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TRADITIONAL GAMES AND PLAYS FROM SOUTHERN PODLASIE AS AN ELEMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

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ABSTRACT

Games and plays preserved from generation to generation allow young people to get to know better their ancestors' traditions. Traditional games are not only about identification with the past generations, but they are also about preservation of those values, which regardless of passing ages, will always be universal. In the past many generations grew up cherishing these traditional forms which served as educating factors attractive to young people. Field research results (interviews with the eldest inhabitants of the Biała Podlaska county in Poland) as well as Polish and foreign literary sources point to similarities between the rules of games from the Podlasie region and from other regions of Europe. This fact is an interesting basis for interpretation in the area of cultural studies of folklore in various parts of the world.

INTRODUCTION

Elements of tradition in physical activity have long been a subject of interest to specialists in various fields, including anthropologists of western culture. Different works [4, 5, 30] have focused on the phenomenon of sport from the perspective of classical and modern anthropologic theories. Similarly, different conferences and symposia on the topic have been organised, for instance, "Games of the Past – Sports for the Future" in Germany or workshops accompanying the World Festival of Traditional Sports and Games. They have been organised under the auspices of ISHPES (International Society for the History of Physical Education and Sport). Another organisation working actively to promote and preserve traditional games in each country is UNESCO.

The subject of traditional games and plays has been treated in Polish anthropological works in

a marginal way. It is difficult to find reasons for such treatment; however, it may be due to the fact that Polish anthropologists have generally underappreciated the influence of popular behaviours on the image of culture in particular communities. This state of affairs has been mistakenly explained by the swirls of Polish history (partitions, Soviet domination between 1945 and 89, etc.); however, as it was proven [18], in countries with even more complicated history, e.g. Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, it did not exert any significant influence on the attitude towards the subject. It can be explained by the fact that in the aforementioned countries there is a much greater interest in traditional games and plays than in Poland, which has been reflected in the number of publications on the topic.

The knowledge of traditional games and plays also serves a practical purpose as no one has ever denied the huge significance of physical activity in the education system aimed at supporting

both physical and spiritual development of young people. In this sphere a great progress has been achieved – beginning from theoretical treatises and empirical research to practical activities promoting fitness and a healthy lifestyle, e.g. the recent concept of Health-Related Fitness [24].

However, the treatment cultural conditions and the cultural anthropology output in a marginal way has been truly outrageous. It is impossible not to notice the fact that culture is present in almost every area of human existence, e.g. in the form of traditions, even though we can accept M. Douglas's standpoint that: "Culture is a virgin area surrounded by general esteem which is an empty drawer. Economists put it off by calling it 'taste', most philosophers ignore it – their problem. Marxists treat it as an ideology, psychologists avoid it concentrating on examining childhood and historians bend it as they want" [8, p. 147]. Another common mistake is treating games and plays exclusively as a folk category, but it must be realized that they have always served as a kind of social communication and thus were an important form of participation in culture.

Games and plays passed from generation to generation let young people get to know better the culture of their ancestors. However, the point is not only to continue what the former generations have left, but also to preserve these values of games and plays which, regardless of time, will always be of universal character. For many years generations have grown up with these traditional forms that have served as an educating factor attracting their attention. This issue has also gained a social dimension as problems observed currently indicate huge difficulties which are encountered by teachers at all levels of education in their work. New methods of dealing with the problem are being searched and thus research in this field has been developing. Taking into consideration the aforementioned observations the authors started their research into the subject of former games and plays in the southern Podlasie region in Poland. The research was aimed mainly at restoring rules, names and equipment used to play the games as well as their significance in the life of the regional population.

The field research included interviews with the oldest inhabitants of the Biała Podlaska county. On the basis of various publications that have appeared in Poland and abroad many similarities between Polish games and those played in other countries were noted.

A rich source of information appeared to be the Festival of Games in Parthenay in France, where every year over three thousand games are presented from all over the world. Another indispensable source of information was *The World Sports Encyclopaedia* (Encyklopedia Sportów Świata) by W. Lipoński.

