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## Nostalgic Street Games and Toy Construction

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# Nostalgic Street Games and Toy Construction

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*Abstract: Street games are games that children play in the gardens and on the streets; in short, outdoors. These street games are group games played with at least two people. Some of them have universal characters. Many of these games come from centuries ago. Some of them were transformed based on the conditions of the present century and these games are played with new rules as a result. "Street games festival" is an application and research project, which is prepared to bring back the memories of the street games that stood in place of today's computer games. This project aims to search forgotten old street games which changed with rapidly evolving technology and to ensure the maintenance of these games after bringing them back to the agenda. Thus, the social interactions between the children will be improved. In the process of facilitating voluntary art education in the Bursa Metropolitan municipality, the idea of the "Street games festival" project was emerged. It was decided to prepare the first stand about toy construction in the 7th street games festival. The "toy construction stand" was added to the project which took place on June 3, 2013. In this stand, children designed and created their own toys. The materials which these children used while creating their toys were supported by the project management committee. Children took away their creations if they wished to. In this study, both "Street games festival" project's presentation and especially, the children which came to toy construction stand were observed. The interviews with these children were also evaluated.*

*Keywords: Street Games, Toy Construction, Art Education*

## Introduction

Games help children develop cognitive, sensory, and psychomotor skills. They prepare children for adulthood while also equipping them with social and cultural values. Games take place in diverse environments, including at home, in front of the computer, in the garden, and sometimes on the streets. "Street games" are those that children play in the garden and on the streets, or simply outdoors. These games, which are played by at least two children, sometimes have universal characteristics. Most of them have been invented centuries ago and reached us through changes made in response to the circumstances of the day. Most of the games also make use of toys.

Street Games Festival is a research and development project aimed at reviving street games that are currently being replaced by computer games. Street Games Festival is one of the projects held by the Municipality of Bursa with the aim of preserving intangible cultural heritage as suggested by UNESCO. Two books have been published so far in the context of this project, one, titled "Street Games" in 2008, and the other, titled "Will You Play with Me?," in 2011. The first book includes descriptions and interviews explaining the games played in and around Bursa. The second book consists of three chapters with the titles "History of Oral Games," "Games through the Eyes of Children," and "They were Children too." These chapters have been supplemented with pictures and essays provided by elementary schools. These two books aim to preserve the street games which are an important part of our cultural heritage.

A new toy-making stand that encouraged children construct toys from waste products was added to the scope of the project in 2013. This study includes a presentation of the "Street Games Festival," which was held on June 3rd, 2013 for the seventh time, as well as the observations and comments of children who attended the toy-making stand. This study was conducted especially to understand and compare the knowledge and experience of children before and after attending the stand. Children have therefore been photographed during work and interviewed after completing their toys.

*Children and Games*

By definition, childhood is the period between infancy and adolescence. During this period, children complete their physical development while interacting with their physical and social environments. The physical environment of children include natural and artificial objects like plants, animals, home, street, vehicles, books, computer, TV, various tools and toys. The social environment, on the other hand, includes family, friends and teachers.

Theorists from various disciplines define “game” in different ways. For example, Huizinga argues (1950) that games are present at every point of the cultural life. He defines games as activities that are fictitious, take any form, and remain outside the normal course of life, but also as activities that have the power to assimilate players and are devoid of material profits and benefits. Another theorist Suits (1978) argues that playing games is a voluntary enterprise. Games are activities in which rules and methods are set so as to achieve a certain goal, in which less effective rules and methods are preferred at the expense of more effective ones, and where rules and methods are accepted only as the means to conduct that activity. Social theorists Avedon and Sutton-Smith (1981) define games as a voluntary activity in which players take action against rules and methods in order to create an unequal outcome. Finally, Salen and Zimmerman argue that games are a system in which players strive to arrive at numerical outcomes in the context of a rule-based artificial challenge (as cited in Juul 2003, 2).

As seen from the definitions, games, which are played for fun and learned while playing, are a very important activity for children. Games have therefore been understood and interpreted in different ways by various disciplines.

The famous 19th century philosopher of education Carlotta Lombroso (1896) makes the following comment about the concept of education: “Games are work for a child. Just as work is a serious and important matter for adults, games are serious and important for children. Games are a developmental tool for children. Just like a silkworm that needs to eat leaves, children need to play games” (as cited in Elkind 1999, 90).

