

RURAL OLYMPIADS AS PROMOTERS OF OLD FOLK SPORTS AND GAMES

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Abstract Traditional sports and games represent the folk tradition and culture of certain regions, part of the people's intangible cultural heritage. Numerous traditional sports and games have been preserved in ex-Yugoslav republics, which are most often affirmed through village Olympiads and competitions in order to keep them from being forgotten. The aim of the study is to determine the content and program of rural Olympiads in ex-Yugoslav republics, the extent to which traditional sports and games are present, and the extent to which some modern sports are included. Also, the study focused on the impact of rural Olympiads on local communities and on the interaction between hosts and guests. The methodology used in the paper refers to field research (interview, observation), and document analysis, as well as the use of different data sources to validate and crosscheck findings. The results of the research indicate the presence of a large number of games of different character in the countries formed in Yugoslavia, as well as a large number of the same or similar games that arose more as a result of certain geographical and social conditions, and less as a feature of individual peoples.

Keywords:

rural Olympiads, traditional sports and games, preservation of tradition, intangible cultural heritage, ex-Yugoslav republics

1 Introduction

Traditional sports and games (TSG) are part of the folk tradition and culture, part of the cultural identity of the people in which they originated. Some traditional sports originated thousands of years ago and are the backbone of various social communities. They are an expression of creativity for the inhabitants of various regions (countries). Traditional sports and games served as forms of recreation, but also entertainment in which all residents of the local community could get involved without special physical preparation and training (children and adults, men and women). Also, some traditional sports and games, due to their complexity, often served as a demonstration of physical ability, strength and maturity. Competitors demonstrated their willingness to take a higher hierarchical position in their community (e.g. young men were old enough to marry) (Bjeljac et al., 2019). Through people's competitions, people “test who is stronger and more capable of life”. When perceiving “who will do better, more, faster or further”, in a way, they naturally determine who is more physically worthwhile (Živanović, 1970, 12), which was especially important for people in the countryside.

The specifics of folk competition are best reflected in the statement: “Unlike the general concept of sport, “folk” sports can be called all those sports activities that are nurtured and carried out in the people without written rules and without competent organizations in the modern sense of the word” (Kurelić, 1953, 1; Živanović, 1970)¹. Traditional sports are “all sports and games that are not regulated by international rules” (Cvetković, 1982, 15). Old folk sports include physical activities that can be competitive or entertaining, and that arose spontaneously through play and work, mostly by the rural population. “They were also simple to play as they were based on social manners and general customs. Some games were supplemented by dance and songs to energize the players” (Zeb Khan et al., 2018, 132).

For a long time, no importance was attached to old folk sports as the content of sports recreation. Also, no importance was attached to old folk sports in preserving the ethnographic characteristics of certain national communities. Old folk sports were replaced by modern sports, i.e. media popularization of sports with global

¹ “In black Africa Wrestling’s forms and functions varied from tribe to tribe... Among the various peoples of sub-Saharan Africa, wrestling matches were a way to celebrate or symbolically encourage human fertility and the earth’s fecundity” (Guttman et al., 2021).

influence and competitions that accompanied them. With the spread of the influence of the mass media in information (newspapers, radio, television) and the change of the image of sports, new patterns of monitoring and evaluation of sports have been imposed.

In the last 30 years or so, there has been a positive change in modern society's attitude towards traditional sports. The re-inclusion of TSG in the sports recreation of children and young people can contribute to strengthening their connection to the community, better mutual interaction and communication, physical dexterity and motor development. Likewise, the effect of play and entertainment in traditional sports can stimulate less physically agile actors to engage unhindered and to enjoy physical activity itself unencumbered by the result. Establishing or relaunching rural Olympic Games, sports meeting, and TSG-based competitions can affect the preservation of these sports from oblivion, as well as the development of a certain identity of the place or local community where the Olympic Games and competitions are organized.

The aim of this paper is to determine the content and program of rural Olympiads in ex-Yugoslav Republics, the extent to which TSGs are present, and the extent to which some modern sports are involved. The research was conducted on selected examples of rural Olympiads and competitions, which the authors assessed as significant in this domain in terms of the tradition of holding, programs (basic and accompanying) and the number of participants. Also, the researchers focused on the impact of rural Olympiads on local communities and on the interaction between hosts and guests.

2 Caring for traditional sports and games in an international framework

Many TSG are either moribund or have already disappeared from the cultural tradition, which irretrievably loses part of its intangible cultural heritage. Traditional games have largely been forgotten and many young people do not know anything about them (Andersen, 2009). The role and importance of TSG have been especially emphasized in the last 30 years through various announcements, declarations, executive plans adopted by experts on sports, education, and cultural heritage at high-level conferences. There is a need to preserve TSG in the growing world globalization and general commercialization of modern sports. For this reason, TSG have come into the focus of interest of UNESCO (United Nation Educational,

Scientific and Cultural Organization), which works to preserve, promote and revive these sports and games. The aim of UNESCO's activities is to ensure that TSG become part of national and international cultural strategies, thus working towards the preservation of an important part of the intangible cultural heritage. In 2003, UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (ICH) and thus created a key instrument for action to identify, list and evaluate certain elements of culture as representative or endangered intangible cultural heritage. UNESCO then wrote that “traditional sports and games are part of our intangible heritage and a symbol of the cultural diversity of our societies” (Jaouen, Petrov, 2018). The inclusion of TSG on the UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity began in 2010. So far, 29 traditional sports and games have been registered (UNESCO, n.d.).

