

## HEALTHY BOOST

### **Urban Labs for Better Health for All in the Baltic Sea Region - boosting cross-sectoral cooperation for health and wellbeing in the cities**

**"Healthy Boost—Urban Labs for Better Health for All in the Baltic Sea Region—boosting cross-sectoral cooperation for health and wellbeing in the cities" co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund under the Baltic Sea Region Interreg Programme**

**Priority 1. Capacity for innovation, specific objective. 1.3 "Non-technological innovation".**

# **Project document on disease prevention and health protection of preschool children**

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# I. Introduction

## 1. Municipality characteristics

Suwałki is situated in north-eastern Poland, in the northern part of Podlaskie Province, in the proximity of the state borders with Lithuania, Belarus and Russia (Oblast of Kaliningrad of the Russian Federation). Suwałki is a town municipality with district rights, the seat of numerous government and self-government institutions. It covers the area of 65.5 km<sup>2</sup> and has approx. 69.8 thousand inhabitants. It is the second, after Białystok, largest town of the Podlaskie Province.

The Municipality lies in the area of the so-called "Green Lungs of Europe", in a very attractive, in terms of tourism and landscape, area adjacent to the Augustów Primeval Forest, Wigry National Park and Suwalski Landscape Park. The Czarna Hańcza River flows through Suwałki, and the town recreation area with Lake Arkadia is located a short distance from the town centre. Many important routes cross the municipality: the National road No. 8: Warsaw - Białystok - Suwałki - Budzisko - State border, a fragment of the S61 expressway: Ostrów Mazowiecka - Łomża - Ełk - Suwałki - Budzisko - State border, and the railroad lines Białystok - Suwałki - Trakiszki and Suwałki - Olecko - Ełk.

The town's location determined its early development, Suwałki was founded in the 1770s as a centre of trade of the old route running from Grodno through Sejny to Przerosl and Królewiec [Königsberg]. Nowadays, Suwałki is situated on the communication route connecting Western Europe with the Baltic States, the Scandinavian Peninsula and the north-western parts of Russia.

The last few decades have witnessed significant ageing of the population, especially in the more developed countries. With a parallel decline in the birth rate, and an increase in human life expectancy, civilization progress and improvement in the quality of life, there has been a steady increase in the number of senior citizens. The current picture of the nationwide demographic trend is one of low birth rates and increasing life expectancy, which has increased both the number and proportion of elderly people in the society.<sup>1</sup>

This trend is also noticeable in Suwałki. At the end of 2019 there were 69,758 people living in Suwałki. Suwałki's population is slowly but steadily aging. While in 2011, only over 13.5% of the city's population belonged in the post-working age group, by 2019, the percentage was already 19.14%. At the same time, the number of people in the pre-working age decreased significantly, i.e. from 20.09% of the town population in 2011 to 18.82% in 2019.<sup>2</sup>

Year	Total population:	Population by sex:	
		Men	Women
2011	69,210	33,170	36,040
2012	69,404	33,250	36,154
2013	69,317	33,151	36,166
2014	69,316	33,127	36,189
2015	69,370	33,157	36,213
2016	69,626	33,261	36,365
2017	69,554	33,257	36,297
2018	69,827	33,356	36,471
2019	69,758	33,348	36,410

1 Strategy for Solving Social Problems of the Suwałki Municipality for 2016-2025, p17

2 2019 State of the Municipality Report p.11

## 2. Origins of the project

This project document was created in the course of the implementation by the Suwałki municipality of the project #R085, titled "Healthy Boost—Urban Labs for Better Health for All in the Baltic Sea Region—boosting cross-sectoral cooperation for health and wellbeing in the cities" co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund under the Baltic Sea Region Interreg Programme Priority 1. Capacity for Innovation, Specific Objective 1.3 "Non-Technological Innovation", further referred to as the "Project" or the "Healthy Boost" project.

Project Lead Partner was the City of Turku (Finland))<sup>3</sup>

Other project partners were:

1. Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Helsinki, Finland
2. City of Helsinki, Finland
3. Tartu City Government (Estonia)
4. City of Kaunas, Lithuania
5. Jelgava Local Municipality, Latvia
6. Västerbotten County Council, Sweden
7. The City of Poznań, Poland
8. The Russian Association of Healthy Cities, Districts and Villages - Regions of North-Western Russia
9. Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine, Department of Health Policy, Poland
10. Riga Stradiņš University, Latvia
11. Klaipėda City Public Health Bureau, Lithuania
12. Lithuanian University of Health Sciences - WHO Collaborating Centre for the Prevention & Control of Noncommunicable Diseases, Lithuania

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<sup>3</sup> In 2019, in the course of the project implementation, there was a change of the Lead Partner: the Baltic Region Healthy Cities Association (applicant) was replaced by the City of Turku



The main aim of the project was to contribute to the sustainable development of the cities of the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) and the social well-being of the inhabitants of the Baltic Sea Region residents by improving cross-sectoral urban policies.

The Healthy Boost project directly addressed the EUSBSR Health strategy, policy area (PA) Health - improving and promoting the health of people<sup>4</sup> in the Baltic Sea region, including social aspects of health. The project addressed the problem of fragmented urban health and well-being policies. This condition was considered to generate inefficient and unsustainable activities that do not help address the loss of human capital due to preventable causes associated with the development of non-communicable diseases. The assumed goal was to equip local governments and administrative bodies with the tools and capacity for cross-sectoral action that would support the creation of integrated policies aiming to improve the health and well-being of citizens. In addition, the project focused on citizen engagement and participation, supporting the development of healthy and sustainable societies.

The general goal of the Healthy Boost project was consistent with the EUSBSR program's goal of reducing premature and preventable loss of human capital. The Healthy Boost project aims to **implement an effective model of cross-sectoral health partnerships at the local level and to increase public participation in the planning and implementation of health interventions.**

When applying for the competition, the Municipality of Suwałki planned to conduct an in-depth analysis of documents concerning health condition of pre-school children (the plan was to update the document "Health condition of pre-school children", which was developed within the framework of the project no. LT-PL-1R-081 titled: "Be active - be healthy" implemented under the Interreg V-A Lithuania-Poland Cooperation Programme, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, Priority axis 3 "Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and discrimination", specific objective - "Enhancing the access to social and health care services for cross-border inhabitants thus combating social exclusion and poverty"), and to implement pilot activities.

- > Total project value: : 2,534,507. 85 EUR
- > Total eligible expenditure (Municipality of Suwałki): 109,700.00 EUR
- > ERDF co-financing (Municipality of Suwałki): EUR 93,245 (85% of eligible costs)
- > Own contribution (Suwałki Municipality): 16,455 EUR (15% of eligible costs)
- Project start date: 01.01.2019
- Project start date: 30.06.2021<sup>5</sup>
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The main focus and project activities of the Suwałki Municipality were to develop a municipal program for disease prevention and health protection of preschool children.

The idea of diagnosing and creating a multi-sectoral document was important for Suwałki, because the Municipality has received signals that children's health problems related to non-communicable diseases are more prevalent nowadays than they used to be in the past.

