

CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE AWARENESS OF TODAY'S YOUNG GENERATION RELATING TO THE GREAT MORAVIAN PERIOD

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Abstract: PAVERA Libor. *Cultural Heritage in the Awareness of Today's Young Generation Relating to The Great Moravian Period*. This study examines the historical awareness of 15-year-old students regarding the Great Moravian period and its interpretation within the current education system. It explores how students perceive Great Moravia, the factors influencing their knowledge, and potential gaps in historical education. The research sample comprises students from the upper grades of primary schools as well as lower grades of secondary and grammar schools in the Czech Republic. A statistical analysis of both correct and incorrect responses is interpreted within a broader historical and pedagogical framework. The findings indicate a tendency among students to view the past through the lens of contemporary media and cultural discourses, confirming differences in historical consciousness depending on region and school type. Additionally, the study includes a control sample of students from Silesian schools, allowing for a comparative analysis between different educational environments and providing a broader perspective on the historical memory of younger generations.

Keywords: *research, 15-year-old students, historical memory, Great Moravian period, education system, paradigm shifts*

Cultural heritage is a fundamental part of both individual and collective identity. It serves not just as a means of understanding the past but rather also as a living source of values, traditions, and inspiration for both the present and future. Cultural heritage encompasses tangible elements – such as architectural monuments, artworks, and archaeological sites – as well as intangible aspects, including language, folklore, traditions, customs, and craftsmanship. Together, these components create a rich cultural tapestry acting as a definition of nations and communities.

In the modern era young people's relationship with cultural heritage is undergoing significant changes. Factors such as digitalization (instantaneous access to data – and therefore less need for memorisation), changes in educational approaches, new forms of leisure activities, and evolving value systems influence how young people perceive their historical and cultural identity. Yingfei Zhang (2023) describes the importance of youth engagement in heritage management, a perspective echoed by Fontal – Ibáñez-Etxeberria (2024) and Selim et al. (2024).

Among 15-year-olds, the target group of this study, attitudes toward cultural heritage vary widely. Their engagement with it is often based mainly upon their school environment, the availability of cultural activities, and the digitalization of heritage sites. However, an important question remains: To what extent is this awareness truly embedded in their value system? Or is it merely a result of external influences, such as school curricula? (See Madgin 2016; Halu 2016.)

This study explores how young people perceive cultural heritage, what factors influence their relationship with it, and how this connection can be strengthened through innovative approaches. The following sections will examine not only their general awareness of cultural heritage, but also how their perspectives compare to those of older generations. We will also discuss the challenges

and opportunities faced by cultural institutions today and explore effective ways to engage young people in actively discovering history and traditions.

The Importance of Cultural Heritage for Young People

Cultural heritage is not just a relic of the past – it is a living part of contemporary society and can play a crucial role in shaping young people's identities. But why should cultural heritage be relevant to 15-year-old students?

A strong connection to cultural heritage helps young people navigate their place in the world. When they develop a deeper awareness of their cultural roots, it gives them a stronger sense of identity, helps them understand historical contexts, and allows them to see their surroundings in a more meaningful way (Madgin 2016, 85; Fontal – Ibáñez-Etxeberria 2024, 78).¹

Cultural heritage is also a powerful tool for critical thinking. It opens up discussions about values, identity, and history – acting as encouragement for young people to reflect on how societies evolve over time. Once students engage with topics like national history, historical monuments, or cultural diversity, they are more likely to think about the bigger picture and question how historical narratives shape the present.² Studies suggest that those who feel connected to their cultural heritage are often more involved in their communities, participate in civic life, and even take part in volunteering or projects that help preserve cultural traditions (Yingfei Zhang 2023, 45; Selim et al. 2024, 112).³

When young people engage with their cultural heritage – whether through learning, discussion, or creative projects – they can also better work with their creative potential (Halu 2016, 210).

Factors Influencing the Relationship Between Young People and Cultural Heritage

Several key factors shape how young people relate to cultural heritage, including school education and curricula, digital media, and the relatively limited availability of cultural programs tailored to youth.

Schools play a crucial role in developing young people's relationship with cultural heritage. The way how cultural heritage is presented in educational curricula influences whether students create a deeper connection to it or see it merely as a collection of historical facts to memorize for exams and forget after (for example, due to lack of usage and no current need for it).

In the classroom, cultural heritage is often framed within history, civic education, or arts and music lessons. However, if teaching methods are not interactive or connected to students' real-world experiences, cultural heritage may feel distant or irrelevant to them. Modern educational

¹ This study explores how students at primary and secondary levels perceive and conceptualize cultural heritage, emphasizing the role of education in fostering a holistic understanding of heritage (Fontal – Ibáñez-Etxeberria 2024).

² This research (Madgin 2016) examines the relationship between young people's connection to heritage sites and their ability to engage critically with history, demonstrating that attachment to physical spaces fosters deeper historical awareness.

³ This study (Zhang et al. 2023) presents a framework for engaging young people in heritage conservation, analyzing factors such as participation, perception, and influence in cultural heritage decision-making. A follow-up study (Selim 2024) then analyses the impact of youth engagement on cultural heritage, focusing on knowledge acquisition, motivation, and long-term contributions to heritage conservation.

approaches – such as project-based learning, field trips, historical reenactments, and participation in community activities – have proven to be more successful in motivating young people to engage with cultural heritage.

