



**INHERIT**

# **Success Factors, Barriers and Future of Intersectoral Cooperation**

A Qualitative Evaluation  
of 12 Triple-win Case Studies

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## This summary is based on the following report:

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The following INHERIT partners contributed to the qualitative evaluation report:

Maria Romeo-Velilla, Ingrid Stegeman (EuroHealthNet, BE)

- Ruth Bell, Matluba Khan, Bettina Friedrich (University College London, Institute of Health Equity, UK)
- Rosa Strube (Collaborating Centre on Sustainable Consumption and Production, DE)
- Vojtěch Máca, Iva Zvěřinová, Milan Ščasný (Charles University Environment Centre, CZ)
- Dragan Gjorgjev (Institute of Public Health, Republic of North Macedonia)
- Sonia Quiroga, Pablo Martinez-Juarez (University of Alcalá, ES)
- Anne-Sophie Merritt, Marita Friberg (Public Health Agency of Sweden, SE)
- Nathalie Bèlorgey (Federal Centre for Health Education, DE)
- Inese Upelniece, Diana Koerna (Riga City Council, LV)
- Marjolijn Vos (Flemish Institute for Healthy Living, BE)
- Sibila Marques, Daniela Craveiro (ISCTE-IUL, Lisbon University Institute, PT)

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# 1. Introduction

INHERIT, a project funded under the EU Horizon 2020 research programme (2016-2019), aims to identify, investigate and promote effective intersectoral policies, interventions and innovations that enable and encourage healthier, more sustainable and equitable behaviours and lifestyles. Current and future challenges of health, sustainability and equity are complex and multi-sectoral and require intersectoral cooperation to allow for solutions that are more efficient.

Many policies and practices that influence how we live, move or consume have the potential to lead to a 'triple-win': improving health while reducing negative environmental impacts and social and health inequities. From INHERIT's [promising practices database](#), containing practices throughout Europe that can offer potential triple-win solutions, INHERIT partners have selected 15 promising practices in the areas of living, moving and consuming to become [Triple-Win Case Studies](#), which were further implemented and underwent several kinds of evaluations. In the [INHERIT Implementation Report](#), detailed descriptions can be found of all the INHERIT case studies. In twelve case studies, the process of intersectoral cooperation was evaluated qualitatively. The methods and results are described in more detail in the full report. In this summary report, we describe the main results.

## 2. Definition and goal of intersectoral cooperation

We defined intersectoral cooperation as partners from different sectors working together (cooperating) to allow actions to be taken that are more effective or efficient than actions taken alone by the different sectors. Our definition includes cooperation between different sectors (health or environmental, but also private and public), between different types of institutes or organisations, between different levels of government (from neighbourhood to national), and between professional and citizens.

The goal of intersectoral cooperation is to bring actors from different parties together to achieve mutual understanding on an issue, negotiate, and implement mutually agreeable plans for tackling the issue or challenge.

## 3. Aim

The aim of the process evaluations was to gain a more complete, detailed insight into the underlying factors, processes and experiences driving cooperation, among cooperation partners in twelve triple win case studies. In addition, we aimed to build capacity and motivation for future cooperation. Studying and evaluating cooperation processes in these initiatives can provide insights for policy-makers and

practitioners to organise and ensure effective intersectoral action to reach the triple-win of improved health, environmental sustainability and equity.

## 4. Method

To explore intersectoral cooperation processes, experiences and perspectives of different types of stakeholders, we conducted 12 focus groups, one for each case study. Focus groups permit interactive discussions and group dynamics that allow thorough explorations of specific topics and insights into collective views and meanings. The focus groups took place between October 2018 and March 2019 (see Table 2 for an overview and description of the case studies).

