

## WOODEN VERSUS PLASTIC TOYS

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Toys have played an important role in childhood since early civilization. Toys are a very important aspect in children development (thinking, vocabulary, language imagination). During a single game the child develops a few skills and increases its attention, and during the group games, the child learns to adapt to the partners' games. The rate of change in the toy industry is faster than five years ago. Also, toy market is a constantly moving one, changing the ranges of two to three times a year. Wooden toys hold great educational value because of their simplicity. They are the most durable toys and can usually last through generations of play. Plastic toys are generally less expensive than wooden toys and are considered safer by some experts, because of the flammability of older wooden toys and possible injuries from thrown or falling wooden objects. On the other hand, wooden toys do not contain toxic PVC like plastic toys do. Currently, billions of toys are sold all over the world, two-thirds being sold during Christmas. As all the time hundreds of thousands of children suffer injuries because of the toys, in EU and also in Romania are laws that protect toys consumers. The promotion of a safe environment for children on this planet is much more important than satisfying children's fantasies which, in most of the cases are the effect of the consumerist trend.*

**KEY WORDS:** toys, wood, plastic, consumer protection, children.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Toys have been an important part of childhood since early civilization. Today children are not much different than those thousands of years ago and many of their favorite toys are similar to those that have been around for centuries. Toys develop children's multilateral personality (e.g. thinking, vocabulary, language, emotional ability, imagination). During single play, the child develops several skills and engage attention and during grup game, the child learns to adapt to play with partners. According to experts' assessments, the life of a toy model is not more than five years. The distributors believe that the rate of change is even greater. Market is constantly moving, changing the ranges from two to three times a year. In the EU the high value toys are the organic ones, such as wooden or textile toys. Plastic toys are avoided because of possible toxicity.

The increasing competition from TV, videos, CD-ROM games and the Internet determine toys producers to develop new marketing strategies. For example, Lego has tried to extend its traditional concepts and values into media products including PC and console software, books, magazines, TV, film and music. Lego has concluded licensing deals with Harry Potter, Star Wars and Winnie the Pooh in order to create themed play sets and went high-tech with products such as Mind storms. After recording losses, the Lego group focused on the re-establishment of a strong core business with classic construction toys, concentrating on small kids' eagerness to assemble. [1]

On the American market, companies are trying to differentiate their brands by approaching the gift delivery service market and using online ordering. For example, the company Vermont Teddy Bear focused on customer service, including last-minute gift delivery and personalization. The company invested in the technology infrastructure to support online orders and is using its identity as an American brand manufacturer as a key element of its market positioning for its brand.

There are many examples of companies which have applied to new markets the same business model used in the United States. Toys “R” US entered in Japan with self-service supermarket formats that offered a great variety of toys sold at low prices, although the Japanese consumers were preferring personal attention from the shop owner rather than low prices. [2]

The toy market may be considered a global market but is still influenced by local cultures and customs. The company Mattel, the producer of the Barbie dolls had to adapt the product for the Arab countries. [3]

## 2. EUROPEAN TOYS MARKET

The toy sector is one of the most dynamic business sectors in Europe: approximately 60% of toys on the market each year are newly developed products. The main EU producer countries are France, Germany, Italy and Spain. In 2010, there were approximately 78.3 million children under the age of 14 in the EU. The overall retail market for traditional toys (video games are not included) in the European Union (EU) totaled €15.5 billion in 2010. This is a 2% decrease from 2009, partly due to exchange rate variations. The toys distribution on main categories can be seen in the figure 1.

