

Physical Activity Programmes – how to make an impact in a city-setting?

***Physical Activity Programmes in the cities of Helsinki,
Järvenpää, Kontiolahti, Lappeenranta and Porvoo***

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1. Introduction

In Finland municipalities and cities have started to build their own Physical Activity (PA) Programmes as part of city strategies and health prevention plans. With this High Impact Project some of the existing PA Programmes will be analyzed through the Collective Impact -approach.

The Finnish [Sports Act](#) gives municipalities the task to promote physically active lifestyle and recreational sports. The physical inactivity rates among all age groups have been growing over the years as the modern lifestyle enables passive everyday life. Normal sports and leisure time activities in traditional sports sector are no longer effective enough to get the population moving enough for their health. The promotion of physical activity needs cross-sectoral work and different organizations and actors to tackle the huge challenge.

In Finland the cost for physical inactivity is estimated to be [3,2-7,5 billion euros per year](#). At the same time the reform of public healthcare, social welfare and rescue services is on-going. The need to save money from health costs is one of the main targets of the reform. Therefore, the promotion of physical activity and healthy lifestyle among population is widely set as one of the main targets in the cities. Also the large variety of positive benefits from physically active lifestyle enhances the well-being overall in the population and that is one of the main tasks of the municipalities as mentioned in the [Local Government Act](#) (2015).

In this High Impact Project five PA Programmes were analyzed: Helsinki liikkuu (City of Helsinki), #Ilokseen #Liikkuva #Jäkeläinen (City of Järvenpää), Myö liikuttaa! (City of Lappeenranta), Liikkuva Kontiolahti 2021-2025 (Municipality of Kontiolahti) and Liikutaan Porvoon mitalla! (City of Porvoo). Initial research questions were:

- What is the rationale for a Physical Activity Programme of a city?
- How are Collective Impact -characteristics visible in the programmes?
- How are the impacts of the programme evaluated?
- What are the most common actions and target groups?

2. Physical Activity Programmes – from global to local

Physical activity is [defined](#) by World Health Organization (WHO) as “any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure. Physical activity refers to all movement including during leisure time, for transport to get to and from places, or as part of a person’s work. Both moderate- and vigorous-intensity physical activity improve health.”

Lack of physical activity is a major challenge in the society all over the world. According to WHO up to 5 million deaths yearly could be avoided if the global population was more active. The research shows that physical inactivity is the fourth leading risk factor for noncommunicable diseases mortality after high blood pressure, high blood sugar and smoking. Inactive people have a 20 to 30 percent increased risk of death compared to people who are sufficiently active. Therefore WHO has created [a global action plan](#) 2030 for improving the level of physical activity.

“[Key facts of physical activity](#) (WHO)

- Physical activity has significant health benefits for hearts, bodies and minds
- Physical activity contributes to preventing and managing noncommunicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer and diabetes
- Physical activity reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Physical activity enhances thinking, learning, and judgment skills
- Physical activity ensures healthy growth and development in young people
- Physical activity improves overall well-being
- Globally, 1 in 4 adults do not meet the global recommended levels of physical activity
- Up to 5 million deaths a year could be averted if the global population was more active
- People who are insufficiently active have a 20% to 30% increased risk of death compared to people who are sufficiently active
- More than 80% of the world's adolescent population is insufficiently physically active”

In Europe WHO work is carried out together with European Union as it prepares an analysis every three years how the EU recommendations on physical activity are implemented in the Member States. The latest reports were released in [2021](#) where Finland scored top scores. The national report provides broad view about the actions and programmes running in Finland to promote physical activity in different settings and among different population groups.

The actions against the lack of physical activity are also seen in the municipalities statutory health and well-being plans. One of the main tasks of Finnish municipalities is to take responsibility in health and wellbeing promotion. The obligations and tasks of the municipalities have been defined in the [Local Government Act](#) (2015) and the [Health Care Act](#) (2010).

As Finland is one of the leading countries in PA promotion in Europe, have some cities become fore runners in developing their own PA Programmes. The first widely known PA Programme was launched by the city of Helsinki in 2018. After that have many cities and municipalities have started to build their own PA Programmes.

3. Theoretical framework: Collective Impact approach

The promotion of physical activity needs a new approach – the old idea of sports sector tackling the huge challenge is not valid anymore. The only way to make a change on population level is to harness cross-sectoral partners and large variety of different actors; non-profits, governments, businesses, the public – to work for the same goal.

Collective Impact (CI) approach is an intentional way of working together and sharing information in order to solve a complex social or environmental problem. The model was first introduced in 2011 by John Kania ja Mark Kramer in Stanford Social Innovation Review. There have been several studies since then to evaluate whether the model is working effectively in solving complex social development programmes; one example being a [cross-site study of 25 Collective impact -initiatives](#) (ORS Impact and Spark Policy Institute 2018). The approach has been used in collaboratives concerning for example health and environment - initiatives such as Teen Pregnancy Prevention initiative and Drug Abuse Prevention in the US.

The Collective Impact approach seems similar to collaboration, but there are certain characteristics that separate it from normal collaboration. Collaboration is often a two-way street, yet a collective impact approach is a way to create an entire community that wants to solve a problem or multiple problems together. All partners in a CI-approach may have their own strategies but they are aimed towards the same goal. At its best, the initiative will have different voices representing the community and tackle together policy changes in order to make long-lasting changes. [Kania and Kramer](#) say that “the most effective approaches are those that include gathering an adequate understanding of the root causes of issues and involve the affected community in creating solutions”.