Groos (1901) argues that games are a natural and basic activity that helps children prepare for adulthood. On the other hand, Montessori (1965) combines games with a concept of education that he defines as social harmony, and comments that games are like work to children. Freud (1938) diverges from Montessori in two fundamental ways: Children act not only on the principle of realism but also on the principle of pleasure. Secondly, games require energy, and the harmony they require is not a social, or at least directly social, harmony. According to the psychodynamic perspective, games help children learn more about themselves than about others. Games provide the tools to control the inner self that can threaten the social order. Accordingly, Montessori argues that children’s games are secondary to work, while Freud argues that children are secondary to games (Elkind 1999, 95).

Piaget (1963) views games from a developmental perspective and believes that games take different forms in different ages. During infancy, it is possible to observe games in which movements are repeated for pleasure and where harmony remains secondary to internalization. Pre-school ages are those in which children start constructing personal symbols and internalization becomes separated from activities of harmony. During this period, symbolic games become tools whereby children reflect their socialized wishes and impulses. In childhood, internalization and harmony are combined in work-rule-based games. Such games are social as they include mutual obligations but also personal as they involve individual competition. In addition, games include collective symbols or distorted designs of the world. For example, in the game of marbles, marbles can represent different things for different children. These marbles are collective, as they are shared and personal at the same time, and marbles do not have a shared meaning except for the roles they play in the game (Elkind 1999, 110-111).

Many theories have been constructed to define “game” and explain its importance for human beings. Among the few that have been included above, it is possible to observe that games are

considered very important for children's physical, personal, linguistic, skills and thought, social and cultural development.

### *Children and Toys*

Games not only provide a source for social harmony but also allow children to define and develop their skills for self-expression. Games allow children to do research and explore, as well as making connections between people and objects. These objects can be classically defined toys as well as other objects that children construct and use during the game. According to Onur (2005), objects used in games grouped according to the core activity can also be classified as toys. These objects include wooden pieces, stones, cubes and dice. Toys receive a meaning and can be called toy only when they are played with.

According to Egemen et al. (2004, 39), games and their medium toys represent an important part of children's lives and prepare them for adulthood by creating the opportunity for personal and skills development.

Toys that change according to age groups can be considered good depending on children's needs. The definition of "good" in the context of toys therefore depends on the environment and needs. While there are various types of toys in today's world, there are also many types of computer games, some of which are likely to improve children's experience and creativity. However, most of the computer games lack the sense of touch and personal communication, which creates a reason to consider them as a negative activity in the context of social and personal development. Simple and fun games therefore are able to constitute a more active and creative activity. Playing with objects like bowls, dough, paper, paint, rope, wire and empty boxes found at home, and stone, soil, sand, mud found outside is likely to develop children's knowledge, skills, imagination and creativity.

Newson et al. (1979, 12) make the following comment with regard to the relationship between games and toys:

We do not play games because toys exist. Games already exist and toys follow them. Toys cannot be more than hooks that we hang games on. Toys are not needed; they are simply points of reference for people to express their wild and complex imagination. Just as language serves to simplify complex thoughts, toys serve to simplify complex games.

### *Street Games*

Street games are group games that children play in gardens, playgrounds, underused streets, or simply outdoors, with two or more children. While some games include cultural characteristics, some of them are universal and played almost anywhere with similar rules. Most games have reached us from centuries before. It is known that games like hopscotch, blind man's buff, and rope tagging were played by children in Ancient Rome. While some of these games have stayed the same for centuries, some of them have evolved and gained new rules along the way.

The first study conducted by Çok et al. (1997) on games, titled "Children's Games in Open Spaces in Cities: The Example of Ankara" provides an important truth for the game culture: "Games are being played less and less outside in Turkey nowadays. In other words, just as in developed countries, games are being shut indoors, being institutionalized and getting under the influence of mass media. Non-traditional elements in games are increasing" (as cited in Bekir 2004, 13).

Most studies of street games in Turkey deal with rural areas. While same games are still played in urban areas, especially in school yards and playgrounds, some of them are being forgotten. Various studies have been conducted and books have been written with the aim of reminding children of these street games. The Center for Children's Culture Research and

Practice, known by its Turkish acronym COKAUM, is an important institution that supports such studies. COKAUM, founded by Prof. Bekir Coskun in 1994, is an interdisciplinary institution made up of members selected from 12 departments in 5 colleges of University of Ankara.

While games cited in these sources have common characteristics, some of them differ by region. For example, games like hide-and-seek, dodgeball, stopping, hopscotch, rope skipping, blind man's buff, tag, jumping rope are played everywhere in Turkey and almost everywhere in the world. On the other hand, games like samidik, bestas, asik differ by region and country.

