
EDUCATION AND INOVATION AS A DRIVER FOR RURAL DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, authors started from the hypothesis that innovations contribute to creativity and that children become more aware of in what way they can contribute to the development of rural areas. With children, play is important, and games that strengthen the imagination and encourage children to think for themselves are one of the best ways to encourage making future, strategic decisions. The challenge was to test the game "Tesla" on older school age children from 12 to 14 years old from rural areas. 138 children from five rural schools on Fruška Gora were examined. The results showed that children from rural areas, with the help of smart devices, played the game at the same level as children from any world metropolis. What's more, through the game, the children showed awareness of the importance of the village, staying in the village and what is needed for the village to "live".

Introduction

When it is said education, what most people think of is learning. It takes place in schools from primary education to education in high schools and colleges. However, such education represents the basis and belongs to formal education. It is not the only form of education.

In addition to this form, there is also informal education. This is education that includes different courses for different professions, training within the company adapted to the

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requirements of the same, permanent education or continuous learning during work, education of “new” personnel (animators, consultants, moderators, “guest relation” informants, etc.) , or “new” education of existing occupations (education with new techniques), education of the population, and others (Flynn and Whiten, 2010). This form of education most often takes place in a new way with many elements of psychology, communication skills, tacit knowledge, planning specific jobs, writing projects and the like (Broesch et al., 2011; Gonul et al., 2018). In doing so, the acquired knowledge represents a starting point and a basis for further independent upgrading. The interactive game “Tesla” is just such a “tool” that can be used to activate children’s imagination, influence their creativity and willingness to come to the most adequate solution in a constructive way. This is an educational board game that challenges children to think on the spot and make strategic decisions. By introducing them to a world where everything depends on their decisions, children behave more maturely and show a certain amount of seriousness and businesslike (Sheridan et al., 2016).

The paper started from the initial hypothesis that innovations contribute to creativity and that children become more aware of that in what way they can contribute to the development of rural areas. Children in villages have the same predispositions for playing games and learning with the help of the game “Tesla”, which in this case served as an “innovative tool” to encourage creativity. On the other hand, we wanted to see if children at that age are aware of the importance of staying in villages, the development of rural destinations and what are the strong and weak sides of rural life. It wanted to see if innovations in education could contribute to the development of rural destinations and how to improve the strengths and overcome all the shortcomings? Innovative learning represents the “backbone” of progress (Lillard, 1993; McGuigan et al., 2017), because only by keeping up with innovations, it is possible to improve oneself and society (Schmidt et al., 2011). Children are more ready than adults for innovation. They were born in a world where technology and progress are part of everyday life. It is necessary to influence the fact that children, using educational programs and games, improve their knowledge and their environment. The problem of Serbian villages is that young people mostly leave them (Vujko et al., 2021). However, innovations should contribute to staying in villages, returning to villages and developing rural destinations as desirable places for young people to live.

For the purposes of this research, a research survey method was used, where 138 questionnaires were taken into analysis, and the research was conducted in five villages on Fruška Gora, in the period from March to May 2023. Detailed analysis and processing of research data confirmed the initial hypothesis. The Chi - square test (Pearson Chi - Square Test) was used. In addition to research data, the authors used available statistical and other secondary documentation.

Literature review

Education is the key to success, there is no doubt about that, but if during that process one does not work on stimulating the creative part of the brain, i.e. the right brain

hemisphere, then there is not much benefit from that process. The right hemisphere of the brain is called the analog brain and controls three-dimensional sense, creativity, imagination, intuition and artistic senses. Scientists (Cutting et al., 2011; Carr et al., 2016) agree that it is necessary to stimulate both sides of the brain to achieve results. They also agree that through various innovative processes during the educational process is stimulated the right side of the brain - so, the side that is in charge of creativity. Innovations are not only the basis of changes in the traditional sense of the word, but are responsible for human incredible success, starting with the invention of fire, and ending with a diverse range of products, services, value systems, and technology.

According to Carr et al., (2016) Childhood innovations appear in a number of domains: games, pretend play, drawing, storytelling, and more general language. Innovation does not have to be something very big. On the contrary, even a small change in the course of an established routine constitutes an innovation capable of making a visible change.

Children are especially “sensitive” to innovations and are able to react to them in an incredible way. It is enough to give them space and observe the change. Games as a tool of innovation make a particularly interesting tactic to stimulate creativity in children. In that case, numerous ideas are observed that are the product of using the right side of the brain. Scientists agree that games have the ability to help children make decisions more easily and creatively and come up with projects to improve the space they live in (Care et al., 2016).

