

Amateurism as a way of improving the cultural activity of preschool institutions in the Balkan countries

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Abstract

Regarding the fact that amateurism is widely represented in all Balkan countries, that it is aimed primarily at children and young people and at nurturing the traditional forms of the intangible culture of the people, which are diverse and autochthonous, the paper analyzes the characteristics of amateurism and the richness of the cultural diversity of the folklore heritage in the Balkan countries. Attention focus is on other components of amateurism as well, especially in terms of the benefits of dealing with folklore and the ways of functioning of amateur organizations in the Balkans. The cultural diversity of the Balkans stems from different forms of traditional culture, customs and preservation of intangible and tangible cultural heritage. Our work is focused on the possibility of incorporating amateurism into the curricula, that is, the plans and programs of preschool institutions and the possibility of improving the cultural activities of preschool institutions. Amateurism in preschool institutions can improve work in terms of improving cultural activities, developing physical and educational activities. Amateurism as an opportunity to improve the cultural activity of preschool institutions in the Balkan countries would improve the socialization of children, their physical activity, but also the acquisition of knowledge about the traditional culture of their own people and other peoples as well.

Keywords: *amateurism, cultural diversity of the Balkans, folklore, improvement of cultural activities, improvement of physical activities*

Cultural diversity of the Balkans and amateurism

The cultural diversity of the Balkans in the sphere of amateurism refers to the richness and diversity of the folklore of the Balkan countries: Montenegro, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Albania, Serbia, Bulgaria, as well as the countries that belong to the Balkan Peninsula with a smaller part of their territory: Slovenia, Greece and Turkey.

The bearers of amateurism are cultural and artistic societies, i.e. ensembles of folk songs and dances. In all the mentioned countries, there is a huge number of cultural and artistic societies that work with children and young people, thus absorbing thousands of young people into their programs. These societies function on the principle of voluntary membership. The work is carried out in groups that are formed according to age and dancing progress. On a weekly basis, each group has at least two couple of hours long rehearsals. The folklore rehearsal consists of several segments: warming up the dancer through various exercises, learning the steps and choreography, learning the style and improving for the performance, and at the same time getting to know the source of the game or customs, the climate and other characteristics of the intangible cultural heritage of the chosen region. Singing rehearsals are generally organized separately from dance rehearsals, and refer to traditional ways of singing specific to a certain climate. And these rehearsals begin with warming up the voice and getting to know the characteristics of the songs and the way of singing. Ensembles usually have their own orchestras consisting of musicians with the traditional instruments, accordion players, etc.

Folk rehearsals are physically intense and animate the whole body, coordination, endurance and fitness. In an artistic sense, the members get to know the culture and tradition of a certain region and

present an artistic form of folk expression on stage. The artistic expression itself can be in a form close to the source - a stage adaptation of the source or choreography – an artistic interpretation based on a source. Both art forms involve performance on stage through: an artistic dance with a musical background, with or without singing and in the traditional folk costume characteristic of a region. Ensembles present their work at concerts and performances at various events, competitions and festivals. Concerts are most often of a local character, that is, the ensembles perform in their hometowns for their parents and fellow citizens, and often the ensembles are guests to each other. Ensembles are part of numerous cultural manifestations at the local, regional, state or wider level, although their appearances abroad are most often in the form of folklore festivals. Folklore festivals are held all over the world, but international non-profit festivals are the most common ones in the Balkan countries. Namely, folklore festivals organized all over the world involve participation, i.e. payment for participation: travel and hotel expenses. Only in the Balkan countries non-profit festivals that bring together folklore from all over the world are widespread. Organizers are local governments or the ensembles themselves, and guests usually pay only their travel expenses. Turkey is the leader in the number of non-profit festivals. Festivals are opportunities to present what has been learned on stage, but also for folklorists from all over the world to socialize with each other, exchange experiences and improve their work.

