

INTRODUCTION: EARLIER EXPERIENCE OF COLLECTING AND RESEARCHING SCHOOL LORE IN ESTONIA AND SLOVENIA

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The current issue of the journal *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* was created as a collaboration between Estonian and Slovenian folklorists and ethnologists within the joint bilateral project, “Slovenian and Estonian Contemporary School Lore”. The main objective of the project was to analyse and compare the contemporary school lore, its collecting, use, and dynamics in two European countries with different geographical positions and characteristics, with a similar history, and no direct contact. The project focused on tradition and transformations of the folklore material, playfulness, and creativity in (new) formats, and on how they reflect the social reality that produces them. The project aimed to apply a new dynamic comparative approach from an intercultural as well as diachronic and synchronic point of view, which offers a unique and innovative perspective in folklore studies of Slovenia and Estonia.

School lore is folklore material that circles among schoolchildren mainly on the school (indoor and outdoor) premises, as well as folklore material that thematises school life. This material reflects the lifestyle, worldviews, and everyday issues of schoolchildren. It also shows what material transfers from one generation to another and has a potential to continue in time. Knowing that

schoolchildren are important informants for folklorists (see Stanonik 1984; Sutton-Smith 1999), it is not surprising that there have been many attempts, collecting campaigns, and interviews with the aim to get the material that circles in the relatively closed social group, i.e., among schoolchildren. However, an insight into two different countries also shows different traditions and successes. School lore collecting traditions are extremely different in Estonia and Slovenia: the former has been successful and therefore Estonians have a rich archive of school lore, while people in Slovenia have not been so collaborative in the collecting actions (for more detail see the article by S. Babič). Consequently, the school-lore archive of the Estonian Literary Museum (ELM) is quantitatively and qualitatively considerably better, more varied, and referential for school-lore studies.

In the Estonian case we can speak about more than 100 years of experience in collecting and researching school lore. Children appeared in the sphere of interest of Estonian folklorists already in the 1920s, when Walter Anderson, folklore professor at the University of Tartu, initiated a collection of children's songs (58,832 pages). In the 1930s, the Estonian Folklore Archives started to also collect material about children's fears (e.g., information of the beings with which adults used to frighten children; 16 volumes, 12,000 pages; see also Västriik 1997). In 1934–1935, the Estonian Folklore Archives started to collect children's games (22 volumes, 15,000 descriptions); the questionnaires were drawn up by folklorist Richard Viidalepp. In the 1930s, Matthias Johann Eisen collected data from schoolchildren on calendar holidays, family heritage, games, etc. The Soviet period was also important: some collecting actions were organised. Even after World War II, a number of surveys targeted at schoolchildren were carried out, using, for example, the children's magazine *Pioneer* (1958); local heritage, short forms of folklore, etc., were collected.

Unlike the Estonian collecting harvest, we cannot see that in the Slovenian case. There were some attempts in the 1950s though not successful. The emphasis was laid on children's games (collected by Slovenian folklorist Niko Kuret from 1945 to the 1980s). The questionnaires were sent to schools, but the number of returned answers was low. The conclusion of these attempts at that time, written down in annual reports, was just that optimism had to be strong and the work had to continue, but later results (from the 1970s onwards) do not report school lore collecting or any attempt to do it until the beginning of the twenty-first century.

On the other hand, Estonia continued the very successful path in collecting school lore. Significant cooperation with Finnish colleagues started in the

1970s. In the past 30 years we have had three collection campaigns in schools and a major one in kindergartens all over Estonia.

In 1992 a joint campaign of collecting school lore was launched in Estonia and Finland, which resulted in over 21,255 pages of diverse and valuable school lore material from the total of 1,797 respondents from 26 schools (see Kõiva 1995). Fifteen years later, in 2007, another campaign of collecting school lore was organised all over Estonia (Voolaid 2007); nearly 2,800 schoolchildren from 71 schools (grades 4–12) answered the questionnaire, the collection resulting in 15,600 pages of material. The third all-Estonian school lore collecting action took place in 2018 (see Hiimäe 2018), with a record number of participants: answers to questionnaires were sent by 3,717 respondents and answers were expected from the pupils of the 4th to 12th grades (incl. those from vocational schools); most of them answered electronically. Besides, an all-Estonian competition for nursery school lore collection was organised in 2011 (Voolaid 2012) and nearly one hundred teachers participated in this action.

The ELM still continues the tradition of school lore collecting and has even extended it to also involve diaspora communities. In 2021 a school lore collection competition for Canadian Estonians was organised in cooperation between the Estonian Literary Museum and the Estonian Museum Canada (VEMU) (see Voolaid & Noorhani 2022).

