

A child wearing a red beanie and a yellow sweater with a dinosaur pattern is standing in a workshop. The child is looking towards a large wooden table in the foreground. On the table, there is a large, abstract painting consisting of concentric, irregular shapes in black and white, resembling a target or a stylized face. The workshop is filled with various tools and materials, including a workbench with a vise, a stack of papers, and a blue metal frame in the background.

Education is a Relationship

Lublin and Reykjavik
Cooperation for Education

PROJECT BROCHURE

*We have the pleasure of inviting you to read this brochure on the project, **Education is a Relationship. Lublin and Reykjavik Cooperation for Education.***

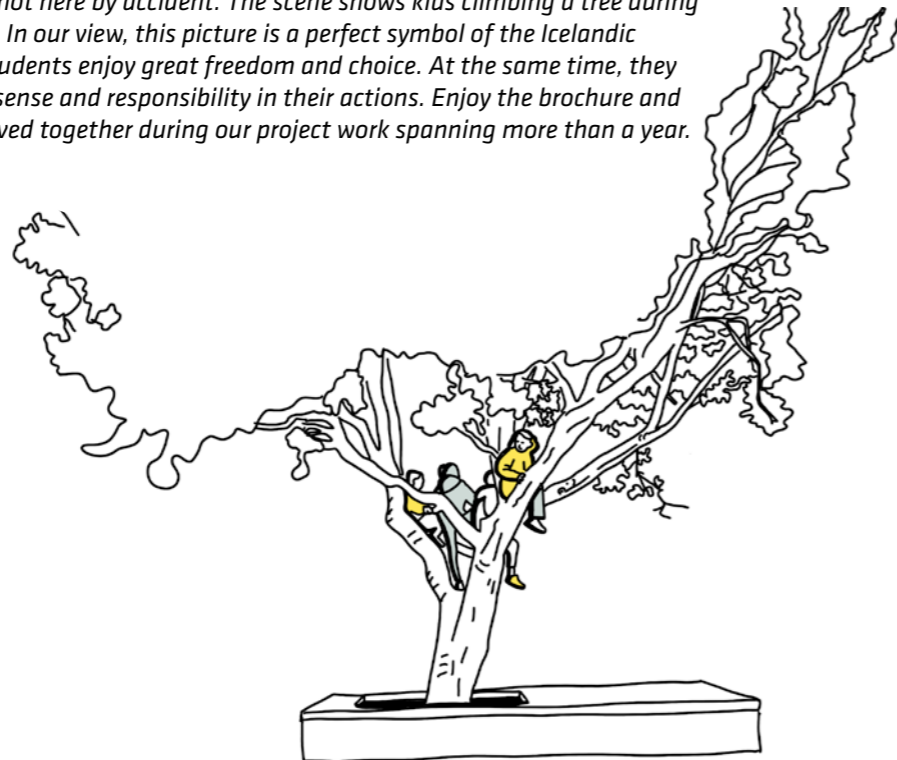
The project aimed to explore the idea of good relationships at school. In our opinion, they are among the key factors that make school a place that everybody dreams of. Good relationships have an invaluable impact on students' sense of safety and sense of belonging to the place. In a congenial atmosphere based on mutual understanding, trust and kindness, not only do student learn better, but they are also more creative and open to accept new challenges.

They are also in a better position to alleviate fear of failure because it is not associated with a person but only with a task, one of many to be tackled at school.

Good relationships and welfare are at the heart of the education system in Scandinavian countries. That is why, we decided to invite a project partner from Reykjavik.

The drawing pasted below is not here by accident. The scene shows kids climbing a tree during a break in a Reykjavik school. In our view, this picture is a perfect symbol of the Icelandic education system in which students enjoy great freedom and choice. At the same time, they must demonstrate common sense and responsibility in their actions. Enjoy the brochure and have a look at what we achieved together during our project work spanning more than a year.

Project Team



Goal

The goal of the project, **Education is a Relationship. Lublin and Reykjavik Cooperation for Education**, was to strengthen the knowledge, competence, and experience of school staff in developing a friendly school environment that helps students grow their social competence set.

By friendly school environment, we mean a school setting where positive emotions and good relationships between people are more than a mere theory. With a view to exploring the problem better, we identified three key areas in which we asked ourselves the following questions:

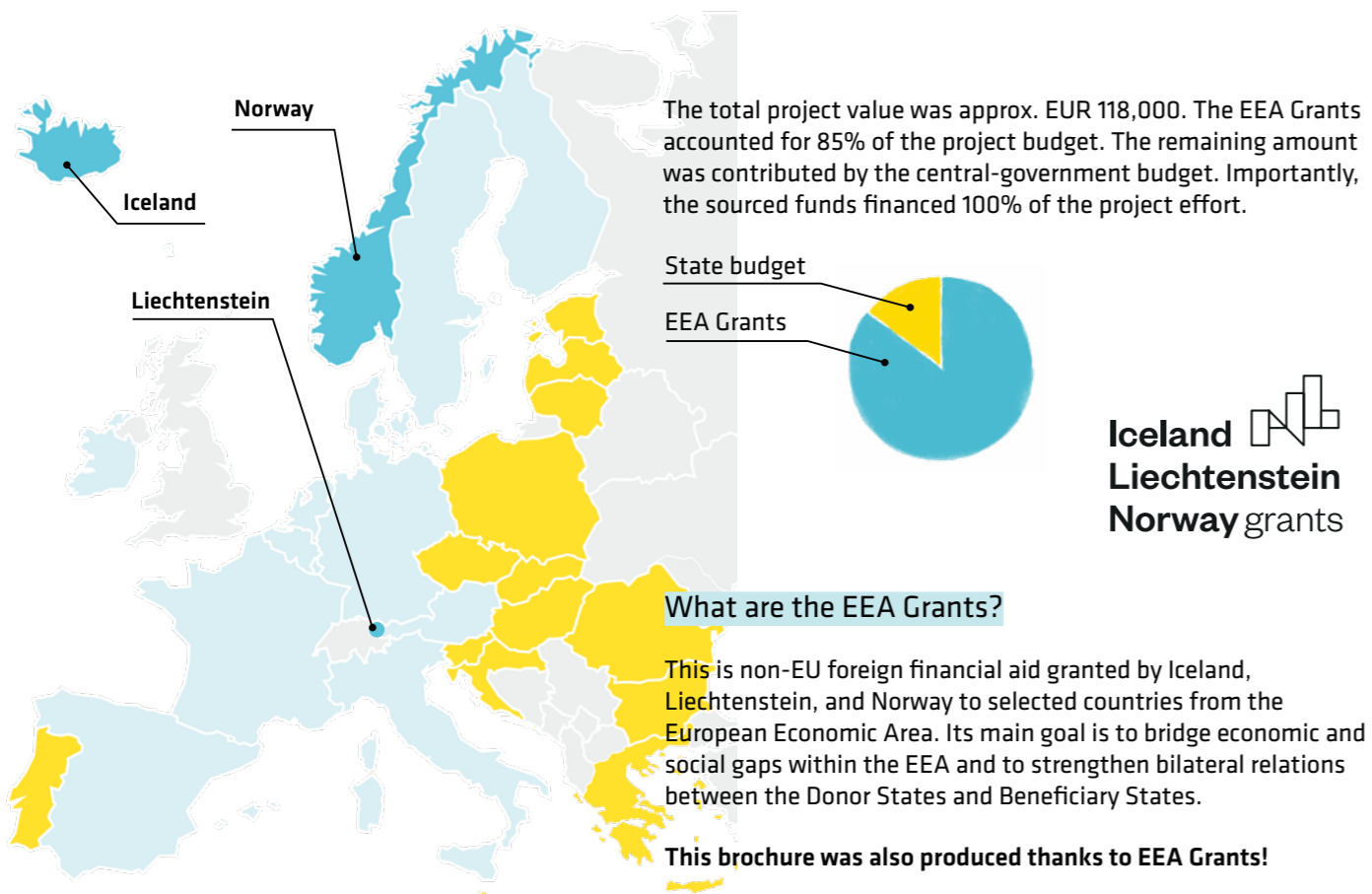
- What should the teacher-student-parent communication be like at school?
- How and why to develop students' social competence?
- How to create a friendly school setting that will facilitate the fostering of good relationships?