**Table 1. Overview of the 12 case studies that were evaluated**

12 CASE STUDIES QUALITATIVELY EVALUATED			
Case study	INHERIT area	INHERIT partner	Brief description
Voedseltuin (Food Garden)	Consuming	RIVM, Netherlands	A food garden that produces ecologically sustainable vegetables and fruit, working with volunteers with a distance from the job market
Gardening with Green Gyms for Meat Free Monday	Consuming/ Green Space	UCL, United Kingdom	Two sustainable practices combined in a London primary school: meat-free Monday initiative and a Green Gym school garden
GemüseAckerdemie	Consuming	CSCP, Germany	Educational program that strengthens the relationship between children and nature, while increasing child's knowledge of food origins
Ghent en Garde: STOEMP initiative	Consuming	Gezond Leven, Belgium	The STOEMP initiative, as part of the Ghent en Garde food policy, is a network that brings good (healthy and sustainable) food initiatives together in the city of Ghent.
PROVE	Consuming	ISCTE-IUL, Portugal	A program to create close links between consumers and producers of agricultural products to promote consumption of seasonal fruit and vegetables
Restructuring residential outdoor areas	Green Space	FOHM, Sweden	Involving residents to restructure one of the most deprived areas in Stockholm to a more attractive and green outdoor environmental area

