

HUMOROUS POTENTIAL OF BOARD GAMES FOR CHILDREN OF SENIOR PRESCHOOL AGE

Rostyslav Rudenskyi

Department of Pedagogy and Methods of Primary and Preschool Education

Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University

2 Maxyma Kryvonosa vul., 46027 Ternopil, Ukraine

E-mail address: rost.rudenskiy@tnpu.edu.ua

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5890-6276>

Oksana Pysarchuk

Department of Educology and Pedagogy

Western Ukrainian National University

11 Lvivska vul. (WUNU Building 1), 46009 Ternopil, Ukraine

E-mail address: pysarchukoksana04@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0110-9174>

Iurii Shcherbiak

Department of Information and Socio-Cultural Activities

West Ukrainian National University

11 Lvivska vul. (WUNU Building 1), 46009 Ternopil, Ukraine

E-mail address: cherbiak@ukr.net

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5870-4188>

Beáta Akimjaková

Faculty of Theology, Department of Social Sciences the Catholic University in

Ružomberok

Hrabovská cesta 1A, 034 01 Ružomberok, Slovak Republic

E-mail address: beata.akimjakova@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3663-5836>

Katarina Minarovicova

Department of Social Work and Social Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences and

Health Care

Constantine The Philosopher University in Nitra

Kraskova 1, 949 01 Nitra, Slovakia

E-mail address: kminarovicova@ukf.sk

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0278-4008>

ABSTRACT

Aim. The aim of the study is to determine the humorous potential of modern board games for senior preschool children which are used in preschool education institutions.

Methods. The aims were achieved through the implementation of methods: theoretical (analysis of the psycho-pedagogical, philosophical and source base in the field of game design and children's game theory), empirical (observation of the game process of children with board games, combined analysis of board game sets from different countries) and comprehensive analysis of board game sets for children.

Results. It has been determined that the humorous potential can be expressed through each structural component of a board game: content (plot, characters and rules), conventional graphic plan (images, symbols, icons, colour, reality and conventionality of the image), equipment (character chips, character figures, tokens, field etc.). It has been proved that humour is a social and game construct of the modern theory and practice of game design.

Conclusion. It has been concluded that the humorous potential of board games for children has a significant developmental effect in the organisation of game activities. The use of humorous board games provides a positive microclimate in the team, promotes the development of emotional intelligence in children, enriches their cognitive and sensory experience. Humorous board games can be used both for organising the education of older preschool children, preparing them for school, and for organising recreation, leisure, and raising children's play culture.

Keywords: preschool education, senior preschool children, game theory, board game, game actions, game rules, humour

INTRODUCTION

The modern theory and practice of children's play is developing due to the enrichment of results from other fields of science. The development of the theory of board games is based on history (Bell, 1969; Elliott & Brian Sutton-Smith, 2015) culturology of board games (Caillois, 2001; García Martín et al., 2021; Huizinga, 1994), psychology of play (Berne, 2016), entertainment theory (Koster, 2013), game design, pedagogy (Lewis & Bedson, 2018), etc. However, the substantive analysis of board games for preschool children, in particular older ones, has not yet been reflected in a holistic manner at the proper level of scientific research. Thus, in the methodical work *Games for children* by Gordon Lewis & Günter Bedson describes the system of teaching English to children through various games, the main place of which the authors give to board games of different types, such as: Family tree, Picture identity cards, Goal!, Rays of sunlight, Big clock game, Higher or lower?, Money in the middle, Colour chain, Mouse race, Face dice, Seasons quartet, Jungle race, Animal checkers, Make

a menu and others (Lewis & Bedson, 2018). However, the humorous orientation is not the subject of their research, while they describe materials, age appropriateness, number of players, materials for the game, educational content, etc. (Kondrla, 2021). Social game constructs (sacred, war, love) from the cultural aspect are defined in the work of Johan Huizinga (Huizinga, 1994) and Roger Caillois (Caillois, 2001). Researchers in the sociology and cultural studies of games have argued that games always reflect a stable social context: events, actions, classes or segments of the population, positions or areas of activity, etc. However, these scholars have not studied humour as a social and gaming construct, in particular, board games for children. Noticeable and significant in the context of our study are works on the history of board games by Tristan Donovan *It's All a Game: A Short History of Board Games*, Irving Finkel *Ancient Board Games in Perspective*, Ian Livingstone *Board Games in 100 Moves*, Apostolos Spanos *Games of History. Games and Gaming as Historical Sources* and others. In fact, the group of these sources is the largest in terms of the number of studies in the theory of board games. Tristan Donovan analyses the most common game mechanics, providing data that has not been previously reported (Donovan, 2019). Irving Finkel, an archaeologist, a scientist who has studied the oldest board games, the prevalence of generalised gaming practices in Ancient Babylon, Macedonia, etc. (Finkel, 2007). Livingstone summarised in his work a holistic chronology of the development, improvement and production of board games, including the modern stage. His generalisation is based not so much on chronology as on the types of materials used to make board games: stone, clay, wood, paper, plastic, etc. (Livingstone, 2019). The authors did not focus their attention on the study of board games for children but laid the foundations for further research. Given this state of affairs, we will specify the structure of a board game, the way social phenomena are transferred to board games for children, identify the most popular themes of humorous board games for older preschoolers, and provide specific examples.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SOCIALLY SIGNIFICANT EVENTS AND BOARD GAME CONCEPTS

In the process of teaching the younger generation, board games were used massively in the era of moralism, in the 18th century. Gambling as an element of leisure culture was widespread and popular, but according to moralists, such games did not contribute to the education of moral qualities such as piety, obedience, nobility, charity, honesty, loyalty, innocence, justice, etc. Children and young people involved in gambling are representatives of the working and peasant classes of society, without proper education and upbringing.

