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ARTICLE



## Holistic leisure education through the Czech *Rapid Arrows* comics

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### ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on a topic interconnecting the potential use of comics in education processes. While previous research demonstrates such a link in formal education, from pre-school institutions up to the middle grades, particularly with regard to the development of arts and literacy, the educational impact in informal education has been neglected. The text analyses the main aspects of the content of the comics series on the example of the Czech *Rapid Arrows* comic and its author Jaroslav Foglar, the values of which are physical activity and health, a romantic landscape and dwelling in nature, the ethical aspects of morality and goodness, selfless work and helping others, a holistic framework of activity, the importance of romance, adventure and challenges. The stories are, therefore, ‘everyday adventures’, inspiring to the reader to experience his own adventures without needing a fantasy stage. The text also points out previous reflections, not only in the dialogue of papers on comics, but also in the fields of literary science, pedagogy and religious studies. Therefore, the article emphasises that comics can be used in informal leisure education, with the holistic development of the entire personality in various aspects of human existence.

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## Introduction

Use of comics and graphic novels for educational needs is more of a controversial topic rather than a clearly decided one. On one hand, it is clear that there is growing interest in the use of texts and other pop culture artefacts in tuition, particularly with the goal of developing literacy. The main reason for this is the inter-text context of experiences, not only from reading comics but also from listening to radio, watching television, films, playing videogames, etc., illustrating a child’s potential to adapt cultural sources under different conditions, not only to the purpose of developing literacy but also in support of social-cultural life and constantly changing conditions (Dyson 2001). On the other hand, it is clear that teachers continue to be averse to accepting children’s interests in the field of pop culture in educational practice, often due to concerns that the joy and pleasure gained from popular texts cannot be connected to the ideal literacy, or due to misappropriation of culture and the traditional school concept of literacy (Lambirth 2003).

This paper intends to focus on supporting the reasoning for the potential utilisation of comics for the purpose of development of personality, not exclusively in the process of school education. It wishes to point out the power of this tool during leisure time, with emphasis on the potential of holistic leisure education by means of the Czech *Rapid Arrows* comics. There were several creators of the pictorial appearance of this comic, but the author of the text scenarios (and often the entire composition and the assignment of the specific artistic appearance) was Jaroslav Foglar (1907–1999). This Czech creator of comics series was also an author of novels for boys, a scout leader and educator, whose compiled works were published in 27 volumes. He became the prototype of modern forms of outdoor and experiential education and, despite his extraordinary influence on the Czech public, he is practically unknown abroad. In his work and educational practice he particularly emphasised outdoor experiences, the willingness to take risks, he promoted an active lifestyle, honourable actions and support of small social groups (Jirásek and Turcova 2017). His comics, which were particularly connected to his activities in the role of editor of magazines for the youth, received an extraordinary response in the Czech Republic and gained great popularity, however, international experts in the comics genre are probably not aware of him.

## Comics and education

Papers on comics, which are devoted to the phenomenon of picture series accompanied by text, perceive comics as a distinctive element of art, or an artistic medium, which can also be analysed using semiotics, i.e. perceived as a specific type of text and a specific type of code, a semiotic system (Foret et al. 2012). The collaboration of words and images in mutual connection and relation stipulates the versatility of potential use, establishes the multimodal structure of compositions, assuming the audience as co-collaborators (Scanlon 2015). The great advantage of comics is the fact that they focus children's attention on the stories, the narrative – often on the topic of adventure, myths, monsters and heroes, whereby they awake the imagination (Wilson 2013). And because comics stories are generally orientated towards dramatic plots and visual action, they are very effective at maintaining a high level of attention, while allowing comprehension of the meaning of the read words and the seen images (Ward and Young 2011).

Previous research points out the broad range of opportunities for the use of comics in school and pre-school education. Comics are shown to be a modern pedagogic strategy, which can utilise the children's natural pleasure from connecting the image and text components into a single narrative with meaning. And although adult recipients usually perceive comics materials as a leisure activity and entertainment for children, they can potentially play a role as a medium when teaching art and literacy. Comics are traditionally used to increase language skills and literacy, including characterisation, establishing vocabulary, grammar and punctuation, awareness of figurative language and writing various genres, they can also be implemented in cross-curricula projects (Ogier and Ghosh 2018).