During the project, a deeper research was planned on the basis of an existing complex document (the aforementioned "Health condition of pre-school children", which was developed under another INTERREG project) to be applied in the Healthy Boost project area (the initial topic was

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/increase-prosperity/pa-health>

<sup>5</sup> During the implementation of the project, there were modifications of the period of its implementation (until 31.12.2021) and the budgets of its partners. The total amount of Suwałki's share in the budget and the total amount of the project budget did not change.

nutrition and physical activity of preschool children).

The Municipality of Suwałki believed and continues to believe that nutrition and physical activity problems occurring as early as preschool age can have a negative impact on the future quality of life and potential health problems of the local residents. It is therefore better to address these problems in the early stages or prevent them before they occur. **As the causes of children's health problems are sometimes complex, the best approach seems to be a multisectoral one.**

The Suwałki Municipality saw opportunities to involve in the project many partners and their representatives: public and private health care/education/non-governmental organizations, kindergarten and school principals (and teachers), entrepreneurs, representatives of the administration (including the Science and Technology Park), as well as parents and children.

The Municipality planned to establish a working group with representatives from the public and private sectors of health care/education/non-governmental organizations, etc. (e.g. kindergarten directors, representatives of business and administration). This was important in the opinion of the Municipality of Suwałki because each member of the planned working group would have different knowledge and experience of child health and the actual problems in this area (obesity, growth defects, visual impairment, etc.).

Another assumed project activity was implementation of activities for children as well as parents and teachers in kindergartens. During the whole project, the project coordinator worked on the creation of a project document based on the collected experiences, data and information from the entities involved in the "life" of the project.

At the start of the project (January 2019), the virtual reality tools mandatory for implementation in the project were envisioned to be used during the implementation phase of activities for children and their parents and teachers (e.g., to visualize therapy outcomes and processes and disabilities in the human body or to play exergames). This approach has also evolved over the course of the Healthy Boost project in Suwałki.



### 3. Health situation in Suwałki Municipality

The occurrence of overweight and obesity in childhood has a significant impact on people's physical and mental health, both in the short and long term. It increases the risk of maintaining excess body weight later in life, and developing non-communicable diseases such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease or cancer. Overweight and obesity among children are also related to a higher risk of psychosocial and emotional problems, antisocial behaviour, or attention deficit disorder. Their incidence increases with age, and the cause is often a large weight gain in preschool age and an increase of problems in peer relationships already at the beginning of the school education. The complexity and multiplicity of problems experienced by obese children contribute to a reduced quality of life, disrupt their proper functioning in current and future social roles, may contribute to poorer school performance and encourage inappropriate, often risky behaviours meant to decrease body weight, resulting in development of eating disorders.<sup>6</sup>

In light of the 2011 nationwide survey, **more than 20% of school-age children have excess body weight**. In recent years, there has also been a slightly higher prevalence of arterial hypertension in the child population, which is associated with, among other things, an increase in the frequency of overweight and obesity in children. According to a current Polish study, body weight is a decisive factor for excessively high blood pressure which **occurs in approximately 3 to 3.5% of the general population of children and adolescents**. The prevalence of hypertension increases with age and after adolescence it already affects 10% of the population.<sup>7</sup>

Overweight and obesity are often a family problem. If the parents of children younger than 10 are obese, the risk of obesity in these children as adults doubles regardless of whether or not they are obese at the time of the study. People who have been obese since childhood are particularly likely to develop late complications typical of adult obesity, such as cardiovascular disease, persistent hypertension, hypercholesterolemia, or metabolic syndrome. A US study of obese children under the age of 10 found that nearly 60% had at least one risk factor for future cardiovascular disease.<sup>8</sup> Given the links between adult and child overweight, the Healthy Boost project implemented by the Suwałki Municipality was designed to create and develop cross-sectoral collaboration among various stakeholders that would contribute to breaking this chain of causation. Developing healthy eating habits in preschoolers and the habit of spending free time actively is a chance for healthy adults and healthier seniors, who will pass on good habits to future generations.

Food behaviours are among the most important factors influencing the maintenance of health and body functions during any period of life, and especially in the periods of early development. Therefore, the diet of younger children needs special attention. According to different authors **the development of obesity in children is determined in 20-40% by the nutritional factors**. Healthy eating habits, along with physical activity, are one of the basic elements of a healthy lifestyle. Adequate amounts of energy and nutrients are essential for normal growth and maturation, promote well-being and disposition for learning, and are an important part of preventing overweight and obesity. Eating behaviours and food preferences formed in childhood and adolescence are replicated in adulthood and determine the risk of developing many chronic diseases.

The local government of Suwałki, while implementing the Healthy Boost project, in addition to nutritional issues also tried to focus on supporting kindergartens in organizing interesting forms of

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6 „Nadwaga i Otyłość u Polskich 8-latków w Świetle Uwarunkowań Biologicznych, Behawioralnych i Społecznych” pod redakcją Anny Fijałkowskiej, Anny Oblacińskiej i Magdaleny Stalmach. Warszawa 2017, p.18

7 As above

8 „Nadwaga i Otyłość u Polskich 8-latków w Świetle Uwarunkowań Biologicznych, Behawioralnych i Społecznych” pod redakcją Anny Fijałkowskiej, Anny Oblacińskiej i Magdaleny Stalmach, Warszawa 2017, p. 42.

active leisure. This focus on physical activities is a result of our conviction that they play the key role in stimulating and supporting the proper development of children and adolescents, including the development of their motor skills. They positively influence the social and emotional development and play an important role in maintaining proper body weight. Children should have a variety of opportunities to be active all days of the week, all year round. Physical activity should be a regular part of the daily routine, from walking or biking to school, through physical education lessons, active games during recess, and after school—activities in the playground, park or a garden. It is also important that physical activities should be incorporated into the daily schedule. Research indicates that the pleasure and enjoyment that movement provides, as well as the success and high self-esteem associated with it, play a large role in the physical activity of children and adolescents.<sup>9</sup>

The most recent document that summarizes the situation of the Suwałki Municipality in many aspects is the Strategy for Solving Social Problems of the Suwałki Municipality for 2016-2025.

According to the above mentioned document, health promotion is a process aimed at mass transformation of individual lifestyles so that they be conducive to strengthening and developing the health potential of the society. Achieving this type of transformation is accomplished through changes in health awareness and health-related behaviours. They may be naturally spontaneous or they may be the result of interventions, undertaken at different levels of organization of social life, and directed at individuals, groups and their living conditions. A factor stimulating changes in the approach to health and its determinants was the emergence, in the developed countries, of new qualitative problems related to health care, such as: health care for seniors, care for people with mental health problems, costs of health care for the poor and unemployed, health consequences of environmental pollution, growing costs of medical technology, and uncontrolled growth of the costs of the medical care.

