

The *Let Us Give Children Roots and Wings* cultural-educational drive of the Ethnographic Museum



With 40,000 visitors over the six months of its duration, the *World by Toys* project realised by Iris Biškupić Bašić, Ph.D., Senior Curator, was the most visited exhibition in the history of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb. Owing to extraordinarily great interest, we have recognised the favourable moment to “extend the life” of skills used in the making of traditional children’s toys and, at the same time, preserve their well-deserved place of a protected cultural good on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

In 2013 we devised and initiated an educational and donation drive, *Let Us Give Children Roots and Wings*, as a cultural and educational complement and extension of the *World of Toys* project. With this innovative drive the Ethnographic Museum has promoted its activities outside the museum and contributed to the development of contacts with protagonists from different social environments. It is precisely by safeguarding cultural identities that the museum serves society and its progress.

The drive has been particularly significant for several reasons: it has promoted intangible cultural heritage; it has sustained traditional crafts; it has also enhanced the awareness of the importance of heritage in the community at large. Specifically, with the support of the European Regional Development Fund Krapina-Zagorje County, the Secondary School in Oroslavje and the toy-producing master craftsmen of Hrvatsko Zagorje are developing a “Toy Route” which would provide opportunities to visit masters workshops

within the scope of tourist attractions. Such an opportunity would promote the development of cultural tourism based on regional identity related to traditional handicraft skills. One of the objectives of the drive is the foundation of the Traditional Toy Museum at Marija Bistrica which would additionally expand the range of tourist attractions and ultimately have a bearing on the economic development of the whole region.

The *Let Us Give Children Roots and Wings* drive is based on cultural and educational programmes through which children gain knowledge, already at the day nursery level, about the value and meaning of Croatian cultural heritage – specifically of traditional children’s toys, a segment of folk creativity the closest to them. It is based on the idea whereby educational institutions throughout Croatia such as day nurseries, abandoned children’s homes, SOS Children’s Villages, but also children’s hospitals, would get a set of 30 wooden toys. It is a well-known fact that the proper choice of toys promotes the children’s psycho-physical development and shapes their personality, which is why children need to be sensitised to their own heritage at a very early age. Even the very motto of the drive, *Let Us Give Children Roots and Wings*, symbolically pinpoints the importance of heritage (*roots*) as the foundation for future development (*wings*).

The donation of toys¹ to institutions is always combined with talks about heritage adjusted to the children’s age and an interactive performance related to the occasion and played by actresses of the *Fun Laboratory*, including the message that cultural heritage needs to be cherished and knowledge shared through play. The enriching of the donation with a show and the elation of the children defy description, and one of the many letters of appreciation from day nurseries is enclosed therefore to this review.

The educational dimension of the drive is also expanded by the reinterpretation of the text given nursery assistants for use in any play with traditional toys, memory cards with pictures of toys helping children to put the toys away and a valuable addition, an ecological drawing kit donated by one of the partners, Narodne novine d.d. (Official gazette) with which children creatively express their experience of tradition. Production is also on the way of a series of picture-books on forest conservation, ecology, homeland beauty

1 The donated toys are produced in accordance with the provisions of the Preschool Education Act, involving the use of special ecological dyes, ecological glues and wooden pegs, and additionally treated sharp edges.

and toy making tradition. This expands and enriches the whole project with new assets.

Over the past year the drive has covered forty day nurseries and one children's hospital from Čakovec and Vukovar to Opatija and Dubrovnik. The presence of mayors and county prefects at such events demonstrates the importance of the drive for the local communities and their support. However, the most important thing of all is the always warm and infinitely merry moment when the children open the box with the toys.

Such a financially and organisationally demanding project could be realised successfully owing to the good preparation of the *Let Us Give Children Roots and Wings* drive, its sound articulation and quality, and the support of important partners and sponsors. They include the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Croatia, the Croatian Chamber of Commerce, the Croatian Forests Administration within the framework of the *Drvo je prvo* (Wood Comes First) project, City of Zagreb – Office for Education, Culture and Sports (Department for Preschool Education), Zagreb County, Krapina-Zagorje County, JANAF d.d., Narodne novine d.d. and the mass media sponsor Radio Kaj.

The *Best Drive in 2013* Prize awarded by the Croatian Association of Radio Stations and Newspapers, and the special acknowledgement of the Croatian Museum Society for 2013 are indicative of the significance and recognised identity of the *Let Us Give Children Roots and Wings* drive.

APPENDIX

Dear Madam,

We thank with all our hearts the Ethnographic Museum for including the *Hrvatski Leskovac* day nursery into your *Let Us Give Children Roots and Wings* project to the great delight of our children and us adults.

We have fostered for years a positive attitude of our children and their parents towards the cultural heritage of our homeland in order to sustain the knowledge and the skills of our grandparents. Such activities have always been very interesting and attractive to persons wishing to learn something

but also to persons wanting to share their knowledge and keep the memory of past spiritual and cultural values.

The inclusion of our day nursery into the *Let Us Give Children Roots and Wings* project has been a wonderful addition to our endeavours and, metaphorically speaking, a “small missing link”. We know that children always react spontaneously and frankly, and such was precisely their reaction when you opened the magic toy box: a loud sigh, and then hand-clapping and cheerful laughter. I must admit that even we, the adults, were also “left breathless” for a brief moment, amazed by the variety and folklore variegation of traditional children’s toys. We had held them in our hands a long time ago...

We also thank your partner *Narodne novine* for the donated art kits (you can never have too many), and the young actresses of the *Fun Laboratory* who entertained us at the end of our socialising with an instructive show, using traditional toys in their act and thereby rounding up the whole event.

After you left our children busily planned which of the donated toys they needed for their specific play and loudly “bid” their right to them. They experienced the box as a treasure trove, and we intend to keep the experience going – because these toys are truly a treasure conveying the spirit of the distant past.

We hope that the project will continue in the years ahead and offer many day nurseries entertaining and instructive socialising such as the one we had the opportunity to experience.

Sincerely yours,
Hrvatski Leskovac day nursery

TRANSLATED BY: MIRJANA RANDIĆ