

## SOCIALISATION IN THE FAMILY AND FORMATION OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN'S CONCEPT OF THE PARENT'S IMAGE

### *Socializācija ģimenē un pirmsskolas vecuma bērnu priekšstatu veidošanās par vecāku tēlu*

**Blāzma Vikmane**  
Liepāja University

**Abstract.** *“Family National Policy Guidelines for 2011-2017 year” underlined that the concept of family is taking shape since birth and will continue in the following years. So the family as primary child's socialization institution has a major role to play in the first picture of the parental pattern formation. It is so important, that the family would facilitate development of concepts of the family model complying with standards in society and would facilitate getting ready for the role of a good father or mother. Children in their games shown as parents educating them: both positive and negative. Unfortunately, as the surveyed preschool teachers mention, quite often children depict their parents as smokers, drunkards and always quarrelling.*

**Aim of the research:** *to characterise formation of the concept of the family model under the impact of primary socialisation and the role of preschool children in depicting the parents' images in the game The Family.*

**Key words:** *child, family, game, parents, socialisation.*

### **Socialisation aspects of sex roles in different theories**

Socialisation as a purposeful activity of personal life (basing on interests and needs adequately perceived and followed by society) helps the child get involved into society, form concepts, acquire knowledge, skills, norms, values, style of behaviour and social roles needed for life. Therefore, it is so important, that the family, as the child's primary socialiser since early childhood, would facilitate development of adequate concepts of the family model complying with standards in society and would facilitate getting ready for the role of a good family member, of good father or mother in future. This socialisation aspect raises a question about learning sex roles.

Formation of sex identity and learning of sex roles starts already at preschool age, when the child psychologically starts to identify their belongingness to a certain sex, forms appropriate behaviour patterns by imitating their father, mother, brothers, sisters, peers, surrounding people, images of family members depicted in literary pieces or mass media.

Unfortunately, not in all families the child can acquire gender-appropriate behaviour models, because the child grows in a one-parent family or the family in which there are no siblings (brothers and sisters). Also in preschool education establishments and schools there prevails spirit of feminism. Consequently, the socialisation process becomes one-sided, incomplete acquisition of sex roles not

only for boys, but also for girls. Mothers and teachers not only demonstrate feminine behaviour models or values, but also attitudes. It becomes particularly evident in upbringing – girls are perceived more positively, but boys feel disapproval because of atypical forms of behaviour for women – inability to behave in a peaceful and calm way.

As it is known, preschool age is a sensitive period of acquiring fundamental values of life, for formation of concepts about the family model. According to A. Adler, the child creates the ideal image of his life already before the age of 5. This image is embodied in games, in which he presents family models known to him and imitates mutual relationships among family members. Parents' model, imitation of their behaviour models is one of the most important factors in learning sex roles; however, neither the parents nor the teachers do pay attention to learning typical sex roles for their future. And this is not a question of sexual aspects.

Quite often, in upbringing process learning of sex roles by preschool or even primary school children is considered as premature or insignificant, due to the fear to “sexualise“ it, yet such *asexual pedagogy* (Репина, 2004; Араканцева, 2006) to a great extent is a cause of the family instability. Insufficiently adopted male and female social roles in the family is the cause of a lot of conflicts, declining birth-rate, weakening of the educational pedagogical potential and even of family breakdown, simultaneously creating preconditions for recurrence of similar problems for coming generations in increasing progression.

It should be noted that nowadays the traditional distribution of sex roles has changed: the woman – the upbringing of children and housewife but the man – the bread-earner and the guard of the family. The modern woman is economically independent and socially active, therefore also the perception of the man's role in the family changes. Modern men are increasingly more involved in child-rearing and sharing the household chores; however, they have not become stable traditions with emotionally convincing behaviour models, which would serve children as positive samples to imitate, especially for boys, in their learning sex roles. As recent studies show (Paulsen, 2011), a new generation of fathers has grown up. In Western European countries two thirds of men are actively involved in child-rearing process since their very birth, and it is good for children. These men consider becoming a father as a good opportunity for their further development, for overcoming their selfishness and that helps them grow fonder of home life. As researches show, focusing on upbringing children and the family life causes changes also in the man's biological body – they become more androgynous, owing to hormonal changes. Men's, who actively participate in childbirth preparatory courses, testosterone level decreases even by one third and the oestrogen level increases. Due to these changes men become more emotional, acquire the ability to care for the child, his wife and the family as a whole – to become concerned and caring fathers (Paulsena, 2011: 54).

