

## TOYS AS ARTIFACTS OF THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD: IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

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### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to generate implications for future research based on the overview and analysis of the findings of relevant social sciences and the humanities that focus on toys as artifacts of the material culture of children, and/or childhood, with special reference to pedagogical research. By material culture of children, we mean items and objects that children themselves make, adapt or modify to fit their interests and the needs of their games, whereas the material culture of childhood refers to objects created by adults for children to play with. Toys can encourage different types of activities necessary for overall personality development, and can help children develop their cognitive abilities, their body and senses, gain knowledge, socialize, cultivate their emotions and appreciation of beauty, and develop their imagination and creativity. The potential of toys that children make themselves is reflected in the upbringing of creative, free, environmentally conscious and active members of society. Additionally, these toys allow children to build play, to perceive their own capabilities and restrictions, and to express their imagination, creativity and respect toward the environment, life and oneself. Future research approaches should be directed toward: a) toys as artifacts of the material culture of children, i.e. objects that children themselves make and use for the purposes of play, learning and development; b) integrating the perspective of children and adults with regard to toys, because the distinction between material culture of children, and material culture of childhood is conditional; c) understanding social practice, as well as different discourses related to process of making toys of children building toys by themselves, or through cooperation with adults; d) qualitative research on the design and application of educational toys created by adults for children to play with; e) examining the possibilities and the potential of integrating the so-called improvised toys into the family and institutional context; and f) initiating evaluative studies and integrating the values and content of local culture into the preschool and school curricula.

**Key words:** play, toy, culture, material culture of children, material culture of childhood

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## ИГРАЧКЕ КАО АРТЕФАКТИ МАТЕРИЈАЛНЕ КУЛТУРЕ ДЕТЕТА И МАТЕРИЈАЛНЕ КУЛТУРЕ ДЕТИЊСТВА: ИМПЛИКАЦИЈЕ ЗА БУДУЋА ИСТРАЖИВАЊА

### Апстракт

Циљ овог рада је да се, на основу прегледа и анализе сазнања референтних друштвених и хуманистичких наука која у фокус постављају играчке као артефакте културе деце и/или детињства, креирају импликације за будућа истраживања, са посебним освртом на педагошка истраживања. Под материјалном културом деце подразумевају се предмети које деца сама израђују прилагођавају потребама и интересовањима игре, док се под материјалном културом детињства подразумевају предмети које су одрасли направили и наменили деци за игру. Играчке могу подстаћи различите врсте активности које су неопходне за развој личности у целини и помоћи детету да развије умне способности, своје тело и чула, да стекне знања, социјализује се, оплемени емоције и осећај за лепо, и да развије машту и стваралаштво. Потенцијал играчака које деца сама израђују лежи у васпитању креативних, слободних, еколошки оријентисаних и активних чланова друштва, а њихов допринос се огледа у томе што омогућују детету да изгради игру, да упозна сопствене могућности и изрази машту, стваралачки однос и поштовање према окружењу, животу и себи. Будуће истраживачке приступе треба усмерити ка: а) играчкама као артефактима материјалне културе деце, односно предметима које деца сама користе и израђују за потребе игре, учења и развоја; б) интегрисању перспективе одраслих и деце у вези са играчкама јер је оштра подела на материјалну културу деце и материјалну културу детињства више условна; в) сагледавању друштвене праксе, разумевању различитих дискурса у вези са процесом израде играчака, од стране деце или посредством сарадње са одраслима; г) квалитативним истраживањима процеса дизајнирања и примене образовних играчака које су одрасли наменили деци; д) испитивању могућности и потенцијала интегрисања тзв. импровизованих играчака у породични и институционални контекст; и њ) иницирању евалуативних студија и интегрисању вредности и садржаја локалне културе у предшколски и школски програм.

**Кључне речи:** игра, играчка, култура, материјална култура детета, материјална култура детињства

### INTRODUCTION

Toys are an integral part of the life of every child and adult. They are a material and necessary element of play, even when they are not physically present, as they mediate between the child's social and personal experience (Kamenov, 2009). The importance of toys adults created for children to play with for their cognitive, emotional and social development has been discussed in various papers and studies (Kamenov, 2009; Lazarević & Malović, 2021; Smirnova, 2011). Toys allow children to better understand the world around them, overcome difficulties, assert themselves, develop emotionally and find their place in society (Kamenov, 2009). What makes playing with toys children have made themselves so special, and what defines their purpose is the fact that such toys allow

children to: develop different aspects of their personality, primarily creativity and cognitive abilities, to re-examine dominant values of their economic and social system (e.g. values of consumer culture), critically assess reality, respect nature and other people, actively and critically approach problem-solving, etc. (Večanski & Kuzmanović Jovanović, 2019). Moreover, industrial, ready-made toys are increasingly displacing unstructured materials from children's play, even though they are particularly important for the development of symbolic and creative play (Krnjaja, 2012).