Comics can help establish meaning for children in nursery schools, when the children are still unable to read. The child reader-viewer recognises the form and placement of the text, the dialogue or narrative in first person, the emotional state of the heroes and other meaning-bearing aspects borne by the image and text (Yannicopoulou 2004). For

instance, conceptual comics can be used in nursery schools within the terms of the constructivist paradigm when helping illiterate children understand specific phenomena in the field of nature, i.e. in establishing the concept of natural science education (Wiegerová and Navrátilová. 2017). One possibility is for teachers themselves to transform classic stories into the form of comics, or create their own comics, which promote not only literary literacy but also natural science literacy in early childhood (Koutníková and Wiegerová. 2017).

Comics can also be legitimately used in primary-school education. And the reasoning for this may be very simple ‘Why do I teach comics in school? I cannot conceive of a legitimate, research-based reason why I would not.’ (Wilson 2013, 65). The role of comics within the school environment would be transformed: while they used to be read in secret under the table or hidden behind a textbook, the stories used to focus on children and adolescent male readers, contemporary mainstream comics and graphic novels are now also available for female teen readers in the primary and middle grades (Ward and Young 2011).

The relationship between fiction, specifically fiction aimed at children, and ethics education, is not new. Fiction can play an important part in forming moral and ethical values because stories enable activation of feelings and emotions (Carr 2005) and children’s books offer many ethical dilemmas on justice or on the good and evil, which are equally suitable for discussions between the educator and children (Koc and Buzzelli 2004). A typical case is the Harry Potter story (Binnendyk and Schonert-Reichl 2002). The relationship between moral education and fiction has been paid significant attention in the Czech Republic, too. Research works focusing on the potential of children’s literature within education on values are also available (Sladová 2016; Řeřichová and Sladová. 2017), and similarly are methodological publications making use of fictionalised micro-stories or moral situations with which a structured discussion can be aided within the educational process (Vacek 2008). Students’ university theses have been dealing with this relationship as well (Pořízek 2019; Petrášová 2016), including the topic of comparison between ethics in Foglar’s stories and in Harry Potter (Wiesnerová 2011).

However, in our article, we will not focus on the potential of comics within the terms of school education but will point out their utilisation within the terms of holistic leisure education. Holistic education is the term used to identify a broad and non-uniform current of philosophical orientation and practical procedures, which emphasise the whole and wholeness, less materialistic and more spiritual, dynamic and holistic view of reality (Mahmoudi et al. 2012). The term for identifying the effect of the diverse programme means on the individual, particularly with an impact on all personality dimensions: the body, the psyche (reason, will, emotion), the social dimension, and the spirit (essentially personal aspects of ethical or aesthetic evaluation, preference of ideals, etc.) can be used in this context. We will therefore also point out the completely specific connection between comics and informal education surpassing holistic self-education, as we can perceive it in the Czech *Rapid Arrows* comics. The comics is a story about a club of five boys experiencing various everyday adventures and entertainment. The important thing about this distinctive world is the fact that it gives the impression of being completely natural, realistic, a natural challenge to imitate. This is not about the fantastic stories of super-heroes, supernatural magic and preternatural power or extra-terrestrial beings, like those required by the contemporary fictional worlds of fantasy stories. The

world of the *Rapid Arrows* is a seemingly realistic depiction of stories about boys from the real world, a message that we can experience adventure if we give ourselves over to its challenges.