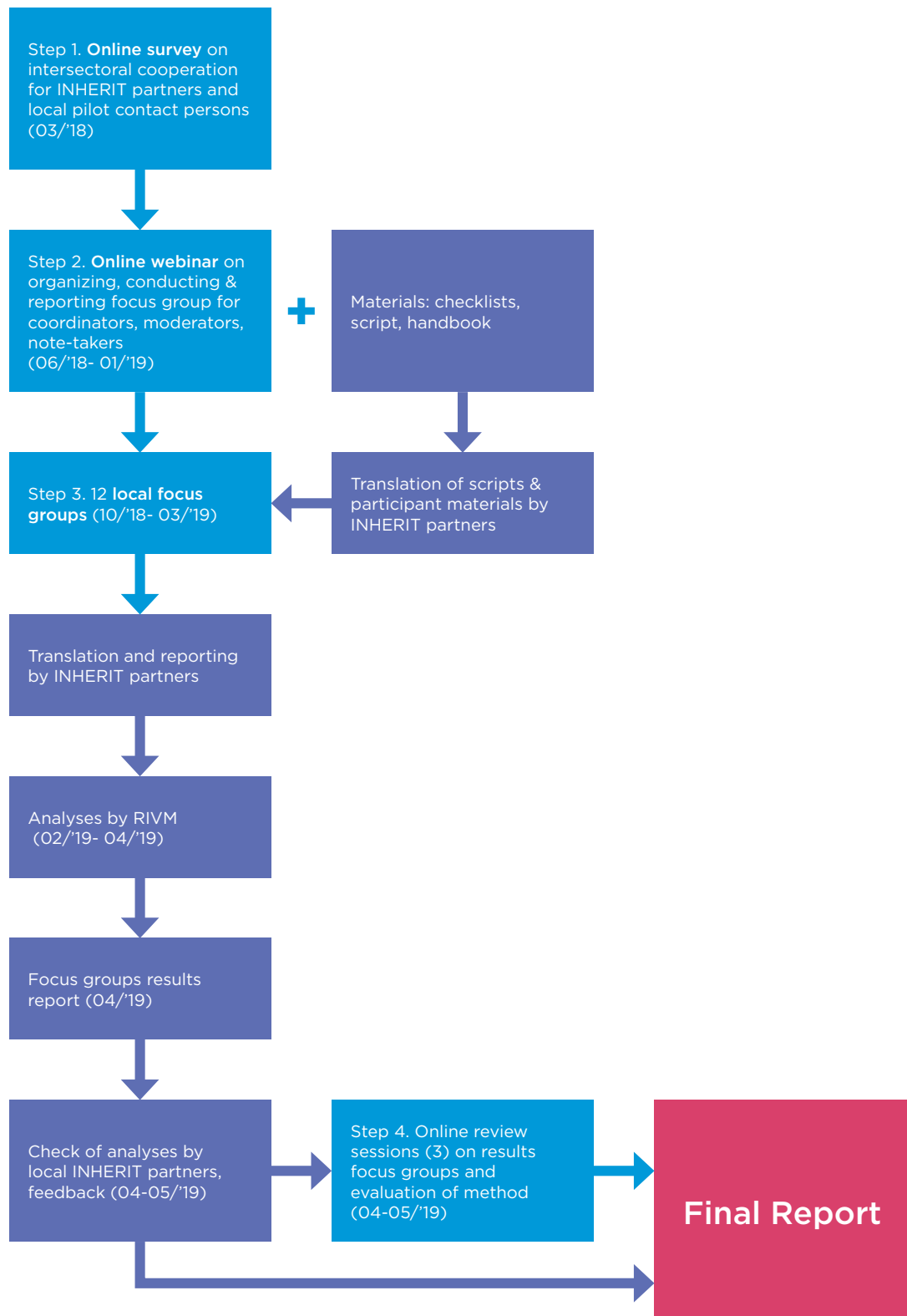


## 12 CASE STUDIES QUALITATIVELY EVALUATED

Case study	INHERIT area	INHERIT partner	Brief description
Restructuring green space	Green Space	RIVM, Netherlands	Green space neighbourhood park intervention in a low-income urban area in Breda
Sustainable schools in public schools	Consuming	UAH, Spain	Sustainable food in public nursery schools in Madrid, advising parents and training school kitchen personnel to raise awareness in families
Place Standard Tool Latvia, Riga	All areas	Riga City Council, Latvia	Applying the PST to assists professionals and communities in identifying what works well and what needs improving within a local community, bringing public health, inequalities, environment together in order to create a healthy neighbourhood (Riga)
Place Standard Tool Macedonia	All areas	IJZRM, Republic of Macedonia	Applying the PST to assists professionals and communities in identifying what works well and what needs improving within a local community, bringing public health, inequalities, environment together in order to create a healthier neighbourhood (Karposh)
Urban Cyclers	Moving	CUNI, Czech Republic	An urban cycling app to promote sustainable mobility by supporting and motivating self-regulated behavioural change
Eco Inclusion	Energy Efficient Living	BZgA, Germany	A training for refugees to help them save energy in their homes, using a peer-to-peer principle (Pforzheim)

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) informed the methodology used in this qualitative evaluation. AI is a strength-based (or asset-based) approach to data gathering. Instead of focusing on problems and what is going wrong, it focusses on questions such as “what works well around here, and how can we do more of it?” It uses a deep understanding of moments when we have been at our very best as a launching point for future action and helps people identify what they want to see more of, to create a shared vision of the future and to make that vision become reality. As INHERIT is a future oriented project exploring new ways to generate healthy and sustainable behaviour, this approach seemed particularly suitable (see Table 2 for the questions we used for the discussion).

Figure 1: Schematic overview of all four qualitative evaluation steps and processes



## Participants


Individuals who had been active in the cooperation process of each case study were invited to take part in the focus groups. In each focus group, at least one policy maker, one implementer and a target population representative were expected to be present, to make sure perspectives from these different groups were represented. The actual number of participants ranged from 4 to 9, with an average of 6 participants. Some case studies were more about cooperation between different disciplines, others more on cooperation between professionals and citizens, and few others about cooperation between the private and public sector. In all focus groups, implementers of the case study were present. In five focus groups, representatives of citizens were present. In ten focus groups, there were representatives of public administration and four focus groups included researchers.

This qualitative study used a stepped approach, with central coordination and analysis by the RIVM, and local implementation and reporting of the focus groups by INHERIT partners. A [webinar](#) and [handbook](#) were provided to the partners to prepare for the focus groups. This webinar aimed to build a shared level of capacity to organise, conduct and note down the focus groups. A handbook complemented the webinar, to enable the RIVM team and INHERIT project partners to organise, perform and report the focus groups in a consistent, comparable way, generating data that could be analysed in a similar fashion by the RIVM team. The focus groups were planned to last between 1.5 to 2 hours, of which approximately 80 minutes were used for the evaluation of intersectoral cooperation (including introductions, warm-up questions, and a debriefing afterwards). About one hour was spent on the core questions. See Table 2 for structure and time schedule of the focus groups. In the case of two questions, before discussions, participants were first asked to write their input on sticky notes before starting the plenary discussion.