Consequently, the present interpretation of the sex role does not any longer correspond to the notions expressed in Z. Freud's psychoanalytical theory about the man as an active, aggressive, logic and decisive person, motivated to compete, and express their creativity outside their family, but the woman as a passive, irresolute and submissive housewife, who lacks logical thinking and other skills required of a socially active being. In this theory too much attention is devoted to sexual instincts and needs, the child's fixation on his bodily zones (oral stage, anal stage, and phallic stage), Oedipus and Elektra complexes and their solutions: identification with their parents' sex and jealousy. Let us remember that Z. Freud's ideas are based on studies of adult psychopaths. As T. Repina (Репина, 2004) points out, Oedipus and Elektra complexes are not observed in all cultures, and they should not be considered to be universal. Besides, at preschool age, children's erotic feelings have not awoken as yet, so much more attention should be given to the social factors in the process of acquisition of sex roles by the child (Репина, 2003: 40).

Although psychoanalytical theory also pays some attention to the child's social environment (the family) and the role of the child's early experience in relations with the parents in further development of his personality, still, taken as a whole, formation of the child's sex role is treated as self-development, based on biological needs.

The focus of attention in social learning or social behaviourism theory is on the impact of social environment in the child's sex roles socialisation. The key idea of this theory is based on the view that the child learns through his own experience: imitating, modelling, identifying himself with the parents, not only with the parent of his own sex, but also with the opposite sex parent as well as with bothers, sisters and other family members. Sex role imitation model may have a generalised character. As pointed out by representatives of this theory, in the social learning process adults' (parents') emotional reinforcements in the form of punishments and praises are significant, which also affects formation of sex roles. For example, threats not to love the child in case of behaviour inappropriate to his sex.

The role of the cognitive process is updated in cognitive development theory (Kohlberg, 1966). Adults are an information source for the child: but formation of the sex role stereotype is affected by the child's cognitive development level – in intellectually more developed children it is more rapid. This theory puts forward the idea about the stage-like character of sex roles, in which three stages can be distinguished:

1. Indifferent perception of the sex role.
2. Polarisation and stereotyping of the sex role or conventional (routine) stage.
3. Dynamic development of sex role.

As L. Kohlberg (Kohlberg, 1966) points out, first of all self-categorisation occurs: the child around the age of five understands that his/her sex (boy, girl) is not transient. Then positive emotional perception of his/her sex and learning of

typical behaviour models begin, where both identification and differentiation take place – culture-specific sexual behaviour standards become moral laws for the child at the age between five and eight. The preschool child fills the first stage in their cognitive development and moves to the second stage (Kohlberg, 1966).

T. Repina (Репина, 2004) writes that socialisation of the child's sex role is also focused on in the new sex psychology or social expectations theory (Репина, 2003). In the child's socialisation of the sex role, according to J. Stockard and M. Johnson (Stockard, Johnson, 1985), three interrelated components can be distinguished: cognition, emotions and behaviour (Stockard, 1985). Cognition is related to formation of their awareness of their sex and to formation of relevant behaviour. Emotions contribute to learning of sex-related behaviour models, sphere of values orientation, needs and motives, which in their turn are affected by stereotypes, social expectations, factors of the closest social environment etc. prevailing in society. Consequently, learning of sex-typical behaviour models are based on concepts identified and emotionally intensified in the cognitive process. (Preschool age, as mentioned above, in this respect is particularly sensitive. B.V.)

Representatives of this theory emphasise that the child's biological sex can only support social (psychological) sex formation, which is affected by stereotypes and social expectations in the particular society. As an example the depiction of traditional male and female social roles in textbooks can be mentioned, which continue to maintain the established stereotypes in society.

### **Sex socialisation of preschool children**

Child's acquisition of sex roles is a lengthy process. Psychic awareness of his/her sex becomes evident in the child already in the second year of life and strengthens in the third year when most children unmistakably and convincingly call themselves a boy or girl. It should be noted that children notice sex differences already in the first year of the life. Basing on the ideas of the new sex psychology or social expectations theory, T. Repina writes that development of *psychic sex* (Репина, 2004) begins with the acquisition of language and continues throughout the preschool period in improvement of one's own "Ego". Within this process three stages can be differentiated:

1. Identification of their sex by watching the people around – both adult men and women and children – boys and girls as well.
2. Concept about formation of the most appropriate behaviour models for the sex.
3. Learning of the most appropriate behaviour models for the sex.

