

Promoting Physical Activity through Urban Active Environments: Learning from Practice and Policy Implementation in the EU Space Project

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Abstract : Active transport (i.e. walking to school, cycle to work schemes etc.) is an effective approach with multiple social and environmental benefits for transforming urban environments into active urban environments. Although walking and cycling often remain on the margins of urban planning and infrastructure, there are new approaches emerging, along with policy intervention relevant for the creation of sustainable urban active environments conducive to active travel, increasing physical activity levels of involved communities and supporting social inclusion through more active participation. SPaCE - Supporting Policy and Action for Active Environments is a 3 year Erasmus+ project that aims to integrate active transport programmes into public policy across the EU. SPaCE focuses on cities/towns with recorded low physical activity levels to support the development of active environments in 5 sites: Latvia [Tukums], Italy [Palermo], Romania [Brasov], Spain [Castilla-La Mancha] and Greece [Trikala]. The first part of the project involved a review of good practice including case studies from across the EU and project partner countries. This has resulted in the first output from the project, an evidence of good practice summary with case study examples. In the second part of the project, working groups across the 5 sites have carried out co-production to develop Urban Active Environments (UActive) Action Plans aimed at influencing policy and practice for increasing physical activity primarily through the use of cycling and walking. Action plans are based on international evidence and guidance for healthy urban planning. Remaining project partners include Universities (Gloucestershire, Oxford, Zurich, Thessaly) and Fit for Life programme (National physical activity promotion program, Finland) who provide support and advice incorporating current evidence, healthy urban planning and mentoring. Cooperation and co-production with public health professionals, local government officers, education authorities and transport agencies has been a key approach of the project. The third stage of the project has involved training partners in the WHO HEAT tool to support the implementation of the Action Plans. Project results show how multi-agency, transnational collaboration can produce real-life Action Plans in five EU countries, based on published evidence, real-life experience, consultation and collaborative working with other organisations across the EU. Learning from the processes adopted within this project will demonstrate how public health, local government and transport agencies across the EU, can work together to create healthy environments that have the aim of facilitating active behaviour, even in times of constrained public budgets. The SPaCE project has captured both the challenges and solutions for increasing population physical activity levels, health and wellness in urban spaces and translating evidence into policy and practice ensuring innovation at policy level. Funding acknowledgment: SPaCE (www.activeenvironments.eu) is co-funded by the Sport action of the ERASMUS+ programme.

Keywords : action plans, active transport, SPaCE, UActive urban active environments, walking and cycling

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