

'Supporting Policy and Action for Active Environments (SPAcE)'

Project: A summary

Background and rationale

The problem of low levels of physical activity is a public health issue of great importance, facing all countries in the EU. Decades of attempts to persuade people to be more active – through campaigns and behavioural approaches – have had little impact on population levels of activity. For some years the emphasis has been moving towards a focus on developing environments that are more conducive and supportive to physical activity. This focus on the local environment to facilitate and promote physical activity is supported by many aspects of EU policy, and is seen in play in many countries in the region. For example:

- Pedestrianisation in many city centres such as San Sebastian or Salzburg encourages and supports cycling and walking and discourages car use;
- extensive cycle networks across many Scandinavian cities make the environment safer for children to cycle to school;
- green gyms in cities such as Gloucester (UK) provide exercise opportunities whilst helping to support and develop the environment (<http://www.tcv.org.uk/greengym>).

However, many of these policy responses are piecemeal and there is little consistency of approach across the region. There are many examples of good practice but these are infrequently disseminated and replicated. There is a strong and increasing evidence base in the academic literature that supports a focus on the environment in order to create conditions in which people are more likely to be physically active.

This project is therefore responding to a demonstrable EU-wide need. As such it requires an EU-wide Consortium response, bringing complementary skills and experience together to achieve greater impact than would be achieved at the national level.

Healthy active urban environments are towns and cities where the policies, design, layout and culture supports physically active movement as part of everyday life. Walking and cycling are the default modes of transport; citizens of healthy active urban environments instinctively reach for their walking shoes not their car keys when they leave home. Traffic speeds are slow and green space is plentiful, encouraging children to play outdoors, and people to make active use of their leisure time. The physical environment has an influence on social norms: in healthy active urban environments it is *normal* to be active.

To achieve the objective of developing sustainable active urban environments in cities and towns across the EU, it is necessary to link together a number of project

partners. These partners possess the expertise, competencies and desire needed to produce the project objectives and outputs. A summary of these outputs include:

- a consensus of evidence and practice symposium;
- Active Environment City/Town action plans;
- implementation and evaluation of the action plans
- EU-wide guidance documents, available in 6 languages.

The guidance documents will provide a structured approach for local and national governments to develop active environments in other towns and cities across Europe.

Project details

- Funding stream: ERASMUS+ Sport
- Call: Collaborative Partnership
- Title of project: Supporting Policy and Action for Active Environments (SPAcE)
- Duration: 36 months
- Start date: 1st January 2015
- Finish date: 31 December 2018

Aims

1. To share current good (evidenced based) practice of the implementation and promotion of an Urban Active Environment (UActiveE) to increase population level (community) physical activity levels.
2. To establish working groups in four EU member states to develop an Urban Active Environment (UActiveE) Action Plan with a focus on creating environments to support physical activity for the creation of a more physical active environment
3. To support the members states to develop and embed the UActiveE Action Plan into policy/practice in each designated city/town
4. To support Member states in developing competencies in the evaluation of the UActiveE Action Plan through the implementation of the HEAT tool
5. Development of three tangible outputs
 - a. Summary of evidence and good practice document
 - b. Guidance document How to Create and Evaluate a UActiveE inc. case studies x 4 from project partners
 - c. 'How to' guidance on measuring value of an UActiveE