The digitalization of cultural heritage opens new possibilities for exploration and accessibility. Today's generation, raised in a world of online media and mobile apps, often prefers visual and action-based learning experiences. Many museums and cultural institutions now employ virtual reality, augmented reality, and 3D modelling, allowing young people to explore heritage in entirely new ways that are much more memorable. Mobile apps – such as digital city guides, educational games, or online archives – are too becoming increasingly popular tools for making cultural heritage more engaging.

On the other hand, there is a risk that digital formats may oversimplify complex historical themes, potentially leading to a superficial understanding of historical contexts.

One of the major challenges is that many cultural institutions primarily target an older audience. Museums, galleries, and historical sites are often not designed with young visitors in mind, leading to a lack of interactive programs and opportunities for young people to contribute to content creation, resulting in lower engagement. To combat such an issue, there is a growing number of cultural institutions experimenting with youth advisory boards, workshops, and volunteer programs, enabling students to actively participate in shaping cultural content.

Expert opinions on the issue can be found in recent domestic literature (cf. Dolák 2022) or in journals and bulletins (Czech Association of Museums and Galleries; *Museologica Brunensia* 2016, etc.).

Research Framework

As previously mentioned, this study focuses on young people's perceptions of the earliest phase of domestic history – particularly the Great Moravian period – which played a fundamental role in shaping the cultural and spiritual landscape of the Czech lands and Central Europe. This period saw the establishment of the first significant state entity in the region and the arrival of Christianity, which profoundly influenced cultural and political development in the centuries that followed.

Although Great Moravia was the first state formation to leave a lasting impact on the historical continuity of Czech lands and neighbouring regions, it remains unclear to what extent this period is still a living part of historical consciousness among today's youth. This study, therefore, strives to answer and evaluate several key questions:

- A) What level of knowledge do 15-year-old students have about Great Moravia?
- B) What factors influence their relationship with this earliest phase of local history?
- C) Do they perceive Great Moravia as a part of cultural heritage that is relevant to them?
- D) How can awareness of this early stage of Czech history be strengthened?

Focusing on the earliest phase of our history allows us to identify deeper structures of historical awareness and perceptions of heritage. Furthermore, this research paves the way for a follow-up study examining later phases of Czech statehood – including the transition to the Přemyslid dynasty and iconic historical figures such as Charles IV, George of Poděbrady, and other influential rulers and thinkers.

Survey Structure, Thematic Areas, and Justification for Test Question Selection

The selection of test questions was not random; rather, it was carefully structured to cover the most significant aspects of the Great Moravian era and its legacy for Czech and Slovak history. The test was designed to reflect the knowledge that students are expected to acquire both through the school education system and within a broader cultural awareness. The primary criteria for structuring the questions included historical relevance, alignment with educational standards, interdisciplinary connections, and the continued presence of this topic in collective memory.

The test was developed following methodologies used in international educational assessments such as OECD/PISA tests.⁴ This means that the questions do not merely assess students' ability to recall dates and facts, but they add an emphasis on their understanding of broader historical contexts, the significance of events, and their long-term impact on cultural and political realities.

The first part of the test focused on general knowledge about Great Moravia. It was important to determine whether students recognized it as the first stable state formation in Central Europe, preceding the emergence of the Czech state and significantly influencing neighbouring regions, such as present-day Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland. Understanding the basic historical timeframe (9th century) and the geographical extent of Great Moravia was essential for grasping its historical significance. The goal was to assess whether students could correctly place Great Moravia within the broader context of Central European history and avoid confusing it with later periods, such as the Přemyslid or Luxembourg dynasties.

Great Moravia was the first political entity in the region to deal with administration, defence, diplomacy, and relations with other local powers. For this reason, the test included questions about the political and military aspects of the empire. A crucial moment was Rastislav's effort to secure Great Moravia's independence from the Frankish Empire, which led to the arrival of Cyril and Methodius. It was therefore necessary to verify whether students understood the political and strategic dimensions of their mission.

One of the most significant contributions of Great Moravia was the spread of literacy and Christianity through the work of Cyril and Methodius. The test examined several key aspects of their influence. The first was their origin – whether students knew they were sent from Byzantium and that their arrival had both religious and cultural (as well as indirectly political) implications. Students should understand that the mission of Cyril and Methodius was not solely focused on spreading Christianity, but also included educational and legal reforms that had a profound impact on the entire Slavic world.

A particular emphasis was placed on questions concerning writing, as the creation of Glagolitic script was a key moment in the development of Slavic literacy and education. Its significance extended beyond Great Moravia, as its legacy endured in Slavic countries for centuries. Another critical topic was *Zákon sudnyj ljudem*, one of the first legal codes in the Slavic world. This question helped assess whether students were aware that legal culture and codification of laws were part of Great Moravia's civilizational development, rather than being exclusive to Western Europe.

