

COP4HL

Being physically active and eating nutritious foods are the keys to healthy ageing. Isn't it simple? However, according to WHO statistics, non-communicable diseases account for 90 percent of all deaths in Europe. And what is the primary cause of NCDs? An unhealthy lifestyle. So maybe being healthy is not such an easy thing to do after all.

Indeed, promoting healthy ageing, and specifically an active & healthy lifestyle, is one of the EU's most pressing societal and economic challenges. To do so, there is an urgent need to shift from cure to prevention by rethinking our lifestyles and putting our knowledge of how to be healthy into practice on a daily basis.

AGEING WITH (HEALTHY) STYLE

Now, imagine if there were communities across Europe that promoted an active and healthy lifestyle and collaborated to innovate in the field of healthy ageing. The good news is that you do not need a lot of creativity because these kinds of communities already exist in Europe thanks to the Knowledge Alliance COP4HL!

COP4HL is a KA project financed by the ERASMUS+ programme of the European Union. The alliance is made up of 17 partners from seven European countries: Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Belgium.

Members include Higher Education Institutions and businesses, all interested in achieving long-term socio-economic innovations in the field of healthy ageing.

The ultimate goal of COP4HL is to combine the efforts and expertise of its partners in order to modernise the approaches to addressing the challenges of healthy ageing.

To do so, the Alliance decided to adopt an innovative strategy that focuses on creating a change on a local level. The members of COP4HL established six Communities of Practice (CoP) in six different cities around Europe that were aimed at sharing best practices and co-creating new knowledge to advance the field of healthy ageing.

THE COMMUNITY OF KAUNAS

To better understand the functioning of a Community of Practice, let's take the example of the city of Kaunas in Lithuania. After analysing the local needs, the members of COP4HL noticed that children and citizens over fifty needed to engage in a more active lifestyle.

What are Erasmus+ Knowledge Alliances?

This initiative of the European Commission supported 2014 – 2020 158 international collaborations between partners from higher education institutions and businesses. Still, it is open to any sector and involves a wide range of stakeholders on all levels. These consortia bring their particular areas of expertise together, amplifying innovation across their fields through collaboration, by developing new and multidisciplinary teaching & learning approaches, providing entrepreneurial mindsets and relevant skills to participants, and stimulating knowledge exchange.

The fields of action are broad and include current topics such as ICT, (green) economy and sustainable energy, education, life sciences, societal challenges, etc.

In the end, the results of KAs strengthen Europe's innovation capacity in the form of novel curricula and study programs, open educational and e-learning resources, accelerators, hubs and start-ups, new products and prototypes.

By putting together HEIs, local schools, sport institutes and qualified fitness instructors, the CoP of Kaunas managed to offer free sports activities to children and adults both live and online, to organise seminars and discussions on healthy lifestyles and to finally improve the quality of life of the habitants of the region.

FROM THE LOCAL TO THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

Through the different local Communities of Practice around Europe, the COP4HL Knowledge Alliance managed to engage 13 higher education institutes, 30 businesses, and 70 public authorities to create community-based interventions towards a more healthy and active lifestyle of European citizens.

In addition, the alliance was able to reach and raise awareness among more than 650 students related to the project and the different local COP. This resulted in a total outreach to over 520.000 citizens, either via different social media or directly through door-to-door visits, workshops and activities.

To ensure the sustainability and the spread of its important outcomes, the Alliance developed "Yanuz", a Social Innovation Learning Space where anyone can find tools, guiding principles, and field-tested practices for developing innovative solutions to today's complex societal challenges. Yanuz's goal is to build a community where everyone can share their knowledge and find partners to help them make a difference.

COP4HL also developed several resources that can be freely used by everyone who wishes to address this important issue. One example could be the "Healthy lifestyle education module" created to raise awareness among students about healthy ageing.

Because of the impact of its Communities of Practice, the developed resources, and the large number of citizens reached by this project, COP4HL is unquestionably a successful Alliance that can be a leader in the transition to a healthy lifestyle in Europe. Its remarkable results will undoubtedly inspire other communities in Europe to embark on the path of positive social change.

