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Healthy Stadia Programme: innovative approach to health promotion

Abstract

Sports stadia play an important role in local communities, therefore they are seen as very suitable places for various health promotion programmes. Since 2005, the Healthy Stadia programme has become a new standard for establishing policies regarding health promotion in local communities and during big international tournaments. This programme is an example of an effective setting-based approach to health promotion. Being funded by the European Union Public Health Programme, it has gained popularity in many European countries and also in Canada and Australia. Key parts of the programme include policies on tobacco and alcohol control, healthy food options and physical activity promotion on stadium grounds. Healthy Stadia programme proved to be an effective tool for promoting healthy lifestyle at many sports stadia. The programme is constantly improving and developing new projects, like Football Fans in Training (FFIT) or European Fans in Training (EuroFIT). This article provides an introduction to the programme's main parts as well as its origins and future projects. Poland is active member of the Healthy Stadia since 2007.

Keywords: Healthy Stadia, health promotion, public health, sports and recreational facilities, preventive health services, social medicine, community medicine, soccer.

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INTRODUCTION

Many countries around the world constantly seek innovative approaches towards health promotion. Sports stadia are visited by thousands of fans, who come to cheer for their favorite team. Therefore, they became a focus for some researchers as a very appropriate place for promoting health and physical activity. A setting-based approach to health promotion proved to be effective in many projects, for example: Healthy Schools, Healthy Cities, Healthy Hospitals, Healthy Prisons. One of the most effective programmes at the moment is the Healthy Stadia Programme, which originated in England in 2005. First carried out in England, later introduced in other European countries, it is becoming a new standard for the European stadia [1].

Healthy Stadia Programme origins

The programme has its origins in the North West region of the United Kingdom. This is where the Heart of Mersey is, a charity focused on cardiovascular disease prevention. Together with the North West Regional Public Health Group, it carried out a pilot programme in 2005 in four stadia (Blackburn Rovers FC, Blackpool FC, Oldham Athletic FC and St Helens RLFC). A „Healthy Stadium” was defined as „one that promotes the health of visitors, fans and the local community and one that provides a place where people can go and have a positive, healthy experience playing or watching sport” [2]. Its aim was to establish a healthier environment for fans and visitors to the stadium, to promote healthy lifestyle among the

club's employees and develop a healthy lifestyle promoting programme for the local community. The pilot stadia were different in size and resource capacity, which demonstrated that the programme had to be flexible in order to provide an approach tailored to each local community needs. After proving to be successful, this programme gained interest in other European countries, what led to the formation of European Healthy Stadia Programme, funded from the European Union Public Health Programme [3]. Final version of the programme includes guidelines for the stadia regarding tobacco and alcohol control, providing healthier food options, promoting active travel, developing physical activity and health awareness programmes for the local community and health policies for the stadiums employees.

Main goals and practical experiences of the Healthy Stadia Programme

The goal of the Healthy Stadia programme is a holistic approach to the setting-based health promotion. The Healthy Stadia Programme Toolkit is a document that provides valuable information for sports stadia and their partners. It contains guidelines for becoming a „Healthy Stadium” and is available to download from the Healthy Stadia website: www.healthystadia.eu [4].

The Healthy Stadia Programme Toolkit contains guidelines for sports stadia regarding stadium-based policies, such as tobacco-free stadia guidance. Its aim is to protect people attending stadia from the harmful effects of passive smoking. It includes not only the prohibition of smoking or selling

tobacco products on the stadium grounds, but also any form of promotion of tobacco (including e-cigarettes). The programme provides a comprehensive guide for the stadium operators that includes step-by-step instructions on how to implement a tobacco-free policy, complete with information on how to communicate, enforce and monitor the policy. An example of the effectiveness of the programme's anti-tobacco approach is a case study from 2016 from France, which is considered a country with a relatively weak tobacco control legislation. The case study focuses on the EURO 2016 event, where there was a special group of volunteers trained to effectively enforce the stadium's smoking ban. Another part of the policy was signage at the stadium. Large posters with signs prohibiting smoking and captions in both English and French were placed in various places in the stadia participating in the tournament. The results showed that this approach was very effective in preventing fans and stadium workers from smoking on the stadium grounds and it can be an example for other stadia willing to implement such policy [5]. Healthy Stadia guidelines are going to be implemented during the 2020 UEFA European Football Championship which will be held from 12 June to 12 July 2020 in 12 European countries.