Questions about Great Moravia's relations with Frankish and Byzantine rulers tested students' ability to understand early medieval diplomacy and the geopolitical situation of the time. It was

⁴ The OECD conducts the Programme for International Student Assessment, evaluating the competencies of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics, and science across member and non-member countries. Detailed results and reports are accessible on the OECD's official website <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/>.

important to determine whether students recognized that Great Moravia was not an isolated state but an active participant in international relations.

Including a question about Prince Svatopluk was crucial, as under his rule, Great Moravia reached its greatest territorial expansion and political influence. It was necessary to verify whether students could distinguish his reign from other periods in Great Moravian history. In addition, a further important question concerned the collapse of Great Moravia and the Hungarian invasion, as this moment illustrates the historical transformation of Central Europe. Understanding the causes and consequences of Great Moravia's fall is required for grasping the continuity and chronology of history – that the decline of one state formation leads to the emergence of new power structures, such as the Kingdom of Hungary.

The final part of the test focused on what has remained from Great Moravia. The goal was to assess whether students understood that its influence did not end in the 10th century but continues in the cultural and religious traditions of the Czech and Slovak regions. Testing students' knowledge of the locations of Great Moravian archaeological sites helped assess their awareness of the physical remnants of this era. Additionally, it was necessary to assess whether they understood the significance of the Cyril and Methodius legacy for present-day Slovakia, as Great Moravia plays a crucial role in Slovak national identity to this day.

The last questions examined the living aspects of Great Moravian heritage in the current era.⁵ The aim was to determine whether students realized that national holidays, linguistic heritage, and Christian traditions have their origins in this period. The selection of questions was designed to reflect school curricula without leaving out broader societal and historical awareness. As can be inferred, the test covered key political, cultural, legal, and religious aspects of Great Moravia, with an emphasis on its historical continuity and also on the facts that can prove useful even nowadays. Such approach allows for a detailed analysis of students' responses and helps assess their understanding of this early phase of Czech and Slovak history.

Based on the test results, the next part of the study will identify potential gaps in students' knowledge and comprehension of historical connections, enabling (and providing) recommendations for the education system and the promotion of Great Moravian heritage among younger generations.

A multiple-choice format with one correct answer out of four options was intentionally chosen, as this approach is methodologically more suitable for comparative analysis and enables a more precise assessment of students' knowledge. Open-ended questions were ruled out primarily due to concerns about objectiveness (how results would be evaluated and scored, since there are many cases in which it can be complex to tell how well something was defined or elaborated upon) and the ease of interpreting results in a quantitative manner. With open-ended answers, grading would depend on subjective evaluation, which could lead to inconsistencies in assessing the correctness of responses among different evaluators. Additionally, the closed format minimizes the risk of students avoiding a direct answer by providing vague responses or simply rephrasing the question.

Another key reason for choosing multiple-choice questions was the higher reliability of the test, meaning the ability to obtain consistent results across different groups of respondents. This approach allows for statistical evaluation of success rates for individual questions and the identification of specific areas where students have the most significant knowledge gaps. Open-ended questions, by contrast, would require more complex qualitative analysis of responses, making direct comparisons between individual students or schools significantly more difficult.

⁵ The author of this study focused on the scientific prowess of Josef Vašica, who explored the topic of Great Moravia in several books (see Pavera 2001).

Time efficiency was also an important factor. Multiple-choice questions enable quick test completion and easy automated grading, which would not be possible with open-ended responses. Moreover, this format eliminates issues related to spelling or grammatical errors, which could otherwise distort the interpretation of answers – such as when a student knows the correct answer but struggles to express it precisely.

This format also aligns with the methodology used in international comparative tests such as PISA or TIMSS,⁶ where multiple-choice questions are employed precisely because they allow for international comparison and quantification of students' knowledge levels. Additionally, this method allows for mathematically identifying specific areas where students struggle. For example, if a significant number of students answer questions about the Cyril and Methodius mission or the geopolitical role of Great Moravia incorrectly, this information can be used to develop recommendations for history education that focus on strengthening these particular areas.

The assessment of students' historical awareness of Great Moravia provided interesting results, allowing for an evaluation of their level of knowledge as well as the identification of key factors influencing their responses. The overall test performance was relatively solid, with some questions answered with high accuracy, while others revealed gaps in knowledge or a natural tendency among young people to interpret the past through the lens of the present.

Among the 305 students tested,⁷ the average number of correct answers was around 65%, indicating that basic knowledge of Great Moravia is not negligible (though not really commendable either). However, certain systematic biases were observed, particularly in questions concerning the geopolitical and cultural context of Great Moravia. While knowledge of the Cyril and Methodius mission was relatively strong – questions about Glagolitic script, Old Church Slavonic, and the mission's significance achieved success rates above 80% – questions focusing on Great Moravia's military and political history caused more uncertainty.

Students performed best on questions related to Great Moravia's direct cultural legacy. For instance, a question about the importance of the Cyril and Methodius mission for Slavic nations had a 91.5% success rate. Similarly, a question about the liturgical language used by Cyril and Methodius reached 88% correct answers. These results suggest that students have a firm understanding of Great Moravia's cultural and linguistic legacy, which may be due to the continued presence of the Cyril and Methodius tradition in Czech education, such as through the national holiday on July 5th or the study of Slavic languages at universities.

