Game Lab+ in Rijeka: Learning, Connecting and Growing Through Play

Young people from Croatia, Hungary, Portugal and Spain explored how games can support learning, teamwork and well-being.

Rijeka, Croatia | 5–12 July 2026

Play as a way to learn

The international youth exchange “Game Lab+: Empowering Minds Through Play” took place in Rijeka, Croatia, from 5 to 12 July 2026. It brought together 20 young people and 4 group leaders from Croatia, Hungary, Portugal and Spain for a week of learning, creativity and intercultural exchange.

Coordinated by the Institute for Youth Power (IYP Croatia), the project used games and non-formal education to explore skills that are important in everyday life but are not always easy to develop in a classroom. Through interactive activities, participants worked on communication, teamwork, creativity, problem-solving, leadership and personal confidence.

Games, teamwork and well-being

During the exchange, participants took part in challenges and group activities designed to help them learn by doing. Activities such as “Collaborative Groove”, “Colourblind Communication Challenge”, “Tower Challenge”, “Tick Tock: Take Control” and “Mind Lab” encouraged them to listen to each other, share ideas, solve problems and work towards common goals.

The programme also explored the link between play and mental well-being. Participants reflected on how games can help people connect, express themselves, manage everyday challenges and build supportive relationships. Working in international teams gave them the chance to discover different perspectives and learn from one another.

Participants also shared games, energisers and traditions from their countries during intercultural activities. These moments helped them get to know each other, practise communication and create a friendly group atmosphere.

Connecting with the local community

An important part of the programme was a visit to Kulturni Front, a local organisation in Opatija. Participants joined a workshop focused on play and board games and learned more about how games can bring people together and create opportunities for learning and cooperation.

The exchange was hosted in cooperation with Dom Učenika Sušak, where participants stayed and took part in programme activities. Participants were encouraged to share what they had learned with peers and organisations in their own communities.

An inclusive European learning experience

Game Lab+ aimed to make international learning accessible to young people with different backgrounds and experiences. Twelve of the young participants had fewer opportunities due to barriers such as economic difficulties, geographical obstacles or cultural differences. The activities encouraged participation, cooperation and mutual respect, so that everyone could contribute and learn at their own pace.

Daily reflection sessions gave participants time to discuss their experiences, share feedback and recognise what they had learned. The exchange supported the development of personal and social skills while strengthening intercultural understanding and a sense of belonging to a wider European community.

Partners and lasting results

The project was coordinated by IYP Croatia in cooperation with partner organisations MaFi from Hungary, Voices of Innovation from Portugal and Laberinto Hurdano from Spain. The partners worked together on preparation, participant support, activities and follow-up.

Game Lab+ was more than a week of games. It showed how play can be used as a practical tool in youth work to encourage creativity, communication, inclusion and well-being. Participants were encouraged to take these ideas home, share them with others and use what they had learned in their everyday lives, education and future activities.

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