In terms of education, the most important thing in folklore is socialization, learning to behave in a group and the responsibility of the individual towards himself and each member of the group. Each player knows that at any moment the whole group depends on him, that everyone in the group is equal, and the socializing within the ensemble is specific: children and young people relatively often stay with each other all day, on tours they depend on each other for several days, in the implementation of various projects they act as a team and foster teamwork and spirit. Folklorists don't have much free time outside of folklore and school. The ideal age for beginners is preschool age or early elementary school age. The continuous practice of folklore enables young people to grow up in a certain way, relieved of prejudice, stereotypes and racism, folklorists are physically active, learn to be part of a collective, socialize outside the family and become ready for an independent life, they get to know different people and enjoy in being different, they spend their free time productively, learn about their own and other traditions, culture and customs, and pass on what they have learned to their teammates and the audience, socialize, travel and meet different people and nations and present properly themselves their families, society, their hometown, their country.

Amateurism lives on in the Balkans through ensembles and manifestations. In every Balkan country the system functions almost identically, with the exceptions of Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina since there are no professional ensembles, that is, national ensembles that deal with folklore in professional and institutional manner. In these two countries, folklore ensembles are exclusively in amateurism and are not connected with cultural institutions. They mostly deal with the research and presentation of the majority culture and minority cultures or entities. In Croatia, there is a national ensemble called Lado, whose program includes choreographies from all Croatian ethnographic areas. The situation is the same in Bulgaria and Albania. When it comes to North Macedonia, apart from the national ensemble Tanec, ensemble Macedonia plays a significant role in the maintenance and development of folklore activities and amateurism, without choreographies in its repertoire like the national ensemble, but only stage adaptations of sources. The ensemble is composed of dancers who attend ethno-choreology at the Music Academy in Štip, and work in cultural centers, with their amateur ensembles. This way, amateurism was elevated to an institutional level, when it comes to the majority, i.e. Macedonian, culture. Other national communities in North Macedonia function according to the usual principles. When it comes to Serbia, there are two national ensembles: National Ensemble Kolo and National Ensemble Venac (National Ensemble of Kosovo and Metohija). Financed by the state, these two ensembles are the umbrella organizations of folklore that provide the basis and direction for the work of cultural and artistic societies on the territory of Serbia. The repertoire of Kolo includes choreographies of all peoples and ethnicities in the country. In Serbia, there are also academic ensembles of a semi-professional character. They are partly financed by the state and function in the academic community, most often at faculties or

as a legacy of successful ensembles in Belgrade/Niš/Novi Sad from the period after the World War II. Amateur ensembles are most numerous. It is assumed that there are about 3000 amateur ensembles on the territory of Serbia (only in Belgrade and its surroundings there are over 400 ensembles). These societies function as in other parts of the Balkans - by financing through membership fees, and helped by local municipalities and sponsors. All Balkan cultural and artistic societies continue to strive to nurture folklore heritage with all its elements and this way adequately research, preserve and present the cultural diversity of the Balkans. Most of the artistic directors of the societies are former dancers who have been involved in folklore since the earliest age, but it is usually not their lucrative profession. The financial problems in this form of creativity most often arises from the high cost of folk costumes and is based on two issues: each ethnographic area, i.e. choreography, requires a special folk costume; original national costumes are too expensive, and even making an adequate copy of the original costs a lot, therefore, for most ensembles, the largest part of the income goes to the acquisition of folk costumes. Although the cultural diversity of the Balkan Peninsula stems from different forms of traditional culture, customs and preservation methods of intangible and tangible cultural heritage, the very preservation manners of the cultural diversity are similar in all the mentioned countries.