FRIENDLY
SCHOOL SPACE

Funding

Our project was co-funded as part of the Education Programme of the EEA Financial Mechanism.



Source: <https://eeagrants.org/countries>
EOG Grants 2014-2021

The Education Programme was developed under an intergovernmental agreement on the implementation of the EEA Grants concluded between Poland and Iceland, the Principality of Liechtenstein, and the Kingdom of Norway.

The main objectives of the Education Programme are:

- to bridge economic and social gaps within the EEA,
- to strengthen bilateral relations in the area of education between Poland and the Donor States,
- to unlock and develop human potential and expand knowledge through education.

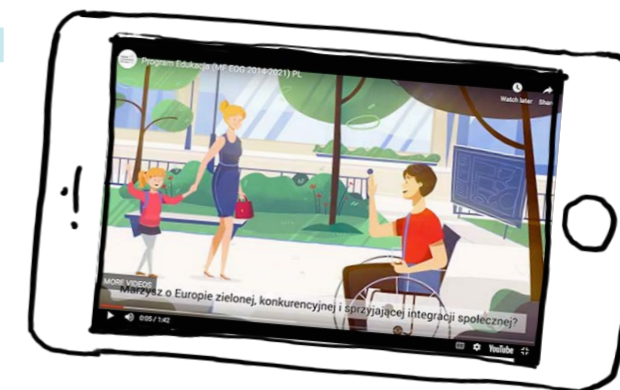
The Polish operator of the Education Programme is the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (Pol. FRSE).

To date, the FRSE has held two calls for proposals under the Education Programme: in 2019 and 2021. In total, over 270 projects were approved as eligible for funding. The allocation for the two calls totalled over EUR 21 million.

Learn more about the Education Programme

Watch a [promotional video here](#)

Programme website: education.org.pl



Project partners

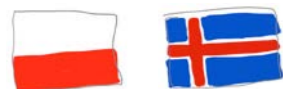
Our project primarily relied upon cooperation of two local governments: Lublin and Reykjavik. This is clearly stated in the title of the project.

Why did the two local governments decide to join forces?

First, they are the administrative bodies running public schools; second, they have a real impact on educational strategies that educational establishments in our cities are bound to implement.

It is crucial to know which path we should take and what needs to be done better to ensure good relationships in schools.

The City of Lublin was the project leader, and the city of Reykjavik was the project partner.



Who was behind project coordination?

International Cooperation Centre (ICC)
Department of Education (DE) of the Lublin Municipal Office

Małgorzata Gałus – coordinator (ICC)
Małgorzata Jończyk – coordinator (DE)

Department of Education and Youth, the City of Reykjavik.
Hjörtur Ágústsson – coordinator

Project participants

The project covers seven elementary schools: five from Lublin and two from Reykjavik.

Schools from Lublin

- Józef Czechowicz Elementary School No. 19
- Queen Jadwiga of Poland Elementary School No. 21
- Adam Mickiewicz Elementary School No. 29
- Henryk Sienkiewicz Elementary School No. 38
- Ignacy Jan Paderewski Elementary School No. 43



Schools from Reykjavik

- Dalskóli Elementary School
- Vesturbæjarskóli Elementary School



How it started

1

Establishment of the Project Team

Establishment of the Project Team and appointment of persons tasked with project coordination on the Leader and Partner sides.

2

Selection of a group of 20 teachers from five Lublin schools

Our intention was for the groups of four teachers from each elementary school to be made up of: a representative of the school governance, a representative of the teaching staff and school psychologists, a teacher working with grades 1-3 and a teacher working with grades 4-8.

3

Selection of experts

A team of experts from Poland and Iceland to work on project recommendations.