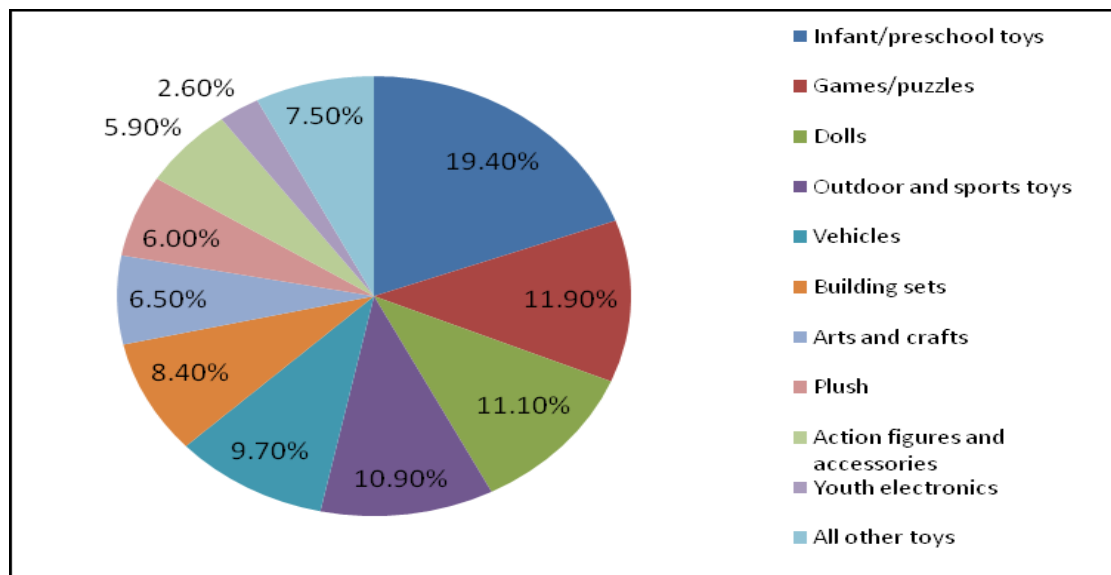
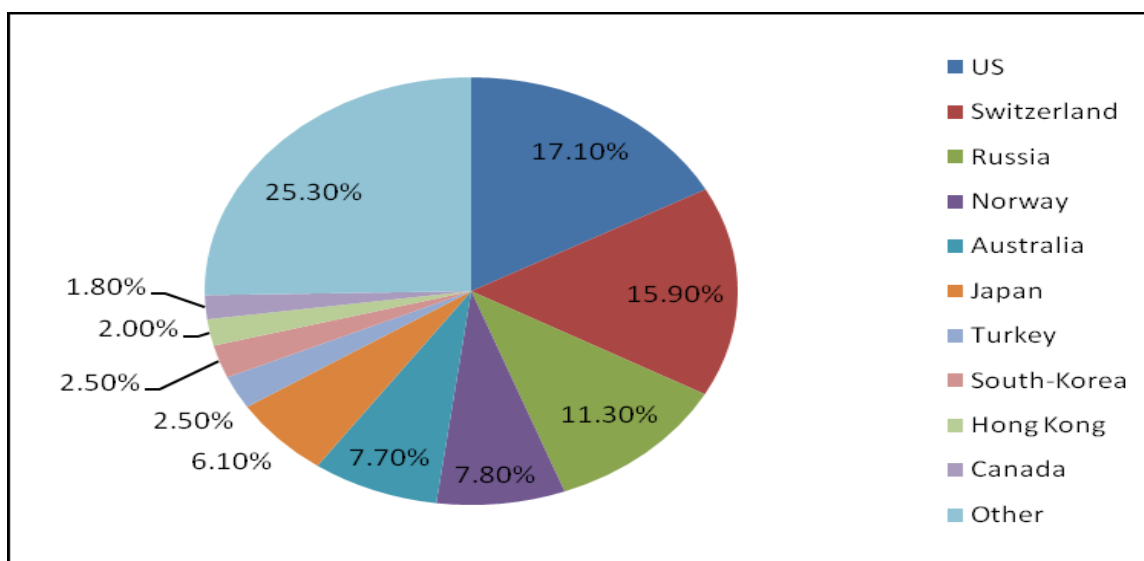


Figure 1. Toys distribution on main categories

Source: [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/toys/files/factsheets/tie\\_facts\\_and\\_figures\\_2010\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/toys/files/factsheets/tie_facts_and_figures_2010_en.pdf)