The second and the third stage can exist simultaneously (Репина, 2003, 63).

Likewise, also T. Arakanceva (Араканцева, 2006) describes several theories that explain formation of sex identity sex roles:

1. Identification theory.
2. Sex type-approval theory.
3. Self-categorisation theory.
4. Sex scheme theory (Араканцева, 2006:13-14).

These theories are complementary and relate to the three stages of learning psychic sex role described by T. Repina. Already at the age five-six the child begins to make judgments as to what kind of father or mother he/she will make, but in subsequent years accumulates knowledge, learns to think, behave, dress according to their sex, acquires mother's and father's communication models both from their own and the families of their peers from (Vikmane, 2009: 215).

At preschool age formation of sex roles standard takes on the meaning of acquisition of moral laws – a great number of boys consider that involvement into girls' games is not decent for them, but girls condemn boys' loud and enthusiastic movement games containing also aggression elements. Under the impact of formation of the notion of the most appropriate behaviour model for their sex children at the age from three, four and even until the age of six and seven mostly play together in the same-sex groups. Consequently, there arise certain difficulties in organisation and process of the role play *The Family* for both genders.

In the child's sex socialisation the family, its cultural environment traditions and other factors play a great role. Similar to above mentioned S. Paulsen (Paulsen, 2011), also T. Arakanceva (Араканцева, 2006), emphasises the idea that in today's society both parents' role becomes more valuable in society, which contributes to sex socialisation of the young generation and helps to learn the important father's and mother's role (Paulsena, 2011: 55; Араканцева, 2006: 20).

Equally important is mutual parental relationship model, sharing household chores, attitude towards the child and methods used in upbringing. If the parents' attitude to the child bears a negative character, the child develops low self-esteem and dependence on the surrounding peers. If the parents put forward strict and increased demands to the child, he becomes aggressive, disobedient or on the contrary – shy and lacks enterprise.

One of the problems of contemporary society is the desire of the modern masculinised woman to reduce the father's masculine role in the family, trying to fulfil the socialising role of both parents (father, mother). Such a tendency maintains dialectical spiralling development not quite in the desired direction: one-member or masculinised families – learning the family model of the ruling woman (Vikmane, 2009: 216).

Many psychologists, in search of personality development issues at an early age in their parents' families, draw attention to the fact that humans have an unconscious tendency to replicate their parents' family model. The emotional needs unsolved in the childhood interfere with the adult life and make to search for such a partner, who would seemingly help to solve the long-standing

problems. In this way, according to V. Celuiko (Целуйко, 2004), *neurotic families* are created in which partners create inexperienced, unresolved situations in childhood, but are unable to resolve them. In such situations most often conflicts between spouses begin (Целуйко, 2004).

Regardless of the type of the family where the child's sex socialisation takes place, there exist regularities indicated by V. Druzinin (Дружинин, 2005):

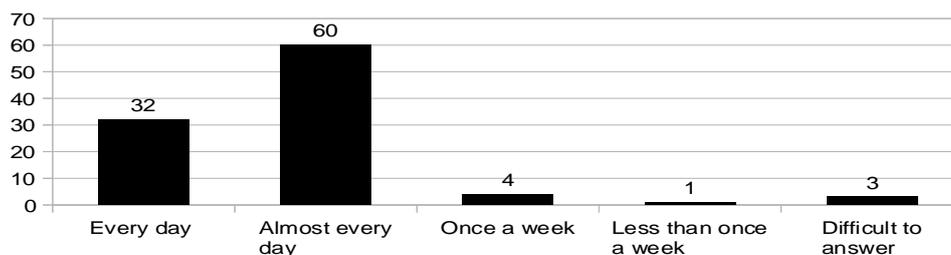
1. Children perceive and watch mutual relationship model between parents.
2. Children play the roles of father and mother with their brothers and sisters.
3. Based on the similarity with their parents' family model, they choose a spouse and form a family, /reproducing the parents' family model (Дружинин, 2005: 15).