Therefore, a relevant question arises – to what degree are toys an integral part of children's culture, and to what degree are they a part of the culture of childhood which is constructed by adults? When we say the *material culture of children*, we mean items and objects that children themselves make, adapt or modify to fit their interests and the needs of their games, whereas the *material culture of childhood* refers to objects created by adults for children to play with (Schlereth, 1985). In addition to having personal significance for each individual, toys are an integral part of the world's cultural heritage, because they are the “embodiment of creativity, engineering, knowledge of the laws of the market, as well as the values and esthetics of human civilization at a certain point in time” (Nedeljković Angelovska, 2012: 5). Jakovljević Šević (2012) believes that toys are accurately classified as cultural media, because they provide information about trends in clothing, fashion, interior design, food preparation, materials, manufacturing technologies, etc.

In the broadest sense, a toy is defined as any object or item children use to play with (Dostál, 2015; Frödén & Rosell, 2019; Kamenov, 2009; Mihajlović & Mihajlović, 2012), whether that object was specifically designed as a toy, or for other purposes. When it comes to specific conditions, primarily to such institutional contexts as Waldorf kindergartens, toys are simple objects, the choice of which is limited, designed to stimulate children's imagination and creativity (Frödén & Rosell, 2019). However, in Waldorf kindergartens, context plays a decisive role in defining toys, because they are “physical objects that are conducive to the kind of interaction between subject, object and context” (Levinovitz, 2017: 271; as cited in Frödén & Rosell, 2019). This way, Frödén and Rosell (2019) emphasize that there are three elements to the definition and use of toys – the child who plays with toys, the subject of the game, and the educational context that determines what a toy is in a given game situation. When viewed from the adult standpoint, it could be argued that toys contain messages and beliefs of adults about what is expected from the child, and what role or type of activity the child should adopt (e.g. to move, to design something, etc.) (Colić, Milošević & Colić, 2018). In that sense, toys and the social environment form a contextual matrix that impacts a child's behavior, development and learning (Pellegrini & Jones, 1994). What can be called the contextual matrix is illustrated by Brougere:

“A baby doll, because it represents a baby, encourages cuddling, dressing, washing, and all the activities surrounding caring for babies. However, there is no parental function in the toy, just a representation that invites this activity on the basis of the meaning (baby) given to the object in a referential social framework” (Brougère, 2006).

This paper analyzes the degree to which toys are artifacts of the material culture of children, and the degree to which they are artifacts of the material culture of childhood. The aim is to derive implications for future research based on the overview, analysis and systematization of the findings of relevant social sciences and the humanities that focus on toys as artifacts of the material culture of children, and/or childhood. Using the procedure of content analysis, we analyzed studies that examined children’s toys from a theoretical or empirical aspect. Among the analyzed works, there were those that could be classified as studies of material culture because they directly focused on toys as material artifacts from the standpoint of children and/or adults. Other works, mainly in the fields of pedagogy and psychology, approached this topic indirectly. The paper can be divided into two parts with regard to the main goal. The first section presents systematized theoretical and empirical findings of the relevant studies about toys in the field of social sciences and the humanities. The papers were analyzed in their entirety and from two aspects: their topic, i.e. whether they focused on the material culture of children and/or the material culture of childhood, and their established findings and conclusions. The second section discusses implications for future research, with special reference to future pedagogical research on toys in the educational context. The main reasons for deciding to bring the generated implications into correlation with future pedagogical research arose from the fact that pedagogy is, among other things, a normative science, and as such, it studies both the past and the present reality of pedagogy, examining and systematizing findings of relevant and related sciences in order to determine the guiding pedagogical principles and laws of educational work.

#### *AN OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH ON TOYS IN RELEVANT SOCIAL SCIENCES AND THE HUMANITIES*

A systematic and serious study of the material culture of children and childhood had been a grossly neglected research topic until recently (Brookshaw, 2009; Schlereth, 1982, 1985), especially outside the framework of archeological and anthropological research. Studying the material culture of children and childhood is invaluable because it proves the presence and activities of children (Schlereth, 1982, 1985), and because it allows us to identify and interpret the assumptions, beliefs, and meanings attached to the cultural artifacts of children or childhood in a particular society, i.e. from their social, cultural and historical position. In addition,

the scientific and practical importance of studying the material culture of children and childhood is reflected in the fact that toys have an undeniable educational potential to shape and influence children's play activities, and to encourage and support various aspects of children's behavior and personality development.

