

# European project aims to boost confidence to play outdoors



*Hanging OUT Outdoor education as a way to enhance the quality of early childhood education and care and to promote active citizenship*

To grow confidence in outdoor play, to inspire teachers, parents and policy-makers to look at outdoor spaces from different angles and give children every opportunity to participate. These are the goals of this promising European project on outdoor play.

## Challenges and outdoor opportunities

Europe is facing major challenges. These include complex cultural issues and challenge in terms of social and economic disadvantage and early school leaving age. High-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) can be a bridge to tackling these problems.

Hanging out! is an ambitious project that explores the potential of any outdoor environment as a way to deal with the challenges mentioned above. Eleven complementary strategic partners from five different countries (Belgium, Lithuania, Portugal, United Kingdom and Denmark) want

to give students, teachers, professionals and parents the confidence, tools and support to explore and create experiments using different educational practices outdoors. The voice of children is central to this project. It aims to look at the outdoor space with all its opportunities from the eyes of a child and draw on this perspective. Barbara De Jonge and Els Teunissen of the Thomas More teacher training college in Mechelen are coordinating the European project.

## Learned early ...

Barbara and Els (Belgium): "We have chosen to start from nursery school. Our vision is that starting early is half the battle. From that point of view, we will work with the target group of 0 to 6-year-olds.

In our project, we investigate the possibilities of 'outdoor learning'. And not just in the forest, but from the moment you step out of the door. The idea behind this is that it is a very accessible area, very democratic too: this public space is accessible to everyone, anytime, anywhere. It offers opportunities for everyone. And we want to explore and exploit those opportunities. We want to make parents, teachers and town planners aware of this outdoor space and all its possibilities.

Research shows that people and children are spending more and more time indoors and much less outdoors. Yet it is both mentally and physically very important to spend a lot of time outside. Teachers and parents often know that, but lack the confidence to do it effectively".

Daiva Kelpsaite (Vilnius): "With this project we really want to convince people to experiment with such an outdoor kindergarten. Try, experiment, don't be afraid to go outside! We want to give them the right tools to go 'outdoors'. And also give them the confidence that as much can be learned outside as inside."



## From Gopro to flashcards

The project is also currently working on some concrete tools. These include an innovative GoPro video database that provides insights into interactions between children and the material environment and can be used not only by teachers, parents, but also by policy makers, architects, etc. It is also developing inspiring flashcards that show children's autonomy through outdoor activities and an App that looks for (learning) opportunities in the outdoor environment (urban and rural) thus bridging the gap between the digital and natural environment.

Ana Loureiro (Portugal): "Although the last year has been challenging in terms of education, we are still developing and producing the flashcards. These are designed around the four natural elements (water, air and earth) and can help the teacher to implement certain activities. The flashcards have also been tested in Denmark."

A website has been created to share these inspirational materials. Users will be able to view the app, videos and use the image bank and the supporting reflective materials.



## Exchange as the greatest strength

The education partners from the different countries meet to share knowledge and experiment with each other's outdoor activities. The current (online) international week was organised by Louvain-La-Neuve. A great asset of enormous added value, says Ida Guldager, project partner from Denmark: "Meeting colleagues from all over Europe is very interesting and also puts our own work into perspective. Working with the Go-Pro is also innovative for us and we are eagerly looking forward to the insights into how children interact with the environment, here in the forest." Mary Scanlan, project partner from the UK says: "Working internationally with schools, early years settings and students means a range of perspectives are heard".

The city of Mechelen is also a partner in the project, Tim Gordts says: "As a city, we find it important that every child has an outdoor space close to home. We also want to encourage children to play in a natural way. What makes this project so interesting are the different visions on play and how some countries are already so much further in this than Belgium. With this project, we also want to find the right words, the right arguments, to convince city residents, parents and teachers that adventurous play is also challenging and right. They are the bricks for our play policy."



Want to know more about the project? Then keep an eye on this site:  
<https://ipsantarem.wixsite.com/hangingout>