### **Materials and methods: Jaroslav Foglar (1907–1999) and comics *Rapid Arrows***

In order to fulfil the aim of the study (i.e. to show possible usage of comics in holistic leisure education) a qualitative research approach was chosen with regard to data incorporating verbal and image element. Document analysis of primary and secondary sources classifies our research as a descriptive approach (Thomas, Nelson, and Silverman 2015). Philosophical background to these qualitative approaches is anchored in phenomenology, and specifically in hermeneutics. While positivism focuses on objectively presented and measurable data, hermeneutics attempts to understand rather than explain; it works with meaning and sense (Hendl 2000). Our study can also be classified as a historical research as it deals with data that already exist. Sources of data in historical research are primary and secondary sources (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2000). Primary sources comprise printed publications by Jaroslav Foglar, with prime focus on complete volume of his comics. Foglar's novels and autobiography are also included among primary sources. Secondary sources comprise books, magazine contributions and reviews reflecting Foglar's works as well as publications broadly focusing on comics' studies and education. The term historical criticism can be used for a method used to evaluate historical data and information. The collected data were categorised into more general groups – the method of data reduction into themes and categories. The following themes were identified on the basis of the *Rapid Arrows* complete volume analysis: health and healthy lifestyle, natural and urban environment in the romantic mode, ethical aspect of the goodness and justice visible as the behaviour of fictional heroes and appeals to readers, social coherence of a peer group and a holistic frame of self-actualisation, which also uses adventures and challenges, while the complex world of this comic book crosses the usual frontiers of real world and fantasy, a reader's imagination and experience.

To understand the findings, several contextualising facts are provided here about the comics and its author – Jaroslav Foglar, who is little known abroad. Soon after the beginning of his editorial work for journal *Mladý hlasatel* – *Young Herald* (1938) he managed to push through an idea for a new magazine section; he believed that an integral part of a modern magazine for children and youth should be a unique whole-page comic strip. But not as a piece of autotelic entertainment diverting from meaningful experiencing, but on the contrary, as a bearer of educational and moral qualities which should be established by the comics and the whole magazine and which should deliberately influence the readers.

The combination of words and pictures to produce comprehensive narrative information was a relatively frequent phenomenon in Czech journalism in the late 1930s. Despite the strong genre diversity, comic strips for children and youth included especially stories of animals, cheerful or humorous tales, or adventure series. However, in 1938 *Rapid Arrows* started an absolutely essential period of stories about children's clubs and everyday adventures that can be tried out by every reader. The literature on the history of

Czech comics (Bezděková 2012; Bezděková and Krejčí 2012; Diesing 2011; Ládek and Pavelka 2010, 2012; Prokůpek et al. 2014; Foret 2012) considers *Rapid Arrows* a breakthrough and an essential phenomenon, which was, incidentally, associated with commercial success. Surely because this cult comic strip was the first in the Czech territory to gain mass attention. ‘This is caused by the quality of the script and drawings, strong position of Melantrich Publishing, and probably also by convenient timing – *Rapid Arrows* appeared on the market at a time when the domestic environment was sufficiently prepared to accept a comic strip after previous failures’ (Prokůpek 2012, 194). The comic strip became so inspiring that all of the other comics started to focus on children’s clubs. The true popularity of this cult series and its general clarity is evidenced by numerous caricatures, often bordering with plagiarism and loathsome vulgarity.

Although Jaroslav Foglar was the author of several different stories linking words and images to comprehensive narrative information (such as the comic series *Svorní Gambusíni*, *Kulišáci*, *Blue Ravine*, and many others) (Foglar 2003b), the stories of the boy’s club *Rapid Arrows* brought him wide fame. Together these comics created 317 stories whose comprehensive view (Foglar 2003a) allows the creation of a clear idea of the plot lines of the narrative, the narrative imagination, and the literary qualities of the author. It also represented the transformation of the art form of the various cartoonists and the gradual development of the individual profiles of major visual artists including Dr. Jan Fischer and Marko Čermák. The social and political context in which these works originated (1938–1941, 1946–1948, 1968–1971 and 1986–1989) are also represented in the narratives.

The comic strip is a series that describes the stories of five boys (Mirek Dušín, Jarka Metelka, Jindra Hojer, Červenáček – Red Cap and Rychlonožka – Speedy). The important aspects of the stories, which are witty and humorous through both verbal and pictorial elements, are their pedagogical purpose and pedagogical effect. The cartoon series earned a leading position and general popularity among the Czech audience. The popularity became so strong that even today some quotes relating especially to moral and ethical norms are used, albeit in completely different social discourses (particularly in economics and politics), and those who use them assume a generally known context of these words along with their meaning and purpose. The metaphors and paraphrases penetrate the broader cultural and artistic environments; not only literature but also film and theatre. At the 80th anniversary of the publication of the first *Rapid Arrows* cartoon, 50 contemporary comic strip authors proposed a possible continuation, paying tribute to this insurmountable model (Prokůpek 2018). Unfortunately, total unawareness in an international context keeps this world purely Czech and incomprehensible in foreign countries.