Scientists agree (Defeyter & German, 2003; Ilić et al., 2022; Hruschka et al., 2018; Kline et al., 2018) that children will react equally if they have the same conditions. If the work requires the Internet, the children will have the same conditions for work whether they are from rural or urban areas. However, as creativity and strategic thinking are influenced by the experience gained in the environment in which the child is located, scientists claim that children from villages will have more constructive solutions for improving life in villages.

According to Lancy (2010), children have a more developed imagination and ability to create creative solutions than adults. You just have to “listen” to them. In his next work, Lancy (2016) believes that children are able to innovate even the most banal thing because they see everything through “rose-colored glasses”. If they are given the opportunity to help, they will certainly do so. The development of rural destinations is possible based on the application of some constructive solutions designed by children, especially at an older age (Legare & Nielsen, 2015).

Every job requires creativity for being done the best way, so people who have the ability to think like this are the ones who lead the world into the future. Every child has creativity in him and the task of non-formal education is to help the child to develop imagination into a creative mind. Some authors (Neldner et al., 2017) believe that creativity is the freest form of self-expression and that children do not need a lot of stimulations to show their creative side. Children are satisfied and fulfilled when they can express themselves openly, and especially when they know that what they have to

say is being heard. The creative ability, creating of something from personal feelings and experiences, can reflect and nurture a child's emotional health.

When it comes to non-formal education, it is important to introduce games that encourage creativity. They help children express themselves and show in the best way how useful members of society they can be. Children perceive things with their heart and therefore it is important to consult them (Neldner et al., 2019; Manić et al., 2022). According to Nielsen (2013), children are considered children whose main role is to play, but if they are given the opportunity to solve some task, children can be very constructive and creative.

Games like "Tesla" help children see the world through the eyes of their experience and express themselves in a creative way (Rawlings & Legare, 2021). In this way, it is possible to solve certain problems in a timely manner, such as life in the countryside. In most cases, young people leave the villages, and if their words are not taken seriously, if the problems imposed by modern trends are not addressed and innovations are not introduced in time in education and life, the villages will remain deserted. The fate of such villages is almost certainly sealed (Rogoff, 2018).

The research methodology

The research was conducted in five villages on Fruška Gora in Vojvodina (Ledinci, Rakovac, Čerević, Susek and Sviloš). These are total of 127 children in higher grades of primary schools, from 12 to 14 years old. The children were presented with the interactive game "Tesla", adapted to their age and interests, and then they were asked 12 open questions, to which they had to answer as honestly as possible. The paper started from the initial hypothesis that innovations contribute to creativity and that children become more aware in what way they can contribute to the development of rural areas. The children were first introduced to the game "Tesla" and how it works. The children were very interested in the game, and particularly mattered was that the game is multidimensional and encourages creativity. In the game, everything depended on themselves. After "playing", the children were asked a group of 9 open questions, to which they gave honest, creative and very interesting answers. The questions were grouped into three groups. The first three questions were related to their perception of villages and rural areas.

Those questions were: 1a. What is the difference between life in the country and life in the city? 2a. Is there a difference between children in villages and children in cities? 3a. What are the main advantages of living in the countryside? The second three questions were related to the real state of life in the countryside. Here the children were asked the following questions: 1b. What are the cultural and entertainment facilities in the villages? 2b. How do people in villages preserve traditions? 3b. What makes you happy? The third group of questions was their vision of the village in the future, that is, what they would do to improve life in the village to make them stay in the village or return after graduating from the Faculty. 1c. How would you improve the living conditions in

the countryside? 2c. How would you reduce the differences between the countryside and the city? 3c. How can villages contribute to the living of people in cities? 4c. In what ways can innovation contribute to a better life for people in villages? 5c. How important is innovation-based education in education? 6c. How did a game you played help you realize that you can do anything you wish?

Respondents' answers are grouped by similarity and are presented as such in the research results.

Two groups of statistical analyzes were used: descriptive statistics (description of the group of respondents, with obtained parameters - frequencies, mean values), inference statistics (making conclusions and testing hypotheses). One of the procedures for analyzing the obtained data was the Chi-square test (Pearson Chi-Square Test). This test is a very practical test which served to determine whether some obtained (perceived) frequencies (answers of male respondents compared to answers of female respondents) deviate from the frequencies that were expected. In this test was asked if there is a connection between these two variables and the probability of connection. In the paper, it was assumed that there would be no difference in the answers of respondents of both sexes, but in order to verify that assumption (hypothesis), this test was applied. Statistically significant differences are taken for those having $p < 0.05$.