TRADITIONAL GAMES AND PLAYS VERSUS OTHER FORMS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

In Poland it has been quite common to adopt ideas originated in other countries which facilitated their civilization development. Nevertheless, we have rarely tried to spread our own ideas concerning games and plays to other cultures. This is what the Dutch have done with korfbal and the Chinese with woodball. What is more, we tend to forget not only about passing our traditions to other countries but also about passing them to our children. Thus, Polish children go roller skating instead of playing with a stove lid, or play unihockey instead of playing 'czyż' ('siskin'), 'pikr' or 'świnka' ('pig'). Young people in Poland do not remember the game of 'palant' any more, which used to be so popular among our fathers and grandfathers. It is also difficult to find other examples of folk games.

People responsible for physical culture in Poland do not pay any special attention to our native traditions. It is a pity because, as it can be observed in other countries, these traditions may be ways to encourage people to participate widely in physical activities. For instance, near the town of Bressure in France, between March and October, 1989, a few dozen of 'le palets' competitions were organized. This region is also famous for organizing competitions in other traditional games, e.g. in 'boules'. Another town in the same county, Parthenay, may pride itself on its festival of games including three thousand events, many of which are folk games. The 'petanque' federation, for instance, belongs to the largest organizations of its kind in the world.

Another example of a place where folk games are really taken care of is Belarus. There have been many different publications on the topic of Belarusian traditional games, e.g. "Nacjonalnyje podwiznyje igry i dosug" published by the Pedagogical Institute in Brest, which serves as a kind of

guide to these games and presents various possibilities of organizing festivals of folk games [3].

In Poland, in the 1950s, traditional games and plays enjoyed a great popularity as dominant after-school leisure pursuits in five counties of the Kraków province. However, they are becoming less and less common [34].

TYPES OF FOLK PLAYS AND GAMES IN SOUTHERN PODLASIE

The research carried out by the authors enabled them to distinguish a few groups of traditional plays and games popular in southern Podlasie.

One of the divisions can be made on the basis of the place where these games and plays were held. We can distinguish, therefore:

- plays held in pasturelands,
- plays held in village paths,
- plays held in the backyards,
- plays held in rooms,
- plays held between cottages.

Another group comprises of holiday and festival games:

- plays connected with religious holidays and festivals, e.g. Lent, St. Stephen's Day, Easter, Good Monday, Shrovetide, etc.,
- plays connected with other festivals, e.g. weddings, birthdays, harvest festivals.

Another division can be made on the basis of participants' gender:

- plays for girls,
- plays for boys,
- plays for mixed groups.

Seasonal games and plays include:

- winter games,
- summer games.

And depending on the use of accessories, the plays can be divided into those:

- with accessories,
- without accessories.

A division depending on the types of accessories used can be:

- games with sticks,
- games with stones,
- games with balls.

Another group consists of games with lyrics and singing. This group may also be further subdivided into more detailed types such as in [7].

Moreover, as we can find in [10], there is a group of games with an element of running and

chasing, i.e. 'ganiany', 'berki', 'kotek i myszka' ('cat and mouse') or chasing, catching and tapping. There are also 'hunting' games with elements of hiding, diving, chasing and heading for the same finish line. A separate group includes 'imitating' games in which children copy professional behaviour of adults or their gestures and body language. Thus, the games can be divided into those using dealing skills, senses or mind puzzles. The same author distinguishes such game types as games for toddlers, children, students, girls; games for both genders; games for upper and lower classes, mind games, old plays, Jewish games; card games (Polish, French, German, Hungarian), gambling, and social games. This division includes even more detailed subtypes.

Moreover, games can be divided according to the following aspects:

Depending on the initial position of the participants into:

- games in a circle,
- game in a row.

Depending on the way in which teams are selected [27]:

- games with rhymes,
- games with paying footing,
- game with exchange, e.g. in 'palant'.

