Wikimedia Research Grant Proposal 2025

Cultural Heritage Edit-a-Thon: Oltenia, Romania & Severozapaden, Bulgaria

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Abstract

This project proposes a collaborative documentation of the cultural heritage in two disadvantaged regions of Southeast Europe: Oltenia (Romania) and Severozapaden (Bulgaria). These areas face economic, cultural, and media marginalization, and their lack of visibility on Wikipedia exacerbates imbalances in the representation of heritage.

By organizing an edit-a-thon, the project aims to:

- Address biases in media and Wikipedia.

- Expand the encyclopedic coverage of the local heritage of these regions.

- Engage local communities, historians, and volunteers in documenting historical monuments, with a focus on old churches.

- Publish the contributions on Wikipedia in English, Romanian, and Bulgarian, using academic and archival sources.

This initiative will contribute to the expansion and diversification of Wikipedia content, facilitating a collaborative framework among university professors, students, and local communities.

Introduction Previous Work

The Problem Addressed
The regions of Oltenia (Romania) and Severozapaden (Bulgaria) suffer from economic and cultural marginalization, a phenomenon well-documented in European Commission reports. These areas face accelerated demographic decline, reduced investments, and low visibility in the public and media spheres.

Despite their rich cultural heritage, these regions are underrepresented on Wikipedia, perpetuating informational and cultural imbalances. The absence of articles about historical monuments, local traditions, and cultural figures affects the global perception of these regions,

reinforcing media bias and exclusion from the digital discourse.

Through this project, we aim to address this underrepresentation by providing a collaborative documentation platform to bring Oltenia and Severozapaden to the forefront of encyclopedic knowledge.

This initiative aligns with the Wikimedia Foundation's global efforts to promote cultural heritage in underrepresented regions.

Importance for Wikipedia

For many communities, Wikipedia serves as the only window to the world. The regions of Oltenia and Severozapaden are not just geographical spaces but zones of exclusion— economically isolated, without investments, and lacking voices to represent them adequately. Their absence from Wikipedia is not accidental: they have not been deemed significant enough to be included in the global digital narrative. This absence reflects not just a lack of documentation but a profound void in perspective.

This project does not seek to jingoistically glorify these places but to affirm their reality— poverty, depopulation, lack of cultural infrastructure, and the absence of a vision to integrate them into a development circuit. Through field research, I will recover fragments of memory that might otherwise be lost, integrating them into a broader process of digital recognition.

Publishing this information on Wikipedia means more than enriching its content. It is an act of resistance against oblivion, a way to make these places visible beyond the economic statistics that define them as "underdeveloped zones." Digital visibility does not guarantee change, but it provides a starting point, an anchor for those who wish to research, understand, and perhaps intervene.

As a university professor and researcher, I consider Wikipedia not just a repository of knowledge but a space for reconstruction—where stories left in the shadows can be brought back to the forefront. I will write about this project in academic journals to demonstrate how the digitization of heritage can become a bridge between the past and the future. In a world where what does not exist online seems not to exist at all, it is essential for these regions to be documented.

This edit-a-thon is not about giving these regions a better place in public discourse—it is about affirming them as part of historical, economic, and cultural reality, with all their limitations, contradictions, and urgent need for recognition.

This initiative contributes to:

- Correcting the representation bias of marginalized regions in Southeast Europe.

- Increasing the visibility of cultural heritage (preserved in these regions for over two centuries but rarely restored) through well-documented, on-site articles.

- Access to academic and archival sources for content development.

- With great respect, I will write about and promote the Wikipedia platform in academic journals.

Research Questions

1. How can participatory documentation (edit-a-thon) influence the representation of disadvantaged regions on Wikipedia?

2. What factors determine the underrepresentation of the cultural heritage of Oltenia and Severozapaden?

3. What are the most effective methods for integrating local sources into Wikipedia articles?

Date

Project Duration Project period: July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026

Previous Work

The undersigned has previously conducted historical and linguistic research (in national archives and on-site) on the feudal period of Romanian history, focusing on the specific area of southern Romania and northern Greece. These studies explored Romanian society and the migration of populations during the 19th century, from Greece to Romania.

Related work

Edit-a-thons have been successfully used to document cultural heritage, combat gender bias, and increase access to academic sources. This project builds on such initiatives and extends them to marginalized geographical areas.

Recent studies (Ferran-Ferrer et al., 2024) highlight that edit-a-thon events significantly contribute to closing representation gaps. Based on these findings, I propose applying this method to document 19th-century cultural heritage (a decisive century for the consolidation of Balkan nations—socially, linguistically, and territorially) in the regions of Oltenia and Severozapaden.

1. Archival and Field Research:

    - Identification of sources (archives, libraries, museums).

    - Documentation trips to churches and monuments.

    - Photography and collection of local testimonies.

2. Content Processing and Analysis:

    - Digitization of materials (scanning documents, adding them to Wikimedia Commons).

- Correlation of data with information from Wikidata.

3. Organization of an Edit-a-Thon:

    - Format: Online and physical event.

    - Locations: University libraries, cultural centers.

    - Themes:

        - History of churches.

        - Local traditions and oral culture.

        - Regional historical figures.

4. Evaluation of Impact on Wikipedia:

    - Statistical analysis of new articles and improvements.

    - Surveys for participants on the challenges of documenting heritage.