## Results: distilled content

The following points are the principal thoughts of the Foglar educational influence visible in reference to the *Rapid Arrows* comic strip (Foglar 2003a).

‘Don’t smoke, do exercises – soon you’ll be fit as a fiddle’, a reformed boy recalls the words of Mirek Dušín after going through a life stage associated with ‘average’ and ‘bad’ boys. A healthy lifestyle, sufficient physical activity, hardening and sunbathing, and resistance to alcohol and smoking are the basic preconditions for all activities that readers

should do to become the right people. *Rapid Arrows* promote and recommend physical activity, sport and a healthy lifestyle in many of its forms, in any season, including floor exercise (p. 115, 169), running competition (p. 10), track and field competition (p. 89, 221, 236), wrestling (p. 147), roller skating (p. 220), riding a bicycle (p. 28, 72, 306, 307), rowing (p. 30–31, 34), riding a pedal machine or a two-wheel cart (p. 40, 52, 228–231), flying a flying device (p. 49), mountain climbing (p. 21–22, 77), camping (p. 33, 75–77, 81, 135–139, 227, 233–236, 247–250, 310–311), sliding in summer (p. 23, 79) and winter (p. 14, 160), snowball fight (p. 61), ice-hockey (p. 163), skating and figure-skating (p. 57, 62, 166), expeditions on skis (p. 102, 204–205), sledging (p. 13, 56, 101, 207, 274, 280). Sufficient physical activity, hardening, sunbathing and absence of alcohol and smoking are signs of this world, the fundamental premise, which is not only moral but also existential, imitated in the readers' reality, as evidenced not only by their memories but also a specifically focused empirical survey (Jirásek et al. 2007).

The contradiction between physical activity in nature and in romantic corners of the city is presented by means of exceptionally sensitive perceptions of products of nature, landscape, and the atmosphere of yards and old streets. The multiform space provides opportunities for symbolisation and experiencing various secrets and adventures. Although in the comic strip itself this issue is projected by means of the above-mentioned leisure activities and especially weekend expeditions in nature and summer camping, more extensive descriptions in the novel trilogy based on comics stories (Foglar 1997, 2005a, 2005b) can significantly enrich this visual perception. Extremely sensitive descriptions and perceptions of particular products of nature, landscapes and atmosphere, pointing especially to the author's deep experiencing, are of an aesthetic nature rather than ecological concern. The colourfulness, mysteriousness, sensitive provocativeness, description of experiences using subtle details and nuances of the experiential mode of intense fascination are strengthened by the sharing of the club community. The natural landscape, which is described by the author is a wilderness with steep slopes and picturesque sinuousness, had been abandoned long ago or had never been visited, but paradoxically, is always within reach of the town, which is also imbued with distinct features of mysteriousness and romance due to its secluded places, yards, winding streets, dark places, passages with a barrage of small roofs. The area is perhaps oversaturated with rich symbols that call for challenges and competitions, on the one hand, and silent contemplation in a place illuminated by moonshine on the other. The spatial symbolism even transforms the way of experiencing and living into an existential mode of ceremony and tradition, into mythical-poetic being, into sacred ecstasy.

The ethical aspect of morality, good and honest conduct is omnipresent. This category includes, for example, polite language and a total absence of vulgarisms, as suggested by a young man in his assessment of Mirek Dušín: 'Supposedly, he has never said a dirty word!!?' and a following comment made by a girl: 'That's why we all look up to Mirek!' (p. 243). This is almost unimaginable in the speech of young people today. A common feature of the variety of activities undertaken with peers is a multidimensional theme of honesty, including the following: discouraging from deception and forgery (p. 165, 252–253), keeping one's word (p. 26, 72), and fair play in a competition (p. 179–183, 192–196, 208, 318). A special place is occupied by redress of damage and grievance (p. 64–65, 128–130, 241–242), protecting the honour of friends and innocent people (p. 20, 167–168, 170–171, 320), and the virtue of forgiveness (p. 186–191).