M. Stary [32] in his work "Gry i zabawy na wolnym powietrzu" ("Games and plays in the open air") distinguishes 32 types of games in the open air, water games, winter games and songs accompanying the games. In [31] we can find such types as plays with singing, dancing, orienteering, running, throwing, hitting, kicking, crawling, lifting as well as team games. In "Gry i zabawy towarzyskie" ("Social games and plays") [29], one of the most interesting Polish sources on the subject, the author discusses ballroom games, parlor games, ball games, intellectual games, fortune telling, playing patience, as well as folk and social superstitions.

Another invaluable work is "Motor games and plays" [35], where the author distinguishes ten different types of games.

Various categorizations are also made by foreign authors. For instance, the book "Gulni, zabawy, igruszcy" [20] published in Belarus distinguishes games and plays with sticks, balls, other accessories, without any accessories, plays with elements of choreography and imitation, as well as games with elements of fighting. The author also divides games according to the seasons of the year: winter, summer, spring and autumn games.

W. Walentinow [36] in his book identifies many various types of games and plays. A basic division includes Russian and Indian games.

A rich collection of games played in different former Soviet republics is included in the work by A.W. Kienieman [15] "Dziecięce zabawy narodów ZSRR" ("Children's games in the Soviet nations"). Another rich collection of games is the French "Petite Larousse des Jeux" ("Little Larousse Encyclopedia of Games") [25], which includes 500 entries. The editors divided the entries into outdoor and indoor games as well as included new developments in games, e.g. computer games.

TRADITIONAL GAMES AND PLAYS IN SOUTHERN PODLASIE AS PART OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

By comparing games and plays from various countries many similarities can be observed. It may seem surprising that often in remote places of the world the differences between games concern only names or some rules, such as in many games with stones and sticks.

E. Piasecki [26] explained this fact using the theory of focal points of games' emergence and their tasks. He also proposed the concept of the "basic cosmopolitan outline" within which tribal, local and national distinctions develop. According to Piasecki [27], the basic outline is a position or movement of players occurring on a motor, social, manipulative or hunting impulse. This outline is the basis of a game's plot which – depending on a particular culture, its conditions and surroundings – represents some aspects of human life in nature. Using the aforementioned theories E. Piasecki [27] described a few Polish traditional plays seeking their origins in historical facts and trying to explain their development by these facts.

Popular games in southern Podlasie included games connected with throwing and catching various combinations of stones, calks or buttons. They had different names in different places, e.g. in Kodeń they were called 'kamyki' ('stones') or 'hacele' ('calks'), in Kostomłoty – 'kamienci', in Kijowiec – 'czechi'. The game was very popular among children as it did not require much space or any complex accessories. In other towns the game was known under different names. In Kijowiec children most often climbed a hill called 'kamieniucha' ('stone hill') in order to collect smooth and even stones. They carried them down in their

pockets so they could be used in a game any time. The number of players was not defined. Each child put four stones on the ground and tossed one up in the air. The task was to pick one of the stones from the ground while tossing up another. In this way a child had two stones, one of which was put away, and the same action was repeated until all stones were gathered. The winner was a child who first gathered all the stones and put them together in one place. Similar rules applied to the game of 'hacele' ('calks'). In Kodeń the game could be played only by two participants. It included various combinations of throws and grasps of stones and calks. The game was well known and popular among children, both among boys and girls. After World War Two mostly stones were used to play the game. One of the interviewees remembered that, "Everyone was carrying five stones all the time. The stones had to be smooth not to perforate trouser pockets or hurt hands." In the 1960s and later, stones started to be replaced by calks. Calks were pointed screws for shoeing horses. Each calk included a square support tipped with a cross (about 0.5 cm) and a screw (about 2 cm). All calks were of the same size, which guaranteed equal chances in the game (stones were usually different). Stones and calks were placed on the hand and tossed up. The aim was to grab another stone from the ground before the tossed stone fell down. If a child managed to do it, then he or she tossed up two stones or calks while the third one was to be grabbed from the ground. This movement was repeated four, five, six or even ten times. The calks already caught were tossed up again all the time with the same hand. A person who gathered the most stones won the game. A useful skill was to toss the stones or calks not too far to be able to catch them all and score more points.

The game had many advantages, e.g.