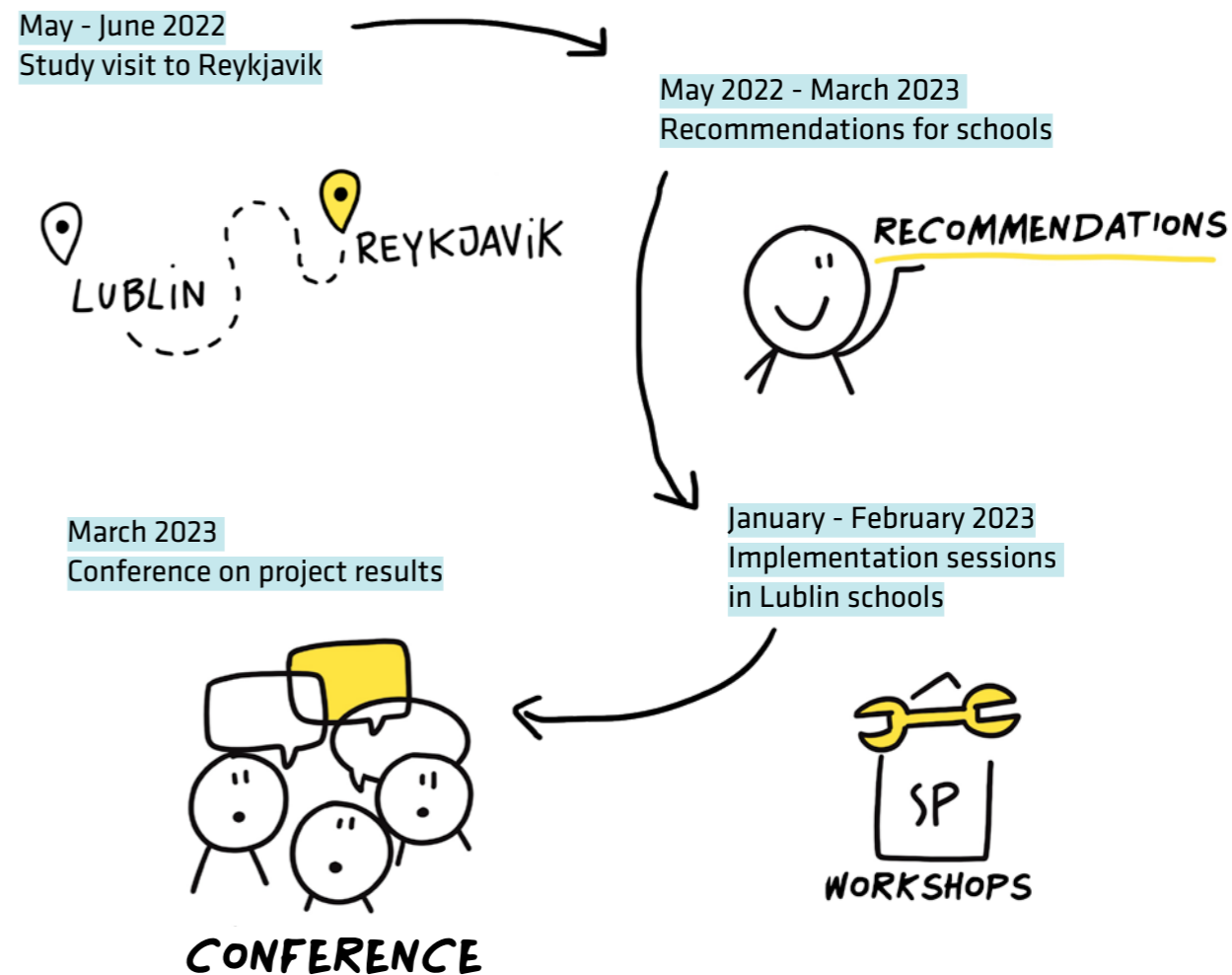
4

Assignment of project tasks

Assignment of project tasks and the phasing of the project into stages.

Project activities

The project covered four main focus actions:



Study visit to Reykjavik

The project launch overlapped with the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Still, we made every effort to ensure that our project activities would continue as planned.

In May and June 2022, a delegation of 24, including teachers and members of school governance from Lublin, as well as representatives of the Project Team from Lublin, travelled to Reykjavik for a four-day study visit. It was the first meeting of the entire project group.



Project team's family photo on top of Vesturbæjarskóli



School chillout zone in Dalskóli



With our project partner, Hjörtur Ágústsson



Rest area



Kids' portraits in Dalskóli



Cosy hole in the wall - Dalskóli

Our goal was:

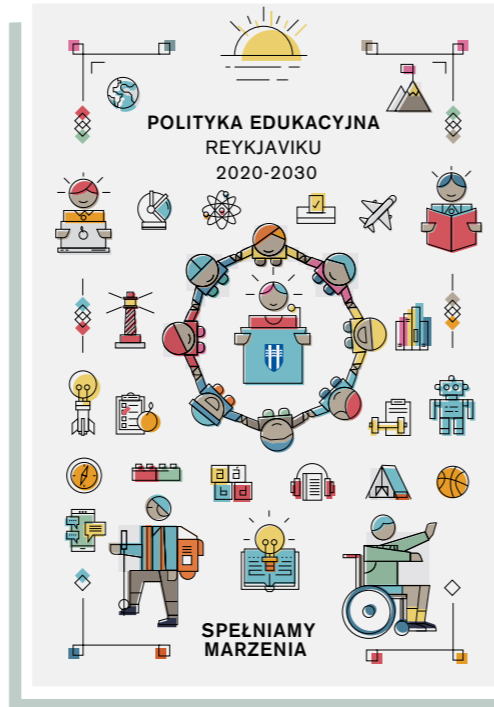
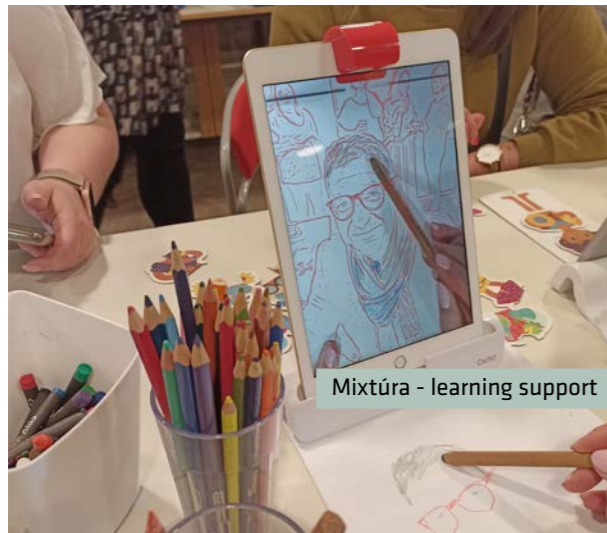
- ✓ To meet representatives of the Department of Education and Youth of the City of Reykjavik.
- ✓ To visit the Mixtúra Centre for Creativity and Educational Technology.
[Follow this link to watch a video about this institution](#)
- ✓ To learn more about how the two Icelandic schools, **Dalskóli** and **Vesturbæjarskóli**, operate.



Why was the study visit important?

- We learned a lot about the Icelandic education system and Reykjavik Education Strategy 2030.
- The strategy document is also available in the Polish language as the capital of Iceland has a sizeable Polish minority.
- We became familiar with the working methods of Icelandic teachers.
- We observed how children learn in Reykjavik schools and studied the curricula.
- We heard opinions of students of Polish origin about Icelandic schools.
- We visited the Mixtúra Centre for Creativity and Educational Technology. The institution supports teachers in Reykjavik in education processes.

✂ [Visit the project website to have a look at selected partners' presentations and photos from the visit.](#)



Our takeaways from the visit to Iceland:

- Student's responsibility and self-reliance.
- Mutual respect among teachers and students.
- No grades for conduct.
- Focus on relationship-building: school is where I like to be.
- Giving feedback to students.
- A lot of teamwork; learning through projects.



- City's support for teachers.
- Regular cooperation with parents, incl. training and workshop sessions.
- Flexible organization of learning: daily outdoor classes.
- Focus on students' social competence.
- Learning by moving.
- No school rankings are held.
- School equipment is not the principal's problem.