By contrast, questions requiring an understanding of power dynamics and Great Moravia's geopolitical role proved more difficult. For example, only 39% of students correctly identified that the disciples of Cyril and Methodius moved to Bulgaria and Macedonia after being expelled, with a large number instead selecting Kyiv. This likely reflects the influence of current media narratives about Ukraine (and students having this in mind – leading them to consider the importance of Ukraine in history as well) rather than an accurate understanding of historical events. These findings highlight the importance of placing greater emphasis on the political and diplomatic aspects of Great Moravia in school curricula while also helping students develop the ability to critically analyse history without projecting contemporary events onto the past.

Another question with a relatively low success rate was question 18, which asked where the center of Great Moravian liturgy was located. Only 80% of students correctly identified the Moravian-Pannonian region, while 35 students believed that Prague was the religious center at

⁶ In the 2018 PISA assessment, Central European countries such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland demonstrated notable performances and appeared in the top half of tested jurisdictions.

⁷ See Annex 2) in this study, named *Test Results Table – Great Moravia and Its Legacy*, which displays the final multiple choice answers of the students.

that time. This distortion can be explained by the fact that students from Prague and Central Bohemia, where the research was conducted, tend to perceive Prague as the historical center of Central Europe, although this is a perspective that emerged much later.

Question 19, which focused on a region that was not influenced by Great Moravia, also revealed uncertainty. The correct answer was Normandy, but only 37% of students answered correctly. Many were unsure whether Poland had been under the influence of Great Moravia, suggesting insufficient awareness of the territorial expansion and diplomatic relations of the Great Moravian Empire.

Looking at the overall results, it is evident that students performed best in questions related to the cultural and religious legacy of Great Moravia, which suggests that these aspects are relatively well covered in school education. On the other hand, the political and geopolitical dimension of Great Moravian history proved to be more challenging, possibly due to a lesser emphasis on this aspect in teaching.⁸

The test also revealed that some responses were influenced by contemporary media and cultural discourse. In the case of the question about the exile of Cyril and Methodius' disciples, it is clear that current geopolitical events influence students' historical thinking. This is a natural phenomenon, but it also suggests that the younger generation may be susceptible to a certain form of "historical shortcut," in which historical events are associated with the present based on intuitive rather than precise knowledge.

From these results, several recommendations can be made for educational practice. Firstly, it would be beneficial to strengthen the teaching of the geopolitical aspects of Great Moravia, as students demonstrate good knowledge of the cultural legacy of this period but have a weaker understanding of how the empire functioned in terms of governance, defence, and diplomatic relations. Additionally, it can be anticipated that providing students with more tools for understanding historical contexts – such as interactive maps or comparative historical overviews for a specific era/time period – could help them better grasp how Great Moravia interacted with other powers of its time.

An interesting aspect that could be utilized in teaching is the study of how contemporary events influence our perception of the past. As mentioned above and demonstrated by the question about the exile of Cyril and Methodius' disciples, some students intuitively linked this event to current developments in Ukraine. This finding suggests that integrating historical education with current affairs could be beneficial, helping students to better distinguish between past and present.

Social and Geographical Factors in Students' Historical Awareness: The Influence of Environment and School Type on Test Results

One of the aspects that should be carefully monitored in future research is the social and geographical background of respondents – whether they come from villages, small towns, or larger cities, as well as the type of school they attend. Such a distinction is important because historical awareness is not solely a product of formal education but is also shaped by family and community environments, public discourse, and local historical traditions.

⁸ Professor Josef Vašica, a great expert in the field of Old Church Slavonic language and script, wrote about Great Moravia in a highly accessible way. He was a priest and a scholar of extraordinary quality. His key works include the publication *Literární památky epochy velkomoravské* (published twice, in 1966 and 1996) and the posthumously published collection *Eseje a studie ze starší české literatury* (Vašica 2001).

In this study, respondents were primarily recruited from Prague and the Central Bohemian Region, which may explain certain trends in their responses, such as the tendency of some students to identify Prague as the historical centre of Great Moravia. This suggests that students subconsciously attempt to place historical events within a familiar environment. If we were to conduct the test among students from Moravia or Slovakia, their answers might exhibit different tendencies, such as greater awareness of Great Moravian archaeological sites or better orientation in questions related to the Cyril and Methodius tradition.

Differences can also be expected between students from various types of schools. Grammar school students typically receive a broader general education, while vocational school students may have more selective knowledge, as their curriculum places a stronger emphasis on practical subjects. If we were to test students from agricultural, business, or technical schools, their responses might reveal less focus on humanities, which would affect their understanding of historical connections.

If we aim to gain a more comprehensive picture of students' historical awareness, it would be beneficial to expand the sample to include rural and Moravian regions as well as a wider range of school specializations. This would allow for an analysis of regional and educational differences in historical knowledge and help determine the influence of social and cultural factors on the formation of historical consciousness.

Active vs. Passive Historical Awareness: Is There a Difference Between Memorization and Understanding?

A key issue revealed by the test is the difference between active and passive historical awareness (Zhang 2023). The results indicate that students are quite proficient in memorizing facts, such as the century in which Great Moravia was established or the name of the ruler who invited Cyril and Methodius. However, problems arise when they are asked to place historical events in a broader context, understand their consequences, or recognize their long-term significance for Czech and European history.