The research of material culture in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was mainly focused on objects that can be classified as artifacts of the material culture of childhood, largely disregarding children's attitudes toward the material world (Schlereth, 1985), which could have provided ample evidence on authentic ways in which children made toys and used play objects from their surroundings. The most dominant group of artifacts of the material culture of children and childhood in museum collections consists of manufactured toys and clothes, followed by educational and school items, baby items, photographs and books (Brookshaw, 2009).

Some authors noticed that museums around the world often exhibit numerous examples of the material culture of children which are still interpreted as artifacts of the material culture of childhood, and which put emphasis on the adults' attitude toward children while completely neglecting the opportunity to reveal the children's perspective on toys (Benjamin, 1999).

#### *Research on Toys as Artifacts of the Material Culture of Childhood*

When it comes to the research tradition associated with the material culture of childhood, it should be noted that researchers have generally sought to discover the objective truth about toys, i.e. to regard toys as an objective fact from the adult perspective. In consequence, the following research questions have emerged as relevant: What were the first children's toys? How did toys develop? What are the material aspects of toys? What toys did children play with in different periods of history? What is the role of toys and what function do they perform? How do toys impact a child's development? How do toys generate gender stereotypes and social inequality? To what degree are toys safe? What are the characteristics of toys in terms of quality? How do we choose toys?

Numerous toys of different type, function and design have been found at archeological sites in and around Athens, and estimates say they date back to the period between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE (Sommer & Sommer, 2017). Children in Ancient Greece had a variety of home-made toys, some of which they made themselves using clay, wood or leather (Andreu-Cabrera et al., 2010; Layne, 2008). Archeological and historical evidence on ancient toys relies on the triad comprising artifacts, iconographic evidence, and written sources (Layne, 2008; Sommer & Sommer, 2017). The doll found in a children's grave may have been a children's toy, but as the site where it was discovered could have been a shrine dedicated to a deity, the doll could also represent a symbolic religious object.

Iconographic evidence found on vases shows how children and adults used particular artifacts. Moreover, ancient philosophical texts and literary sources help us to identify the views of adults on children and children's play.

Anthropologic, historical and ethnographic research of dolls proves the dual nature of archaic dolls, which were used by adults in cult traditions and religious ceremonies on the one hand, and by children in their games on the other (Chernaya, 2014). First, the theory of survivals states that artifacts use their utilitarian function when they stop being used by adults and pass into children's hands. Second, according to the labor theory, the invention of tools preceded the invention of toys because there was a stage in human history when those tools were miniature copies of the items used by adults, and were in direct correlation with the future activities of children. Today, many objects used as toys (e.g. bow and arrow) have lost a direct link with everyday tools even in the communities at the lowest level of social and cultural development.

In one of the most famous historical studies of P. Ariès (1989), in addition to other analyzed historical sources (memoirs, pedagogical literature, representation of children in fine arts, etc.), material childhood artifacts are considered important evidence of the thesis that childhood is a social construct in Western culture. The view of the child as its own being that qualitatively differs from adults appeared in Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, whereas the modern understanding of childhood was constructed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Ariès, 1989). Another, very extensive historical overview of toys and games was compiled by Sutton-Smith (Sutton-Smith, 1986; as cited in: Diaz, 2008), concluding that, in the past, toys had a far more pronounced social component, encouraging children to play with others. In contrast, modern toys encourage children to play on their own, preparing them to successfully perform independent work tasks.

Different research indicates the role of toys in the early stages of a child's development (Else, 2009; Pellegrini & Jones, 1994; Tengfei, 2016; Yogesh, Sreenivasa Rao & Krishnamurthy, 2017), thus confirming the importance of toys for the physical, social and intellectual development of children. Toys can be used in the contextual sense, which would impact the nature and content of play. At the same time, different styles of play can also impact the use of toys as a resource (Pellegrini & Jones, 1994).

When it comes to relevant research, special emphasis should be placed on those studies that focus on the quality of children's toys, i.e. their safety, toxicity, and faithfulness to the objects they were modeled after. One such study conducted in India (Rangaswamy, Kumar & Bhalla, 2018) examined the environmental impact of traditional *Channapatna* toys, made from natural materials, in comparison to the environmental impact of plastic toys, made from *polyvinyl chloride* (PVC) manufactured in China. In contrast to PVC toys, traditional toys from India are made of