In such games, players often broke the rules, placed bets, lost money, got into debt, caused fights, and hooliganism. All of this was of great concern to tutors,

teachers, and clergymen in the upbringing of children. Particularly negative was the phenomenon of robbery and theft, that arose because of participation in gambling (Roubalová, Hlad et al., 2023; Roubalová, Judák et al., 2023). From the point of view of moral and spiritual education of children, the starting point can be considered, as noted Králik et al. a violation of the fundamental Christian commandment (Králik, et al., 2022). In this context we agree with the opinion of Králik et al. that “a fellow man is every person with whom we are connected by social ties (family, tribal, national, covenantal, friendly)” (Králik, et al, 2022, p. 13; Roubalová, Hlad et al., 2022; Roubalova, Kralik, Maturkanič et al., 2022; Roubalová, Králik, Slivka et al., 2022), and one of these ties is cultural, leisure practices, such as joint games, then violation of the culture of gaming behaviour is not aimed at enriching the spiritual world of the player’s personality, fostering a culture of empathy, care and joy of playing together. This is quite understandable, because gambling does not cultivate a friendly attitude towards the opponent, the joy of spending leisure time together, but rather fosters self-interest, greed, wastefulness, laziness, and faith in chance and fortune.

In contrast to the above, the emergence of the cultural topos “On the Way to the Temple of Happiness” is a thorough solution to this problem. These topos were generalized in the middle of the eighteenth century based on the “moralite” trend in literature and drama. It entered the sphere of children’s play pedagogy a little later, but in a less allegorical way. The topos of “on the way to the Temple of Happiness” is quite stable in the history of game culture, including children’s culture, and has, we believe, Christian roots. This symbolism is undermined by the view of the game’s route as the path of a person’s earthly life, which acquires unlimited piety and inherits eternal life. The human player, in our opinion, is a traveller of eternity, a pilgrim to the Heavenly City, the Temple of Eternal Happiness. This connection is also noticeable with the concept of the Jubilee Year. Let’s consider this relationship.

The idea of presenting a children’s board game as a “path to happiness” or “path to salvation” originated in pedagogical practices. The symbolism of such a path was formed in moral and allegorical journeys and treatises that described human life with metaphors of a journey. The sources of this topos were primarily literary works. For example, Abbot Telemac’s novel *The Journey of Telemac* (*Les Aventures de Télémaque*), *The Pilgrim’s Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come* John Bunyan, 1678, etc. An example of such a board game can be fully considered *A New game of virtue rewarded, and vice punished*, London, 1818.

The pilgrim’s path goes through difficulties, suffering, success, and ends with the arrival in the Heavenly City. This tope can reflect the essence of the Jubilee Year, as it, like the board game in this context, becomes, as Judák et al. (2023) note, “a dimension of repentance, conversion, reconciliation, finding a path and purpose, new integration into the community, overcoming loneliness and subjectivity” (Judák et al., 2023, p. 218; Murgaš, et al., 2023). The structure of the game is straightforward,

but the sequence of moves in the game remains unknown: which way will the player “go”? This depends on several factors: the subjective preference of intermediate arrival points on the route, or the randomness of the numerical value that will be rolled on the dice. However, this thesis reflects the process of the game, but not the player’s initial entry into the game. In other words, when starting the game, the participant needs to enter the path, open the door of a specific route: the gate/door of piety and salvation, or the door of earthly pleasure and destruction of the soul. Thus, this reflects the importance of the meaning of the symbol of opening the Holy Gate. Judák et al. point out that “the opening of the gate refers to Christ, who is the doorway to the Father and therefore the only and absolute way to salvation... is an indicator of the Christian’s spiritual journey...” (Judák et al., 2022, p. 223). The beginning of the game, the choice of the route in this context at the beginning of the game is already a symbolic indicator of the player’s goal and lifestyle, the desire to acquire spiritual virtues-treasures, or material ones that will destroy the soul and will not allow reaching the “Heavenly City”.

While the acquisition of moral virtues in literature is easily perceived and understood by adults, in games for children it should be encouraged, because it is easier to be free-thinking and indifferent than to be obedient, hasty, and pious. Board games have a system of awarding points for acquired and achieved moral virtues. The social prototype of such a reward system was, for example, the “tickets of good behaviour” or “tickets of courtesy” (*billetes der fleisses*) developed by the educator Christian Gotthilf Salzmann in 1784. A child who earned 50 such tickets received a “golden punkt” on a “merit board” (*meritentafel*). This board with the children’s names was placed in the prayer hall. Those who reached 50 points received the “Order of Good Behaviour” (*Fleißabzeichen*), a badge of courtesy in the shape of a golden cross with a relief of the symbol of hard work. In the context of the Jubilee Year, its symbols and signs, such iconic items can be considered clothing items, accessories, badges that were attached to clothing and were the pilgrim’s identification marks. The research of Judák et al. contains an important fact that “distinctive clothing and badges attached to a hat or coat (from previous pilgrimages or before the return journey) served as a letter of recommendation for the pilgrim, protected him from extortion and allowed him to enjoy hospitality” (Judák, et al., 2022, p. 231). In board games, such tokens were cards, tokens, stamps that had to be paid to or taken from the cashier, as specified in the rules. Such signs were also cards with emblems depicting positive and negative virtues. For example, the emblem of hope, stupidity, generosity, caring, pleasure, and time were paired. Bravery, courtesy, wisdom, chaos, elegance, and happiness were trump emblems. There were also emblems that were considered simple and lucky. Depending on the emblem gained on the way to the Temple of Happiness, the Heavenly City, the number of stamps was awarded, or the participant was deprived of stamps and returned to the beginning of the game.

