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Fortune-telling games played by Croatian and Polish girls

Since entering Petar's hotel room on 21 May 1971, to my escape in May eighteen years later, whenever I saw the hands of a clock overlapping, which happened several times a day, I would repeat a few words in a fixed order. I would regularly count twenty five times on my right hand I love Peter, then depending on my current mood continue to count to 100 saying he loves me, he wants me, we will be together, or just mine.

From the novel *Bilješka o piscu* by the Croatian author Julijana Matanović (p.31)

I twisted the ring finger on my right hand and pressed it with the left palm. My knuckles cracked. The clock showed twenty-five to seven. 'Name a city and a number', I said to a woman from Bugojno, who had just entered the room. 'You're like a little girl, what do you want me to say? My granddaughters play the same way.'

From the novel *Bilješka o piscu* by the Croatian author Julijana Matanović (p.168)

Even as an adult the heroin of this novel plays children's fortune-telling games the author remembers from her childhood.

Fortune-telling game: *Hand on hand*

When you see the hands of a clock overlapping, you ask the first person you see to name a town and a number. If the person said *Osijek 5* for example, you take the fifth letter in the name of the town. In our example it is the letter E. This means that someone whose name, family name, or a nickname beginning with E is thinking of you. (If the chosen number is bigger than the total number of letters in the word, you continue counting again from the beginning of the word.). In order to find out if E is the starting letter of the name, family name or a nickname in our example you should count to five repeating name, family name, nickname. In our example someone whose family name begins with E is thinking of you.

From the unpublished collection of fortune telling games by M. Duran

When we asked 14 highly educated women (seven from Croatia and seven from Poland) about fortune-telling games, they all confirmed that they used to play them as adolescents. They also said that these games are common among girls. Some mentioned the link between such games and horoscope, reading cards, etc., which they still do for fun.

One Polish women revealed that in order to organize the day she is looking for clues in the numbers on registration plates, and two Croatian women said that when they are with their old

female friends they react to car license plate numbers. *I do not believe in it, but I must admit that I prefer seeing the 1 1 combination to seeing 4 4*, stated one of them.

Both Croatian and Polish girls have several sets of meanings for different license plate number combinations. Here are tables with one possible reading for each country.

LICENSE PLATE NUMBERS - meaning in Poland

If you see the following combination of numbers on a license plate, check the meaning in the table:

00	Surprise
11	Meeting
22	He loves you
33	Female friend
44	Kiss
55	Someone is falling in love with you
66	Male friend
77	Letter
88	Argument
99	Cancel all of the above

LICENCE PLATE NUMBERS - meaning in Croatia

If you see the following combination of numbers on a license plate, check the meaning in the table:

00	Date
11	He loves you
22	He is thinking of you
33	You will see him
44	Separation
55	Surprise
66	He will return to you
77	He is jealous
88	Kiss
99	He is cheating on you

In a preliminary investigation 40 high-school girls from Croatia and Poland, and 40 female students from each of the countries gave information about fortune telling games among females. In both countries these games are mostly played between the ages of 10 and 15. Even though this testing was unannounced, four of Osijek female students had the so-called *sneezers* that tell you what it means to sneeze at a given time. For example, if you

sneeze from 10 to 10.30 am your boyfriend or your crush is not honest, if you sneeze between 1 and 1.30 pm, one brown-haired boy is thinking of you. Many girls in the group confirmed that they have the *sneezers* from primary school.

In this pilot investigation (which is a preliminary investigation for more comprehensive research now in progress), alongside data on these games played by different generations in both countries, we collected and described eight fortune-telling games in Poland. We then asked the Croatian students if such games exist in Croatia. For each of the games we could find a *twin game* in Croatia. Such games provide girls with answers to the following questions: who loves you, how much he loves you in percents, how pretty you are (in percents), who will be your husband, what you and he will do for a living, where you will live (Polish version), what car you will drive (Croatian version). Using several initials of boys and girls it can be found out who will kiss whom, who cheats whom, who likes whom, and who admires whom.

The search for fortune-telling games in Croatia resulted in identifying and registering fifty such games.

Describing traditional children's games in New Zealand, Sutton Smith (1972) considers playful activities by New Zealand girls to be *informal games*. For example, they pluck the flower petals to find out whether their husband will be a blacksmith, tailor, soldier, sailor, rich, poor, beggar, or thief, if at their wedding they will wear silk, satin, cotton, rags, etc. Furthermore, Smith lists different versions of picking pieces of paper for destiny reading.

In each culture we find those culture creations in which children and young people are creators, mediators and senders (games, jokes, stories, songs, black humor, secret erotic folklore, secret languages, magic, fortune-telling chants, youth laws, lexicons (golden thoughts), autograph books, diaries, dare verses, games, girls' songbooks, etc.) These creations are parts of the spontaneous culture of children and young people (Duran 2003) and children pass them on from generation to generation. Fortune telling games can be considered as parts of the tradition of the *children's nation*.