The imminence of the connection between human health and his environment is expressed in the social-ecological model of health which constitutes the theoretical basis of health promotion. Improving the health of the population increases the opportunity for social and economic development of the country. Indicators describing the state of health of the Polish society worry not only doctors, but also many other animators of social life. There is a growing demand for interdisciplinary knowledge and social practice related to healthy lifestyles in numerous countries.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to remember that the concept of "health" is variable and often depends on the knowledge, beliefs, and cultural norms that exist in a given society. The history of the concept of health is primarily a history of the ideas always bound with medical practice and socio-cultural reality.<sup>11</sup>

The World Health Organization (WHO) currently defines health as: **A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.**

This definition does not stop at the mere negation defining health is the absence of disease, but very strongly emphasizes that health contains an active aspect which is referred to as well-being. This means that when it comes to health, we are not only to focus on disease and try to fight it, but we should particularly focus on health itself—on boosting it.

What emerges thus, is the great importance of disease prevention. Mere going to the doctor when we are sick is not the way to stay healthy. We should focus on our health and strengthen it

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9 "Nadwaga i Otyłość u Polskich 8-latków w Świetle Uwarunkowań Biologicznych, Behawioralnych i Społecznych" pod redakcją Anny Fijałkowskiej, Anny Oblacińskiej i Magdaleny Stalmach, Warszawa 2017, p. 72.

10 [http://www.sbc.org.pl/Content/73406/zdrowie\\_w\\_aspekcie\\_pedagogiki\\_spoecznej.pdf](http://www.sbc.org.pl/Content/73406/zdrowie_w_aspekcie_pedagogiki_spoecznej.pdf)

11 "Edukacja zdrowotna z promocją zdrowia" dr Julita Błasiak, Wyższa Szkoła Nauk Społecznych w Warszawie

through proper lifestyle (e.g., proper nutrition, exercise), mind-set, and proper handling of our emotions.

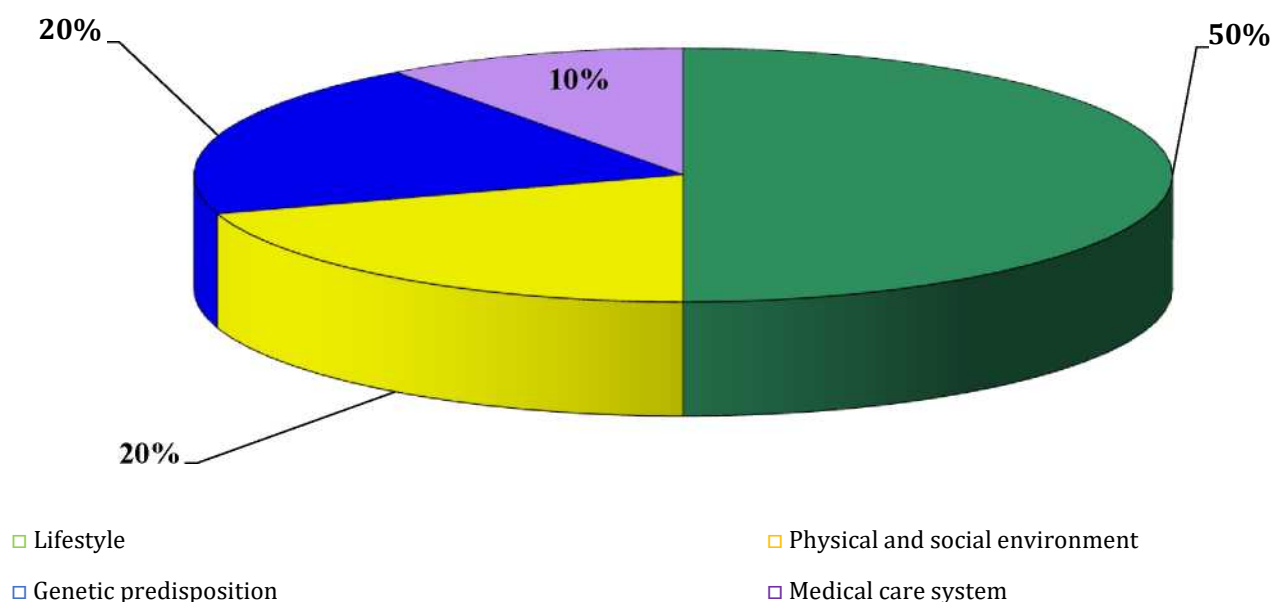
The WHO's contemporary definition of health therefore very strongly emphasizes the connection between a person's inner and social life and health, as well as his personal concern for physical well-being.

A healthy person has a better chance of self-realization, satisfactory performance of social roles, or good adaptation to environmental changes. Only a healthy society can create material and cultural goods and ensure social and economic development.

Until the 1970s, it was believed that health depended most on health care. A marked shift in the perception of health determinants came with the last quarter of the 20th century. M. Lalonde, Canada's Minister of Health and Welfare, proposed a scheme of "health fields" in which he distinguished 4 basic groups of factors that affect health:

1. Lifestyle (about 50% "share")
2. Physical and social environment (about 20%)
3. Genetic predisposition (about 20%)
4. Medical care system (about 10%)

**Factors affecting health and their impact on mortality**  
**due to specific causes**



The chart above shows how important lifestyle is to a person's health and how much can be improved in the health of the community by shaping healthy habits in children from an early age.

It is generally accepted that the main threat to the health of societies in developed countries, but increasingly also in developing countries, are the so-called civilization diseases. One of the primary determinants of these diseases are overweight and obesity. The prevalence of obesity is increasing in many countries, and it is now considered one of the most important health threats to their populations. From a public health perspective, particularly important are physical activity and dietary habits of children and adolescents and, by extension, the prevalence of overweight and obesity. Their incidence in childhood is significantly related to the health condition of young adults, middle-aged adults and even partly to the health condition of the elderly. Childhood obesity is associated with a higher risk of developing such diseases as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and many types of cancer in adults. It is also associated with a higher risk of psychosocial and emotional problems and antisocial behaviours.<sup>12</sup>

Taking the above into consideration, the Suwałki Municipality focused its project on the youngest members of the local society aiming to foster healthy eating and leisure habits from an early age.

<sup>12</sup> "Nadwaga i Otyłość u Polskich 8-latków w Świetle Uwarunkowań Biologicznych, Behawioralnych i Społecznych" pod redakcją Anny Fijałkowskiej, Anny Oblacińskiej i Magdaleny, Warszawa 2017, p. 6.

Suwałki local government finds the issue very important because an analysis of the current situation of kindergartens in Suwałki showed that about 70% of preschool-age children have health disorders. The main ones are bad posture, overweight, speech disorders, and allergies. This justifies the need to strengthen and develop health promotion activities, raising awareness of healthy lifestyle<sup>13</sup>.

Additionally, according to the "Strategy for Solving Social Problems of the Suwałki Municipality for 2016-2025", most deaths of Suwałki residents between 2011 and 2013, were caused by cardiovascular diseases (...).<sup>14</sup>. Also, the morbidity data for the Suwałki Municipality in 2018 confirm a big problem in this area—the largest number of adults suffered from cardiovascular diseases (10,327 people). Generally available knowledge indicates that cardiovascular diseases are caused, among other factors, by overweight and obesity, often combined with poor physical activity.