For example, questions requiring an understanding of power relations between Great Moravia, the Frankish Empire, and Byzantium performed significantly worse than fact-based questions. This suggests that history education still emphasizes encyclopaedic knowledge rather than historical interpretation.

Due to this fact, education of history should place greater emphasis on analytical thinking and historical interpretation, using project-based learning, discussions, analysis of historical sources, and comparative studies of different historical periods. This approach would help students understand why historical events unfolded the way they did and what lessons can be drawn from them for the present. This also supports greater student engagement – when a student appears inattentive to historical facts, it may not stem from disinterest, but rather from a natural lack of understanding of how that information holds value or relevance in today's world.

Great Moravia: A Czech, Slovak, or Central European Phenomenon?

Another important aspect of test interpretation is how students perceive Great Moravia in a national context. In Czech textbooks, Great Moravia is often presented as “the first state on our territory,” which can inadvertently suggest that it was primarily a Czech state entity. In reality, its

core lay in present-day Slovakia and Moravia, and its legacy is perceived differently in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

If the test were conducted in Slovakia, we could expect students to view Great Moravia as their historical state, whereas in the Czech Republic, it is more often perceived as a precursor to the Přemyslid state.⁹ This difference may influence how students associate certain historical events, such as the significance of Great Moravia for Czech history – some students may not identify it as a direct predecessor of Czech statehood.

It would also be interesting to observe how students from Poland, Hungary, or Austria would respond to the test, as Great Moravia had cultural and political influence in these regions as well. If we wanted to gain a deeper understanding of regional historical awareness, it would be valuable to compare the responses of Czech students with those from neighbouring countries to determine how Great Moravia is perceived in the broader Central European context.

Control Sample – Comparison of Czech and Polish Respondents: The Influence of National Educational Curricula on Historical Awareness

An important supplement to the main test sample was a control group of 26 respondents from Silesia, representing a Polish environment. The results of this sample showed significantly lower success rates compared to Czech students, revealing major differences in several key areas. These differences can be explained by both the different school curriculum, which in Poland places primary emphasis on national history, and the generally lower level of cultural awareness of the Great Moravian period.

Lower knowledge of Slavic rulers: If he wasn't "ours," he isn't important

One of the most striking differences was that Polish students had more difficulty identifying key rulers of Great Moravia. For example, in the question about which ruler invited Cyril and Methodius, only 27% of Polish students correctly selected Rastislav, whereas among Czech students, the success rate was 61%. Similarly, in the question about which ruler expanded Great Moravia the most, Polish students had only a 23% success rate, compared to 58% among Czech students.¹⁰

This result aligns with expectations, as Polish school curricula emphasize the Piast dynasty and the formation of the Polish state; conversely, Great Moravia is perceived as a distant phenomenon with only marginal significance for Poland. Naturally, Polish students are less familiar with Great Moravian rulers than Czech students, for whom these figures are part of their national historical tradition.

It also confirms a broader tendency of national education systems to focus primarily on their own history, with neighbouring historical entities often mentioned only briefly or within the context of the local country maintaining foreign relations. Polish students, for example, are

⁹ Several prominent Czech historians have dedicated their research to the Přemyslid dynasty and the Czech Middle Ages. František Kavka, Jiří Spěváček, Josef Žemlička, Petr Sommer, Dušan Třeštík, Marie Bláhová, and Eva Doležalová focus in their works on various aspects of the Přemyslid era, ranging from political history to economic and social development, as well as cultural and religious issues, thus significantly contributing to our understanding of this key epoch in Czech history.

¹⁰ The intellectual output of the survey consisted of a percentage-based evaluation of student responses. For detailed data, see Annex 2 of this study (*“Test Results Table – Great Moravia and Its Legacy”*), which presents the final multiple choice responses collected from the students.

well-acquainted with figures such as Mieszko I or Bolesław the Brave, but historical figures like Rastislav or Svatopluk are not perceived as historically relevant.

Even greater uncertainty in geopolitical questions

In addition, a significant difference was the even lower success rate of Polish students in questions concerning Great Moravia's geopolitical context. For example, in the question about where the centre of Great Moravian liturgy was located, only 19% of Polish students correctly identified the Moravian-Pannonian region, whereas among Czech students, the success rate was 80%.

Polish students more frequently selected Prague or Rome, which suggests that the perception of church history in Poland is strongly linked to Catholic tradition and Roman Christianity, whereas the Byzantine influence is less emphasized. This is due to the fact that Poland historically oriented itself toward Latin Europe, whereas Great Moravia had to navigate between the influences of Byzantium and Rome. This difference in historical trajectories is also reflected in the students' answers.

Similarly, in the question about where the disciples of Cyril and Methodius moved, only 15% of Polish students selected the correct answer, Bulgaria and Macedonia, whereas among Czech students, the success rate was 39%.¹¹ Most Polish students chose Kyiv, which indicates a similar issue as among Czech students – a tendency to project contemporary geopolitical perceptions onto history (though the issue here could also be something else, e.g. Poland having control over now-Ukrainian land at some points in history, or other factors). In Poland today, Ukraine is often discussed in political discourse, and so students likely intuitively associate it with “old Eastern Europe,” despite the fact that Kyiv was not the main centre of the Slavic mission.

