

REVITALIZING TRADITIONAL SPORTS AND GAMES IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Playing represents the most natural form of human movement, essential for the physical, cognitive, psychological, and social development of a child, and an excellent learning catalyst. Despite being recognized as a universal activity in different cultures and societies, it remains hidden, ignored, or insufficiently recognized. (Lavega et al., 2006). Throughout history, autochthonous games have been the only form of school PA rooted in tradition and, as a mirror of society, the messages they reflect are as varied and original as the societies that make them emerge (Lavega et al. 2006).

Physical education provides an excellent avenue for delivering Traditional Sports and Games activities. One of their main advantages is the variety of motor situations they offer with highly varied playing structures (Lavega, 2000). By providing a broader range of physical activities, schools can cater to their students' diverse interests and abilities, ensuring that everyone finds an activity they can enjoy and excel in (Siedentop & Van der Mars, 2022).

Hence, Parlebas (2005) stresses that TSGs should be reintegrated into PE from the early years as they may represent a focal point for the child's education progress and may play a double role: make motor skill learning activities within school settings meaningful and stimulating and include TSGs in outdoor contexts during free play (Cataldi et al., 2003) sharpening ingenuity and creativity through the construction of the game material itself and the adaptation of the space (Daniel and Sánchez Sánchez, 2003).



Case Study - Spain

Through a national legal framework, the Legislator encourages the practice and preservation of traditional motor activities. The regulation establishing minimum teaching standards for Primary Education at the national level (RD.157/2022) incorporates a specific competency in the area of Physical Education which refers to the teaching of traditional motor elements: *"4. Recognize and practice different recreational, sporting and artistic-expressive manifestations of motor culture appreciating their influence, their aesthetic and creative contributions to traditional and contemporary culture [...]. There are numerous contexts in which to*

develop this competency. Thus, traditional motor culture could be addressed through traditional and popular games, dances from traditional folklore, multicultural games, or world dances [...] in addition to addressing traditional sports and games, rooted in the environment or belonging to other cultures."

To assess this specific competence, the Legislator establishes an assessment criterion for the 2nd cycle of primary education: *"4.1 Actively participate in motor games and other artistic-expressive manifestations rooted in one's own culture, whether traditional or current, as well as*

diverse cultures, contextualizing their origin, their structure and their transmission over time, assessing their importance, impact, and influence on past and present societies." as well as an assessment criterion for the 3rd cycle of primary education: *"4.1 Actively participate in motor games and other artistic-expressive manifestations rooted in one's own culture, whether traditional or current, as well as diverse cultures, recognizing and transmitting its cultural value and potential as a space that generates constructive interactions between people of different origins and understanding the advantages of their preservation."*



The regulation establishing minimum teaching standards for Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO) (RD.217/2022), aligned with the above, states that *“as in the previous stage, traditional motor culture could be addressed through traditional and popular games, dances from traditional folklore, multicultural games or world dances, among others.”*

Assessment criteria related to this topic are therefore established: *“4.1 Manage participation in motor games and other artistic-expressive manifestations linked to both one’s own culture and other cultures, promoting their conservation and valuing their origins, evolution, and influence on contemporary societies.”* (1st and 2nd ESO); *“4.1 Understand and practice*

various modalities related to one’s own culture, traditional culture, or those originating from other parts of the world, identifying and contextualizing the social influence of sport in contemporary societies and valuing its origins, evolution, different manifestations, and economic-political interests” (3rd and 4th ESO).



Territorial regulations concretizing and adapting the national curricula to regional contexts further encourage the practice and preservation of traditional motor activities. Decree 106/2022 concretizing the Primary Education Curriculum establishes a series of basic competencies in the area of Physical Education, some of which are directly related to traditional physical activities i.e. “Valencian Popular, Traditional and Regional Dances for Children” (1st, 2nd, 3rd cycle of primary school), “Main Traditional Games: Valencian Cultural Heritage Games” (1st cycle), “World Games” (2nd cycle). Special emphasis is placed on a traditional sport, the Valencian Pilota (1st, 2nd, 3rd cycle). Decree

107/2022 concretizing the Secondary School Curriculum makes a true statement of intent in favor of traditional physical activities stating that *“The teaching of traditional sports and games within Physical Education helps students appreciate and value the cultural manifestations of human locomotion and adopt an open attitude toward cultural diversity”*. In this sense, the Legislator establishes a series of basic competences linked to the teaching of TSGs, “Native Popular Games” and “Popular World Games” (1st and 2nd years of compulsory secondary education) as well as the learning of Valencian Pilota (1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th years of mandatory secondary education).

Consequently, education institutions throughout Spain develop different learning situations addressing regulatory, technical-tactical, and sociological aspects of popular games, autochthonous games, traditional sports and games of their respective autonomous communities, traditional games of Spain and TSGs of the world and create innovative content and initiatives for enhancing pupils’ engagement (e.g. CEIP La Fonteta’s TSG website <https://rodrigoatienzaeduc.wixsite.com/mestrerod>, Promotion Programs of the *Escola Autònoma de Jocs Tradicionals* (FJETCV): *Cerrajero de Juegos*, *Calle de Juegos*, and *Olimpiada Escolar*).



