

# REPOPA NEWSLETTER

Bi-annual publication published by the REPOPA Consortium under the REPOPA project

February 2014

Working together to build future evidence into policy making

## **What is REPOPA?**

REsearch into POlicy to enhance Physical Activity (REPOPA) is a five year project within the EU research funded Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) financed to:

- Build on evidence and experiences on policy making processes
- Study innovative 'win-win' ways to collaborate between academia and policy makers
- Establish structures and best practices for future health promotion

## **What we do?**

As REPOPA members we will try to integrate scientific research knowledge, expert know-how and real world policy making process to increase synergy and sustainability in promoting health and preventing disease, and promote physical activity in structural policy making.

## In this issue:



REPOPA project is almost half-way of its five year project time. A large, multi-country project in the novel topic with a comprehensive cross-sectorial and cross-disciplinary approach is not the quickest to get speed. However, we are on the schedule and what is more important, the Consortium has built strong internal collaboration and also wider learning network; further, REPOPA is also becoming known as a flagship in the research area of evidence-informed policy making. At the moment we are in the early phases of reporting the first results of the project.

From the Coordinator's perspective, the first half of the project has also been challenging due to administrative work related to organizational changes and subsequent contract amendments in the Consortium. Fortunately these changes have allowed keeping the scientists who were involved in creating REPOPA, on board. And the Coordinating team has learned a lot in this process!

Finally, I want to express my warmest thanks for fruitful and interesting journey so far to the REPOPA partners, collaborators and all those who have showed interest in our endeavour.

[-Letter from Coordinator \(150 – 200 words\) \(by Arja R Aro, DK\)](#)

# REPOPA News

## Role of evidence in the policymaking. Overview of WP1 results (by Riitta-Maija Hämäläinen, FI)

Overall, peer-reviewed research was rarely used or referenced. When it was used, mostly ad hoc research and population based epidemiological research was used. Instead, former strategies, programmes, recommendations, laws, and political support or other types of information, such as intuition, trends, public hearings, opinions or media related information were used.

Experience-based information was often used in HEPA policy making and included expert's know-how as well as good practices from projects and experiments.

Socially and contextually formed individual factors of decision makers, such as values, interests, common sense and inspiration played a part in the policy making. In summary the evidence used was mostly implicit.

Various types of information as well as explicit and implicit research evidence were integrated in the analysed health enhancing physical activity policies in the six EC countries involved. However there are various facilitating factors to increase use of research evidence in policy making.

Some of our conclusions are that in order to increase evidence informed policy making

- research evidence should be easily accessible,
- the appreciation of human and financial resources among policy makers and researchers should increase and
- both researchers and policymakers should focus on development of continuous and active communication methods and ways.

## REPOPA at Holland Fuse Conference, April 22nd-23rd 2013 (by L.A.M van de Goor & Hilde Spitters, NL)

Our extended team of researchers has contributed with several presentations and in several workshop sessions to 2013 Holland Fuse Conference. The conference theme was 'How to get practice into science', with the overall aim to explore different strategies and approaches, opportunities, and challenges to enhance the use and sharing of knowledge and evidence across sectors and also across professionals, researchers and policymakers that participate in the public health and wellbeing community.

Since the theme of the Holland Fuse Conference was very closely aligned to the REPOPA project we saw this as a great opportunity to exchange the first results of REPOPA: current status of evidence-based policy making in HEPA policy in 6 European countries (WP1) and a first insight on the Policy Game (WP2) and the Stewardship Approach (WP3) interventions. All sessions went well, information on the REPOPA project was spread during the conference, new insights and ideas were discussed in the sessions and new contacts were made. The conference was hosted by Tranzo, Tilburg University, one of the partners in the REPOPA consortium.



Knowledge-to-action and REPOPA (by Susan Roelofs, CA, Sarah Viehbeck, CA, & Maja Larsen, DK)

At the International Union for Health Promotion & Education (IUHPE) conference in Pattaya, Thailand, health promotion experts from around the world exchanged knowledge about "best investments" for health promotion research, policy, and practice.

REPOPA had a presence at this conference through a symposium on Collaboration across sectors to integrate research and real-life policy development. The symposium included presentations from Drs. Arja R. Aro and Maja Larsen (SDU) and Dr. Nancy Edwards (UOttawa) on behalf of REPOPA Consortium members.