Collective Impact -approach [characteristics](#) are:

Common agenda	Shared measurement	Mutually reinforcing activities	Continuous communication	Backbone support
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Shared vision and goals•Building the initiative together based on data and participation of different groups• Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Monitoring the same things•Hold each other accountable	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Activities are aligned, yet suitable for each organization•Depending on each other to move the initiative forward•Making progress towards common goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Open and consistent communication internally and externally•Motivation-building•Public awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Coordination of activities and participants•Building of culture and trust•Sharing information•Administrative role, resources•Data collection, monitoring

Table 1. Characteristics of Collective Impact approach

In the 2018 [study](#) it was noted that in CI-approach the foundational elements are backbone support and common agenda. Continuous communication is a critical function of the backbone. A strong backbone and common agenda are more likely to have strong mutually reinforcing activities. Shared measurement systems are not always present, but they are normally tied to having a common agenda and mutually reinforcing activities.

For successful CI-initiatives eight principles of practice need to be recognized in order to achieve population change. Principles of practice are:

- Design and implement the initiative with priority on equity
- Include community members in the collaborative
- Recruit and co-create with cross-sector partners
- Use data to continuously learn, adapt and improve
- Cultivate leaders with unique system leadership skills
- Focus on programme and system strategies
- Build culture that fosters relationships, trust, and respect across participants
- Customize for local context

There are often some challenges regarding planning and implementation of a CI-initiative. As noted in a research by [Riley et al \(2021\)](#) the challenges implementing a well-being initiative in three US communities included: “1) recruiting and sustaining community member and leadership participation, 2) cultivating leaders with system leadership skills and managing turnover of highly instrumental stakeholders (elected officials, CEO’s, key staff), 3) maintaining focus on system strategies, 4) implementing and sustaining multisector interventions, 5) managing communication to sustain awareness and 6) managing the evolution of strategies and campaigns to keep them “fresh” while maintaining fidelity.”

The CI-approach is often used for solving complex problems on population level. The lack of physical activity is a huge challenge due to major changes in Finland and all over the world. According to the [Finnish Olympic Committee](#) the trends behind the changes in sports and physical activity are digitalization, the changing role of media, urbanization, responsibility, international competition, polarization and demographic change in population. All trends have a significant role in levels of physical activity and how to promote physical activity in the future.

4. Rationale for local Physical Activity Programmes

The health benefits of physical activity and on the other side the challenges of physical inactivity are widely known. The global and national strategies have tried to tackle the challenge for many years but there haven’t been any major breakthroughs. The problem can be seen as climate change – all efforts are needed with a large network of collaborators. Everyone can make an impact, but someone has to lead the change. As one possible solution on local level, cities have started to build their own PA Programmes in order to help their residents to live a healthier and more active lifestyle.

Globally and [nationally](#) there are and have been many strategies to reduce the lack of physical activity. The evidence shows that physical activity levels are not getting better – the polarization grows between population groups as some are overly physically active and others overly passive. The same problem is seen in the cities as they are monitoring their physical activity levels according to [national guidelines](#).

The strategies of the countries and cities are underlining the wellbeing of their residents. In Finland Prime minister Sanna Marin’s [government programme](#) 2019 has an its own objectives for PA promotion:

- Objective 6: A physically more active lifestyle will be encouraged for all population groups
- Objective 7: Conditions for outdoor and daily activity will improve

Physical activity is seen as part of strategic planning of the cities as can be demonstrated also in the PA Programmes that are benchmarked in this project work. There has been a shift from sports to larger concept of physical activity and active transportation over the last years. The COVID-19 pandemic has set new challenges to keep people engaged with sports as well as making choices in everyday life to be physically active. This new idea of larger concept of physical activity is seen as a key to make a change on population level. Every step counts – and the active choices can be offered easier with strategic decisions, cross-sectoral work and well-lead programmes.

4.1. Five cities: background information of the programmes

Helsinki is the capital of Finland, and the population is around 650.000. Helsinki's PA Programme was the first well known effort to tackle the challenge of physical inactivity as a larger strategic programme in a city-setting. There were already many actions in the field of sports but an "out-of-the-box"-thinking was needed. The city's idea was to concentrate "how things are done" rather than "what things will be done" – Helsinki is seen as a setting for physical activity where everyone makes decisions in their everyday life. The ex-mayor of Helsinki Jan Vapaavuori was the front man of the programme and the rationale for the strategic top-objective was decided in the city council. Mayor Vapaavuori said: "No one has yet solved the problematic of physical inactivity. Helsinki wants to try to solve it".

In Helsinki's programme everything is based on information, research, monitoring and evaluation. In order to succeed the city set up a large data of the existing situation and created the core aims for development with indicators. Over the three first programme years 2019-2021, approximately 60 actions were planned in eight target areas. The actions of the PA Programme were targeted at the overall system, community and environment, as well as the individual level. The plan had many references to WHO's Global Action Plan. The programme is continuing after the first project period.

[Let's Get moving – Helsinki PA Programme 2019-2021](#)

Porvoo is a historical city located in southern Finland. It has now about 51.000 inhabitants, but it is estimated to grow 13 percent until year 2040. The growth will come mainly from migration from northern parts of Finland and also from other countries. The city is well connected to Helsinki-area which attracts new citizens to move to Porvoo.

