

Children Access to Play at School

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Gdańsk as the first city in the world aims at providing 1 hour free play everyday to each child from public school in early education



With the new school year in Gdansk, a pilot educational program begins, the aim of which is to promote freely play, everyday with what the young people will find in a „container”.

The story is about how your "junk" will serve the school.

What is GratoSfera?

GratoSfera assumes placing in the green area of **9 Gdańsk schools** of maritime container (warehouse) with unobvious

equipment, which will allow participants to spread the wings of imagination. This creative space will contain so-called "loose parts", i.e. elements such as plastic pipes, nets, boxes, materials, tires, barrels, wooden spools, used electronic equipment, cables, nets, sponges, etc. It will be a perfect place for the participants to develop their imagination.

The role of the adult guardian will be kept to a minimum and will be limited to ensuring the safety and organization of the space for children.

During free play, young people will be able to develop their social skills, increase the level of physical activity and, above all, stimulate their creativity by using what they have at hand. This means doing exactly what their parents and grandparents did before the Internet age.

Who invented it?

GratoSfera is part of a wider **CAPS** (Children Access to Play in School) grant project and was developed in close cooperation with the British organisation OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) - a pioneer in the field of free play and in cooperation with partners from **5 EU countries** under the **Erasmus+** programme. In Gdańsk, the coordinator is the Social Development Department of the Municipal Office, the Department of Strategy and Social Programmes, in cooperation with the **Sports Club Gedania 1922**, here **Kamil Maciaszek** as the play-leader. **Aleksandra Kulik** from the Department of Social Development is a large part of city success and **prof Tomasz Frołowicz**, a part of our Gdańsk team to design researcher proving the necessity to increase outdoor play.

Does it work?

One of the foundations of maintaining the mental balance of children up to 10 years of age is about 1 hour of free play per day. Just as sleep and food are essential for a child's health, free play is essential for children to maintain their mental health.

During the designated time of the day, which lasts about an hour, children, under supervision of adults, have fun using "Loose Parts" and their own, unlimited imagination.

Undoubtedly, this is confirmed by long-term research conducted by the OPAL organization. It has been shown that children with access to free play have seen a significant increase in **interpersonal competences (by 80%)**, a significant increase in resistance to stress, self-confidence and the ability to adapt to changing conditions, resilience and plasticity of the mind. Teachers working in institutions providing children with free play reported extended active teaching time (**by up to 20 minutes/ 45 minutes lesson**), as well as a **significant decrease in negative behaviours**, including acts of aggression and violence. This also reduced the amount of time spent on solving conflicts among children.

(Source: Howard J, Miles GE, Rees-Davies L, Bertenshaw EJ. Play in Middle Childhood: Everyday Play Behaviour and Associated Emotions. Child Soc. 2017;31(5):378-389. doi:10.1111/chso.12208))

Since we have seen a **steady increase in depression and suicide rates** among children and adolescents over the last 10 years, the issue of maintaining the mental health of children is fundamental to us.

(sources: https://www.who.int/mental_health/suicide-prevention/globally_in_young_people_2016.JPG?ua=1

https://www.who.int/mental_health/resources/suicide/en/)

Invitation

We would like to invite here all **parents, school staff memebers, NGOs** or any other people to join us and spread the idea of free play for kids all over Europe.

Any action on the part of adults, teachers, parents, NGOs and governments to promote everyday free play for kids under the age of 10. will lead to a better world where children will be able to develop the necessary skills like: creativity, resilience, empathy, cooperation. We would like to underline the necessity of unrestricted play crucial for children to maintain their mental balance.

Watch the movie:

<https://youtu.be/nqi1KyJJeKg>

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