Dr. Arja R. Aro provided an overview of the REPOPA project including its goals and objectives. Dr. Maja Larsen covered findings from WP1 of REPOPA around analysis of health-enhancing physical activity policies in multiple countries, including specific findings from Denmark and Italy. Our main message was that there is a need to integrate research evidence in the full processes of the policy development, not only to 'drop them out' at the beginning of the policy development activities. Furthermore, we tried to point out that research evidence needs to be balanced and merged with other valuable sources of knowledge, e.g. policy makers and practitioners' expertise, target group preferences and the available resources.

Dr. Nancy Edwards, lead of the evaluation work package, spoke about the REPOPA evaluation approach in the presentation "Knowledge-to-action and REPOPA: Adapting an existing cycle for use with complex health promotion interventions", examining the use of knowledge-to-action models to inform the evaluation approach.

A lively audience included representatives from many countries and from the European Commission, who funds the work of REPOPA, around 50 professionals participated in the workshop. Issues discussed included challenges of using evidence in real-world policy-making, opportunities for enhanced learning through multi-country projects, and the plans for further dissemination of REPOPA results

## REPOPA Annual Meeting, November 11th – 13th 2013 (by L.A.M van de Goor & Hilde Spitters, NL)

The third REPOPA Annual Consortium Meeting was held in Tilburg, The Netherlands, hosted by Tranzo, Tilburg University. It was again a full program (two full days) with updates on all the different Work Packages. Special focus was put on WP1 - the analysis of evidence use in HEPA policies in 6 EU countries - which was near to being finalized, and how all other work packages will use the information collected and analyzed in WP1. We were very happy to welcome 'our' EC officer Caroline Attard to our meeting. She highlighted some practical points in reporting results, administrative issues and special interest of the EC for results from the REPOPA and possibilities to bring these further

One of the highlights of the meeting was the lecture of the deputy chairman of the direction of Sports from the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, Mariken Leurs. With her background in research and practice in Public Health, and her experiences at the Ministry, she was very happy to share her experiences on the use of different sources of evidence in policy decision making at the Dutch Ministry.

She described the complicated picture of the policy development process, the use of evidence and the events of every politics, to which she added her personal experience in looking for evidence.

This year the Consortium meeting will be held in Rome, Italy, October 27th – 29th and hosted by The National Research Council.

Disseminating results at 6th EUPHA Conference (by Riitta-Maija Hämäläinen, FI)

### **Is it fact or fiction to have evidence informed policies in six European countries in physical activity?**

This was the main question in the workshop organized at under the European Public Health Conference (EUPHA ) in Brussels in November 2013. The presentations concentrated on the use of research evidence and other types of evidence in policy making in Italy, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Romania.

The gathered crowd heard that the use of research evidence was a drag in the Dutch policy making and politics, which opinions and interests counteract and intervene constantly with the well regulated prevention cycle that is used as an instrument for evidence based policy processes. In Italy the vocal personalities and communication brought results to get evidence into policy making. In Romania research evidence such as demographic and statistical data was used but peer-reviewed scientific literature and reviews are almost nonexistent.

In Denmark, research evidence was used in the policy development process; however few or no references to specific sources were given in the main policy documents. Reviews were used if available in (mostly national) reports and guidelines. Several other kinds of information were used e.g. input from experts in health promotion and “in house” knowledge and experts.

In Finland, in the policy making processes evidence was brought by expert and advisory groups that consulted with researchers, which were expected to bring research evidence into the process. However this is not explicitly noted in policies. Other information sources that policy makers used and were identified across countries were community consultations, workshops and consultations with research institutes.

The workshop concluded that in addition to research evidence, other types of evidence and information such as various types of media; laws, regulations and strategies; common knowledge and intuition; good practices, public hearings and consultations provide evidence for policy making.

*The abstracts of each presentation can be found from European Journal of Public Health 2013 Oct; 23(Suppl 1): 184-196 (K.2. Workshop: Fact or fiction: 'European physical activity policies are evidence-informed' )*

## REPOPA Stewardship approach – short insight (by Maja Larsen, DK)



The aim of the intervention in WP3 is to study if the stewardship approach increases the level of evidence-informed policy making in selected, real-world case study events. A particular focus point is to test methods and techniques that can identify and effectively engage specific stakeholders in the development of physical activity policy processes under investigation.

