

TWELVE OBSTACLES TO AN ACTIVE, LOW-CARBON LIFESTYLE

– Overcoming factors hindering healthy mobility



This paper provides a starting point for the panel discussion on the obstacles to healthy mobility and actions to support it in STYLE webinar *Towards Healthy Mobility – Transdisciplinary contribution to health, climate and business targets* on 29 April 2020.

Current generations are less fit than the previous ones as the majority of any age cohort do not meet the national recommendations for physical activity in Finland. According to recent studies, only about one third of adolescents and one fifth of the adult population are active enough to stay healthy. At the same time, discussions on active transport – walking, bicycling and other soft modes – as a sustainable means to achieve sufficient physical activity have increased. Yet, the considerations on public health and active, sustainable transport are seldom integrated.

Healthy Lifestyles to Boost Sustainable Growth (STYLE) project combines the perspectives of public health and active, sustainable transport in an interdisciplinary manner. According to the project's societal vision, physical activity in Finland will be enhanced by increasing the modal share of active transport by 30% by 2030. Increased everyday physical activity would reduce a sphere of health problems, public health costs and CO₂ emissions from transport as well as generate demand for new sustainable business on the physical activity sector.

Everyday physical activity is the top priority to neither different stakeholders (public, private or third sector stakeholders) nor different administrative sectors (i.e. transport, health care, sports, urban planning). To tackle the problem, multiple actors should be included in the knowledge production dialogue. In order to encourage stakeholder dialogue and co-creation, STYLE organises participatory stakeholder workshops both at local and national level.

This background paper for the webinar contains the results of two stakeholder workshops conducted earlier in the project. The goal of the two national level workshops was two-fold. First, to gather views from physical activity and sustainable mobility experts on barriers hindering the increase of physical activity and active transport, and mapping potential solutions enabling this increase. Second, the object was to include the participants in a continuous dialogue, which will continue throughout the project.

First workshop: Obstacles for physical activity and healthy mobility

In the first national workshop, 60 participants from NGOs, research, governance and business worked in small groups and discussed different obstacles that hinder or prevent the increase of physical activity and active transport. Each of the groups had an assigned age group to consider. As individual's level of physical activity and the choice of transport modes are influenced by various different factors, all groups identified challenges concerning products and services, technology, infrastructure, governance and operational culture. After the event, qualitative content analysis of the material was carried out by thematising notes made in groups as well as the transcript of the dissemination discussion at the end of the event. As a result, twelve obstacles that impede the increase in physical activity and active transport were identified. These twelve obstacles were further categorised under four large themes describing root causes behind the challenges.

The first set of challenges stems from **the lack of knowledge** on the advantages of physical activity and daily active transport. There is a lack of relevant knowledge at multiple levels: individuals, organisations and the society as a whole require more information to boost healthy lifestyles. In practice, this knowledge gap can mean anything from the incomprehension of the impacts and costs of non-active lifestyles in general to the

hardships of finding updated information on bike routes. Furthermore, existing knowledge may be disregarded due to other priorities. For example, in decision-making, short-term economic benefits are valued over the long-term ones, or perceived risks and restrictions outweigh the advantages of physical activity. Without a shared goal of increasing physical activity in the future, governance remains atomistic and integrated actions to support the growth of daily physical activity will not happen.

The second set of challenges concerns planning and business activities, namely the **design of services, infrastructure and technology**, which do not necessarily support physical activity and healthy active lifestyles. From the business perspective, everyday physical activity is difficult to productise. Whereas services and products for organised sports are numerous, daily physical activity seems to provide less business opportunities. Additionally, cities and public spaces are not designed to enhance physical activity. Services (shops, schools, workplaces and sport venues) are structurally centralised into larger units, situated further away from residential areas. Long distances between home and everyday locations combined with inadequate public transport and poorly planned, built or maintained cycling and walking routes, direct people to choose private cars instead of active transport modes. All in all, technology is developed to make everyday life more convenient: the abundance of technological and digital tools minimise our need to move.

