

Varaždin County, Croatia



## Mentors and educators for Centres of Excellence

Keyword(s):

**educating educators,  
gifted students  
entrepreneurship, mentoring**



### Introduction

Gifted elementary and high school students have opportunity to learn within one of the 10 centers of excellence in Varaždin County (centers of excellence for mathematics, chemistry, biology, physics, Croatian language, fine arts, national history, new technologies, astronomy (operates within the center of excellence for physics), robotics (operates in within the Center of Excellence for New Technologies) and the Center of Excellence in Informatics, Entrepreneurship and Chess (operates within the Center of Excellence in Informatics). Attendance for all students is completely free, and Varaždin County provides them with food and free transportation. These Centers, which operate as part of the European Talent Center Croatia, can include students from the second grade of primary school (mathematics, robotics, and fine arts) to the final grade of secondary school. All Centers have in common the application of work methods created for highly motivated students, expanding basic (school) knowledge in a particular area, developing specific skills, preparation for competitions, individual approach to each student, encouragement of research, teaching based on experiments, encouragement on a scientific approach, developing creativity, working in small groups, independent research, cooperation

with scientific institutions and working with modern and quality equipment and quality mentors. Their work has been recognized at European and world level. The centers of excellence are members of European Talent Support Network (ETSN) and became the only European Talent Center in Croatia within this network. The Center is placed in Varaždin County. In 2020 they were admitted to the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children (WCGTC), based at Western Kentucky University in the USA. Thanks to that, Centers of excellence became the only affiliate member from Croatia and have the privilege to represent Croatia as one of the 47 countries in this Council. In 2021, Varaždin County founded an adult education institution "ETC Croatia –CIVZ" with a purpose of educating teachers to work with gifted students.

### **Main challenge**

The main challenge of the initiative was to find ways to improve the work of educators with gifted children, including the early identification of gifted and highly motivated students and how to educate educators.

### **Timing**

2018 - today

### **Objective**

Varaždin County pays great attention to the lifelong education of educators/mentors. In cooperation with the University of Radboud, an international postgraduate education program for working with gifted students, the project "RITHA Practitioner Croatia" is being implemented. This training of educators regularly starts every year in April and has a duration of one year.

### **Target groups**

Professional educators in the field of gifted education.

### **Geographical range**

Varaždin County

## **Stakeholders and partners**

The main partner of this initiative is Radboud University that is ranked among the top 30 universities in the world and has been educating professionals to work with gifted students for more than 30 years. Since 2020, Varaždin County has been the only partner of the Radboud University Center for Social Sciences for the implementation of the "RITHA Specialist" and "RITHA Practitioner" education programs for the Republic of Croatia. On the other hand, the Centers of Excellence of Varaždin County are the only ones in Croatia to hold the title of European Talent Center, which is a title awarded by the European Council for the Gifted (ECHA).

## **Strategy / materials**

RITHA is a postgraduate training programme in the area of giftedness and talent. The programme is for professionals who work in education. By participating in the program, educators gain insight into identifying and navigating the options and educational needs of gifted children, young people, and adults. Varaždin County is a partner of Radboud University and together they train experts to work with gifted students.

## **Resources**

In accordance with the standards of the European Council for High Ability (ECHA), Radboud University offers a post-academic training programme for professionals (at post-academic level), who are working in the education or (mental) health care sectors. Radboud University has been educating ECHA Specialists in Gifted Education for over 25 years.

## **Compliance with SDG's**

Project is in-line with SDG 8.

## **Innovation(s)**

As of next year, the education program "RITHA Practitioner Croatia" will be implemented as a regular education program of the Public Institution European Talent Centre Croatia - Centres of Excellence of Varaždin County - institution for adult education. It will be a one-year program that includes 620 hours, of which 200 hours are practice, with 80 percent of the programs taking place online, and seminars usually take place live. From the 2022, the Public institution "ETC Croatia – CIVZ" will offer Certified educational program of 150 hours in Croatian language for professionals working with gifted and talented children.

## Evaluation

The first group of 9 “ECHA Specialists” in Gifted Education according to the RITHA program successfully completed their education on March 2, 2020. After that, in 2020 a first group of "RITHA Practitioner" consisting of 15 students started its program and finished on April 16th 2021. Currently, second group of 20 participants is in progress. RITHA had set a new standard for professional and high-quality online education. The education is blended by design (20% in-person, 80% online learning activities).

## Success parameters

The result of continuous investment in education of students within our County are excellent achievements of students at all levels of competition, European and world competitions, Olympics, ACSL All-Star competition (All Star American Computer Science League) achieving top results. “Radboud International Training on High Ability” (RITHA) is a winner of Internationalization Award 2021. that contributes to the internationalization of education at Radboud University and/or a more inclusive/multilingual academic community.

## Concluding remarks

This type of specific adult education has strong potential to build a worldwide community of expertise.

## Website/Facebook profile of the initiative:

<https://www.facebook.com/RadboudCSW/>

<https://www.civz.hr/ritha/>

<https://www.rcsw.nl/beroepsopleidingen/ritha/en/news>

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