As V. Druzinin (Дружинин, 2005) points out, implementation of this scenario is possible in families with several children and it is important to have opposite-sex children. Unfortunately, a large number of families in Latvia raise one child or two children of the same sex. Therefore, the significance of the role play *The Family* in preschool establishments or children's play-groups is topical.

### **Practical study of formation of the parents' image through the role play *The Family***

In order to clarify the empiric experience of teachers working in preschool establishments – ideas derived from everyday observations of children's involvement into the role play *The Family*, a questionnaire methodology was used. 156 teachers from several Liepāja preschool education establishments with length of service from less than a year to 39 years, working with children in the age bracket 1.2 - 6-7 years were questioned; their participation was anonymous on a voluntary basis. This to some extent influenced the obtained data, because role plays are not typical for the youngest children as yet.

In response to the question how often children engage in the role play *The Family*, 94 respondents (60%) answer that this occurs almost every day, but 50 respondents (32%) indicate, that children practice the game every day. Only 6 respondents (4%) believe it occurs only once a week. Only 2 teachers consider (1%) that it is less than once a week, but 4 teachers (3%), consider that it is difficult to answer the question. (see Figure 1)

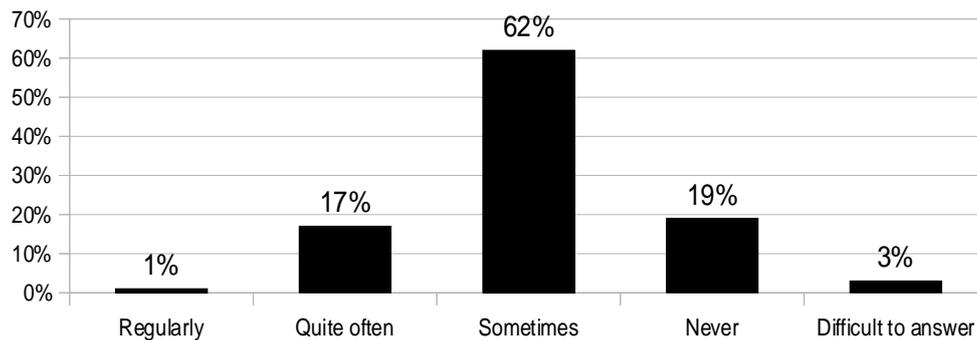


*Figure 1 Frequency of choosing the role play Family (%)*  
*1. attēls Lomu rotaļas "Ģimene" izvēles biežums (%)*

Preschool education teachers' responses confirm the significance of the role play *The Family* in children's life. The respondents (almost 100%) point out that this game is organised mainly by girls and more girls than boys are involved into it. The roles reproduced most often are: mother, child/children, father and domestic animals – the dog and the cat. Sometimes also roles of grandmothers, grandfathers and other relatives, of neighbours, friends – boys or girls - are included. It is the girls who present their roles with more confidence, even with some creativity, but with boys (in case they get involved) an expressed monotony of roles is observed, even confusion and ignorance what to do. There are cases when boys refuse from their roles and withdraw from the game. Boys are more willing to take the role of a younger brother or animal than that of the father's. As the respondents mention, in this game girls sometimes perform the role of the father or another person of the opposite sex, but boys assume the role of the opposite sex (mother, sister) very rarely and unwillingly. Girls usually dominate, even with a tendency to command, but boys submit to their orders.

The content of the role play *The Family* is rather traditional – the things children have observed in their families. Girls cook meals, lay the table and invite others to have a meal, celebrate birthdays, nurse the baby or take him/her to the doctor etc. Girls often play a very busy, hard-working mother, who has little time or a spoilt, capricious daughter. The following relations model can also be observed: mother – housewife, daughter – her assistant. Girls often show care: wipe the baby's nose, huddle him, if something has happened, bathe someone or take care about domestic pets – feed them or take for a walk. Frequently this game goes beyond the family boundaries and continues at the hairdresser's, a café or outpatient clinic. Children not only invite guests to them, but also go to see their friends. After holidays children quite often play out their holiday experiences. When reproducing mothers or fathers, children quite often speak on cell phones and tell their "children" not to interfere with their conversation. The boys taking the father's role are usually drivers and drive their mother to the nursery and the mother and the child to the nursery or the shop. They also push prams or trolleys in the supermarket or shopping carts in the supermarket. As the respondents point out, it is more important for boys it is more important to drive than get involved into the game.