The Heavenly City, the Temple of Happiness or the City of Happiness may reflect, in the context of the Jubilee Year, the purpose of the pilgrimage – the arrival of the holy apostles Peter and Paul in the city as a place of Christ's graces, a place of healing and spiritual enrichment. Judák et al. highlight that “the place of residence of Peter and Paul, represents in the Christian faith an important place of almost tangible fidelity to the Messiah for whom they were willing to give their lives and where they were buried” (Judák et al., 2022, p. 227; Maturkanič et al, 2022). The follower of St Peter is the Pope, who personifies the Living Christ. For these reasons, we can trace the connection between Rome as a prototype of the Heavenly Jerusalem, the Temple of Eternal Happiness and Grace. The topos of the Heavenly City in board games allegorically reflects happiness, and the city itself, as the goal and result of the game, is the repository of Truth and virtue. Thus, upon arriving at the Temple of Happiness, the Heavenly City, the child of God receives a worthy reward.

Thus, we have analysed the specific example of some symbols and signs of the Jubilee Year celebration, how they can be transferred to the context of a board game and become its organic construct. In other words, we have revealed the relationship between a social phenomenon that becomes a board game construct, and vice versa, when a board game acts as a holistic subject of reflection of socially significant events and phenomena.

HUMOUR AS A SOCIAL GAME CONSTRUCT OF MODERN GAME BOARD DESIGN

Let us analyse the theoretical and practical aspects of transferring humour from the spheres of social life to the content of board games for preschool children.

First, we proceed from the considerations that the game is inherently aimed at obtaining pleasure, a sense of joy, and vitality, since the game process is characterised by emotionally intense sublimity, dynamism, subjective interest of each player, and the presence of comic means.

Humour, in our understanding, is a social construct that penetrates all spheres of human activity, comprehensively influences its development, and occupies a prominent place in the learning process, as the latter can only be effective based on positive learning motives.

Based on this position, we can assume that each of the elements of a board game can be a means of expressing humour, containing the comic. Hence, humour is one of the social and gaming constructs.

Humour, as a social construct, not only enriches the dynamics of board games but also serves as a significant motivator for children's engagement. Just as in social life, where humour permeates various activities, including learning processes, the incorporation of humour into board game design enhances the overall gaming experience.

In other words, humour inherent to the essence of play, infuses elements of pleasure and joy into the gaming process. Consequently, within the context of modern game board design, humour emerges as a vital tool for fostering positive learning motives and creating an enjoyable atmosphere for preschool children.

Moreover, humour within board games provides a constructive alternative to online activities, mitigating concerns associated with their excessive use. Unlike online games and activities, which may expose children to risks such as oversharing (Tkáčová, Pavlíková, Azizi et al., 2023), various contemporary manipulative tactics (Tkáčová, Pavlíková, Stranovská et al., 2023), conspiratorial content (Tkáčová, 2022a), false information and disinformation (Tkáčová, Maturkanič et al., 2023), board games offer a safe and wholesome gaming environment. By appealing to the current expanding user base (Tkáčová, 2022b) through fun and interactive communication (Pavlíková et al., 2023) within enticing and attractive formats (Tkáčová et al., 2021), board games entertain and promote healthy social interactions and children's cognitive development (Hašková et al., 2021). Thus, humour serves as a link between social engagement and gaming constructs, reinforcing the significance of board games in modern childhood experiences (Maturkanič et al., 2023; Svoboda et al., 2024).

It should be noted that humour as a social phenomenon becomes a board game construct at the level of game design and development. That is, if the game designer purposefully transfers events and phenomena of humorous content into the game system. In this context, the opinion of a contemporary game design and entertainment theory researcher Raph Koster is in line with this, noting that it is important to understand the game as “symbolic representations of human experience, the patterns of which we can practice and learn” (Koster, 2013, p. 36). Based on this point of view, it is necessary to consider the possibility of designing and programming the actions of players at the level of each structural component of the game as a system. At the same time, board games are an example of a formal, closed system with a small number of mathematical variables (in our understanding of rules-functions) that provide the ability to extrapolate to the entire gameplay with a specific printing set. Generalisation of the social experience of expressing humour in rules-functions creates the basis for transferring game mechanics to other plots, characters, sets, and the development of new games for children. In this context, we can talk about the game as a means of preserving and disseminating social experience of interaction (Valčová et al., 2021).

As any system, a board game has its own structure, the components of which provide it with relative closure, stability, and integrity (Elliott & Sutton-Smith, 2015). The structural components of board games are: content (plot and rules), conventional graphic plan, and equipment (Rudenskyi & Pysarchuk, 2023). Let's consider the humorous potential of each structural component and how it is reflected in the real game practice of children.

THE SELECTION CRITERIA FOR HUMOROUS BOARD GAMES: ORGANISATION OF A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

We analysed 40 sets of board games for preschool children that are relevant and popular among children as of the end of 2023. The board games we selected for the study had to meet the following basic criteria:

- recommended age from 4(5) to 7(8) years;
- ideologically and politically neutral game;
- language-independent, or translated and localised into more than 3 languages;
- game timing does not exceed 20-30 minutes.

The selection of humorous board games in the age-appropriate category means that we establish the level of subject content on the subject of the game, establishing whether the child has the necessary knowledge, skills, experience to learn the rules of the game, develop the game process with the set. The period of preschool childhood is defined differently in different countries. For example, in the UK, the age of a junior schoolchild is at the end of the fifth year of a child's life, in fact, the 1st grade of primary school. In Ukraine, a child aged 5-6 is considered a senior preschooler and attends kindergarten. Children enter primary school at the age of 6 or 7. In the United States of America, Germany, Spain, France and other countries, compulsory primary education begins at the age of 6. It should be understood that up to this age, children have the right not to attend kindergarten at all, or on a private basis in child development centres. Such variability in preschool education leads to the fact that the level of children's minimum educational competences differs in terms of the amount of knowledge, quality and strength of their learning. This leads to the fact that board game publishers often recommend developed games for certain age intervals: for children from 3 to six years old, from 2 to 4 years old, from 5 to 8 years old, from 6 to 10 years old, etc. That is, the period of senior preschool age, which is important for the context of our study, falls within these intervals, when a child naturally physically and intellectually prepares for school, which means that the content and scope of his or her social experience, the level of general learning mechanisms, the duration and range of activities change. With this in mind, we have defined the age range for this criterion as 4(5) to 6(7) years, considering the fact that the period of senior preschool age falls within the recommended limits of the publishers.

