

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR PLUNGE HEALTH AND WEALTH

1. The project

Project goal is to develop physical activity for better health and wealth of the residents of Plunge district.

Main expected outcomes are:

1. Active and healthy leisure and daily physical activity becomes a generally acknowledged value of the residents of Plunge district.
2. Better conditions in Plunge district for everyday physical activity by creating new infrastructure for active leisure and combining it with the existing ones into an integrated system.
3. Constant monitoring and impact measurement of active lifestyle on health of Plunge's residents.

2. The Context

Citizens' involvement in decisions regarding health and healthcare traditionally was very low in Plunge region as well as in most European countries. Public health specialists based on statistic data have identified several priority problems in Plunge district, like very high suicide rate, unhealthy diet of children and aging of population, lack of physical activity, smoking, alcohol consumption, high rate of cardiovascular mortality, over-usage of medications, etc.

From the economic point of view it is several times more useful to invest into teaching health than treating patients due to unsuitable life style.

Taking into account that population of Plunge is aging and considering migration abroad or to larger cities of Lithuania, it is essential to prolong healthy and working age and to create conditions for people to stay in the labor market as long as possible, to strengthen health of workers, and encourage active and healthy lifestyle. Moreover, it is essential to decrease morbidity, disability and mortality of elderly working-age population with a view to encouraging active and healthy aging.

Also, as increase of mental and physical disorders among children and teenagers is observed it is necessary to develop cooperation between family, educational, health care, social care institutions, business and NGOs. Risk factors of health and early symptoms of illnesses of children and adults are often not noticed on time due to insufficient professional skills, lack of medical personnel and unregulated cooperation.

From the urban point of view, the district of Plunge, with its unique nature, existing parks and developing infrastructure (bicycle roads, farm tourism homesteads) has exclusive conditions for active leisure time and physical activity. However, it is under-exploited.

From the political dimension monitoring of health indicators has insufficient influence on future instruments of financing and programs of physical activity.

3. The rationale

In Plunge district, similar to Lithuania in 2013, the highest general morbidity cause among adults remained with respiratory (539,7/1000 people), vascular (387,9/1000 people), connective tissue and musculoskeletal (289,9/1000 people) diseases. General morbidity with diseases of digestive system, nervous diseases, traumas and other consequences of external factors, behavioral and mental disorders in Plunge district were higher than in Lithuania and Telsiai county.

The number of doctors in Plunge decreased by 5,21% in 2013 compared to 2008. Meanwhile in Lithuania and Telsiai county this number increased.

International practice and research justify that development of physical activity helps to decrease prevalence of harmful to health risk factors. Positive experience of physical activity in childhood and youth helps to lay background for active and productive life in the future: it is important to foster positive approach to health by promoting active lifestyle, seeking to broaden knowledge about healthy life, encouraging active leisure of families and strengthening partnership of parents in educational process.

Physical activity of children is essential for prevention of diseases, productivity of children, better stress resistance at school, better relations, lower morbidity and fewer tendencies to harmful habits. Physical activity is also related to another health supporting behavior: healthier diet, fitness, work /leisure time, better personal hygiene and body care, absence of bad habits, etc. Passivity, on the contrary, has negative impact on mental health (cognitive function deteriorates, it is difficult to concentrate), back pains and poor posture appear, risk of obesity and depression increase.

It was determined that physical activity, such as walking or cycling, etc., reduces the early risk of death from various chronic to non-communicable diseases.

4. The Theory of Change

Project idea and action plan have been developed through series of interactive workshops with representatives of different community groups and representatives of public and private sector. As a safety catch for project success in the future, is a fact that not health professionals, but community representatives themselves acknowledged that low physical activity for all age groups is a top reason leading to health problems.

With an aim to minimize financial resources required for successful implementation of public health infrastructure, particular attention was spent to investigate existing resources and to plan activities with minimal public input and through private investments, e.g. involvement of bicycle dealers to support development of infrastructure for bicycle roads etc.

Project initiative seeks to address root causes of the low involvement for physical activity of population in Plunge district.

Problem tree methodology has been used for problem analysis performed together with various stakeholders. Following this, groups of problems have been defined, which need to be addressed through project activities:

1. Negative attitude to physical activity and there are no physical activity habits since

childhood. It is the consequence of widely spreading passive lifestyle in families and inadequate attitude to physical activity.

2. There is a lack of sports and physical activity infrastructure in the district, although natural environment and existing infrastructure is not properly exploited.
3. There is insufficient cooperation between family, educational, health care, social care institutions, business and NGOs in monitoring health indicators.