Let us now inquire the connection between amateurism and children upbringing: children and young people all over the world, including the Balkans, have a similar upbringing that has been marked by modern technology for the past decades. Children grow up with mobile phones, tablets, computers, the Internet, computer games and social networks. Today, computer games are mostly played online, with teammates who are not from the same city or country, and in a similarly, children and young people are connected all over the world on Instagram, Tik-Tok, Snapchat, etc. Younger children often spend hours watching videos on YouTube because the smart phone is available to them from an early age as a mean of calming down. The same function have television programs for children. This type of mass media harmful influence used on children's upbringing is being talked about more and more often. The fact is that children and young people spend their free time indoors with some of the mentioned devices. Free time is a time that a child does not spend in a preschool institution, or a student at school. Although there are different types and possibilities of organizing child's free time, each possibility implies the will and desire of a child to do something, to have a hobby, but also that parents are aware that children shouldn't spend their free time with technology and the Internet. Free time activities may also be based on the child's talents and interests. Folklore leads the way in educational benefits for several reasons: folklore as a sport has a positive effect on a child's physical development and his coordination and fitness. "The process of physical exercise greatly affects changes in human abilities and characteristics in the anthropological sense" (Mekić, R. and group of authors. 2021: 8). Folklore as an artistic activity contributes to the development of a child's artistic expression: through movement, voice and developing new skills. In terms of education, folklore improves child's memory and learning ability about its own and other peoples, cultures, traditions and customs. In terms of socialization, the child learns to be an equal part of the team, and in addition, folklore is socializing without the use of modern technologies, devoid of prejudices that are characteristic especially for the Balkans and its complicated history.

Therefore, in folklore, the most important thing is socialization, learning to behave in a group and the responsibility of the individual towards himself and each member of the group. Each player knows that at any moment the whole group depends on him, that everyone in the group is equal, that they act as a team where teamwork and team-spirit are what's important. The continuous practice of folklore enables children (and young people) to grow up in an alternative way, relieved of prejudices, stereotypes and racism. Folklorists are physically active, learn to be part of a collective, socialize outside the family and become ready for an independent life, they are familiar with the beauty of otherness, they spend quality free time, learn about their own traditions, culture and customs, as well as those of other peoples, and pass on what they have learned to their family, teammates and audience. In terms of improving physical activity, the folklore rehearsal begins with exercises, during the rehearsal all muscles are active, motor skills and the center for balance are developed, the work begins with proper standing and walking, after which proper two-steps, three-steps and hops are learned, then squats and various acrobatic activities

(depending on age and choreography). "Physical education is an inseparable part of the cultural heritage of a nation and as such represents an integral part of physical culture" (Mekić, R. and a group of authors, 2021:7). Physical activity is in conjunction with music, rhythm and history - namely ethnology and the traditions and culture of own people and other peoples. "Artistic expression is based on the mastery of a certain movement technique, and the presence of music deepens the aesthetic value of the displayed activity" (Mekić, R., Petković, E. et al. 2023:211). Dancers certainly do not have any weight problems, which is very important nowadays when children spend most of their time indoors, physically inactive with television programs, computer games, etc.

Amateurism and ways to improve the cultural activity of preschool institutions

When it comes to amateurism and preschool institutions, we are primarily thinking about the possibility of incorporating amateurism into the curricula, that is, the plans and programs of preschool institutions and the ways of improving the cultural activities of preschool institutions. This intention is based on the specificity of the preschool learning and the ways of improving the plan and program, that is, the curriculum of preschool institutions.

The learning process of a preschool child, in terms of its character and developmental effects, differs from the learning process of a school child and from the learning process of adults. Unlike school learning and adult learning in which the acquisition of logical experience prevails, in the learning process of a preschool child, in addition to symbolic experience, main role has the acquisition of sensory experience (achieved through the use of senses and perception) and motor experience (acquired thanks to movement, manipulative and other tactile influences on objects of reality). It is necessary to organize the learning process so that, especially at younger ages, children have the opportunity to gain both sensory and motor experience. One of the main characteristics of preschool child's learning is the internalization of practical action, whereby internal intellectual processes are preceded by the perceptive and practical activity of a child. As Podđakov points out according to Prentović, and in the context of efforts to overcome the opposition between internal theoretical and sensory activity, i.e. thinking and practical action, internal action, created by the transformation of external action, thanks to the process of interiorization, does not remain an isolated creation, but begins to interact in different ways with the knowledge that the child has and the procedures of intellectual activity and that it changes itself and takes on a form in which it becomes an organic part of the child's experience (Prentović, Sotirović, 1998: 22).

