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Luparenko, Svitlana

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## **Children's Game Library as a Unique Extracurricular Educational Establishment in the USSR (the Middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century)**

Svitlana Luparenko \*

29 Artema Street, Kharkiv, Ukraine  
Kharkiv G. S. Scovoroda National Pedagogical University

Corresponding Email: swetka1408@mail.ru

**Keywords:** children, children's game library, extracurricular educational establishment, extracurricular education, game, leisure time.

**ABSTRACT.** The article reveals the history of emergence and work of children's game libraries in the USSR in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first children's game libraries, which were educational establishments where children could come and play different games, using various game and sport equipment free of charge, appeared in the 1930<sup>th</sup> and became wide spread in the USSR in the 1930<sup>th</sup> – 1950<sup>th</sup>. Children's game libraries had different tasks of their work (organizing children's cultural leisure time, increasing the educational and political levels of children's games and entertainments which were conducted in schools, summer camps and extracurricular educational establishments). They also had different directions of their work, namely: organizational, methodic, educational, experimental, instructive and consultative directions. It has been shown in the article that children's game libraries had great results of their work (they involved a lot of children and adults in their activities; the network of children's game libraries began to grow; a lot of new toys and games were created and produced by them). However, children's game libraries faced certain difficulties in their work, namely: absence of own premises of children's game libraries, lack of enough support for their activities by some educational institutions and teaching staff, lack of the required amount of toys and games, insufficient instructive and publishing activities of children's game libraries.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

One of the characteristic features of development of education in the USSR in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was expansion of the network of extracurricular educational establishments and activation of their work. First of all the system of extracurricular education had to solve the problem with organization of child population. Extracurricular educational establishments fought against children homelessness, had ideological and political influence on children and involved them in cultural and educational activities.

During the period investigated due to the initiatives of party, trade union and komsomol organizations, some outside school children's association, which were different in nature and organizational structure, emerged in the country. In the 1920<sup>th</sup> the extracurricular activity was conducted primarily by clubs where various children's interest groups and playgrounds worked under the direction of social activists. The extracurricular unions and fraternities were established on the basis of clubs. Besides, the first children's sections at party and komsomol cells, children's clubs, art studios and houses of artistic creativity, centers for young technicians and nature lovers, bureau of school excursions, children's tourist centers, houses of pioneers etc. appeared in the USSR in the 1920<sup>th</sup> – 1930<sup>th</sup>. These educational establishments organized children's socially useful activities and their leisure time. A bit later new specialized extracurricular educational institutions were established. They were children's railways, sports schools, ports, radio stations, aero clubs etc.

At the end of 1931 in Zagorsk (Sergiev Posad now) a Scientific-Experimental Institute of Toys was established at the Museum of Toys. This institute was intended to collecting and study of

games and toys, development of exemplary (pedagogically appropriate and necessary for the child) toys and specialists' training for the production of toys [1].

The idea of creation and distribution of exemplary toys among children was implemented in establishment of special unique institutions – children's game libraries (CGL) which had not been anywhere else in the world. They were peculiar "game libraries" which focused their work on children's attraction to game communication, teaching children, parents and pedagogues how to play different games, development of children's independence and social skills, organization of children's leisure time.

CGL began to work as small playrooms at clubs and culture parks in 1933. The first children's game library of a wide profile was established at Zagorsk exemplary seven-year school by specialists of Scientific-Experimental Institute of Toys in April 1934. Throughout this year a lot of rooms of toys and games started to work at palaces and houses of pioneers, schools and clubs in Moscow, Leningrad, Rostov and other cities.

In 1935-1936 the Central Children's Game Library, a special children's educational institution, was established in Odesa. It was "a rental service of children's games, toys and sport equipment" [2, 3]. It was the first game library in Ukraine, but later (throughout the 1930<sup>th</sup> – 1940<sup>th</sup>) new children's game libraries were established in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Lviv, Kherson, Dnepropetrovsk and other cities.

So, the study of activity of CGL would facilitates organization of activity of extracurricular educational establishments in modern conditions, reveal the ways of organizing children's reasonable leisure time, help to determine and realize the reasons of difficulties of modern extracurricular education and possible ways of overcoming them.