**Table 2. Structure, questions and timing during the focus groups.**

STRUCTURE AND TIMING OF TOPICS DURING FOCUS GROUPS	
Topic	Questions
<b>Start and development of the cooperation</b> (±10 minutes discussion)	<p>“How did the cooperation/project start?”</p> <p>“How did it develop to where it is now?”</p> <p>“What contributed to the cooperation process?”</p>
<b>Core (success) factors of the cooperation</b> (±15 minutes) (use of sticky notes and discussion)	<p>“What are the core factors that make this cooperation happen, that energised and inspired cooperation?”</p> <p>“Describe a peak experience in (intersectoral) cooperation in [project X], when you felt really engaged and motivated”</p>
<b>Barriers, challenges, missing in the cooperation</b> (±15 minutes discussion)	<p>“How could the cooperation have been?”</p> <p>“What would you change if you could change anything in this cooperation? What could it still become?”</p>
<b>Future of the cooperation</b> (±15 minutes) (use of sticky notes and discussion)	<p>“Where do you want to be between now and a certain period, what does this future look like? If your dream is X, what would you want to have accomplished in Y years?”</p> <p>“What are possible options (actions, projects) to reach this and enhance cooperation in the future?”</p>
<b>Wrap up, summary</b> (±5 minutes)	<p>“Of all things discussed, what was most important to you?”</p>





For data analysis, we used thematic analysis in order to find repeated patterns of meaning. We followed the next phases: familiarizing with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report. We used deductive coding with further emerging themes being considered, with an analytical framework based on literature on intersectoral cooperation and on the COM-b behavioural system to organise the data into codes and the codes into categories. The COM-b system embedded in this wheel consists of three behavioural determinants that influence each other and behaviour: capability, motivation and opportunity. More information on the COM-b can be found in the full report (Van der Vliet et al., to be published).

After data analysis, INHERIT partners were given the opportunity to check the results and provide feedback, upon which data could be revisited.

## 5. Results

In Figure 2, the key themes that were extracted from the 12 focus groups are visualized.