In addition to UNESCO, there are other associations that recognize the importance of old folk sports and games for recreation and culture and deal with their preservation and promotion at various levels. The following associations are especially important:

1. *The Association For International Sports for All (TAFISA)* is a world association that promotes primarily recreational, mass sports;
2. *The International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA)* is a global platform open to organisations working in sports for all, recreational sports and physical activity (ISCA, n.d.);
3. *The European Traditional Sports and Games Association (ETSGA)* brings together sports or cultural federations, associations, educational institutions or companies whose goal is to manage, promote and preserve traditional sports and games (ETSGA, n.d.);
4. *The International Traditional Sports and Games Association (ITSGA)* represent the global network of traditional sports and games in order to preserve, study, share, promote and develop their practice for greater intercultural dialogue, better health and better social coexistence of mankind in the world (ITSGA, n.d.);
5. *The World Ethnosport Confederation (WEC)* is an international institute that organizes activities and events aimed at increasing the awareness of traditional sports and games and popularizing them (WEC, n.d.);

6. *The World Ethnosport Society* unites scientists, organizers of traditional games and ethnosport events from 48 countries on all continents (World Ethnosport, n.d.).

Traditional sports and games are found all over the world, although in the professional literature, those that originated from Europe and Asia were mostly treated. This has been contributed by many national or regional organizations dedicated to the protection and preservation of certain traditional sports (Scottish Highland Games Association, Romanian Oina Federation, Iran's Federation for Local Games and Rural Sports, Pakistan Traditional Sports and Games Association, Bhutan Indigenous Games and Sports Association, the Korea Taekwondo Association, and others). Similar organizations have been established on other continents to preserve ancient folk sports and local sports cultures (African Traditional Sports and Games Confederation (ATSGC), African Association of Games and Traditional Sports (AAJST), Pan American Traditional Sports and Games Association (PATSGA), Mexican Traditional and Autochthonous Games and Sports Federation (FMJDAT/Mexico), Australian Sports Commission, and others).

Many events dedicated to TSG have strong potential to attract tourists and affirm lesser-known tourist destinations in the context of event, rural, cultural, excursion, or sports tourism. Manifestations are most often in the form of competitions and promotions of TSG, and can be supplemented with accompanying programs. Some events have become famous outside national frameworks such as: Gaelic games (Hurling, Gaelic Football, Rounders and Handball) (Ireland), Highland games (Scotland), Pelota (Basque Country, Spain), Gures (Turkey), Oil wrestling (North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, Kosovo and Metohija), Gatika (India), Japanese archery yabusame (Japan), Qatari falconry competitions (Qatar), Indian sports games in North and South America, Aboriginal people in Australia, national minorities in China, Russia and others. In this way, the manifestations contribute to the preservation of the cultural diversity and cultural identity of local communities or peoples.

3 Traditional sports and games in ex-Yugoslav republics

In the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia², folk sports and games were an important segment of rural life where they served as entertainment and recreation. It is common for traditional sports and games to deal most often with competitions and sports skills in rural areas, which can be passed down from generation to generation, with ritualistic character, and which can still be registered today (Marjanović, 2005; Bjeljac et al., 2020). These games were mostly preserved in rural areas because they remained compact for longer in cultural terms (Bjeljac, Ćurčić, 2017; Ćurčić et al., 2021).

The old sports that originated in the countryside are similar or largely the same, regardless of the fact that they were developed by different peoples (Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Bosniaks) and were thus tied to their cultural tradition. In most settlements, the population was multinational, which influenced the acceptance and practice of sports and games throughout the local community, as well as the exchange of cultural traditions and intercultural learning. Today, there are attempts to revive those old sports and games in order to keep them from being forgotten and to make them familiar to the young people who need to accept them. Village Olympiads are held for this very purpose (or village games, all-around), as they contribute to strengthening the collective spirit and to connecting people within the community. The initiators of the games are citizens' or youth associations (non-governmental organizations), local self-governments, or sports associations. Rural Olympiads, in addition to bringing together participants and audiences at the local level, often outgrow their local frameworks and become regionally, nationally or internationally significant (competitors usually come from neighbouring countries).

Over 50 different Yugoslavian TSGs can be singled out, which are organized within 70 different events. Of these, 39 manifestations of this type are held in Serbia.³ Some events are completely dedicated to old sports, and some have included modern sports to increase the number of participants and spectators. Sports content is

² The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is a state that emerged at the end of the Second World War on the foundations of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and began to disintegrate in 1991, when civil war began in Slovenia (1991), Croatia (1991-1995), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995). The result of the war, as well as the later peaceful disintegration of Macedonia and Montenegro, led to the emergence of new states within the spatial framework of the Yugoslav Republics (6): Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia.