According to the results of our theoretical study, children's board games can reflect the ideological and political situation in a country. This means that the socio-political experience of a particular state is used as a game construct and artificially introduced into the content of children's games. In this case, board games are militarised by their themes, characters, the nature of social interactions in the form of rules, conventional graphic design (signs, symbols, icons, logos, flags, colours, ornaments, the whole range of visual practices, etc.), and equipment that directly sensorially reflects the content

of the ideological layers in the game (Nuremberg Municipal Museums, 2018). This trend can be traced in board game sets of the 30s and 40s of the twentieth century, produced in the Soviet Union, Germany, the USA, France, and other countries (Livingstone, 2019). The idea of the militarisation of leisure penetrated not only games for preschool children, but also for primary school students. In the twenties of the twenty-first century, the internationally recognised intrinsic value of preschool childhood, the right of a child to play without violence, ideology, militarisation, as it does not correspond to the development of society as people who do not recognise the value of war, the arms race, all forms of violence, seizure of territories, etc. (Pavlíková, 2017; Valčová et al., 2023). Any context of ideological and political influence should not be reflected in a children's game offered or produced by an adult. In our understanding, a game is a means of uniting, bringing together players who value joy, positive emotions, spending time together, developing culture and leisure. For this reason, we do not analyse games that make fun of the social system, the state system, specific segments of the population, professions, social roles and statuses, religions, and beliefs, etc. (Kondrla et al., 2023) Our study is based on the analysis of games aimed at bringing joy, emotional satisfaction from the game process, common cultural social practice, rather than ridicule, demonstration of negative aspects of social life, etc.

The criteria of language independence of a children's board game with humorous potential involves several aspects. First, such games have a minimum number of rules that need to be read to the child. Such games are not related to the mechanics of speed writing, spelling, word formation, etc. Secondly, the instructions or rule booklet mostly demonstrates the preparation, the course of the game, the location of elements visually with the help of diagrams, pictures, pointers to the location of chips and game components, etc. Such an instruction helps the child to intuitively learn the content of the rules, since visually presented game rules are a visual support for the child's thinking and the game process. Thirdly, language independence as a criterion reflects the construct of game design, which reaches a much larger number of audiences, in contrast to the narrowly focused monolingual approach. Language independence also stimulates the spread of game practice at a higher level—the global level, since localising a language-independent game does not require as much production costs as those where the language and speech context is an important game construct. In addition, a significant advantage of language-independent board games is the lowering of the age threshold for accessibility of game content for younger children. This means that the gaming experience of older preschool children can be much more extensive, as preparation for learning for such children can take place through board games rather than traditional teaching aids such as textbooks, workbooks with a printed basis, workbooks, etc. The humorous potential of language-independent board games for children creates a social and emotional space that recognises the values of joy, cheerfulness, entertainment and fun, which can be perceived by children regardless of the borders of the state through images, plot, characters, graphics, and thus these values spread,

unite child players regardless of geographical boundaries, and promote the spread of game culture in general and the ethos of children's play in particular.

Gameplay timing as a construct and result of game design has recently gained a foothold in the entertainment and game design industry. This phenomenon was influenced by several social factors. We believe that one of them is the development of the psychology of preschool children's play and the theory and practice of game design. Observations of preschool children's games show that free, self-initiated, independent, unregulated by rules story games are long (over 25 minutes). Such games cover a wide range of topics, content, game roles, number of participants, attributes, and substitute objects, etc. In contrast to free play, regulated or closed-ended games limit children's initiative in developing the plot, selecting game props, space, etc. In this regard, it is as if someone offers the child a ready-made version of the game activity, and the desire and motivation of children are not considered. On the other hand, this type of game (due to its structure) lends itself to design, filling with the necessary educational content, rules, way of playing, characters, etc. That is, these games have no less developmental effect and influence on the child than creative games. Therefore, they also have a prominent place in the practice of the educational process of preschool education institutions. However, closed games, according to our observations, last less time, they have a predetermined number of players, rules, methods and conditions of the game, so that during the game itself a new player cannot join or leave the current one, as this disrupts the game dynamics, the game process breaks down. If board games, which are a subtype of closed games, successfully balance the game component and educational potential, then the level of children's game motivation and cognitive activity is at a high level for no more than 20 minutes. In board games that take more than 8-12 minutes, the level of development of arbitrary processes, including thinking, memory, attention, etc. has a significant impact. If mental processes are underdeveloped at a sufficient and high level of arbitrariness, the level of motivation for the game process decreases, rules are often broken, the game plot is directed towards free creative play instead of completing the game task, or the child stops participating in such a game altogether. It is also recommended that learning sessions for older preschool children should not last longer than 20-25 minutes. In fact, the entire lesson can be organised in the form of an interesting board game. This point should be considered by game designers of board games for children, as well as by educators and parents who offer these games to children.

According to the results of our study, the humorous potential in board games for children can be expressed through a separate structural component of the game, or through its optimal integration, which enhances the game motive of children.

We have summarised the experience of the most famous international board game corporations' offers on official catalogue websites, including the Internet. Among the international companies that produce such games and meet the above criteria are the following: AMIGO Spiel + Freizeit GmbH, Ravensburger Spieleverlag, Innovakids

GmbH, KOSMOS Verlag, HABA GmbH & Co. and others. The representative list includes board games from the following countries: Finland, Germany, United States of America, England, Ukraine, France, and Netherlands. In Table 1, we provide examples of humorous board games for children of senior preschool age from different countries and manufacturers.