natural and biodegradable materials, such as wood, clay, sprouts, sawdust, coconut, walnut, cloth, etc. This comparative study revealed that native *Channapatna* toys are far less toxic compared to PVC toys, and that their manufacturing process involves the consumption of less energy and a minimal ecological footprint. Similarly, Mihajlović and Mihajlović (2012) point out that modern toys are far from natural, and that the issue of their alienness is particularly visible in three aspects: a) the use of artificial (synthetic) materials to manufacture toys; b) the lack of social and emotional components that characterize children-made toys; and c) instant gratification. When it comes to classifying toys, and the requirements that define toy quality, authors should take the following principles into account: a) toys should be made with children's participation, and in social interaction with them, instead of in accordance with adult criteria on how children of a certain age should behave; b) toys should be observed multidimensionally; c) we should respect the circumstances in which children use toys; d) long-term and continuous observation of children's activities with toys and their consequences for various aspects of children's development is needed; e) toys should bring about children's emotional satisfaction; and f) toys should have clear educational effects (Duplinský, 1991; as cited in: Dostál, 2015).

In the age of intensive development of technology and consumer society, toys are subject to market laws designed to encourage consumerism, which is why mass-produced toys are prevalent, while only a small percent of toys currently used in kindergartens are hand-made toys from natural materials (Večanski, 2016). In addition, modern life forces children to play by themselves using toys that glorify stereotypes and brute physical force (Klemenović, 2014). Večanski (2016) examined the opinion of kindergarten teachers on the importance of hand-made toys, their expediency and usefulness, and the potential problems in their use. The results of this study indicate that kindergarten teachers understand the importance of hand-made toys for all aspects of a child's development (cognitive development, development of fine motor skills, development of gross motor skills, social interaction, imagination, self-confidence, etc.), but that in reality, such toys are not nearly as present in kindergartens as the importance teachers attach to them would suggest. Game-like art activities, especially making toys by hand, can be an adequate response to the various negative consequences of neoliberal ideology on children's free play, of which the marginalization of the importance of free play within and outside the institutional context is the most important (Večanski & Kuzmanović Jovanović, 2019).

Although the market of educational toys for children is developing fast, some authors (Abdi & Cavus, 2019; Tengfei, 2016) believe that modern toys cannot meet children's needs, that their quality is often questionable and uneven, and that there is little innovation in their design. In their experimental

study, Abdi and Cavus (2019) designed an educational toy for preschool children ages 4 through 5 to examine the toy's impact on children's learning of English as a second language, especially in relation to learning the Alphabet, words, colors, shapes and numbers. The results of this experiment show that the educational toy designed by the authors is suitable for preschool children and can be used to teach them English as a second language.

Numerous studies have confirmed that toys perpetuate gender stereotypes (Owen Blakemore & Centers, 2005; Rheingold & Cook, 1975). Children learn expected gender roles and social behavior through toys, although some studies show that toy-based gender differentiation does not exist at an early age (Jakovljević Šević, 2012). Rheingold and Cook (1975) observed toys and other items that can be found in the bedrooms of boys and girls between the ages of 1 and 6. The results of this study show that boys and girls own approximately the same number of books, music instruments and stuffed animals. However, boys have more toys than girls, and these toys are more varied. The authors also identified differences in the types of toys owned by boys and girls. In another study (Owen Blakemore & Centers, 2005), undergraduates rated toys based on their suitability for boys, girls, or both genders. Toys were classified into five categories based on these estimates: distinctly male, moderately male, gender-neutral, moderately female, and distinctly female. In yet another similar study (Owen Blakemore & Centers, 2005), undergraduates assessed the characteristics of toys for boys and girls. The results suggest that toys for girls are associated with physical attractiveness and care, whereas toys for boys are assessed as violent, competitive and dangerous. Educational toys that stimulate the development of physical, cognitive, and artistic abilities were assessed as gender-neutral or moderately male. The overall conclusion of this study is that distinctly gender-stereotyped toys support optimal child development to a far lesser degree than gender-neutral toys, or toys that perpetuate moderate gender stereotypes.

Examining the attitudes of parents and preschool teachers about toys in the context of institutional and family education and care, Colić et al. (2018) found that the highest level of agreement between teachers and parents occurred with regard to the instructiveness of toys, followed by their agreement on the safety of toys and gender stereotypes to a somewhat lesser degree. Their attitudes about ways to obtain toys were in complete disagreement. In addition, the aforementioned study showed that the choice of toys largely depends on the beliefs of parents and teachers about their instructiveness, followed by market trends and TV ads, and finally, the specifics of the institutional/family context. The choice of toys to play with is often related to the adults' conceptions on ways to support children's development and learning (Lazarević & Malović, 2021). Researching the practices of purchasing toys for children, Lazarević and Malović (2021) established that adults often buy toys



for children, and that the most common reasons for purchasing toys are birthdays, holidays, and other special occasions. However, the primary motive of adults for buying toys for children is not their contribution to the child's development and learning. The results of this research indicate that the practice of buying toys has to do with the consumer culture trends of modern society – that is, buying a large number of toys and using them for a short time only.