Cultural creations of the *children's nation* exist in line with principles that regulate national culture. They are characterized by anonymous work of many individuals, synthesis and a holistic approach, as opposed to discursiveness of the official culture, the results of which are fixed and documented. The national, humorous culture, as stated by Bahtin (1978) is in opposition with the serious everyday world. Children's tradition is also opposed to the rules and the powerful world of adults. Maybe that is the reason, or it is the egocentrism of adults (the impossibility of stepping away from the adult world), why the creations of

children's and youths' subcultures have not been as thoroughly investigated, so little is known about specific genres of children's tradition. In literature we find certain terminology linked to traditional forms of children's work. Some authors use the terms *children's folklore* and *children's tradition* as synonyms. Opie, I. and Opie, P. (1969, 1977) consider the following activities as parts of children's folklore: games, graffiti, verses, jokes, teasers, secret language, and different activities of children's groups (passed on from generation to generation, and sometimes existing for over a century – such as ringing someone's doorbell and running away).

Simon J. Bronner (1988) talks about the American *children's folklore* describes rhymes, jokes, parodies, camp legends, games, stories, secret language, etc. Sutton-Smith (1972) adopts a similar view of this issue.

For Vinogradov, G. S. (1925) the term *children's folklore* covers only oral and collective creations of children expressed in words. Osorina, M.V. (1983) defines children's folklore as a form of collective creativity of children that is realized and fixed in a system of fixed texts passed on directly from generation to generation of children and have an important meaning in regulating their games and communication activities. Hence he understands children's tradition as a broad term that in addition to children's folklore covers different experiences and activities of children's groups, the knowledge of games and their rules, beliefs, jokes, fun, behavior norms, etc.

In the world of childhood there is a certain subculture that has its own tradition. Games are a part of that subculture. Creation, sustainability, changing and passing games on are ways of creating children's culture products children keep and pass on as parts of their tradition. With unwavering precision children find and pass on exactly those games that meet their existential needs and anticipate their development. Games are the best ground for development and testing of various psychological processes and human characteristics. Games reflect the zone of actual development and present the zone of future development for many psychological functions. In games, all developmental tendencies are in the focus of the magnifying glass. As stated by Vigotski (1966), in games children are a head taller than themselves. Games are expressive, **autotelic**, individual, divergent activities. Games are characterized by the lack of a goal, which makes them suitable for experiments, investigations, and testing. In games children get the taste of the activities and processes they are still not ready for.

Games and everything related to the world of childhood, are important links in the socialization process, in the process of establishing human nature that is not only given to children, but also defined by culture. In the cultural setting of growing up, as stated by many authors, there are differences in the sexual socialization of boys and girls. I. S. Kon (1988)

points out that parents who have children of different sexes adjust their behavior according to the norms acceptable for both sexes. With boys the stress is on encouraging energy and competitive spirit, and with girls the stress is on obedience and care for others. Boys are given more autonomy since early childhood (Edwards, Carolyn, Pope 2000). This results in different preferences for games and toys.

As a result of different socialization messages, the trained helplessness, when it occurs, is more frequent in girls (Boggiano, Barrett, Kelman, according to Vasta, Haith, Miller). This shows that girls more often feel that the locus of control is under control of external factors. *Locus of control is a perceived place or location of doers who are experienced as sources of managing personal behavior and a sources of what is happening to a person, including their successes and failures.* (Psihologijski rječnik, p. 222) A person perceives control as internal when they believe that events or results depend on their own behavior or personal characteristics. On the other hand, the control is considered external if a person believes that events are caused by factors outside their control, such as luck, destiny, or other people's actions. In the light of the above discussion, could we associate the existence of fortune-telling games, mostly played by girls, with the specifics of their indirect socialization?

Our examinees from both countries claim that women in their respective countries read horoscopes more often than men, or go to fortune tellers to have their fortune told. In both countries there have been investigations indicating different socialization patterns for boys and girls in primary school books.

According to Prop, folklore is an international phenomenon. Dancing in a circle can be found world-wide. The motif of pulling through is found in ceremonial games of all European nations, as well as in traditional children's games. The plots found in myths and fairy tales are similar world-wide. There are 345 versions of Cinderella in different nations on all continents (according to Langer 1967). Scholars investigating children's games are often interested in games played by children from different cultural backgrounds. Contrastive analysis of games and their rules played by children from Croatia, New Zealand and Great Britain (Duran, 2000) showed the existence of amazing similarities. We are about to find great similarity in fortune-telling games played by Croatian and Polish girls. It will be interesting to compare different types of games. Does this mean that the world had become a global village long time ago? Do games develop general human or culture-specific traits? It is possible that all of the above statements are true.

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