Table 1

Board games with humorous potential for children of senior preschool age

№	Title.	Age	Number of players	Timing	Publisher	Country	Year
1	Spotlight Slam	4+	3-5	20+	Tactic	Finland	2020
2	Who did it?	6+	3-6	15-20	FeelIndigo	Ukraine	2018
3	Crazy socks	6+	2+	15-30	Fun Games Shop	Ukraine	2019
4	Cubeez	6+	2-4	15+	Blue Orange	USA	2018
5	Keekee	4+	2-4	10+	Blue Orange	USA	2013
6	Spin Circus	4+	2-5	10+	Blue Orange	USA	2022
7	Halli Galli Junior	4+	2-4	15+	AMIGO	Germany	1998
8	Clown	5+	2-6	15	Ravensburger	Germany	1988
9	Stapelmannchen	5+	1-4	15-20	Ravensburger	Germany	2009
10	Peppino the Clown	5+	2-4	15+	Ravensburger	Germany	1999
11	Mix-Max	5+	2-6	20	Ravensburger	Germany	1999
12	Clown Face	4+	3-6	10	White Goblin Games	Netherlands	2016
13	Clown Around	6+	1-4	15	Tactic	Finland	2006
14	Clown Capers	6+	2-4	20-30	Whitman	USA	1957
15	CooCoo	3+	1-6	5+	Blue Orange Games	USA	2005
16	Happy Clown	3+	1-4	15	Ravensburger	Germany	2005
17	Confetti The Clown	6+	2-4	30	Cadaco	USA	1968
18	Clowns Party	6+	2-6	15+	Winning Moves France	France	2011
19	The Classic Brio: Clown Game	3+	2-4	15	Alga	Sweden	2008
20	Jumbolino	4+	2-4	15	KOSMOS	Germany	1978
21	Knall & Fall	5+	2-6	10	HABA	Germany	2003
22	Der dumme August	6+	2	20+	Spear's Games	Germany	1920

Source. Own research.

Here we interpret the content of the summary data in Table 1. Its content analysis shows that the most expressive in terms of the intensity of humorous content is the theme of the circus and clowns, which is reflected in particular in game sets numbered 6-10, 12-22 in the table, i.e. 72.7% of the total number of analysed games. The rest of the games are aimed at reflecting funny situations from life: making faces, pulling down socks, or performing the rules-functions of the game in an extraordinary way: using animal paw chips, constructing images of fantastic funny animals, etc.

CIRCUS AS THE MOST POPULAR TOPIC IN HUMOROUS BOARD GAMES FOR CHILDREN

The theme of the circus entered the field of board games at the end of the nineteenth century, with the massive opening of large circus establishments around the world. Unlike the interest of adults, children liked the circus for its trained animals, festive atmosphere, and most of all for the actions and actions of clowns. The most popular acts on the programme were tricks with animals, demonstrations of their training, and performances with riders.

The design, mechanics and components of the board games were based on circus aesthetics. For example, the rules were printed in the form of a circus poster, and the image of the box itself and the game board reflected the content of advertising posters. The characters of board games were mostly clowns, dog trainers, strongmen, aerialists, and female horsewomen. The rules of the games were lengthy, with complex syntactic constructions that were often difficult to understand, which significantly reduced interest in the game.

The content of circus events and circus performances was a prominent phenomenon in many cultural practices and penetrated in a peculiar way. For example, the circus entered the literature with its metaphorical, comic, ridiculing of shortcomings, flaws, ignorance, ineptitude, etc. It was believed that a circus performer always covers his inner world, the pain of daily poverty, hard work and long journeys. The polarity of the image, their inner dilemma, was felt in the works.

As opposed to works of literature, dramatic events and motifs were not transferred to the plots of board games. Games have always been dominated by festivity, fun, excitement, entertainment, etc. That is why, we can assume, circus-themed games were popular among children.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, circus programmes changed significantly, primarily under the influence of technological progress. The popularity of acrobats in the circus had a significant impact on the field of board games. According to the content of an acrobatic act, the performer should not do all the actions in a “circle” on the arena, as with horses and riders, trained dogs, but “going uphill” under the circus dome. Performing stunts at different heights, rising higher and higher each time, the acrobat delighted the audience with his fearlessness, courage, and skill. With this in mind, traditional route games have become “rise up” games. With this mechanic, players make multi-pass moves with a single roll of the dice until they “arrive” at the conditional top-finish. This type of game is better suited to the theme of the circus: the fast-paced, dynamic nature of the action.

It was one of the first games to provide a few general guidelines for the game instead of a step-by-step description. Lengthy step-by-step explanations were avoided by using graphic symbols — shapes that indicated the direction of movement (“up”, “down”). Gymnasts were the best at acting as a “pointer”. The graphics of their

body conveyed the direction and place of the player's movement. Later, the figures of animal performers in the process of performing a trick also became pointers. The use of vectors accelerated the game, as reading long grammatical rules out loud deprived the game of dynamism and reduced interest in the game.

In the games of the 1950s in the Soviet Union, the style of the pictorial plan changed from eccentric and colourful to descriptive and sentimental. Images of half-naked gymnasts and riders were replaced by images of athletes and acrobats in tracksuits. The game's plot has also changed. Instead of the emotionally intense pleasure of traditional laughter and entertainment, the circus's theme was the promotion of hard work and physical education. In other words, the broad social context of culture and entertainment was directed into a narrow channel of moral, physical and labour education.

This period preserved the principle of multi-step movement. Images of monkeys, elephants, acrobats, seals, and tigers graphically depicted such movements. Among the characters in Soviet games were clowns, tightrope walkers, cyclists, rifle shooters, gymnasts, animal trainers, etc. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the humorous potential of board games was significantly enriched, penetrating the sphere of children's games.