The PA Programme of Porvoo is built until year 2030. It was produced in cooperation with SmartSport Osuuskunta. The changes of the operational environment globally and nationally are described with "Current of Changes"-model which opens the large view how different megatrends are affecting sports and physical activity. In Porvoo the analysis of the current local situation included information about the infrastructure and procedures. The aims were built in overall level which included cooperation with third sector, better brand for the city and the network of different stakeholders influencing physical activity. In the city-organization level the aims were to develop the organization of the sports sector to tackle more the PA promotion needs, to engage the whole organization to finding solutions to increase physical activity, and to build better cooperation between different stakeholders in Porvoo. The official project plan was structured mainly through workshops and questionnaires. There were no references to nation-wide strategies, programmes, or laws.

[Liikutaan Porvoon Mitalla – Liikuntaohjelma 2030](#)

Järvenpää is a vast growing city in Uusimaa, around 30 kilometers from Helsinki with population around 44.000. Järvenpää started to build its own PA Programme in the fall of 2020. They used Helsinki and Porvoo as a benchmark. As in Porvoo, Järvenpää used the Smartsport's background model "Current of changes" which outlines the megatrends that are affecting lifestyle of the population. In Järvenpää the rationale for the PA Programme was heavily underlined from the societal perspectives for example different laws, national guidelines, National Report on Sports Policy and "On the move" -programmes.

In Järvenpää the rationale was also strongly linked to the strategy of the city and the health and well-being plan of Järvenpää and the area of Keusote. The city is growing strongly and therefore there is a need to develop the city infrastructure and services. PA promotion is seen in a lifespan context which involves all the sectors of the city.

#Illokseen #liikkuva #jäkeläinen 2021-2024

Kontiolahti is a rural municipality in the region of North Karelia, the easternmost region of continental Europe. It has 15.000 inhabitants. The PA Programme of Kontiolahti is build for 2021-2025 and based on tackling the lack of physical activity, not promotion of sports or physical exercise as the other programmes are also highlighting. The programme is build to reach a common goal and actions in order to increase the levels of physical activity and to enhance the well-being of the residents of Kontiolahti.

The rationale for the local PA Programme was well prepared underlining the benefits of physical activity, the lifestyle changes, and the levels of poor physical activity. It was also linked strongly to the strategy and the laws governing the actions of the municipality. The prepared actions are selected according to lifespan.

Kontiolahden kunta – Liikkumissuunnitelma 2021-2025

Lappeenranta is a developing and growing city in South Karelia region with population over 72.000. The PA Programme is part of the city's 2033 strategy, and it is ongoing from 2020 to 2025. As Porvoo, Lappeenranta used Smartsport Osuuskunta's consultation to build the programme.

In the PA Programme the main overall challenges are identified: most of the Finns are physically too inactive, it affects all levels of population, and sports clubs can no longer attract youth to participate so that they would be moving enough for their health. Locally challenges were identified as well: over third of the citizens of Lappeenranta were not satisfied how PA and sports promotion was done at that moment, and according to workshops more actions were required to develop infrastructure, better coordination and development of easy access sports and physical activity done independently. The official project plan was built mainly through the results of workshops, questionnaires, and the evaluation of present state of sports sector and infrastructure. There were no references to global or national guidelines, strategies, or laws.

Myö liikuttaa! – Lappeenrannan liikkumissuunnitelma 2020-2025.

4.2. Benefits of physical activity – more than just health impacts

The PA Programmes lean heavily on the benefits of physical activity. All research shows that being physically active enhances one's health in many ways. UKK- research institute has gathered [evidence](#) showing the benefits of physical activity. But there are other topics to consider also when talking about the benefits of physical activity. As written in Physical Activity Programme for the city of Helsinki: "There are strong scientific grounds for promoting physical activity more effectively. Physical activity generates value across economic, health and wellbeing, social, environmental, and overall monetary impact".

Mental health and wellbeing	Lower levels of anxiety Lower levels of depression Helps prevent onset of depression
Social integration	Reduces marginalization and loneliness Stronger social relationships Increased self-confidence, esteem and efficacy
Environment	Less traffic emissions, noise and carbon monoxide Less congestion and accidents More enjoyment of the environment
Learning, memory, brain health	Less memory disorders Better mathematical and linguistic skills Better blood circulation in the brain Better concentration and attention More satisfaction at school
Work ability	Improved work ability and productivity Improved stress management and coping Extended working life Fewer absences due to sick leave
Health and wellbeing	Better health and quality of life Less lifestyle diseases (e.g. type 2 diabetes) Less overweight and obesity Less cancer
Business, economy	Stimulates business opportunities and employment Stimulates travel

Table 2. Benefits of physical activity (www.helsinkiliikkuu.fi).

In Järvenpää the benefits of physical activity were notified through life-span approach and how physical activity enhances physical, social, and mental health on individual level. Kontiolahti municipality highlighted more the physical benefits mentioned in [Käypä hoito -suositus](#). In Porvoo and Lappeenranta the classical benefits of physical activity were not included in the project plan as a rationale. The reduction of health costs was not a key benefit mentioned in the plans, but it was an overall argument that lack of physical activity causes many extra costs through health care costs and loss of work.

4.3. Monitoring physical activity

The Finnish [Physical Activity guidelines](#) describe the weekly physical activity that one needs to stay healthy. The guidelines are built by UKK- Research Institute for different target groups. The guidelines can be used for example in personal health counselling, in developing more active school and workdays and in developing infrastructure in the cities.

There are many tests, research and monitoring systems that are used to assess the levels of physical activity on population level nationally and locally. It is still difficult to measure the actual level of physical activity in different target groups. All [evidence](#) shows that most of the population does not reach the PA guidelines. For example, the latest MOVE-[research](#) shows that approximately 40 percent of children in 5th and 8th grade are already suffering from poor physical health. MOVE-test has information from over 107 000 pupils nationwide.