## **2. THE LITERARY REVIEW**

It should be noted that the problems of CGL work in the system of extracurricular education in the USSR have not been under careful consideration. However, some problems of activity of children's game libraries have been revealed in works of some Soviet and modern scientists. For instance, Ye. Minskin, a founder and a head of the Central Children's Game Library [2, 4, 5, 6], and N. Panova [3] characterized the peculiarities of foundation and work of Odessa Children's Game Library. Ye. Yefimova [7] and Yu. Timofeyev [1] analyzed the result of activity of different CGL. Nevertheless, there are only some short mentions of the CGL in modern scientific works. There is no complete research of activity of CGL, their essence, directions and forms of work with children and adults. That is why insufficient study of the problem of CGL activity, the presence of their interesting and effective experience caused the conducting of this study. Little known archive materials of The State Archive of Odesa Region became a basis and a source of this research.

## **3. THE MAIN TEXT**

### **3.1. The Tasks of Activity of Children's Game Libraries**

Children's game libraries had certain tasks of their activity, namely: extension of work on organization of children's cultural activities; increasing the ideological and political level of children's entertainments and games which were played at schools, summer camps and extracurricular educational establishments.

For implementation of their work CGL had methodic and consultative departments, experimental workshops, mobile methodic exhibitions of games for school-age children. As a rule, CGL had their branches in schools, orphanages etc. In summer CGL pedagogues went to parks, gardens, countryside children's camps and sanatoria. Sometimes CGL had special wheelbarrow using which CGL pedagogues could go from house to house and distribute the most popular games among children, organizing children's leisure time and attracting them to the work in CGL.

### 3.2. The Directions of Activity of Children's Game Libraries

Children's game libraries realized their activity in some directions, namely: organizational, methodic, educational, experimental, instructive and consultative directions.

*Organizational work* of CGL meant establishing branches of CGL and game rooms in all palaces and houses of pioneers, summer camps, schools, orphanages, children's sanatoria, parks, gardens and other places; organizing CGL cooperation with enterprises which produced children's games and toys; implementation of games and toys into work of children's sections at workers' clubs, cultural houses and rural clubs; providing CGL branches and exhibitions with materials; holding of educational meetings for CGL pedagogues; conducting work to improve political knowledge of CGL pedagogues etc.

*Methodic work* included development and publication of teaching materials on children's entertainment. CGL coordinated the activity of toy industry workers on the basis of recommended and useful games and toys, attracted new authors and artists to creating games and toys, writing books on organization of children's leisure time. CGL developed teaching materials on different forms of organization of children's games and entertainment. For instance, CGL developed a program of games and entertainment on holidays, mass school games-competitions to solve tasks and puzzles (CGL described the peculiarities of games and necessary equipment), handbooks for shows of interesting science (CGL provided educational establishments with descriptions and drawings), handbooks for conducting games and entertainment on Christmas, board games (for instance, "Answer Quickly", "The Cut Map", "Who will remain" etc.), active games, summer camp games. Moreover, CGL manufactured samples and templates of handmade Christmas decorations and masks and published a book "Handmade Games for School Game Library" [8, 9]. CGL also sent teaching materials to authorities and teacher training colleges.

What is more, CGL organized exhibitions of developed games and toys, which were very popular with children, the Republican contests for the best organization of CGL, the best program of work of children's groups (as a rule, such programs were dedicated to scientific entertainments and cognitive games).

*Instructive and consultative work* of CGL included providing assistant for children, children's educational establishments and teachers in organizing entertainments at home and at children's educational establishments. CGL pedagogues conducted interviews, visited educational institutions in different cities of the country in order to help and check the status of work in sphere of children's games and entertainments, organized seminars on different problems of children's games, toys and entertainments [10].

CGL pedagogues held consultations (face to face and by correspondence) for camp leaders and entertainers. Besides, CGL specialists were attached to their branches, play grounds, schools and extracurricular educational establishments to provide advice and to organize children's game activity.