- School is a place where you gain confidence.
- School builds up students' confidence in their abilities.
- The ubiquity of the **growth mindset** concept, i.e. focus on development.
- A large number of design and craft classes.
- Students' participation: the kinds are included in decision-making processes at school.
- Schools spaces are of multifunctional character





School events gather everyone together



Rooftop class



Home corner in class - Vesturbajarskóli



Design and craft class



Music class



Vesturbajarskóli rooftop class



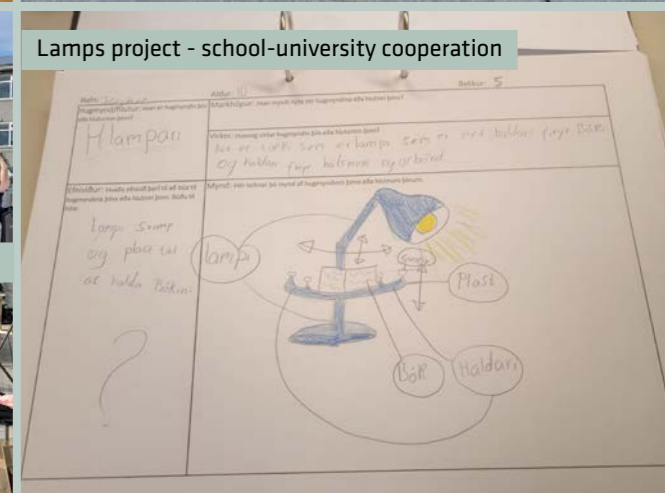
Inside a classroom



Vesturbajarskóli - we also take part in handicraft classes



Outdoor zumba. Everyone working out



Lamps project - school-university cooperation

Recommendations for schools

Our main project pursuit was to develop recommendations for schools. Our intention was to share experience and best practice from Iceland with other schools. The recommendations were divided into the following areas: communication, social competence, and school space. The official title of the document is, **Recommendations for the Development of Friendly School Space (Friendly School)**. It can be downloaded from the project website.

We started with:

- creating three five-person teacher teams,
- selecting Polish experts to supervise the teacher teams,
- selecting Icelandic experts to support the Polish colleagues.

Communication



Izabela Meyza – expert

Jolanta Brzozowska / ES 21
Barbara Cegłowska / ES 29
Judyta Malec-Kuta / ES 43
Małgorzata Mańko-Puderecka / ES 19
Jolanta Sobkowicz / ES 38

Social competence



Paweł Dryl – expert

Agnieszka Chrapowicka / ES 38
Katarzyna Dąbrowska-Żmuda / ES 29
Katarzyna Jankowska / ES 21
Ewelina Sz waj i Marta Rycerz / ES 43
Monika Tomczyk / ES 19

Space



Agnieszka Czachowska – expert

Agnieszka Bancercz ES 38
Katarzyna Bondyra ES 43
Jerzy Jarosiński ES 29
Katarzyna Kubica ES 21
Monika Zyga ES 19

The experts from Poland were supported by those from two Reykjavik schools

Hrefna Birna Bjornsdottir and Gudlaug Elisabet Finnsdottir
from Vesturbæjarskóli.



Jóhanna Björt Guðbrandsdóttir and Solveig Thorarinsdottir
from Dalskóli.



Our effort to prepare the recommendations covered the following:

- team work,
- individual teachers' work, e.g. surveying the school community, answering experts' questions,
- online meetings and e-mail exchange with the Icelandic experts.

**Please, have a look at the project outcomes.
Download the Recommendations as a PDF file! 📄**

Implementation workshops in Lublin schools

The aim of the workshop sessions was to test the methods and tools named in the recommendations in practice and to supplement them with any other lessons learned and suggestions from other teachers.

The sessions, just like the recommendations, were divided into three segments: communication, social competence, and space. The one covering school space, on top of the theoretical component, also had a practical part. Each school chose one indoor area which was to be altered in such a way as to foster better relationships among students.

This is what happened during the workshop sessions and how the spaces evolved.



ES 43 Workshop kick-off



ES 29 Talented parents transformed the space



ES 29 School management deserves some rest



ES 43 Floor games



ES 19 Another chillout zone ready



ES 19 What a change



ES 43 New bag seats



ES 21 Chillout zone ready for students



ES 38 What a door!



ES 38 Better red than grey



ES 21 Colours and fun

Dissemination Conference

The project closed with a two-day conference held on 3-4 march 2023 in Lublin. The event called, **Education is a Relationship. Communication. Competence. Space**, was a great opportunity to share the project recommendations and talk about contemporary school.

The conference was attended by our partners from Iceland, educators and experts from Poland, delegates from numerous Lublin schools and universities, as well as parents and students.



Ambasada Islandii
Warszawa

The honorary patron of the event was the
Embassy of Iceland in Warsaw.

Four panel discussions and three workshop sessions were held.
The event enjoyed great interest and attracted many delegates.

Speech by Jan Hernik,
representative of the Embassy
of Iceland in Warsaw



Panel IV Space



Krzysztof Stanowski, Head of
the International Cooperation
Centre welcomes the delegates



Panel II Let's Talk. About Communication at School



Panel III Student's Social Competence



Panel I Skola: the Icelandic Way



Panellists

The conference was a great success. We had 22 speakers from Poland and Iceland. Every day almost 150 delegates arrived at the venue, and the panels aroused great interest and sparked heated debates.

🔗 Visit the project website to have a look at: [conference videos](#), [speakers' presentations](#), [photos from the event](#), [speakers' and panellists' opinions and reflections](#).

One of the delegates, **Agnieszka Jachymek**, surprised the organizers with a wonderful gift: four **eduNOTES**. They are colourful graphic images which highlight the key topics discussed during the panels. They can be seen on the following pages of the brochure.



Moodboards



Young volunteers

Panel I. Skóla: the Icelandic Way. Inspirations for Polish Schools.



Hjörtur Ágústsson Guðlaug Elísabet Finnsdóttir Hrefna Birna Björnsdóttir Ólöf Kristín Sívertsen Magdalena Elisabet Andresdóttir Sólveig Þórarinsdóttir Jóhanna Björt Guðbrandsdóttir

Panel II. Let's Talk! About Communication at School.



Jarosław Durszewicz Izabela Meyza Magdalena Elisabet Andresdóttir Sylwia Jaskulska Anna Kędzierska i Maciek Cichocki - Opowiedz To Daria Chmiel

Panel III. Social Competence: Student's Capital for Life.



Jarosław Durszewicz Pawel Dryl Sólveig Þórarinsdóttir Wiesława Mitulska Małgorzata Zachajczuk Rafał Boryc

Panel IV. School Nooks and Crannies: Where Students Hang Out More than Anywhere Else?



Małgorzata Michalska Nakonieczna Agnieszka Czachowska Guðlaug Elísabet Finnsdóttir Barbara Ostrowska Iwona Pietrzak-Płachta Alina Januszczyk

Panel I

Skóla: the Icelandic Way: Inspirations for Polish Schools.

