

**7th Gaetano Cozzi Prize for studies on the history of games, 2023**

GESINE SCHUSTER

*Tanzende Patrioten? Nationale und internationale Tendenzen  
des deutschen Gesellschaftstanzes im Übergang  
vom 18. zum 19. Jahrhundert*24th November 2023 **Citation**

The study submitted by Gesine Schuster, *Patriotic dancers? National and international trends in German social dancing in the period of transition from the 18th to the 19th century*, starts with an assertion that ballroom dancing should be considered as belonging to the sphere of ludicity and social leisure activities and shows that at least in part it is by nature different from theatrical dance. She continues with observations of the importance of social dancing and other ludic practices in an attempt to reconstruct the frame of mind of the participants, their sense of belonging to or separation from groups and the extent to which such practices were indicators of social change. While this perspective is already common in sociological and anthropological studies, she recommends more a consistent adoption of the approach in the domain of historical research.

The study is based on an analysis of dance manuals, dance calendars and theoretical treatises on the development of social dancing published in German- and English-speaking countries between the mid-1700s and the mid-1800s. The prime focus is on the Napoleonic period and on the peculiarity of the role that the politico-military events of the time famously played in the development of national identities. The Germanic area is especially representative from this point of view, considering that compared with other European countries, the absence of political unity shifted the needle of the scales of identity dynamics towards the invention of a cultural tradition.

In Europe in the Modern Age, however, social dancing was strongly influenced by French fashions and featured a marked cosmopolitan character. In this context, the description of the different kinds of dance found in the sources examined increasingly mentioned their presumed association with one nation rather than another by seeing them as an expression of the character of the people in question. The case of the Germans featured a wavering between negative self-evaluation of native choreutic traditions and signs of their re-appraisal. The waltz was a typical example, though its geographical origins are the subject of debate. Especially in its livelier variants, it became the subject of both moral and medical concerns: association of the waltz with the Austro-German world, however, featured considerably more in foreign sources.



One outcome of studies like the one treated here is that it helps to shift consideration of the ludic-recreational practices of the past from the margins of somewhat anecdotal historical research that aims to reconstruct the daily life of the past, including its most ephemeral details, towards the heart of an analysis of the socio-cultural dynamics that characterise a historical period and which to some extent orientate both the forms of life and perception and evaluation of them by the women and men of the time.

For these reasons the Selection Commission for the 2023 *Gaetano Cozzi Prize for studies on the history of games* has decided to award a special mention to Gesine Schuster and to recommend that her study be published in the forthcoming issue no. 29 of the journal *Ludica. Annali di storia e civiltà del gioco*.

The Selection Board, comprising members of the Scientific Committee  
of *Ludica. Annali di storia e civiltà del gioco*:  
*Gherardo Ortalli* (chairman), *Alessandro Arcangeli*, *Maurice Aymard*, *Élisabeth Belmas*,  
*Peter Burke*, *Piero Del Negro*, *Thierry Depaulis*, *Angela Fabris*, *Christian Jaser*,  
*John McClelland*, *Alessandra Rizzi*, *Bernd Roeck*, *Manfred Zollinger* (1956-2023).