*Mass educational work* meant, firstly, that CGL gave toys and games to children to play at home.

Secondly, CGL took part in organizing children's rest and entertainments on holidays. For this purpose, extra play grounds were established. For instance, in summer 1948 all staff of the Central Children's Game Library and its funds of games and amusements were mobilized to service children in Odesa. Different garden amusements and halls for games were established in three parks and gardens (Park of Culture and Recreation, the City Garden and the garden at the Palace of Pioneers). There were CGL branches in 43 summer camps, sanatoria and play grounds. Each branch had set of games. According to the report of CGL work in summer 1948 "...all CGL branches involved 30,000 children in their activity. About 95,000 children visited CGL branches in the parks and gardens in Odesa" [10].

Thirdly, CGL pedagogues conducted a lot of mass educational activities, namely [11]: competitions, quizzes and game tournaments, intellectual competitions (children showed their abilities, solved interesting tasks, puzzles, took part in games), shows of scientific entertainments,

excursions, interviews, talks on different problems of gaming, demonstration of interesting experiments, science fiction “traveling”, games (there were different kinds of games: cognitive (games-riddles, games with objects etc.), literary games (“Literary Snake”, “Proverbs and Sayings” etc.), creative games (“A Story according to a Picture”, “A Story of Many Authors”, “Synonyms”, “Antonyms”, “Winged Words”, “Where Does This Expression Come from” etc.), active games), exhibitions (they showed the achievements of toy industry), holidays of toys and games etc. These activities were carried out in nursery schools, summer camps, courtyards of houses etc.

These and other forms of organization of educational work were realized by children’s game libraries and became a basis for organizing interesting educational activities in different educational institutions of the country. For instance, using the materials of the Central Children’s Game Library, teachers of Bekhtery secondary school of Kherson Region conducted quizzes and shows of scientific entertainments. A head of pedagogical department in № 3 Dzerzhinsk orphanage of Dnipropetrovsk region conducted literary games with students of this orphanage. A head counselor in Lozovatka secondary school in Odesa region organized different games with students on holidays [9].

Some schools and orphanages created handmade board games for school clubs, playrooms and handbooks for games. For example, in № 8 Odesa orphanage children created handmade board games “Hockey”, “Table Football” etc. under the guidance of pedagogues and a head counselor. Students of Rososhanska secondary schools made illustrations, pictures and handbooks for shows of riddles and puzzles [9].

*Experimental work* was carried out in experimental workshops. Their pedagogues investigated children’s needs in games, developed and manufactured new games. Due to this work, a lot of games were created (for instance, “Cherries”, “Children in Exploration”, “Football Players”, “Young Tourists”, “Learn Foreign Languages” etc.) [9, 10]. After manufacturing of games CGL pedagogues performed approbation of new games, watching children’s reactions, activity and interest while playing. For example, in summer 1948 pedagogues of the Central Children’s Game Library conducted a test investigating children’s reaction to new types of motor board games with balls, skittles and tops, tactical and educational board games. About 11,000 children visited experimental halls of the Central Children’s Game Library in summer 1948 [10]. The best types of games were approved in the Ministry of Education and became a part of mass production.

Besides, experimental workshops repaired toys and game equipment which were given back from summer camps, playgrounds and children-individual subscribers. For instance, in summer 1948 the experimental workshop of the Central Children’s Game Library repaired and returned to service 270 children’s games and 18 amusements [10]. Children’s game libraries also underwent revision of board games in order to improve them, produced game equipment and took part in mass holidays decoration, seminars and courses for training entertainers.

So, CGL provided different children’s educational establishments with games, having attracted a lot of children [9, 12]. It should be noted that CGL were very popular with children and adults (as reports of the Central Children’s Game showed, some parents were so much interested in work of children’s game libraries that they came there with their sons or daughters almost every day in order to change games) [4].