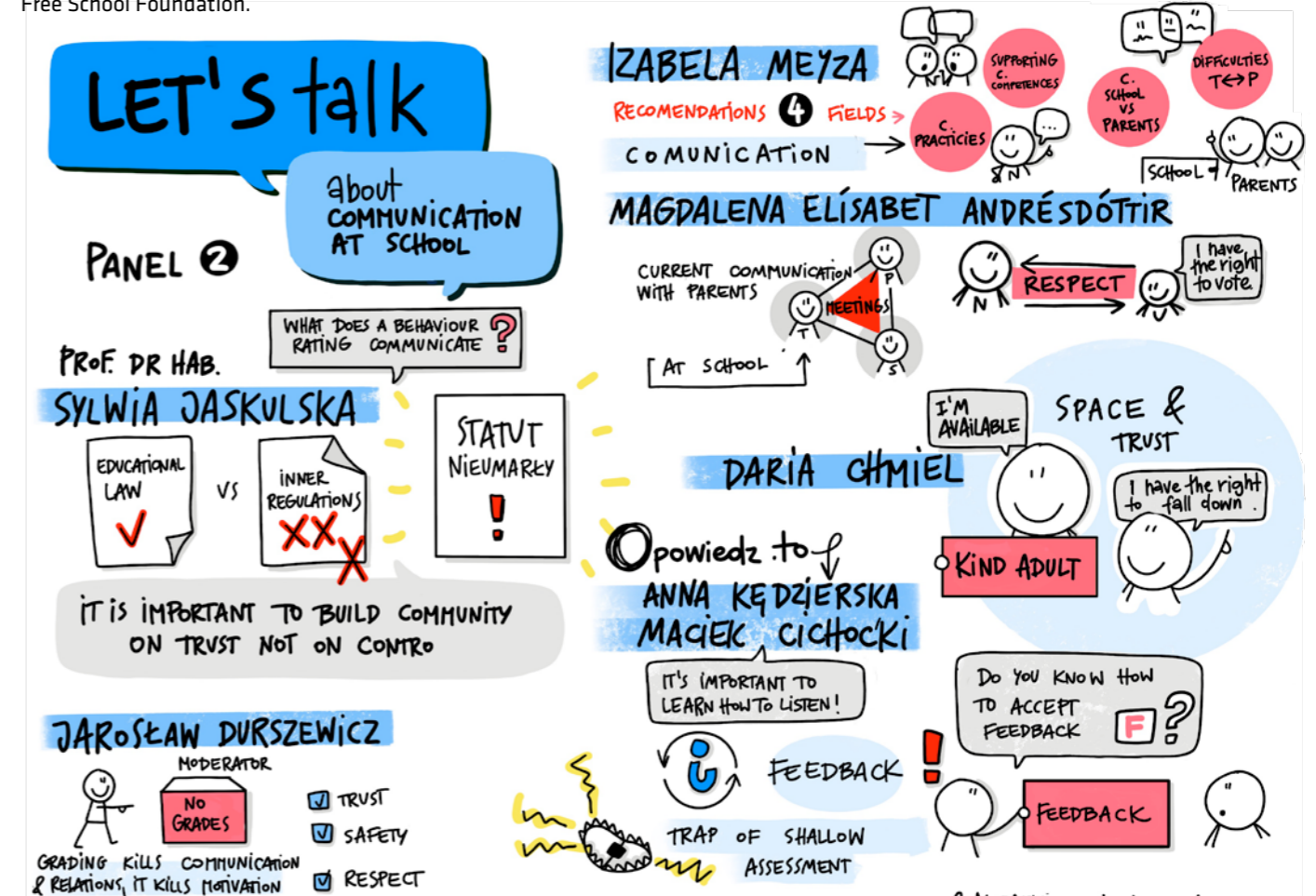
"Let the Dreams Come True is the motto of Reykjavik's education policy explored in the conference opening panel. Dreams of students from Reykjavik schools come true by taking care of the mental well-being of students and their physical health; by teaching young learners that each of them is important and that they can grow to the best of their abilities, in harmony with displayed aptitudes, and in mutual respect. Dreams come true owing to the working methods applied, which differ much from what we know from traditional school. The education system in Iceland prioritises project-based learning; they implement the Reggio Emilia approach (the Hundred Languages of Children) which proves tremendously helpful in developing children's creativity. The speakers also shared insights on cooperation, mutual respect, and the growth mindset, i.e. focus on development, as the basis of Icelandic education. The panel has representatives of the Reykjavik authorities: Hjörtur Ágústsson, Magdalena Elisabet Andresdottir and Ólöf Kristín Sívertsen, and representatives of two schools: Hrefna Birna Björnsdóttir and Guðlaug Elisabet Finnsdóttir from Vesturbjarskóli and Sólveig Þórarinsdóttir and Jóhanna Björt Guðbrandsdóttir from Dalskóli.



Panel II

Let's Talk! About Communication at School.

The second panel was devoted to communication at school. The Icelandic education system attaches great attention to communication as the very core of relationship-building. Emphasis is laid on the development of good communication practices which promote mutual respect and partnership in the pursuit of learning goals. This, in turn, enhances the quality of teaching and the social development of students in Reykjavik. The experts of this panel pondered upon what disturbs everyday communication between school, students, and parents? They also touched upon how to handle challenging communication situations and how to support students' communication competence, especially with regard to receiving feedback. We spoke about what educational law communicates, including school statutes and regulations, and what the role of grades is in communication, especially if they pertain to students' conduct. The project recommendations were presented by our expert, Izabela Meyza. The speakers in the debate were: Prof. Sylwia Jaskulska (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań), Anna Kędzierska and Maciek Cichocki (Just Say It!), Daria Chmiel (KAŹ Social Therapy Centre) and Magdalena Elizabeth Andresdottir from Reykjavik's Department of Education. The panel was moderated by Jarosław Durszewicz from the Grade-Free School Foundation.



Panel III

Social Competence: Student's Capital for Life.

Panel III focused on the development of students' social competence. The panellists addressed the question of how to grow students' competence that will foster their personal development and drive success in life. Are the teaching methods prioritising memorisation, filling in worksheets, and mapping ready-made patterns really helpful? Well, far from it. The speakers firmly emphasized that school is not a preparation for life, but IT IS life. We acquire competence by creating and tackling daily challenges at school. At school, we should collaborate with others in solving problems; we learn by trial and error; we draw conclusions; and we implement lessons learned. We develop competence sets when we pursue small and large projects, especially social ones. The speakers also talked about the importance of learning in the spirit of the growth mindset, i.e. a focus on development that gives students faith and strength in their own abilities. They also acknowledged the role of sport in shaping students' character and pro-social attitudes. Some expressed regret at how much PE classes were underestimated. We learned that there were schools whose students were also certified for various talents and social attitudes. The recommendations were presented by the project expert Paweł Dryl. The panel speakers were Wiesława Mitulska (early school education teacher/trainer), Małgorzata Zachajczuk (teacher at Elementary School No. 10 in Zamość), Rafał Boryc (teacher at Elementary School No. 20 in Lublin) and Sólveig Þórarinsdóttir and Jóhanna Björt Guðbrandstóttir from Dalskóli.

