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## THE ROLE OF GAMES AND PUZZLES IN THE POPULARIZATION OF MATHEMATICS

by Miguel de GUZMÁN

SUMMARY. The main features of popularization of mathematics are described first. Then a brief analysis of the relations between games and mathematics is presented. In the third place the uses of mathematical puzzles and games for the popularization of mathematics are indicated and finally attention is directed towards some objections to the use of mathematical games.

### THE POPULARIZATION OF MATHEMATICS

In September 1989 the ICMI (International Commission on Mathematical Instruction) held an international meeting in Leeds (England) on the subject *The Popularization of Mathematics*. Almost one hundred participants from twenty different countries, including mathematicians, scientific journalists and writers of mathematics for a broad public gathered during a week in order to discuss the main features and problems of this activity called *the popularization of mathematics*. The main documents for study that arose for and from this meeting have been published by the ICMI [7] and by Cambridge University Press [4]. I shall borrow freely some of the very interesting ideas from these documents, above all from the introductory paper by Howson and Kahane, in order to better frame my own thinking about the role of games in this task of popularizing mathematics.

*What is popularization?*

Popularization is:

*sharing mathematics, its beauty and its power, with a wider public, in some cases trying to demolish the prejudices and the traditional barriers between the two cultures, much sturdier around mathematics than around any other science;*