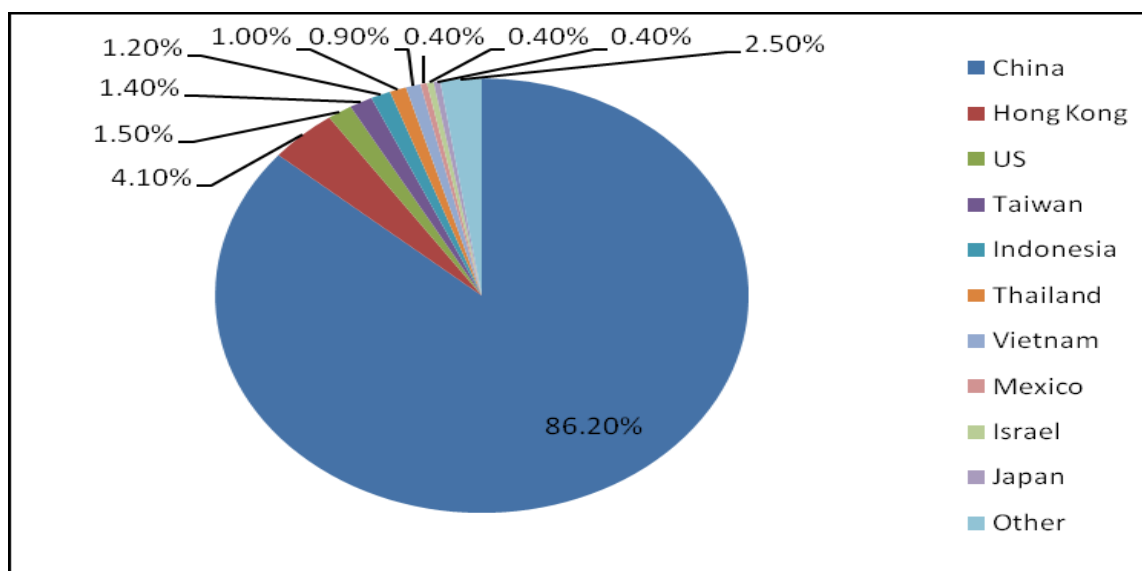
In terms of market share, the majority of EU toy sales (73%) took place in the industry’s five largest European countries that are France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK. Traditional toy sales in the top five markets were up by 4% in value every year, arriving in 2010 at €11.4 billion. In terms of revenue (turnover at retail including tax), the European toy market was the second largest in the world in 2010 with the US as the largest market for traditional toys. Total world toy sales in 2010 were approximately €62 billion in 2010, which means that the European market constituted around one quarter of the global toy market. Total exports of traditional toys from EU27 countries to non EU countries in 2010 were €1.05 billion (+10.2% compared to 2009). Figure 2 highlights the total exports and imports of traditional toys EU 27 to non EU countries.



**Figure 2. Total exports of traditional toys from EU27 countries to non EU countries in 2010**

Source: [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/toys/files/factsheets/tie\\_facts\\_and\\_figures\\_2010\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/toys/files/factsheets/tie_facts_and_figures_2010_en.pdf)

Total imports of traditional toys from non EU countries to EU27 in 2010 were €6.96 billion (+20.3% compared to 2009). China was the leading supplier of toys and accounted for 86.2% of total imports. Figure 3 reveals the total imports of traditional toys from non EU countries to EU 27 in 2010.



**Figure 3. Total imports of traditional toys from non EU countries to EU 27 in 2010.**

Source: [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/toys/files/factsheets/tie\\_facts\\_and\\_figures\\_2010\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/toys/files/factsheets/tie_facts_and_figures_2010_en.pdf)

### 3. WOOD OR PLASTIC TOYS

The earliest toys discovered by archaeologists were all made of wood. Wooden toys continued to be part of childhood for thousands of years. In the last century, toymakers became more elaborate and detailed with their wooden creations. Wooden miniatures like dollhouses, soldiers and theaters became popular during the 19th century. The production of wooden toys steadily declined as more and more toymakers opted for cheaper and more modern materials.

Today, wooden toys are rarely seen on the shelves of traditional toy stores, but the charm and appeal of these childhood classics has kept a number of wooden toy manufacturers in business. Wooden toys hold great educational value because of their simplicity. They are the most durable toys and can usually last through generations of play.

Plastic toys are made much easier for mass production and are more affordable to families. Plastic toys are generally less expensive than wooden toys and are considered safer by some experts, because of the flammability of older wooden toys and possible injuries from thrown or falling wooden objects. On the other hand, wooden toys do not contain toxic PVC like plastic toys do.

Plastic toys are made from standard issued BHT and contain phthalates and formaldehyde. Their paint is toxic and, in general, they are not good for the environment, neither in the production process, nor when they are discarded. Phthalates are chemicals present in toys which are added to make PVC soft and flexible. Phthalates are not chemically bound to PVC, so they can "leak".

An alternative to plastic toys, which are toxic, and also to protect trees used in the toy industry, new toys made from rubber trees have developed in Thailand. These rubber trees are no longer used for latex site collection. These trees are cut around the age of 25 and in the last 3 years of their life, the land is not fertilized. No chemical conservant is used. Paper and paperboard are used for packaging which are recycleble and help reduce waste. The colours used are 100% natural, water-based colours. The adhesives used are certified E0 (E-Zero), therefore they correspond to the norm.