While these games differ in their names and objects used, they are still similar in that they are played by two or more children, necessitate personal interaction and physical power, and are sometimes accompanied by songs or nursery rhymes.

## Description of the Study

Street Games Festival is an activity organized by the Municipality of Bursa, Bureau of Museums, City Museum of Bursa. The first of this festival was held in April 22nd, 2007 in the amphitheater of City Museum of Bursa while the seventh was held in June 3rd, 2013 in Pinarbasi Park. This was the first year in which Pinarbasi Park was chosen as the site of the festival. This decision had a nostalgic element to it as Pinarbasi Park used to be an open-air site where religious and civil holidays were celebrated.

Activities in the festival are directed at elementary school students. In 2007, 5 elementary schools were invited to the festival, while the number rose to 6 in 2008-10, to 10 in 2011-12 and to 11 in 2013. These schools are all located in the city and provinces of Bursa.

The project aims to revive street games that are being replaced by the products of rapidly changing technology and thereby contribute to the social communication among children.

The project involves two types of activities: competitions with a prize and teaching and playing of games that are almost forgotten. The Street Games Festival of 2013 included the following competitive games: samidik, bestas, sack race, dodgeball and blind man's buff. In Samidik and Bestas one child, in other games two children were given prizes at the end. The games that did not include a prize were: hopscotch, asik, stopping (istop), tissue pass (mendil kapmaca, leapfrog (birdir bir), cockfight (horoz dovusu), tag (ayak ipi), gama ball and the newly added toy-making stand. Each game was planned to be played in different areas of Pinarbasi Park and signs that indicated each were placed in the respective areas. Each game area was attended by employees of the City Museum of Bursa as well as third-year Visual Arts students (teacher candidates) from Uludag University. These students voluntarily joined the project and assisted elementary school students in playing games and constructing toys.

The toy-making stand, titled "Wish Tree Station," was situated in the open-air teashop of the park and next to the miniature pool. The "Wish Tree" was constructed from wire and assembled by volunteering third-year students. The City Museum of Bursa supplied paints and waste products that were subsequently used by children to design their own toys, which were later displayed on the "Wish Tree".

The main aim of the project is to observe, understand and interpret the toys of children living in cities, toys inherited from previous generations, the knowledge and experience of children in toy-making, and the knowledge and experience achieved at the stand. In this context, children have been observed and photographed during toy-making and interviewed at the completion of their work.

The interview form consisted of four parts: the first aimed at gathering personal information, the second at general knowledge pertaining to toys, the third at toy-making and the "Wish Tree Station" and the fourth self-evaluation questions aimed at the activity. The interview form also includes open-ended questions. Student Semra Oran contributed to the photographs for the study.

## Discussion

45 students attended the toy-making session and the interview. In the first part, some of the personal questions and questions pertaining to games and toys are open-ended.

Table 1.1: School Attendance and Student Gender Distribution

| <i>Schools</i>                     | <i>Female</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Total</i> |          |
|------------------------------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|----------|
|                                    |               |             | <i>n</i>     | <i>%</i> |
| <i>Ali Durmaz E. S.</i>            | 2             | 3           | 5            | 11       |
| <i>Osmangazi E. S. S.</i>          | 8             | 3           | 11           | 25       |
| <i>Sönmez E. S. S.</i>             | 7             | 2           | 9            | 20       |
| <i>Ş. K. P. Y. Hakan Tan E. S.</i> | -             | 1           | 1            | 2        |
| <i>Zafer E. S. S.</i>              | 15            | 4           | 19           | 42       |
| <i>Total</i>                       | 32            | 13          | 45           | 100      |

*The study group consisted of 13 male students and 32 female students.*

Table 1.2: Distribution of Students by School and Age Group

| <i>Schools</i>                     |          | <i>Age 10</i> | <i>Age 11</i> | <i>Age 12</i> | <i>Age 13</i> | <i>Age 14</i> |
|------------------------------------|----------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| <i>Ali Durmaz E. S.</i>            |          | 4             | 1             | -             | -             | -             |
| <i>Osmangazi E. S. S.</i>          |          | 3             | -             | 3             | 4             | 1             |
| <i>Sönmez E. S. S.</i>             |          | 6             | 2             | 1             | -             | -             |
| <i>Ş. K. P. Y. Hakan Tan E. S.</i> |          | 1             | -             | -             | -             | -             |
| <i>Zafer E. S. S.</i>              |          | 13            | 6             | -             | -             | -             |
| <i>Total</i>                       | <i>n</i> | 27            | 9             | 4             | 4             | 1             |
|                                    | <i>%</i> | 60            | 20            | 9             | 9             | 2             |