Another part of the Healthy Stadia programme is focused on the food consumed by people visiting the stadia. In 2009 Ireland and Watkins conducted a case study in one of the English Premier League football stadium. They interviewed five focus groups of male and female fans. The results showed that most of the fans were dissatisfied with catering options available at the stadium. Lack of healthy food and drink options was a problem for more women than men, but both groups expressed the need for change [6]. A YouGov report from 2016 shows that 69% of people who bought food at the stadium felt that it was overpriced. Almost half of the people (46%) expected the food to be poor quality for the money. When it comes to 63%, they thought they could only buy unhealthy food at the stadium [7]. This data shows there is a demand for healthier food and drink options with better quality that would justify the price. The Healthy Stadia Network developed the Healthy Match Mark in order to improve stadia's catering offer. Its key elements include healthy food and beverage options on sale with portion size control and improvement of preparation and cooking techniques [8].

The Healthy Stadia programme encourages stadia to develop active modes of transportation for fans and workers such as walking or cycling. Benefits of such solution are for example: improved health of fans, less problems with not enough parking spaces, better air quality. The club's workers improved physical activity level may result in preventing many illnesses, what contributes to taking less sick leave days by the staff. This programme encourages stadia to provide information about walking/cycling routes to the stadium and promote this information among fans and workers. For example, stadia may place signs along the key points of the route from the nearest bus stop/train station to help people arrive. Another important part of promoting active travel is making sure that there are cycling locking facilities near the stadium for people who choose cycling as a mean of transportation. It is important to promote active travel behaviors in order for the programme to be effective. Stadia are encouraged to include this information on their websites and in their newsletters [9].

Another key part of the Healthy Stadia programme is encouraging local communities and stadium workers to increase

their level of physical activity during their free time. It has become one of the biggest tasks for the programme, which resulted in the birth of projects like Football Fans in Training (FFIT) [10] and European Fans in Training (EuroFIT) [11], which will be described further in the article.

European Healthy Stadia Network is currently developing new project, Active Voice, which aims to engage civil society organizations in promoting physical activity that is compatible with the EU Physical Activity Guidelines [12]. The Healthy Stadia programme inspired many organizations to implement similar practices in other countries, for example Australian Aussie-FIT [13] or Canadian Hockey-FIT [14].

Good practices and health policy analysis in European sports stadia

In 2009 International Sports Projects Association in Finland with support from the Heart of Mersey carried out an „Audit of Current Practice”. This document examined practices that were supposed to promote healthy lifestyle at sports stadia across 11 European countries (England, Northern Ireland, Sweden, Spain, Ireland, Georgia, Poland, Finland, Italy, Latvia, Greece). A questionnaire was sent to different stadia in the mentioned countries and a total of 88 questionnaires were returned for analysis. The questionnaire contained questions about the stadium itself (for example: capacity, year of construction, private or public ownership, types of sports played on the stadium) as well as practices relating to public health promotion (catering options, tobacco and alcohol control, promoting physical activity etc.). It also included questions about environmental care, social responsibility and engagement in the local community. The results of this audit gave a lot of useful information for the future of the programme and areas that need improvement. For example, 45% of the stadia had no antismoking policy, but the majority of those were from Georgia, a country where, at that time, smoking and tobacco sales were highly prevalent. In 34 out of 88 stadia (38.6%) smoking was prohibited throughout. Over 26% of stadia had a designated person dealing with healthy food issues. The policy about healthy eating was present only in 18.2% of stadia. This included provision of healthier meals for the staff or fans or using low salt, low saturated fat food products. Available drink options in most stadia were rather unhealthy. Nearly all of the stadia (98.9%) had carbonated drinks on sale. Alcohol was available to buy in 64.8% of the stadia, but only 21.6% expressed any initiative to encourage responsible alcohol use (for example posters informing about alcohol's harmful influence on health). Physical activity policy for fans and for the club's workers was present in half of the stadia. This included promoting active travel to the stadium, sports events for the local community, free classes (football, fitness, dance) for young people. Some stadia prolonged lunch breaks for their employees so that they could participate in a form of physical activity. The audit also examined presence of anti-racism, anti-violence policies and other interventions supporting positive mental health. These were present in 33% of stadia. When it comes to 37.5% of the stadia, they claimed to have policies for environmental care (for example: recycling schemes, energy and water efficiency, active travel plans) [1].

Four main parts of the Healthy Stadia programme are: anti-tobacco policy, alcohol awareness policy, healthy catering policy and policy promoting physical activity. Three out of four of these were present in only 20% of the stadia. Most of these

stadia (18) were under private ownership and only 5 were under public ownership. Stadia implementing at least three out of four key parts of the programme were mostly from the UK (but also from Finland, Poland and Spain) and the sport mostly played at their grounds was football [1].

