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Popularization of folk toys from Russia and the Republic of Belarus as a means of strengthening international relations

Abstract. This article focuses on the popularization of traditional folk toys from Russia and the Republic of Belarus. It examines the interaction between the allied states within the framework of the cooperation agreement, using the example of the Art and pedagogical museum of toys named after N.D. Bartram and the Rogachyov center of culture and folk art of the Republic of Belarus. The article presents implemented projects in various forms of interaction and analyzes the practices of cooperation. Additionally, it discusses the approaches and methods used in the popularization of traditional folk toys.

Keywords: traditional folk toy, popularization, cooperation of allied states, interaction, approaches and methods.

Folk toys are a significant cultural phenomenon of a particular country, reflecting its regionally historical and socio-cultural characteristics. They serve as carriers of the country's cultural code, accumulating life meanings and the artistic value potential of the people's culture. As noted by V.V. Abramenkova in her study "Games and toys of our children", a toy is not merely a child's amusement but a tool through which they explore the vast and complex world, grasp the laws of human interaction and comprehend eternal truths [1].

The development of modern folk toys is characterized by diverse trends, one of the key ones being the creation of authorial toys. Currently, traditional folk toys are predominantly used as small-scale sculptures and souvenir products. Folk toys are rarely incorporated into children's independent play or educational processes, and if they are used, it is typically as illustrative material.

This reveals a contradiction between the significant pedagogical, spiritual and moral potential of folk toys and the insufficient utilization of this potential in education, popular science and sociocultural activities.

The popularization of folk toys is the process of disseminating popular science information about the toy to various target audience groups. Forms of popularization can include various events such as forums, conferences, exhibitions and artistic and creative competitions. For example, the Art and pedagogical museum of toys named after N.D. Bartram of the Sergiev Posad institute of toys, a branch of the Russian

university of traditional art crafts, annually hosts international Bartram readings dedicated to the problems of games and toys not only in Russia, but also worldwide.

The history of traditional toys in Russia and Belarus spans several centuries. If we consider the images of toys from Russia and Belarus, we can see similarities: almost all of them are created using simple, essentially identical technologies, using eco-friendly materials (toys made of clay, straw).

The folk toy can perform various functions, serving both as a child's amusement and as an educational tool, helping to acquire sociocultural experience. In traditional culture, a whole range of toys with a movement effect has been formed. For children beginning to walk, wooden toys with and without wheels were created, allowing the child to take their first steps while holding onto the toys and ride on them. As the child grows, they gradually become involved in traditional festive culture, participating in holidays, games and amusements using folk toys. Using a bow and arrows, a ball in games helped to develop children's resourcefulness, attentiveness, quick reaction and other skills. Playing with a doll allowed children to "rehearse" life situations, understand the basics of social interactions, express various emotions and instill in the child a sense of care and attachment. The traditional doll reflected the entire way of life of a person, basic life situations and natural phenomena. For example, dolls called "Inseparables", tied together, meant "to go hand in hand", "to be together". Playing with such dolls, the child, reenacting life situations, received guidance for adult life.

The toy is a sufficiently widespread and popular subject of interdisciplinary research. As early as the late 19th century, P.F. Kapterev and E.A. Pokrovsky wrote about children's games in education and learning [5; 11]. In N.D. Bartram's 1912 study, it was noted that "folk tales and folk toys, like drops of living water, awaken the creative seeds that might otherwise lie dormant in the child's soul" [4, p. 171]. D.V. Mendzheritskaya in the late 1960s observed that the toy serves as a means of cultivating qualities such as love for labor, curiosity and inquisitiveness in children [7]. In the works of modern authors N.S. Aleksandrova and I.A. Kachanova, the role and specificity of the phenomenon of the folk toy in children's art and aesthetic education are revealed [2; 6]. V.A. Polyakova conceptualized the process of creating traditional wooden toys based on a historical and art-historical approach and the use of the potential of the Art and pedagogical museum of toys named after N.D. Bartram in students' research activities [13; 12]. O.V. Ozerova and E.G. Sergeeva examined the pedagogical potential and significance of the folk toy [15]. Additionally, domestic research has highlighted the importance of preserving regionally historical centers of traditional toys, whose activities have always been a bright example of preserving and transmitting artistic and technological traditions [9; 8].