As part of a sociological study, Diaz (2008) interviewed women who had at least one child in order to examine their understanding and perception of toys and their role in everyday life. The main conclusion she arrived at was that mothers perceive toys in two contrasting ways. First, they see toys as a means of social interaction and learning for children, but in a way that limits the time they have to spend with the child. Second, mothers prefer toys that require little time and energy on their part, i.e. games that do not require too much direct involvement. The results suggest that toys are observed in correlation with the limited time a modern working mother has at her disposal, but they refute the view that modern mothers use toys as aid in performing their maternal responsibilities. Certain sociological studies examined the link between social stratification and the choice of toys to purchase. One study determined that middle-class mothers believe that the main function of toys is to encourage children's educational development and help them acquire essential life skills, whereas working-class families perceive toys as more of a means of entertainment and play (Lareau, 2003; as cited in: Diaz, 2008) (Seiter, 1993; as cited in: Diaz, 2008). Another study discovered that middle-class parents buy toys not only for their educational value, but also for the ideological and aesthetic value they attribute to those toys (Seiter, 1993; as cited in: Diaz, 2008).

Research on toys as artifacts of the material culture of childhood points to numerous findings, the most important of which include: a) since the beginnings of organized society, toys have had a significant role in the lives of children and adults, largely reflecting the attitudes and beliefs of adults about their nature, use and functions (Andreu-Cabrera et al., 2010; Ariès, 1989; Chernaya, 2014; Layne, 2008); b) as a consequence of the commercialization of childhood over the past decades, there has been an increase in the number of mass-produced, automated, digital, plastic, PVC and other toys of questionable quality (Rangaswamy, Kumar & Bhalla, 2018; Mihajlović & Mihajlović, 2012; Večanski, 2016; Večanski & Kuzmanović Jovanović, 2019); c) the early academization of pre-school education practices and working parents greatly influence the choice and purchase of children's toys (Colić et al, 2018; Diaz, 2008; Lazarević & Malović, 2021) which are primarily perceived as educational tools designed to encourage a child's learning and development (Abdi & Cavus, 2019; Tengfei, 2016). For all these reasons, many are concerned

that the nature of toys is being distorted and increasingly removed from the very essence of play and child's nature. Instead of fulfilling the function of allowing children to play and design games, and helping them learn, create, modify, make decisions and participate, toys are increasingly becoming a disciplining tool, a means of forgiveness, redemption, a status symbol, etc.

#### *Research on Toys as Artifacts of the Material Culture of Children*

Another research tradition strives to decipher the children's world of play and toys, as well as examine their perception of toys. What items and objects from the immediate and broader environment do children use as toys and in what manner? What is the significance and function of these improvised/homemade toys for children? In his earlier studies, Brougère (Brougère, 2003) analyzed the social component of toys as part of an organized network system that involves many parties (manufacturers, parents, sellers, children) and different processes (manufacturing, distribution, advertising, purchase, play, destruction). In his later works, the author conducted research using the socio-anthropological approach which observes objects outside their usual context, and which, in the case of toys as artifacts of the material culture of children, includes their independence from the ways in which they are used and the ways in which they are incorporated into the system of cultural exchange, or any social practice.

Ethnological and anthropological research by Rossie (2005a) indicates that children from the Sahara and North Africa make toys using natural and waste materials from their local environment. The list of natural materials that can be used to make toys is inexhaustible, and Rossie offered the following classification: *materials of mineral origin, materials of plant origin, materials of animal origin, and materials of human origin*. In addition, children often use waste material from their environment to make toys, primarily: *earthen materials, glass, wood materials, fibers, metal, paper materials, plastic and rubber*. Another important finding of this research is that Moroccan children do not enjoy or care too much about the toys themselves. They primarily care about and enjoy the process of finding the materials to make toys, and the activities in which such homemade toys are used. Moreover Rossie (2005a) noticed the so-called impermanence of homemade, DIY toys, i.e. he noticed that Moroccan boys and girls show indifference toward their homemade toys because, once they finish playing with them, they abandon them or purposefully destroy them. Children play with the same types of toys, regardless of whether they live in the rural areas of the Sahara and North Africa, or in densely populated urban areas, and their similarity facilitates mutual communication and the establishment of a common understanding between the local culture and the culture of play. The overall conclusion of this research is that children's activities during play, as well as the toys

and other items used to play with, are in direct correlation with the natural, social and cultural reality in which these children live. However, play activities and toys are not unchangeable, even in traditional and rural communities (Rossie, 2005a).

