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# **EU PERSPECTIVES ON SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

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This paper provides an insight into sport and physical activity promotion throughout EU, with a particular focus on Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands and the UK.

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## SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

At European Union level, the past decade has seen a proliferation of policy interventions which seek to increase participation in sport and physical activity.

The Lisbon Treaty has given the European Union a 'soft competence' on sport, however, a tailored sports strategy is expected in 2012. The upcoming strategy will provide a basis for the promotion of physical integrity, physically active lifestyles and social inclusion.

The European Commission's White Paper on Sport recommends that Member States:

- examine how to promote the concept of active living in their respective nations;
- strengthen cooperation between health, education and sport sectors at ministerial level, so as to maximise the potential of sport for public health; and
- recognise the utility of sport as a means of promoting '*social inclusion, integration and equal opportunities*', particularly in reference to groups which are traditionally under-represented in sport (e.g. people with disabilities, and those from less privileged backgrounds).<sup>1</sup>

Research suggests it is only in the last decade that countries within the EU27 '*comprehensive national strategies for the promotion of health-enhancing physical activity*'.

The publication of the World Health Organisation's 'Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health' and their 'European Ministerial Conference on Counteracting Obesity', has been influential.

Existing strategies tend to be under-pinned by a common theme, namely: '*physical activity should be promoted as part of daily life and across all settings where daily life takes place (at home, workplaces, schools, for transport purposes etc)*'.

Finland, the UK and the Netherlands stand-out amongst other regions within the EU27 as having a longer history of promoting physical activity. The Netherlands and Denmark have the highest and second highest percentage of the population taking part in moderate physical activity seven days per-week respectively (based on 2005 figures). For these reasons strategies, from these regions have been examined in detail.

### **Finland**

Since the 1970s Finland has gone from the 'world record' holder in cardiovascular disease to one of only two countries to arrest downward trends in activity (2005).

Key elements of the Finnish approach include:

- A rigorous and systematic approach;

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid

- Target groups – focusing on the elderly. Sophisticated assessment of key behavioural drivers for each target group;
- Annual national physical activity survey to inform strategy and evaluate policy;
- Long term research and analysis of physical and social sports science;
- Best use of natural assets, for example floodlit ski and walking paths;
  
- Health as a priority: sport and physical activity are seen as a major input into health policy. The focus is on having fun to encourage participation, rather than a competitive culture; and
  
- High level of funding: public and private sectors invest highly in sport and physical activity.

The organisation of sport and physical activity is devolved to the lowest level (local councils and clubs), with investment in coaches and informal teachers at that level.

### **The Netherlands**

The Netherlands current sport and physical activity is underpinned by a desire to:

*...address the problem [of inactivity] from every available angle, including the physical and social environment in which people find themselves.*

Interventions are aimed at five intersecting areas: neighbourhoods; schools; the workplace; healthcare; and sport.

The policy interventions contained in the Dutch strategy are marked by:

- Ambitious targets;
- A joined up approach incorporating national and local government, healthcare, business, communities and sporting bodies;
- A broad conception of activity with emphasis on social and health aspects rather than the competitive side of sport; and
- A holistic approach to individual activity, that is, the strategy caters from children to older people.

### **Denmark**

The Danish strategy represents a variant on the others. Sports and physical activity are incorporated into a more general health strategy. The regions current strategy (2002-2010):

- emphasises *collective* responsibility – i.e. it is as much the responsibility of the individual as it is of the government to improve public health through physical participation; and
- recognises the merit in promoting physical activity as a form of rehabilitation, and encourages the integration of this idea into the training of the health care and educational professions.

The strategy does not outline measurable targets (preventing quantifiably evaluation). Furthermore, although target groups have been identified, strategies to address the 'collective challenges' are ambiguous and lack specific detail. They are more aspirational than definite.

## The UK

This paper focuses on strategies in England and Wales, as Scotland's strategies were previously examined in an earlier research paper (NIAR 112/09 'Background Information – Participation in Sports and Physical Activity').