The action plan provides practical measures to increase physical activity of the population, fostering to raise the perception of benefits of good physical and mental health.

Business is encouraged to cooperate with public sector while creating sports and leisure infrastructure in Plunge district (swimming pool, multipurpose sports complex, stadium, outdoor fitness equipment, playgrounds, etc.). Infrastructure of pedestrian and bicycle roads is developing in combination with the existing ones.

It is planned to increase the number of mass sports and active leisure events for families and target groups.

There are encouraging joining European healthy lifestyles initiatives, such as “European Mobility Week“, “International Tourism Day“, etc.

Public campaigns and dissemination of healthy lifestyle events is also planned to increase.

5. The project objectives

Commitment for implementation of project activities already has been stated from representatives of different sectors who also were owners of project idea and had proposed project activities. There are three parallel groups of activities planned that respond to the three project objectives:

1. Create a supportive environment and conditions for physical activity
2. Develop strategies to change attitudes towards physical activities, i.e. behavioral change strategies targeted to different population groups: children up to six years, school age children, youth, middle age citizens, seniors etc.
3. Improve Plunge’s health monitoring system.

6. The local policies and areas involved

In the process of priority setting and problem analysis, a wide partnership was created, which included representatives from public and private sectors. A supportive political platform for the project idea was put in place, under the leadership of the Mayor of the district, who has profound experience in public health policy (he worked as vice-minister for public health in the ministry of Health of Lithuania). A strong leadership in mobilizing stakeholders from education sector, private enterprisers, NGOs have been demonstrated by health care administration and Public health bureau, also involved.

In 2012 by decree of the Mayor, an URBACT Local Support Group (ULSG) consisting of 16 members was created for the preparation of the Local action plan. Taking into account the progress of the preparation of the Action plan, the composition of the group was changed and new members were involved. It was extended up to 19 members.

The ULSG had regular meetings (every month/second month) to discuss the situation, analyze main problems and needs in health, in economy and other topics with regards to the district.

The working group discussed the goals, structure, composition, content and instruments of the Local action plan. Brainstorming and problem tree methods were used to choose new ideas and propositions. Representatives of various fields and mass media were invited to the meetings. After each international meeting the experience was shared with ULSG members and stakeholders. Progress and results of the joint work on the 4D Cities project were publicized locally and nationally.

Preparation of Local Action Plan (LAP) was developed in coordination with Strategic development plan of Plunge district for 2010-2020. Finally URBACT LAP will be submitted to the political council of Plunge district for approval.

7. The governance. Who does what

There are defined responsible actors for every measure and responsible coordinators for results. The created LAP contact database will enable to create communication corridors with the help of which networks relations will be enabled between different European local action groups, institutions, universities, research and innovation centers and all of this will be directed towards economic growth of cities.

- Plunge municipal council - will participate in the activities of the network of Healthy Cities with a commitment to work and collaborate with the other cities, achieving the Healthy City properties and better health of city residents.
- The Public health Bureau will collect statistical data and will be in charge of issuing meaningful data for project monitoring.
- The Public Health Board - will coordinate the municipal fields of health education, alcohol, tobacco and drug control, public health safety and health promotion, will elaborate and implement disease prevention measures, will identify priorities of the municipal public health support program.
- The Private Health services will carry out preventive inspections and preventive programs. Together with the Public Health bureau will conduct health promotion activities more effectively strengthening the health of individuals and will introduce the principles of healthy lifestyle, teach how to change lifestyle, manage stress, and will advise in choosing healthy diet and physical activity.
- Private business companies and institutions will establish positive working conditions; will organize programs on health by themselves and will actively participate in other's initiatives related with positive to health business surrounding. Also private entrepreneurs will participate in creating new infrastructure for active leisure activities and will give healthy friendly services, such as will organize massive cycling races, etc.
- Educational institutions will actively participate in activities related to Health Promoting Activities at Schools and Kindergartens.
- Citizens not only take care of their own but also family members' health, and will actively participate in prevention programs.

8. What we learnt. How we use it

The participants of Transnational meetings have gained a lot of knowledge about health innovation strategies and methodologies. They had the opportunity to ask the opinion of experts on the development of the Local action plan in order to encourage higher interest of the local community in it. It was pointed out that the most important thing is to find out the needs of the community. Only then, according to the experts, the desired results will be achieved.

Transnational meetings enabled the partners to discuss the ways to involve citizens into the

process of planning, to formulate the structure of local action plans. Thanks to local and international experts the network of cities deepened their theoretical knowledge about mechanisms of social involvement of citizens, focused on public health planning, setting priorities and applied methods seeking better results of this social project.

