

Thematic Output: Policy Action Plan

March, 2015

Background

The long term goal of the Diet for a Green Planet project is that each city will adopt a Diet Policy. This project aims at helping to get the process started and for some important steps to be taken in that direction.

The purpose of this Policy Action Plan is to outline (for each receiving city) the steps taken and the steps that remain to be taken in this area. The finalization of this report was planned for January 2015, but since the project was still ongoing then, it made more sense to write this report in March, after the project activities. It is now that we can overview and analyze what has been achieved and what remains.

This document can be seen as a brief summary status when it comes to the policy work being done in this project. It will not attempt to provide a fully detailed account of the policy transfer – for that we have produced on-going reports from bilateral meetings and transnational conferences. It will rather be a “temperature check” at the time of project end.

The situation for the three receiving cities was very different from the start, and the preconditions along the way have also differed substantially. Therefore this document will go through each receiving city according to the following structure:

- Background
- Steps taken during the project
- Remaining steps



Mollet del Vallès

Background

The structure of school and kindergarten canteens is very different in Mollet del Vallès from that in Södertälje.

In Sweden all children in schools and kindergarten are by law entitled to a free public meal every day. In Södertälje the canteens are run by the municipal Diet Unit.

Mollet del Vallès has 9 kindergartens (3 public and 6 state granted), 15 primary schools (11 public and 4 state granted), 4 public secondary schools and one institute for persons with special needs. The school canteen services in these educational centres are organized in different ways. Some of the school canteens are managed by headmasters, others by parent associations and still others by school boards. All of them sign contracts with private companies which are the ones supplying the canteen services.

Normally the parents pay fully for the school canteen services, but in Catalonia there is a grant system for families with economic needs, or for geographic reasons, to guarantee access to school lunches for all children.

The situation at project start of the public contracts for school canteen services in the public kindergartens which are managed by the city hall of Mollet, was that there was no reference to ecological and locally sourced food. The situation is similar for 95% of the school canteens in Catalonia. There are more than 2,400 primary schools in Catalonia and less than 50 have a school canteen based on ecological food.

Another challenge at project start – which had implications on the policy work – was to improve the management of the rural area called Gallecs, which covers almost 50% of the city territory.

Steps taken during the project

There have been many important steps taken in Mollet del Vallès during the project. The most impressive result is that a diet policy was actually drafted and signed during the project! This is way beyond the initial expectations and it truly shows that the Diet for a Green Planet project has produced concrete and tangible change on policy making level.

Below we list the major achievements within the policy field.

- A feasibility study: An initial audit of the public canteens in the three public kindergartens and the public institute for disabled people was done. As expected a lot of opportunities for improvement showed.
- A new public procurement model for a total transformation was elaborated, which allows Molle del Vallès, as public administration, to buy products according to the Diet for a Green Planet criteria. The big change lies in the fact that 90 points of 100 are attributed to food quality, and not for the cheapest offer to manage the service, as it was before.
- Transformation of three kitchens has taken place in the public kindergartens.



- Auditing the service: The three canteens were audited after six months of transformation, which gave valuable information to make new changes and reach further improvement of the public service.
- A letter of Intent between Mollet and Södertälje about future cooperation has been signed.
- A new Diet Policy approved: All the political parties of Mollet passed this new policy on the 23th of March 2015 by consensus.

Remaining steps to be taken

The progress in Mollet del Vallès has indeed exceeded all expectations, and a solid foundation has been laid since the diet policy was passed – with unanimous support from all political parties – in late March, 2015. In that sense, all steps have already been taken.

However, the following steps have been identified to further strengthen and improve the Diet for a Green Planet concept on the political level:

- To develop management control systems which have objective indicators regarding local, ecological, seasonal food etc. Currently there are no public indicators for food quality in the school canteens of Catalonia. When a functioning control system is in place, it can be offered to the primary schools, together with the new procurement models and the expertise of the civil servants.
- To transform the Local Support Group into a Food Council that will drive the continued process. The aim is for the council to have a legal body, a budget and human resources. The mission would be to give expertise to primary schools, to the public hospital, to kindergartens and all other public kitchens in the city.
- To spread the work done in Mollet del Vallès to other municipalities in Catalonia (and elsewhere), with the aim of inspiring them to work in the same direction.



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Molėtai

Background

In Lithuania, the heads of the educational institutions are responsible for the organization of students' meals. The canteen services may be organized by the municipality itself or purchased from private companies via the public procurement process.

The diet policy is regulated by national laws and these laws leave little room for local creativity. However, local authorities have the possibility to decide whether the catering organization should be centralized or decentralized.

What a meal should contain and how it should be prepared is specified by orders from the Minister of Health. Lists of recommended and prohibited groups of food are provided. The dishes must correspond to the age of the students and to the nutrition recommendations. Each kitchen has a dietician who decides the menus for 15 days and orders the food deliveries according to the contracts of procured goods. The menus have to be approved by the state controlling institution.

Local public health specialists at schools and kindergartens perform internal quality control on meals' quality once a week. Control of the canteens' organization and menus' approval is performed by the State Public Health Center. Food hygiene safety is monitored by The State Food and Veterinary Service.

The regulatory framework was one important factor for Molėtai entering the Diet for a Green Planet project. Another one was the somewhat wavering political support for the project. The city of Molėtai has a history of participating in many EU projects, but they have mostly been "hard projects" focusing on constructions and infrastructure, which are easier to see and measure.