PANEL 3 I KNOW I CAN I WANT

SOCIAL COMPETENCE

STUDENT'S CAPITAL FOR LIFE

Sólveig Þórarinsdóttir: EVERYTHING TAKES TIME TRUST THE PROCESS
Jóhanna Björt Guðbrandstóttir: → GROWTH MINDSET → FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

MAŁGORZATA ZACHAJCZUK: RESPONSIBILITY FOCUS RELATIONSHIP BUILDING
 • UPBRINGING IS A WAY PROCESS
 • 5+, 6 GRADES. HAVE A LIMITING ASPECTS
 • P-T-S TRILATERAL MEETINGS
 • UNIQUE LEARNING CODE
 • OUTSTANDING SCHOOL CERTIFICATE - DIFFERENT COLOUR FOR DIFFERENT SKILLS

WIEŚLAWA MITULSKA: SUPPORT YOUR STUDENTS DEVELOPMENT
 • CHILDREN LEARN WELL WHEN THEY FEEL WELL AT SCHOOL
 • KNOW THE PARENT AND KNOW THE STUDENT
 • BUILD A CARING AND COLLABORATION-READY TEAM

RAFAŁ BORYC: PE IS ♥
 • SCHOOL FANS
 • PARTICIPATORY BUDGET
 • COOPERATION WITH TUTORS
 • SPORT IS A WAY TO BUILD SOCIAL COMPETENCE
 • KIDS FROM DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES

JAROSŁAW DURSZEWICZ: SOCIAL COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SPORT
 • MODERATOR METODA PROJEKTU
 • GRADEFREE SCHOOL FOUNDATION

Paweł Dryl: WHY DO WE TEACH?
 • SCHOOL MISSION
 • GRADUATE PROFILE
 • SCHOOL GOALS
 "I LEARN FOR MY MOTHER TO PRAISE ME"
 • PROMOTE COLLECTIVE SUCCESS

Jóhanna Björt Guðbrandstóttir: UPBRINGING IS A JOURNEY
 • CULTURE
 • TUTOR
 • STUDENT COUNCIL
 • VOLUNTEERING DAY ROOM

Wiesława Mitulska: SCHOOL IS LIFE!
 • ORDINARY BOOK
 • DAY WITH THE PROJECT
 • PARENT-PARTNER TEAM

Małgorzata Zachajczuk: GIVE SPACE TO ACT

Jarosław Durszewicz: MODERATOR

Wiesława Mitulska: KNOW THE PARENT AND KNOW THE STUDENT
 • BUILD A CARING AND COLLABORATION-READY TEAM

Małgorzata Zachajczuk: UPBRINGING IS A WAY PROCESS

Rafał Boryc: PE IS ♥

Jarosław Durszewicz: SOCIAL COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SPORT

Wiesława Mitulska: CHILDREN LEARN WELL WHEN THEY FEEL WELL AT SCHOOL

Małgorzata Zachajczuk: GIVE SPACE TO ACT

Jarosław Durszewicz: MODERATOR

Panel IV

School Nooks and Crannies: Where Students hang Out More than Anywhere Else?

The final panel looked at the school setting. The "nooks and crannies" in the panel title are the school areas which students pointed to in a survey as places where they feel safe and can be the best version of themselves. The meeting was moderated by Małgorzata Michalska-Nakonieczna, PhD, and the panellists discussed how to create such places. They pointed out that, in the learning process, space was important for both students and teachers. Light, colour, the travel of sound in the school space, as well as interior aesthetics, are factors that affect our subconscious mind, have a tremendous impact on emotions at school, and the level of knowledge acquisition. The speakers also looked into how to make the space not only supportive and stimulating in terms of relationship-buildings, but also innovative and functional. Iwona Pietrzak-Płachta, who had earned the title of the Teacher of the Year 2022, showed how an ordinary school library could be transformed into a student hub where students team to experience, for example, a light-sensitive break. The project recommendations were presented by Agnieszka Czachowska. The participants of the debate were Barbara Ostrowska, PhD (Paderewski International High School in Lublin), Iwona Pietrzak-Płachta (Teacher of the Year 2022), Hrefna Birna Björnsdóttir and Guðlaug Elísabet Finnsdóttir from Vesturbajarskól, and Alina Januszczuk from the Beetle Foundation.

SCHOOL NOOKS AND CRANNIES

JÓHANNA BJÖRT GUÐBRANDSTÓTTIR

GUÐLAUG ELÍSABET FINNSDÓTTIR: RESPECT STUDENTS' ART

- ALL THE TEACHERS SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE
- HIDE AND SEEK
- PORRIDGE IN THE MORNING

W. CHURCHILL: "WE SHAPE OUR BUILDINGS AND AFTERWARDS OUR BUILDINGS SHAPE US."

AGNIESZKA CZACHOWSKA: THE BEST SPACE EXPERTS ARE SPACE USERS
 INCLUDE STUDENTS IN MAKING SPACES!
 EDUCATE BUREAUCRATS

BARBARA OSTROWSKA: SPACE SHOULD COMMUNICATE HOW WE TEACH
 » SEARCH FOR PROJECTS, ACT «

ALINA JANUSZCZUK: BUILDING RELATIONS THROUGH SPACE
 THERE IS NO SPACE WITHOUT RELATIONS AND EDUCATION
 SPACE MUST NOT BE AN EXTRA ONLY

IWONA PIETRZAK-PŁACHTA: EVEN SCHOOL NEWSLETTERS CRY AT SCHOOL
 SPACE = MESSAGE
 COME & FEEL SAFE

MAŁGORZATA MICHALSKA-NAKONIECZNA: MODERATOR
 MOTHER & INTERIOR DESIGNER
 WHY LIGHT HAZEL?

Barbara Ostrowska: WHERE STUDENTS HANG OUT MORE THAN ANYWHERE ELSE?

Małgorzata Michalska-Nakonieczna: "GIVE STUDENTS SPACE MAKE THEM FEEL IT'S THEIRS!"

Alina Januszczuk: BUILDING RELATIONS THROUGH SPACE

Iwona Pietrzak-Płachta: EVEN SCHOOL NEWSLETTERS CRY AT SCHOOL

Agnieszka Czachowska: THE BEST SPACE EXPERTS ARE SPACE USERS

Guðlaug Elísabet Finnsdóttir: RESPECT STUDENTS' ART

Jóhanna Björt Guðbrandstóttir

Hrefna Birna Björnsdóttir

Guðlaug Elísabet Finnsdóttir

Barbara Ostrowska

Małgorzata Michalska-Nakonieczna

Alina Januszczuk

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Guðlaug Elísabet Finnsdóttir

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Family photo at ES 29 - portraits of children inspired by the portraits at Vesturbæjarskóli in the background



Meeting at Elementary School No. 29

Our project closed with an educational conference. Just before the event, we had the opportunity to gather the entire project team together.