The intervention is carried out in three countries: The Netherlands, Italy and Denmark. Each country has selected 2-3 cases dealing with physical activity policy development. The cases were identified during spring 2013 and comprehensive needs assessment was conducted.

Based on the collected data, the interventions were developed and included meetings between researchers and policymakers, evidence briefs and workshops. The interventions will be finalized during summer 2014 and a post measurement and process evaluation will be carried out at 12 months after the end of the interventions.

## The policy game preparation – where are we now (by L.A.M van de Goor & Hilde Spitters, NL)

Policy game (previously referred to as game simulation) is part WP2. As mentioned in the previous newsletter, policy gaming is a methodology for participatory policy analysis (PPA) and a way to improve communication and collaboration in an interactive way within a complex organization network.

As a whole network of different organizations can be part of the policy development process of a municipality, this setting could be seen as an excellent opportunity to examine a policy game. The development of a policy game consists of three stages - system analysis, design of the generic game and adjusting and performing the game in each of the three countries, the Netherlands, Denmark and Romania.

Last year each of the three countries has developed a system analysis which shows all organizations which are or could be involved in the policy development process at local level (some of the results were presented during the Holland Fuse Conference and the EUPHA Conference in Brussels).

In the last couple of months the concept of the game has been specifically adapted to the Dutch case and materials for the game have been developed. At the end of this month the first REPOPA policy game will be carried out in the Netherlands, an exciting moment to look forward to. The Danish and Romanian game will be adapted to their specific country context afterwards and carried out later this year.

## **Student Section**

“I was lucky to be part of REPOPA WP 1 on the case studies of Esbjerg and Odense municipality in Denmark. I was given work tasks of assisting in interviews, carrying out complex policy analyses and writing reports. I really appreciated all the confidence that was shown in my abilities as a green researcher as it further sparked motivation and learning opportunities for me.

While working for the REPOPA project, I also used these case studies as part of the data collection for my master thesis. It was a qualitative study on youth participation in HEPA policy making. The REPOPA project provided me with in-depth data through 11 interviews and 123 background policy documents. It has been very valuable to have been able to use otherwise confidential the material for this thesis, which considerably strengthened my results. If the REPOPA project had not existed, I would not have been able to carry out my research.

This work has given me a whole new insight into policy making and the evidence-informed approach to public health. Through my experiences I gained great confidence in my research abilities, which is reflected in the quality of the thesis. So thank you REPOPA.”

**Charlotte Haaber Pettersen, MA, graduated from Southern Denmark University in November 2013 and used REPOPA research for her master thesis**

“In relation to my employment as a student assistant at REPOPA, I was given the honour to write my undergraduate thesis as part of my work. As a contribution to the project I did a literature review about facilitators in order to promote intersectoral collaboration in the municipalities in relation to my work in WP 3. Alongside my colleagues I consulted city officials in order to understand how a partnership between different cities sectors work.

The results from this process formed the basis of my thesis. Gathering data for my thesis as a part of the REPOPA project was a great opportunity in the sense that I was able to immerse into a field of great interest while contributing to REPOPA. I am honoured, that I was given the opportunity to work as an intern on REPOPA.”

**Danielle Louise Nørager Johansen, BA, participated in REPOPA WP3 and used some of the research for her bachelor thesis**

## Summary of the recent dissemination activities

- Our Finnish partner, represented by Riitta-Maija Hämäläinen has successfully represented REPOPA in the Working group 'Access to physical activity and sports information' coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Culture as part of their Sports and physical activity section. More information will be uploaded soon on our website.
- One workshop on the findings from the analysis of evidence use in HEPA policy in 6 EU countries (WP1) and two separate presentations (from WP2: Policy game intervention and WP3: Stewardship intervention) were held during the Holland Fuse Conference last Spring
- Policy making and use of research evidence in health enhancing physical activity was presented last year at the Finish National Conference on Physical Activity and Sport in June last year
- For the first time our researchers presented REPOPA findings at the International Congress of Physical Education, Sports and Kinetotherapy held in Bucharest, Romania
- REPOPA work and findings are more and more visible especially during IUHPE World Conference on Health Promotion and the European Public Health Conference
- REPOPA's next Consortium Meeting will be held in October, in Rome, Italy, hosted by The National Research Council.