In response to the question whether also imitation of unfavourable everyday situations can be observed, 27 respondents (17%) indicate that *quite often*, 96 (62%) respondents chose the answer *sometimes*. 28 respondents (19%) consider that such situations are not reproduced, but 4 respondents (3%) find it *difficult to answer* the question. Only one respondent (less than 1%) chose the version for the answer *regularly* (see figure 2).



*Figure 2 Frequency of imitating unfavourable family situations (%)*  
*2. attēls Nelabvēlīgu ģimenes situāciju attēlojuma biežums (%)*

It means that 122 respondents (78%) have observed reproduction of everyday unfavourable situations model. It is alarming that even teachers working in infants groups (1-3 years) note, that children put a pencil in their mouth and pretend that they are smoking or taking a toy block fancy it is a glass from which they drink. On the other hand, it gives satisfaction that both teachers from junior and senior groups (18%) note that children are relatively calm, friendly and nothing negative is observed when they play.

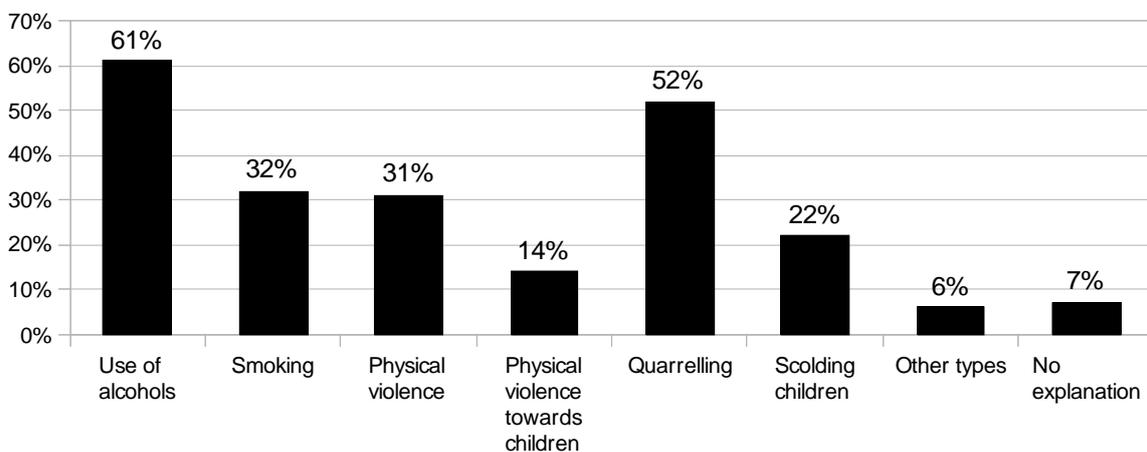
Further data will be collected only from those questionnaires which mentioned unfavourable situations. It should be noted that possible situations were not offered on purpose, i.e., no possible answers versions were defined not to influence the respondents' views.

Giving a broader characteristic of the unfavourable situations depicted in the role play *The Family* preschool education teachers most often mentioned alcohol use. 74 (61%) teachers mention it in their questionnaires. In the second place with 52% is emergence of quarrelling and arguing between parents, including also scolding children (22%). However, these responses not always give a clear answer to what extent it is meant to be only conflicts between parents, to what extent it is expression of dissatisfaction for the child's behaviour because each respondent has expressed her opinion in freely formed phrases and sentences. Smoking ranks as the third – 32%. It should be noted that smoking is usually mentioned together with the use of alcohol in the questionnaires. Also disputes and conflicts are mentioned together with alcohol use. As a dramatic complement to this situation the respondents present also manifestations of violence both between the parents and physical punishment of children, 31% and 14% correspondingly. For example, one of the respondents with a 27-year service writes: "Imitate drinking, clink glasses. Display pace of a drunken person, and speech. Arguments, exchange of sharp words. Girls "teach" dolls – scold, hit them, and make them stand in the corner."

Several questionnaires emphasise that children in their games use the name of the alcohol used: most often talking about drinking beer and champagne. For

example, “put an *actimel* bottle to their mouth and drink beer (“aliņu”) from it”. It should be noted that usually parents neither in talks or questionnaires admit that they use physical punishment against their child; however their children quite often and convincingly reproduce it in their games. For example, “mummies” frequently address their “children” by threatening, imposing prohibitions, “throw them into bed to sleep”.