³ The exact number of manifestations is difficult to determine, there is no precise record of them. The collected data were created by processing various electronic or written sources.

usually supplemented by a cultural program of ethnographic content (music program, art program, dance program, recitation program, culinary program), which makes the event more attractive and strengthens cultural creativity in the local community (Bjeljac et al., 2017). In this way, sport becomes a link that connects local cultural creativity in a complex way and influences a greater homogenization of relations in the local community.

4 Methodology

The paper monitors and analyses individual rural Olympiads (traditional sports) in former Yugoslavia in order to determine the place and time of organization, the organizers, the represented sports and games, the character of the games, modifications that are present and that occur due to adaptation to modern expectations of participants and audience, and accompanying cultural and entertainment content, etc. The methodology used in the paper refers to field research (interview, observation), and document analysis, as well as the use of different data sources to validate and crosscheck findings.

The development of the research problem started from the authors' previous knowledge about the importance of traditional sports and games for the culture and identity of the local community, as well as the need to preserve traditional sports from oblivion. The sports, cultural and tourist framework for the study was provided by the village Olympiads and games where competitions in old sports predominantly take place. Competitions in old sports have two basic tasks: 1) building the identity of the local community (or destination), 2) strengthening cohesion among competitors (Figure 1). The following hypotheses arose from these tasks:

- H1 Old sports are a reflection of the local population's tradition.
- H2 Old sports contribute to the location's tourist image.
- H3 Competitions in old sports bring participants closer.
- H4 Competitions in old sports enable intercultural learning.

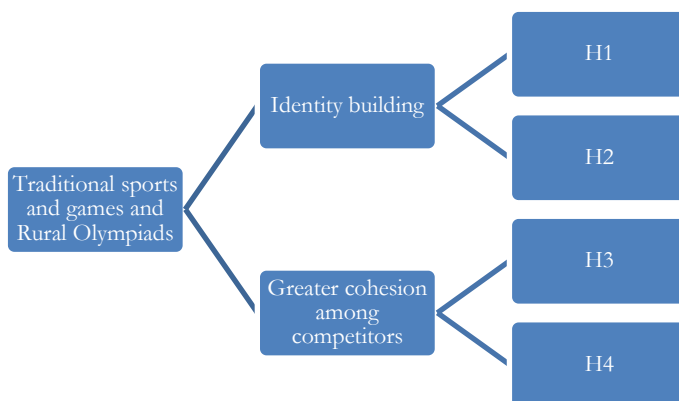


Figure 1: Conceptual model of study.

Source: own.

5 Research results

For the needs of the research, rural Olympiads and competitions were selected that have a long tradition of holding, appropriate programs (basic and accompanying) and a large number of participants. One event was selected from each ex-Yugoslav Republic, a total of 6. The following events were analysed and processed: Vojvodina Olympics of Old Sports, Bačko Gradište (Serbia); Village games of old sports, Salinovec (Croatia); Nevesinje Olympics, Nevesinje (Bosnia and Herzegovina); Župa Village Games, Nikšić (Montenegro); the Pelivan wrestling competition “Tradition continues”, Studeničani (North Macedonia); Škuljanje, Primorska region (Slovenia).

Vojvodina Olympics of Old Sports, Bačko Gradište (Serbia) – In 2019, the 10th Vojvodina Olympics of Old Sports was held, in mid-August, at the football club stadium. The organizer is the Bečej Youth Association (BUM), and support was provided by the municipality of Bečej, the Association “Sports for All Vojvodina”, the Football Club “Vojvodina” from Bačko Gradište, and entrepreneurs from Bečej. The Bečej Youth Association (BUM), through the volunteer work of its members, covers all organizational activities related to the Olympics. The goal of the Olympics is to revive the forgotten skills with which young men tried to impress their girlfriends, or to beat the young people from the neighbouring villages a few centuries ago. Today, sports disciplines such as *pilcike* (hitting a piece of wood with a wooden stick to fly as far away as possible), *ringlanje* (throwing horseshoes on a peg driven into the ground), *štulanje* (walking on stilts), *kandžijanja* (swinging a whip), *natežanje mosora*

(pulling the rod), archery, honor game (fencing with a shield and a fake sword), *džakanja* (sack racing), *dragača* (one contestant leans on his palms and the other holds his legs and races with the other pairs) or *vranica* (the pitcher throws his wooden stick at least 6 meters into the air only vertically, and the players shoot with their sticks) do not have a serious competitive character, but they guarantee great fun for both participants and fans (Figure 2). Participation is team-based (5 competitors per team) and free for all, without an upper age limit. The teams come from surrounding places, but also from Hungary and Croatia, which gives international significance to this Olympics. About 80-100 competitors gathered. Competitors can try out in as many as 17 forgotten disciplines, in which peasants used to compete in leisure (Vojvodanska olimpijada starih sportova, 2019). During the event, participants and spectators can refresh themselves with crêpes that are sold for humanitarian purposes. The money collected is intended for the renovation of the cinema hall in the village. The Vojvodina Olympics of Old Sports was promoted through the website of the Olympics organizers (<https://bum-becej.org/>), social networks, on Bečej's local TV station, articles in the press, and through flyers and posters.