In the General Principles of the preschool program, it is emphasized that the learning process is specific. The learning process is limited by the context of events and the abilities of preschool children. Children are constantly learning, through all activities and situations. Child learns in the present space, it learns from adults and children in its environment, both in organized learning situations and in spontaneous ones (General Principles of the Preschool Program, 2006). In this sense, the contents and activities of folklore fit into the potential set of knowledge and skills of preschool child. The introduction of these contents implies an innovative attitude towards the curriculum of preschool institutions.

The term curriculum (lat. currere – to run, to run a race, to run along a certain path), i.e. time, path, rules, norms and criteria (of running), marks the flow and schedule of learning that must be mastered in a certain time. In traditional teaching, this term includes the content of teaching subjects, but also school documents, articles, reports and manuals. There are many definitions of this term in the literature, which indirectly indicates that it is really difficult to define. The most common definitions of curriculum are the following: curriculum is the area and sequence of learning, curriculum is a syllabus (course plan that contains explanation, topic, resources and evaluation), curriculum is an overview of content with standards, with or without textbooks, then curriculum is defined as a set of permanent subjects which represent essentially the most important knowledge but also a set of school subjects that are used for the preparation of child for life challenges. That is why Turner and Turner divide all definitions of curriculum into two groups: traditionalist definitions of curriculum and progressive definitions of curriculum and consider that curriculum is: learning content + learning plan + learning product + learning experience (2007). School curriculum is often conceptually equivalent with the

concept of teaching. Posner (2004) completely equates these concepts, and distinguishes between two curricula: curriculum as a document with content and operational curriculum as everyday teaching practice, which is quite close to the teacher's general and operational curriculum.

Today, teaching is mostly equated with learning process, although the primary meaning of this term (in traditional education) is just delivering lectures. Given that the learning activity is emphasized in learning, these terms are increasingly equated. Didactics defines teaching as a planned learning and teaching situation (Mijatović, 2002: 32). The aim of the lesson is to develop knowledge, i.e. cognitive abilities, ability to act and evaluate in social reality (Mijatović, 2002: 33). Learning and teaching are not the same; learning is only one aspect of teaching in which learning takes place as a reproductive, productive or interactive process. Teaching is a complex and dynamic process of harmonizing content and form (what and how), and the interdependence of teaching and curriculum is quite understandable. That is why the most relevant definition of the curriculum is the one that defines it as learning and teaching plan, and teaching as the act of learning and teaching and the implementation of the plan. Curriculum is projection and prescription, and teaching is implementation and situational creation (Mijatović, 2002: 34). That is why curriculum and teaching can be studied separately, but they cannot function separately. Integrated curriculum is a term that has recently been introduced into teaching theory. As the presumed ideal of achieving all educational goals, it finds a place in numerous preschool and school institutions, but it is still underrepresented.

In teaching theories, we often encounter the term disciplinary curriculum. The differences between integrated and disciplinary curriculum are not just terminological differences. Integrated and disciplinary curriculum are not different scientific-teaching disciplines. These are two different understandings of the purpose of education, the organization of the learning process, the evaluation of learning, the relationship between children and adults, the role and responsibility of children and adults, as well as the relationship of kindergartens with the family and the social community (Krnjaja, 2019: 1).