Limited awareness of the Cyril and Methodius legacy

Another interesting difference emerged in the question about the legacy of Cyril and Methodius. While Czech students were relatively aware of the fact that the mission of Cyril and Methodius held a large role in the development of Slavic literacy and education, the Polish sample showed significantly lower success rates.

For example, in the question about Glagolitic script as the writing system of Great Moravia, 83% of Czech students answered correctly, while among Polish students, the success rate was only 46%. This may be related to the fact that Poland never adopted the Cyril and Methodius tradition but instead maintained Latin script and Roman liturgy from the beginning. The Cyril and Methodius mission is therefore not perceived as part of Poland's cultural heritage, and Polish students are naturally less familiar with it than their Czech peers.

Perspectives and Insights for Educational Practice

The Great Moravian period is an integral part of history education in primary schools and remains a permanent feature of educational curricula. However, the research findings indicate that attention should be paid not only to the content of instruction but also to the methods used to convey this historical era to students.

¹¹ Quantitative results from the research are summarized as percentage values of student answers. These findings are documented in Annex 2, titled “*Test Results Table – Great Moravia and Its Legacy*,” which outlines the distribution of multiple choice answers submitted by the respondents.

Although students encounter Great Moravia in textbooks and classroom lessons, their knowledge often remains fragmented, superficial, or purely memorized. This becomes evident in their responses. For example, test results show that while students can recall certain factual details – such as the century in which Great Moravia emerged or the arrival of Cyril and Methodius – they struggle to grasp broader historical contexts. They often have difficulty understanding Great Moravia's geopolitical situation or the long-term consequences of its collapse.

To understand the context of textbook use in the Czech Republic, it should be noted that textbooks for primary and secondary schools are not centrally or mandatorily prescribed. Each school can choose textbooks that comply with the Framework Educational Program [*Rámcový vzdělávací program*] and align with the School Educational Program [*Školní vzdělávací program*] of the specific institution.¹² This flexibility allows for diverse approaches to history education but also means that the content and emphasis on specific historical topics, including Great Moravia, may vary between schools.

Research conducted as part of our study shows that one of the most frequently used textbooks is Playful History [*Hravý dějepis*], which includes the subtitle "In Accordance with the Framework Educational Program". This textbook series is particularly popular due to its interactive approach and the use of visual and game-based elements. It is used in both primary schools and multi-year grammar schools.

The topic of Great Moravia appears as early as the lower primary level, specifically in the educational area "Man and His World" [*Člověk a jeho svět*]. Within the subject of social studies in 4th grade, students are introduced to the early history of the Czech lands, including the era of Great Moravia.

Commonly used textbooks for teaching this topic include Playful Social Studies 4 – The Earliest Czech History [*Hravá vlastivěda 4 – Nejstarší české dějiny*], published by *Taktik*, which covers history from prehistoric times to the rise of the Habsburgs (Autorský kolektiv 2021). Another option is Social Studies 4 – Textbook for the 4th Grade of Primary School [*Vlastivěda 4 – učebnice pro 4. ročník základní školy*], which covers similar topics (Binková et al. 2024). Each school can adjust the inclusion and scope of the Great Moravian Empire within its School Educational Program. Although this topic is primarily taught in 4th grade, students may revisit it later, for example, in 7th grade, when medieval history is covered in greater depth. Such fact may also contribute to the case of worse understanding, i.e., as there are several years since the student has explored this topic, they will have partially forgotten it at the time they were surveyed due to lack of use or interest.

At the upper primary level, the topic of Great Moravia reappears in 7th grade as part of a broader discussion on the formation of early medieval states. The most commonly used textbooks for this grade include Playful History – Textbook for the 7th Grade of Primary Schools and Multi-Year Grammar Schools [*Hravý dějepis – učebnice pro 7. ročník ZŠ a víceletá gymnázia*], published by *Taktik*, which emphasizes interactive learning (Autorský kolektiv 2022). Another option is History 7 – The Middle Ages and the Beginnings of the Modern Era [*Dějepis 7 – Středověk, počátky novověku*], published by *Nová škola*, authored by Libor Vykoupil, Robert Antonín, and Marie Fejfušová (2021). A more traditional choice is History for Primary Schools 7 – The Middle Ages and Early Modern Era [*Dějepis pro základní školy 7 – Středověk a raný novověk*], published by *SPN* and written by Veronika Válková (2019).

¹² More about the structure of teaching history at a primary school level can be found in the Framework Education Program, accessible from: https://www.edu.cz/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/RVP-ZV_2017_červen-2.pdf [23.02.2025].

The diversity of textbooks allows for different approaches to teaching – for example, even though some textbooks focus on factual knowledge, others might emphasize interactive methods and creative approaches to history education – either approach might have its own set of issues and missing information. Schools thus have the flexibility to choose textbooks that best align with their teaching strategies and students' needs.

One of the key issues is that history instruction still largely relies on rote memorization rather than fostering critical thinking, connecting historical events, and understanding cause-and-effect relationships in historical processes. This challenge is not limited to political history; it also extends to topics such as the Cyril and Methodius mission, liturgy, and the spread of literacy.