[TEAvisari](#) describes municipalities' activities to promote their citizens' health. One part of it is cross-sectoral physical activity promotion in the municipality. TEAvisari is designed to support municipalities and schools in the planning and management of health and PA promotion work. It also helps to compare and evaluate the health promotion activities with other cities nationally.

At the same time as physical inactivity is growing, people spend most of their time sitting. Sitting or remaining stationary for a longer period of time has negative impacts on health. Therefore, many PA Programmes target both physical activity promotion and reduction of sitting. There are also [national guidelines for reduction of sitting](#) which were launched 2015 by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

It is quite complex to measure the impact of the local PA Programmes as monitoring physical activity levels on individual level is impossible on a large scale. The most important rationale for the PA Programmes was a serious worry about the levels of physical inactivity in all age-groups in their cities. Therefore, all the benchmarked cities wanted to invest resources to new actions of PA promotion.

5. Collective Impact approach and the Physical Activity Programmes

Collective Impact approach is often used for initiatives tackling complex issues such as health promotion or environmental actions. The main idea of the used approach is that there are many different collaborators that are aiming to make a change on population level. Physical activity promotion is an objective that needs large collaboration and cross-sectoral work in order to succeed. It would be beneficial to use the CI-approach already from the beginning of the initiative.

In this project work the existing PA Programmes were evaluated with using the five characteristics of the approach as well as identifying the principles of practice.

5.1. Characteristics of Collective Impact approach in the PA Programmes

The Physical Activity Programmes of the five cities were analyzed through the characteristics of Collective Impact -approach (appendix 1.). Additional information was searched from the internet pages from the cities. As an overall remark it can be said that the programmes were well prepared, but the information of the execution was difficult to find or did not exist in the documents or internet pages. From the five programmes one had pointed significantly more resources to the programme: Helsinki had set a well-structured plan with a specific project personnel, communication portfolio and large evaluation structure.

Creating a *common agenda* is one of the most important parts of CI-approach. It gives a shared understanding of the challenge for the collaborative. It also needs to be specific and has a timeframe and a clear target group. The five analyzed programmes had a written common agenda which was prepared with a large group of partners and background material. The PA Programme was mostly well connected to the city's strategy and other policies nationally and locally. The common agenda was mostly vague, and the only idea was to get residents more physically active through various actions. None of the cities had written the vision so that it had a measurable goal within a specific timeframe. Helsinki had set a measurable goal, but it was not stated in the common agenda. Also, the timeframe for the initiative was seen to be much longer than the actual project plan was covering.

All the cities need to prepare a statutory health and wellbeing plan yearly where some of the indicators are also being monitored. The connection between the PA Programme and health and wellbeing plan was not clearly notified in the programmes analyzed.

The other key element of the CI-approach is the role of *backbone organization*. It was quite interesting to note that the programmes were well prepared but there was hardly any information how the actual programme is being executed and who is leading the work. There were steering groups and different expert groups preparing the programme objectives and actions, but it is unclear who is the backbone for execution. Helsinki – as the internet pages www.helsinkiliikkuu.fi show – invested greatly to the execution of the programme with a project personnel during first three years of the initiative, but the continuation of the programme is not clearly found in terms of how it will be lead in the ongoing new strategy period. The information of the PA Programme was found from the sports and leisure section of the city's internet pages – thus it seems, that most of the backbone organizations are still tightly connected to sports.

Continuous communication is often connected to the tasks of backbone organization. All the programmes concentrated on building awareness of benefits of physical activity and the possibilities to be more physically active in the city-setting. It was also mentioned that the scope of the programmes needs new thinking, new partners, and broad cross-sectoral work. There wasn't any information found from the internet pages or from the written programmes how internal communication was planned or how it was executed. External communication had many actions, and it was seen as a key element to the programme, but it was unclear who was in charge of it. Helsinki was a forerunner in communication as well as they had built own internet pages, social media channels and other ways to make sure the strategic initiative was seen all over the city. They also had paid personnel dedicated to the communication actions.

Mutually reinforcing activities are always connected to the common agenda. They are the set of activities, which are seen most valuable to reach the objectives. Every collaborator finds its own way to help to reach the goal with concrete set of activities. The activities can be practical such as campaigns and services, or they can be targeted to systems change. Systems change can be reached with CI-approach for example when changing of the culture or a mindset is needed. It can also focus on changing policies. In these PA

Programmes the mutually reinforcing activities were mostly in four different categories: developing infrastructure, developing services, building specific actions, and developing decision-making and procedures of the city. The activities were mostly targeted to the whole lifespan. But it was also noted that systems changes are needed that are targeting community, environment and individuals. The planned activities needed a large network of partners, but it was unclear how the partners were integrated into the programme objectives or if the partners were committed to the same agenda knowing what their role in the big picture was.

Shared measurement is important in order to know whether the initiative has an impact; it tells if progress is made towards the common goal. Measurement should be agreed by everyone and there should be a common understanding that everyone is measuring the progress in the same way. Not every partner can have the same indicators, but few indicators should be picked that everyone is following. In the benchmarked programmes some cities had no information about evaluation processes nor indicators listed. Helsinki was in its own class with a large monitoring system build to measure the results operationally, tactically, and strategically (<https://liikkumisvahti.hel.fi/>). Järvenpää had indicators for activities but none on strategic level. Kontiolahti is monitoring the programme, but specific indicators were not listed. From Porvoo and Lappeenranta no indicators were found nor how the programme is evaluated. Also, the role of indicators of the health and well-being plans were not mentioned.