- easily available accessories – stones and calks could be found everywhere. (Used calks were usually scattered all over the farm or could be received from a blacksmith);
- the game could be played in any place: meadows, pasturelands, backyards, houses, etc;
- it could be played without adult supervision. Children were frequently tired with their daily chores, so they wanted to relax and play instead of helping their parents.

Another game in which stones were tossed up in the air in order to fall on a designated spot was 'bierki' ('spilikins') played in Głuszyn and Sadlno in the Kujawy region [16]. The same game

was played in the Białystok region using beans or broad beans. What is more, this game was known in other, often very remote places in the world. A great deal of information on this topic can be found in “Encyklopedia Sportów Świata” (World Sports Encyclopedia) [19]. In England this game was called ‘dalies’ and was played by tossing small bones or wooden dice. Girls usually played ‘chulks’ with the use of five sea shells, or a similar game called ‘checkstones’ or ‘fivestones’ with the use of stones. A similar game was ‘hucklebones’ which was played with a set of five knuckle bones (usually sheep tali or astragali). The same game, however, played with metatarsus bones, was known in Mongolia under the name of ‘Aduu Kumikhi’. Variations of this game were known in antiquity. In Mali, people played ‘Main Serembam’ with fifteen or twenty sea shells. It was a family game in which participants threw one shell and tried to grasp another one from the pile on the ground [14]. An Arabic version of the game popular in Syria was called ‘Bogusy’. Another version of the game mostly known in Syria and Saudi Arabia was called ‘Al-laqusa’ and was played by throwing stones and trying to catch them with the back of a hand. In France, the game consisting of throwing small sheep or ram bones is called ‘osselets’ [1]. The bones were to be caught with the back of a hand as well. A number of variations of this game has existed in Belarus, e.g. ‘kamuszki’, ‘kamienciki’, ‘krucjoł’, ‘szliaki’, ‘babki’, ‘kazanki’ [20], whereas in Estonia it was called ‘scjelcok’.

Another popular game in Podlasie – ‘klasy’ (hopscotch) played mostly by girls who hopped on one leg from one square to another has been also known in other countries. In Arabic countries similar rules may be observed in such games as ‘berber’, ‘al Hagla’ or ‘Lu Bat Ummal – Hutut’. A German version of this game is ‘Fuss Scheibenspiel’, whereas a Danish one is ‘at hinke’. The English name for this family of games is ‘hop-scotch’, and in Portugal this type of games included ‘jogoo do cara – col’ or ‘jogoo do aviao’. In France such games can be encountered as well, e.g. ‘marelle’ with ancient origins [17]. This type of games also appeared in eastern Europe and were called ‘klasy obyčnyje’, ‘klasy z morzem i bołotom’ or ‘klietki’ [36].

E. Piasecki in his book “Zabawy i gry ruchowe dzieci i młodzieży” (Motor games and plays for children and youth) presents many variations of this game, e.g. ‘klasy proste’ (‘simple hop-scotch’), ‘klasy z niebem, piekłem i morzem’

(‘hop-scotch with heaven, hell and sea’), ‘klasy żydowskie’ (‘Jewish hop-scotch’) or ‘zegar’ (‘clock’) and ‘ślimak’ (‘snail’) [26]. The variation popular in Estonia ‘koolimjang’ [37]. In Argentina a family game played on the pavement is called ‘el caracol’ (‘snail’) and children hop on one leg in order to take as many squares as possible [14].

Another game with numerous equivalents all over Europe is ‘ciuciubabka’ (blindman’s buff) played mostly by girls. It can be played in houses, in the backyards or in the front of schools. One child was blindfolded and became a ‘ciuciubabka’. The child was standing in the middle of the field, whereas the rest of the children waited around and started a dialogue:

Children: Where are you?

Ciuciubabka: On the stone.

Children: What are you cooking?

Ciuciubabka: Acid!

Children: So catch us!