The stories urge to follow the good example in helping by one's work, whether this relates to removing snow from the pavement and sprinkling with gravel (p. 63, 203), activities during the harvest (p. 81, 142), watching over a railway line (p. 50), or putting out a fire (p. 16, 41). They help children rescue a ball from the sewer (p. 17) and fountain (p. 84), or help build the clubroom (p. 149–152, 167–168). With compassion they help a poor boy (p. 27), a child wanderer (p. 102–104), child ropewalkers (p. 160–162), they make up for injustice in a children's home (p. 105–107, 149–152), comfort a sick boy (p. 261), give presents to children in an orphanage (p. 157), foil dog abuse (p. 109–110), frighten away poachers (p. 35). Most frequently, however, they help older people (p. 158, 198, 232, 237–238). An example of their readiness to do good deeds whenever needed is illustrated by their repeated lifesaving efforts (p. 32, 57–60, 75, 85, 99, 200, 279, 304, 313).

Justice should be observed also in the context of property relations (p. 12, 19, 146, 174–176, 254–257). They often catch thieves and robbers (p. 25, 86–87, 212, 259–260, 296–297). And when their own strengths are insufficient, they help by calling somebody more competent, if possible an institutional authority, for example, a doctor or the police (p. 225), or at least an adult person in conflict with older peers (p. 264).

Sometimes the activity that is held up as an example is considered by most children as sycophancy, tale-telling, and informing. But also cooperation with the state authority might be seen as controversial both in terms of civil virtues and from the position of loyalty or even servility to the legality of any political system under which the series was created. Attentive readers may obtain sufficient evidence that the real world does not allow the black and white perception of good and evil and that members of the *Rapid Arrows* club members commit evil and their possible tyranny is masked by nobility (Fafejta 2007; Vučka 2015). As a result, for somebody *Rapid Arrows* may symbolise hypocrisy, because they 'constantly declare a desire for nobility, truthfulness, honesty, etc., but their deeds do not correspond' (Balaščík et al. 1999). Although Jaroslav Foglar seeks for a clear distinction between good and evil and clearly defends the side of good so that he can even be considered a potential 'translator' of Plato's philosophy into the language of images (Floss 2007), the true reality is much more colourful and philosophical categories permeate human experiencing. The appeal not to give up the ethical dimensions of our perception is also associated with outdoor education, although these values are rather discernible in the context of specific activities.

Social peer cohesion, participation in the life of the club, part of individual and collective identity, all this facilitates not only self-reflection and deeper self-awareness but also sharing of jointly recognised values and principles. Through the comic strip, the author expresses an unusual degree of trust in independence and believes in the transition from education to self-education. This is also the reason why certain aspects of the club should serve as inspiration for the readers' own activity and their club life, thereby supporting collective cohesion, such as club anniversary presents (p. 219), or a useful camp product (p. 36). Involvement in teams and strengthening collective identity are facilitated by real traditions, rites and rituals, but particularly by notes and records of all kinds: diaries scoring, chronicles. At the time of communication shared through information technology, a call for personal meeting in an informal community is important even more.

However, the most significant aspect of the world of *Rapid Arrows* is a holistic framework, a call for holistic self-development. Readers who imitated the activities of



the club really lived the Blue Life (activities recorded on a daily basis including morning exercise, cold shower, enjoyable experience, good deeds, etc.), hunted for beavers (13 tasks aimed at the development of physical strength, knowledge of nature, craft skills, and ethical behaviour), fully used their time capacity to activate their lives, were open to the needs of others, and were prepared to do good deeds and actively search for opportunities for their implementation (Veselský 2007). The emphasis on the whole rather than on individual performance or a separate personality quality is evidenced by the themes that transpose from the fictional world to the readers' reality, which at the same time served the above-mentioned strengthening of group cohesion and joint experiencing (even remotely), for example, through awarding the *Rapid Arrows* Honorary Badge with eight ribbons, namely 'for bravery, for devotion, for fidelity, for toughness, for mental prowess, for physical fitness, for diligence, and for honesty' (Foglar 2005c, 173), or giving the Yellow Flower to everyone who refuses violence, lawlessness and dishonesty – six months after its announcement, the flower was worn by 100,000 boys and girls (Mrva 1990).

