

## Functions of Toy and Play Museums in Turkey in terms of Intangible Cultural Heritage Museology

Somut Olmayan Kültürel Miras Müzeciliği Açısından Türkiye'deki  
Oyuncak ve Oyun Müzelerinin İşlevleri

Dilek İşler Hayırlı<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Children are the key point in acculturation process because the future and continuity of traditions belonging to a community depends partly on how effectively we transmit them. In this sense, in general museums and specifically museums of toy and play considered quite important for children's folklore are vital research topics for folklorists and educational scientists in terms of their cultural and educational aspects. The number of toy and museums have relatively increased in recent years and there are currently twenty-one museums of toy and play in Turkey. I visited most of them for the purposes of research and observation. The aim of this article is to define their mission, vision; discuss their cultural, economic, educational and political functions; analyze them in terms of such criteria as place, personnel, collection, advertisement, policies of administration, educational activities and finally to propose a model museum linking intangible cultural heritage perspectives with Turkish toy and play museums. It is important to create a report of their current situation to help them improve. This study was created with data gathered from the fieldwork conducted in Turkey from 2018 and 2019. As a result, it was found that some of the museums tend to fail reflecting the 21<sup>st</sup> century intangible cultural heritage museum ideals, which bind 'experience', 'cultural transmission' and 'learning' together. Some of them though have started to adopt very modern ways and techniques to both safeguard and transmit Turkish intangible cultural heritage at the same time.

**Keywords:** Intangible cultural heritage, museums, toy, play, culture

### Öz

Çocuklar kültürlenme sürecinde büyük öneme sahip toplumsal gruplardan biridir ve bir kültüre ait geleneklerin geleceği ve devamlılığı, onları bu gruba ne derece etkili aktarabildiğimize bağlıdır. Bu anlamda genel olarak müzeler, daha özel olarak çocuk folkloru için önemli görülen oyun ve oyuncak müzeleri, kültürel ve eğitim açılarından halkbilim ve eğitim bilimciler için değerli bir araştırma alanıdır. Son yıllarda Türkiye'de oyun ve oyuncak müzelerinin sayısında önemli artış görülmüştür ve şuanda toplam yirmi bir müze bulunmaktadır. Yüksek lisans tez çalışması için bu müzelerden çoğunu gözlem

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<sup>1</sup>M.A., Lecturer, Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, School of Foreign Languages, [dileksler@yahoo.com](mailto:dileksler@yahoo.com), ORCID 0000-0002-6338-7703

ve araştırma için ziyaret ettim. Makalenin de temel amacı, Türkiye’deki oyun ve oyuncak müzelerinin misyon ve vizyonunu belirlemek, kültürel, ekonomik, eğitimsel ve siyasi işlevlerini tartışmak yer, personel, koleksiyon, reklam, yönetim politikaları, eğitim aktiviteleri gibi kriterler açısından bunları değerlendirmek ve son olarak somut olmayan kültürel miras perspektifleri ile Türkiye’deki oyun ve oyuncak müzelerini birleştirecek yeni bir model müze önermektir. Dolayısıyla bunu yapabilmek için müzelerin mevcut durumlarını değerlendirmenin ve bir rapor oluşturma gerekliliği açıktır. Çalışmaya konu olan müzelere alan çalışması, 2018 ve 2019 yıllarında ziyaretlerle gerçekleştirilmiştir. Elde edilen sonuçlara göre müzelerden bazıları, ‘deneyim’, ‘kültürel aktarım’ ve ‘öğrenme’ kavramlarını birbirine bağlayan 21. yüzyıl somut olmayan kültürel miras müzeciliği yaklaşımlarını yansıtmamaktadır. Fakat yine bazılarıysa Türkiye’deki somut olmayan kültürel mirası ‘bağlamında yaşatmak’ ve aktarmak için yeni ve modern müzecilik yaklaşımları benimsemiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Somut olmayan kültürel miras, müzeler, oyun, oyuncak, kültür.

