

## Book reviews

**Carlos López von Vriessen.** *El Palin. Juego tradicional de la cultura mapuche*, Ediciones Universitarias de Valparaíso, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Valparaíso 2011, pp. 361.

In 2005, UNESCO issued a special document on the protection and maintenance of indigenous games, declaring simultaneously that all indigenous games should be treated as an important part of world cultural heritage. This was a highly symbolic act promoting, on the one hand, studies on ancient games on the verge of extinction, and on the other hand, various projects of revival of traditional sports by adapting them to contemporary needs. There is no doubt that the mentioned UNESCO declaration serves as a stimulus for new research into the ethnology of traditional sports. One of examples of such research is a recent publication on an indigenous Chilean hockey-type game known in Mapundungu, i.e. native language of the Mapuche people, as *palin* or in Spanish as *chueca*.

The author of the monograph, Carlos Lopez von Vriessen, is a well-known Chilean researcher of traditional games of the native peoples of South America. Affiliated with the Catholic University at Valparaíso, a historic city on the Pacific shore of central Chile, Von Vriessen has studied palin throughout his entire academic career years since his first encounter with Mapuche hockey in the 1970s. His in-depth ethno-historical and ethnological research produced more than 50 articles, reports and essays in Spanish, German, English and Portuguese. Von Vriessen's publications have made a vast contribution to the documentation, understanding and revival of palin.

The area inhabited by the Mapuche people lies in southern Chile, in the area traditionally known as Araucanía. C. Lopez von Vriessen traveled extensively in the native territories and gathered valuable field data, made observations of sports matches and conducted interviews with palin players and local authorities concerning different aspects of the game. Thanks to such extensive ethnographic research he was able not only to collect original data on the rules and principles of palin, but as an experienced fieldworker, he also took interest in many contextual aspects of the game that used to be strongly associated with the social, religious and political life of the Mapuche.

His current project developed in Chile focuses on transforming the indigenous game of palin into a widely recognized national sport, which can be practiced by young people from all over the country, regardless of their ethnic origins. For this reason, he standardized the rules of the game and has organized workshops, competitions and teams to propagate palin in the mainstream Chilean society.

The game of palin belongs to the cultural tradition of the Mapuche, the largest native minority group in Chile, which in the former times was wrongly identified in literature as the Araucanians. As the result of the Spanish conquest followed by the coming of European settlers and finally the incorporation of their indigenous territory into the Republic of Chile the Mapuche have been marginalized economically and socially and deprived of most of their native lands even in their original homeland. Today Mapuche rural communities are quite dispersed in the area between the Biobío River in the north and Chiloé Island in the south, and between the Pacific coast in the west and the Andes in the east forming a natural frontier with Argentina. As a matter of fact some Mapuche communities can be also found in the Argentina, mostly as the result of historical migrations of the Araucanians to the nearly desolate areas of the pampas. Today, the Mapuche who continue to live in their Araucanian country are mostly farmers, fishermen, shepherds and artisans. Many of them have decided to move to the cities, where they usually occupy the lowest social positions associated with low income and poverty. The greatest paradox is that the majority of the Mapuche people live today outside their original homeland. They prefer to settle down in the metropolitan area of Santiago de Chile, where they try to preserve their culture, including traditional games such as palin, language and ethnic identity.

Lopez von Vriessen's book on palin is mostly based on studies carried out among the indigenous communities in the historical country of Araucanía, where traditional palin competitions are still frequently organized. However, the game of palin is today also present in the cities, especially played by Mapuche youngsters and students. For them, the game inherited from their forefathers constitutes a core element of their endangered identity. In many Mapuche urban neighborhoods centers of native culture have been constructed mostly in the shape of traditional "ruka" – a thatched conical building for gatherings and ceremonies. A playfield is usually located close to such a center, which is used both for palin and football matches. Unfortunately, Lopez de Vriessen barely mentions this new aspect of urban palin revival. Von Vriessen concentrates on palin workshops he organized in Chilean high schools rather than on native "chueca" played by the young urban Mapuche. I should mention here that the subject of palin was researched from the perspectives of ethnology of sport, intercultural education and anthropology of ethnic-

ity by three other specialists who presented their results in a book *Juguemos al palin* (We Play Palin) published in Santiago in 2005 (LOM Editorial). Unfortunately, this monograph was not included by Lopez von Vriessen in his extensive bibliography on native sports.

According to Lopez von Vriessen, in the light of archeological and historical records, palin should be treated as an aboriginal game typical for the southern cone of South America. It was definitely practiced before the Spanish conquest, during colonial times and is also practiced to a limited extent today. However, the process of acculturation and the increasing popularity of global football (soccer) have diminished the significance of palin, which as many other traditional, indigenous sports is now in danger of extinction.