As parents care for the children, they should ask themselves which of the toys available on the market are suitable for the children and which are not.

The main advantages of wood toys are:

- as we all know kids are rarely gentle when playing with their toys. Things that would cause pieces of a plastic toy to break, wouldn't damage a wooden toy. Thus, there is less chance that a toddler will swallow a broken piece;
- wooden toys tend to be passive. This means that the children become more involved, which in turn stimulates their imagination;
- generally they are of a higher quality in terms of design and decoration than plastic toys.
- it is easy to clean; you can simply leave the toy out in the sunshine for a few hours and that will usually kill any bacteria.
- wooden toys do not contain harmful chemicals.
- wooden toys are environmentally friendly and can be recycled.

The disadvantages of wood toys are:

- check the type of paint that was used to color the toy; some were made prior to the unleaded paint. There may be vintage and antique toys which contain lead paint which can adversely affect and harm your child.
- be aware of imperfections in the wood such as splinters and wear. Ensure also that there has not been some sort of infestation that can spread to your home, such as termites.
- wooden toys HURT when they are thrown. Make sure that you instruct and follow up with the proper use of toys. They should not be used against anyone (even at anger).
- wooden toys may cost more than plastic ones.
- can split and splinter, leaving children at injury risk

Advantages of plastic toys:

- usually plastic toys have a more polished look and therefore parents may choose them;
- plastic toys are washable than wood toys;
- plastic toys come in all shapes, colors and sizes;
- less pricey than wooden toys;
- plastic toys have more features such as electronic devices inside them, lighting etc.

Disadvantages of plastic toys:

- plastic toys are made out of PVC which is made out of chlorine which is hard and brittle. These chemical can easily be ingested while handling and chewing the toys;
- they contain various sorts of chemicals that are not considered environmental friendly and cannot be recycled as the wooden toys;

- plastic toys are not as durable as wooden toys;
- they have usually a certain purpose or only one use, such as pushing a button or turning a wheel, thus limiting the child’s imagination for other uses.

#### 4. PROTECTION OF TOYS USERS

Currently, billion toys are sold worldwide out of which two thirds are sold during Christmas. Unfortunately, hundreds of thousands of children suffer injuries because of them. The most common accidents are choking with small pieces and being hit by flying or thrown toys.

The main issues recommended by the National Authority for Consumer Protection, when adults will buy toys are:

- ✓ Read labels carefully to ensure that the game or toy meets the child's age
- ✓ Avoid noisy toys and toys which “shoot” with other objects and projectiles
- ✓ Avoid toys with sharp points or edges
- ✓ Kits (e.g. chemistry) should not be purchased for children younger than 12 years.

In our country, protection of toys is based on Government Decision 396 / 04.02.2003 on the safety of toys and GD 962 / 22.08.2007 amending and completing certain normative acts regarding the free movement of goods and the Order of the Ministry of Economy and Commerce 393 / 12.23.2003 approving the List of Romanian standards in the field of toys, which adopt the harmonized European standards: Order of the Ministry of Economy and Finance 405 / 12.02.2008 replacing the Annex to the Order of the Minister of Economy and Trade no. 393/2003 approving the List of Romanian standards in the field of toys, which adopt the harmonized European standards, based on Directive 88/378/EEC.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

Nowadays parents tend to buy toys to make children busy and take away their attention from other things e.g. watching TV. This kind of people will choose flashy plastic electronic toys, which will keep the children busy and quiet for the moment, without knowing that their creativity or learning functions are not stimulated. The consumerist character of the world we all live in does not avoid affecting our children. Therefore, parents should think twice before they use the instinct to calm a child by buying something for him, whether is plastic, wooden or any type of toy. Parents can avoid some risks by checking where the toy was manufactured, considering that some countries have established regulations regarding the use of materials in building toys.

Wooden toys have the advantage of not harming the child and the environment. They are also very simple and have the ability to transform any pile of wood parts in a parallel universe of creation and physical interaction. Parents should, still check if the pain is not lead based.

Being safe and promoting a safer environment for our children and our followers on this planet is more important than satisfying a child’s fantasies, which in most cases are an effect of the consumerist trend. The most important things are education and time spent with children which are the main activities that come hand in hand with a good toy.

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