Figure 2: A game of walking on stilts.

Source:

<https://hr-hr.facebook.com/pages/category/Non-Governmental-Organization--NGO-/Vojvo%C4%91anska-Olimpijada-Starih-Sportova-119508628099534/>

Rural games of old sports, Salinovec (Croatia) – Rural games of old sports have a tradition of since 1984. The organizer of the games is the Salinovec Sports Recreation Association. Financial support is provided by the sponsors of the City of Ivanec and Varaždin County, as well as numerous sponsors. The tourist organization of the town of Ivanec is a co-sponsor. Competitions in 11 games are planned: standing jump, bikovanje (4 players from two different teams push the trunk from opposite ends), shotput, pulling the rod (two players in a sitting position hold the same stick and try to pull another player to their side), tug of war (for women and for men), walking on stilts, climbing a pole, carrying a basket on your head, sack racing, vožnja živih tačaka (the contestant pushes the construction cart in which the contestant sits and races with the other couples), and assembling a plow. Associated teams of “musicians” also perform in a special category. The games are held on the grass field next to the old school at the beginning of August (Figure 3). The village games in Salinovac gather hundreds of competitors every year who compete in speed, strength and dexterity. In addition to the games, the organizers also stage an accompanying programme, including presentations of old trades, performances from the cultural and artistic society, and an exhibition of handicrafts. The musicians that the teams bring with them take care of the good mood and fun (Turistička zajednica grada Ivanca, n.d.).

Since 2015, *the Children's Village Games* have been held in Salinovac (in June), initiated by the children themselves. This is especially significant because adults have managed to instil in them a love for the old sports played by their great-grandparents. The competitions are held on the grass field next to the school. The disciplines are as follows: standing jump, *bikovanje* (4 players from two different teams push the trunk from opposite ends), throwing a stone from the shoulder, tug of war (category for women and for men), pulling the rod, walking on stilts, carrying a basket on your head, sack racing, *vožnja živih tačaka*, rolling a bicycle wheel. Boys, and especially girls, are ranked according to age groups: from 1st to 4th grade, and from 5th to 8th grade (Grad Ivanec, 2017).



Figure 3: Game of *bikovanje*.

Source:

<https://www.ivanec.hr/galerija/3736-35-seoske-igre-starih-sportova-u-salinovcu>

Nevesinje Olympics, Nevesinje (Bosnia and Herzegovina) – The Nevesinje Olympics have been held continuously since 1891 in the form of equestrian races in Bratački lug near Nevesinje. Since then, it has been interrupted only twice – during World War II and during the war in BiH (1992-1995). It is interesting that this event has always been supported by the current government: first the Turkish Empire, then the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and today Bosnia and Herzegovina (more precisely, Republika Srpska). The Nevesinje Olympics is older than the modern Olympic Games (1896 in Athens). The organizer of this great cultural and sports event is the Municipality of Nevesinje with the support of numerous sponsors. The Nevesinje Olympics are held in mid-August in the open, on a meadow. Athletes, guests and locals from all over the world gather at the Olympics. The very meaning of the Nevesinje Olympics is reflected in the openness to amateur and professional sports, old and young, regardless of religion and nation (Nevesinje, 2020).

In addition to equestrian races (Arabian horse races, Bosnian-mountain horse races), which are still the central event today, the Olympics have expanded to other disciplines. The following disciplines are represented: climbing a pole smeared with tallow, jumping on a bellows (a running competitor jumps on a sheep's bellow in

order to break it), shotput (throwing a stone from the shoulder), sack racing, tug of war, pulling a piston, high jump, long jump, race on a log (the competitor should run over the log in the shortest possible time), battle on a log (two contestants try to push each other off the log), race carrying eggs on a spoon, and more (Figure 4). Later, chess was added, and then basketball, indoor soccer, and volleyball. In the seventies of the 20th century, a record attendance of 30,000 spectators was recorded. The event is accompanied by performances by cultural and artistic societies, and by a fair of domestic agricultural products and handicrafts (Bjeljac et al., 2021). The mascot of the Nevesinje Olympics is Ero, a rugged Herzegovinian in folk costume and peasant shoe, but with a sports jersey. The event is promoted through various websites (<https://etrebinje.com/>, <http://www.opstinanevesinje.rs.ba/>, <https://www.glassrpske.com/>, <https://mojahercegovina.com/>), social networks, radio, promo film, press articles, posters, etc. The Nevesinje Olympics is on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Republika Srpska, and on the Preliminary List as part of the intangible heritage of BiH. In 2020, the Nevesinje Olympics was nominated on the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage (Božić, 2020).



Figure 4: Jumping on bellows.