## II. Implementation of the Healthy Boost project in the Suwałki Municipality

### 1. Project Working Group

To implement the project, the Suwałki Municipality set up a project working group. It was composed of representatives of the Suwałki Municipal Office, representatives of educational units of the municipality (kindergartens and elementary schools), representatives of small business and of the Science and Technology Park in Suwałki. Working Group meetings were conducted both in-person and, due to the epidemiological situation, as online conferences.

Participants of the meetings were informed about the project assumptions and planned activities. Representatives of the Project Working Group and educational entities were consulted on the possibility of using VR technology, the purchase of which was one of the necessary elements of the implemented project. Thanks to the suggestions gathered during the 1st meeting of the Working Group, it was possible to determine the needs and market availability of the equipment, the purchase of which would be possible within the framework of the project.

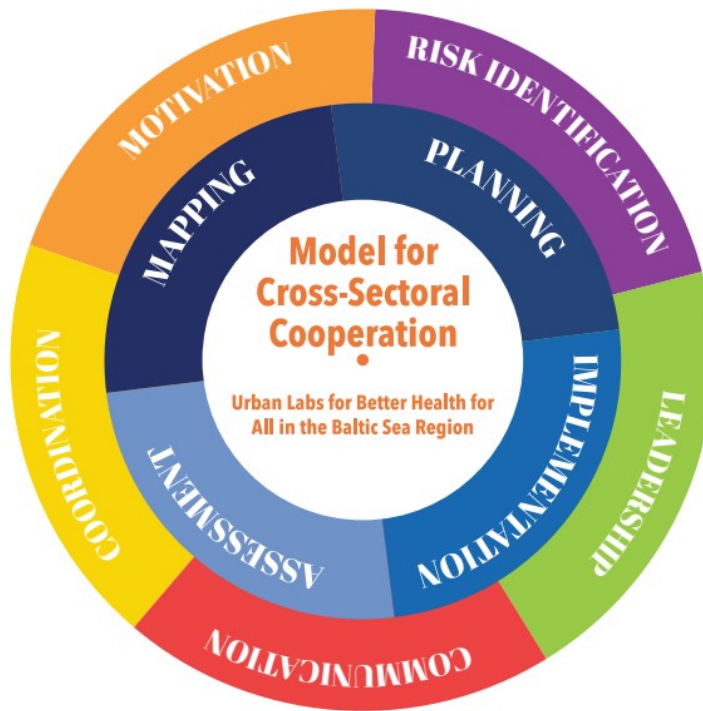
Working Group members were also introduced to the cross-sector collaboration model, the development of which was the main aim of the project.

The model provides a general framework for cross-sector collaboration and patterns of collaboration using a systematic approach. It was developed based on systematic analysis and literature research, as well as a self-assessment of cross-sectoral cooperation in health promotion by professionals and experts in the Healthy Boost partner municipalities. The developed model provides a general framework for cross-sector collaboration and can be used to address problems and complex challenges. It can also be employed to conduct assessments and improve the current state of existing cross-sectoral collaboration in sectors other than the health sector.

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13 "Programme for improvement of children's health" developed under the project "Be active - be healthy" of Girinukas Nursery and Kindergarten Schools in Alytus and its partners from Poland and Lithuania (No. LT-PL-1R-081), funded under the Poland-Lithuania INTERREG V-A Cooperation Programme, p. 18

14 Strategy for Solving Social Problems of the Suwałki Municipality for 2016-2025, p. 55



In the developed model, five domains of sectoral cooperation were identified:

1. Risk identification
2. Leadership
3. Communication
4. Coordination
5. Motivation

Also, each of the above-mentioned areas was additionally defined by distinguishing four stages of cross-sectoral cooperation:

- > Mapping
- > Planning
- > Implementation
- > Assessment

**Mapping** is the preparation stage for cross-sectoral cooperation. At this stage previous experience and current situation in cross-sectoral cooperation is identified and described.

**Planning** is the strategy stage for cross-sectoral cooperation. At this stage strategic goals and activities for the cross-sectoral cooperation are decided and set.

**Implementation** is the working stage for cross-sectoral cooperation. At this stage cross-sectoral cooperation is taking place accordingly to the previously set plan.

**Assessment** is the evaluation stage for cross-sectoral cooperation. At this stage cross-sectoral cooperation is assessed.

One of the most important features of the model is that its focus is the collaborative process itself, and not the project implementation as such. It can be used by partners of various types - government organizations, NGOs, or small and medium enterprises. It is a model designed to be utilized not only in the implementation of the Healthy Boost project, but also in other projects or activities involving collaboration of multiple entities. It is also important to note that the model can be used by all partners involved in a given project, at its different levels - leaders, project managers, assistants, staff, etc.

## 2. VR/AR Technology

One of the tenets of the Healthy Boost project was the use of VR/AR technology by project partners.

Taking into account the specificity of the activities undertaken by the Suwałki Municipality and especially the target group (preschool children) the use of this technology became from the beginning the object of the activities, including the activities of the Project Working Group. In the end, after consultation with the Lead Partner's VR/AR expert and after consultation with representatives of the Working Group and educational units, it was decided to purchase the so-called magic walls and magic carpets.

The magic wall is an innovative solution offered in the market of multimedia educational aids. It is a multifunctional interactive board which can be operated by a throw of a ball or with an interactive pen. It is an integrated group entertainment system for effective learning through play for preschool and school children. Its mobile design allows you its easy transport between rooms, so the magic wall can be successfully used it in many preschool groups or during events or performances.

The magic wall combines physical activity with virtual reality, allows playing audio and video materials, operate a web browser, or use a dedicated graphic software or a language course.

The magic carpet is an electronic device that serves as a floor and an interactive table, it is a teaching aid for physical exercises, games and activities, and is equipped with a set of multimedia contents designed for working with preschool children. As an interactive projection device, it contains, in one enclosed housing, all the components necessary for its operation, including a motion sensor, projector, and an internal computer.

With a suite of apps, quizzes and games, both the magic wall and the carpet are modern educational tools that are not only successful in kindergarten and school, but also provide invaluable assistance in any training.

Interactive games and activities foster creativity, problem-solving skills, and ability to work as



a team. Magic walls and carpets encourage children to play and learn creatively.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Training & Workshops



As part of the implementation of the Healthy Boost project, on February 3, 2020, the Suwałki Municipality signed a contract for the implementation of workshops and trainings for parents and children of preschool age as well as for teachers and administrative and educational personnel of the educational institutions in Suwałki.

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<sup>15</sup> During the work on the final project draft (2nd quarter of 2021), the Suwałki Municipality organized another tender under the Healthy Boost to purchase 8 magic walls and 1 magic carpet.



Workshop/Training topic		Workshop/Training location
workshops	Nutrition workshops	Primary School No. 10,
		Primary School No. 2
	Healthy cooking (workshop)	Kindergarten No. 8,
		Kindergarten No. 1,
		Kindergarten No. 5,
		Primary School No. 5
		Primary School No. 9
training	The importance of healthy meals for normal child growth and development, as well as obesity prevention	Kindergarten No. 3,
		Kindergarten No. 4,
	Health education in the core curriculum of pre-school education as the foundation of the didactic and educational process	Kindergarten No. 8,
	Movement is healthy	Kindergarten No. 7,
	Physical activity as an essential part of healthy development	Kindergarten No. 6,
	How to shape a healthy lifestyle - sport as the key to health	Kindergarten No. 1,
		Primary School No. 10

Both the workshops and training sessions were open to people from outside the kindergartens and schools indicated as the location of the activities. Such a provision was included in the agreement in order to possibly extend the scope of influence of the activities carried out. It was also important to involve the children in nutrition workshops so that they could see that meal preparation can be fun. It was also a way to spend time with parents.

