

Masopust carnival in in civic education, English, history and arts classes in Czechia

Age of students: 16 to 18 years old

Masopust is a celebratory period occurring early in the calendar year that brings people together and strengthens the bonds within the community. During the colourful *Masopust* carnival, students connected school subjects with their local identity. They reflected on the social and cultural significance of the event from both a historical and a present day perspective, through discussions and projects in English conversation, history, civic education and art classes. A video made by students during the carnival will be used as a teaching resource in the future.

Learning objectives

Masopust carnival was integrated into four different subjects with specific learning aims.

English language:

- ▶ Learning and using new vocabulary associated with the *Masopust* carnival and its practice;
- ▶ Collecting a family recipe for the *Masopust* donuts and cooking the donuts, contributing to the intergenerational transmission of the recipe.

History and civic education:

- ▶ Understanding the differences between the *Masopust* carnival and other celebrations such as Christmas and Easter, as well as the relationships between the related practices.

Art:

- ▶ Learning about anatomy and representing the human body in movement.

Objectives related to the ICH element:

- ▶ Understanding the seasonal traditions and rituals in the local community and other regions, their meaning and their evolution over time;
- ▶ Increasing awareness of the *Masopust* carnival, its practice and its meaning for the local community.

2

Preparation

Description of the ICH element and the way it is practised today:

The *Masopust* is a celebratory period starting on the day of Epiphany (early January) and continuing to the start of Lent on Ash Wednesday. It brings people together to celebrate and share food, allowing them to strengthen the bonds within the community. Historically, people organized feasts and entertainment over the entire period. Many beliefs are linked to *Masopust*, especially concerning weather and the quality of the coming year's crop.

Currently, the culmination of *Masopust* is the carnival procession, when costumed participants and musicians stroll around the villages and cities and collect food and drinks. Specific games or dances are also added in the different regions. Masks and costumes have evolved over time, but some recurring figures can easily be identified and maintain a sense of continuity. The *Masopust* festivities are accompanied by typical dishes,

including donuts, which are usually prepared within households.

Linkages between the ICH element and the school subject:

In Czechia, the curriculum includes a theme on Feasts and Notable Days. Teachers usually focus on events like Christmas, Easter or National Day and only briefly touch upon other events. However, this theme provided a natural entry point for students to delve into the *Masopust* celebration in four parallel subjects: English conversation, history, civic education and art, linking school learning with local knowledge and practices that students knew from home.

Involvement of learners in the preparation of the activity:

The student who participated in the UNESCO training provided her classmates with films and photographs from *Masopust* celebrations in a nearby village. The audio-visual production was

shown in an English lesson and it will continue to be shared in future years, enriching class discussions with local experiences. One of the students, who is part of a fencing club and whose family is actively involved in the *Masopust* celebrations in another village, dressed up in his costume to share his experience with his classmates, fostering a sense of belonging among the students.

Involvement of bearers and local community in the preparation and/or implementation of the activity:

Because of time constraints, the preparation was mainly based on desk research and discussions with staff from the local museum carried out by the teachers. However, in future years, the teachers envision inviting a member of the community to talk about the event from his or her perspective as a bearer or practitioner, to make the lesson livelier and to share personal perspectives on the meaning of the practice.

Description of the activity

The pilot teacher invited her colleagues to a meeting to share the project objectives, and two teachers volunteered to develop lessons related to the local living heritage. The parents, who were also informed, welcomed this initiative to raise awareness about meaningful local practices with much enthusiasm.

Like many carnivals, the *Masopust* music, dances and colourful characters dressed in costumes provide rich sources of inspiration for art lessons. Students experimented with ink and watercolour to study colour and movement, analysing realistic and unrealistic postures. They showed their art pieces at a school exhibition.

English, history and civic education lessons offered an opportunity for students to learn more about the practice, its cultural, social and historical significance, and to reflect on its continuity and evolution from the past to the present. Class discussions allowed students to share their knowledge about the carnival and express their sense of belonging. Students watched a documentary from national television and compared what they saw with the way it is

celebrated in villages nearby. While the focus of the lessons was on discussion and exchange, a quiz and an opinion piece measured their knowledge and understanding.

Beyond formal learning, students also participated in the actual carnival traditions. A special donut is prepared and eaten during this period. In lieu of homework for the English class, students researched their family recipe, transmitted from generation to generation, and prepared the sweets for the next class. Not all students brought donuts, but there were enough to share among the classmates during the lesson, recreating the conviviality of the actual carnival.

A highlight of the project was when a group of students and their English teacher attended the *Masopust* carnival in a nearby village. They were able to recognize the masks and the different characters they had identified in class and certain local crafts that they had learned to make. The outing also allowed students to document the carnival in photos and videos, materials that will enrich the presentations in future years.

Learning outcomes

This pilot project demonstrated how a theme from the national curriculum can be adapted to focus on meaningful elements of the local living heritage. **Lessons were connected to students' reality and became more engaging.**

Students enjoyed the less formal activities proposed. Those who attended the carnival were captivated by the fascinating rituals and the happiness radiating from the carnival goers. Through this experience, they become sensitized to the importance of safeguarding their traditions and culture, which they recognize as part of their identity.

In the words of the pilot teacher, *'This experience broadened my views. It encouraged me to make more exciting lessons while at the same time raising awareness about our living heritage.'*