Ciuciubabka then started to run and chase children. A player who was caught became a new ciuciubabka and the game started again. It used to be one of the most popular games in Poland and was known under many names such as ‘ślepa baba’ (blind woman), ‘mżyk’ or ‘mżytek’. The simple rules of the game in which a blindfolded player was to tag others made the game easily accessible and attractive to children. Scottish variations of the game were called ‘Bellie-Matie’, ‘Belly-Blind’ or ‘Chacke Blyndman’. In England it was known as ‘Biggly’, ‘Billy Blind’, ‘Blind Bell’, ‘Blind Man’s Buff’ or ‘Cock Stride’. In Germany it was called ‘Blindekuh’, in Portugal ‘Cabra-Cega’, in Italy ‘Masca cieca’, in France ‘Briche’, in the Czech Republic ‘Hra na Slepou Babu’ and in Russia ‘Żmurki’. There are also other variations of the game, e.g. ‘żmurki’ with tied hands, ‘żmurki na obrót’ or ‘żmurki na miestie’. “Podwiżnyje igry” [38] describes ‘Żmurki-nosiłściki’ in which blindfolded children were to carry objects from one stool to another.

Another game popular in Podlasie was ‘chowanki’ (hide-and-peek). It was played by boys and girls. The game started with one child covering his or her eyes, and other players hiding away. The aim of the game was to reach a particular place before the seeking player. Any number of participants could play the game. A child covering its eyes stood with the back to the others leaning against a building, fence or tree and counted to some number, e.g. to twenty. Then he or she started looking for other players. If a player was spotted

the seeker started running fast to the counting place and shouted “One, two, three, come out!” and called the name of the spotted child. It could also happen that the spotted child ran faster and reached the counting place before the seeker.

An Arabic equivalent of the game is ‘al-libi-da’. A Russian one is ‘priatki obyčnyje,’ whereas a Ukrainian one is ‘priatki’. However, the game was also known in more exotic places. The book “Zwyczaj i zbrodnia w społeczności dzikich” (Custom and crime among savage tribes) [22] describes a similar game which was played outside the village in a nearby forest. First, girls were looking for boys, then, the other way round. When a partner was found, a special song was sung. A variation of the game was very popular in the Island of Triobrianda.

At least since the 17th century we have known a game called ‘czoromaj’ [37]. In Podlasie it was also known as ‘świnka’ (‘piglet’). Children dug a hole in the ground and tried to put there a small ball using a stick. It was not easy because the hole was guarded by one child. A player who managed to place the ball in the hole became a new hole guard. In Polubicze children used stones to play this game. Apart from the main hole there were more smaller holes, always one less than the number of players. The so-called ‘shepherd’ did not have a hole and his task was to place his stone (‘piglet’) in another player’s hole. Other players tried to prevent the shepherd from doing this. The stone was pushed with a stick. In France a similar game was called ‘la truie’ (‘pig’), in which the number of holes was also smaller than the number of players and the main hole was bigger. I. Gryś [11] in the article “Gry i zabawy w Rosji” (Games and plays in Russia) quoting Russian authors writes that the origins of games and plays among Eastern Slavs date back to the 6th – 8th century. The origins of these plays and games are often culture-related. They were connected with everyday life abundant in wars, struggles against nature and foraging. In those times people knew such games as ‘len’ (‘flax’), ‘sieliśmy proso’ (‘sowing millet’), ‘świnki’ (‘piglets’), ‘gorodki’, ‘babki’, ‘swajki’ and ‘piatki’. A game similar to ‘świnka’ and ‘czoromaj’ was played in Germany, where children tried to place a ball in a number of holes. It was called ‘loch ball’, whereas a similar game in Denmark was known as ‘bold i hul’. In Estonia children played a folk game called ‘kitse lautaajamine’ (leading goats to the shed), which very much resembled the Polish ‘świnka’. A big hole (‘shed’) was dug in the

ground, and about 4-7 meters from it there were a few smaller holes, one less than the number of players. Each player held a long stick. One player tried to put a wooden ball (‘goat’) into the big hole, while other players tried to prevent him from doing it.

In Belarus there were also a few games with similar rules. The most popular was ‘swinnja’ (pig). The hole in the ground was called ‘chlew’ (pigsty) and the players tried to place the ‘pigs’ in it using sticks. One player called the “swineherd” tried to stop them. The game had a few variations, differing in rules or names, e.g. ‘masła’, ‘ganiac wauki’, ‘guski’. A game called ‘miacik w jamku’ could be even played by two people.