The workshops and trainings concerned broadly understood healthy nutrition as well as physical activity as necessary elements of proper development.

As part of its promotional activities for the project, the Suwałki Municipality decided to focus on providing small gadgets that could be a good complement to the workshop and pilot activities mentioned in point 4 of this document. Therefore, in 2020, the Municipality purchased<sup>16</sup> gadgets (300 sets) related to the theme of improving and protecting the health of preschool children.

A handy water filtration bottle and a rubber ball, all packed in a bag with the project logo made

<sup>16</sup> During the work on the final project draft (2nd quarter of 2021), the Suwałki Municipality organized another tender under the Healthy Boost to purchase promotional gadgets.

an attractive "Healthy Boost package" for children combining fun for children with health education.



During the meetings, parents and children learned how to prepare healthy meals and acquired knowledge on how to cultivate a healthy lifestyle in terms of both diet and physical activity.







#### 4. Pilot activities



While implementing the project, the Municipality of Suwałki conducted activities in 1 preschool and 2 primary schools with preschool units which aimed at protecting and improving the health of preschool children.

The activities carried out in Kindergarten no. 8 with Integration Classes in Suwałki, included:

- General development exercises with elements of art therapy and relaxation training, aimed at relieving the state of increased psychophysical tension, facilitating emotional expression and boosting self-esteem,
- General development activities with elements of music psychotherapy and hand therapy, aimed at channelling movement, developing concentration, memory, imagination, spatio-temporal orientation, psychomotor self-regulation, suppressing neurotic elements of anxious attitudes, improving the ability to independently solve life tasks, constructively orienting the child's personality, awakening aesthetic sensitivity, improving manual and fine motor skills,
- Corrective gymnastics with elements of Bilateral Integration and
- Sports activities with elements of sensoplastics, aimed at developing motor skills, supporting development through sensory stimulation and freedom of the creative process.

Classes were also conducted at Aleksandra Piłsudska Elementary School No. 2 with Bilingual Classes in Suwałki and at Alfred Wierusz-Kowalski Elementary School No. 5 in Suwałki. The activities included:

- General development exercises with elements of pedagogical therapy,
- Motor skills exercises with Sensory Integration,
- A sound mind in a sound body - physical activities with elements of corrective gymnastics,
- Rhythm and movement activities developing the sense of rhythm and motor coordination,
- In the rhythm of melody - dance and movement activities,
- Games and plays - sports competitions in groups.



All activities that took place as part of the Healthy Boost project were an excellent form of promoting sports and healthy eating habits among children. They improved sports and recreation skills and habits and developed sports interests. They also improved visual and auditory perception, eye-hand coordination and spatial orientation. The activities were also designed to improve participants' concentration and memory. The activities stimulated children's interests and were an active form of leisure. After a whole day in the kindergarten, the children had the opportunity to calm down, actively spend their free time, while at the same time learning the principles of a healthy

lifestyle.



One of the goals of the Healthy Boost pilot activities was the aforementioned purchase of magic floors and magic walls for the educational entities involved in the project's pilot activities. Preschool children used the purchased equipment during pilot activities and other learning activities. Adaptation to the requirements of the project and the limitations of the target group, i.e. preschool children, was the biggest challenge, but also a great success. Thanks to the purchased equipment, children from kindergarten and preschool units of primary schools easily mastered the acquired skills, thus combining active education with fun.





## 5. Impact of the epidemiological situation related to the spread of SARS-CoV-2 virus on project implementation.

The implementation of the Healthy Boost project began before the occurrence of the worldwide problems associated with the emergence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Therefore, the timing of its implementation differs from the time frames originally envisioned (the implementation period was extended by 6 months). Also due to COVID-19, not all activities planned in the Suwałki Municipality could have been carried out, and those that were carried out were not always completed to the extent previously assumed.

On February 3, 2020, the Suwałki Municipality signed a contract for trainings and workshops on healthy eating and physical activities as an essential element of proper child development. The activities organized in Suwałki kindergartens and preschool units working in school buildings were to include parents and their children, teachers and administrative and educational personnel of the municipality educational institutions.

Originally, 14 workshops and trainings were to be held by March 31, 2020. However, already in March 2020, due to the deepening of the SARS-CoV-2 epidemic and restrictions introduced in the functioning of the whole country, including kindergartens and schools, it was necessary to attach an annex to the agreement, which enabled the extension of the implementation of the concluded agreement until 30 June 2020. The adopted assumptions proved to be insufficient, and in June the



period of implementation of the workshops and trainings was once again extended - this time until October 31, 2020.

Despite the introduction of changes consisting in extending the duration of the contract, eventually, until October 31, 2020, the Contractor carried out 11 classes in kindergartens and schools with pre-school units located in the Suwałki Municipality. In 2 locations, it was not possible to conduct classes due to the lack of consent from the headmasters to allow people from outside of the institution to enter the school and to organize a meeting which included gathering of many people. This was due to fears related to the SARS-CoV-2 virus epidemic. Also, in one of the locations where the activities were to be carried out, the kindergarten unit operating at the time of signing the contract was liquidated during the project implementation.

The project-run activities designed to protect and improve the health of preschool children were extended due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, too. This happened because, on the basis of the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of March 20, 2020 on the temporary restriction of the operation of units of the educational system in connection with the prevention, counteraction and eradication of COVID-19, in order to limit the spread of the coronavirus, kindergartens and kindergarten units at primary schools for which Suwałki Municipality is the school authority, all teaching, educational and caring activities were suspended as of March 12, 2020.

Only with lifting of the above restrictions, classes could be resumed on the condition the above-mentioned educational units followed and complied with the Guidelines of the Minister of Health and the Chief Sanitary Inspector of May 6, 2020, which introduced, among other things, limits for children in groups, designated minimum space for rest, play and activities for children in classrooms, and provided for priority attendance in kindergartens and preschool units by children of employees of the health care system, uniformed services, employees of trade and production enterprises carrying out tasks related to the prevention, counteraction and eradication of COVID-19.

The restrictions that have been put in place have significantly limited the possibility to conduct Healthy Boost classes. The restrictions continued until August 31, 2020. Accordingly, in accordance with Article 15r of the Law of March 2, 2020 on Special Solutions Relating to the Prevention, Prevention and Control of COVID-19, Other Infectious Diseases and Crisis Situations Caused by Them, teachers implementing classes under the above-mentioned project submitted statements that due to the prevailing epidemic situation in the country and the nationwide restrictions introduced by the government, they did not have the opportunity to meet their contract deadlines. As a result, annexes to the agreements were drafted.