As shown in Table 1, the circus theme has penetrated board games that differ in plot, nature of game actions, characters, type of game environment, etc. Let us consider these distinctive characteristics of humorous board games in more detail.

TYOLOGY OF HUMOROUS BOARD GAMES FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

The first characteristic that we use to unite board games is the way the game environment is organised: plane and space. Depending on the intentions of the game designer and developers, each board game can be either plane-oriented or spatially oriented.

For example, we refer to board games-balancers as spatially oriented board games, since the gameplay does not involve performing game actions on a plane, a field, but consists in the involvement of spatial construction, balancing figures, compositions with precise care. In fact, in spatially oriented games, the foreground is the construction of structures so that with each movement, game action, the composition (tower) does not disintegrate, otherwise the player loses. In games of this type, the theme, plot, and character recede into the background, being of more secondary importance than the clear and careful implementation of the rules and functions.

Surface-oriented board games involve game interaction on a plane, often a specially prepared field or board. We also include all types of card games, such as quartet, bridge, etc. Although card games do not involve a playing field, the interaction of players, the way they are placed, and the way they play cards still unite them around a tempo-

rarily organised plane of a table, carpet, etc. This type includes all types of route games, positional games (checkers and chess), etc.

In the board game design industry, since the 2000s, there has been a trend in which developers have successfully integrated both planar organisation and spatial involvement, which gives a third, combined type of modern board games—planar-spatial. Their number for preschool children is growing significantly in modern game practice.

From the point of view of gaming practice, the types of plane- and space-oriented board games are sufficient for the average player. However, in the theory of board games under such circumstances, there is a noticeable contradiction, for example, regarding the classification of all types of card games as plane-oriented. This is a significant remark, according to which the plane as a game dominant core in the analysis of this type of game requires that these games are not considered in the research process, that is, they are left out of the researchers' attention. This is also the case with spatially oriented games. For example, the well-known game *Jenga* or *Tower*, despite its distinct spatial focus, also contains a planar involvement, as the pieces of each floor of the tower form a plane of three pieces. However, there are a lot of balance games in which the location of an element is not clearly defined in advance and involves free placement in any part of the structure so that the structure does not lose balance and collapse. Given this state of affairs, we believe that within the plane and spatially oriented types, it is advisable to distinguish two subtypes: open and closed board games. This greatly enriches the way we analyse games, allows us to more clearly define and organise game mechanics, themes, etc. Let's consider these types on the example of the games in Table 1.

Thus, among all the sets we analysed, we found that the number of plane-oriented humorous games is twice as high as spatially oriented games or a combined type. There are more plane-oriented closed games (6) per set than open games (5), which evenly reflects the popularity of these games among children. As for spatially oriented games, there is 1 set of closed games, and three more sets of open games (4). This means that the openness of actions in balance games is more expected and popular among children. The number of games of the combined type is 6, i.e. about 27.3% of the total number of all games in our study. Let's summarise the data of the quantitative analysis with a specific percentage for each subtype and type of humorous board games:

- Plane-oriented open – 22.72%;
- Plane-oriented closed – 27.3 %;
- Spatially oriented open – 18.18 %;
- Spatially oriented closed – 4.54 %;
- Plane-spatial (combined) – 27.3%.

Thus, we conclude that plane-oriented humorous board games for children are more interesting, popular, and widespread in gaming practice, as opposed to spatially oriented ones. It is important that the plane-spatial (combined) type of games is found

in 1 out of three cases of humorous games, which significantly enriches the content of children's play activities, as it provides the possibility of combining different mechanics and developing new games.

Regarding the subject matter and content of the game rules, we note that children often prefer dynamic actions with objects that make them laugh and are funny in nature of implementation, rather than the appearance of the character, its size, etc. That is why the most popular games among children were *Spotlight Slam*, *Who did it*, *Crazy socks*, *Halli Galli Junior*, *Stapelmännchen*, *Peppino the Clown*, *Confetti The Clown*, *Knall & Fall*, etc. Here are some examples of funny game activities.

For example, in the game *Spotlight Slam*, each player is given a plastic animal foot, which the player must use to cover the required card in time to win. If these plastic paws are removed from the game and children are asked to cover the card with their hand, they become less interested and less fun to play. In *Crazy socks*, children use a spinner to determine which object they will search for in a sock. If the sock is replaced with an ordinary bag, children quickly lose interest in the game, and the humour of its content disintegrates. When playing the game *Halli Galli Junior*, children have to find two identical images of a clown (in colour, shape, clothes, etc.) as quickly as possible and signal by pressing the bell. If the bell is taken away and children are asked to raise their hands high to indicate that the player was the first to guess, then children do not want to play this game again, they become uninterested, because they like to signal quickly, loudly, with the help of special equipment. The humorous content of the actions in the game *Stapelmännchen* is that each plastic clown figure must be placed hooked to the others, building a structure in height. At the same time, the actual positioning of the characters in the construction is fun and funny for children: by the side, by the cap, by the arm, by the leg, by the body, etc. The spatially orientated game *Peppino the Clown* involves constructing a Peppino clown figure from cylinders of different colours in a speed race. In this case, it is important for the child not only to build the clown as quickly as possible, but also to do it correctly, as shown on the condition card. The one who builds the fastest puts the clown's head on top of his construction. In fact, only one player will build the Peppino clown. Children in this game like to build for speed, to display the clown head figure. If children are asked to build just cylinder towers for speed, without the clown head and legs, the replayability of this game is extremely low. Children also find the game *Confetti the Clown* amusing, in which children have to find circles on the playing field according to the colours thrown on the dice. The children search for these circles with the help of a cardboard figure of a clown who juggles two discs and rides a unicycle at the same time. The images of the discs and the wheel have holes through which children look for the right coloured circles. The game is funny because it requires a lot of manipulation of the clown figure, turns, rotations, movement, turning over – all in order to find the necessary coloured circles as quickly as possible. If you take the figure away and ask children to point to the colours with their fingers or cover it with white circles, you lose the sense of the clown's ridiculousness. In a real