Results and discussion

The analysis showed that almost twice as many girls (90) than boys (48) participated in the research. This was expected, because girls at this age are much more open and mature for conversation (Knight, 2013). Before conducting the survey, the children were familiar with the game "Tesla", when they are enabled a creative approach to giving an answer. What the authors noticed was that the children were relaxed after the game and that they energetically approached giving answers. These were exactly the required prerequisites for good research.

Table 1. Gender of respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Male	48	34.8
	Female	90	65.2
	Total	138	100

Source: Authors' calculations

Similar answers are grouped, so in this paper, a certain grouping of answers, based on similarity, was presented. Looking at table 2, it can be concluded that children from all villages gave very uniform answers, percentage wise. The group with the most answers was the commitment to the society members in the villages. The second was the fact that there is much more greenery in the villages than in the cities. At the start, the children singled out two basic indicators of the quality of life in rural areas: household behavior and living in greenery (Zečević et. al., 2022).

Table 2. The difference between life in the countryside and in the cities

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
What is the difference between life in the country and life in the city?	No difference	7	12	19
	Life in the countryside is healthier	7	8	18
	The air is cleaner in the villages	9	5	14
	Food is healthier in villages	7	8	18
	In the villages, everyone knows each other and greets	9	20	29
	The villages have much more greenery and people live in houses	3	22	25
	People in villages as well as people in cities use the Internet	6	15	15
Total		48	90	138

Source: Authors' calculations

By looking at table 3, it can be seen that there is a statistically significant difference in the responses of respondents in relation to gender because $p=0.000$. This is attributed to the fact that there are many more female respondents at the start, so the answers given by girls are also more diverse.

Table 3. Pearson Chi-Square

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	26,156 ^a	6	,000

Source: Authors' calculations

The answers in table 4 show the children's opinion about the differences between their peers in cities and whether, in their opinion, there are any. Here, quite uniform answers were given, so table 5 does not show a statistically significant difference in the answers, in relation to gender. Among the most interesting answers, the "closeness" of children in villages stood out, because in villages everyone knows each other and most children live in multi-member families, which in itself is a characteristic of villages (Vujko et al., 2021).

Table 4. Difference between children in villages and cities

		Gender		Total
		Male	Male	
Is there a difference between children in villages and children in cities?	Children in villages are more dexterous	4	12	16
	Children in villages all know each other	13	27	40
	Children in villages live with many people (grandparents, sisters, brothers) in households	19	14	33
	Children in the villages help their parents in the fields	1	15	16
	Children in villages learn to drive earlier because they drive a tractor early	4	11	15
	Children in the villages know how to light a fire by themselves	7	11	18
Total		48	90	138

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 5. Pearson Chi-Square

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	14,636 ^a	5	,012

The main advantage of living in the villages, according to the children, is healthy food, a healthy life and respect for tradition (Table 6). Scientists agree just on this point, that “health”, “homemade food”, tradition and the like are the main reasons for visiting and staying in villages (Zečević et al., 2021).

Table 6. Advantages of living in the countryside?

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
What are the main advantages of living in the countryside?	The village has healthier air	1	15	16
	The village has healthier food	13	21	34
	In the countryside, everything is homemade	19	10	29
	The tradition is nurtured in the villages	1	28	29
	People in the villages are never hungry because they produce everything themselves	7	8	15
	There are many animals in the villages and everyone can have many pets	7	8	15
Total		48	90	138

Source: Authors' calculations

Statistical significance was also observed in this question, $p=0.000$ (Table 7).

Table 7. Pearson Chi-Square

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	32,417 ^a	5	,000

Source: Authors' calculations

Statistical significance was also observed in this question, as it is important for children to play and have fun, so the next group of questions related to cultural and entertainment facilities in the villages (Table 8). Obviously, the children also showed the inside of their families with their answers, so it was recorded that many older women (mothers, grandmothers, aunts, etc.) go to women's associations and thus empower themselves (Maksimović et al., 2019). It is a very important component of life in the villages, because a “strong” and satisfied woman is the pillar.

Table 8. Facilities in the villages

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
What are the cultural and entertainment facilities in the villages?	In the villages we have manifestations	3	9	12
	In the villages, women socialize in women's associations	14	27	41
	In the villages we have KUDs and we travel and art societies come to us	19	16	35
	In the villages we have “moba” and we help each other. That's fun.	1	13	14
	We have knitting, weaving and other crafts classes	6	14	20
	The boys play football and have matches every week	5	11	16
Total		48	90	138

The non-existence of statistical significance in the answers shows the degree of maturity in children, in relation to gender, given that $p=0.44$ (Table 9).