The implementation of the project had also provided for the organization of one large mass event, for children from kindergartens and preschool units called "Health Day for Preschoolers". It was meant to be a meeting of preschoolers and their parents, teachers and city residents summarizing the entire project, during which there were to be organized stalls offering healthy food, movement games and lectures on protecting and improving the health of preschool children. However, the dynamic development of the SARS-CoV-2 epidemic made it impossible to hold the event.

Lack of implementation of the intended activities, or their implementation to a limited extent, made the planned spending of the funds included in the project impossible. It was necessary to take a new look at the ongoing project in order to plan the spending of the remaining funds in a way ensuring their rational use. The Suwałki Municipality planned to use the funds that could not be spent on originally planned tasks, among others, to equip kindergartens with magic walls/carpet. The equipment was granted to the units which have not received any previously.<sup>17</sup>

### III. SUMMARY

The first years of a child's life are a period of many quantitative and qualitative changes in the child's diet. These changes are closely related to the dynamic development of the child and the child's reaching successive developmental stages. It is the period of formation of proper and improper eating habits, which are to affect not only the child's development and health, but also its later life. Modelling healthy eating behaviours and dietary practices, as well as other elements of a healthy lifestyle, by parents and caregivers will pay off in the future with a better quality of life for the child (better health and fitness).<sup>18</sup>

The local government of Suwałki has for years taken part in activities aimed at broadening the knowledge of healthy nutrition and healthy lifestyle. Health education should be viewed as a long-term "investment" in the health of the community. Hence, nutrition education activities should be directed to children from an early age and implemented in a multifaceted manner: starting from raising awareness of the importance of proper nutrition in shaping health, to undertaking decisions and health interventions. The importance and role of health education is growing due to the threats posed by the developing civilization. Health behaviours, i.e. habits or activities that directly or indirectly affect individual's health, are primarily shaped during the period of personal growth and development. Many diseases of civilization have their determinants in improper eating habits established in childhood. Nutritional education, because of its great importance, should be implemented at all stages of human development, beginning from the early childhood.

Education in proper nutrition is a way to improve human health potential and a form of prevention of many diseases of our civilization. Great advances in nutrition education have been made possible by the growth of research on food and eating behaviours, increasing our knowledge of the role of nutrition in human health.<sup>19</sup>

Actions undertaken by the Suwałki local government are directed both to the employees of the municipal educational institutions, where the youngest children eat many meals a day, and to the parents and children themselves.

Implementation of the Healthy Boost project has once again allowed many people to get involved in the fight for a better future for our society.

An additional measurable effect of the Municipality of Suwałki's participation in the project is

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<sup>17</sup> During the work on the final project draft (2nd quarter of 2021), the Suwałki Municipality organized another tender under the Healthy Boost to purchase 8 magic walls and 1 magic carpet.

<sup>18</sup> Problemy Higieny i Epidemiologii 2008, 89(4), Emilia Kolarzyk, Anna Janik, Jacek Kwiatkowski pp. 531-536

<sup>19</sup> "Rola edukacji żywieniowej w populacji dzieci i młodzieży" Magdalena Zalewska, Elżbieta Maciorkowska Medycyna Ogólna i Nauki o Zdrowiu, 2013, Tom 19, Nr 3, pp. 375-378

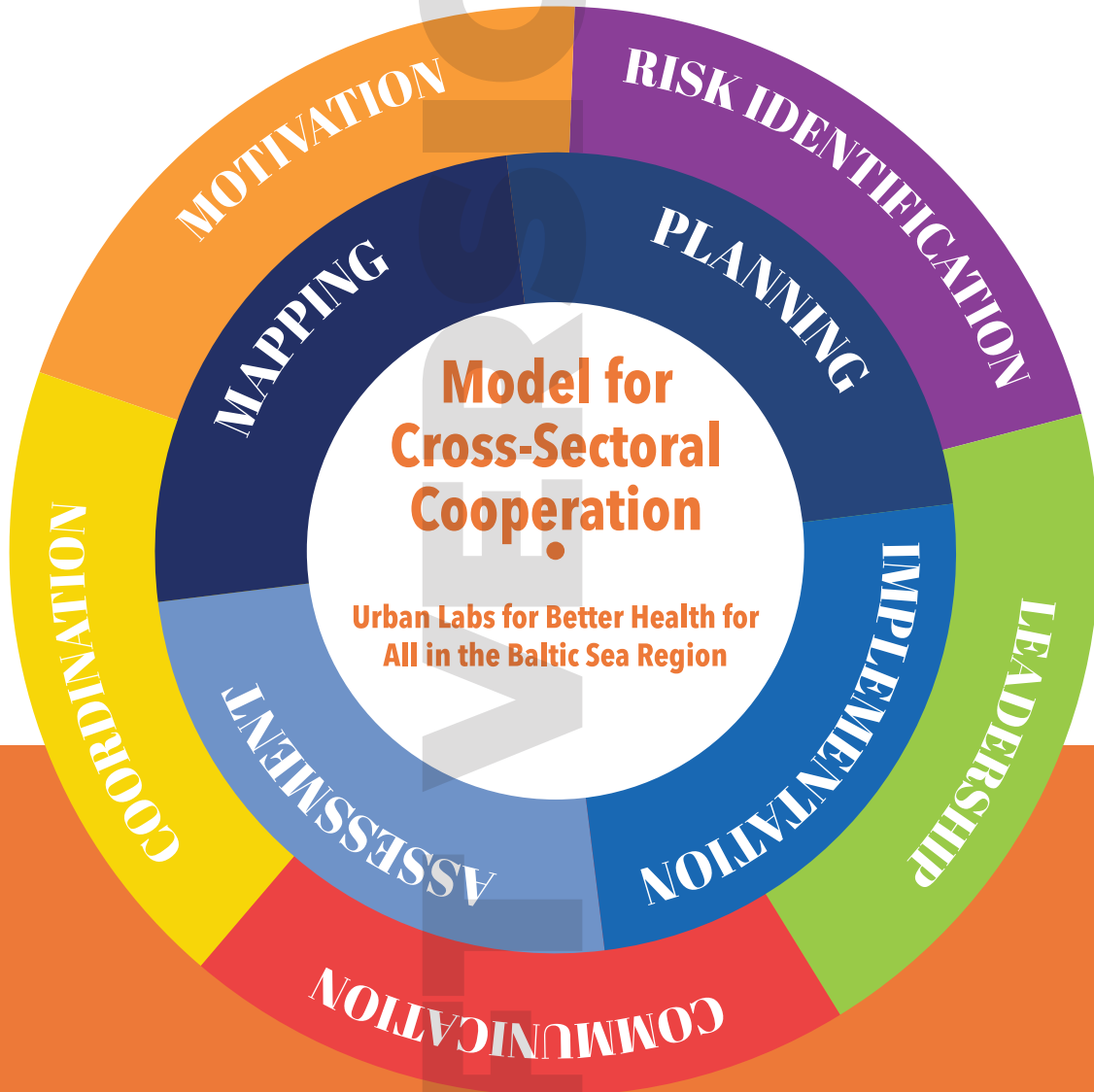
receiving a developed Model for Cross-Sectoral Cooperation that will enable the local government to develop cooperation with non-governmental organizations and businesses etc. in order to implement tasks aimed at increasing the welfare of Suwałki residents.