'Game Plan: a strategy for delivering Government's sport and physical activity objectives' (2002-2008), outlines the long-vision (until 2020) for physical activity in England, that is:

*...to increase significantly levels of sport and physical activity, particularly among disadvantaged groups; and to achieve sustained levels of success in international competition.*

The strategy recommends policy interventions that seek to inform individuals; offer financial incentives; promote best practice; and encouraging public recognition of achievement in sport and physical activity.

The strategy includes:

- recommendations based on thorough research into physical activity and sport participation levels;
- a combination of short and long term objectives, some of which are *quantifiable* (e.g. 70% regular sport/exercise participation by 2020);
- a 'time-line for action' outlined at the beginning of the process;
- a wide range of government-led incentives, to encourage grassroots participation; and
- a 'twin track' approach which emphasises the advantages of participation in sport and physical activity for the individual (health, fun, success) as well as the nation/region (national health, economic benefits, collective pride).

## Wales

'Creating an Active Wales' (2010-2020), is the most recent and perhaps most ambitious strategy examined. It aims at increasing activity through a partnership between the Assembly, local authorities, the NHS, the Third Sector (comprising of volunteer organisations, social enterprises and charities) and local communities. The plan has 4 main 'strategic aims':

- to develop and maintain a physical environment that makes it easier and safer for people to choose to be more physically active;
- to support children and young people to live active lives, and become active adults;
- to encourage more adults to be more active, more often, throughout life; and
- to increase participation in sport, by all sectors of the population.

The programme has the following significant traits:

- it is cross departmental and across government, including regional and local authorities;
- It includes the Third Sector who have been afforded a parity of importance with Government Departments;
- Aims, objectives (and the key themes to underpin these) have been clearly identified and agreed upon by all participants from the beginning;
- Targets are quantifiable, and continuous data analysis will provide periodic assessments of whether participation is increasing across the board; and
- Priority groups have been identified within each of the strategic aims, and the cooperation of other Departments and the Third Sector should ensure that these groups are targeted from as many angles as possible.

### **Commonality**

Similarities across the strategies include:

- emphasis on a shared approach and the view that physical activity promotion is the responsibility of all levels of government, communities, the private sector, sporting bodies and educational institutions;
- the use of broad conception of physical activity to include work and home related activities. The strategies share an emphasis on physical activity as an integral part of daily life;
- Where leisure-time activity is considered the strategies suggest activities that are fun and which encourage activity for the sake of activity will be more likely to encourage participation among the least active than competitive sports;
- consideration the wider environment – whether that be the work place or infra-structure – and examine ways these elements could be used to encourage participation;
- inclusion of funding streams; and
- a stratified approach, tailoring specific projects to particular groups

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The following paper provides insight into sport and physical activity promotion throughout European Union (EU). The paper begins by outlining recent developments in EU policy, before examining policy trends in the EU27. A number of case studies are then considered: Finland; the Netherlands; Denmark; and the UK. These have been chosen on one of two bases: if the region has had a long history of promoting physical activity or if the region's promotional activities have been particularly successful.

## 2 EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union's enthusiasm for physical activity and sport promotion has been growing in recent years, and this has been reflected in legislation and international policy initiatives.

The Lisbon Treaty has given the European Union a 'soft competence' on sport. This means that the European Commission shall develop a specific EU sports policy for its Member States, and this shall be supported by a budget.<sup>2</sup> It is expected that this policy shall be launched in 2012.

It is intended that this new competence, and the forthcoming sports policy, shall be used to promote physical integrity<sup>3</sup>, a physically active lifestyle (through tackling health related issues), and social inclusion (by addressing barriers to those groups traditionally under-represented in sport, e.g. people with disabilities).