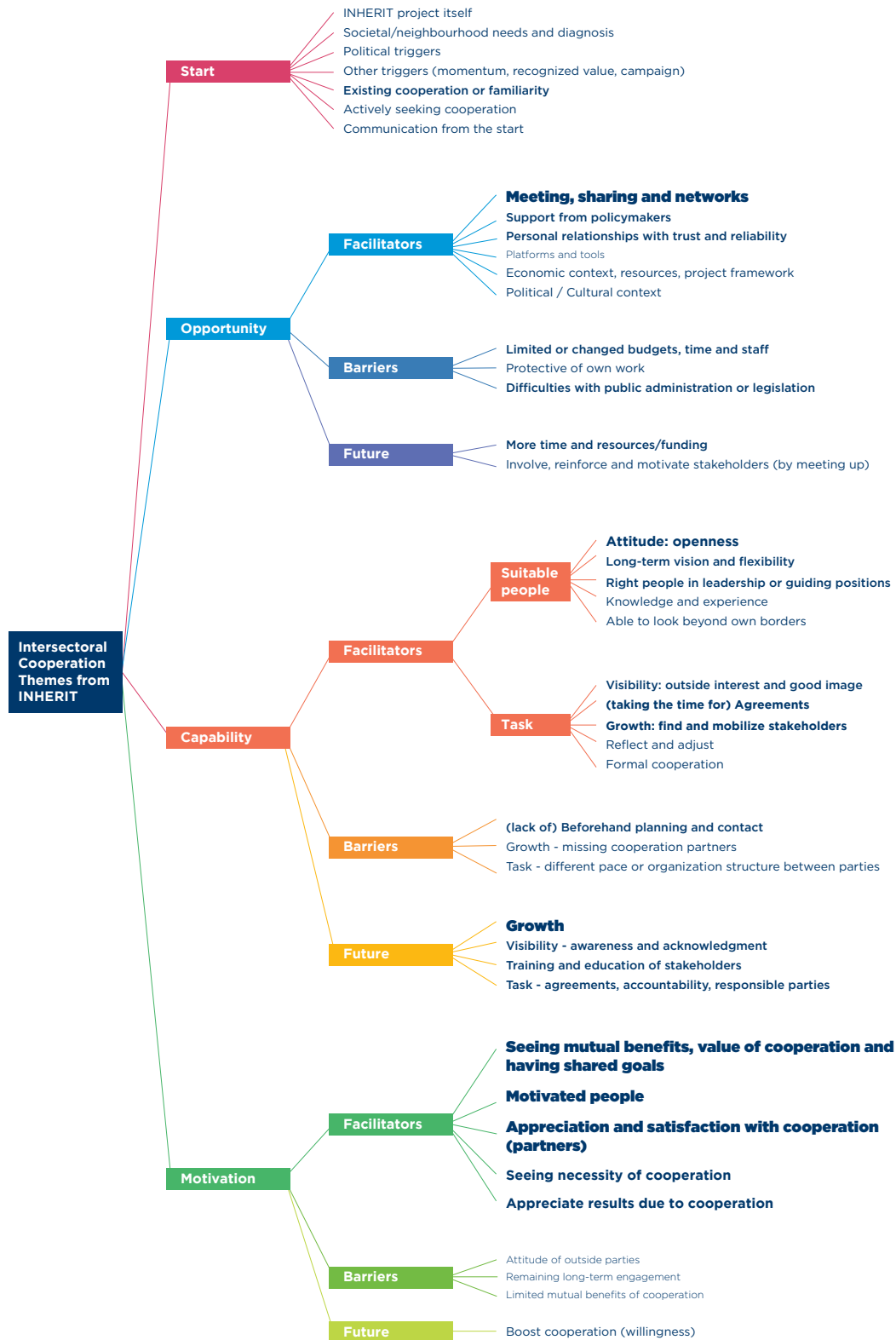
### Facilitators of cooperation

The most important facilitators of intersectoral cooperation appeared to be related to motivation levels of the cooperation partners. Most focus group participants saw the mutual benefits of cooperation with other partners, they shared common goals, and they valued cooperating and saw its necessity. In addition, facilitators related to cooperation partners were having an open attitude, long-term vision, being flexible and having personal relationships in which people feel that they can trust and rely on one another. Having cooperation agreements, and being known and acknowledged by important stakeholders was considered important for cooperation success.

Facilitators were often people- and value-oriented: participants saw motivation and competence of partners as vital facilitators of cooperation, and they appeared intrinsically motivated to make the initiative and cooperation successful. In addition, meeting face-to-face with cooperation partners was experienced as very valuable: it contributed to understanding each other and each other's goals, and making agreements. Thus, when setting up intersectoral cooperation, investing in personal relationships and having common goals is key, to ensure that all stakeholders see the necessity of cooperating and experience the cooperation as pleasant. When planning for action that requires intersectoral cooperation, stakeholder should make sure to plan enough opportunities to meet up in person to allow personal relationships to grow and to be and remain on the same page. Having support from policy makers or the municipality was considered very helpful. The political or economic context was explicitly mentioned as affecting cooperation, which corresponds with previous literature that showed context and culture to be critical determinants of success for intersectoral initiatives.

Our findings generally agree with earlier literature on intersectoral cooperation. Several facilitators identified in a recent mapping exercise across EU region case studies by the WHO match our results, among which are having a long-term impact focus, political support, and having clear co-benefits among partners.

Figure 2. Key themes Intersectoral Cooperation of 12 focus groups





## Barriers to intersectoral cooperation

Regarding barriers for intersectoral cooperation, less commonalities between focus groups could be identified, with various types of barriers mentioned in the different focus groups. However, there were some main themes. The main barrier mentioned in more than half of the focus groups, was related to not (or no longer) having enough budgets, time or staff for the project, which resulted in limited opportunities to meet up, to fulfil set goals or growth of cooperation. This agrees with earlier literature. Moreover, some focus groups showed difficulties in cooperating with public administration or difficulties due to legislation. To tackle both the issue of having enough and suitable resources and allowing adequate cooperation with these types of multisectoral initiatives, we believe public administrations should transform from sectoral towards more intersectoral programmes and policies, which may allow more integral subsidy options.


Besides budgets, time appeared to be a prevalent barrier in several case studies, often related to the INHERIT project timeframes, which demanded the implementation and the evaluation of case studies being conducted within a tight schedule. When lacking these external conditions, it can be a challenge to make sure necessary processes for cooperation take place. Another prevalent barrier was a lack of (beforehand) planning and contact between cooperation partners, and in many focus groups, participants indicated that they would have liked to have better and earlier communication with each other. A lack of political will or commitment and coordination were also mentioned as important barriers in earlier literature.

Focus group participants appeared to share common goals and values and they saw the necessity of cooperation with other sectors to reach their goals. They also did not mention language barriers or misunderstandings due to jargon. This could be due to our selection of triple-win case studies in which intersectoral cooperation was already happening. Barriers related to motivation were very focus group specific, and often related to motivation of outside parties. For example, civil servants who thought negatively about social entrepreneurs.