A specific and determining feature of this world is the importance of romanticism, adventure and challenge. Often moving on the existential border, on the border between life and death, often with a tragic end. In this context, however, death does not represent a fatal unsurpassable horizon, the final task of everybody defining our existence as living-towards-death, but rather constitutes anonymity of death in the sense of fascination by unusualness, unlikeness and inaccessibility of secret. The impatiently luring secret is not intensified only by the story told, but also its form, thereby increasing readers' eagerness to the limit of bearability by subtle references to a later continuation of the adventure. The ability of the author to culminate tension, interrupt the plot by an interlude that addresses the readers in the context of their usual life circumstances, and at the same time enhance the experience of imagination by suggesting what is going to come is amazing. The words, images, pauses, silence and deliberate concealing provide room for guesses, surmises, fantasy, and interest in knowing more.

The world of *Rapid Arrows* is – in addition to these features that are perhaps more content-based than formal – also a world which does not respect the established boundaries between fantasy and reality, readers' imagination and experiencing. The stories include not only numerous guidelines for the implementation of self-development activities such as writing diaries, living the Blue Life, hunting for beavers, but also allusions to other works by the author, for example, those related to magazines *Young Herald* (p. 48, 54, 64, 66, 82, 91, 105), and *Forward* (p. 147, 167, 220), or a product inspired by the hedgehog in the cage conundrum (p. 108), etc. The effect of the challenge was many times confirmed by the participants.

## Discussion: Foglar's evaluation

Foglar's work continues to attract admirers as well as followers. Many writers have attempted to make meaningful literary connections to his stories (Hrnčíř 2005, 1999, 2000; Velinský 2003). For the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first story of the *Rapid Arrows* comic series, 50 contemporary comic creators developed the series' possible development, expressing in a diverse form and content the recognition of this unsurpassed pattern (Prokůpek 2018). Information regarding the further reference of Foglar can be found in

several resources: the 'Friends of Jaroslav Foglar Association' who publish the *Beaver Track* magazine; the 'Circle of Friends of J. Foglar' distributes relevant information through the irregularly published *Collection of Independent Foglarists*.

The most interesting aspect of this historical personality is the fact that the 'Foglar phenomenon' has become a subject of scholarly interest in research. Foglar himself had very little formal education and spent his entire life in an intellectually flat environment absent of any profound spaces of rationality and has yet earned academic interest in several scientific disciplines. The structure of the most significant (except comics studies, the topic of this paper) benefits follows.

## Literary critique

The first reflections of Foglar were written by art experts. However, the art-based analysis at the time of the then-producing writer was often driven by goals other than aesthetic or formal literary criteria. The life orientation of the spring season, the 'April' of human life, specifically, the boy – the desire not to age and remain eternally in the world of childhood and youth – is the source of an exceptionally sensitive understanding of the child's soul. This literary style is coherent and near to the child reader, but not necessarily to a literary critic of high-art scales on novels. The texts were negatively evaluated by critics' ideologically perception of Foglar: 'irritating tastes', 'dishonest, mischievous irritants', 'ancient schemes of low taste', and 'patchwork' (Stejskal 1962). Very little praise came out of the aesthetic critic as they are 'poor spoken linguistic and stylistic prints', the 'unbelievable fable', 'the most primitive schematicism', 'comforter of unreal relationships', and 'educational monster' (Kovářík 1964; Stejskal 1964; Vavřík 1964; Zapletal 1970). From the 1940s to the present, this point of view has continually persisted.