Methods

1. **Archival and Field Research**

    - Identification of sources (archives, libraries, museums).

    - Documentation trips to churches and monuments in Oltenia and Severozapaden.

    - Photography and collection of local testimonies.

2. **Content Processing and Analysis**

    - Digitization of materials (scanning historical documents obtained from archives, adding them to Wikimedia Commons).

    - Correlation of data with information from Wikidata.

    - Comparing online visibility of marginalized regions vs. central regions on Wikipedia.

3. **Organization of an Edit-a-Thon**

    - Format: Online and physical event.

    - Locations: University libraries, cultural centers.

    - Themes:

        - History of old churches in Oltenia and Severozapaden.

        - Local traditions and oral culture.

        - Regional historical figures.

4. **Evaluation of Impact on Wikipedia**

- Statistical analysis of new articles and improvements.

- Examination of bias trends in Wikipedia content.

- Surveys for participants regarding the challenges of documenting heritage.

Expected output

- Publishing Wikipedia articles in 4 languages: English, Romanian, Bulgarian, and Greek.

- Academic contributions published on the digitization of heritage.

- Development of a best practices guide for edit-a-thons.

Risks

- Potential difficulties in obtaining archival sources.

- Low participation at events. *These risks will be managed through alternative plans and local collaborations.*

Community impact plan

- Involvement of local communities (historians, students, volunteers).

- Promotion of the project through academic journals and conferences.

Evaluation

 To measure the success of this project, we will use the following evaluation metrics:

Academic Impact:

- Number of new Wikipedia articles and contributions.

- Translations of research results on Wikipedia into 4 languages: English, Romanian, Bulgarian, and Greek.

- Diversification of Wikipedia content by adding articles on the concepts of Orthodox religion in Southeast Europe.

- Quality of academic sources utilized.

- Publication of results in academic journals.

Community Involvement:

- Participation in the edit-a-thon.

- Engagement of historians, students, and local volunteers.

Impact on Media Bias:

- Comparison of the visibility of marginalized regions on Wikipedia before and after the

project.

- Evaluation of the balance between local and international sources.

Recommendations for Wikimedia:

- Development of a best practices guide.

- Feedback on the documentation process and its adoption.

Budget (Max €5,000)

- Coordination and organization: €2,500

- Access to archival sources: €800

- Digital materials and equipment: €700

- Promotion and logistics for the edit-a-thon: €500

Appendix: Academic Contributions. Research Background & Publications

Wikipedia Profile: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Graziella_Popescu

Academic Profile – Grațiela Popescu Grațiela Popescu is a PhD in Philology, scientific researcher, and university lecturer with extensive experience in cultural studies, comparative literature, journalism, and communication theory. Her expertise spans a wide range of fields, from mythological and semiotic analysis to the representation of cultural heritage in media and theater.

Throughout her career, she has contributed to the preservation and interpretation of cultural heritage, focusing on Romanian and European culture. Moreover, her active involvement in digitization and academic documentation projects positions her, according to references from her postdoctoral research supervisors, as a leader in heritage conservation initiatives on digital platforms. She now aspires to become a Wikipedia researcher.

Academic Experience and Research Grațiela Popescu has made a significant impact in literary, theatrical, and cinematographic studies, with international collaborations and contributions published in prestigious journals.

✔ **Title:** PhD in Philology ✔ **Role:** University lecturer in journalism and cultural studies ✔ **Research Areas:**

- Mythology and dramaturgy

- Comparative literature

- Cultural heritage and national identity

- Communication theory and semiotics

- Mass media and digital culture

Awards and Recognitions:

- Contributions recognized by the Writers' Union of Romania.

- Publications indexed in international research databases.

- Articles cited in academic studies on comparative literature and cultural heritage.

Relevant Publications Grațiela Popescu is the author of numerous studies and academic articles exploring the relationship between myth and performativity, as well as the impact of mass media on cultural heritage.

▶ "Le Mythe, Un Concept Ouvert" – A study on myth criticism and cultural anthropology. ▶ "Strategies to Avoid Imposed Themes in Romanian Drama and Film under Communism" – An analysis of theater and film under the communist regime. ▶ "Fairy Tales: Scenic Narration and Baroque" – Research on scenic narration and the aesthetics of Baroque. ▶ "Mitodrama, Proximate Genre" – A study on myth and spectacle in contemporary theater. ▶ "The Presence of the Dramatic Myth in Contemporary Romanian Theater" – Research on intertextuality and theatrical semiotics, etc.

▶ **Indexes and Citations:** Her publications have been indexed in ISI Indexed Journals,

Scientific Publications Index, Recent Science Index, Scholarly Journals Index, CEEOL, and other academic databases.

Relevance of Contributions to the Project Grațiela Popescu's academic work is directly relevant to the Cultural Heritage Edit-a-Thon, as her research focuses on: ✔ **Cultural Studies and Heritage:** Documenting and interpreting local traditions in Romania and Bulgaria. ✔ **Mass Media and Informational Bias:** Addressing the underrepresentation of marginalized regions. ✔ **Digitization and Open Access:** Expanding knowledge through platforms like Wikipedia and Wikimedia Commons.

This project will facilitate the transfer of her academic expertise to the Wikipedia community, providing a solid framework for balancing informational bias and promoting more equitable encyclopedic coverage of cultural heritage.