Integrated curriculum is the understanding of curriculum as practice¹ (rather than content²) (Smith, 2000). It responds to dynamic social changes. Social changes, changes in modern science and technology, human development and the modern way of life give an argument to support the integrated curriculum (Krnjaja, 2019: 2). Therefore, when education is understood as a social practice that is realized in a concrete cultural context, in real life learning situations based on the students' experiences then it is composed of both intellectual understanding and action. Integrated curriculum is an evolving form of participation in joint activities of children/students and adults in the community (Lave, Wenger, 1996 in Krnjaja, 2019: 3). The integrated curriculum also represents the connection of knowledge and action, and is built through the negotiation of all participants and obligates educators to self-reflection, which forms the basis of curriculum development (Krnjaja, 2019: 3).

As three basic differences between integrated and disciplinary curriculum, Krnjaja singles out: understanding of knowledge (epistemological or ontological change); understanding of learning and understanding of the function of kindergarten/school. The integrated curriculum includes teacher's self-image, image of others, the way teacher participates in the social community, etc. (Barad, 2007 in Krnjaja, 2019: 4). That is why the integrated curriculum implies a mutual connection between the individual and the environment. Mutual connection is based on 3 arguments - that knowledge is not neutral, but culturally conditioned; that knowledge is socially constructed; that it is built on the level of mutual cultural transformation and individual transformation (Lave, Wenger, 1996 in Krnjaja, 2019: 4). The integrated curriculum implies the understanding that the individual and reality as a whole are based on the personal identities of the community, and that knowledge depends on the interaction of the individual with the community: also in terms of participation in the community's socio-cultural activities.

¹ In the modern understanding of teaching, learning is the process of acquiring knowledge - by subjects, activities or as a whole (Glatehorn, 2012).

² In the traditional understanding of teaching, content is only "delivered" (Glatehorn, 2012).

Learning as transmission is realized in the disciplinary curriculum. In the integrated curriculum, learning is a co-construction because there are many different sources of learning, the sources of learning change through interaction with those who learn, the learning process is dynamic and unpredictable. Learning takes place in the synergy of different learning potentials and its essence is in the process of transformation. Understanding learning as a co-construction indicates that culture, nature and the world participate in the construction of meaning/knowledge; that people contribute to processes because they change practice; that learning is not a universal process because it is always integrated into an environment (Krnjaja, 2019: 5). Therefore, the integrated curriculum is a completely different understanding of teaching and all teaching factors. It implies a different position of the child and different roles of the educator and a completely different attitude towards learning, knowledge and everyday work.

In terms of the incorporation of amateurism, i.e. folklore activities into plans and programs, i.e. curricula of preschool institutions, care should be taken in the sense of incorporation and volume. Folklore activity can be introduced as a regular activity at least twice during the working week. Apart from the teacher's knowledge, no additional tools are needed for the work except the music device. To carry out these activities, children should be dressed in comfortable clothes that do not restrict their movements and have a spare shirt if they sweat during the activity. The activity should last about an hour with a break between the two parts. Before starting work on the concrete mastering of folklore elements, the activity begins with stretching exercises and elementary fitness training, because in folklore dancing almost all muscles in the body are active so they need to be warmed up beforehand. "Through physical exercises, physical abilities are developed in a planned and systematic way, health is strengthened, moral qualities are developed, in a word, a complete personality is built" (Mekić, R, Mekić, M. et al., 2021:7). Learning starts from the basics: learning two-steps, three-steps, acquiring the initial elements of rhythm, in order to work on mastering the steps/choreography and integration with music, as well as singing, in accordance with the progress of the group. The activity ends with the learning of traditional dances that enable children to remember multi-rhythmic patterns more easily and connect new contents with previous knowledge because children encounter elementary forms of folklore in everyday life. Children can master simple choreography in about two months, while more difficult choreography takes about four months. In addition to intensive physical activity, children learn and remember through these activities: steps, choreographic solutions, songs, learn about the culture of their own and other peoples - about customs, traditions and the intangible cultural heritage of humanity. The stage performance brings the team members together because it is the product of a joint effort to present themselves as a group in the best manner and there is no competition between the children. Stage performances relieve children of stage fright. Since knowledge also depends on participation in socio-cultural activities in the community, it is folklore that provides a wide range of opportunities to involve the group in the social life of the community - by organizing concerts, participating in all cultural manifestations at the local level, presenting at national and international festivals, etc. The local community, for its part, should be involved in providing the national costumes and purposeful inclusion of the group in the cultural life of the community.