Local meetings-discussions were organized on the topics of impact of health on economy, differences of health care organization in Europe were discussed, and health innovation strategies were analyzed in more detail.

The partnership between ULSG members was fruitful, well organized, strong and active. It brought together 19 different stakeholders and united them to a strong network. The partnership with media during the project implementation got stronger and it has been focused on improving the quality of journalism, strengthening websites, and building stronger contacts with national level.

9. The innovation

There are a lot of initiatives and projects in Lithuania to increase physical activity, most of them initiated by public health specialists and/or trainers of physical activity. Our initiative is different, since it was started by community representatives, and had with wide involvement of different stakeholders.

What is innovative in the project is mass character of active lifestyle and activities, taking into account all age groups, social status and economic opportunities.

Regular monitoring of health indicators and analysis of changes will have direct impact on forming public attitude to distribution of public assets, attracting private investments and creating long-term development plans.

10. The benefits

Expected outcome of the project is increased proportion of physical activity. This will contribute to better health and wellbeing of population. Due to increased demand for healthy and active leisure, there will be more people employed in related sectors. Due to developed health supportive tourism infrastructure and environment, Plunge district will become more attractive for national and international tourists and the indirect outcome will be a more sustainable socioeconomic development of the district.

Benefits of the project - not only to create a theoretical document, but to work actually, encourage the community to live healthy and actively using the principle of leadership - to invoke leaders while developing various ideas, to listen to the needs of the community, to help people communicate and participate.

Mortality from chronic diseases will decrease, the number of disabilities will be reduced, and working-age people will have more opportunities to participate in the labor market, thus decreasing state and municipality costs on health care and social care, reducing the number of lost working days.

It is expected to reach higher involvement of citizens in physical activities, this will lead to prevention from physical and mental diseases, improvement of working capacity, stress reduction and better attention to professional health. Health of workers of companies and institutions will be improved due to this implemented measures.

11. The measurement

As a result of implementation of the project, 5 health indicators, which are the most problematic in Plunge district will be monitored to see how they change while implementing URBACT local action plan. Monitoring will be carried out in the territories assigned by the municipality with the aim to get detailed information about public health situation.

Public health prevention measures will be planned and implemented. Changes of habits in physical activity of citizens and their relation to health, social and economic factors will be monitored, evaluated and analyzed.

The Public Health Bureau will regularly carry out analysis (body mass index, drug prevention tests, monitoring of quality of bathing water, etc.), and taking into account the needs of the community it will provide health improving services to the population: consultations on smoking and alcohol prevention, healthy nutrition habits, physical activity, as well as organization of practical training.

Monitoring data will be used for evaluation of effectiveness of programs implemented by the municipality and it will help to allot financial resources purposively to target territories or indicated target groups.

Every year, Plunge Public Health Bureau will evaluate health changes of children and those data will help the Educational system in adjusting physical training courses and methodology at schools and kindergartens according to the main health problem trends.

Figures of local tourists will be evaluated yearly.

12. The transferability

In order to stimulate positive changes in the community towards health promotion, strong leaders and strong partnerships are needed. One of the most important factors for the successful implementation of the main goal of the project and LAP measures is local and national political support. However, it is firstly necessary to recognize problems and to wish to change longstanding habits.

Plunge distinguishes itself from other partner cities for healthy city management structure: there is a Public Health Board, a Public Health Bureau, a Sports and recreation center and the network of private health institutions is well developed and functions successfully. Active lifestyle infrastructure is in place in Plunge district: tourism routes around the Plateliai lake, pedestrian and bicycle routes, recreation areas and all this contributes to better health of the population. Municipality programs relate to preserving and strengthening health, by encouraging healthier nutrition habits and physical activity, and to prevent alcohol, smoking and other psychoactive substances.

Also all local governmental institutions, public organizations, business representatives and NGOs should adopt some kind of physical activities, adapting them to the needs of the local population.

Joint efforts should be directed to adapting the environment to the needs of the local population, having the goal to gradually change their personal and communal behavior in real living environment.

13. The next steps

It is planned to:

- Share gained practical knowledge and spread best practice;
- Publicize and promote health activities with the help of press, radio, Internet, advertisements, booklets;
- Educate and teach family members about positive impact of physical activity;
- Integrate family doctors in prevention programs of diseases;

Plunge has now a strong platform between stakeholders who are eager to promote physical activity and healthy lifestyle from private person and family to public life.

Project will create supportive environment for health and physical activity. This will serve as a basis for new healthy and wealthy projects in Plunge district municipality.

14. I want to know more

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