Other popular folk games from Podlasie had also their equivalents in other countries. For example, games in which a smaller stick was flicked up with a bigger one such as ‘czyżyk’ and ‘klop’.

A game called ‘klop’ from Kostomłoty was played by both boys and girls (three, four and more). Before the game the players drew a square or a circle on the ground (about 50-60 cm in diameter). In the middle of the drawn figure a specially prepared 20 cm long stick was put into the ground. The players were standing around, holding their own sticks and tried to toss them to knock the big stick out of the square or circle. A player who managed to do that became the winner and could carry on playing. In Kijowiec a game called ‘czyżyk’ (siskin) was played around a special hole found or dug by children with a stick placed across the hole (the stick was called ‘czyżyk’). Some players approached the hole in turns and tried to flick the stick up and knock it away with their own sticks, while the remaining players tried to catch it. If someone managed to do that children said, ‘złapał czyżyka’ (‘the siskin was caught’). The player who caught most of the sticks became the winner.

Many games similar to ‘czyżyk’ existed in many different countries, e.g. ‘gulli dunda’ in Pakistan, ‘gross’ in Denmark, ‘bate pilouette’ in France, ‘al ba a’ in Arabia, ‘mouilih’ in Brittany, ‘tip-cat’ in England or ‘bige’ in Hungary. ‘Czyż’ was the name of the game in Chechnya, and ‘czyżyk’ was a game played in Armenia. In Germany, the stick could be placed on two stones so that it would be easier to flick it up [2]. In Belarus similar rules applied to the game of ‘kljok’. The stick was to be thrown over a field called “mud”. In Poland this game had many different

names, e.g. 'kiczka', 'klipa', 'sztekiel'. A game in which players threw sticks at a peg stuck in the ground was called 'pikier'. In Denmark a game called 'munk' followed similar rules. In different regions of Poland popular 'ducza' used to be played in noble houses. An Arabic game with similar rules was called 'lu bat kasir uda'.

In Kodeń during a pikier game children drove a 30-centimetre stick ('pikier') into the ground. The number of players was not defined. One of the players was chosen the pikier guard. Other players were standing 10-15 meters away from the guard holding their 60-70 centimeter sticks specially made for this game. Each player threw his/her stick trying to knock down the 'pikier'. The guard's task was to prevent the players from knocking the pikier down using his own stick. A player who managed to knock the pikier down became the guard. The guard's aim was to hold his position as long as possible against the other players. After each turn they gathered their sticks and started throwing them again or changed the guard.

The game of 'płaz' ('amphibian') followed different rules. One of residents of the town of Antopol described the rules of the game in the following way: "Players are waiting in a row leaving some space to spread their arms, about 5-6 meters. Parallel to the players on the ground there is a long stick called 'płaz' ('amphibian'). The players throw their sticks at the long stick. After that the 'płaz' is moved further away from the players. The second turn is taken by those players who did not manage to hit the target in the first turn. If there are still players who cannot hit the stick they receive one more chance. A player who still cannot hit the target gives his cap which is placed on a stick stabbed into the ground. It becomes the target in the next turn. Players try to knock the cap down by throwing their sticks like javelins. The game continues until the cap is knocked off. Then the game starts again." Many variations of this game were played in the east of Europe e.g. in Belarus, where it was known as 'pikar', 'pjekar' or 'pup' [33].