Steps taken

Although the political support was hesitant during the main part of the project, the project team worked hard and did accomplish quite a lot. And, in the last bilateral exchange meeting, in January 2015, the vice mayor did participate a full day in meetings and discussions. This represented a breakthrough in the policy related work of the project. After this the level of awareness and interest from the political sphere was considerably higher than previously.

As explained above, all menu decisions are taken by dieticians and approved by the state control organism. This gives very little freedom for different interpretations of the detailed state regulations, and the municipalities are not authorized to develop their own diet policies. These preconditions of course implied that no real diet policy work was possible in Molėtai. Nevertheless, this situation led to a very interesting initiative which should be highlighted.

At a local Diet for a Green Planet conference in January, which was combined with a bilateral exchange for kitchen staff, the state food control institution was invited to participate and discuss how the Diet for a Green Planet concept could influence the Lithuanian regulations. The representatives for the control



institution were very pleased to be invited to a dialogue – this had never happened before.

The outcome was – instead of a municipal diet policy – that the Local Support Group in Molétai agreed on, and created, a set of written recommendations (“Recommendations for the improvement of legal acts on children’s nutrition”) on how the Diet for a Green Planet concept could influence the state regulation system. It includes recommendations to the State Public Health Centre on how legislation and regulations could be changed to let the Diet for a Green Planet concept influence policies, and it also includes recommendations on how the local level can contribute. The set of recommendations has been presented to the municipal health committee during the course of the project.

Remaining steps

It is during the final three months of the project that the wind has turned when it comes to political awareness. The written set of recommendations was an immensely important step. However, much work remains. In March, 2015, local elections were held in Molétai. Upon the installation of the new government, the well-functioning Local Support Group will invite the new politicians to have a round-table discussion about what is needed to create an environmentally friendly region – one of the components should be healthy diets, taking the concept of Diet for a Green Planet into consideration.

Another important step will be actively applying for EU projects that will allow further development and deepening of the Diet for a Green planet concept in Molétai.



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Łomża

Background

Headmasters of educational institutions are responsible for public procurement and for organizing the canteen services. There is an Authorizing officer who is responsible for the menus, and what they should contain. There is no particular department in the city hall which takes care of public canteens, and there were no political steering documents when the project started.

The State Sanitary Inspection (a specialized institution established to execute the tasks of the public health) controls the menus, to ensure that meals are nutritional and healthy, that products are not repeated too often, etcetera.

The political sphere has been interested in the project from the start, but the local elections in November 2014 would come to dampen the activity in the policy making field of the project.

Steps taken

Even though there was a positive interest from the start among politicians, the local elections that were held in November 2014 somewhat paralyzed the political involvement. The old local government did not want to change anything, and at the end of the project the new government and the new mayor had just started their work.

In spite of these difficult preconditions there have been constant efforts from the project team to involve politicians in the project:

- High level politicians were present during the conference “Healthy Diet in Educational Institutions” at the University PWSiIP in Łomża in June 2014.
- There was political presence in the second transnational conference in Mollet del Vallès in September, 2014. And, as stated above, the interest has been there, but the will to act has been limited.
- In a document for development strategies for Łomża it was stated that there is a need to increase entrepreneurship among farmers. The need for a diet policy and some kind of legal contract with local producers has been presented to the Education Department and to the City Council of Łomża.

In addition, the new political leadership – two deputy mayors participated in the final conference in March, 2015 – is very interested and has publicly (during the final conference) expressed the wish to create a diet policy that will be included in the municipal strategy for the period 2014-2020, in accordance with the Diet for a Green Planet concept. This represents a breakthrough and offers a true sense of optimism when it comes to further development.

Other steps taken during the project are:

- Organized contacts between eco-farmers and headmasters of educational institutions have been established and there is a mutual interest of continuing to work according to the Diet for a Green Planet concept.



- Increased networking and cooperation: Łomża city has developed cooperation with other organizations and networks like Podlaskie Centre of Agriculture Advisory, the Slow Food-movement and other Polish URBACT-cities.
- An inquiry has been carried out concerning the preparation of a set of recommendations and plans to formulate a Local Action Plan for the implementation of Diet for a Green Planet.

Remaining steps

The continuation of the policy related work is about getting a diet policy created, approved and implemented in the municipality during 2014-2020. It is recognized that this will take time and since diets is a national issue that is implemented through regional health authorities, the policy work needed must be based on science. It will be important to engage a well selected consortium of high level research institutes.

Applications for new EU projects will be one way to continue this work. Łomża now sees a possibility to apply for external funding for the period 2014-2020 for projects in connection with the implementation of the "Diet for Green Planet", co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund and URBACT III.

As is the case in Molėtai, Łomża City Hall is mostly used to "hard" projects (buildings, roads etc.). But a concrete result of this project is a widened scope of interest to including also the "soft" issues such as competence building and attitudes. There is an ambition to set up a "Department of Soft Projects" in the city administration, to develop the capacity to apply for new EU projects.

The new political leadership also intends to spread the concept to all the headmasters in the municipality. The project has created a window of opportunity to create a planned cooperation between municipality, headmasters and farmers.

Appendixes to this report

The following appendixes are directly connected with this report.

- Appendix 1. Set of written recommendations produced in Molėtai ("Recommendations for the improvement of legal acts on childrens' nutrition") on how the Diet for a Green Planet concept could influence the state regulation system in Lithuania.
- Appendix 2. Diet Policy from Mollet del Vallès passed on March 23, 2015.

We also recommend the reports made throughout the project. The reports from the bilateral meetings, the transnational conferences and the Roadmap for Applications provide a more detailed account of the transfer process.

Download the reports on <http://urbact.eu/diet-for-a-green-planet>.

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