## Start and future of cooperation

For some case studies, the INHERIT project was a direct cause of starting the project and intersectoral cooperation. For others, there were political or environmental triggers, or a need to solve an identified clear problem. Having a shared concern or issue and a shared interest in this issue, helped in achieving a consensus on the approach to take, facilitating cooperation. Facilitating factors for starting the project were inspiration from international experience, existing familiarity or long-term established cooperation, partners who actively sought cooperation, and who had clear communication from the start. This corresponds to findings by the WHO, who found that early engagement of co-operators and open communication facilitated cooperation. One of the conditions of effective intersectoral action identified in the literature is that parties have developed a strong relationship, which is clearly defined and based on trust and respect. This corresponds with our finding that long-term established contacts and good relationships between partners facilitated cooperation.

For the future, important themes that emerged were growth and visibility: in more than half of the focus groups, participants stated the desire to expand their cooperation (including more partners) or transferring the project to other places, or to make it more structurally embedded (for example in school curricula). Identifying plans to monitor and sustain outcomes were described as conditions for effective intersectoral action in earlier literature. Our participants generally did not discuss ways of monitoring or evaluating outcomes and were focused more on how to improve or expand the project or cooperation. This could be due to the questions asked during the focus groups, which focused more



on the processes and contributing factors to cooperation, and future desires, and less on outcomes of the cooperation. In addition, especially prevalent was the wish of participants for acknowledgement and awareness by outside parties, participants wanted their work to be known and valued. Several focus groups discussed the wish for more time and (different types of) resources in the future (which closely relates to the identified barrier of lacking resources). Half of the focus groups indicated a wish or discussed plans to boost the cooperation (by deepening or strengthening it) and cooperation willingness by engaging all stakeholders. Meeting up was commonly proposed to accomplish this. Other future wishes that emerged were to have more training and education of stakeholders and to work on agreements on roles and responsibility.

## Citizen participation and engagement


More than half of the case studies involved citizen participants and engagement. It appeared that participants saw the value of citizen participation and expressed the importance of taking citizens seriously (and making them feel being taken seriously) and having direct conversations with them.

However, reaching, engaging and/or increasing ownership amongst citizens was found to be a difficult task. For some case studies, such as the Place Standard Tool Macedonia and Place Standard Tool Riga, this may relate to cultural aspects or that professionals and citizens need to get used to citizen participation in these kinds of projects, making the first steps more difficult. Participants in five focus groups indicated that they wanted to increase citizen participation in the future, for example, by activating neighbourhood alliances, a monthly neighbourhood event or educating them, or by peer-to-peer learning opportunities.

## Benefits and limitations of the methods used

Using an approach inspired by Appreciative Inquiry (AI) fitted both the goals of evaluation and stimulation of future action, but a common criticism is that it ignores issues and problems. However, AI leaves room for negative experiences but these are dealt with from a different perspective: participants are asked to think about what they are missing in cooperation, and what creates the gap between what they see and what they want to see, but in addition think about how to close that gap. Our results demonstrate this effect: more themes emerged relating to facilitating factors than to barriers, but when discussing what should be done in the future to reach ambitions, additional barriers (and how these could be taken away) emerged. The AI approach thus did not prevent discussions on negative aspects and barriers, but it did shift attention towards how aspects that were not going well before, could (or should) be done different in the future.

Doing focus groups instead of individual interviews (as stated in the project proposal) when evaluating cooperation processes turned out to be particularly valuable, as it brought cooperation partners together and provided an opportunity to jointly evaluate and identify future ambitions and potential actions. Statements from several focus group participants show that focus group discussions fostered new ideas for the project and cooperation, and that focus groups created an opportunity to jointly reflect on specific aspects of cooperation, including challenges and future plans. However, doing focus groups instead of individual interviews may have created some limitations due to socially desirable answers. Participants may have found it more difficult to talk openly and go against what the majority of the group expressed. Related to this topic, in an AI approach focus group, it might be harder to provide genuine answers within focus groups where there is (political) hierarchies or power imbalances



amongst participants (for example, where one of the participants is the subsidizing party such as a municipality employee).


The stepped approach of qualitative research, with central coordination and analysis, but local implementation of evaluation by INHERIT partners, was a resource-efficient way of conducting international focus group research, minimizing travelling and incorporating steps to ensure quality of data collection with detailed instructions. Despite the provided instructions, some differences remained between the focus groups in terms of length, timing, off-topic conversations, moderator experience and reporting details. This resulted in differences in the amount, quality and richness of input from each case study. An important benefit of the chosen approach, however, was that all participants could express themselves in their native language, enhancing the richness of the data.