In the second edition, observing children from the Sahara and North Africa play, Rossie (Rossie, 2005b) analyzed the material, technical, cognitive and emotional aspects of children's dolls, concluding that both male and female dolls used in this region almost exclusively symbolize an idealized form of an adult man or woman. In addition to a collective and standardized manner of playing with dolls, every ethnicity and region also have their own unique ways of playing with dolls. Children use dolls to interpret the roles and lives of adults; they transmit and internalize knowledge of their physical and social environment, attitudes, symbols, meanings, social and moral values; they are directly involved in each community's system of visual communication, thus achieving exchange with their environment and actively adopting culture through conventional symbols (Rossie, 2005b). However, according to Rossie (2005b), it is still questionable whether games that involve dolls project family reality in line with the values and roles dictated by the community. In other words, to what extent dolls are a means for conveying conservative messages and maintaining an established socio-cultural systems is uncertain.

Another group of research on toys as artifacts of the material culture of children we analyzed is that which pays equal attention to toys as artifacts of the culture of children and childhood, and the standpoint of adults and children (Benjamin, 1999; Frödén & Rosell, 2019). We paid special attention to the research of the art historian Karl Gröber (Benjamin, 1999) which represents a creative synthesis of knowledge about toys as artifacts of the culture of children and childhood. Gröber singles out the following findings as the most important: a) the process of industrialization marks the beginning of the emancipation of toys because, at that time, toys started to elude the control of the family and become increasingly alien to children; b) there is a contradictory relationship between the material culture of children and the material culture of childhood: toys are largely observed as items made for children, and not as items created by children; the more attractive and harmonious a toy is, and the more it is based on an imitation of the adult world, the further it is removed from the actual child's play; c) rationalist views on children and toys prevent us from seeing the child's true self and the toy; d) toys are not evidence of the autonomous existence of children's culture; instead, they are always a symbol of dialogue between toys and context (community, nation and class).

Research conducted by Frödén and Rosell on toys used in Waldorf kindergartens (Frödén & Rosell, 2019) established that the physical environment and toys, or simple objects in the environment, whose form and content does not invite children to engage in any particular activity or

game but encourages free transformation and the right to express their imagination, actually have the greatest impact on the development of children's play and creativity.

In conditions in which the social and economic system are dominated by the values of neoliberal ideology which promotes industrial toys, artifacts of the material culture of children, i.e. toys that children make, adapt or modify to fit their needs or the needs of their games, are being increasingly pushed aside (Brookshaw, 2009; Frödén & Rosell, 2019; Schlereth, 1985; Rossie, 2005a, 2005b; Večanski, 2016; Večanski & Kuzmanović Jovanović, 2019). Children use various objects and materials from their natural, social and cultural environment as playthings, including themselves and their own creative process. In the process of making one's own, improvised toys, children discover the different functions of existing objects, or create various items as toys with particular functions during play (Rossie, 2005a, 2005b; Večanski & Kuzmanović Jovanović, 2019). Therefore, handmade toys combine research and creativity: "A home-made toy is a visible proof of children's creativity and skill, and therefore a source of pleasure and pride, especially if it is later used to play with" (Večanski & Kuzmanović Jovanović, 2019: 406). Due to the importance of toys for children's overall development, and due to the fact that the process of creating and making toys is more important than the end-result, it is necessary to initiate research focused on the material culture of children in the current family and institutional context.

### *IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH*

The overview and analyses of existing papers show that most authors address the theoretical and empirical aspects of toys as artifacts of the material culture of childhood. The fact that toys are largely viewed from the adult standpoint, i.e. from the aspect of adult beliefs and assumptions on what an adequate children's toy is in terms of its nature, material, function and purpose, largely contributed to this viewpoint. Some of the most consistent research findings about toys as artifacts of the material culture of childhood are: evidence that toys have always played a special role in the development of human society and in the lives of children and adults, and evidence of the durability of toys, based on the fact they outlasted the basic tools they were modeled after. As suggested by research results on toys as artifacts of the material culture of childhood, toys mostly represent diminished copies of objects involved in family and work life, war, family care or entertainment. As such, they fulfill their didactic and socialization function, imitating real life and helping children to better prepare for it (Dostál, 2015). All these reasons indicate a need to change the direction of research so as to focus on toys as artifacts of the material culture of children, i.e. as items children themselves make and use for the purposes of

learning, play and development in general. There is also a noticeable lack of theoretical papers and studies that analyze the pedagogical aspects of the material culture of children. Although the distinction between the material culture of childhood and the material culture of children is only provisory, arising primarily from theoretical and practical reasons, there is a need to unify these perspectives. Moreover, even the researchers' determination to examine authentic children's methods of making toys using material and items from everyday life is not entirely independent of a wider social and cultural context. Even when the child independently makes toys, defines their purpose, and gives them meaning, he/she is still influenced by previous experience, interactions, and relationships established with adults.

