

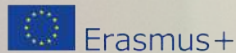
GAMES FOR HEALTH EUROPE 2026



Elio Salvadori (FBK)

**GAMEON: Bridging Digital Gaming
and Real-World Skills for Autistic
Individuals**

31 March 2026



DISCLOSURE SLIDE
for presentations at the

GAMES FOR HEALTH EUROPE 2026 CONFERENCE

I herewith confirm that there is not any conflict of interest with the conference organization or any of its sponsors.

Autism

Understanding the challenge

Daily Challenges

Difficulties in social interaction, communication, and sensory processing

Contributes to social isolation and unemployment

Executive function issues hinder daily life skills and independence

Emotional Well-being

Pervasive anxiety impacts psychological and physical well-being

Early psycho-educational support is vital for autonomy and quality of life

Access is difficult due to distance, lack of professionals, and long waiting lists



Conventional Interventions

Main Limitations

Motivation Gap

Traditional therapies lack patient engagement, limiting effectiveness

Skill Generalisation

Skills learned in therapy are hard to apply in real-world settings

Growing Need

Urgent need for effective, cost-efficient, engaging alternatives



The promise of digital games

41.4% of autistic youth spend most of their free time playing video games, compared to only **18%** of the general population [Mazurek 2013]

Enhanced engagement

Boost attention and motivation

[Walsh 2024]

Cognitive Benefits

Improves cognitive, perceptual, motor functions

[Atherton et al 2021]

Social Skills Development

Multi-player games as a gym for social skills

[Davis et al 2022]

Warning: a study of 230 autistic adults found that **9.1%** met the clinical criteria for **Gaming Disorder**, compared to **2.9%** in the neurotypical control group



Current gaps in gaming for autism

Serious games

Clinically proven, but often lack engaging gameplay

Entertainment games

Their learning potential is underutilized in support practices

Cultural barriers

Caregivers & educators are unaware of benefits; many view games as addictive





Introducing GameOn

An Erasmus+ project proposing a novel approach to therapeutic gaming for autistic individuals



1 Engagement First

GAMEON leverages the opportunity to modify existing entertainment games (**video game modding**)

2 Sustainable Access & Long-term Viability

Utilizes established games for pervasive access through popular marketplaces + extend game's lifetime

3 Co-design with autistic community

Ensures the modded games meets diverse needs, including underrepresented groups such as autistic girls & women



Blended Learning: from Digital to Analogue Skills Training

The GameOn approach



Digital Skills Training (DST)

Develop skills in safe, engaging virtual games



Real World Missions

Game progress unlocks daily life missions



Analogue Skills Training (AST)

Real-life practice reinforces skills

GAMEON transfers virtual skills to real life, with the aim of overcoming generalization challenges

Digital Skills Training example

Exercising social skills in modded Skyrim



Fobahn, the in-game mentor, offering the player advice and feedback

[Gay et al 2016]

Analogue Skills Training example

Practicing shopping in Dinkum, then apply them in real life



Dinkum mod to strengthen communication skills when shopping



Encourage autistic youth to accomplish “missions” in real-life

Preliminary results

Almost 6 months since GameOn kick-off

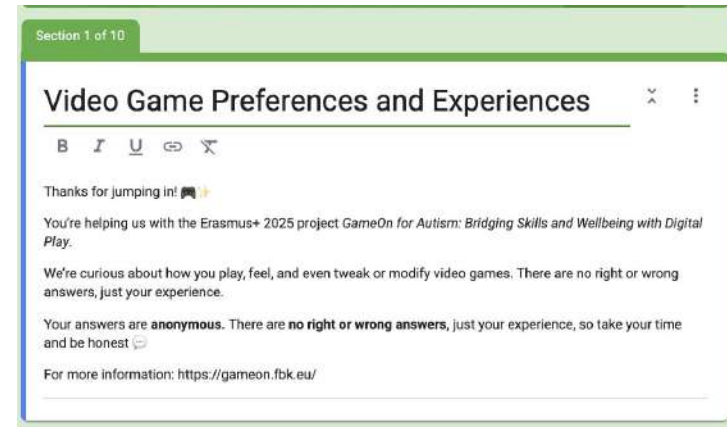
Scoping review (WIP)

It will be part of **GameOn Methodology Handbook** to help therapist choose the most proper games



Online survey to identify preferences

Workshops with autistic communities are currently being planned in 3 EU countries to perform needs analysis



Join us!

Partners



Fondazione Bruno Kessler

Fondazione Bruno Kessler (FBK) is a multidisciplinary research institution specializing in the fields of technology, innovation, the humanities and social sciences, based in Trento. FBK is the coordinator of GAMEON.



Latvian Autism Association

Founded in 2006, Latvian Autism Association is a non-governmental organisation which aims to protect the rights and interests of autistic people in Latvia.



Asociación Autismo Burgos

Asociación Autismo Burgos is a non-profit organisation in Burgos, Spain. Since 1984, it offers a range of services to autistic people and their families.



A Thousand Wishes Foundation

A Thousand Wishes Foundation, located in Belgrade, Serbia, was established in October 2018 by a group of family members of persons with autism.



Meeva

Meeva, based in Trento, Italy, creates immersive games designed to foster social skills in neurodiverse teens while giving them the opportunity to practice self-regulation.



Autism-Europe

Autism-Europe, located in Brussels, Belgium, is an international association of 90 member autism organisations from 40 European countries. Its main objective is to advance the rights of autistic people and their families and to help them improve their quality of life.



Playful design,
serious impact



Thank you

Elio Salvadori

esalvadori@fbk.eu