circus, a clown juggling on a unicycle shows his skill, flexibility, attentiveness, and is also funny. In this game, this element of the cardboard clown figure is dominant in the humorous implementation of the game. The board game *Knall & Fall* is somewhat similar to the game *Peppino the Clown*, but here players do not build their own clown. They all have one clown in the set, which also consists of cylinders of different colours. Each cylinder has a rope attached to it, which participants pull during the game, so that only the coloured cylinder required by the player is pulled out and the clown figure does not disintegrate. If the player pulls the cylinder successfully, he covers the colour of the cylinder he pulled with a chip on his card and moves on until he reaches the finish line. It is the idea of pulling a cylinder that children like so much, because it is an atypical mechanic. You have to pull it out sharply and carefully. If the pulling action is replaced, for example, with pushing or blowing the cylinder, children lose interest in it quickly. In fact, the game process stops, and children become uninterested.

Thus, we have considered the games whose nature of actions is most appealing to children in their play practice. Their atypicality in the way they are performed comes to the fore, instead of the game character or plot. This should be considered by educators and parents when choosing a game for older preschool children.

CONCLUSIONS

Humour as a social phenomenon at the level of game design becomes a socio-game construct in game design theory. With this in mind, humorous social events are summarised, concentrated in the form of humorous potential and transferred to the content of board games for preschool children. The means of expressing humour and laughter can be either each individual structural component of the board game or their combination. When combined, the potential of humour leads to a noticeable increase in interest in the game among older preschool children. Such games become favourites among children who play them for a long time and willingly.

The humorous potential of board games for children has a significant developmental effect in the organisation of play activities. The use of humorous board games provides a positive microclimate in the team, promotes the development of emotional intelligence in children, enriches their cognitive and sensory experience. Humorous board games can be used both for organising the education of older preschool children, preparing them for school, and for organising recreation, leisure, and fostering a playful culture in children.

The criteria for the most appropriate selection of games for older preschool children are as follows: the recommended age is from 4(5) to 7(8) years; the game is ideologically and politically unbiased; the game is language-independent or translated and localised into more than 3 languages; the game's timing does not exceed 20-30 minutes.

The most common board games in children's play practice are those that reflect the theme of circus events, acts, and artists. The most common image is that of a clown, his behaviour, skills, activities, appearance, etc. In terms of the way the game environment is organised, plane-oriented games and the combined type prevail. By the nature of the game rules-functions, the most popular among children are those that require atypical, funny, humorous, and playful performance of game actions. The plot and the image of characters in humorous games fade into the background in board games for senior preschoolers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The paper was supported by the Cultural and Educational Grant Agency (KEGA) of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic based on the project: Social Work Based on Moral Values – Innovation of the Study Program Number 011KU-4/2023 and VEGA project No. 1/0777/22 Individual and collective empowerment of the population of marginalized settlements in field and community social work.

REFERENCES

- Bell, R. (1969). *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Berne, E. (2016). *Games People Play*. Penguin Life.
- Caillois, R. (2001). *Man, and the Sacred* (M. Barash, Trans). University of Illinois Press. (Original work published 1950).
- Donovan, T. (2019). *It's All a Game: A Short History of Board Games*. Atlantic Books.
- Elliott, M. A., & Sutton-Smith, B. (2015). *The Study of Games*. Ishi Press.
- Finkel, I. (2007). *Ancient Board Games in Perspective*. British Museum Press.
- García Martín, J., Morales Rojas, A., & Kralik, R. (2021) The Kantian ethical perspective seen from the existential philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard's Victor Eremita. *Ethics & Bioethics*, 11(1- 2), 48-57. <https://doi.org/10.2478/ebce-2021-0003>
- Hašková, A., Šafranko, C., Pavlíková, M., & Petrikovičová, L. (2020). Application of online teaching tools and aids during corona pandemics. *Ad Alta*, 1(10), 106-112.
- Huizinga, J. (1994). *Homo Ludens*. Osnovy.
- Judák, V., Hlad, L., Ďatelinka, A., & Zemančík, V. (2023). Symboly jubilejního roka ako pozývajúce zname-
nia ku komplexnému rozvoju človeka postmodernej doby. Historicko-teologická kerygmatická štúdia
[Symbols of the jubilee year as inviting signs to the complex development of man in the postmodern
age. A historical-theological kerygmatic study]. *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 14(1), 218-234.
- Kondrla, P. (2021). Freedom as a means and a goal in Comenius's philosophy of education. *Caritas et Veritas*,
11(2), 21-33. <http://dx.doi.org/10.32725/cetv.2021.032>
- Kondrla, P., Trstenský, F., & Datelinka, A. (2023). Social Teaching of the Church and the Values of a Sustain-
able Society. *Acta Missiologica*, 17(2), 142-154. https://www.actamissiologica.com/sub/am_2_2023.pdf
- Koster, R. (2013). *A Theory of Fun for Game Design* (2nd ed.). O'Reilly Media.
- Králik, R., Roubalová, M., Judák, V., Hlad, L., & Ďatelinka, A. (2022). Může Bůh Izraele podle Rabínské
tradice požadovat od svých vyznavačů v sociální oblasti nemožné? [Can the God of Israel, According