Our partners visited two elementary schools (project participants) and a number of cultural institutions. In the evening, we dined together. It was a great time filled with memories and sharing. All the participants shared the same view that the project had won their hearts and minds, and that its measurable effects had already become part of their work and school reality.



Book is the best gift in Iceland



Education is a Relationship. Here we go



Visit to Hey - the youth space in Lublin

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Lublin Municipal Office:

- Małgorzata Gałus - Coordinator
- Małgorzata Jończyk - Coordinator
- Iwona Nowakowska - Deputy Director
Department of Education (DE)
- Roman Jaborkhel - Deputy Director of
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- Edyta Baczewska - Head (DE)
- Ewelina Graban - Head (ICO)
- Justyna Targońska (ICO)

Department of Education and Youth of the City of Reykjavik

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Icelandic experts

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- Gudlaug Elísabet Finnsdottir
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Representatives of Lublin schools

- ES 19 - Monika Borowska, Małgorzata Mańko-Puderecka, Monika Tomczyk, Monika Zyga
- ES 21 - Anna Dul, Jolanta Brzozowska, Katarzyna Jankowska, Katarzyna Kubica
- ES 29 - Jerzy Jarosiński, Agata Węska, Barbara Cegłowska, Katarzyna Dąbrowska-Żmuda
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Finally, please read the interview with Hjörtur Ágústsson, project coordinator on the side of the Icelandic partner.



Hjörtur Ágústsson – Deputy Director of the Centre for Educational Innovation, Department of Education and Youth of the Reykjavik Municipal Office.

He runs international projects and is responsible for grant policy. He boasts 15 years of experience in various international projects, especially in the field of education and youth work. Over this time, he has led many domestic and international projects aimed to support the development of education in pre-school and school institutions in Reykjavik. Hjörtur has been working on the implementation of Reykjavik's education policy for four years. In the project, Education is a Relationship. Lublin and Reykjavik Cooperation for Education, he served as coordinator on the partner's side.

Małgorzata Gałus: Hjortur, a lot is said about Icelandic education. What, in your opinion, is its greatest value? What could be considered your “educational export goods”?

Hjörtur Ágústsson: Icelandic education is like our geothermal hot springs - it's warm, welcoming, and has an inherent ability to invigorate and refresh those who dip into it! I believe its greatest value lies in the well-rounded approach we take, focusing not just on academics but also on social skills, creativity, health, and empowerment of the individual. It's like we're exporting well-prepared, globally-conscious individuals, ready to take on the world's challenges in the 21st century.

As a father of three, what do you personally like about Icelandic schools?

As a father of three, what I personally love about Icelandic schools is their commitment to creating an environment that nurtures the whole child. The curriculum is diverse and engaging, and the teachers are dedicated and supportive. Plus, the emphasis on leisure and extracurricular activities ensures that my children aren't just learning, they're also having a great time doing it!

Do your children enjoy spending time at school?

As parents and teachers know, no two children are the same. One of my children had a hard time transitioning from pre-school to primary school and I think there is a valuable lesson to learn there

in that it is important to maintain emphasis on learning through play in the first years of primary school. My other two children have fully enjoyed the dynamic learning environment, the focus on creativity, and the opportunity to interact with their peers.

You work in the Department of Education and Youth in the City of Reykjavik. Could you tell us about your major responsibilities?

As the Project Manager of International Relations and Grants at the Centre for Educational Innovation, my role feels a bit like being a lighthouse keeper. I guide the way for international collaborations, ensuring the City of Reykjavik's educational pursuits are well-aligned with global standards. My work involves overseeing and managing grants that fund our innovative education projects. But what truly excites me about my role is the opportunity to forge international relations, much like the old Viking explorers, albeit in the realm of education rather than uncharted territories. Every day is an adventure, a chance to make a difference, and an opportunity to ensure our city's educational system continues to help the dreams of our young ones take flight.

While implementing the project, we've had a chance to learn about the Reykjavik Education Strategy 2030. Could you tell us more about its creation? Who was involved in the process,

and why were the goals of social skills, self-empowerment, literacy, creativity, and health chosen?

The creation of the Reykjavik Education Strategy 2030 was a monumental task, much like composing a grand symphony, with different instruments contributing to a harmonious outcome. The City Council kick-started this initiative in 2017, but the real magic began when we started involving everyone. And by everyone, I really mean everyone! We had over 10,000 participants - children, parents, teachers, the general public, academics, NGOs, workforce, basically anyone who had a stake in the future of our education. It was like we were crowd-sourcing the future!

The goals of social skills, self-empowerment, literacy, creativity, and health emerged from this rich tapestry of diverse voices. Why these particular goals? Well, they represent what our community believed to be the fundamental competencies for our children to thrive in the 21st century. They are the chords that will enable our children to compose their own successful life symphonies.

What actions does the City take to implement the Education Strategy? How do you assess whether the Strategy is achieving its intended effects?

Our approach to implementing the Reykjavik Education Strategy 2030 is indeed a harmonious blend of innovation, collaboration, and continuous learning. To orchestrate this, we have established the Centre of Innovation in Education, which plays a pivotal role, much like a conductor leading a grand symphony. This Centre is dedicated to cultivating a culture that encourages innovation and development within our educational community. We also have our online platform, menntastefna.is, acting as our virtual stage where this grand performance unfolds. This platform provides a collective space for all stakeholders to stay connected, engaged, and inspired throughout the journey of implementing our strategy.

Implementation of the strategy is not a one-off concert but a continuous performance that evolves with time. We fund approximately 200 local projects each year, allocating €1.435 million to this endeavour. The majority of these funds support smaller projects across all our educational institutions, while the remainder is allocated to larger cooperative projects.

This process is designed to encourage all participants to be innovative, take risks, make mistakes, and adopt a resilient growth mindset. Our collaboration with the University of Iceland: School of Education further strengthens our approach, with a focus on courses, research, and the co-construction of new knowledge. To verify the effects we have the results of innovative projects as well as and online self-evaluation tools where our schools can measure their progress with regards to the 5 core skills: social skills, self-empowerment, literacy, creativity, and health.

What does it take to become a teacher in Iceland? Are there any special pedagogical courses required? Is teaching considered a well-paid and prestigious job in Iceland today?