Source:

<https://etrebinje.com/2020/08/17/nevesinje-tradicija-nevesinjske-olimpijade-jaca-od-ratova-i-nepogoda/>

The Župa Village Games, Župa, Nikšić (Montenegro) – Village games were launched in 2017, after a break of 30 years. The Župa village games are held on the last weekend in August. The organizers of the games are the NGO “Župa in the Heart” through the project “Small actions, big contribution”, which is funded by the Fund for Active Citizenship. The organization of the competition is helped by the local community of Župa and the elementary school “Dušan Bojović”, on whose training ground the games are held. The Župa village games were launched in order to promote the homeland and foster civic activism (Mandić, 2017). Participation in the games is team-based (minimum 5 and maximum 10 competitors) and free. Apart from the teams from Župa, teams from other cities and villages of Montenegro, as well as from the region, can also participate. Teams compete in six disciplines: tug of war, long jump, plovkanje (each competitor throws a small stone slab in order to reach the stabbed stick), pole pull, shotput (throwing a stone from the shoulder), and “carrying a bale of hay”⁴. Already in the second year of the games, a new competition game of “pouring water”⁵ was introduced, as well as a revival competition in the game of “jumping in out of a barrel”. The organizer of the NGO “Župa in the Heart” provided trophies and medals for the winners (Župa u srcu, 2018). The Župa village games were promoted on the website <https://zupa.today/>, then on the organizers’ YouTube channel, where a promotional video was published, as well as through posters and newspaper articles (Figure 5).

Pelivan wrestling competition “Tradition Continues”, Studeničani (Northern Macedonia) – Pelivanstvo has a very long tradition in North Macedonia and is especially fostered in the village of Studeničani (broader area of Skopje), where it has been held for almost five centuries. “It became popular after the Ottoman conquests of the Balkans. This type of folk wrestling with its specific elements primarily started to spread among the Islamized population. The pelivan fights were usually held in spring and summer, in honor of some religious holiday or at weddings and sunets (circumcision) among the Muslims” (Angelov, 2016, 99-100). “It was rare to find a village with Islamized Macedonians, Turks or Albanians without at least two pelivan fighters” (Konstantinov, 1991, 51). Pelivan wrestling is characterized by a ceremony; before the start of the fight, a special dance ritual is performed accompanied by

⁴ Competitors of one team turn their bowed heads around a pole 1 m high, 10 times, take a bale of hay and transfer it 10 m to their team member who does the same and so on until all 5 team members finish the discipline. Time is measured and the team with the best time is ranked first.

⁵ Competitors lie on the meadow on their backs one behind the other. The first contestant from the bucket fills the tray with water and passes it over to the contestant behind and so on until the last contestant who fills the empty bucket. The game lasts 2 minutes, and the team that fills the most water is the winner (Župa u srcu, 2018).

music (*zurla* and *tapan* drum instruments). “Music that adds the ancient spirit to the fights which evokes from the piercing sound of the *zurla* and the rhythmic pulses of the *tapan*” (Angelov, 2016, 100). Pelivans appear shirtless in special leather pants and smeared with oil, which strengthens and protects the skin, and makes it difficult to grasp. The fights take place on open grassy terrain.



Figure 5: A game of pulling the rod.

Source:

<https://zupa.today/plugin/gallery/gallery/52.html>

The Association for Education, Culture, Sports and Ecology (AKSI) holds an international singing competition called “Tradition Continues”. The event is supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Macedonia and the Pelivan Federation of Macedonia. The event has taken place for nine years (2019), in September, and gathers up to 5,000 spectators. In addition to competitors from Macedonia, there are competitors from Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Kosovo. The competition takes place in five weight categories. The representative of the AKSI association, Afet Jashari, pointed out that: “This competition is also of a cultural character, [and] singing is now one step closer to being declared the cultural heritage of Macedonia” (Vijekovna tradicija, 2016).

Škuljanje, Primorska region (Slovenia) – “*Škuljanje* is a traditional game in the Primorska region, where an individual or a team throws a *škulja* (a flat, carved stone or half-brick), trying to get it as close as possible to a jack (*balin*). The person or team who first gets 13 points is the winner” (Slovenski etnografski muzej, n.d.).⁶ The rules of the game were created during the game itself and over time it was passed from generation to generation. Due to the development of other sports games (modern sports), *škuljanje* has almost sunk into oblivion. At the end of the 20th century, the game experienced a revival, and in 2006, the Sports Association Škulja Vogrsko was founded, which catalysed the establishment of other similar federations in Slovenia. *Škuljada* has become part of the identity of the municipality of Renče-Vogrsko, and contributes to the difference, recognisability and uniqueness of its tourist products. At the same time, it has a strong social and connecting role in the community. *Škuljanje* is a very old game, as in the past it was played as a shepherd’s game. *Škuljanje* is the forerunner of bowling. Today, the *škuljada* is played everywhere, from gatherings of pensioners, the disabled, veterans, and students, to various social gatherings and family celebrations. Virtually anyone can *škulja*, including the disabled and people with special needs. Competitions in *škuljanje* contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage, recognisability of places (municipalities) and their identity. It is an important factor in the development of tourism and an integral part of social events (Figure 6). As part of school activities, *škuljanje* is a sport that students like to do and that is in line with educational goals and standards; it is considered a welcome addition to classes (Športno Društvo Škulja, 2016). On 20 September 2016, the game was entered in the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Slovenia (Slovenski etnografski muzej, n.d.).