Table 9. Pearson Chi-Square

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11,387 ^a	5	,044

Source: Authors' calculations

Another advantage of living in villages is tradition. It is really very important that children recognize this as a comparative advantage of living in villages, but also as a way to develop rural areas. Customs, folklore, national costumes, but also ecologically grown food and products made from such raw materials, represent the real treasure of life in the countryside and the development of rural areas (Vuković et al., 2019).

Table 10. Preserving traditions in the villages

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
How do people in villages preserve traditions?	They make traditional food	2	13	15
	They play folklore and wear national costumes	13	23	36
	They stick to customs	22	17	39
	They cultivate the land in a traditional way	2	14	16
	They nurture old crafts	3	14	17
	They pass the tradition from generation to generation	6	9	15
Total		48	90	138

Source: Authors' calculations

Statistical significance was observed in the answers to this question, in relation to the respondents' answers (Table 11).

Table 11. Pearson Chi-Square

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16,995 ^a	5	,005

Source: Authors' calculations

If we consider happiness as something that represents the essence of life (Busseri and Quoidbach, 2021), then it is really interesting what the children from the village answered when they were asked about happiness. Helping parents and "playing games" were the two most common answers. This shows that children in villages are absolutely the same as children in cities, that is, with adequate conditions (internet) they have the same opportunity to do the same things. This is in favor of the development of rural areas, because knowing this information, the Internet is and must be the right of everyone, wherever lives.

Table 12. Happiness

		Gender		Total
		Male	Male	
What makes you happy?	Hanging out with friends	6	12	18
	Helping parents in the fields and playing with animals	11	22	33
	Playing games in free time	14	14	28
	Playing sports	5	20	25
	Learning new things	8	12	20
	Cycling	4	10	14
Total		48	90	138

Source: Authors' calculations

No statistically significant difference was shown in relation to the answers, but that was expected, because of course, boys and girls have different interests regarding some things (Table 13).

Table 13. Pearson Chi-Square

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5,792 ^a	5	,327

Source: Authors' calculations

And as far as this question is concerned, the children gave different answers in relation to gender, so no statistically significant difference was observed here either (Table 15). However, the children agree that “events” are the key to the development of villages and rural areas, as well as that tourism is a way to develop the village and for people in the villages to get a job, which automatically means staying of young people in the villages as well as the return of people to the villages (Vujko et al., 2018).

Table 14. . Improvement of living conditions in the countryside

		Gender		Total
		Male	Male	
How would you improve the quality of life in the countryside?	It should be enable more work for people in the countryside	8	13	21
	People need to engage in tourism and let other people into their households	17	26	43
	There should be more manifestations such as cobasiades, slaniniades and the like	16	29	45
	Some male and female singers should be brought to hold concerts in villages	7	22	29
Total		48	90	138

Source: Authors' calculations

The results that can be seen in table 14 show the opinion of children about the possibilities of improving life in the villages, that is, the rural development of destinations. The children agree that events are the key to life in villages, and that rural tourism is the backbone of that development.

Table 15. Pearson Chi-Square

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1,990 ^a	3	,574

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 15. shows that there is no statistically significant difference $p=0.574$.

Table 16. Reducing differences between villages and cities

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
How would you reduce the differences between the countryside and the city	Children from cities should spend more time in villages	45	90	135
	I don't know	3	0	3
Total		48	90	138

Source: Authors' calculations

To find a solution to the answers we saw in tables 2 and 4, almost all children agreed that children from cities (people, in general) should spend more time in villages. Building on the previous question and the answer given regarding the development of rural tourism (Table 14), the way how children could spend more time in villages is clear, but also the direction of development of rural areas. Rural tourism and the development of rural tourism are a constructive solution. Here too, the answers are uniform, so it is very commendable that the children are thinking in a constructive way. The data in the following table show that statistically significant difference does not exist in relation to gender (Table 17).

Table 17. Pearson Chi-Square

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5,750 ^a	1	,016

Source: Authors' calculations

Innovations affect life in every sense, so on children and people in villages. Networking, cooperation, association and connection represent the essence of an innovative worldview (Žarnauskaitė, 2023). The Internet represents a “window to the world” and today, knowing how to work with computers and using the Internet is the “new literacy” (Beck et al., 2012). Therefore, it is normal that the children in the villages highlighted the Internet as one of the greatest innovations of humanity, which is additionally innovated and developed every day. The Internet, properly used, represents a base for innovative learning (Carpenter and Nielsen, 2008). The Internet provides opportunities for people to see how people live and work anywhere on the planet (Beck et al., 2016). Looking at table 19, it can be seen that there is no statistically significant difference, given that $p=0.246$.