Another game very popular in Podlasie was 'palant'. After 1918 the game was introduced in school P.E. curricula [18]. In Kodeń, players used a hard fist-size ball called 'lanka' made of fur gathered from molting cows, firmed with water or saliva until it was hard enough. The players used also a straight, 60 cm long bat. The game was played by two teams of five members each. The

game pitch had different sizes. It was usually marked by lines on the ground and posts marking the half-line and the end line. The field was divided into two parts by the start line (called 'kingdom'), half-line and the end line. The distance from the 'kingdom' to the half-line and the end line was about 20-30 meters. The 'kingdom' was occupied by one team. The other team was waiting in the main field (a part of the field between the 'kingdom' and finish line). Players from the first team pitched the ball and hit it as far as possible with the bat. Then the batter started running as quickly as possible to the end line. Players from the other team were to catch the ball and try to hit the runner with it. However, if the runner managed to reach the end line and return to the 'kingdom' his team scored a point and the next player repeated the task. If the opposing team did not manage to catch the ball before the runner reached the end line then the runner was safe. The next player from the batting team hit the ball and the previous player could return to his team trying to avoid being hit. Before each game players determined the number of throws from each team. Usually each player had one throw and the leader had more, e.g. ten. The leader was able to set free the players who were hit. If all throws were made, or a player from the opposing team caught the ball before it touched the ground, the teams changed the sides and the player who caught the ball became the leader. Sometimes the rules were made easier and they played palant "just for the game's sake." The change could only be made when one of the players was hit. The aim was to hold the 'kingdom' as long as possible. After World War Two the game became very popular especially in Śląsk (Silesia). In some regions a system of competitions was even organized. However, the hypothesis that immigrants from Poland were to have brought the game of palant to North America, which was then to give rise to baseball, has not been confirmed. Nevertheless, it is said that 'palant' and other bat and ball games such as 'rounders' or 'town-ball' were the precursors of this popular Olympic sport. In Belarus the game is known as 'łapta'.

Children and youth also spent their free time playing 'krąg' ('circle') in which children threw a wooden puck along the road so that the other players could not catch it. The aim of the game was to gain the largest area possible. Father A. Pleszczyński [28] in his article "Zabawy, gry i tańce w okolicy Międzyrzecza Podlaskiego" (Plays, games and dances around Międzyrzec Podlaski) lists about

a dozen of games and plays and divides them into different categories. He distinguishes plays for younger children: 'zając' ('hare'), 'rzepa' ('turnip'), 'gul', 'kot i szczur' ('cat and rat'), 'kruk' ('crow'), 'świnka' ('pig') as well as games for older children: 'krąg' ('circle'), 'wojna' ('war'), 'duca', 'koło z połynką', 'pierścień' ('ring'), 'ptaszek' ('bird') and 'przepiórka' ('quail').

Other popular forms of spending free time which have their equivalents in other countries were 'wieczorki' ('evenings'), 'dwa ognie' (two fires), 'wybitki' and 'taczanka'. One of the interviewees in Kodeń said that in playing 'dwa ognie' ('two fires') they used a ball made of pig's bladder. The bladder was blown up and then covered with ash. While drying up it was blown up even more until it became oval in shape. The game was played by two teams with an equal number of players, who first chose their captains and took the opposite sides of the field. The players took their positions in the field at random whereas the captains stood behind the opposite team lines. They threw the ball to their own teams trying to hit players from the opposite team. If a player from the opposite team managed to catch the ball they tried to do the same. The players, however, tried to avoid being hit and ran around the field without crossing the boundary lines. If a player managed to hit another player with the ball, then the hit player could stand next to the captain and help him. After excluding all the players the captain took the position in the field and continued playing the game by himself, but then he could only be hit three times before leaving the field. The team which first hit all the players from the opposite team won the game. If the players wanted to continue the game, then the winning team received one point. The second game was played after a short break and after a change of the sides. The game was also played in Belarus and in France, where it was known as 'la ballon prosounier' [13].

Aniela Halczyk [12] in her article "Dawne gry i zabawy dziecięce w okolicach Dołholiska na Podlasiu" ("Former games and plays around Dołholiska in Podlasie") divides the games into those for girls, boys and coeducational. Games for girls included mainly singing games such as 'czyżyk', 'jawor', 'posłała', 'muże', 'matka', 'mam chusteczkę mam' ('I've got a handkerchief'). Boys' games included: 'pikier', 'świnka', 'łunka', 'świniopas' ('swineherd'), 'cyz', 'w kręga', 'roszki', 'potopielnik' ('drowned body'), 'kiczki' or 'kary' ('penalties'). The coeducational games

included 'lisek' ('little fox'), 'gęsiego' ('in Indian file'), 'masło trzasło', 'tasy zaciągacz', 'guziki' ('buttons') and 'budowanie mostów' ('building bridges'). She also distinguished games with playful character, pointing out that they existed in various parts of Podlasie and had different names or rules, e.g. 'piker' was called 'pikier' in Klonownica Mała and in this version of the game the players tried to knock off a stone placed on a stick, but without touching the stick. The same game in Zabłocie was called 'spikuli'.