*60% of 45 students are aged 10 and consist of the majority.*

Table 1.3: Thoughts on Toys and Number With Inherited and Not Inherited Toys from Parents

| <i>Questions</i>                                     | <i>Yes</i> |          | <i>No</i> |          |
|--|------------|----------|-----------|----------|
|  | <i>N</i>   | <i>%</i> | <i>N</i>  | <i>%</i> |
| <i>Do you like to play with toys?</i>                | 40         | 89       | 5         | 11       |
| <i>Do you have toys inherited from your parents?</i> | 27         | 60       | 18        | 40       |

89% of students, the majority of which are 10 years old, commented that they like to play with toys. This can be considered normal given the age of the students. The 11% of negative

answers can be attributed to those students who are in the pre-adolescence period or who may feel reluctant to admit that they like toys given their stage of growth.

On the other hand, only 60% of the students affirmed that they received or inherited toys from their parents or elders in the family. Many students could not initially remember the toys inherited from their parents but provided details of the toys once prompted with questions like “Do you remember your parents or elders telling you about toys that they themselves constructed? What kind of toys did they use to make?” Among the toys that the students received in this fashion are dolls, dolls made from fabric, tree branches or glass, cars, wooden or wire cars, spintops, cradles, puppets, marbles, teddy bears, hula hoops, and, interestingly, dinosaur toys. Students mentioned that among these toys, dolls made from fabric, and wooden and wire cars were made by their parents, who used to play 3-stone game, and rollerskating with wheels.

The open-ended question in this part required students to write down three of their favorite toys, while most of the students mentioned only one or two toys. 21 different toys were mentioned in total. Nostalgic toys are among the answers. The most frequent answers are dolls, balls, cars, rope, spintop, teddy bears, and hula hoops. Less frequent ones are kites, marbles, roller skates, puppets, toy helicopter, toy man, toy pistol, balloons, bikes, fish in bowls, make-up set, toy TV and puzzle.

The second part of the interview form included general knowledge questions on toys. In this part, questions have been asked with regard to toys that students have heard of or previously or currently owned. Questions have been asked about spintops, puppets, marbles, kites, dolls made from fabric, hula hoops, cars made of balls, and fireworks crackers. Some of these toys exist while others can be considered nostalgic.

Table 1.4: Values Related to Toys Known or Owned by Students

| <i>Toys</i>                      | <i>Have heard of</i> |          | <i>Own</i> |          |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|----------|------------|----------|
|                                  | <i>N</i>             | <i>%</i> | <i>n</i>   | <i>%</i> |
| <i>Spintop</i>                   | 41                   | 91       | 29         | 64       |
| <i>Cloth doll</i>                | 39                   | 87       | 31         | 69       |
| <i>Puppet</i>                    | 44                   | 98       | 25         | 56       |
| <i>Marbles</i>                   | 42                   | 93       | 34         | 76       |
| <i>Kite</i>                      | 43                   | 96       | 30         | 67       |
| <i>Hula Hoop</i>                 | 16                   | 36       | 11         | 24       |
| <i>Cars (with steel marbles)</i> | 5                    | 11       | 1          | 2        |
| <i>Crackers</i>                  | 24                   | 53       | 13         | 29       |

As seen from Table 1.4, the most commonly owned toys are marbles, dolls, kites and spintops. It is contradictory that while 36% know of hula hoops and 24% own them, only 5 have mentioned it as a favorite toy. This might be because most students recognize hula hoops by another Turkish name that can be translated directly as “circle”.

When percentages are compared, it is expected that students recognize the toys that they own. The fact that some toys are not recognized or owned, can be interpreted as these toys are being produced much less, or these toys are not as fashionable given the development of technology and emergence of computer games.

The third part of the interview form consisted of three questions related to the toy-making session. The first question in this part aimed to establish the type of toys that were made by students at the stand. The most common type of toy that was made by students was dolls, either



as simple doll, doll made from paper, or doll made from fabric. Students have subsequently placed all the toys and products they have made, on the “Wish Tree”. Here, some of the toys are better called “products” as they are more ornamental than functional. Some of the students have inscribed their toys and products with their names or the name of their favorite soccer teams in order to show the creator of the toy.