Intervention programmes based on the Healthy Stadia experiences

Football Fans in Training

Healthy Stadia programme focused not only on the food choices fans make or tobacco and alcohol consumption, but also their level of physical activity. A study from 2013 examined health of male football fans and the effect of a national health programme delivered by the English Premier League, called Premier League Health. It was a three-year-long programme, which included weekly physical activity and health awareness classes for the participants. Each participant was interviewed at the beginning and at the end of a three month period. Results from 16 football clubs which took part in this programme, showed the positive effects it had on weekly physical activity in men, as well as reduced sitting time, increased consumption of fruit and vegetables, decreased body mass index, less frequent smoking and alcohol consumption [15]. A physical activity promoting programme FFIT (Football Fans in Training) proved to be effective by Wyke et al. in 2015 in Scotland [10]. It resulted in weight loss and decreased systolic and diastolic blood pressure among men in the intervention group. Another follow-up study proved that the weight loss and other beneficial results of the programme were long-term. Participants showed long-term improvements in body mass index, physical activity and other factors after 3.5 years from the start of the programme [16]. Another study from 2018 focuses on how the feedback (on weight, BMI and other indicators of health risk) can affect motivation to improve one's health. Results show that it can be effective if delivered with empathy and in a non-stigmatizing way. Otherwise, it can be discouraging for people with poor body image [17]. Future projects include developing a programme designed for women, called FFIT for Women. Initial studies show it has a potential to be an effective weight loss programme [18].

European Fans in Training

Similar approach to fans' health is seen in the EU funded European Fans In Training (EuroFIT) programme, which is a part of the Healthy Stadia Network. EuroFIT uses the strong feeling of attachment to the club in football fans in order to deliver effective physical activity programme. Several football clubs from four European countries (UK, Norway, Netherlands and Portugal) were involved in EuroFIT. A 12-week programme for overweight male fans aged 30-65 years old took place at the stadium grounds and was led by the pilot club's coaches [19]. The programme combined classroom discussion and group-based physical activity, similar to the FFIT programme. Participants of the programme were also given a device called SitFIT, which monitors physical activity and time spent on sedentary behaviors. This device proved to be very effective in measuring the daily step count as well as time spent sitting down [20]. They also used an app-based game MatchFIT that encourages them to lead an active lifestyle [11]. Participants were measured at baseline, after 12-week programme and after one year from the baseline. Results show that the programme was effective in improving their level of physical activity,

as well as weight and self-reported food intake. It also improved resting blood pressure and some cardio-metabolic blood biomarkers. However, it did not show very effective results in reducing time spent sitting-down at 12 months. This showed which areas of the programme need to be worked on in the future in order to improve its effectiveness even more [21].

Poland's involvement in Healthy Stadia

In Poland, the need for health-promoting programmes was proved by the Mind Your Heart programme that took place between 2003 and 2009. It was a very successful educational programme focused on cardiovascular health and promoting healthy lifestyle [22]. Currently, Poland is one of the countries that belong to the European Healthy Stadia Network and it is working on developing health-promoting policies in the national stadia. Since 2007, more and more Polish sports objects have participated in the programme. Sports club Budowlani Łódź was awarded for its educational and sport promoting work with youths from high risk environments. Orlik court from Rumia was also recognized for its employer's work in health promotion among adolescents [24]. Other objects that participated in promoting healthy lifestyle according to the Healthy Stadia programme guidelines are: Białystok City Stadium, Białystok MOSiR Ice Rink, Białystok MOSiR Swimming Pool no. 1, no. 2, no. 3, Białystok Athletic Stadium, Śrem Center of Sport and Recreation, Kazimierz Górski Stadium in Płock, Gdańsk City Stadium, Florian Krygier City Stadium in Szczecin, Kielce City Stadium and Rybnik City Stadium [25]. The programme received much attention from Arka Gdynia Club in Gdynia.

The Healthy Stadia programme was implemented in training stadiums representatives in collaboration with Volunteering for the Sports Foundation and the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine during the EURO 2012 tournament held in Poland [23]. Despite the fact that many prestigious organizations worldwide expressed interest in the Healthy Stadia programme, e.g. UEFA, EPHA, Euro Heart Network, World Heart Federation and WHO, unfortunately Ministry of Sport and Tourism in Poland has not yet shown interest to cooperate with the Healthy Stadia Network to implement health promotion policies in Polish sports objects.

Participation in the Healthy Stadia programme is an opportunity for sports objects to exchange opinions and experiences from promoting healthy lifestyle in local communities. Several international conferences on Healthy Stadia organized since 2010 in Liverpool, Manchester and in London gathered a large group of participants representing both academic society from a dozen of European countries as well as many representatives of sports and public health international organizations, NGOS, managers from famous European sports clubs and football fans. International cooperation of sports stadia across Europe enables the programme's effectiveness to be constantly improved. The programme continues to gain popularity and may soon become a new standard for health promotion. The Healthy Stadia website (<http://healthystadia.eu>) is a great source of information on the programme and its future projects.

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