



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



INTRODUCTION

The effects of the Covid-19 have reached all areas and have also affected the development of the European Sport! Op! project which will be extended by another 6 months, until December 2022. COVID 19 has forced the delay of the various project partner's pilot projects, however, all the partners have finally been able to start during 2021. You will find out about many of these pilot projects in this second newsletter.

In addition, we have resumed the face-to-face follow-up meetings starting with the one held in Sarajevo during the month of October.





Multisport enters western Zagreb



Through the local needs assessment, it was recognised that in the western part of the city of Zagreb there is little on offer for kids who want to do sports. The only thing available is football, which targets mainly boys. The problems arising from this lack of sport offer are:

- Exclusion from sport of a substantial part of the child population who are not interested in football
- Exclusion of kids whose parents don't have the time, or the means to take them to different sport activities in other parts of the city
- Lack of organised physical activity outside regular school hours
- Children are deprived of socialisation that comes through participation in sport.

During the first SportOP! local working group meeting a few ideas were given as how to best address these problems. In the end HAŠK Mladost in collaboration with its field hockey section has developed a program to offer a new sport activity in cooperation with two elementary schools.

The program is being implemented through organised sport activities. Participation is free of charge and the activities take place twice a week with educated and experienced coaches. This is a structured sport program for enhancing physical, motor and coordination skills. Proven sport training methods are used to help children learn how to act in different social situations. The biggest benefit is that activities are organised in schools immediately after the end of school hours so there is no need for parents to take the children to training sessions. Additionally, the parents know that the children are in a safe environment with organised activities and adult supervision.





Psychosocial effects of physical activity on mental health. How involving vulnerable groups in sport activities improves their social resilience



NGO “Marathon” Sarajevo, within the Erasmus+ project Sport!Op! and in collaboration with SOS Children Village BiH and Athletic club Novi Grad, implements activities which use athletics as a tool to promote and develop social inclusion of children without parental care. But what are the fundamental improvements which benefit better social status of these children? Taking into consideration the fact that children without parental care often deal with different forms of life traumas and therefore are “overwhelmed with feelings of abandonment, rejection, worthlessness, guilt, and helplessness which leads to depression and anxiety” (Folman, 1998), it was natural that we, as an NGO which organizes running school and running activities in the local community, try to pay attention on those negative emotions and try to influence them through sport.

Studies show that individuals who engage in light or intense physical leisure activities have lower rates of depression, anxiety or comorbid depression-anxiety. It is shown that the intensity of physical activity does not appear to be important but the activity itself is what produces positive effects. (Physical activity and common mental disorders, Cambridge University, 2018).



Furthermore, the researchers investigated possible factors influencing the link between physical activity and common mental disorders and identified 3 key factors of which the social factor (number of friends and social activities) stands out as the most important in moderate reduction of mental disorders.





According to the analyzed results, factors such as social support and social engagement may partly explain this relationship between physical activity and the reduction of symptoms of depressive disorders.

According to the Evaluation of the Recreational Racing Club in 2017, almost all participants who completed the running school program and participated in the final sports event, expressed greater satisfaction with their quality of life, and thus the improvement of their general psychosocial condition.

Guided by the previously mentioned research and by good examples of programs for the implementation of social inclusion based on sports in public running schools, NGO 'Marathon' Sarajevo started activities with the aim of improving children's physical fitness, social skills, position in the local community and general mental state (which had been disturbed by life traumas they had been through).

Enes Hatibović- Child Development Associate working in "SOS Children's Village Sarajevo" said that he noticed significant improvement in general behavior and positive thinking of children involved in the project. He reported the positive results of activities, particularly the fact that organized training enabled children and young people to develop their social skills, sense of belonging to the group, their mental and physical abilities and a competitive spirit and love for sports. Furthermore it enabled them to adopt work habits and respect rules.

All the above mentioned contributes to raising children's self-confidence, positive self-perception, which ultimately produces better social acceptance and involvement in both the local and wider community.

After several months of training, significant progress was seen within the group of children who took part in project activities. Most noticeably in respect for group rules and authority, responsibility, a raised level of concentration, discipline, communication quality and clear expression of personal states and feelings.

These results achieved show that the Sport! Op! project activities carried out in Sarajevo, BiH undoubtedly join a number of good practices which confirm the connection between physical activity and its positive impact on common mental disorders. Moreover, there is an improvement in the quality of life and personal self-perception as a valued member of society, thus reducing the risk of developing anxiety and depression disorders.