## Introduction

The very first toy and play museums were founded in Turkey around 1980s and 1990s like the one in *Urla* province of İzmir. It belonged to Dr. Musa Baran who was also an archeologist and founded the museum by himself exhibiting the toys that he and the children in the village called *Bademler* made. The year was 1983 and later on in 1990, Professor Bekir Onur created a new museum in the capital of Turkey, *Ankara*. These can be counted as the first steps for the toy and play museums. In fact, the first museums were only ‘toy’ museums because they only and rightfully focused on collecting, protecting and exhibiting the toys that were generally old and historical. The point of view that intangible cultural heritage museums emphasized developed a little bit later. 2000s have been very fruitful in terms of creating new museums of toy and play.

My study focuses on all these toy and play museums and holds the view that because the 20<sup>th</sup> century museum definition has drastically changed, museums need to embrace the ways brought by intangible cultural heritage museology which promotes interaction, experience, learning and culture transmission. The model intangible cultural heritage toy and play museum suggested here for Turkey combines safeguarding, exhibition and education activities with experience-based approach. Although Turkish toy and play museums have improved a lot, the need for more educational and interactive approach is obvious.

I used a couple of criteria while conducting the field research and analyzed the museums in the light of these. The criteria included the number and quality of the personnel, collection, how it is exhibited and used, research and education activities, publications, mission, function and type of the museums. The fieldwork lasted from August 2018 to January 2019 and because the museums are scattered all around Turkey, the visits were not continuous. Some of them could not be visited because of my work schedule at university. I was working at a private university where the permission process was quite difficult for an academic research. When I visited the museums, I conducted interviews with the personnel and the managers, participated in educational activities and talked to the visitors. When visit was not possible, the necessary information was gathered via mail, e-mail, phone calls and the personnel sent printed the necessary materials to me.

### **1. Toy and play museums and ICH**

From a pedagogical and educational perspective, toy and play museums should be places where children's discovery urge and curiosity is encouraged, where they can be creative and active, their critical thinking skills are boosted and feel themselves relaxed instead of no-touching places where children only look passively at the materials exhibited, get bored and leave the building. The very focus of this view is experience. Moreover, the experience focused museum approach does not support passive learning but creativity and active learning. From folkloristic and anthropological perspective, a toy and play museum is a great opportunity for a community to pass their traditions, knowledge, rituals and cultural memory on to the new and following generations. In this sense, museums should be living and dynamic institutions, which have collaboration with other national and international cultural and educational institutions.

Children's folklore is one of the subfields of folkloristics and the direct topic of this study and is defined as all the tangible and intangible material which is created both by children themselves and adults (Özdemir, 2006). It is directly connected to intangible culture, which in time and with many different agreements has evolved from protecting things to an encompassing and human oriented perspective focusing on knowledge, know-how and practices of people (Matsuura, 2004: 4-5). UNESCO and other institutions have taken many steps for this change. The view that

holds that intangible cultural heritage is not dead and passive but instead recreated and renewed by the new generations has become common and popular (Alivizatou, 2008: 48). People especially families with children and institutions like schools have begun to prefer museums where intangible cultural heritage is taught in a fun, active and experience-based environment. It will be considerable to claim that typical old fashioned museums where such activities as touching, playing and running is forbidden have been preferred less and less because of their limiting structure. The research conducted with families in 2002 is a very good example to show what parents and teachers think about traditional museums and interactive museums. Here is the table taken from Adams (Marianna Adams, 17–18 May 2002: 3):

Interactive- traditional museums	Non-interactive – experience focused museums
Exciting, enjoyable, Interesting way to demonstrate things, Colourful, Touch, feel, hold, handle Get involved, participate	Boring, Keep off, Look-but-don't-touch, Nothing to do
Explore and play, Experiment, Use all senses, Explainers (social interaction)	Passive Look, read Labels
Appreciate, think, understand, Get an insight, More educational, easier to learn Learn more and in different ways	Cannot absorb anything
Aimed at children, Exhibits are unbreakable Children are safe here, Freedom of movement, Relaxing	Adult-centred Keep an eye on the children Afraid of breaking things (behavioural & physical constraints)
Time flies (flow) Stay longer Remember (long-term effect)	Get in, get out

As we can see, the museums in general are seen places to explore, experiment, touch, feel and get inspired. So, learning, thinking and acculturation are expected in a free, exploratory and enjoyable atmosphere. I took this research into consideration while conducting field work and analyzing the museums of toy and play in Turkey and used the given data as a checklist in my study.