Table 18. Contribution of innovations to a better life

		Gender		Total
		Male	Male	
In what ways can innovation contribute to a better life for people in villages?	The Internet enables people to learn something new	6	19	25
	People in the villages can see how other people in the villages live and work	19	23	42
	New recipes can be seen	13	32	45
	The Internet provides the opportunity for connect and meet	10	16	26
Total		48	90	138

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 19. Pearson Chi-Square

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4,150 ^a	3	,246

Source: Authors' calculations

The results that can be seen in tables 20 and 22 show the children's attitude towards the game "Tesla", which the children played before the start of the test. It was something completely new, which helped the children to relax and to approach answering the questions in a creative way (Boyette, 2016). Bearing in mind the children's enthusiasm for the game "Tesla", their answers are clear, in which most children answer that education based on innovations in education is very important and desirable.

Table 20. Importance of education based on innovations in education

		Gender		Total
		Male	Male	
How important is innovation-based education in education?	It is very important	45	90	135
	I don't know	3	0	3
Total		48	90	138

Source: Authors' calculations

The data seen in Table 21 show that there is no statistically significant difference, $p=0.016$

Table 21. Pearson Chi-Square

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5,750 ^a	1	,016

Source: Authors' calculations

Children's opinion about the game "Tesla" is in accordance with everything that has been said so far. There were many answers here, but all of them were grouped together under the answer: "It helped a lot" (referring to the game), (Table 22). The children gave very creative answers, such as: "it stimulated my imagination", "it freed me

and encouraged me to think”, “I was excited to decide what and how to do and that everything depends on me”, “this game made me invincible”, “the game is interesting, creative, fun”, “I didn’t even know that I knew all this. Thank you for allowing us to try the game”, “the game is great”, “the game opens up a new view of the world”, “while I was playing the game I thought I was a superhero”, “I know I can do anything because it all depends of me “, “I want and can do whatever I want”, and many more similar answers. The children were aware that their opinion was respected and that they had the possibility to create solutions and make decisions. As in real life, everything depends on the decisions they made. Even the future itself.

Table 22. Children’s opinion about the game “Tesla”

		Gender		Total
		Male	Male	
How did a game you played help you realize that you can do anything you wish?	It helped a lot	45	90	135
	I don’t know	3	0	3
Total		48	90	138

Source: Authors’ calculations

Table 23. Pearson Chi-Square

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5,750a	1	,016

Source: Authors’ calculations

Looking at table 23, it can be seen that in the answer to this question, there is no statistically significant difference $p=0.016$.

Conclusion

Play is important, just like education. Scientists agree that it is necessary to find ways to permanently increase the efficiency of learning and the rate of knowledge acquisition (Carruthers, 2002; Nielsen and Tomaselli, 2010). Traditional methods are considered outdated and not follow the step with the time in which we live. Therefore, teaching needs to be enriched with active interactive content that enables active participation in solving tasks (Gonul et al., 2019). That interaction should allow children to give their best. Children are creative and able to make mature decisions. The right part of the brain hemisphere, responsible for creativity and ideas, functions on the principle of “stimulation” which, if it comes from a familiar environment, can manifest its full potential (Gopnik, 2020).

Therefore, children go from observers to active participants. In this research, it showed that children from villages can provide good constructive solutions for the development of rural areas. This is especially important, because it is the children who will be adults tomorrow who should stay in the villages and for whom the villages should “live”. The children we examined are aware of the advantages of staying in the villages and very

maturely, encouraged by the interactive game, gave guidelines for the development of the village in the future. If we were to go a little deeper into the analysis of those answers, we would see that they are actually the choices of some of their future occupations. Both girls and boys gave uniform answers which, first of all, also show the maturity of the changes in life in the villages, from the typically patriarchal to the modern one, in which the woman in the village is also strong and independent.

There are numerous ways for education to develop, improve, be enriched with innovative content and as such adapt to modern life and the needs of new generations (McGuigan et al., 2011). This is also the obligation of education as we know it today. Education must “listen” to needs and respond to them. One of the ways to innovate education is the introduction of interactive games into teaching. A game like “Tesla” allows children to express their potential and to feel that everything depends on them. In fact, while playing the game, children apply certain elements of the game in real life as well, which enables an easier and unhindered reaction to different situations. With this, we officially confirmed the starting hypothesis of the work: that innovations contribute to creativity and that children become more aware in what way they can contribute to the development of rural areas.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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