As said by Selma Kukić- NGO “Marathon” Team leader: “Research and examples of positive practices are the starting point for each of our activities. However, the satisfaction of the children which can be seen during the training we organize, the attitude they have and the pride and smiles they share when mastering each exercise, are what confirm the ultimate goal of the project in a more honest, simple and convincing way than any statistics”.

Granollers City Council and various sports clubs in the city are joining forces to bring sport closer to children in situations of vulnerability.



Ajuntament de Granollers

Granollers City Council has started a pilot test within the Sport!Op! project which involves the sports and social services departments working together with sports organizations and clubs in the city. The aim is to build the resilience and improve social skills of children in vulnerable situations by taking part in sports in an inclusive manner.

To further this objective, an inclusive approach for children between 8 and 12 years old has been adopted by various sports organizations (three football clubs and a skating club). Special emphasis has been put on the participation of girls. About thirty children have taken part and have been able to choose in which club they prefer to play sports. From November 2021 until June 2022, they will have access to sports activities outside school hours twice a week.





This pilot project in Granollers focuses on two aspects: the **support and advice to trainers** and the **support to families and children** participating in the project.

With regard to the **support and advice to the trainers**, it is necessary to facilitate the socio-educational intervention which training staff provide. Consequently, they will be provided with tools to unleash the educational potential of the sports activity. In addition, there will be a need to develop training programs related to social inclusion and education in sport, as was proposed by the city's sports organizations during the 1st Multiplier Sport Event with local stakeholders. Throughout the pilot test process, the trainers will be accompanied by a social educator and a leading sports technician from the project.

As well as the support to carry out an activity that combines sport and education, it is important to know what the training staff need to effectively support their task when working with children. This will enable a teaching/learning educational process promoting values and the acquisition of skills for life.

Finally, The effectiveness of the program will be evaluated by assessing: - if it has widened trainers' knowledge of how to resolve situations of conflict; whether instructors have improved their ability to carry out more inclusive and fair sports activities for all, with a philosophy of zero tolerance to discrimination; whether they have more practical resources to release the educational potential of sport. Last but not least, the usefulness of the project will be analyzed.

Regarding the second aspect of the project, the process of **support for children and families**. We would like to accompany and monitor the participants of the project, encouraging sports participation to develop introspection, self-confidence, motivation and the children's ability to socialize. The aim is to discover what difficulties have been faced throughout the process, what solutions have been adopted and future plans to avoid these difficulties. Likewise, the effectiveness of the program must be evaluated by the recipients of the test.

With the participation of the different groups involved, it should allow us to make recommendations on what the best tools for integration are. Consequently, it will allow us to propose a local strategic action plan to work for this integration in the future.





Refugees doing sport at school. A valuable step to improve integration



The sports department of the GO! atheneum leper is highly motivated to commit itself to the Sport!Op!- project. A team of 7 senior students have been working very hard on

integrating vulnerable young people into society in sporting and social terms. Together with their mentors Renato Brion and Björn Vanisacker they have approached three different target groups.

The first of these groups are the refugees from the Fedasil asylum seeker center in Langemark-Poelkapelle. To promote and disseminate sports, the seven students organized a cricket match for the young adults and some games for the children at the center. For these events, our students travelled to the center, as due to limited mobility it was difficult for the refugees to come to our facilities. In addition, some women are not allowed to participate in sports in public areas because of their religious beliefs.

The second group of participants is the OKAN class, which is a class where non-native speakers can go to school and learn Dutch. This group is highly motivated and have got to know and play all kinds of sports. On a weekly basis we provide a different sports experience where some sports students are the coaches and other participants in the activities. Autonomy is the keyword in these lessons, the students and the other participants help to decide which activities we need to provide.





We wanted to reach more vulnerable youngsters, so we expanded by contacting the 'De Mote' primary school. This school is located on the campus of the atheneum, where vulnerable children are a large part of the population. In the near future we will also start up activities for this group. We think it's important to teach these children all kinds of sports at a young age, so they can discover their talents.

So far everyone has been driven to participate in the sports activities. We are convinced that the integration of our students in the sports culture of the vulnerable youngsters will provide positive outcomes for general inclusion. Another big help is the fact that we have a lot of facilities and cooperate with the local football club KVK Westhoek.