Village Olympiads (traditional sports) are organized in the summer part of the year, when warm and dry weather allows for outdoor activities (Table 1). Most sports take place on a meadow or grass surface. For some sports, there are rules and procedures for organizing and competing, with ritual dances and music (as is the case with pelivan wrestling). And in other sports, the rules of competition are not too rigid and can be adapted to a certain extent to certain categories of competitors. The real effects of such competitions are achieved through the participation of competitors of different athletic prowess, where the result is not the only measure of success. This is confirmed by the following attitudes: “The women's team “Veni Vidi Vici” eagerly awaits the old sports competition in Bačko Gradišče every year. However, in

⁶ The same game in Croatia is called *pljočkanje* (Istarski pljočkarski savez).

the foreground is not the result, but quality time spent in the best company” (Sport, 2016).



Figure 6: Skuljanje International competition in Vogrsko.

Source:

<https://www.primorske.si/2018/09/26/sosedski-obracun-dobili-hrvati>

Selected events from Yugoslavia that nurture traditional sports and games differ in the number of sports represented at the competitions, as well as in the accompanying content and food served (Table 1). Only one event recorded an activity that belongs to the group of modifications, and refers to the introduction of some modern sports (basketball, indoor soccer, volleyball). At half of the events, there are no accompanying cultural contents and local gastronomic specialties, which can be introduced. This content would further increase the social and cultural interaction of participants and visitors, i.e. they would influence to increase the sports, tourist, ethnographic, and cultural effect of the events themselves.

Table 1: Basic data on competitions in traditional sports and games in Yugoslavia

The name of the event	Place	Maintenance time	Organizer	Number of sports	Game type	Cultural content	Food	Modifications
Vojvodina Olympics of old sports	Bačko Gradište (Serbia)	August	BUM- Becej Youth Association	17	National all-around	Tamburitza music	Pancakes	
Rural games of old sports	Salinovec (Croatia)	August	Salinovec Sports Recreation Association	11	National all-around	Music teams	Local food and wine	
Nevesinje Olympics	Nevesinje (Bosnia and Herzegovina)	August	Municipality of Nevesinje	2 horse races + 6 games	Equestrian races, all-around	Fair of domestic agricultural products, handicrafts, folklore	Local specialties	Chess, basketball, five-a-side football, volleyball
Zupa village games	Nikšić (Montenegro)	August	NGO „Župa u srcu“	8	National all-around			
Pelivan wrestling competition „Tradition continues“	Studentićani (North Macedonia)	September	Association for Education, Culture, Sports and Ecology (AKSD)	1	Wrestling			
Škuljanje	Primorska region (Slovenia)	October	Sport Society Škulja Vogrsko	1	Folk game of throwing			

Sources: <https://nsuzivo.rs/vojvodina/vojvodjanska-olimpjada-starih-sportova>;
<https://www.ivanec-turizam.hr/hr/obicaji-i-manifestacije/scoske-igre-u-salinovacu>;
<https://etrebinije.com/2020/08/17/nevesinje-tradicija-nevesinjske-olimpjade-jaca-od-ratova-i-nepogoda/>;
<https://zupa.today/vijesti/>; Športno Društvo Škulja, 2016;
<https://www.balkanplus.net/vijekovna-tradicija-borba-pelivana-u-selu-studenicani-kraj-skoplja-foto/>

6 Discussion

“Identity building uses building materials from history, geography, biology, productive and unproductive institutions, collective memory and personal fantasies, the apparatus of power, and religious revelations” (Castells, 2002, 17). Traditional sports and games are part of the collective memory, way of life and entertainment of ancestors. The peculiarity of the games or the varieties that are found in different regions provide a sense of uniqueness or difference from other places and regions. This diversity is the basis for building a local identity.

Sport enables a common way of thinking and access to competitions. Sport creates collectivism resulting from mutual contacts, which are continuous and repeated over a long period of time. The athletic spirit that is nurtured is more important than the result of the competition. And that is exactly what strengthens the cohesion among the competitors.

6.1 Old sports are a reflection of the traditions of the local population (H1)

Creativity in folk sports is abundant, no matter in which part of the world they originated. World Sport Encyclopedia (Liponski, 2003) is well known in the world literature, with over 3000 traditional sports and games. The exact number of traditional sports and games for Yugoslavia cannot be determined, because there is no consolidated literature. In the book “Old Sports of Yugoslavia”, Cvetković (1982) covered about 60 old sports, some of which have 4-5 varieties. About 30 of these sports have survived to this day.

The long history of holding competitions of traditional sports has preserved, in addition to sports, the usual norms and behaviour. The virtues and courage of the competitors have always been emphasized in public, which has also influenced the popularity of the competition. In the rare archival material covering the Nevesinje Olympics, there is a “record of a French travel writer from 1894 who vividly describes the competition at the time and speaks with admiration about mountaineers who prove their courage in treacherous disciplines” (Bukvić, 2016).