- to the Rabbinic Tradition, Demand the Impossible of His Followers in the Social Area?]. *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 13(1), 3-21.
- Lewis, G., & Bedson, G. (2018). *Games for children*. Oxford University Press.
- Livingstone, I. (2019). *Board Games in 100 Moves*. DK.
- Maturkanič, P., Jiříšřová, D., Gruber, J., Šuráb, M., & Majda, P. (2023). "North Bohemian" God – does he speak or remain silent? a Pastoraltheological reflection on the phenomena of the "Absent" God in the Litomerice diocese and its psycho-social dimension. *Acta Missiologica*, 17(1), 59-72. https://www.actamissiologica.com/sub/am1_2023.pdf
- Maturkanič, P., Tomanová Čergetřová, I., & Přibylová, D. (2022). Cyrilometodějská tradice v pojetí České společnosti 21. století [Cyrillo Methodian tradition in Czech society in the 21st century]. *Constantines Letters*, 15(1), 161-176. <https://doi.org/10.17846/CL.2022.15.1.161-176>
- Murgaš, F., Podzimek, M., Petrovic, F., Tirpáková, A., & Králik, R. (2023). The impact of religiosity on quality of life. *Acta Missiologica*, 17(2), 169-186.
- Nuremberg Municipal Museums. (2018). *Spear's Game. A Family History of Games*. German Games Archive.
- Pavlíková, M. (2017). Kierkegaard's reflection in Don Delillo's novel "Falling man". *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 13(1), 15-23.
- Pavlíková, M., Tkáčřová, H., & Timor, T. (2023). Grief of the bereaved in a social media environment as one of the prominent consequences of the covid-19 pandemic. *Acta Missiologica*, 17(2), 75-84.
- Roubalová, M., Hlad, L., Šuráb, M., Maturkanič, P., & Králik, R. (2023). Teologické důrazy zákazu přijímat úplatek v kontextu Tanachu a Rabínské tradice [Theological implications of the prohibition of accepting bribes in the context of Tanakh and Rabbinic tradition]. *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 14(1), 179-200.
- Roubalová, M., Judák, V., Maturkanič, P., Podhorec, I., & Králik, R. (2023). Zákaz krádeže/loupeže v Tanachu a v Rabínském právu [Prohibition of theft/robbery in Rabbinic law and Tanakh]. *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 14(2), 253-266.
- Roubalová, M., Králik, R., Maturkanič, P., Hlad, L., & Ďatelinka, A. (2022). Basic aspects of sleep from the perspective of Tanakh and Rabbinic Judaism. *Acta Missiologica*, 16(1), 169-184.
- Roubalová, M., Králik, R., Slivka, D., & Žalec, B. (2022). Založení první vinice v Tanachu a jeho následky s pohledu Rabínského judaismu. Historicko-sociálně-teologická analýza [Establishment of the first vineyard in Tanakh and its consequences from the point of view of rabbinic Judaism. Historical-socio-theological analysis]. *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 13(2), 202-220.
- Rudenskyi, R. & Pysarchuk, O. (2023). Yevropeyskyi kontekst evoliutsii struktury nastilnykh ihor dlia ditei doshkilnoho ta molodshoho shkilnoho viku [Structure evolution of board games for preschool and primary school children in the european context]. *Naukovyi visnyk Vinnytskoi akademii bezpererвної osvity. Seriya «Pedagogika. Psykhologhiia» – Scientific Bulletin of Vinnytsia Academy of Continuing Education. Series "Pedagogy. Psychology", 4*, 109-118. <https://doi.org/10.32782/academ-ped.psyh-2023-4.17>
- Spanos, A. (2021). *Games of History. Games and Gaming as Historical Sources*. Routledge.
- Svoboda, M., Medzihorský S., Gruber, J., Janackova L., Surab., M. & Králik, R. (2024) Manipulation as a Risk Factor for Psycho-Social health. *Acta Missiologica*, 18(1), 43-54.
- Tkáčřová, H. (2022a). *Global narratives, local adaptations. Specifics of conspiracy narratives during the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovakia*. Verbum.
- Tkáčřová, H. (2022b). *Spilling ink: Blinding words and the people who write them*. Verbum.
- Tkáčřová, H., Al-Absiová, E., Al-Absi, M., & Pavlíková, M. (2021). "Media Invasion" against Islam in the context of the Slovak Republic. *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 4(1), 165–179.
- Tkáčřová, H., Pavlíková, M., Azizi, M., & Sotirofski, K. (2023). Oversharing of content online by children during the holidays and parental control. *Acta Missiologica*, 17(2), 75–84.
- Tkáčřová, H., Maturkanič, P., Pavlíková, M., & Slobodová Nováková, K. (2023). Online media audience during the Covid-19 pandemic as an active amplifier of disinformation: Motivations of university students to share information on Facebook. *Communication Today*, 14(2), 155–167. <http://dx.doi.org/10.34135/communicationtoday.2023.Vol.14.No.2.11>
- Tkáčřová, H., Pavlíková, M., Stranovská, E., & Králik, R. (2023). Individual (Non) Resilience of University Students to Digital Media Manipulation after COVID-19 (Case Study of Slovak Initiatives). *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(2), 1605. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20021605>

- Valčová, K., Kardis, K., Paľa, G., Valčo, M., & Kardis, M. (2021). Úloha náboženského diskurzu pri riešení integrácie európskych imigrantov z perspektívy historických aj súčasných konceptov náboženského kultúrneho dedičstva [The role of religious discourse in addressing the integration of European immigrants from the perspective of historical and contemporary concepts of religious cultural heritage]. *Historia Ecclesiastica* 12(2), 207–215. https://www.unipo.sk/public/media/41141/historia_ecclesiastica_02_2021_vnutro.pdf
- Valčová, K., Valčo, M., Šimková, P. S., & Hanus, R. (2023). Renaissance der Bildung im reformatorischen Europa: Eine Analyse des pädagogischen und katechetischen Erbes von Leonard Stöckel [The renaissance of education in reformed Europe: An analysis of the pedagogical and catechetical legacy of Leonard Stöckel]. *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 14(2), 3-31. https://www.unipo.sk/public/media/46855/historia_ecclesiastica_02_2023.pdf