Researchers from the Republic of Belarus, G.A. Bartashevich, E.M. Sakhuta and V.A. Silivon, view the folk toy as a means of education and introducing the younger generation to national culture [3; 14; 16]. N.S. Starzhinskaya emphasizes the need to use the folk toy in children's subject-game space [17].

The relevance of the study is determined by the necessity to search for, first and foremost, the most effective paths, forms and methods that contribute to the preservation, study and popularization of traditional folk toys.

The results of the study can serve as a foundation for organizing joint specialized projects in the field of toys, attracting participants of various levels and competencies.

The Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus are countries that preserve unique traditional art crafts recognized as a contribution to the world's cultural heritage. In this regard, cooperation in the field of popularizing traditional art crafts, including folk toys, is of particular relevance. The Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus are part of the Union state, whose goal is to create a unified political, economic, military, humanitarian, market and cultural space. This cooperation involves a variety of forms of interaction.

In the field of culture, events such as the "Slavic bazaar in Vitebsk", forums on "Digitalization in culture", international sessions "Knowledge. Culture. Family", dedicated to the Year of the family in Russia, as well as forums, round tables and seminars, in which representatives of authorities, researchers, educators, creative youth and others participate, are implemented.

Every year, the Art and pedagogical museum of toys named after N.D. Bartram hosts international Bartram readings, whose main idea is to find an answer to the question: "What should a toy for children be like?" In 2024, an Agreement on cooperation was signed between the Sergiev Posad institute of toys, a branch of the Russian university of traditional art crafts, and the Stren'kovsky district craft center of the Rogachyov center of culture and folk art of the Republic of Belarus. This agreement is one of the directions for strengthening friendship and joint activities between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus in the field of ideology, preservation of historical truth, as well as the development and popularization of traditional art crafts, particularly the folk toy. The subject of the agreement is joint activities in organizing various events, exchanging experience and educational activities in the field of social projects and the development of traditional culture.

In 2024, the Rogachyov center of culture and folk art celebrated its 20th anniversary. The main task of the center is to study folk crafts, revive and preserve rare and forgotten crafts, introduce the population to traditional culture and develop creative initiative. The center organizes various events aimed at familiarizing people with the values of traditional culture of the Republic of Belarus, arranges exhibitions and lectures, which contributes to the preservation and development of the country's cultural heritage as a whole.

The Rogachyov center of culture and folk art organized the festival "Z narodnykh kryniz" with a toy competition "Belarusian lyal'ka", where traditional dolls were presented (Figs. 1⁶⁵, 2). In 2010, the "Belarusian lyal'ka" doll museum was opened, for which employees of the Stren'kovsky district center created

⁶⁵ Figs. 1-4. Photos by the co-author of the article O.D. Tkachyova.

traditional dolls. Each doll, decorative element and embroidery is an embodiment of carefully preserved history and tradition.

A special mention goes to the joint project between Russia and the Republic of Belarus as part of the Day of traditional art crafts, which took place from June 18 to 22, 2025, at the Art and pedagogical museum of toys named after N.D. Bartram of the Sergiev Posad institute of toys, a branch of the Russian university of traditional art crafts. The project participants organized a joint creative platform "Unity in the diversity of traditional art crafts", where a popular science lecture on Russian and Belarusian toys, a cultural and educational program, a workshop on creating an author's doll, and a folk game were presented. O.D. Tkachyova demonstrated a presentation material about traditional Belarusian dolls online and conducted a master class on making a traditional straw doll "Strigushka" (Figs. 3, 4).