5.2. Principles of practice

Eight “principles of practice” have been recognized to make a collaborative initiative successful. The principles guide practitioners how to successfully put CI-initiative into action.

The five PA Programmes were analyzed whether the principles can be identified from the plans. Overall, there was hardly any information from the implementation of the programmes – neither in the written plans nor on the internet pages of the cities.

“Design and implement the initiative with priority on equity” is the first principle and it is often regarded as the most important. Engaging diverse perspectives to planning and to implementation is seen to make an initiative more successful. Equity also helps to enlarge the view for data collection, targeting solutions to larger population and to build people’s capacity to understand the scope of the collaborative. It is important to have an equity lens throughout governance, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

In the five PA Programmes equity was well present in the planning phase as large groups of partners were engaged. The information and the ideas were collected in workshops, questionnaires, and cross-sectoral working groups in all five cities. Also, the residents had often possibilities to bring out their ideas through questionnaires. The steering groups were usually built from internal decision-makers and cross-sectoral partners. Different city councils had a role on building the plans, and in some cases in monitoring the progress of the initiative. But as noted in the [study](#), it is very important to keep equity as a guiding principle of practice – how to listen and engage those who are mostly targeted in the initiatives? In these PA Programmes everyone wanted to get citizens who are physical inactive to be more physically active. Was that target group engaged in the planning or implementation? That information was not found from the plans.

“Use data to continuously learn, adapt and improve” is the second principle of practice. CI-approach is not a solution, but rather a problem-solving process. Therefore, it is important that data can be used to modify and adapt to vast changing environment. In the initiatives useful qualitative and quantitative data must be used for constant learning and strategic refinement. Challenges lie mostly on the skills needed to use the data and also in access to data for all necessary parties.

Data was well used in all the PA Programmes in creating the common agenda and the reinforcing activities. The data from existing infrastructure and the levels of physical activity among different target groups were documented. As with other principles it is difficult to say how the data is used in implementation. All the cities notified that the long-term plan and activities will be modified through experiences and feedback. Also, the idea of experiment and the data collected from the experiments were notified to use for refining the plan. Managing information and leading with knowledge are often used as terms in the Finnish initiatives. A common understanding of what this means in physical activity promotion is needed in the future.

“Include community members in the collaborative” means that those whose lives are mostly directed from the initiative, or the problem addressed, must be meaningfully engaged in governance, planning, implementation, and evaluation. Their involvement can bring crucial information but are often overlooked perspectives in decision-making tables. The opportunity to contribute to the process creates co-ownership and helps embed the work in the community. This principle was difficult to find from all the PA Programmes analyzed.

“Recruit and co-create with cross-sector partners” -principle highlights that all cross-sector partners play a role in the solution but are not active at the same time. In the collaborative all partners need to have specific and meaningful engagement where they can co-create the agenda, identify shared measures, and implement their work required to achieve the objectives. Challenges may occur because partners have different purposes (for example for-profit/non-profit, prevention-treatment) or it is difficult to engage community members of different target groups. Often there is also too little capacity or time to devote to cross-sector engagement. This principle was also difficult to find from the PA Programmes analyzed.

Leaders, backbone organization, steering group members, community leaders and action team leaders have an important role in creating a successful CI-initiative. *“Cultivate leaders with unique system leadership skills”* points out that the leaders must possess strong facilitation, management and convening skills. They also must be able to change their own organizations in service of the common agenda as well as build relationships and trust among collaborators. From the execution of the PA Programmes is difficult to find whether this principle is being followed. Helsinki’s plan has a specific target: Systemic change - together, innovatively. There the role of each city employee as a physical activity promoter is identified. In Porvoo and Kontiolahti the target is that every employee working with primary care needs to understand the role of physical activity and how to promote it. But the actual role of initiative leaders and their support is not recognized.

One of the principles of practice points out that a Collective Impact initiative should *“Focus on programme and system strategies”*. This means that the aim should not focus on individual organizations or programmes but should make a change in practices and behavior of professionals, shift social and cultural forms, and improve services system and change policies. This practice point was well seen in the PA Programmes of Lappeenranta and Helsinki as one of their selected objectives. Helsinki aims for systemic change in the whole city-setting – as noted already in the previous practice point. Lappeenranta also wants

to make a systemic change by integrating physical activity assessment throughout the decision-making process of the city. As Lappeenranta plan says: “the decisions made by the city have either a positive or a negative effect on physical activity of the residents. These effects need to be identified already in the planning phase”. Porvoo, Järvenpää and Kontiolahti plans were mostly targeted towards specific age-groups or organizations and the thrive towards systemic change was not present.

An important task of the backbone is to “*Build culture that foster relationships, trust, and respect across participants*”. This work needs continuous communication efforts, workshops, and meetings in order to achieve the common goal. Many of the cities planned to build new networks for the programme goals which indicates that the relationships across key partners will be fostered in a new way. In the PA Programmes better communication and awareness building was mentioned as a key area. Kontiolahti also mentioned the will to organize partner-workshops yearly to monitor and evaluate the execution of plan.

“*Customize for local context*” is the basis for each physical activity programme. The city is selected as a setting where the CI-initiative - the common agenda, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, shared measurement, and backbone support – is being planned and implemented. The local environment, infrastructure, people, decision making procedures and other background information needs to be considered.