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## Attachments

**Healthy Boost**



**Model for cross-sectoral cooperation.**  
**Urban Labs for Better Health for**  
**All in the Baltic Sea Region -**  
boosting cross-sectoral cooperation  
for health and wellbeing in the cities

INTERREG Baltic Sea Region project "Urban Labs for Better Health for All in the Baltic Sea Region" (Healthy Boost) aims **to boost the cross-sectoral cooperation** for health and wellbeing in cities by developing and testing the Model for the cross-sectoral cooperation.

**Cross-sectoral cooperation** is a collaborative effort in which partners from different sectors (public, private, and non-profit) pool their resources to provide joint solutions for common benefit, and address problems and complex challenges.

**The Model** provides a general framework of cross-sectoral cooperation, which guides partners through best practises of cooperation by using a systematic approach.

The Model is developed based on systematic literature search and analyses, as well as the results of the self-assessment of cross-sectoral cooperation for health promotion by professionals and experts in Healthy Boost partner cities.

- The process of cooperation is the focus of the Model, not the project implementation itself.
- The Model can be used by different types of partners – governmental organisations, NGOs, SMEs, etc.
- The Model can be used by every partner involved on different levels – leaders, project managers, assistants, employees, etc.

In the Model five domains of cross-sectoral cooperation are described: (1) risk identification, (2) leadership, (3) communication, (4) coordination, and (5) motivation. All of the domains are important for best practises of cross-sectoral cooperation. The used order of domains does not mean that certain domains are more important than others.

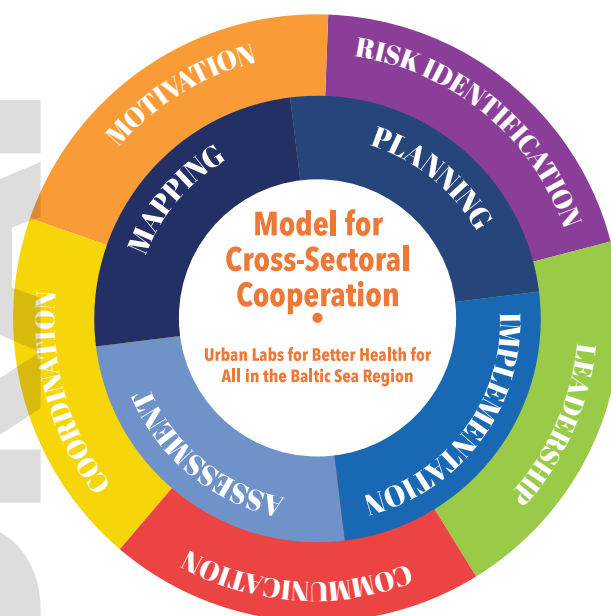
Each domain is described based on four stages of the cross-sectoral cooperation – (1) mapping, (2) planning, (3) implementation or (4) assessment.

The Model can be used in different ways:

- a. By looking through all domains and all stages;
- b. By selecting one or several domains relevant to your situation;
- c. By selecting one or several stages relevant to your situation.

Please, use the provided space for your notes!

**The Model provides main guiding questions for boosting the cross-sectoral cooperation in particular domain/ stage. Please, consider that there are no right or wrong answers! The Model is not aimed for grading your cooperation.**



**Risk identification** is the process of determination, assessment and management of risks that could potentially prevent effective cooperation and achievement of cross-sectoral cooperation goals.

**Leadership** is the ability of individual or group to motivate and guide others to act towards achieving common goal. Managing is about organizing and coordinating, but leading is about enabling and co-creating. Collaborative leadership is about leading the process of collaborative problem solving and decision making, rather than the partners.

**Communication** is a two-way process of reaching mutual understanding, in which participants not only exchange information, news, ideas and feelings but also create and share meaning. It is a key function of management – communication among different partners, levels, departments and employees are crucial both within the partnership and externally.

**Coordination** is synchronization and integration of activities, responsibilities, and command and control structures to ensure that the partners cooperate in most effective way to reach specified objectives.

**Motivation** is the force that initiates, guides and maintains partners' goal-oriented behaviour in cross-sectoral cooperation. Common goal and values among partners are crucial elements for motivation to cooperate.

**Mapping** is the preparation stage for cross-sectoral cooperation. At this stage previous experience and current situation in cross-sectoral cooperation is identified and described.

**Planning** is the strategy stage for cross-sectoral cooperation. At this stage strategic goals and activities for the cross-sectoral cooperation are decided and set.

**Implementation** is the working stage for cross-sectoral cooperation. At this stage cross-sectoral cooperation is taking place accordingly to the previously set plan.

**Assessment** is the evaluation stage for cross-sectoral cooperation. At this stage cross-sectoral cooperation is assessed.

# MAPPING

## Read and consider these issues regarding to your context of cross-sectoral cooperation

### What is the already established cooperation that can be used?

Cross-sectoral cooperation can be considered successful if:

- Cooperation from all partners involved is collaborative
- There is a clear understanding of mutual goals, tasks and duties, that all partners take into consideration throughout the partnership
- There is synergy between partners
- Advantages of each partner are mutually beneficial and shared
- There are no conflicts of interests or ethical conflicts
- Responsibilities are clearly divided
- Each partner contributes to their assigned tasks and duties

### What is the best timing for cooperation with potential partners?

- There is a demand and/or urgency for the project of the cooperation
- Goals and policies are aligned
- Additional resources for cooperation have become available
- Potential partners already are working towards the same goal or outcome separately

### What characteristics should potential partners for cross-sectoral cooperation possess?

- Willing
- Motivated
- Resourceful
- Honest
- Trustworthy
- Able to fulfil and understand the goals and details of tasks to be achieved
- Able to bring additional knowledge, information and contributions to the partnerships

### What characterises a partner with reliable reputation?

- Image
- Corporate identity
- Vision and leadership
- Corporate responsibility
- Corporate expertise
- Emotional appeal
- Workplace environment
- Products and services provided
- Financial/strategic performance
- Reviews from other/previous partners
- Media coverage

### What kind of obstacles exist in potential cross-sectoral cooperation?

- Ethical and/or moral incompatibility
- Lack of resources
- Lack of motivation
- Different goals and objectives
- Power and authority of potential partners
- Lack of initiative

## What can be considered realistic objectives of individual partners?

- ## What are the signs for inequality of commitment among partners?