The European Commission has also produced a White Paper on Sport. The White Paper sets out the potential benefits of higher sport participation for EU Member States, and aims to '*give strategic orientation on the role of sport in Europe, to encourage debate on specific problems [and] to enhance the visibility of sport in EU policy-making*'.<sup>4</sup>

Recognising the positive contribution which sport and increased physical activity can make to public health, the Commission's White Paper has recommended that:

- Member States of the EU examine how to promote the concept of active living in their respective nations; and
- cooperation is strengthened between health, education and sport sectors at ministerial level, so as to maximise the potential of sport for public health; and
- Member States should recognise the utility of sport as a means of promoting '*social inclusion, integration and equal opportunities*', particularly in reference to groups which are traditionally under-represented in sport (e.g. people with disabilities, and those from less privileged backgrounds).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Consolidated Version Of The Treaty On The Functioning Of The European Union, *Official Journal of the European Union*, <http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:115:0047:0199:EN:PDF> (accessed 25/01/2010)

<sup>3</sup> Promoting physical activity as part of a healthy and typical lifestyle

<sup>4</sup> European Commission on Sport, White Paper on Sport [http://ec.europa.eu/sport/white-paper/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/sport/white-paper/index_en.htm) (accessed 14/01/10)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

### 3 EU 27

Examining physical activity promotion within EU 27 suggests that, unlike promotion of sport, there remain few examples of *'comprehensive national strategies for the promotion of health-enhancing physical activity'*. With the launch of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) 'Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health' and their 'European Ministerial Conference on Counteracting Obesity', however, there has been a growing interest in promoting physical activity. Such promotional strategies have tended to have a common theme, developing the notion that *'physical activity should be promoted as part of daily life and across all settings where daily life takes place (at home, workplaces, schools, for transport purposes etc).'*<sup>6</sup>

Finland is a notable exception to this pattern of late development. The region has a long history of physical activity promotion stretching back over 30 years. The Netherlands and the UK have also had a longer history of physical activity promotion in comparison with other regions.<sup>7</sup>

Comparative data on physical activity, on an EU wide basis, is lacking. Studies are limited to the Eurobarometer on 'Self reported physical activity', which was published in two separate editions – one in 2002 examining the EU15 and one in 2005 examining the EU25.<sup>8</sup>

The tables outlined in Annex 1, which are drawn from the 2005 Eurobarometer, demonstrate that despite its longer history of promoting physical activity the UK had the sixth highest percentage of individuals taking part in zero days of moderate intensity activity per week (table 1, annex 1).<sup>9</sup> The Netherlands, by contrast, had the lowest percentage of individuals taking part in zero days of moderate activity per week, and the highest percentage of those taking part in moderate intensity activity seven days a week (tables 1 and 4, annex 1). Denmark has the second highest rate of individuals participating in seven days moderate intensity activity. Despite its long history of activity promotion, 34 percent of Finland's population take part in physical activity zero day per week (compared to 13 percent in the Netherlands) and only 18 percent of the population take part in physical activity seven days a week (Netherlands:43 percent) (tables 1 and 4, annex 1).<sup>10</sup> However, despite this, amongst health experts Finland is considered to be one of only two countries to have halted downward trends toward sedentary inactivity amongst its citizens (the other being Canada).<sup>11</sup>

### 4 FINLAND

<sup>6</sup> Daugbjerg *et al.* (2009) Promotion of Physical Activity in the European Region: Content Analysis of 27 National Policy Documents. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 9, 805

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>8</sup> EU Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health (2008), Working paper on physical activity and health p14

<sup>9</sup> Information refers to 2005, published in 2006 and the latest available.

<sup>10</sup> European Commission, Directorate – General for Health and Consumers (2006), Self-reported physical activity levels, 2005, selected European countries

<http://www.heartstats.org/temp/Tabsp6.9spweb07.xls> (accessed 09/02/10)

<sup>11</sup> The Guardian (2005), Fat to fit: how Finland did it,

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/befit/story/0,15652,1385645,00.html> (accessed 09/02/10)



Historically, the Finnish population has been physically active, and has had great enthusiasm for participation in sport. The Finnish State has helped to mould such an ethos – for example, physical education in schools has been mandatory for both boys and girls for almost 170 years. Sport and physical activity are, therefore, part of the Finnish cultural identity.

Nevertheless, Finland has not remained unaffected by the declining levels of physical activity across Europe. In the 1970s Finland held the ‘world record’ for heart disease. By 2005 the number of men dying from cardiovascular disease had dropped by approximately 65%, with deaths from lung cancer dropping by around the same amount. Finland began its healthy living strategy by encouraging communities to quit smoking and lower cholesterol, with quit and win competitions in the 1970s.<sup>12</sup>

The Finnish government then switched focus towards physical activity, the section below outlines the two major strategies introduced since the 1990s.