We used a code tree as a framework to analyse data deductively, meaning that we have looked at the data with specific research questions and through a certain perspective. However, partners were asked to check the results of the data analysis in order to make sure the results still grasped the focus group discussions. From these online review sessions, it was concluded that we captured the major themes, and there were no missing ones. We used the COM-b elements of Michie et al. (2011) as the main themes in our analytical framework. In our experience, the benefit of using the COM-b is that it provides insights into what behavioural elements are important for intersectoral cooperation. Changing any behaviour, either being that of individuals or group behaviours, involves changing capability, opportunity and/or motivation. When aiming to set up or improve cooperation, the COM-b can assist as a relatively simple tool that guides thinking about the necessary elements to include or improve (for example, regarding motivation, cooperation partners should have a positive attitude towards intersectoral cooperation and understand its value. Regarding opportunity: time and budget should be planned from the start of cooperation, to allow moment to meet up, reflect and adjust actions. Regarding capability: cooperation partners should be able to communicate openly and speak the language of partners from other sectors).

## 6. Conclusion

This qualitative evaluation of intersectoral cooperation in twelve (potential) triple-win case studies shows that for intersectoral cooperation to be a success, it is necessary for cooperation partners to have or find common goals, shared values and to have and recognize the common need for cooperation. Cooperation partners should be committed and open with a long-term vision and patience, and relationships between partners should be marked by trust and reliability, with clear agreements. Finally, meeting up and receiving support from public administration contributes to cooperation. Barriers that need to be tackled include having inadequate resources, a lack of (beforehand) planning and communication.

Policymakers should facilitate initiatives that work intersectorally, for example, by developing more intersectoral, integrated, programmes and policies and allowing more integral subsidy options. Public administrations could enhance intersectoral cooperation within their own (often still sectorally structured) organisations, e.g. by appointing an intersectoral working group, or by appointing people who go into the field and function as bridge builders, bringing perspectives and people from public administration and other organisations (or citizens) together. Specific to citizen participation, efforts should focus on effectively reaching and engaging citizens, and to raise awareness on how to do this, but also generate more knowledge on how to do this, since citizen participation and engagement was found difficult amongst many of our focus group participants.



Our focus group participants wanted to boost intersectoral cooperation in the future, by expanding and including more stakeholders, or by increasing involvement of current stakeholders in the cooperation. Often meeting up in person was the suggested strategy to do this. Beforehand planning of meeting opportunities in cooperation projects that allow partners to align, reflect on the process and adjust actions if necessary seems to be an effective strategy to ensure that cooperation partners have enough time and budget to organise these meetings. Future wishes were also to increase awareness and acknowledgement of the initiatives, together with more time and resources to improve and expand the initiatives and cooperation processes, and to have more clarity on roles and responsibilities. Regarding citizen participation, plans were made to engage citizens more actively, for example, by having monthly neighbourhood events. In addition, seeing the value of citizen participation and taking the input from citizens seriously should be stimulated, as for example engaging citizens in the development of local green space or cycle paths can stimulate actual use of that green space or cycle paths.

Often, approaches that work in one country or context do not necessarily work in another country or context. The current study has generated rich data from case studies spread out over different European regions, cultures and contexts. Common facilitators and barriers to intersectoral cooperation were identified among these case studies, which all aim to achieve the triple win of improved health, sustainability and/or equity. In addition, the case studies differed in terms of topic (food consumption, green space, active travel, energy efficiency). This variety adds to the robustness of our findings. Overall, most of our identified facilitators and barriers are quite similar to those found in earlier literature, and despite the varying nature and context of the different case studies, many similarities between case studies were identified. This implies that existing checklists (such as the Coordinated Action Checklist by Wagemakers et al, 2010) on intersectoral cooperation contain useful elements to include when developing and implementing triple-win initiatives.

Cooperation with other sectors is essential when aiming to achieve the interlinked Sustainable Development Goals and improve the lives of all people and the world they live in. Insights from this study can be used as a starting point to develop effective intersectoral cooperation, which is essential when aiming to reach the triple-win of improved health, environmental sustainability and equity.