## 2. Different types of museums

There are no clear-cut definitions regarding what is a play museum, toy museum, play and toy museum, children's museum and childhood museum. These can be separated from each other with their content, goals, collection, mission, and structure. When the examples all around the world are analyzed, it can be said that the places where experience is the focus, exhibiting collection is not important and even there is no collection to exhibit, informal educational events and exhibitions are regularly organized are called children's museums. The Association of Children's Museums founded in 1962 put forward that children's museums should create opportunities for children to play according to their age, needs and development, follow the technological developments and support cultural transmission and learning (About ACM, 2019). Children's Museum in Pittsburg, USA and Canadian Children's Museum are two good examples for this type. Play museums on the other hand focus on play; help children spend quality time with their peers and parents. The Strong National Museum of Play is one of the best examples. Thirdly, Childhood museums include toys, clothes, cribs, pacifiers, beds, home furniture, dollhouses, board games, photographs, books, documents, paintings, and music that are created by and for children and adults. They mostly aim to collect and exhibit. Fourthly, toy museums collect and exhibit toys from different cultures, times and their common purpose is to organize educational events to spread toy culture. The exhibition is the main focus again. Toy and play museums which are quite new in Turkey try to combine two things: the active, experience and activity-oriented approach of play museums and exhibiting, collecting and protecting activities of toy museums. There are many examples of toy and play museums in Turkey and in other countries but as I will mention in the following pages, the approach with which they were created, and the end result are not in line with each other.

### 3. Methods and data collection

The research was carried out in museums called with different names like toy and play museum, toy museum, play museum, children's toy museum and even children's playhouse and toy museum. The names and details of these museums are given in the following table.

Name of the museum	Year of Foundation	The City/Country	The Founder
Ankara University Toy Museum	1990	Ankara	Ankara University and Prof. Bekir Onur
Children's Play and Toy Museum	1983	İzmir	Archeologist Musa Baran
İstanbul Toy Museum	2005	İstanbul	Poet Sunay Akin
Gaziantep Play and Toy Museum	2013	Gaziantep	Municipality
Antalya Toy Museum	2011	Antalya	Municipality
Ümran Baradan Play and Toy Museum	2004	İzmir	Ceramic Artist Ümran Baradan
Ankara Rahmi M. Koç Museum (Toy Section)	2005	Ankara	Rahmi V. Koç Museology and Culture Foundation
Düştepe Play Museum	2017	İstanbul	Municipality
Universal Values Children's Museum	2017	Ankara	Municipality
Çamlidere Chuf Chuf Train Play and Toy Museums	2017	Ankara	Municipality

Anatolia Toy Museum	2017	Antalya	
Kyrenia American University Children's toy Museum/Arabahmet Toy Museum	2014	Cyprus	Kyrenia American University-Arabahmet Region Development Company
Celil Atasever Toy Museum	2016	Osmaniye	Korkut Ata University-Celil Atasever
Adana Museum Complex - Children's Museum Section	2017	Adana	Municipality
Children's Playhouse and Toy Museum	2016	Malatya	Municipality
Canik Toy Museum	2017	Samsun	Samsun Municipality
Çekmeköy Toy Museum	-	İstanbul	-
Mahmutbey Toy Museum	2013	İstanbul	-
The Tofaş Museum of Cars and Anatolian Carriages - Toy Exhibition	2002	Bursa	Jean Nahum, A. Naim Arnas Prof. Önder Küçükerman-supported by Koç Holding
Karşıyaka Universal Children's Museum and Education Campus	2017	İzmir	Municipality

Of twenty museums, I conducted fieldwork in fifteen museums. I tried to contact with the museum personnel in other museums that I could not visit because of the work schedule of the university where I was working at the time. I conducted the field work in different times, so there were cases when I could not find any personnel available to talk to me. In these cases, I made observations, talked to the visitors, gathered information from them and took the printed material and photos of the museums. Some museums like Universal Values Children's Museum in Ankara were not open for individual visit, so I contacted the manager personally and made an interview and museum tour with educators and experts of the museum which was a hard-to-find opportunity.