#### **4.1 POLICY IN FINLAND**

##### ***‘Finland on the Move’ (1991-94)***

- This was the first major national policy initiative, which was launched to develop, improve and increase appropriate conditions and services for exercise and sport at the local level across the country (particularly through the joint work of civic organisations and municipal authorities);
- The strategy was to support local projects initiated by local ideas and resources (local projects applied for support on a competitive basis);
- Support consisted of partial funding, authorised status for projects, training and consultation on various aspects of sports and exercise promotion;
- The programme ran for four years, cost approximately \$2 million in total, and granted \$1.2 million to 94 projects throughout Finland which sought to promote physical activity; and<sup>13</sup>
- Evaluations of this first programme have found that the experiences were very positive: competition for sponsorship money and authorised status encouraged numerous local ideas and initiatives which corresponded with local needs, and resources.<sup>14</sup>

##### ***‘Fit for Life’ (1995-2000, 2000-2005, 2005-2010)***

- This programme was the product of the favourable experiences of the previous ‘Finland on the Move’ initiative;
- The programme was jointly launched by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, and the Ministry of Education;

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<sup>12</sup> The Guardian (2005), Fat to fit: how Finland did it, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/befit/story/0,15652,1385645,00.html> (accessed 09/02/10)

<sup>13</sup> I. Vuori, B. Lankenau, M. Pratt, Physical Activity Policy and Program Development: The Experience of Finland, UKK Institute, Finland (2004)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

- Whereas the previous policy was catered to the population as a whole, this programme was specifically targeted towards the 40-60 age group;
- The programme's overall aim was to increase the number of regularly active citizens by 10% in five years;
- The basic strategy and approach was similar to that of 'Finland on the Move': local projects competed for funding, status and support;
- After only the first year of its inception, data showed that the programme was 20% of the way towards its specified target;
- By the end of 2003, more than 1,500 local projects had been supported by the programme; and<sup>15</sup>
- The programme has been very successful, as evidenced by the fact that it has been extended to run for three consecutive 5-year periods.

Since the beginning of 'Finland on the Move' in 1991 until the present day, the general strategy and approach of the programme(s) has remained much the same. Sponsorship ('seed money') is granted to local projects geared towards increasing participation in physical activity, and the prospect of this sponsorship has spurred on hundreds of local initiatives. Local projects have focused on activities such as Nordic walking, cross country skiing and balls games, which are either free or subsidised to prevent exclusion.<sup>16</sup>

There has, however, been greater emphasis placed upon improving the environmental conditions for physical activity, creating a permanent network of services supporting engagement in various types of physical activities, and increasing 'lifestyle' physical activity in transport, domestic chores, and other aspects of daily life.

## **4.2 WHAT CAN NORTHERN IRELAND LEARN FROM FINLAND?**

Key elements of the Finnish approach are:

- A rigorous and systematic approach;
- Target groups – focus on the elderly. Sophisticated assessment of key behavioural drivers for each target group;
- Annual national physical activity survey to inform strategy and evaluate policy;
- Long term research and analysis of physical and social sports science;
- Best use of natural assets, for example floodlit ski and walking paths;

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<sup>15</sup> N. Cavill, C. Foster, P. Oja, B. Martin, An evidence-based approach to physical activity promotion and policy development in Europe: contrasting case studies, *Promotion & Education* (2006)

<sup>16</sup> The Guardian (2005), Fat to fit: how Finland did it, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/befit/story/0,15652,1385645,00.html> (accessed 09/02/10)

- **Health as a priority:** sport and physical activity are seen as a major input into health policy. The focus is on having fun to encourage participation, rather than a competitive culture;
- **High level of funding:** public and private sectors invest highly in sport and physical activity; and
- The organisation of sport and physical activity is devolved to the lowest level (local councils and clubs), with investment in coaches and informal teachers at that level.<sup>17</sup>

## 5 NETHERLANDS

### 5.1 NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR SPORT AND EXERCISE

The current Dutch physical activity promotion strategy, the '*National Action Plan for Sport and Exercise*', launched in 2006 (and scaled up in 2008), outlines policy interventions across five sectors: neighbourhoods; schools; the workplace; healthcare; and sport.

