



INHERIT

ROUNDTABLE DEBATE

Health in our urban policies – How healthy are our cities?

Meeting Report

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Background

On 1st of October 2019, in the premises of the Academy of Science and Arts of the Republic of North Macedonia (MANU), a high-level roundtable organised under the umbrella and support of the EU-funded [INHERIT](#) project brought together over 20 policymakers at central and local level, urban planners and architects, health professionals, university representatives, non-governmental and international organizations as well as representatives of disabled groups of citizens. Participants gathered to discuss the current environment and health status of urban policies, as well how latest research findings can contribute to the planning and implementation of intersectoral policies addressing health, environmental protection, and health and social inequalities.





Debate summary

After an introductory speech by the President of the Academy, all participants were invited to take part in a moderated discussion focusing on issues such as:

- How much are health, environment and inequalities addressed in our policies in the cities and places where we live?
- What is the intersectoral collaboration like and how much are the citizens involved?
- Do we have promising practices?

Below are included some of these promising practices, as well as information on the Place Standard Tool.

Promising practices

- In the past years, the Ministry of the Environment has been actively involved in policymaking linking health and the environment (preparing the National Action Plan for Health and Environment, introducing the Law for urban greenery, and projects in close collaboration with other sectors such as the Ministry of Health as well as local governments).
- The Ministry of Health and public health institute presented some positive practices of close collaboration with local municipalities, such as establishing local public health councils or applying methods for introducing healthy planning on local level. The lack of resources and sustainability are among the obstacles they encountered.
- The Ministry of Social Affairs presented projects which focused on socially vulnerable groups. These groups were assessed as particularly vulnerable to environmental pollution.
- The Mayor of the Karpos municipality was very pleased to present the results of the piloting of Place Standard Tool (PST) in Karpos, describing the positive effects it had on the debate between the local administration and citizens (more than 600 citizens took part). The municipality council has started to implement the citizens' priorities that emerged from PST discussions, in the context of preparing the annual plan of the Karpos municipality council. As an outcome, beside more activities to enlarge the green areas in Karpos, through various projects NGOs and citizens are now more closely involved in the urban planning process of the municipality. More information on PST is provided below.
- The City of Skopje representatives emphasised the problem of overlapping responsibilities as a serious obstacle in dealing with environmental and health issues in the city. Whether activities succeed in being efficient very much relies on the personal interrelations of the top management. However, the City of Skopje did still mention positive practices, such as the improvement of public transport, and dealing with agricultural organic waste in close collaboration with farmers' associations. There are also positive cases of close consultation and collaboration with citizens on enlarging the green and public spaces for citizens' benefit, as well as public campaigns for dealing with solid waste in public spaces, which is a serious problem in the city. In other cases, citizens' involvement had stopped projects which posed a serious threat for the environment. On the global level, beside applying for the WHO Healthy City Network membership, the city is active in making and implementing a Climate Change adaptation strategy and action plan.



○ International organisations in the country also took part in and supported positive projects such as the green cadasters, revitalisation of public spaces in the city of Skopje, or mapping the heating systems in the city as sources for air pollution, with a special focus on disadvantaged groups. However, some weaknesses in most of these activities were also mentioned, such as a lack of specific focus on the needs of disabled persons and other disadvantaged groups, or a lack of data for analysing the status and the needs for better quality of life in the cities.

Place Standard Tool (INHERIT)

Prof. George Morris (Exeter University), introduced participants to the [INHERIT](#) project. He notably presented the scientific background of the INHERIT ‘triple-win’ (protecting the environment, improving health and health equity), as a basic analytical concept of the project which takes into account the physical, societal and biological determinants of health, emphasising the importance of inequalities and of changing the social values of health when assessing the health of the places in which we live. Through a triple-win approach, today’s policies addressing the places in which we live must simultaneously deliver health and wellbeing, equity and social sustainability. In order to do that a simple [conceptual model](#) should be applied, and all sectors should act together, bearing in mind the mixed context of the place (social-economic-cultural and environmental). Prof. Morris presented the Scottish experience of such a policy approach. He also highlighted that in parallel with these policies, it is crucial to also consider the need to encourage and enable behaviour change. For this, closely collaborating and engaging with people in projects such as PST, for instance by asking them to assess which parameters of the places in which they live are important for them, is crucial in this policymaking process.

The Lead PST Coordinator for Scotland, Mr. John Howie, presented the whole story behind the Place Standard Tool in Scotland as well as internationally, and Prof. Gjorgjev presented how the tool was piloted in North Macedonia. The PST is an extraordinary tool for facilitating the assessment of the quality of living places in a structured way across different groups of citizens. It can also help to advise how to use public money for citizens’ priorities. Citizens in Scotland but also in North Macedonia were astonished that they were included in the process of policymaking, and the tool was also well accepted by the public administration in Skopje and Karpos. Of course, it is very important that citizens’ expectations should be properly managed. Since capacity-building is very important in this process, the PST has been adopted as a learning/training resource. This resource extends to any group looking to undertake a Place Standard assessment and has primarily been designed with community and other groups and organisations in mind like health professionals, public administration, etc.

The established special infrastructure for managing and monitoring the PST implementation in Scotland was presented in more details. It is also important to note that the PST could be used as an excellent tool for monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals implementation process across different countries. Mr. Howie showed some details regarding the PST implementation across Europe, emphasising the specificities of the different contexts of the countries where the tool is used.



Final discussion and recommendations

It is highly important to enable and encourage [behaviour change](#) by introducing the **triple-win mindset** to policymakers and citizens, as our health and wellbeing and environmental sustainability should be a responsibility of the whole of society.

It is of high importance to have strong political will and legislative foundations for introducing a system of real and **efficient/productive [inter-sectoral collaboration](#)** at vertical (central-local government) and horizontal levels (among sectors and institutions) on a regular basis.

It is also highly important **to meaningfully and actively include citizens** in policy and decision making and implementing processes, with a special focus on vulnerable groups and children. Using the PST could be a solution to apply the triple-win approach whilst including citizens (including the disadvantaged) at all stages of the policymaking process, enabling them to have control over ad hoc solutions which they may not agree with regarding their health and wellbeing. The urban planning process must put citizens in the center.

We should fully **support positive practices with triple-win effects** (health and environmental protection as well as social inequalities). We need more positive practices like PST, work on enlarging green spaces, public campaigns for changing behaviour etc. The PST could be an excellent tool for monitoring and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. There is a need for more concrete interventions regarding [social and gender inequalities and meeting the needs of disadvantaged groups of citizens](#).

The focus should also be on investing in **research, training and education for the triple-win** (amongst the public administration, policymakers, health professionals, volunteers, citizens, vulnerable groups...). The lack of valuable data, information and a comprehensive database regarding the quality of life and triple-win aspects must be overcome. The use of PST enriches the scientific methodology in the many fields linked with the triple-win area and also enhances the societal capacities of citizens by framing issues with respect to the key factors in the context of the particular places in which they live.



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