7% of the respondents point out other adverse situations, for example, sex 3 (creation/production of the child), going to a strip bar. To characterise this situation the respondent gives a phrase used by children: “Hey, guys, let’s make for the strip bar!” Sometimes children reproduce episodes from TV serials: poisoning, murdering. Among unfavourable situations also passion for computer games, an accident and rushing to help the victims, family mourning for the death of a pet are mentioned. Nine questionnaires (6%) do not include answers to the question to specify the unfavourable situations (see Figure 3).



*Figure 3 Reflection of family situations through the game The Family (%)*  
*3. attēls Ģimenes situāciju atspoguļojums lomū rotaļā “Ģimene” (%)*

As the respondents’ answers show, in the role play *The Family* unfavourable everyday situations are tactfully adjusted to the language understandable for children. When teachers themselves engage into this game, most often as grandmothers, they discretely and tactfully suggest other plots: the family going to a concert, museum, on an excursion, calming down a crying baby by singing or teach to be friendly with each other, not to use rude words etc. If the teacher assumes the role of a sales-woman, everybody goes shopping with great enthusiasm.

It means that children enjoy playing games together with an adult, because it meets their need for positive emotional interaction and new concepts about functional family models are developed – not all children can get such experience in their families.

## Conclusions

1. The child's primary socialisation in the family and learning sex roles is a focus of attention in a number of theories: psychoanalytical theory, social learning or social behaviourism theory, cognitive development theory, new sex psychology or social expectations theory etc., which, although they emphasise different aspects, taken as a whole, they successfully complement each other and help to create a more complete, detailed picture of the nature of these issues.
2. Acquisition of sex role theoretically is divided into three stages: identification of own sex, formation of notions about most appropriate behaviour models for their sex and their acquisition.
3. Preschool child's primary socialisation in the family is the best way of acquiring psychic and social sex-role, which, unfortunately, is not always possible for all children in their parents' families, therefore, playing the role play *The Family* is really significant in children's groups of preschool educational establishment.
4. As preschool teachers' questionnaires show that children quite often get involved into the role play *The Family* – however, it is mainly girls, but sometimes after their invitation also boys.
5. Through this game children reproduce parents' action models observed in their families; however, alongside with typical positive family scenes: cooking, laying the table, baby care, shopping etc., quite often adverse situations are depicted: drinking and smoking, abusive words, conflicts and disputes among parents including also physical violence not only between themselves but also against the child.
6. The fact that the respondents are not indifferent to reproduction of unfavourable situations through the role play *The Family* should be evaluated positively and it helps children to develop their notions about more positive parents' behaviour models and more varied game content.

## Kopsavilkums

“Ģimenes valsts politikas pamatnostādnēs 2011.-2017. gadam norādīts, ka priekšstatus par ģimeni bērns apgūst kopš dzimšanas. Tāpēc ģimenei kā primārās socializācijas institūcijai ir liela nozīme bērna dzimumsocializācijā un vecāku ideāltēla izveidē. Diemžēl mūsdienā ģimenēs vērojama vecāku nevērība, pat vardarbība pret saviem bērniem, alkoholisms u.c. negācijas, kas negatīvi ietekmē bērna izpratni par vecāku lomu un viņa ideāltēlu. Primārās bērnu socializācijas, t.sk. dzimumsocializācijas jautājumiem pievēršas vairākas teorijas: psihoanalītiskā teorija (Z. Freids), biheivioristiskā teorija (A. Bandura), kognitīvās attīstības teorija (L. Kolbergs), kultūrvēsturiskā teorija (Ļ. Vigotskis), ekoloģisko sistēmu teorija (U. Bronfenbrenners) u.c. Bērna dzimumlomas socializācijas jautājumiem pirmsskolas vecumā pievēršas arī T. Repina, T. Arakanceva, V. Družņins u.c.

Kā liecina 156 pirmsskolas izglītības skolotāju aptauja, bērni bieži spēlē lomu rotaļu “Ģimene”, kurā atspoguļo saskarsmē ar vecākiem iegūto kā pozitīvo, tā arī negatīvo pieredzi.

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<b>Blāzma Vikmane</b>	Liepājas Universitāte Lielā iela 14, Liepāja, LV3401 E-mail: <a href="mailto:blazma.vikmane@liepu.lv">blazma.vikmane@liepu.lv</a> Tel.: +371 26435253
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