The PA Programme must be integrated into existing strategies and plans of the city. The Collective Impact approach is normally used for solving complex social issues. According to this brief benchmark with five PA Programmes it seems that the characteristics and the principles of practice seem to fit also to PA promotion even though the cities were not using the approach as their scientific framework.

5.3. Main target groups and activities

All the cities targeted the actions towards the whole lifespan – from children to elderly. The other way to look at the target groups and actions was to divide the selected actions to development of services and activities, development of infrastructure and change of the procedures, planning and decision-making.

Järvenpää’s plan included a model for lifespan which was used to develop the sports sector of the city, but in the programme plan itself the activities were described according to the “spearhead” themes.

Kontiolahti’s and Helsinki’s approaches were quite identical. Kontiolahti described [socioecological model](#) in their programme but it was unclear how that was used in the selection of the target groups and actions.

Socioecological model includes different levels of physical activity promotion: environment/society, organization, surrounding environment/family, friends and individual. Helsinki used a modified framework from GAPP and WHO where the actions were targeted towards the overall system, community, and environment, as well as the individual level. As written earlier Lappeenranta and Porvoo collected the information mainly through workshops and questionnaires which also influenced what target groups and activities were selected. If a specific theoretical framework was used in the setting of the target groups or activities, it was not seen in the documented programmes.

	<i>Helsinki liikkuu – We all could move a bit more!</i>	<i>#Ilokseen #liikkuva #jäkeläinen</i>	<i>Liikkuva Kontiolahti</i>	<i>Liikutaan Porvoon mitalla!</i>	<i>Myö liikutaa!</i>
<i>Main target groups</i>	The actions are targeted at the overall system, community and environment, and individual level Increased overall awareness, promotion, and coordination of physical activity.	Lifespan model – according to “Spearhead” themes	Lifespan model Equal to health and wellbeing plan	Lifespan model – according to main activities and divided into developing organized – non-organized activities Sports clubs and private entrepreneurs	Lifespan model – according to main activities and divided into developing organized – non-organized activities City’s procedures
<i>Main activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase awareness - Systemic change: together, innovatively - Urban environment will attract people to be physically active - Small children will adopt basic skills and habits of PA - PA is part of the life of children and young people - City’s personnel is more physically active and sit less - Older people are more physically active - PA is utilized in the prevention and treatment of illnesses and rehabilitation 	“Spearhead” themes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing the accessibility and the use of outdoor activities - Lowering the gap to attend sport for all activities and other physical activity - Digital services in PA - Developing communication - Collaboration with neighboring municipalities 	Cross-sectoral themes in all age-groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Possibility to PA close to home - Inspiring and reachable communication - Accessibility - Experiments 	Activities that have special impact or are new actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kokkonniemi recreation area - Multisports-arena for youth - Modelcity for walking and cycling - Communication, networking, and experiments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing infrastructure and services: facilities located close to residents, easy access services for the whole lifespan - Developing procedures: more cooperation and networking, participation, communication and experimenting - Planning and decision-making: assessing the impacts of PA in all decision making

Table 3. Main target groups and activities.

All the cities wanted to invest for children and youth to make an impact in increasing physical activity levels. In the benchmarking of the programmes the following activities were seen in all the plans:

- Use of national [On the move programmes](#): Families on the Move, Early Childhood Education and Care on the Move, Schools on the Move, Studies on the Move
- Easy access hobbies and sports: after school activities, cooperation with sports clubs, “low threshold” activities
- Infrastructure close to home: parks, playgrounds, bike trails, sport facilities
- Organized sports: better cooperation, easy access activities, enough resources for the clubs
- Communication and marketing: better awareness and knowledge of the possibilities, education of personnel
- Other actions: health counselling, child, and school health care

For adults and elderly, the activities were more targeted to independent physical activity and active lifestyle choices. Regarding elderly it is important to understand better the needs of that specific target group, to have clearer roles in a very heterogenic group and service providers. There is also a need to find a way to communicate with them in a changed communication environment. The following actions were the most common for adults and elderly:

- Infrastructure close to home: pathways, nature, sports facilities
- Active transportation: walking, biking
- Services: better quality, education, more communication of the possibilities, innovation projects, applied and easy access groups, digital services at home
- Organized sports: better cooperation
- Communication and marketing: campaigns, accessibility, clearer roles
- Other actions: assisted living for elderly, health counselling, reducing sitting

The programmes also included many other objectives and actions concerning decision-making processes, networks, communication, and marketing. All the cities wanted to raise awareness of the importance of physical activity. It was also clear that the built environment has a huge impact on daily choices and therefore all the cities had many actions towards infrastructural development. From the programmes the following actions can be highlighted that were seen most common:

- Awareness building: all possible channels to be used, campaigns, education of personnel, cooperation with sports sector
- Policy and culture changes: common agenda, decision making processes, equality, digitalization, participation
- Infrastructure, active transportation: focus on daily choices rather than sports and leisure time activities, less sitting in schools and workplaces
- Cross-sectoral work: networks, roles, interventions to different target groups, experiments

The Physical Activity Programmes had a large variety of different actions that were targeted to the whole lifespan and to the system of the city. It remains to be seen whether the actions had an impact in the levels of physical activity among the residents.