On the other side, and again for more than half a century, the literary criticism reacts with 'a sense of plot', 'a lot of engaging epic ideas', 'a story-filled action story, very readable and exciting', and again, readers will 'take on the characteristics typical of appropriate ages', as the author 'creates one big boyish dream from the suburbs' (Bösser 1964; Červenka 1965; Mikulášek 1987; Sohr 1968; Sýs 1987). Foglar's effort is the 'work of the deep concept', 'the archetypal symbolic drama of initiation', the confrontation of the conscious with the 'unconscious and the integration of their symbolic content into communication' (Hybler 1987; Nezkusil 1991; Sýs 1987). A comprehensive assessment from the point of view of literary critique has addressed this topic over the last decades (Příbáň 2007; Hamanová and Lábusová 2008).

But even more important and revealing than the art-based criticism is the surprisingly persistent reading interest, confirmed in various surveys of popularity from the 1940s to the new millennium by the undisputable position of Foglar and his works among the most popular authors.

Foglar's books have an extraordinary reader following that has been constant across several generations, regardless of the prevailing political circumstances or the public availability of his publications. Jaroslav Foglar has always stood at the forefront of popularity with readers regardless of when his books were published. A 1947 survey demonstrated an extraordinarily high efficiency in copying the example of literary design strategies to improve the nature of youth (Pírek 1990; Sohr 1968). Research by the Museum of National Literature in the spring of 1957 showed that Jaroslav Foglar was

voted the most popular Czech author among the youth despite the fact that none of his books had been published for more than 11 years (Mrva 1990). Furthermore, an inquiry among randomly selected boys in 1964 by the *Golden May* (*Zlatý máj*) magazine and a radio station in the city of Ostrava confirmed the extraordinary full-generation knowledge of the *Rapid Arrows* comics (known by 82% of the respondents) and knowledge of the Foglar arena among the 30- to 40-year-olds (86% of the group). Even for young people aged between 22 and 25, the knowledge of Foglar was at 63% even though he was not published for over 16 years and his works were removed from public libraries and not promoted in schools, in print, or on the radio, etc. (Jírek 1964). Exploratory probes about reading through public libraries showed that in 1990 and 1991, Jaroslav Foglar was the most read author and readers claimed that they had been favourably influenced by reading his work because they cared more about their physical fitness, had greater respect for nature, and thought more often about themselves and their potential for self-reliance (Uherková and Úlovcová. 1993; Urbanová and Matýšková. 1992). The survey 'The Most Popular Book of the Population of the Czech Republic', announced in 2004 and which collected more than 93,000 votes (approximately 1% of the population), is likely the most representative survey about reading taken in the country. In this survey, Jaroslav Foglar appeared in fourth place (J. K. Rowling was in the first place). Among the 200 most popular authors ranked by Czech readers, and he took second place among the 71 most popular Czech authors (for survey results, see [www.mojekniha.cz](http://www.mojekniha.cz)).

## Religious studies

Most recently, the science of religions has shown interest in the Foglar phenomenon which is a curiosity. Foglar was baptised and belonged to the Roman Catholic church but ceased attending in his early childhood followed by his mother's decision. His entire life was void of direct religious influences and ideas and he mocked superstition, occultism, and spiritism. And yet, in the literature, religious terms describe stories which have grown into a cult dimension and the author is revered by the image of deification. Various authors have already used in their own reflections descriptions such as 'evangelisation text', 'scout gospel'; events are 'sacred', speaks of 'mystery', 'initiation dedication', and 'mythical space'; 'the full moon song' becomes 'prayer' and the hedgehog puzzle is a 'sacral object', and the moments of rituals are a 'revelation of mystery' (Dvorský 2011; Hošek 2017; Nezkusil 1991; Vučka 2015).

For some people, *foglaring* can be so defining to the dimension of life that it becomes essential to the individual and thus plays a role of religion. In this regard, this approach may not only be used as a literary work, but, with its inclusive social links, the term 'implicit religion' is both appropriate and meaningful (Jirásek 2018). In other words, something that reveals the principles and values of the spiritual world behind its secular representation of the empirical world. Through the background of Foglar's stories, one can approach areas of spirituality. The author himself was certainly not aware of the archetypal and ideological depths by which he helped to mediate the transition between the everyday procreation and the sacred realm of otherness. Yet he helped to ignite the fire of a spiritual sense and meaning that cannot be revealed by rational criticism but can be intensified by the engagement of the entire personality, solely by their own experience.