Becoming a teacher in Iceland requires a completion of a Bachelor's degree, followed by a Master's degree in Education. The Master's degree is where prospective teachers are introduced to specialized pedagogical courses, which cover a wide range of topics from classroom management to inclusive education and teaching methods. The profession of teaching is not as highly respected in Iceland as we would want. Teachers should be recognized for their significant role in shaping the future of our society. Like many countries, teacher salaries can be a topic of discussion, and while they are generally competitive, there are ongoing conversations about further improvements.

How does the Department of Education support teachers in their teaching process? Are there regular workshops or trainings to enhance teachers qualifications?

The Department of Education in Reykjavik is deeply committed to supporting our teachers. We have a strong emphasis on continuous professional development, offering regular workshops and training programs to enhance teachers' qualifications and skills. These trainings cover a wide range of topics, from pedagogical strategies to technology integration, and are designed to keep our teachers at the forefront of educational innovation. Additionally, we encourage and facilitate teachers' participation in local, national, and international educational conferences and forums.

Could you tell us more about the resources available on your website, menntastefna? Is it primarily aimed at teachers?

Our online platform, menntastefna.is, is a robust resource hub designed to support the implementation of Reykjavik Education Strategy 2030. While the platform is certainly a valuable resource for teachers, it is not exclusively aimed at them. It is designed to engage all stakeholders involved in the educational

process – including students, parents, school administrators, and community members. The platform hosts a variety of resources, including policy documents, research, best practices, and a toolkit for self-evaluation.

Could you tell us about MIXTURA and why it holds a special place in your education system?

Certainly, Mixtúra, the Centre for Creativity and Educational Technology, is a pivotal component of our educational system in Reykjavik. It's a vivid embodiment of the Reykjavik Education Policy's commitment to leveraging digital technology to enrich learning, foster creativity, and prepare our students for the future.

Mixtúra is unique in its comprehensive and innovative approach to integrating technology in education.

It offers a wide array of services, from professional development to school innovation and development projects, and maintains several resources like the EdTech Tool Library and a cutting-edge Makerspace.

Professional development is a key focus area for Mixtúra, with a robust schedule of seminars, workshops, and consultations tailored to meet the varying needs of educators. These events, along with other initiatives such as EdTech camps, open houses, school visits, and a coaching and mentoring program, provide educators with ample opportunities to learn, grow, and innovate.

Mixtúra holds a special place in our education system because it encapsulates our commitment to embracing digital technology, fostering creativity, and preparing our students for a future that will undoubtedly be shaped by technological advancements.

We've heard that your Department implements many international projects in the field of education. What sort of inspiration do you seek abroad?

In our international projects, we seek inspiration from a variety of sources. We are particularly interested in learning from educational systems that prioritize creativity, innovation, and holistic child development. We also look for good practices in integrating technology in education, fostering inclusivity and diversity, and implementing strategies for continuous improvement and development.

Are there good practices from other countries that you think would be beneficial to implement in your educational system?

Absolutely, we are always open to learning from others. Practices such as Finland's emphasis on teacher autonomy and trust, Singapore's rigorous teacher training, and Canada's approach to inclusive education are all sources of inspiration. However, it's important to remember that what works in one context may not work in another, so any practices we consider would need to be adapted to fit our unique context.

What similarities and differences do you see between your education system and those of other Scandinavian countries like Finland, Norway, and Denmark?

There are many similarities between the education systems in Iceland and our Scandinavian neighbours such as Finland, Norway, and Denmark. All these countries place a strong emphasis on child-centered learning, inclusivity, teacher autonomy, and continuous development. However, there are also differences. For instance, Finland has a notably less prescriptive national curriculum compared to us and other Scandinavian countries, allowing for more flexibility at the local level.

You had the opportunity to visit a few schools in Lublin, and perhaps you have also had experiences with other Polish schools and teachers. What do you see as the major differences between our educational systems when you compare them?

After visiting schools in Lublin and interacting with Polish teachers, I have noticed several differences in our educational approaches. One of the main differences lies in our approach to homework. In Iceland, especially with younger students, we assign very minimal homework.

The only regular task is reading with parents for 15-20 minutes five days a week. This approach is designed to encourage a love for reading from a young age, and to ensure that children have ample time for rest, play, and family activities after school.

This is quite different from the Polish system, where homework seems to be more prevalent.

Another significant difference is in our approaches to student achievement and competition. During my visit, I noticed

a distinct emphasis on individual student achievement and competition between schools in Lublin and Poland more broadly. In Iceland, our focus tends to be more on empowering the group as a whole and improving the school system collectively rather than promoting competition between individual schools. We believe that every student and every school has unique strengths and areas for improvement, and our goal is to support all learners and educators in their growth and development.

Overall, while both the Icelandic and Polish education systems are committed to providing quality education and promoting student success, our methods and philosophies have distinct differences. Both systems, however, have valuable strengths and offer interesting insights that can enhance our understanding of effective education practices..

What good practices from Lublin schools will you be taking back to Reykjavik?

From the Lublin schools, we've been particularly inspired by the dedication and passion of the teachers. Their commitment to their students and to their profession is truly commendable. We've also been impressed by the emphasis on cultural


education, and we are exploring how we might enhance this aspect in our schools.

Lastly, could you share your impressions from the Education is a Relationship project? Have you learned any valuable lessons from this partnership?

The Education is a Relationship project has been a great learning experience for us. We've learned so much about the importance of fostering strong relationships in education - between students and teachers, between schools and families, and between educational institutions and the wider community. This project has reminded us that education is not just about imparting knowledge, but about nurturing connections and fostering a sense of belonging. We're eager to bring these insights back to our work in Reykjavik.

Thank you for your time.



 [Icelandic school and teacher's work in Reykjavik were also discussed with our Icelandic experts. Visit the project website to read the interview.](#)

The visit opened up my horizons. I was impressed by the educational objectives, the emphasis on creative thinking, talent development, and the promotion of healthy lifestyle and well-being.
Katarzyna Bondyra

See-remember, touch-understand: these were the first ideas that crossed my mind. I met wonderful people who strive to change the image of the school. And they do not seem to be burned out at all. Education is about relationships, and they are conceived in the school space.
Agnieszka Banczerz

The project is an amazing adventure. ...In Lublin and Reykjavik I came across extraordinary people who think and feel the same way, who want a school that is friendlier for everyone: students, parents, and teachers. They want a school which is more effective, less stressful, and based on real relationships.
Ewelina Sz waj

The project inspired me to act. We created chill-out zones indoors. ...We spend class breaks outdoors, keep remodeling the school space, and encourage students to be more visible in school life.
Katarzyna Kubica

The project has opened the door for genuine in-school transformation at many levels. We have understood the importance of having a friendly infrastructure for not only learning but also for leisure. We are boldly making towards a grade-free school.
Monika Zyga

 Visit the website of the **Education in a Relationship** project.

Iceland
Liechtenstein
Norway grants


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of the Education System

 Reykjavík

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