In Slovenia the collecting of school lore was suspended for some time. Only in 2015 another smaller school lore collection campaign was run; it was carried out to supplement the collection of riddles and therefore focused only on school jokes and riddles. A bigger one was launched in 2018, when the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology ZRC SAZU under the mentorship of the ELM sent e-questionnaires¹ to schools and families, though the result was quite poor (71 completed questionnaires). Although the answers were not many (which seems as a continuation of previous low contacts of educational institutions with the research ones), they were important and reflected differences and changes in material as well as indicated that times were different and needed different approaches.

In Estonia research into school lore has already produced impressive results: many research articles and collections of the material from different perspectives (e.g., Kõiva 1995, 1996, 2014; Kalmre 2010; Vissel 2004) and a large number of popular publications and collections have been published, whereas Slovenian school lore research has been more modest. Precisely for that reason bilateral projects are extremely advantageous: on the one hand researchers can share their knowledge, on the other the experiences and difficulties are discussed.

Therefore, the current issue of *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* encompasses different materials, approaches, topics of school and even children's lore. The issue discusses methodologies as well as the material itself. The material under discussion is both old and contemporary, which gives us an opportunity to see the shifts in topics and forms as well as worldviews of schoolchildren.

The issue starts with a comprehensive article by **Saša Babič** about school lore collecting in Slovenia, which was diametrically different from the Estonian case, being anything but fruitful. Contemporary collecting methods provided new opportunities but along with them also new thoughts on the material as well as new ways for reaching schoolchildren.

The issue continues with three articles discussing humour, creativity, and play in folklore among and about (school)children.

The article by **Barbara Turk Niskač** and **Katarina Šrimpf Vendramin**, "Play and Folklore in Children's Peer Cultures", examines children's creative production of and participation in a shared peer culture. Focusing on material on children's use of counting-out rhymes, faecal humour, and word play, gathered through participant observation and video ethnography in two Slovenian kindergartens, the article demonstrates the importance of social participation in peer groups from an early age and the alliances, conflicts, and power hierarchies involved.

Anastasiya Fiadotava touches on the topic of family folklore in the article "Children as Agents, Targets, and Intermediaries of Family Humour". Many humorous family memes are generated by children either consciously or unconsciously: humorous utterances, unexpected behaviour and funny mistakes are just a few examples. Many of children's idiosyncratic words and idioms that provoke laughter when they are originally uttered can go on to form long-standing parts of family folklore, inevitably losing some of their humorous flavour but still cherished by parents or other adult relatives as children grow up and stop using them. Plenty of family humour is also generated at children's expense. This aspect of family humour highlights the different status dynamics between children and their parents, many of whom tend to playfully tease their children to a greater extent than they do each other.

Piret Voolaid's article, "Representations of Distance Learning in the Memes of the First Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Humour as a Coping and Self-defence Strategy", presents creativity as a consequence of the pandemic crisis. The author shows that students who are the main creators of memes regard the humorous memes about distance learning as a form of communication which offers an alternative and multifaceted perspective on this important method of learning during lockdown.

The following two articles constitute a different section: they emphasise the role of the media, fear and adaptation to panic and its mirroring in games and tales.

Astrid Tuisk's article, "Children as Consumers and Co-creators of Cultural Products: The Impact of Foreign Films on Estonian Children's Culture in the 1950s", examines how the post-World War II trophy films, which differed from Soviet films in terms of their themes, ideas, presentation, and setting, became box-office hits and one of the sources on which the post-war generation built their gender identity. The films showed different perceptions and ideas, such as personal freedom and responsibility.

Reet Hiimäe and **Andrus Tins** present the contemporary material of school lore in the article "Suicide Games, Abandoned Houses, and Thirst for Danger: The Youth's Personal Experience Narratives and the Media's Moral Panics about Semi-Supernatural Challenges in Estonia". The article discusses the material that is not widely known in the general public, and even more difficult to approach: the dynamics of the media and real life in relation to the so-called dangerous folklore of teenagers, which includes, for example, contacts with aggressive (semi-)supernatural fear creatures, frightening experiences in abandoned houses, and notions of so-called suicide games.

The issue finishes with the article titled "Slovenian Folk Lullabies: Analysis of the Lullaby Texts and Their Functions" by **Vanja Huzjan**. The author analyses folk lullabies through the psychoanalytic view as the archaic form of calming down with rhythm and begging.

The aim of this issue of *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* is not only to bring to the reader new analyses of the material but also a reconsideration of how to reach the material and the creative methods to incorporate the heritage into schools, into the creative and learning processes. The discussion is never-ending, especially with the contemporary fast evolution of the digital world and rapid changes. On the one hand, the reconsideration of traditional archival material slowly disappearing from live circulation and on the other reconsideration of the very quick appearance of new topics and forms also give an opportunity to search for function-constants (lullabies) and methods for reading universal anthropological topics.

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NOTE

¹ See https://www.folklore.ee/kp/2017_18/slovenian/index.html, last accessed on 17 June 2022.

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