Another form of spending free time in various parts of southern Podlasie was a game called 'horse' popular in Kijowiec. One of the inhabitants of this village described it in the following way: "Cows were grazed on a pasture by boys and girls equipped with a stick. While the cows pastured, children could spend their time playing. They sat in a circle, each holding a stick that they could hit the other children's sticks and said: 'Let's hit the sticks'. If a child managed to hit another child's stick, he or she said: 'Show me a bird and I'll give your horse back'. The other player had to find a flying bird and show it to the other players. Then the game resumed." In Polubicze near Wisznice children played the same game but used a different rhyme about showing a bird. Another popular game played while grazing cattle was 'guessing the time'. Cows were usually taken to pastures twice a day – first, from the early morning till noon, and later from late afternoon till the evening. The game started with the words: "Let's see how many hours there are till the noon" (if it was before noon). Each player placed his/her own stick vertically on one finger and said "Moon, moon, how many hours are there to the noon" and counted one, two, three, etc. until the stick fell on the ground. The winner was a player who counted to the highest number thus holding the stick for the longest time. In the afternoon the game was played in the same way, but the rhymes included the word 'evening' instead of 'noon'. The winner was chosen in the same way. It is possible that children in other countries played similar games and used similar toys, as, for instance, it can be seen in museums of toys, such as *La vie des jouets* in Mouléon, France. However, this issue requires further research.

Games, like any other cultural phenomena, survive social upheavals and become cultural symbols of former times. A game is a product of culture and an outcome of history, and thus, we should never let our past be forgotten.

How beautiful were the childhood years, when we could play till dusk? We came back home tired but happy. Thus, we should look at children's playtime not from the point of view of an adult but we should also come back to the things which we liked the most in our childhood. How different our attitude to children's plays would be?

Each country has its own customs which are preserved in poetry, literature and art, and passing this heritage is each nation's duty. The aforementioned research results should be treated as comparative material which opens a broader research activity in the sphere of rites and customs in various regions of the world. The obtained data seems to be interesting due to its broad territorial and cultural range, and it may be expected that a further analysis of traditional games and plays may yield attractive educational effects – both theoretical and practical. Some time ago, Alfred Louis Kroeber aptly compared culture to a coral reef which is made of simple separate parts. On a microscale the organisms on the coral reef do not differ much, but as a whole (reef) they create inimitable patterns and configurations, which may be compared to human culture. Different societies, despite differences in their traditions and customs and, thus, cultures, seem to be similar because of their common values and needs. These values and needs are also preserved in games and plays which are unique and at the same time very similar despite the physical distance between them. On the one hand, this richness of forms and patterns is a proof of uniqueness or cultural identity of different societies. On the other hand, it is a rich source of inspiration to create on their basis new and culturally rich forms of physical activity.

Studies into traditional plays and games could contribute to the mingling of sports from industrial culture with traditional games and plays as a kind of confrontation of mass culture with folk culture. Such a juxtaposition would be interesting, because, as D. MacDonald [21] suggests, folk culture compared to mass culture "... grew without any help. It was a spontaneous, local image of people's preferences created for their needs. [...] Mass culture is imposed and manufactured by technicians. [...] Its receivers are passive consumers and their participation is limited only to the choice between buying and refusing to buy. The leaders of kitsch exploit cultural needs of masses just to gain profits" [21, p. 544]. Additionally, in order to broaden the perspective of ethnological research in sports and recreation it would be good to make use

of some classic and contemporary anthropological theories. For instance, the perspective of cultural ecology may play a significant part in analyzing and interpreting cultural reasons behind the children's and adolescents' behaviour.

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