I conducted this research for a Master's thesis at Hacettepe University, Department of Turkish folkloristics and thesis committee found it successful. My supervisor Prof. Nebi Özdemir suggested a list of criteria to be able to analyze the toy museums in Turkey and it can be found in the article called *Museum-Child Relationship and Some Considerations about Center of Children Culture* written by Prof. Özdemir. After I listed the toy museums in the country, I realized that most of the museums have added the word 'play' in their names. Therefore, I decided to add 'play' in thesis scope and title. The criteria includes analyzing mission, goals, function, personnel (founders, visitors etc.), collection, research and educational activities of museum management (organizing seminars, conferences, etc.) and publication (printing books, booklets etc.) in toy and play museums. As a result, the criteria listed here is used as a framework for the research. While analyzing the structure and functions of the museums, intangible cultural heritage museum approach is never abandoned and to what extent they serve the purpose of cultural preservation is discussed.

#### **4. The structural analysis of toy and play museums in Turkey**

When we look at the names of the museums, most of them have titles 'toy museum', 'toy and play museum', 'play house' and 'play museum'. However, we have seen that the names of the museums do not reflect the content because in some museums, there were only toys and the museum design was for adult view not for children. Some of the ones with the name 'toy museum' served as educational play houses that collaborate with the surrounding schools and focus on instructive games and plays. So the names here should be changed into 'Activity house', '..museum and atelier',



‘...museum and education center’ (Özdemir, 2003: 4). The name choice is crucial. During the field work, one of the visitors said that they ‘expected a place where their children run and play actively because the name of the museum indicated’ that but they ‘disappointed because there were only objects to see there’. The founders can take the content, the purpose, the audience, architecture or specialization into consideration when they decide the name. As we can see the names in the table, there is no reference to Turkish intangible culture; however, toy and play museums are correct places to keep culture alive and pass it on. In addition to that, localizing the content will serve the purpose better.

Almost all the museums indicated their mission as to help their visitors have fun and learn with interactive content and enriched materials, to boost the creativity, critical thinking and curiosity in children. These are for sure perfect missions for a modernized toy or play museum, however, toys and plays are integral part of both adult and children folklore. Because toys and plays are inseparable from culture and material side of them are exhibited and protected in most of these museums, then the immaterial know-how part should find itself a place in these museums. The design of toy and play museums should be in line with the approach which supports that these are alternative educational environments together with cultural preservation and exhibition spaces, so in order to protect our past and pass it on the following generations, classical museums and intangible cultural heritage museology should be integrated (Kuşhan, 2014: 17).

What we have said until here does not mean that intangible cultural heritage is totally ignored, and no cultural and educational activities are organized. This is definitely not the thing claimed here. There are activities and organizations that focus on intangible cultural heritage of Turkey, but these are not enough. In another museum, the mission and slogan was to help visitors ‘touch, see, hear and smell’ during their visit, but for example for the section where children can experience a plane simulation, there were not enough and suitable clothes for children from different ages and sizes. Other than that, there was nothing to ‘smell’ in the museum. It was observed that some museums claimed they are hands-on museums, some of them are so but hands-off approach was seen in many museums.

During the field work, we have seen that only one museum (Istanbul Toy Museum) collaborate with European Museum Academy, International

Council of Museums (ICOM), TOYCO and International Association of Children in Museums. Other museums should also start new collaborations with national institutions such as Turkish Historical Association, The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey, Technology and Industry Ministries and international institutions like ICOM, UNESCO or UN.

Among the museums examined, it was observed that Ankara Rahmi M. Koç Museum and Karşıyaka Universal Children's Museum and Education Campus used educational booklets belonging to the museum and prepared by the museum.

## 5. Intangible cultural heritage education in museums

In displaying the intangible cultural heritage, it is a more correct approach to exhibit the cultural element in its place if possible, if not in the most realistic environments. Living cultural heritage cannot be detached from its context like the object display practice in classical museology, as it gains meaning with the culture it is attached to. According to functional folklore theory, the text itself is meaningless unless it is presented to an audience (Çobanoğlu, 2015: 281). In this context, it would be a more meaningful and contemporary approach for the play and toy museums to be taught in the context of each toy and/or on the foundations of intangible cultural heritage, as opposed to the context-free, object display-oriented approach as in traditional archeology-art history museums.