Recommendations for Improving History Education

These findings highlight the need to modernize history education, particularly in some key areas:

A) Emphasizing connections between historical events and the broader European and cultural context. Students should not view Great Moravia as an isolated historical phenomenon but rather as part of a complex geopolitical system that influenced other regions of Europe.

B) Encouraging analytical and critical thinking in history lessons. Instead of merely memorizing facts, students should be guided to understand why certain events occurred and what their long-term implications were.

C) Utilizing modern teaching methods to make history more interactive and engaging. Digital reconstructions, interactive maps, historical simulations, and gamification can help students relate history to real-world experiences and increase their engagement.

D) Developing historical awareness and understanding specific roles in society. The test results suggest that when students lack a solid historical foundation, their knowledge can easily become distorted by misinformation or modern reinterpretations. History lessons should therefore include discussions on how historical narratives are shaped and why they matter today.

E) Integrating Czech history education with regional and international perspectives on Central European history. As the testing in Poland demonstrated, historical awareness varies significantly depending on how Great Moravia is presented in national curricula. Future history instruction could better reflect the shared past of Slavic nations and Great Moravia's role within the broader context of European history.

Addressing Historical Awareness of the 1990s

A recent survey conducted by STEM for the Václav Havel Library (STEM 2024) revealed that young people aged 15 to 20 have limited knowledge of key events from the 1990s. Nearly half of the respondents believed that the Czech Republic joined the European Union in the 1990s, while a third mistakenly placed the creation of Charter 77 in this decade. Furthermore, a quarter of young people incorrectly stated that Soviet troops invaded Czechoslovakia in the 1990s, confusing this with the actual invasion of 1968.

These findings suggest that today's young generation often has an incomplete or distorted understanding of recent history. One possible reason is the insufficient inclusion of this period in school curricula. According to the survey, 85% of young people expressed a desire for the 1990s to be a firm part of history education.

Another contributing factor may be the lack of interactive and engaging educational materials that could make this era more accessible to younger generations. Johana Fundová, author of the

project *Pure Nineties*, emphasized the importance of an interactive approach to teaching the 1990s to increase awareness among young people (Fundová 2024).

These insights point to the need for a revision of educational programs and the introduction of new teaching methods that would provide students with a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of recent history. At the same time, fostering critical thinking and the ability to analyse historical events in a broader context is needed to prevent similar misconceptions in the future (Czech Television 2024).

Even though Great Moravia is firmly embedded in Czech history education, the study's findings suggest that the way this period is taught may contribute to fragmented or distorted knowledge among students. If historical memory is to remain both sustainable and resistant to myths and manipulation, history education must be modernized. Students should be equipped with tools that allow them to see history not merely as a collection of dates but as a dynamic process that shapes their present and future.

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ANNEX 1)

Test Questions – Great Moravia and Its Legacy

(For students approximately 15 years old, inspired by OECD/PISA testing)

Instructions for students: This test consists of 20 questions focusing on key aspects of Great Moravian history and its legacy. Answer each question as accurately as possible, drawing on your school knowledge and general understanding.

Section 1: General Knowledge about Great Moravia

1. In which century did Great Moravia emerge as the first significant state formation in Central Europe?
 - a) 6th century
 - b) 7th century
 - c) 9th century
 - d) 11th century
2. Which two main territories formed the core of Great Moravia?
 - a) [Čechy] Bohemia and [Morava] Moravia
 - b) [Morava] Moravia and [Slovensko] Slovakia
 - c) [Slezsko] Silesia and [Polsko] Poland
 - d) [Rakousko] Austria and [Slovensko] Slovakia
3. Which ruler was responsible for bringing Cyril and Methodius to Great Moravia?
 - a) a) [Mojmír I.] Mojmir I
 - b) b) [Rostislav] Rastislav
 - c) c) [Svatopluk] Svatopluk
 - d) d) [Boleslav I.] Boleslav I

Section 2: The Arrival of Cyril and Methodius and the Spread of Literacy

4. From which empire were the missionaries Cyril and Methodius sent?
 - a) [Franská říše] The Frankish Empire
 - b) [Byzantská říše] The Byzantine Empire
 - c) [Kyjevská Rus] Kievan Rus
 - d) [Řím] Rome
5. What script did Cyril and Methodius bring to Great Moravia?
 - a) Latin script
 - b) Cyrillic script
 - c) Glagolitic script
 - d) Greek alphabet

6. What was the purpose of Glagolitic script?
- a) To record the Old Church Slavonic language
 - b) For secret communication among priests
 - c) For recording trade agreements
 - d) As a decorative element in churches
7. What was the name of the legal code created in connection with the mission of Cyril and Methodius?
- a) [*Zákon sudnyj ljudem*] *The Law for the People*
 - b) [*Dekret kutnohorský*] *The Kutná Hora Decree*
 - c) [*Svatováclavská smlouva*] *The Saint Wenceslas Agreement*
 - d) [*Zlatá bula sicilská*] *The Golden Bull of Sicily*

