10].



## Conclusions and recommendations

As we have seen, even if the support measure for the stimulation of cultural consumption for youth and children is called cultural voucher, culture pass or any other similar way, in essence it is the same tool, but across different countries varies its amount, the age of its beneficiaries, the spectrum of cultural products and services, the periodicity of payment and the presence or the absence of spreading of the payments.

In the case of Republic of Moldova, the reduction in the indicators related to culture consumption in the last years has motivated the introduction of cultural vouchers as a measure to counter these worrisome trends. However, in order to improve the application of cultural vouchers in Moldova we give the following recommendations: 1) substantiation of the monetary amount of culture vouchers after elaboration of a sound methodology that would justify this amount; 2) elaboration of a law on operation of houses of culture or amendment of current laws about cultural institutions in order to cover the responsibilities and rights over the cultural vouchers; 3) clearly establishing the category of beneficiaries of cultural vouchers and their age group (for example, two groups: children of school age (7-17 years old) and youth (18-35 years old)); 4) deciding on the list of cultural products and services which will be covered by the compensation through the use of the cultural vouchers and on the types of cultural institutions that can provide the cultural services/products and on the validity period of the voucher.

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