

Urban Environment and Health

Submitted by the Barcelona Provincial Council

★ ★ ★ *Nominee Cross-Cutting Award*

EPSA2015068



Barcelona Provincial Council

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Size of organisation

500-5000;
people involved: >15

Type of sector

Urban planning; housing and urban improvement; diversity and citizenship; facilities and public space

Key words of the project

Health, urban environment, housing, public space

There is plenty of scientific evidence about the close relationship between health and the environment in which people live and work. This relationship, well known for many years and recognised internationally, is complex and has direct and obvious impacts and some others which are less obvious but important ones.

Following this evidence, it is important to create synergies between different areas of political action to promote healthy urban environments fostering the improvement of population's health. Taking into account that the design of our cities and towns (urban planning, gardens, parking, transport network, district's equipment, etc.) has direct impact on our health, it becomes clear that the strategy, promoted by the UN, "Health In All Policies" (HIAP) requires the collaborative work of different professionals.

This idea of a common perspective guides the actions of the Public Health Service (PHS) of the Barcelona Provincial Council (BPC), which provides support to municipalities in designing and implementing local policies aimed at improving the health of people living in the province and adapting the services to the necessities and size of all cities and towns, promoting equal access of all of them to the offered services.

To include the health perspective in all local policies, the Barcelona Provincial Council initiated the project called "Urban Environment and Health", which was launched under the framework of the Table for Urban Improvement (TxMU, on its Catalan acronym). The TxMU is an instrument of coordination and transversal work to support municipalities promoted by the Department of Planning and Sustainability of the Barcelona Provincial Council. It facilitates the formulation of comprehensive intervention projects in neighbourhoods and urban areas with special needs.

The "Urban Environment and Health" project has developed, until now, two action lines:

- Training courses on "healthy urban environments". The training courses are addressed to local technicians from different disciplines and areas of work dealing with the design, management and maintenance of a healthy urban environment for everyone.
- The "Urban Environment and Health Guide". The guide is an online product that aims to create urban environments encouraging people to live healthily. It also envisages the environmental minimisation of the factors that can pose a risk for the health of people.

The guide is structured into five areas of action (information and participation, urban planning, public space, amenities and housing) and by means of 75 different files it explains how to design, maintain and use those public areas to promote health and to prevent them from becoming a risk for health.

Every single file contains seven sections ranging from the scientific evidence and the detected needs, proposals and recommendations in order to achieve the desired goal of health, the local applicability and their regulatory framework; and finally, referential experiences and technical documentation supporting it. The guide offers a search engine based on the intervention phase (e.g. design, use...) and the area of action (e.g. amenities, housing...), facilitating a fast response to the interests of professionals using it.

This project is an opportunity to integrate the expertise and perspectives of various disciplines, facilitating the holistic (comprehensive) intervention projects in order to reduce health inequalities and improve people's health.

The "Urban Environment and Health" project is a valuable tool for building capacity for action to promote healthy cities and towns.