Section 3: Great Moravia as a Power Center

8. Which political entities were Great Moravia's main rivals?
- a) The Byzantine Empire and Kievan Rus
 - b) The Frankish Empire and the Hungarians
 - c) The Holy Roman Empire and the Duchy of Poland
 - d) [Čechy] Bohemia and the Duchy of Austria
9. Which Great Moravian ruler is associated with the greatest territorial expansion of the empire?
- a) [Mojmír I.] Mojmír I
 - b) [Rostislav] Rastislav
 - c) [Svatopluk] Svatopluk
 - d) [Boleslav II.] Boleslav II
10. What was the main reason for the collapse of Great Moravia in the early 10th century?
- a) A plague epidemic in the region
 - b) The Hungarian invasion
 - c) A commercial crisis
 - d) A rebellion against Christianity

Section 4: The Legacy of Great Moravia in Later History

11. What happened to the disciples of Cyril and Methodius after the fall of Great Moravia?
- a) They were executed
 - b) They continued spreading education in Bulgaria and Macedonia
 - c) They became rulers in Kievan Rus
 - d) They fled back to Byzantium
12. What role did Great Moravia play in shaping the future Czech state?
- a) It laid the foundations of state organization
 - b) It facilitated the adoption of the Latin script
 - c) It prevented the spread of Christianity in Bohemia
 - d) It played no significant role in Czech history

13. In which present-day country is the most significant Great Moravian archaeological site, [Mikulčice] Mikulčice, located?
- a) [Česká republika] The Czech Republic
 - b) [Slovensko] Slovakia
 - c) [Polsko] Poland
 - d) [Rakousko] Austria
14. What is the significance of the Cyril and Methodius legacy for modern Slovaks?
- a) It became the basis for their national holiday on July 5th
 - b) It has no significance
 - c) It is connected to the arrival of the Hussites
 - d) They still use Glagolitic script today

Section 5: Cultural and Religious Aspects

15. What language was used in the Cyril and Methodius liturgy?
- a) Latin
 - b) Old Church Slavonic
 - c) Germanic
 - d) Greek
16. What was the main difference between Christianity coming from Byzantium and Christianity from Western Europe?
- a) Byzantine Christianity allowed the use of local languages in liturgy
 - b) Byzantine Christianity rejected baptism
 - c) Frankish Christianity prohibited education for priests
 - d) There was no difference
17. What was the significance of the Cyril and Methodius mission for other Slavic nations (e.g., Bulgarians, Serbs, Poles)?
- a) It helped spread Slavic literacy and Christianity
 - b) It enabled trade with China
 - c) It prevented the collapse of the Byzantine Empire
 - d) It led to the creation of a unified Slavic state
18. What was the main center of Great Moravian liturgy?
- a) [Řím] Rome
 - b) [Konstantinopol] Constantinople
 - c) The Moravian-Pannonian region
 - d) [Praha] Prague
19. Which of the following regions was NOT under Great Moravian influence?
- a) [Polsko] Poland
 - b) [Uhry] Hungary
 - c) [Normandie] Normandy
 - d) [Slezsko] Silesia

20. What part of Great Moravia's legacy is still alive in Czech and Slovak culture today?
- a) The Cyril and Methodius tradition and a national holiday
 - b) The use of Glagolitic script
 - c) The teaching of Old Church Slavonic in schools
 - d) The borders of Great Moravia correspond to the present-day Czech Republic

ANNEX 2)

Test Results Table – Great Moravia and Its Legacy

The table shows the number of responses from 305 students for each of the answer choices in the test questions. It also includes the correct answers, which will be key for the subsequent interpretation of results.

Nr	Question	A	B	C	D	Correct Answer
1	In which century did Great Moravia emerge?	13	37	220	35	C
2	Which two territories formed the core of Great Moravia?	98	168	6	33	B
3	Which ruler invited Cyril and Methodius?	55	185	65	0	B
4	From which empire were Cyril and Methodius sent?	13	237	39	16	B
5	What script did Cyril and Methodius introduce?	31	117	154	3	C
6	What was the purpose of Glagolitic script?	278	7	15	5	A
7	What was the name of the legal code of Cyril and Methodius?	156	84	46	19	A
8	Who were the main rivals of Great Moravia?	9	123	98	75	B
9	Which ruler expanded Great Moravia the most?	54	178	60	13	C
10	What caused the fall of Great Moravia?	77	217	3	8	B
11	Where did the disciples of Cyril and Methodius relocate?	38	119	29	119	B
12	What was Great Moravia's significance for Bohemia?	220	56	4	25	A
13	Where is [Mikulčice] located?	128	103	18	56	A
14	What is the Cyril and Methodius legacy for Slovakia?	253	47	0	5	A
15	What language was used in the Cyril and Methodius liturgy?	32	270	2	1	B
16	What was the main difference between Byzantine and Frankish Christianity?	97	13	76	119	A
17	What was the significance of the Cyril and Methodius mission for Slavic nations?	279	3	5	18	A
18	Where was the center of Great Moravian liturgy?	8	35	246	16	C
19	Which of the following regions was NOT under Great Moravian influence?	56	61	114	74	C
20	What aspect of Great Moravia's legacy remains alive today?	164	14	57	70	A