In addition to the missions and objectives of play and toy museums such as preservation and education, the cultural transmitter role should not be forgotten. Play and toy museums should be designed and created as places where intangible cultural heritage is introduced, transferred, and experienced. For example, elements of our cultural heritage such as traditional Turkish toys, fairy tale grandma (Masal Ninesi), Fatoş toys (Fatoş Oyuncakları), Anatolian toys, Kaleiçi Street sections, Hacıvat and Karagöz theme in the outdoor area are exhibited in the Anatolian Toy Museum. However, increasing the diversity and frequency of the activities that will enable them not only to be exhibited but also experienced and transferred within the museum will be an important service to the transfer of intangible cultural heritage. For example, The National Museum of Finland is among the most important museums in terms of activity in transferring intangible cultural heritage. It is possible to ride horses, grind coffee, weave rugs, build a traditional Finnish house, and listen to traditional Finnish music in the

'Workshop Vintti' section of the museum, where national Finnish history is conveyed through temporary, permanent, traveling collections and events. In Turkish society where horses are so important, the lack of themes, activities and trainings on horse riding culture in play and toy museums is an important drawback. In The National Museum of Finland, the architectural heritage is also transferred. As in Finland, it is possible to organize similar events, especially in the Black Sea region museums, where the wooden masonry architecture is seen (Çiftçi, 2015: 78).

## 6. The functional analysis

Considering that society is not separated from culture and culture from society, it is clear that unprotected memory will be erased, and there may be erosions in the sense of belonging and identity in the society. Here Shils's argument comes to mind that tradition is possible with a people who choose to keep it alive (Shils, 2003: 113). According to him, tradition and, accordingly, memory are not a phenomenon that can create and maintain itself. In the same sense, the culture of remembering aims to continue social responsibility and is based on a group (Demir, 2017: 29). According to Yoshida, museums are not places where only tangible cultural heritage is preserved; they are places where also intangible cultural heritage is transferred and created, and more importantly, they can be used not only for the legacy of the past but also to build the future (Yoshida, 2004: 109-112). Museums are institutions that can produce solutions and application models in terms of keeping intangible cultural heritage alive and transferring it to future generations (Nalcioğlu, 2018: 336). At the same time, museums have functions that stimulate memory, trigger new discussion environments and topics, highlight community identity, and add a sense of belonging (Sandell, 2007). Play and toy museums are places of acculturation, culture and enculturation. It helps the individual to learn the tangible and intangible elements of the society he/she lives in and to learn the cultural identity of the individual. All these can be counted as the cultural functions of the museums each of which is fundamental and vital.

## Conclusion

Among the museums analyzed, for example the Istanbul Toy Museum is the industrial museum for exhibiting toy industry products; ethnography museum for displaying handmade and cultural toys; the archaeological museum, as it displays toys dating back 300 years. It would not be wrong to

say that because it only exhibits toys, it has features of toy museum. Although this is not the purpose of the museum, the structure where play and toy can be used as a tool for the transfer of intangible cultural heritage will be able to respond to current needs by guiding the new generation not to forget its identity in the 21st century in which all cultures are intertwined.

There is no contact information such as websites and e-mail addresses of some of the play and toy museums. Due to the distance factor, potential visitors who cannot visit these museums cannot obtain information about these museums. This situation makes us question the reasons why museums were opened. It would be a better approach to promote these museums more actively in order to increase the interest and visit to the city. The number of museums without social media and websites is high. It has been seen in museums in different countries that great importance is attached to all kinds of publications such as books and worksheets and these are used as educational materials. Even for temporary exhibitions set up inside the museums, qualified publications are produced by the experts. Considering that many activities in the play and toy museums are organized in Turkey, the importance of quality education material preparation is obvious.

While museums are designed, children and their families living in that region should be reached through a questionnaire, and the expectations of children and families should be determined through a needs analysis.

The main purposes of play and toy museums to transfer intangible cultural heritage are to teach and convey traditions, to give children the awareness of the past and the future, to support the development of creativity, and to enable different generations to understand each other. National heritage consists of not only monuments, objects and sites but also living forms of cultural expression. Since plays and toys, which are cultural creations in this sense, are important elements of the intangible cultural heritage, toy and play museums should also evolve into intangible cultural heritage museums.

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