Folk dances³, including all forms of movement (walking, running, jumping, step game, painting, choreography) have a positive effect on the physical development of the child. In the national costume, children play in a certain position, which significantly affects the correct posture of the body. In addition, it develops coordination, movement techniques, improves speed, strength, endurance and dexterity, motor

³ Folk dances are one of the forms of folk creativity. They are closely related to the life of the nation, and therefore maintain its spirit, its understandings, based on material and spiritual culture in certain stages of the socio-historical development of our nations. Even today, folk dances occupy a prominent place in the lives of a large part of our people, although once their role was much greater. The primordial need of every being is the need for movement. These movements represent the existence and essence of life itself. Movement is synonymous with life. A person expresses himself through the movements of his body and expresses his feelings.

skills of the child, as well as a sense of rhythm and music. In addition to physical development, folk dances and folklore influence child's character: resourcefulness, persistence and relief from nervousness. Collective spirit and discipline are also important factors in the child's psychological development. In conjunction with learning about the culture and customs of one's own and other peoples, the child's qualitative progress is fully achieved.

The choice of games, pace and scope of work in teaching folk dances depends on the group itself (its age and abilities), as well as on the one who teaches folk dances (his knowledge and abilities) as well as on the technical conditions (preschool institutions should be well acquired for teaching folk dances. Proper space and sound system or an accompanist are needed). Children love to dance, they need to dance. Through dance we take care of both children's social and aesthetic education.

CONCLUSION:

Folk dances, folklore and amateurism are the priceless wealth of all Balkan nations. They contain the primordial need of man to express his inner life through dance, movement and melody. All Balkan peoples have a huge range of folk dances, songs and traditional costumes. The folk dance expresses the most diverse feelings and beliefs. The possibilities of applying folk dances and amateurism in these countries are enormous, just as the contribution of folk dances and amateurism to the overall development of preschool children is immeasurable. Through folk dance, children develop a sense of beauty through movement and voice, they acquire the skills of affirmative attitude, and at the same time, the folk dance is a form of healthy and cultural entertainment for children.

Thus, amateurism in preschool institutions can improve work in terms of improving cultural activity, developing physical activity in aesthetic and educational sense. Amateurism as an opportunity to improve the cultural activity of preschool institutions in the Balkan countries would improve the socialization of children, their physical activity, but also the acquisition of knowledge about the traditional culture of their own people and other peoples. Incorporating amateurism into preschool institutions can be realized as part of regular activities, but also in cooperation with amateur organizations. In Serbia, teachers of folk dances are trained at the High School for Teachers in Kikinda. On the one hand, this type of activity could be carried out by a teacher who is a dancer himself, within his group or in cooperation with a cultural and artistic societies, that is, by hiring a folk dance teacher who could carry out these activities with one or more groups at the same time.

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Rezime

Iako svaki društveni sistem ima specifičnosti, kada su u pitanju deca i mladi i obrazovni sistem, činjenica je da naše vreme zahteva dodatni napor da se deca motivišu da postanu fizički aktivna. Folklorna delatnost je oblast koja spaja sport i umetnost i odlična je mogućnost za unapređivanja celokupnog razvoja deteta. Upravo zbog bogatstva i razvijenosti folkloru i amaterizma u balkanskim državama, ova oblast je zahvalna za implementaciju u predškolski sistem obrazovanja.

Summary

Although each social system has specifics, when it comes to children and youth and the education system, the fact is that our time requires extra effort to motivate children to become physically active. Folklore activity is an area that combines sports and art and is an excellent opportunity to improve the overall development of the child. Precisely because of the richness and development of folklore and amateurism in the Balkan countries, this area is grateful for its implementation in the preschool education system.