- Do partners provide honest and trustworthy information about their contribution capabilities to the cooperation about:**

- Motivation to participate
- Their competencies
- Their resources
- Their experience
- Their goals



# IMPLEMENTATION

Read and consider these issues regarding to your context of cross-sectoral cooperation

## Is the responsibility for the project implementation distributed fairly?

- Responsibilities of the partners are in accordance to their expertise and resources
- Tasks are distributed evenly among all partners – no one partner has assigned to all the major tasks

## Is cooperation going in accordance to the previously planned activities and strategies?

- Leader and all the partners are still actively involved
- Partners respect their previously assigned responsibilities
- Partners respect each other's responsibilities
- There are no gaps between planned resources and capabilities and actual performance
- There is no deviation from the planned time frame
- There is no deviation from the planned budget and resources provided by partners

## What are the signs that information and sensitive data is at risk?

- There has been already an incident in the breach of data and information
- There is no safe data transfer and communication network established
- Sensitive information and data are not protected by any technical or physical solutions
- All the partners do not follow the agreed upon data protection and security measures

- Observation
- Reporting/report analysis
- Evaluations of tasks and assignments
- Leader ratings/ evaluation and vice-versa
- Discussions
- Document analysis
- Audit
- Focus groups

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- Cross-sectoral policies
- Strategic plans
- Legal regulations
- Contracts for cooperation among partners
- Written ethical principles for cooperation

Read and consider these issues regarding to your context of cross-sectoral cooperation

## What are the major factors affecting the context and strategy of leadership?

- Community values and culture
- Previous experience of cooperation among partners
- Motivation and capacity for change and partnership of each partner
- Existing relationships and power among the partners and stakeholders
- The nature of the problem to be solved together

## What are the major focus areas for cross-sector cooperation leadership?

- Understanding the problem and achieving impact
- Building teams and distributing power and responsibility
- Taking a systematic approach and defining results of a cross-sector effort
- Aligning motivations and values

## How the partners could support the leader?

- Demonstrating loyalty
- Being reliable
- Being honest
- Taking initiative
- Making information available
- Treating with respect
- Communicating

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## How to ensure that goals and objectives of cooperation are achieved?

- ## How to ensure successful teamwork?

- Developing and maintaining trust, participation and respect
- Managing group diversity, power dynamics and conflicts
- Facilitating collaborative problem-solving and decision making



- Partners have internal communication system
- Procedures for transparency and on-going partner communications are established
- Multiple spokespersons who can communicate on the behalf of partnership

**Read and consider these issues regarding to your context of cross-sectoral cooperation**

## What are the best practices in communication?

- Transparency
- Trust
- Openness
- Mutual understanding and respect
- Accountability
- Existing platform for information exchange

## What expertise, resources, and networks are available for communication for each partner?

- There are expertise, resources and networks available from either internal or external communication
- There are partners with relevant experience in communication
- Outsource expertise, resources, and networks are considered for communication

## What should be considered when planning internal communication?

- Information sharing process among partners should developed
- Communication should be transparent
- Agreement on corporate and private data sharing is established
- All partners should have the opportunity for direct communication with each other
- Ethical guidelines for communication and conduct among partners should be developed

## What should be considered when planning external communication?

- There are rules for communication outside of the project and for the public profile of the partnership
- Partners have understanding and agreement on what, how, and to whom to communicate
- The messages of the cooperation within the project are defined and agreed
- Partners should be open for communication



- Management and implementation
- Achievements and failures
- Fulfilment of tasks
- Identified risks
- Conflict management
- Ethics
- Monitoring and evaluation



Read and consider these issues regarding to your context of cross-sectoral cooperation

## What is the already established cooperation that can be used?

- Existing formal agreements
- Existing informal networks
- Existing partnership from previous cooperation

## Has the previous experience in coordination been successful?

Coordination among partners can be considered successful if:

- Resources were shared among partners to achieve the common goal
- Roles and responsibilities were understood and respected
- Communication was regular and transparent
- Teamwork among all levels was ensured

## Who are the potential partners for cross-sectoral cooperation?

- Municipalities and their departments
- Different governmental and municipality institutions
- Civil society (e.g. NGO, interest groups, unions, parties)
- Local community
- SMEs

## What are the partner's selection criteria?

- Legal importance: degree to which the participation is needed as a legal requirement
- Political importance: degree to which partners can influence political decisions
- Strategic importance: degree to which involvement of partners facilitate achieving objectives
- Relation with the topic: degree to which partners are affected by and responsible for the issue
- Representation: degree to which involvement of partners guarantees equity and representation
- Trust: previous experience in cooperation

Read and consider these issues regarding to your context of cross-sectoral cooperation

## What resources are available for the planned cooperation?

- Humane resources
- Expertise
- Financial resources
- Time resources
- Tools and materials
- Equipment and technical resources
- Facilities and infrastructure

## How to accommodate all partners' management styles?

- Acknowledging different management styles
- Achieving common agreement on cooperation management style
- Involving all partners of cooperation in the planning phase

## How the roles and responsibilities are assigned?

- By the decision of the leading partner
- By negotiation among partners
- By volunteering

## What are the principles for assigning roles and responsibilities to each partner?

- Legal requirements
- Expertise and resources of the partners
- Power relations among the partners
- Political interests
- Cooperation timeframe

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- Sharing cooperation plan with key partners
- Notifying management about the problems
- Creating customized reports
- Avoiding blaming
- Ensuring honest cooperation environment
- Encouraging sharing ideas
- Avoiding double standards
- Ensuring flexibility and open mindedness



## What factors could motivate partners for potential cross-sectoral cooperation?

- Clear vision about the benefits and fulfilment of the interests
- Financial benefit
- Legislative requirements
- Political support
- Sharing resources
- Innovation promotion
- Sharing knowledge and gaining new skills
- Easy and acceptable communication
- Advocacy and lobbying
- Friendship and networking
- Sense of ownership and belonging
- Enjoyable outcome

Read and consider these issues regarding to your context of cross-sectoral cooperation

## What ensures motivation for cross-sectoral cooperation among partners?

- Boosting of reputation
- Building images and branding
- Combining of diverse competences and expertise
- Gaining or sharing of financial, human, technological and other resources
- Increasing public awareness and providing public goods

## What kind of common goals motivate partners for cross-sectoral cooperation?

- Corresponds with individual goals
- Provides additional benefits for each partner (e.g. financial, knowledge, innovation, professional networking, publicity)
- Provides emotional and intellectual satisfaction (e.g. enjoyment, friendship, socialization, altruism)

## How to reward performance of partners in cooperation?

- Financial benefits
- Incentives (e.g. excursions, dinner, entertainment)
- Possibilities for promotion
- Social recognition among partners and community
- Achievement recognition

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## What maintains partner motivation in cross-sectoral cooperation?

- Consistent and ongoing surveillance of tasks
- Constant support from management
- Regular communication
- Progress measurement
- Task fulfilment
- Monitoring of successes and challenges
- Effort and achievement acknowledge and recognition
- Consistent feedback
- Conflict solving
- Cooperation boosting
- Support among partners
- Awareness of each partner's added value for cooperation
- Sanctions or incentives plan followed and executed

Read and consider these issues regarding to your context of cross-sectoral cooperation

## What can be assessed regarding motivation in cross-sectoral cooperation?

- Active participation
- Proactivity and initiative
- Sharing resources
- Sharing ideas
- Sharing information
- Commitment to teamwork
- Result orientation

## In which areas motivation can be assessed in cross-sectoral cooperation?

- Assignment of roles and responsibilities
- Teamwork
- Leadership
- Resources
- Communication
- Individual goal achievement

## How to assess partner motivation in the cross-sectoral cooperation?

- Personal face-to-face interviews
- Questionnaires with self-assessment tools
- Focus group discussions

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