The native hockey game of the Mapuche is a very simple game passed from generation to generation. The first written rules of palin were published around 1980 thanks to the initiative of one of the Mapuche regional associations. The players are divided into two teams playing on a grass field usually 50 to 200 meters long and 5 to 15 meters wide. The number of players varies from 7 to 15 in each team and usually depends on the size of the field. Every player uses his own stick, slightly bent at its end, made of native hard wood. The ball called "pal" is a wooden round piece 3 to 5 cm in diameter. To score a point the ball must cross a specially marked line. A palin match consists of two halves of 20 to 30 minutes each, and the winning team is the one that scores more points. Good players enjoy high prestige in their respective communities.

Palin matches are mostly organized by two or more rural communities, each represented by its own team. The organization of such encounters is an opportunity for gatherings of native peoples celebrating "palin festivities" composed of dances, songs, rituals, consumption of special food and beverages. In some cases palin has been also treated as an oracle game that could provide a solution to crucial problems of the local community. If this is so, then the winning team is entitled to make its own decision regarding a given problem, which must be accepted by all participants. The game of palin is played in different ways according to local variations and traditions, but its basic concepts and rules are remain the same. Contextually, palin is played for different occasions, sometimes only for pleasure, or as part of community sport events; however, it could also supplement different kinds of religious, social and even civic celebrations. All these aspects of palin have been studied in detail and well documented by C. Lopez von Vriessen, who presented his research results in the monograph.

The first version of the book was actually drafted more than two decades ago, which to some degree could explain an old fashioned approach to the major topic. As a matter of fact, C. Lopez de Vriessen wrote his book first in German to obtain a Ph.D. in sport sciences at the University of Cologne. Because of the uniqueness of the topic and the quality of original sources used by Lopez de Vriessen his dissertation was immediately published (in 1990), under the title: "Das Hockeyspiel (Polin oder Chueca) der Mapuche-Indianern in Chile. Ein Beitrag zur Ethnologie des Sportes" (Hockey game (polin or chueca) of the Mapuche Indians of Chile. A Contribution to Ethnology of Sport). The limited circulation made

the book rather unknown among ethnologists, sport scientists and experts in Latin American studies.

After returning to Chile Lopez von Vriessen continued his studies on different aspects of palin and published many articles on the game, contributing substantially to the state of knowledge of the origins, history, rules and revival of palin. Finally, he decided to publish a revised and enlarged version of his German dissertation in Spanish and in this way greatly enrich the available bibliography on Mapuche society and Chilean multicultural heritage.

The latest book by Lopez de Vriessen published by a prestigious university press was financially supported by the "Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes" (National Council of Culture and Arts), one of the Chilean governmental agency, which to some degree reflects the position of palin as a potential national sport of indigenous origin. The editorial layout of the book has been developed in an attractive way. The book printed on glossy paper contains hundreds of color photos taken by the author during his fieldwork in Araucania. There is no doubt that the majority of them have a unique documentary value showing different details of palin play. Taking into account merely this aspect, C. Lopez de Vriessen's book could be treated as a good piece of visual anthropology, which supplements not only the text, but in fact creates its own parallel narration. Apart from the photographs we can also find many reproductions of historical paintings and drawings depicting ancient scenes of palin players, carefully elaborated schemes explaining the game rules, players' movements and positions, match stages as well as many tables containing comparative data of ethnographic, historical, linguistic, geographic and sport quality. Some of these materials are grouped in an appendix, which also includes a special selection of photographs documenting current developments of palin.

The book is divided into two parts. The first one provides the necessary information on the history of palin, and it discusses various written colonial sources that included the earliest descriptions of chueca. In the same section Von Vriessen describes in detail his ethnographical fieldwork, and stresses the importance of his friendly relationships with the indigenous authorities and palin players. In general, this part has mostly an ethno-historical profile. According to the author the oldest information on palin comes from 1558. He also identified the oldest known picture of a palin match from 1646, and presented the results of his historical research on the prohibition of palin by the Spanish colonial authorities in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries as a part of forced acculturation directed against all traditional and "heathen" customs.

The second part is 200 pages long and constitutes, in fact, the book's essence. The major goal of this part is to present all aspects and contexts of palin as it is played and maintained today. C. Lopez von Vriessen, with the use of his extensive fieldwork is trying to reconstruct the basic rules of the game, dimensions of playgrounds, and different ways of palin organization as an important community event surrounded by rites, celebrations and social gatherings. In fact, his description of palin is very comprehensive, original, well-documented and clear as well as interpreted from many perspectives.