Everyday objects that children use as toys should pedagogically, didactically and psychologically complement toys created specifically for child's play (Stoppardová, 1992; as cited in: Dostál, 2015). Speaking of which, there is a need to examine the possibilities and the potential for integrating the so-called improvised or homemade toys children made on their own into the family and institutional contexts. It would be especially interesting to learn the extent to and the ways in which children use objects from their family and wider local (natural and social) environment, and how they link them with didactically modeled toys and items.

Despite the prevalent ways in which childhood has been universally viewed for decades, the concepts of toys, the material world and material culture are not stagnant, but historically, socially, and culturally specific. Due to the fact that these categories are social constructs, future research approaches should be focused on understanding social practices and different discourses related to toys, as well as the process of children making toys by themselves, or in cooperation with adults. Toys are closely related to specific social situations and uses, so it is not possible to talk about a singular understanding of toys, a singular type of toys, or the best classification of toys per se. On the contrary, there is a plurality of understandings regarding toys, and the different uses and functions of the same toy.

Given the fact that most pedagogically oriented studies focus on studying and designing educational toys to support children's development, the existing results need to be verified, and qualitative research into the process of designing and implementing educational toys needs to be conducted.

Although sociological research has shed light on many of the social aspects of toys, it has also raised numerous questions. To what extent and in what manner do parents, educators and adults in general participate in children's play with toys? To what extent are they regulators and partners in children's play with toys, and how do they understand these roles? Do mothers' employment, emancipation and free time influence the choice of toys they purchase for their children, and the way children use them? Are

toys, from the standpoint of children and parents, a medium for learning, playing or improving academic knowledge and skills in later life?

Many discussions and studies of toys are focused on gender issues and stereotypes, i.e. the reproduction of societal gender inequalities through toys. These studies have failed to answer how the manner in which parents raise their children leads to gender inequality.

Early toys were not made just to encourage children's play; they also represented a means to control and discipline children, hiding complex gift-giving, and reward/punishment rituals (Mouritsen, 1998). The analyzed papers contain very little knowledge about the educational models that form the base for play with toys, whether toys are treated as artifacts of the culture of children, or the culture of childhood, and few genuine research attempts were made to identify those models.

As the thesis about the relationship between the quality of stimulation of children's development in early childhood (within a family and institutional context) and their academic performance in later education is widely accepted, it is very important to pay special attention to children's toys and games, as well as adults' attitudes toward them (Mouritsen, 1998; Rossie, 2005b). Therefore, the need to adapt educational institutions to children's needs, experiences and interests has been recognized. For example, it would be useful to initiate evaluative studies and integrate the values and content of local culture into the curricula of preschools and primary schools. The toy culture of local communities and groups must not give way to the overpowering influence of the culture of play promoted by consumer culture, Western media, standardized European and American toys, or mass-produced plastic toys (Rossie, 2005b). In addition, future research can be used to promote and examine the interaction between traditional and modern toys.

### CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to systematize the existing knowledge needed for deriving guidelines for future research, especially research within the educational context, by conducting an overview of scientific research that focuses on children's toys as artifacts of the material culture of children and childhood.

Despite the widespread use of the terms *material culture of childhood* and *material culture of children* in different social sciences and the humanities, authors generally do not question the conventional meaning of these terms. The material culture of children includes those toys that children themselves have designed, made, modified and used in play activities, and which reflect their creativity, imagination, current needs and interests. In addition, the material culture of children involves everyday objects and items from the world of adults which children have adapted to their own culture by changing their original purpose or function. The ma-

terial culture of childhood involves objects created by adults for children to play with.

Sciences that study toys (e.g. ethnology, archeology, history, sociology, pedagogy, psychology, anthropology, art history, art education, teaching methodology, etc.) have come to significant conclusions about toys, indicating the directions in which the future research of toys should go. Different interpretations of the importance, role, nature, and ways to use toys can be associated with industrialization processes, early academicization, rapid development of modern technologies, different concepts of childhood, etc.

If we review existing studies of the material culture of children and childhood, we can argue that the adult perspective prevails over the perspective of children. Pedagogy is focused, both in terms of theory and in terms of practice, on what children should become rather than on who children are and what constitutes their life (Mouritsen, 1998). It is, therefore, perfectly legitimate to ask: What do toys as artifacts of the culture of children and childhood tell us about child rearing? Seemingly apolitical and immune to ideology of any kind, toys can reveal complex, often implicit social constructs associated with parenting and child rearing (e.g. the model we want our children to embody, the direction we would like our children to go in, the social and cultural values we want to nurture and preserve, and those we need to accept). The best way to update our knowledge about toys as artifacts of the material culture of children, and to initiate the development of the perspective of children is through qualitative research that involves observation activities with or without the participation of adults and/or researchers, and qualitative analyses of children's activities during play with homemade toys.