Fig. 1. Fabric dolls.
“Belarusian lyal’ka” doll
museum of
the Stren’kovsky district craft
center of the Rogachyov
center of culture and folk art
of the Republic of Belarus



Fig. 2. During the workshop sessions in the Stren’kovsky
district craft center of the Rogachyov center of culture and
folk art of the Republic of Belarus



Fig. 3. Samples of straw toys in the
Stren’kovsky district craft center of the
Rogachyov center of culture and folk art of
the Republic of Belarus



Fig.4. Samples of straw dolls in the
Stren’kovsky district craft center of the
Rogachyov center of culture and folk art of the
Republic of Belarus

A variety of traditional straw dolls from the "Belarusian lyal'ka" doll museum were also presented, including "Zhelannitsa", "Krupenichka", "Martinichka", "Pokosnitsa", "Blagodat'" and "Nerazluchniki". The demonstration workshop included creating the doll's frame by twisting, bending and tying straw at the waist, neck and securing it with threads, as well as decorating the doll with additional accessories (ribbons, beads, embroidery, etc.). This method has been known for a long time and is widely used in many regions of Russia (for example, the "Kuvadka" doll is created in a similar way). Additional decorations for straw dolls, such as a headdress, scarf, hat, apron, etc., were used depending on the doll's image. The step-by-step algorithm allowed for the creation of interesting images of traditional dolls "Strigushka", whose main feature is that they could not only stand confidently on the surface but also start moving – spinning and dancing – when gently tapped on the surface (Fig. 5⁶⁶).

Students of the Sergiev Posad institute of toys participated in a workshop on making traditional toys from natural materials. For example, third-year student Yu. Goncharova, majoring in "Design" (artistic design, modeling and decoration of toys), conducted activities on preparing materials, manufacturing technology and developing a step-by-step process for making a traditional straw doll, which were demonstrated at the Art and pedagogical museum of toys named after N.D. Bartram (Fig. 6). Samples of such straw dolls were developed based on the collection of folk toys from the Art and pedagogical museum of toys named after N.D. Bartram.



Fig. 5. O.D. Tkachyova's presentation at the joint creative platform "Unity in the diversity of traditional art crafts" between Russia and the Republic of Belarus at the Art and pedagogical museum of toys named after N.D. Bartram



Fig. 6. Workshop conducted by Yu. Goncharova, a student of the Sergiev Posad institute of toys, at the Art and pedagogical museum of toys named after N.D. Bartram

It is important to find new ways to attract attention to the folk toy, making it interesting and in demand for modern children, youth, and adults. Organizing workshops, exhibitions, conferences, round tables, forums, as well as creating interactive educational programs, contributes to the popularization of traditional folk toys, their preservation for future generations in Russia and the Republic of Belarus.

⁶⁶ Figs. 5-7. Photos by the co-author of the article O.V. Ozerova.



Fig. 7. Workshop on making a traditional Belarusian doll at the Art and pedagogical museum of toys named after N.D. Bartram

The experience of the Rogachyov center of culture and folk art in making traditional toys from natural materials was applied in the educational activities of the Art and pedagogical museum of toys named after N.D. Bartram.

The revival of interest in folk toys in Russia and the Republic of Belarus is evidence that people are seeking authenticity, beauty and a connection to the past, developing new approaches to cooperation (Fig. 7).

The cooperation between two institutions – the Sergiev Posad institute of toys, a branch of the Russian university of traditional art crafts, and the Stren'kovsky district craft center of the Rogachyov center of culture and folk art of the Republic of Belarus – is an important contribution to bilateral relations and cultural interaction between the two countries. This cooperation promotes traditional toys, strengthens partner relationships and facilitates the exchange of information and experience in the face of modern global challenges. The Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus are not just brotherly sovereign states; they also share common Slavic roots, history and culture, which is the most important foundation for mutual understanding, respect, cooperation and trust between each other.

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