With the green magical goalcha ball and the concept of 'Hand the Ball' we build self-confidence and social skills among children



In this second newsletter we would like to give you an update about the development of our project and tell you more about our pilot implementation.

At the beginning of September, we started our pilot implementation at Vikingaskolan in Lund. Our main goal is to use handball as a tool to build self-confidence and social skills among children by using the concept of 'Hand the Ball'. The aim is to trigger the inner motivation in the participants and demonstrate that physical activities are fun and that friendship across age groups, ethnicity, skill levels and backgrounds are possible.

We introduced 'Hand the Ball' during the physical education class for the children in the 4th, 5th and 6th grade (age of 10-12 years old). This introduction was followed by activities in the schoolyard once or twice a week during the breaks supervised by our 'Hand the Ball' instructors. The instructor plays an important role in 'Hand the Ball' by making it an inclusive activity unlimited by the participants age, background, and skill level. The main task of instructors is to mo-





tivate and encourage the children to participate in the activities and inspire them to challenge themselves. The instructor always participates in the activities to ensure that everyone is involved and to challenge the participants based on their individual characteristics and skill levels.

The training program consists of individual activities and challenges, activities performed in pairs and other elements done in either smaller or larger groups.

The training program consists of coordination exercises, shooting drills, obstacle courses and activities with rebounder and playing elements of street handball. The concept is flexible to the executing environment, amount of people participating, and the equipment being used. The most important component in the activities is the green magical soft 'goalcha' ball which encourages participation. All training sessions are developed so everyone is moving a lot and the focus is on the fun parts of the activities, rather than the results.

The outcome of the pilot implementation so far :

After running the project for two and a half months we have noted some difference in the behaviour of the children which we would like to share.

- It is notable that we didn't attract the same children during the introduction during the PE class as we do during the breaks. The explanation may lie in the fact that there are certain underlying norms during the physical education class that suit some people, while others prefer another environment based on voluntary participation.
- We found it easier to reach the younger children, they are generally more open-minded, while we must work harder to attract the older children, especially girls.
- 'Hand the Ball' as a concept feels very appreciated among the children. It is





based on inspiration from many different sports and therefore is easy for them to relate to, and they think it is a lot of fun.

- Our presence at the school during the breaks has spread and there is generally curiosity to take part in the activities. Also, children outside our target group have shown great interest in participating.
- The instructor in 'Hand the Ball' has an important role as the person who has the power to inspire and affect the children in a positive way. At the same time, he/she has can adjust the exercises and make it an inclusive activity for everyone.
- As the children begin to adopt the concept of 'Hand the Ball', they understand that the activities are built on their own engagement, creativity and initiative to challenge themselves and develop the activities together.
- It shows that the children are confident in the context and motivated to contribute, take responsibility, be open-minded and receptive to change and develop. They come up with suggestions on how exercises can be performed and developed depending on the environment and what is available from the surroundings. Some activities can be perceived as organized chaos, which indicates a high level of commitment and great ingenuity by the children.
- Team-spirit has increased among the children, everyone is welcome to participate and are being encouraged to join the activities by the others, regardless of age, ethnicity, or skill level.
- The concept of 'Hand the Ball' has had a positive outcome in the everyday activities during breaks in the schoolyard. We have seen a tendency for the children to develop the games differently than before in a more inclusive way to get everyone involved, which is a really positive outcome.
- The joy of the moment is consistent and there is a lot of laughter during the activities. We have found that the children appreciate that we are doing activities with them, and we have noted that the self-confidence of the children is growing. They are interested in showing what they have come up with, or what they (now) can do (after practicing)- which they do with pride.

During the period of the pilot activity, we have engaged with more than 200 children at Vikingaskolan in Lund. In our experience 'Hand the Ball' is a great concept to build self-confidence and social skills among children and the key to its





success is the role of the instructor and the green soft magical ‘goalcha’ ball.

By using the concept of ‘Hand the Ball’ we contribute to the well-being of the participants by fostering better physical and mental health through sport activities. We shift focus from competition and results to the social and activation element of the game and make it an inclusive activity unlimited by participants’ age, gender, experience, and skill level. We achieve social inclusion and contribute to the welfare of the children by using ‘Hand the Ball’ as a tool.