Case Study - Italy

Traditional sports and games are not completely excluded yet not specifically integrated into the ministerial curricula and programs for physical education. Although there are no systematized curricular or extracurricular activities, within the free choice of teaching, the teacher can decide to include a traditional sport or game in a lesson.

At the national level, TSGs are regulated by the Italian Federation of Traditional

Games and Sports affiliated with the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI). Following the 2025 reclassification of FIGEST's traditional sports disciplines aiming at greater coherence and systematization, new categories have been established, i.e. Shooting TSGs, Rolling TSGs, Aosta Valley TSGs, Skittle-alike TSGs. Apart from presentations of regional TSGs in schools in Perugia, large scale interventions or competitions in the above disciplines have

not been identified. The Italian Bocce Federation, on the other hand, organizes a multitude of competitions and initiatives directed at schools, namely the Open Sports Days, Active Schools, the CONI Trophy, *Bocciando si Impara*, *Bocce in Casa*, SOFIA. The *Bocciando si Impara* initiative alone, recognized by the Italian Ministry of Education as good practice, gathers more than 25.000 participants each school year.



Case Study - Croatia

Through a national legal framework, the Physical Education Curriculum for Primary and Secondary Schools established by the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia, the Legislator acknowledges in section A of the Curriculum Key Areas - Kinesiological Theoretical and Motor Knowledge, *“the acquisition, refinement, and application of various kinesiological theoretical and motor skills whose mastery leads to the achievement of pupils’ competence, including physical literacy. [...] Within the components of this key area, traditional culture is to be transmitted, and national identity preserved”*. However, transversally the incorporation of TSGs into PE curricula greatly varies.

In Primorje Gorski Kotar County, TSGs are not formally blended into the PE syllabus, but rather implemented as extracurricular activities, initiatives, and elective actions thus enabling integration into the education system. Although their incorporation has not yet been standardized, there are educational institutions that attach great importance to their preservation, particularly, Bribir Primary School where TSGs are practiced within curricular and extracurricular activities, and the *Forgotten Children’s Games* project, a seven-episode series documenting traditional games from Bribir and Vinodol developed; Primary School Vežica Rijeka and Primary School Tribalj where TSGs are used during introductory and conclusive lesson stages as well as during School Days

as is the case of primary schools in Lovran and Kastav; Primary School Gornja Vežica Rijeka includes, to some extent, modified TSGs in lower grades while in subject-based PE focuses more on sports (variations of bocce). The PGŽ Bocce Federation places great emphasis on the *Bocce in Schools* and *Little Bocce Players* in Action initiatives, conducting regular presentations within PE in primary schools in Čavle, Kastav, Lovran, Matulji and Bribir and organizing multiple kids-only events. In collaboration with the PGŽ School Sport Federation, a pilot will be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of introducing traditional sports and games, particularly bocce, into primary schools’ programs in the form of interventional plans and competitions.



In addition to the above, several EU projects in the field of traditional sports and games have been implemented in the Primorje Gorski Kotar County, namely *TSG Heritage*, *INCLUSport*, *Bocce and Sport Camps for People with Disabilities*, *Bocce Together - Active Forever* and *Bocce from 7 to 70*, mostly promoting inclusivity and PA through TSG.

In the Istrian County the state of play is relatively similar: TSGs are fairly implemented in Pazin, Buzet, Labin, Nedešćina, Čepić, Potpićan, Svetvinčenat, Sveti Petar u Šumi,

Višnjan and Tar where around 200 primary school students adhere each year to the *Bocce in School* program, a 45-minute long session of fun bocce games and to the Regional Pljočkanje School Competition, both organized by their respective regional federations.

In Dalmatia, cultural identity, defined through the lens of historical and ancestral heritage, holds particular significance and is deeply rooted in tradition. Traditional sports and games, embedded in their essence, remain nurtured and preserved to this day.

In Split-Dalmatia County, schools from Sinj, Trilj, Cista Velika, Baška Voda, Srinjine, and Otok kod Sinja participate in polygon-type TSG school competitions jointly organized by the BSSDŽ and the regional School Sport Federation.

In Slavonia, bocce schools are present in Vinkovci and Vukovar while in Zagreb, besides the implementation of the *Boccia, pljočka and bulin - NEXT GENERATION TSG* project, no initiatives supporting TSG in PE practice have been identified.



BOCCIA
PLJOČKA
and
BULIN 2.0
NEXT GEN TSG
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While this report reiterates the significance of reintroducing traditional sports and games in physical education, it does not intend to discredit the value of contemporary physical activities. Traditional and modern sports have their respective merits, and striking a balance between them is essential in creating a comprehensive and engaging PE curriculum.



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