Toys can encourage different types of activities necessary for overall personality development. They help children develop their cognitive abilities, their body and senses, gain knowledge, socialize, cultivate their emotions and appreciation of beauty, and develop their imagination and creativity. The potential of toys that children make themselves is reflected in the upbringing of creative, free, environmentally conscious and active members of society. Additionally, these toys allow children to build play, to perceive their own capabilities and restrictions, and to express their imagination, creativity and respect toward the environment, life and oneself.

Issues that seem important to us are the possibility of a wider use of toys children made themselves in the context of family life and pre-school education practice, as well as the need for a more natural, development-oriented and culturally appropriate toy industry (e.g. toys made of natural materials, wood, wool and cotton, and traditional toys).

Based on the findings of the analyzed scientific papers, future research in the educational context should focus on: a) toys as artifacts of the material culture of children, i.e. items that children themselves make

and use for the purpose of play, learning and development; b) integrating both adult and children's perspectives regarding toys; c) discourse regarding toys that children make themselves, or in partnership with adults; d) the process of designing and implementing children's educational toys designed by adults; e) integrating the so-called improvised/makeshift toys into the family and institutional context; and f) integrating the values and content of local culture into preschool and school curricula.

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## ИГРАЧКЕ КАО АРТЕФАКТИ МАТЕРИЈАЛНЕ КУЛТУРЕ ДЕТЕТА И МАТЕРИЈАЛНЕ КУЛТУРЕ ДЕТИЊСТВА: ИМПЛИКАЦИЈЕ ЗА БУДУЋА ИСТРАЖИВАЊА

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### Резиме

Играчке представљају интегрални део живота сваког детета и одраслог. У најширем појмовном одређењу играчке означавају било који предмет који деца користе у игри, било да су ти предмети дизајнирани за такву употребу или имају друге сврхе. У ужем значењу играчке су предмети специјално намењени деци за игру. Из тих разлога, као релевантно питање се издваја колико су оне интегрални део културе деце, а колико део културе детињства. Под материјалном културом деце подразумевају се предмети које деца сама израђују и прилагођавају потребама и интересовањима игре, док се под материјалном културом детињства подразумевају предмети које су одрасли направили и наменили деци за игру.

Циљ овог рада је да се изведу импликације за будућа истраживања на основу прегледа и систематизовања сазнања референтних друштвених и хуманистичких наука која у фокус постављају играчке као артефакте материјалне културе деце и/или детињства. Применом поступка анализе садржаја анализирани су радови који са теоријског или емпиријског аспекта разматрају деचे играчке. Међу анализираним радовима постоје они који би се могли сврстати у студије материјалне културе јер непосредно разматрају играчке као материјалне артефакте из перспективе деце и/или одраслих, док се други радови само посредно баве том проблематиком. У оквиру првог поглавља приказана су и систематизована сазнања релевантних истраживања друштвених и хуманистичких наука о играчкама (археолошка, историјска, антрополошка, етнолошка, социолошка, психолошка, педагошка и методолошка истраживања). Радови су анализирани у целости, са два аспекта: са аспекта теме којом се баве, односно материјалне културе деце и/или материјалне културе детињства, и са аспекта утврђених сазнања и закључака. У другом поглављу рада разматрају се импликације за будућа истраживања, са посебним освртом на будућа истраживања о играчкама у васпитно-образовном контексту.

На темељу сазнања изложених у оквиру референтних научних радова изведене су бројне импликације за будућа истраживања, а посебно се издвајају следеће: а) иницирање истраживања о играчкама као артефактима материјалне културе деце, односно предметима које деца сама користе и израђују за потребе игре, учења и развоја; б) интегрисање перспективе одраслих и деце у вези са играчкама јер је оштра подела на материјалну културу деце и материјалну културу детињства више условна; в) сагледавање друштвене праксе, разумевање различитих дискурса у вези са играчкама, ка процесу изградње играчака од стране деце или посредством сарадње са одраслима; г) иницирање квалитативних истраживања о процесу дизајнирања и примене образовних играчака; д) испитивање могућности и потенцијала интегрисања тзв. импровизованих играчака у породични и институционални контекст; и е) иницирање евалуативних студија и интегрисање вредности и садржаја локалне културе у предшколски и школски програм.