Preservation of traditional sports is the preservation of a certain culture of remembrance, as well as the culture of belonging to a certain tradition of ancestors. “The Nevesinje Olympics are still held at Bratački lug; every year there are more and more participants who participate in traditional sports games and equestrian races. There are also those whose grandfathers and some of their close ancestors were participants and that is an example of good practice, because transmitted from generation to generation,” states the senior curator ethnologist-anthropologist at the Museum of Herzegovina Božana Đuzelović (Glas Srpske, 2020).

“Folk dances and competitions, as an integral part of folk culture and intellectual creations, are inseparable companions of folk customs and folklore” (Živanović, 1970, 11). In the area of Gora, Dragaš municipality (Kosovo and Metohija), singing has become particularly widespread. “The first pelivans at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century were wage earners who learned the art of pelivaning from Turkish pelivans. Competitions were organized during wedding ceremonies, and later on the occasion of all celebrations.” (Goranski sajt, 2014).

Recalling the long tradition of traditional sports can play an important role in attracting young competitors today. Young competitors are the guardians of tradition and an important link for the survival of the games. “Pelivanism is a centuries-old tradition of the Albanian people, which means respect for power, respect for opponents, respect for rules, and a dignified celebration. When rituals are added to all this before the performance of pelivan wrestlers, then the tradition acquires great values that are for the admiration of every nation”, said the Minister of Culture Ismaili (Министарство за културу Северне Македоније, 2019). Young men are actively involved in pelivan competitions, aware of the importance of preserving this traditional game. Pelivan Isamit Sabir confirms that with the words: “I have been playing for ten years. I inherited my love for this sport from my ancestors, my father and grandfather were pelivan and I continue the family tradition” (Тасев, 2018).

The love for old sports and their revival with the active participation of younger people is the best way to preserve these sports from oblivion. “Excellent organization of the match, above all. I am glad that ŠD Škulja-Barje has so many young members in its association, who will be able to continue this tradition of mutual friendship for many years to come” (K. Š., 2015).

6.2 Old sports contribute to a location's tourist image (H2)

The promotion of the Village Olympiads has changed over time and has adapted to the media and their impact on the public. In addition to traditional media (newspapers, radio, television), in practice, advertising is increasingly turning to online tools and social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter). The promotion of rural Olympiads and competitions affirms the villages in which such competitions are held. Good promotion leads to an increase in the number of visitors, which further leads to a greater demand for food, drinks, souvenirs, accommodation.

The organizers of the Vojvodina Olympics of Old Sports have combined tradition and tourism in order to create a brand. From the beginning of the Olympics, the goal would be clear. "BUM recognized the need to organize an event in Bačko Gradište that will become a tradition and future brand of Bačko Gradište. Out of the desire to make an event that would be different from kotličijada and pasuljijada from neighbouring places, the idea of organizing an event to promote tradition from the area of Vojvodina was born. The event carries a sports spirit and the possibility of interactive cooperation between organizers and citizens. That is how the Vojvodina Olympics of Old Sports was created, which gathers more and more competitors, spectators, and media from year to year. He is expanding his program with common ideas, ambitions and forces" (Drapšin, 2018).

Some organizers of village games have had a strong influence on the launch of traditional sports games in other places and on the interaction of sports and tourism. "We are glad that DŠR Salinovec encouraged the holding of village games in more than half of Croatia! The fact that our games and efforts have been recognized at higher levels is also shown by the fact that our games have been declared an event of special interest to the City of Ivanec", said Hudoletnjak (M. N., 2019).

In support of the hypothesis, we can add the example of Škuljada from Slovenia. "Škuljada has become a part of the identity of the municipality of Renče-Vogrsko, and it contributes to the difference, recognisability and uniqueness of the tourist offer. ...It is an important factor in the development of tourism and an integral part of social events" (Športno Društvo Škulja, 2016).

6.3 Competitions in old sports bring participants closer (H3)

The role of traditional games for physical, social and psychological wellbeing has been universally recognized (Pfister, 1997). Competitions in old sports bring together teams from surrounding places and regions or neighbouring countries, which creates new friendly ties and good neighbourly relations. Competitions are an occasion for team meetings, and socializing, communication and cultural interaction are the biggest result of all competitions.

“I am participating in this Olympics for the first time, it is beautiful and interesting. Until now, I was not familiar with the disciplines in which we are competing” (Lj. M., 2012).

Ognjen Miric, who lives in Melbourne, emphasizes the importance of socializing at the Olympics: “For him, the Vojvodina Olympics of Old Sports is an ideal opportunity to meet old friends, but also to remember the discipline in which he participated five or more years ago” (Sport, 2016).

“There are also those in my 'Libero' team, who participated in previous years, and this is my first time. I knew about these disciplines, but I didn't practice them. Everything is great. Socializing is in the first place and I think that it should continue to be maintained and developed, because a lot of young people gathered,” said the contestant from Bačko Gradište (Lj. M., 2012).

“The point of every such event is socializing. I think that only in that way will we be able to secure the future of Macedonian wrestling Pelivan. I have to admit that there is not much interest among the younger ones. I hope they understand that this is a noble sport. It is not as rough as it seems, because it comes down to technique, reflex and speed,” says Mitrov (Тасев, 2018).