The last section of the main part is devoted to the game of palin played at present in urban settings and practiced in a few, recently invented forms (on horses, played by native girls, and by a non-Indian “winka” people). However, I must once again regret that the modern transformations of palin are only given brief notice in the book. As mentioned earlier, palin is today played in the urban environment. This traditional element of Mapuche culture was transferred to Santiago and other cities of the North along with the new wave of indigenous migrants, who left Araucania in search of better life opportunities. Urban palin functions today not only as a kind of traditional sport, but it is regarded, especially by the Mapuche youth, as an important expression of their own ethnicity, and as a part of ancient heritage well adopted to urban life.

In fact, many such questions would be worth tackling in the book. I hope that the next edition, perhaps in English, would be supplemented by materials necessary to obtain a much broader view of the social and ethnic function of contemporary palin.

In spite of some shortcomings and omissions, Carlos Lopez von Vriessen's book should be considered a precious contribution to the ethnology of sport, specially to the study of indigenous games of Latin America. Von Vriessen has made a great contribution to the state of knowledge of Mapuche culture, and I am truly convinced that for many years his book will be treated as the most comprehensive study on this traditional sport of the Mapuche.

Reviewed by Aleksander Posern-Zieliński

**Bob Hughes**, *Evolutionary Play. Reflective analytic practice. Second edition*. Routledge – Taylor&Francis Group, London and New York, 2012, 408.

Play was “utilized” by mankind in the early civilized world in an individual and specific sense by accommodating two functions: education and joy. It was only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, that play began to attract academic interest. Today, play as an important issue not only for children, has been researched from different angles. As a multi-functional and timeless ‘product’, play has become the subject of diverse scientific disciplines such as archaeology, history, psychology, pedagogy and even ethnology.

I do not think there is anyone in the world of social sciences, especially sport sciences, who would not appreciate the importance of play in the overall human development. *Evolutionary play. Reflective analytic practice*, a new book by Bob Hughes, is a ‘must read’ for every young professional in the field of human playful movement. The reason I mentioned young professionals is rather a simple one: those more experienced might already have read the first edition of the book from 2001. We all know play is crucial for children's development. But who really knows how important play might be for adults? Daily hassles of adult life diminish our sensitiveness that was once part of our childish attitude. Bob Hughes brings back all these feelings so that one may only regret that time passes by so quickly or get on with it and keep playing.

For the prospective readers of the book, I would recommend, first of all, getting acquainted with the Preface. Few realize how simply and effectively, even in the times of recession, the British governments created a solid policy on financing play from the National Lottery and other sources.

Hughes's book is divided into fourteen chapters devoted to the history, values and types of play. In the first chapters Hughes guides his readers through the imaginative world of play discussing the well-known, the less obvious and the unexplored. He tackles the eternal doubt of every parent: How long (if at all) should our child be supervised and to what extent should this supervision be open or discreet and remote? This question has been posed by parents for ages, but with the development of evolutionary play theories and studies some systematic observations and conclusions can

be now made. The theories Hughes refers to concern, on the one hand, psychology (touching on neuroscience), and on the other hand, early education and childcare. Much of what children learn, they acquire through contemporary experience, but there are theories, such as recapitulation theory, that indicate a genetic determinant. The combination of both enables a child to turn into a self-governed, physically able and creative young teenager and later adult. Hughes outlines a short history of evolutionary playwork which, probably due to the text length limits, is the author's choice of the most valuable works in the field. This is an interesting selection but unfortunately narrowed to English academics. This is actually the problem of the entire book – it seems as if it has been written for the English and with the English in the center of the scientific world of play.

An interesting and certainly valuable concept in the book is Hughes's typology of play. This categorization of play developed in his earlier works and updated in his previous one, brings order to the study of play and gives the reader (parent, teacher) an idea of what can be used in the educational context and how. It also provides useful instruments of observation of children at play. Although Hughes's typology is quite broad, I am under the impression that not enough attention has been paid to the cultural and moral aspects of play such as self-responsibility, moral development, learning and teaching qualities, aesthetics and movement expression.

In the later parts of the book Hughes's analyses the link between play and the senses: sight, sound, smell, taste and touch, in order to enable a teacher to extend the use of play by providing new opportunities that could be created on the sensual basis. He also provides some interesting examples of such practical uses of play. Provision of numerous examples is actually a very positive component of this book, which helps the reader imagine what the author had in mind when he was writing the book.

In Chapter 11 Hughes deals with play safety and supervision, and carries on with similar topics in Chapter 12. All those who think that organizing children's play is easy,