## Pedagogy

The Foglar approach should be given a much-needed and deserving examination in the given context. Yet Foglar and his work are rather dismissed despite the fact that the educational potential has been repeatedly put on the positive side in the literary science evaluation, as well as pedagogical instruction, educational work, and building patterns worthy of garnering adequate attention. Education by play, self-improvement, exposed didactics, so easily rejected by critics is readily accepted by the reader. The pedagogical aspect as the basic imperative of all Foglar's action is evident in subjecting all other criteria to educational goals.

What is taken from the pedagogical aspect in modern forms of Czech experiential education is, in particular, the educational use of the principles of the game along with the motivational power of the legend, the emphasis on the complexity of the prepared programme, mutual peer measurement and competition, the adventurous and mysterious use of the surrounding landscape, the use of free time as disposable, and a general direction towards good.

It seems that specialised institutions funded by the state do not consider this topic to be sufficiently inspiring for their research activities. The Scopus database lists only one record pertaining to our topic when searching for 'Foglar' by article title, abstract, or keyword (Jirásek and Turcova 2017); the Web of Science lists two entries by topic category, in addition to the above-mentioned literary study on Scout diaries by Czech writers (Hoffmann 2001).

If we are convinced that this topic should be researched only locally, we can examine Czech pedagogical journals. When we use the search tool within the six major Czech pedagogical journals, the results will provide only two valid records in one journal, with five others not having any results at all. One of the listed items is a review of proceedings (Němec 2008) and the second item focuses on education for a healthy lifestyle (Jirásek 2007).

However, the lack of interest by pedagogical experts – individuals and institutions involved in education and training – in research projects and publications on this topic is remarkable. The interest from students is significantly higher – theses.cz portal offers 573 university qualification works on this topic, the digital repository of Charles University's dissertations lists 221 papers, and the Digital Library of the University of Pardubice includes 11 records. This situation is very similar to the phenomenon observed for experiential education: 107 dissertations correspond to zero articles in the journal *Pedagogika*, one article in the journal *Pedagogická orientace*, and two articles in the journal *e-Pedagogium* (Dvořáčková, Šulcová, and Jirásek. 2014).

While Foglar has been rather rejected from a literary criticism point of view and has not been sufficiently evaluated from a pedagogical point of view, he is extraordinarily popular among readers. The ideal of a boyhood before erotic excitement focused on measuring and competing with members of a peer group contributed to Foglar's misunderstanding of the latter developmental stages of his divisional charges. When the boys in a group crossed the threshold of boyhood and manifested a greater interest in their female counterparts than in the activity of the troupe, it led to crises and repeated disputes with the maturing individuals (Zapletal 2007; Zachariáš 2007). However, Foglar had an extremely sensitive understanding of the pre-pubertal stage.

## Conclusion

The *Rapid Arrows* comics achieved extraordinary popularity in the Czech Republic. Its author influenced hundreds of boys directly through his work in the scouts, tens of thousands of children and young people by means of instructions for activities by means of ‘reader clubs’ in magazines, for which he acted as editor. Moreover, hundreds of thousands or rather millions of people of many generations in the Czech Republic by means of the *Rapid Arrows* comics, which became the most popular comics series for children of formative age from the end of the 1930s until the present day.

Leisure education in the Czech Republic gained a powerful tool for informal holistic activities in the *Rapid Arrows* comics. I believe that this example of a de facto case study indicates sufficiently clearly that this example is also generally valid for the reasoning for the potential use of comics for holistic leisure education.

## Disclosure statement

Author does not declare any conflict of interest.

## Notes on contributor

**Ivo Jirásek**, Ph.D., undertakes philosophical aspects of movement culture (game and play, experience, body and movement) and education including topics of spirituality and spiritual health. The author of four books and decades of journal articles and book chapters (in both English and Czech languages).

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