6.4 Competitions in old sports enable intercultural learning (H4)

Folk sports are based on festivity and community, rather than on disciplinary rules and achieving results (Eichberg, 2012). The Village Olympiads, in addition to sports content, also provide entertainment and local food. After the sports, the socializing continues with music and local specialties (e.g. baked goods, fish, pancakes, wine, etc.). Village Olympiads can also have a humanitarian character, so that the funds

collected from the sale of food pay for the purchase of school supplies or goes to equipping the space that serves for cultural events in the village (cinema, library). In this way, the event achieves cultural, sociological, psychological and sports significance among participants and visitors, as well as the transmission of traditions and customs to younger generations. “And this year's village games were an opportunity for us all to move away from technology and modern hobbies and briefly return to better times when man, society and community came first” (Radio “Bljesak” Okučani, 2018).

We understand that TSG can break socio-cultural barriers (Saura, Zimmermann, 2021). Participation in competitions in other countries means a lot to young people from the countryside: “Young people have the opportunity to meet another culture and break down prejudices. The charm of everything is that we were housed in houses, which made everything even better,” said the contestant from Bačko Gradište at the Festival of Rural Games in Gornji Bogičevci (Croatia) (Jovičević, 2016).

“We learned what *plovkanje* is here, because we never played it. We are best at shotput and tug of war. Next year, guests from Župa will come to us, so they will also learn something from us”, said the captain of the club “Velika”, after participating in the Župa Village Games (Mandić, 2017).

For many young participants, the great importance of the Olympics is reflected in the fact that it is held in the village and thus provides entertainment and introduces dynamism into the often monotonous life of young people in the countryside (“We are glad that the Olympics are being held in our village. Unfortunately, more and more young people are leaving the village today, and this manifestation, in a way, brings them back and at the same time revives Bačko Gradište”) (Bečejsko udruženje mladih, 2019).

Music has an important cultural, artistic, but also social moment for connecting all participants and visitors of the games, because “carrying meanings which transcend across time, space and even cultural boundaries” (Chen, 2017, 43). Music, folklore and song are accompanying contents that make the atmosphere at the village games cheerful and prolong the socializing after the competition itself. Their role in intercultural learning is great and should be a mandatory part of such programs. They are especially important for people who like celebrations and socializing, as is

the case with the people in Yugoslavia (In Salinovec, the “musicians” that the teams bring with them ensure the good mood and entertainment).

7 Conclusion

Traditional sports and games are important for participants because they develop many skills (teamwork, cooperation, challenge management, setting priority goals, etc.), build character, and help develop feelings of belonging to the community, as well as feelings for fair play. In this way, traditional sports and games are not only ordinary games and entertainment, but also contribute to the development of a healthy lifestyle and a positive attitude towards life. On the other hand, traditional sports and games can encourage the development of tourism in rural areas, include local producers in the tourist offer with natural and healthy products (fruits, vegetables, honey, cheese, meat), then motivate small craft shops to get involved through production souvenirs and handicrafts, and encourage the creation of micro-enterprises and jobs for rural women and young people. Also, through events dedicated to traditional sports and games, valuable sports heritage will be preserved, ethnographic and rural tourism will be developed, and the heritage and collective memory of ancestors will be passed on to current generations. Tourists will be able to experience an active vacation and get involved in traditional sports on their own.

“It can be seen that the organizers have enthusiasm and do everything with their heart” is a concisely expressed attitude, which reflects the already known fact that the organizers of rural Olympiads are great visionaries and activists in preserving folk tradition and sports culture of local communities. The organizers are most often sports recreation associations, non-governmental youth organizations, sports associations, and they receive support from the municipality, county, tourist organization, as well as sponsors. Some Olympiads are also funded by EU cross-border cooperation projects. EU projects are contributing to the popularization of these events in other countries, all with the aim of promoting peace and cooperation among neighbouring nations. These projects are of great importance among the peoples of the states that emerged after the break-up of Yugoslavia, with the aim of renewing broken cultural ties and overcoming the barriers and prejudices that have arisen.

“The possibility of sharing with children, and especially with teachers and educators in training, the richness of TSG supports the transmission to new generations, encouraging intergenerational exchange and the diffusion and practice of TSG as a living heritage in schools” (Berti, Zingari, 2019, 74). Incorporating TSG into school curricula is one of the steps in promoting TSG. Through narrative and storytelling that involve parents and grandparents, the community is strengthened and children learn about the local tradition “in vivo”.

The results of the research indicate the presence of a large number of games of various characters in the countries of former Yugoslavia, as well as a large number of the same or similar games that arose more as a result of certain geographical and social conditions, and less as a feature of individual peoples. Coexistence in the same area and cultural intertwining have led to a large number of the same or similar games in ex-Yugoslav republics. The same (or similar) language, multinational settlements and common economic tradition have influenced the development and characteristics of traditional sports. The cultural overlap was great, and the same traditional sports are an integral part of our history and culture. They also contribute to our current recognition of similarities and the building of new sports and cultural cooperation and togetherness.

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