### **3.3. The Results of Activity of Children’s Game Libraries**

According to the archive data [10], CGL materials contributed to the improvement of work of children’s educational establishments in organizing children’s games and entertainments. CGL did not only give games to children, but carried out a variety of work and used different forms and methods of educational activity. For instance, in CGL at Vinnitsa Palace of Pioneers there was created a group of active children who helped pedagogues to conduct mass shows and competitions. During the summer, with the help of active children, Vinnitsa CGL conducted 6 mass quizzes and shows of riddles, 7 puzzle contests, chess tournament, 6 interschool tournaments in Vinnitsa region.

Besides, Vinnitsa CGI mobilized a lot of children for taking part in socially useful work for production of games, and as a result, CGL extended its game fund [10].

Many children's game libraries in the USSR did not only use games, but they also organized instructive talks about the rules of using the games, technology of manufacturing handmade games and conducted contests and tournaments.

According to the report of CGL work in 1948, "Kherson children's game library carried out a great work on extending its fund at the expense of purchased and mainly handmade games. The quantity and variety of games has increased, and it enabled Kherson CGL to be the first to give games home or to children's educational establishments" [10].

### 3.3. The Difficulties in Activity of Children's Game Libraries

At the same time, there were certain difficulties in organizing the work of CGL.

Firstly, not all educational establishments and pedagogical collectives supported the activity of CGL and implemented their experience. It was caused by pedagogues' insufficient understanding of possibilities of using CGL experience; poor organization of educational process at some children's educational institutions; lack of the required amount of games and toys available for sale; insufficient instructive work that was carried out by CGL; insufficient publishing activity of CGL as game libraries often did not have special methodic department [9]. The data of archive materials prove it: "...Houses of Culture and trade union clubs carried out their work on organizing children's leisure time separately. Children's sectors of these cultural-educational establishments conducted mainly mass shows and group work with children. Active games and games which did not need any equipment were the most popular. At the same time, there was poor distribution of board games and games with equipment; it was caused primarily by absence of these games for sale. Industry was focused on production of toys for pre-school children, but there were not enough games for school-age children" [12]; "... The main disadvantage of CGL was poor distribution of interesting long experience on organizing children's games and entertainments... CGL should have a network (play rooms or small children's game libraries) at extracurricular educational establishments and schools" [9].

Secondly, some CGL did not have own premises, which hindered the work: "Lack of own convenient premises hinders the successful holding of work in winter. No planned measures to solve the problem with providing premises to the Central Children's Game Library has been realized yet" [10].

At the same time, it should be noted that since the middle of the 1950<sup>th</sup> the Central Children's Game Library, which existed in Odesa, gradually began to lose its popularity because of the government decision to move the Central Children's Game Library to another city (Kyiv or Kharkiv) and leaving its founder and head Ye. Minskin for Moscow in order to manage Moscow Children's Game Library. It weakened and slowed down the activity of the Central Children's Game Library. But despite this, CGL continued existence in many cities and became unique educational establishments which involved a lot of children in their activity. The work experience of CGL was appreciated and used all over the country.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

So, during the period investigated there were a lot of achievements in development of extracurricular education: there was created a system of children's extracurricular education, and this system solved the task of personal development, young generation's preparation for life and work in society; a network of extracurricular educational institutions was established. The development of children's movement and enhancing the role of social organizations in children's education facilitated the formation of the system of extracurricular education and attracted a lot of children to it. This system of children's extracurricular education realized its activity through complex and specialized children's educational institutions.

Children's game library became a unique educational institution which was not anywhere else in the world. It was aimed at extending the work on organizing children's cultural leisure time, increasing the educational and political levels of children's games and entertainments which were conducted in schools, summer camps and extracurricular educational establishments. There were different directions of work of children's game libraries, namely: organizational, methodic, educational, experimental, instructive and consultative directions. Children's game libraries had consultative and methodic departments, rental game fund, experimental workshops and mobile methodic exhibitions of games for school-age children. The archive materials [8, 9, 10, 11, 12] have proved that children's game libraries were popular with children, and the experience of their work was effectively used in different cities of the country: the branches of children's game libraries were established in all regions. The results of work of children's game libraries have confirmed high effectiveness of their work on organizing children's leisure time. Unfortunately, this experience has not been widely used because of financial and organizational difficulties.

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