5.4. Evaluation and monitoring of the impacts

In the Physical Activity Programmes one city was supreme compared to the others. Helsinki built the whole programme based on evidence-based information and they worked closely together with research institutes in order to set the objectives and assessment as clear and transparent as possible for all stakeholders and the residents. The city created “Liikkumisvahti” (<https://liikkumisvahti.hel.fi/>) where all the activities and target areas are monitored with operational, tactical, and strategical indicators. Operational indicators are tightly connected to practical activities and how they are executed. Tactical indicators address more the system or cultural changes in the city. Strategic indicators follow the actual physical activity levels which are the main indicators if the people are getting physically more active. With the indicators the city of Helsinki is measuring whether the actions are done as promised, if the work is efficient, if the actions selected are adequate and is there an impact to the daily lives and choices of the people living in Helsinki. The realistic timeframe for achieving more permanent changes in the physical activity behavior is estimated to be around five years of the start of the actions. Helsinki has also mentioned the following idea: “The programme also offers an opportunity to create a new perspective for the evaluation of the long-term impact of physical activity with regard to, for example, the state of health, work and functional capacity, learning results, and social and mental wellbeing.”

From the other cities Järvenpää had set operational indicators to follow the activities of the programme. In Kontiolahti and Järvenpää the PA Programme objectives were also closely related to mandatory health and well-being plan which is reported yearly. Porvoo and Lappeenranta did not give any information on the evaluation and monitoring of the programme.

Shared measurement	<i>Helsinki liikkuu – We all could move a bit more!</i>	<i>#Ilokseen #liikkuva #jäkeläinen</i>	<i>Liikkuva Kontiolahti</i>	<i>Liikutaan Porvoon mitalla!</i>	<i>Myö liikutaa!</i>
<i>Evaluation and monitoring</i>	For each main target and actions within - “Liikkumisvahti”: operational, tactical, strategical indicators For achieving more permanent changes is within approximately five years of the start of the actions	Part of the city’s larger development plan, no information how the monitoring and evaluation is done strategically and together with the collaborators	Health and wellbeing report yearly, part of report schedule of the city Local education committee: monitoring yearly targets Regional sport survey every 4 years Partner-workshop yearly	No information from evaluation and monitoring	No information from evaluation and monitoring

<i>Indicators</i>	Executive Board monitors by means of three strategic indicators: - % of PA and sedentary time during the waking hours of Helsinki residents (motion measurement data by age group and gender) - Children's physical capacity (Move! measurements) - % of people engaging in recreational exercise	For each main target and actions within - action done / not - quality - quantity No main strategic indicators are mentioned	No indicators listed	No indicators listed	No indicators listed
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Table 4. Evaluation, monitoring, and indicators.

6. Conclusions

The lack of physical activity among all age groups has caught the attention of decision-makers nationally and globally. Global trends such as digitalization and urbanization affect everyone's lives and thus have a direct impact on the choices we make for our health. The lack of physical activity is the fourth leading death cause among noncommunicable diseases, and it could be concurred with more active lifestyle. Almost everyone recognizes the benefits of physical activity. Why is it so hard? Why haven't the multiple national and global strategies, programmes, activities, and campaigns succeeded? This is the reason why some Finnish cities have started to build their own Physical Activity Programmes. There is an intention to do something differently this time; there is more scientific research, more information channels, better awareness and more will to make a change. And there is a need to save money from rising health costs.

The initial research questions of this High Impact Project were:

- What is the rationale for a PA Programme of a city?
- How are Collective Impact -characteristics visible in the programmes?
- How are the impacts of the programme evaluated?
- What are the most common actions and target groups?

The rationale for the programmes had a clear connection to the city's strategy in all the cities that were being benchmarked. The programmes also played some role in the mandatory health and wellbeing plans, but it was unclear what the role between them exactly was. As Finland and its ministries have different national strategies and programmes it is desirable that the cities would be implementing those strategies. This was seen in some of the activities planned but not so much on the strategical level. In a city-setting there are multiple strategies and programmes that are tightly connected to each other; it can be questioned though how these plans could be better coordinated or yet merged into one plan to make better impact and use the resources in more accurate way.

There are five characteristics identified in a successful CI-initiative. These PA Programmes were not built consciously through CI-characteristics, but they had many similarities. It is identified in CI-approach that a common agenda for all stakeholders is the most important starting point which leads to mutually reinforcing activities and shared measurement. All the PA Programmes were built in cooperation with many stakeholders and the activities involved many partners from different organizations and city departments. Everyone was aiming to solve the same problem: how to make people more physically active in the city. All the cities wanted to solve this complex challenge in collaboration with large network in a specific period of time. The reinforcing activities were mainly built from the eyes of the city; the change in the institutions, systems, and cultures often make the greatest impact – and the city itself must lead the change. Hopefully there is also room to engage the other stakeholders to experiment and build their own activities in line with the set target.

The sports and leisure time department of the city often was the driving force behind the PA Programme. It can also be called the backbone organization in these initiatives. This is interesting, because the idea in many of the plans was to specifically find new ways to activate people who are sedentary and not at all involved in sports activities. There was a need to engage all city departments, health professionals, education system, infrastructure etc. cross-sectorally and focus more on systems and policy changes rather than single activities. It can be questioned whether sports sector has the power to act and lead the initiative effectively and credibly. Helsinki was an outstanding example how the importance of the programme was politically and strategically cemented into the work of city council and its leaders.

