

From the Campus, Through the Tuchola Forest, to the Museum of the Second World War – BIP ‘Outdoor Education in Intercultural Perspective’ at the University of Gdańsk



Participants of the BIP programme at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Gdańsk

Outdoor education is often associated simply with leaving the school premises or going on a field trip. It is also sometimes reduced solely to environmental education. In reality, however, outdoor education is a carefully planned teaching process based on experiential learning and placing pupils/students in problem-solving situations. Participants of the Blended Intensive Programme “Outdoor Education in Intercultural Perspective” explored the principles of this teaching method in various locations across the Gdańsk Pomerania region. The programme was coordinated by Dr. Paweł Śpica, ECO and Vice-Dean for Education at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Gdańsk.

The ‘Outdoor Education in Intercultural Perspective’ programme brought together a total of 27 students from various teacher-training degree programmes and 9 academic teachers from several ETEN member universities: AP University of Applied Sciences and Arts (Antwerp, Belgium), HZ University of Applied Sciences (Vlissingen, the Netherlands), Dalarna University (Falun, Sweden) and University of Gdansk (Poland). The goal of the virtual component was to methodologically prepare students to conduct outdoor education activities and to explore various ways of applying this form of education in the participants’ local environments. The aim of the visit to Poland was to demonstrate the broad range of possibilities for applying outdoor education in teaching practice.



BIP 'Outdoor Education in Intercultural Perspective' – map for the field game

'Outdoor education is education conducted outdoors, outside the school building. It is often mistakenly associated exclusively with environmental education, although its scope is much broader', noted Paweł Śpica, the programme coordinator. 'It is an educational approach focused on learning through experience. We absorb knowledge differently when learning about a forest in a classroom than when we are actually in the forest. However, the point is not for outdoor classes to focus solely on transmitting specific knowledge, as in the traditional education model, but rather to have a problem-solving character. What matters is placing students in front of a specific problem to solve, which also helps develop their creativity. This approach is characteristic of experiential learning'.

The BIP course consisted of two parts. The first was an online course that had been running since April. The second included tasks and activities in Gdańsk, Kashubia, and the Tuchola Forest. During the programme, participants took part in, among others:

a field game and classes on the University of Gdańsk campus in Oliwa (including workshops in the laboratory at the Faculty of Chemistry, the Sustainable Development Centre, the Career Office, the University Library, the Institute of Pedagogy, and the Institute of Media, Journalism and Social Communication);

workshops at the Teodora and Izydor Gulgowski Kashubian Ethnographic Park in Wdzydze (including the workshop 'School Long Ago');

a canoe trip on the Brda River;

nature-based activities in the 'Tuchola Forest' National Park;

a visit to the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk.



Kayaking trip on the Brda River

The first item on the programme was a field game held on the University of Gdańsk campus in Oliwa. As Dr. Paweł Śpica emphasized, the field game is one of the most characteristic methods used in outdoor education:

‘It is a way of experiencing space and places connected with specific people, either in the past or present. Field games work especially well in history education, which is particularly close to me because of my academic background. In the case of our project, the field game was the best way for our guests to get to know the University of Gdańsk. Most of the international participants of the BIP visited Poland for the first time. We tried to change the perception that people from Western or Northern Europe may have about Poland and our education system.

‘During the BIP, we familiarized participants with different approaches to outdoor education and showed them what it looks like here in Gdańsk Pomerania. During the classes, students also presented their own projects demonstrating possibilities for organizing outdoor activities in their local environments’, said Paweł Śpica. ‘From an educational perspective, it was extremely important for us to show students that the places where they live provide an excellent space for educating in various contexts—not only regional, but also global’.



In the Tuchola Forest National Park

Activities within the programme took place from 18 to 22 May.