The third category – **siloed physical activity** – reinforces moving as a separated, additional form of activity performed in a certain place and time instead of understanding it as an innate part of daily life. As a consequence, people do not move by chance. For instance, workplace culture and practices tend to be static: physical activity is not a goal either for employers or for employees. Although organisations do invest in car parks, they lack adequate facilities to support active transport (e.g. dressing rooms, showers or bike shelters). In addition, the ways in which we speak about exercise may further emphasise silo thinking, as the image of what is considered the ‘right kind’ of physical activity is narrow. The prevailing discourse easily focuses on exercise as a performance, although emphasising feelings of pleasure, joy or meaningfulness linked with physical activity might encourage people to move even more.

Psychological, cultural and socio-economic aspects, such as emotions, attitudes, values and socio-economic status hinder the increase of physical activity and active transport. Although the benefits of active lifestyles may be well known on the individual level, the hectic pace of everyday life together with hedonistic behaviour make people passive. Being busy signals status and the private car is oftentimes the main mode of transport for hurrying from one place to another. Secondly, physical activity may be perceived as unpleasant and out of one’s comfort zone. Strong focus on performance and sports can be alienating, if a person does not consider oneself active. Lastly, the prospects for active lifestyles are not equal for all. The lack of economic resources or social contacts can hinder active lifestyles. In addition, available services may be designed in a non-inclusive manner, excluding people based on their gender or cultural background.

Second workshop: physically active Finland 2030

The dialogue and co-creation continued in the second workshop, where 52 multisectoral stakeholders concentrated on the solutions for the obstacles and challenges identified in the first workshop. These findings provided the starting point for the second workshop. Participants worked in small groups. Concentrating on a particular challenge, the groups imagined visions of the year 2030 in Finland, where the challenges to physical activity be solved. In addition, the participants were asked to imagine the desired change, solutions and actors contributing to such a future.

After the workshop, we conducted a qualitative analysis on the results. The desirable future for Finland in 2030 can be summarised in four main themes. These four themes provide counterparts for the root causes identified from the results of the first workshop. The first characteristic of the desirable futures image is that **relevant knowledge** on the benefits of everyday physical activity are available for everyone, and this

knowledge is acknowledged in decision making processes. Secondly, **products, services, design processes and business** in general support the increase of physical activity. Thirdly, physical activity is a **natural part of the everyday life**. According to the fourth characteristic, **the opportunities to be physically active are equal for all**. Active lifestyle brings pleasure and is available for all.

A summary of the findings from the previous stakeholder workshops

OBSTACLES TO INCREASE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTHY MOBILITY	PHYSICALLY ACTIVE FINLAND 2030
<p>Lack or disregard of knowledge on the benefits of physical activity and healthy mobility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of knowledge and know-how in decision-making • Skewed public guidance and funding • Excessive safety seeking 	<p>Knowledge on the benefits of everyday physical activity and healthy mobility is available and it guides decision making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant knowledge on physical activity is available for all • The benefits of everyday physical activity are understood and prioritised in decision making • Decision makers are committed to increase physical activity and healthy mobility • Adequate resources are allocated to physical activity and healthy mobility • All communication supports healthy lifestyle
<p>Business and design disregard physical activity and healthy mobility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Products and services do not support everyday physical activity • Infrastructure and urban planning do not support everyday physical activity • Passivating technology 	<p>Business and design enhance physical activity and healthy mobility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and business increase everyday physical activity • Increased supply and demand of products and services related to everyday physical activity • Participatory design acknowledges the needs of different user groups • Safe and liveable infrastructure supports everyday physical activity and healthy mobility • Technology activates and eases only when needed
<p>Siloed physical activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical activity as a separate part from everyday life • Sedentary work culture • Narrow-minded views on physical activity 	<p>Physical activity is an innate part of everyday life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical activity is part of daily routines • Physical activity is prioritised • Work places and schools support physical activity and healthy mobility • The definition of legitimate physical activity is wide, and everyone has their own way of being active • The prevailing discourse on healthy lifestyle is kind and supportive
<p>Personal priorities, emotions and socio-economic status passivate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hurry and self-indulgence as priorities • Physical activity perceived as unpleasant or too sport-oriented • Social exclusion 	<p>Physical activity as a lifestyle that belongs to everyone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical activity is a pleasure and a lifestyle • Physical activity is considered as beneficial even though it would be seen as unpleasant • Everyone has a right to be active • Everyday physical activity enforces communality • The individual emotions related to physical activity are acknowledged and understood

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