Measuring impact in a Physical Activity Programme is not an easy task. The results can be seen after many years – Helsinki estimated that the first real changes might be seen after five years. Measuring impact gives an understanding whether the initiative is successful or whether it needs to be adjusted over time. [Early changes](#) are seen as a key to push systems changes forward as they tend to deepen and expand partnerships and engagement. Evaluation and monitoring were the weakest links in most of the PA Programmes – the variation was very big from Helsinki's "Liikkumisvahti" to no indicators at all. As physical activity is very subjective and personal, it will remain difficult to measure the real impact of the programmes. Some nationwide research is done via schools' MOVE-tests and in the army, but in a city-setting it is still difficult to know if the programme has an impact at scale. In the study by Riley et al (2021) the conclusions showed that CI-initiative can achieve greater health and wellbeing for the residents as the initiative had process-oriented elements such as building will, leveraging social capital, developing capacity, creating coalitions, fostering community leadership, and defining shared goals and objectives. Community-led initiative can have all intervention types: programmes, large scale built environment, policy change, community engagement – therefore it can improve wellbeing at scale even though the evaluation of the concrete results might be difficult.

Equity was seen as one of the most important practical principles in a CI-initiative. Engagement of the target group needs to be present while building the plan, in the decision-making groups and during implementation. This might be the biggest worry – as quite often in the field of sports. "Sports lovers" are making the plan for those who are not into sports or physical activity. Is the target group involved and how to get them involved? Are the research and theoretical frameworks used to understand the reasons behind physical inactivity? Equity also goes beyond only achieving set of outcomes – it is necessary to rethink the systems and structures that produce inequity, equity work by backbone and partners and meaningful inclusion.

The documentation of the PA Programmes was done excellently, but there was hardly any information about the execution seen in the internet pages of the cities excluding Helsinki. Most of the cities are running the programme at this moment, yet there was no follow-up information on the activities nor the indicators. It can be wondered whether the cities have enough resources to execute the programmes as planned or if the communication is done poorly.

The planned actions were often built for the whole lifespan. Day care centers and schools played a big role in activating children. Active transportation through walking and cycling was mostly seen the best way to get make an impact for adults and elderly. The other way to look at the action plans was to divide them into development of services and activities, development of infrastructure and change of the procedures, planning and decision-making. Services and activities included for example cooperation with organized sports and development of city's own services. It also highlighted knowledge-building through education of personnel and stakeholders and awareness raising and communication for the whole lifespan. Development of infrastructure was a very important objective in all the cities. The perspective of active transportation was mentioned in all the programmes as walking and cycling infrastructure need to be develop for creating a realistic option for a car. However, building sports facilities played quite a big role in the plans which naturally helps the organized sports, but hardly tackles the lack of physical activity in sedentary population unless the way the facilities are used is changed too. How decisions are made in the city and how they affect people's choices for physical activity was one of the angles that all cities wanted to enhance. The impact assessment of city's decision-making for physical activity was also the aim in the plans. This needs commitment from the whole city and structured model how the assessment is made throughout the whole organization. It is interesting to see how the decision-making processes are developed – and how this knowledge and model could be distributed for other cities.

In CI-approach one of the practice principles is “customize for local context”. As resources are limited there should be more collaboration between cities and municipalities that are trying to solve the problematic behind the lack of physical activity in city-setting. The CI-approach could be used to build a national framework which includes the research and knowledge base, the strategies, laws, programmes, ideas for evaluation and monitoring and set of activities that are seen to have most impact. The cities would then customize the framework into their own needs. Of course, the existing plans are benchmarked by other cities who are building new programmes, but the information is not found nor gathered anywhere as a “databank”. Which organization could act as a backbone for collecting this important data? Who could take the lead and create a network for the cities in physical activity promotion? Is it a task for the sports sector, for example The Finnish Olympic Committee, or should there be more political power behind the important task? How to merge the health and wellbeing plans and PA programmes or is it needed?

The main idea of the PA Programmes was to make something different this time – to make an impact in the long run. “How things are done rather than what is done” – was the idea in Helsinki. Systems and culture changes are needed to make a difference. It takes time, but they lay a good foundation for the change. The built environment needs to push us to make better choices, there needs to be new leadership and modern decision-making processes and all the stakeholders need to strive for the same aim. Systems changes take many forms, and they are not predictable. With Collective Impact approach the challenge to solve the lack of physical activity could be tackled in a more systematic way.

Appendix:

Summary of Physical Activity Programmes

Sources:

[Sports act](#)

[UKK-institute](#)

[Local government act](#)

[WHO](#)

[Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018-2030](#)

[Physical Activity Factsheet Finland 2021](#)

[Health Care Act](#)

[ORS Impact and Spark Policy Institute: When Collective Impact has an Impact: A Cross-Site Study of 25 Collective Impact Initiatives](#)

[Kania and Kramer: Collective Impact](#)

[Riley C, et al. BMJ Open 2021: Can a collective-impact initiative improve well-being in three US communities? Findings from a prospective repeated cross-sectional study](#)

[Collective Impact Forum: Collective Impact Principles of Practice](#)

[Finnish Olympic Committee](#)

[Ministry of Education](#)

[THL: Physical Activity promotion in municipalities](#)

[Marin's Government programme](#)

[Let's Get moving – Helsinki PA Programme 2019-2021](#)

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[Käypä hoito -suositus](#)

[THL: Sports activity in Finland](#)

[MOVE-tests](#)

[THL: TEAviisari](#)

[Ministry of Social Affairs and Health: National Guidelines for reducing sitting](#)

[Liikkumisvahti](#)

[Sosioecological model](#)

[On the Move Programmes](#)

The internet-pages: [Helsinki](#) / [Järvenpää](#) / [Kontiolahti](#) / [Porvoo](#) / [Lappeenranta](#)