Table 1.5: Values Related to a Toy-making Session

| <i>Questions</i>                                | <i>Yes</i> |          | <i>No</i> |          | <i>Don't Know</i> |          |
|---|------------|----------|-----------|----------|-------------------|----------|
|   | <i>n</i>   | <i>%</i> | <i>n</i>  | <i>%</i> | <i>n</i>          | <i>%</i> |
| <i>Do you like making toys?</i>                 | 44         | 98       | -         | -        | 1                 | 2        |
| <i>Do you have difficulties in making toys?</i> | 4          | 9        | 40        | 89       | 1                 | 2        |

In the second question of this part, students were asked whether they enjoyed making toys and why. Except for one student who replied by Don't Know, all the remaining students answered that they enjoyed making toys. Below are some of the reasons stated for enjoying toy-making:

- “It was nice to paint, draw, cut.”
- “Making use of waste products”
- “It was nice to create something new.”
- “I liked to produce something.”
- “I was happy to be able to create something.”
- “It improves imagination.”
- “Everybody gets to see what I create.”

In addition, one student mentioned that he was happy that everyone got to see the name of his favorite soccer team.

In the third part of the interview form, students were asked whether they had difficulties in making toys. Those students who answered in the affirmative were in turn asked about the stage(s) in which they had the most difficulty.

A great majority of students mentioned that they did not have any difficulty in making toys. At the construction stage, the City Museum of Bursa provided students with paper roll, net, adhesives, scissors, paints and pieces of cloth. First two and later four third-year students, who are teacher candidates, helped children with creating and producing their toys. Even though it was thought that there were not enough supplies, volunteer students did their best in assisting children and helping them create simple designs in a fun and creative way. It is therefore understandable that most of the students did not have any difficulty in making their toys. Those that mentioned having difficulties stated the following as reasons for hardship:

- “I could not tie the doll's hair.”
- “I had difficulty placing the wire around the bride and putting its hair together.”
- “Painting”
- “Placing the cloth”
- “It was difficult to hang my toy on the tree.”

The final part consists of 4 self-evaluation questions.

Table 1.6: Values Related to Self-evaluation Questions

| <i>Questions</i>                                     | <i>Yes</i> |          | <i>No</i> |          | <i>Don't Know</i> |          |
|--|------------|----------|-----------|----------|-------------------|----------|
|  | <i>n</i>   | <i>%</i> | <i>n</i>  | <i>%</i> | <i>n</i>          | <i>%</i> |
| <i>Do you like the toys you made at the stand?</i>   | 44         | 98       | -         | -        | 1                 | 2        |
| <i>Did your friends like your toys?</i>              | 34         | 76       | -         | -        | 11                | 24       |
| <i>Would you like to keep your toys?</i>             | 34         | 76       | 10        | 22       | 1                 | 2        |
| <i>Would you like to attend this activity again?</i> | 44         | 98       | -         | -        | 1                 | 2        |

The first question of this part aims to understand whether students liked the toys they created. Table 1.6 suggests that a great majority of students liked their toys, also mentioned that their friends liked the toys they created. Similarly, majority of the students mentioned that they would like to keep their toys, and finally mentioned that they would like to attend the activity again.

From the data included above, it can be inferred that students enjoyed making new products and toys and would like to attend such activities in the future.

## Conclusion

This study was conducted with the aim of understanding the knowledge and experience of urban children with regard to toy construction before and after attending the stand. In this context, interviews have been conducted with children. The interviews did not question the aesthetic sensitivity or creativity of the children but still documented and tried to interpret the toy-making session and the end products through photographs and videos.

“Street Games Festival,” which has been organized by the City Museum of Bursa since 2007, tries to explore and revive nearly-forgotten street games. By inviting different schools from the city and provinces of Bursa each year, communication of students from different socio-economic background is also achieved.

The 45 students who attended this study constructed at least 1 and at most 4 toys each, which included both 2D and 3D designs. The session started with difficulty because of the shortage of supplies. The supplies that reached the stand within an hour of the opening consisted of paper, paint, fabric, scissors, waste paper rolls, nets, wires and plastic water bottles. While the supplies seemed inadequate at the beginning, they proved to be adequate at the end. It is believed that the supplies could be enriched with the addition of tree pieces, soda covers, colored paper, buttons, etc.

The “Wish Tree Station” has been a new addition to the Festival in 2013 and proved to be an activity that pleased children who may not have engaged in a similar activity since pre-school ages. In this age of consumerism, it was also important to show to children that they can construct toys from simple materials just as previous generations used to construct wire cars, boxes, houses and cloth dolls. As construction proved to be a fun and creative activity, it was also confirmed that learning can be a fun activity.

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