For further information on the Alliance, please consult the following link:

COP5HL official website: <https://cop4hl.eu/>

Questions to the Project Coordinators (Johan & Chris)

How (and in what moment of your lives) did you develop the idea for COP4HL?

Apparently, it was a bright moment in our professional lives when we developed COP4HL. We wanted to combine knowledge, expertise and insights from earlier projects in COP4HL. The main goal was to find a solution for the fact that many approaches focusing on promoting a healthy lifestyle lack implementation and consequently have a small or

no impact. Our “bright” idea was to focus more on cooperation, learning and social innovation process to stimulate local engagement between different stakeholders and sectors in striving for a healthy lifestyle. From the start, higher education institutes, businesses, local governments and other stakeholders were very interested in this innovative concept, which ultimately paid off.

What was one of the most challenging moments of COP4HL?

There were two main challenging moments in COP4HL. The first moment was at the end of the first year of the project period. In COP4HL, setting up Communities of Practices around different healthy lifestyle related topics was made central. Setting up and running a local Community of Practice is something completely different to running a traditional project. Issues like shared decision making together with stakeholders, distribution of power, emergence, not knowing what the exact project results would be etc. were new experiences for almost all of us. At the end of year one, we started to really understand and feel what it actually meant to form a community of practice in which learning together about a certain topic is the main goal.

The second challenge was the rise of the Covid-19 pandemic. In March 2020, we had a very important consortium meeting planned in Spain. After evaluating the status in all participating EU countries together with institutional policies we had to decide to cancel this meeting. In COP4HL this was an even more difficult call, since many partners were higher education institutes, businesses, non-profit organisations active in the field of public health. Therefore, for many reasons we had to reorganise our last project year because of Covid-19. Despite this, we still had a great last year due to the flexibility and understanding of all partners. Organising our first online final event because of Covid-19 was also challenging, but proved very much worthwhile with 297 registrations from 30 countries across 6 continents.

From your point of view, how is the project contributing to the beneficiaries' real lives and activities? Could you provide examples?

COP4HL brought different types of organisations together, sometimes for the first time, despite often operating in the same field, in the same city or region already. For instance, in Kaunas (Lithuania), cooperation between different stakeholders and sectors regarding the topic of a healthy lifestyle was rare and uncommon. Due to the development of a Community of Practice, this cooperation started and is becoming more and more a regular pattern. In the Netherlands, we started in the Europapark neighbourhood in Groningen, with our partner the Municipality of Groningen. The lessons learned there in COP4HL, we later applied in other neighbourhoods in the municipality, and even in different municipalities. Since the project finished in January 2021, the activities have not stopped. In Malaga (Spain), the cooperation between the university, municipality and many businesses, that was started because of COP4HL, is continuing after the end date of the project. Many new activities are still carried out under the umbrella of COP4HL, also online. Such as those via the developed Yanuz.eu platform, which is also being used

by new partners in a follow-up Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education project (suswell.eu).

Which moment made you laugh a lot?

We had many moments of laughter but one moment I still remember was the online COP4HL Christmas celebration in December 2020. COP4HL is about social innovation through Communities of Practice and this implies that social interaction is very important. For that, we organised an online Christmas party with a pub quiz but also with a moment of showcasing your own Community of Practice Christmas wish with all its personal and cultural aspects in it. This was a moment of laughing but also with a touch of emotion since we could not meet each other in real life. Such moments of social interaction and cultural exchange - even online - were indescribably important and valuable for all.

And what was the most rewarding moment?

One very rewarding moment in particular was the online conference we held as the official closure of the project. It was very sad we could not celebrate our 3-year journey with the whole consortium in real life. However, we had a lot of interest in our conference so we had more participants from many more foreign countries than expected. Therefore, after a difficult last project year because of Covid-19, this moment of appreciation by the attendees was very rewarding. Additionally, seeing the ongoing activities in the different Communities of Practice after the project ended and still being informed about them by the consortium partners is a continuing reward.