All interventions are based upon the premise that the Government will:

*...address the problem [of inactivity] from every available angle, including the physical and social environment in which people find themselves.*

The campaign has three overriding targets:

- by 2012, at least 70% of adults (18+) do the recommended amount of exercise (2005: 63%);
- by 2012, at least 50% of young people (aged 4-17) do the recommended amount of exercise (2005: 40%); and
- by 2012, no more than 5% of adults in the Netherlands are inactive (2005: 6%) .

**Neighbourhoods** – specific interventions under this heading will attempt to address physical activity among older people and the unemployed. The policy which relied on work from local government and local sports clubs was first trialled in 25 locations during 2006 and then rolled out in 2008.

**Schools** – the aim of the strategy with regard schools has been to increase pupil participation in sport both during and after school. The strategy saw schools work in conjunction with sports associations. Non-competitive activities such as dance have been used to encourage activity amongst the inactive pupils.

**Workplace** – the aim of this strand of the strategy has been to ensure that at least 25% of Dutch companies should have a formal exercise policy by 2010. Such exercise programmes have included 'cycle to work' schemes, lunchtime walking and bringing in sports federation to develop tailor-made sports opportunities for the business sector.

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<sup>17</sup> 'Game Plan: a strategy for delivering Government's sport and physical activity objectives, A Joint Department of Culture, Media and Sport/Strategy Unit Report (2002).

**Healthcare** – the strategy has introduced methods to enable people with chronic illness or disability to take part in physical activity. It has introduced concepts such as ‘exercise on prescription’, which local health practitioners refer patients to ‘*appropriate, and if necessary specially adapted forms of sports and exercise*’. Such projects have been supervised by the Netherlands Institute for Sport and Physical Activity, but have incorporated a joined up approach between the Institute, local health authorities, and local sports associations.

**Sport** – the sport sectors are highlighted in the strategy as the most important players in increasing participation, particularly among inactive groups. Easily accessible forms of activity, such as gymnastics, cycling, walking and swimming rather than competitive sports have been prioritised. Providing information and education to the public has also formed part of the strategy, along with interactions with the four other spheres as outlined above. Any projects supported have been picked on the basis that they are cost effective and have had the potential to be self sustaining after initial government funding.

## 5.2 WHAT CAN NORTHERN IRELAND LEARN FROM THE NETHERLANDS?

- Ambitious targets;
- A joined up approach incorporating national and local government, healthcare, business, communities and sporting bodies;
- A broad conception of activity with emphasis on social and health aspects rather than the competitive side of sport; and
- A holistic approach to individual activity, that is, the strategy caters for all, from children to older people.

## 6 DENMARK

Denmark’s first national health promotion programme (*‘Health Promotion Programme of the Government of Denmark’*) was launched in 1989. It aimed to improve the general health of the nation by increasing life expectancy, reducing preventable diseases, and reducing inequality in health provision. Its most recent national programme (*‘Healthy Throughout Life’ 2002-2010*) follows suit from the first programme, although it has given more emphasis to the promotion of public health through increasing physical activity.

### 6.1 ‘HEALTHY THROUGHOUT LIFE’ 2002-2010 <sup>18</sup>

This programme was launched by the Ministry of the Interior and Health in 2002. Although the programme approaches the issue of improving public health from numerous angles (reducing smoking, alcohol consumption, accidents etc), it also pays particular attention to the promotion of physical activity and has established some targets and strategies.

The overarching theme of the programme is ‘collective challenges’, which advocates the idea that responsibility for each of the targets should be shared between the Government, the Third Sector (comprising of volunteer organisations, social

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<sup>18</sup> ‘Healthy throughout Life – the targets and strategies for public health policy of the Government of Denmark, 2002–2010’, Government of Denmark (2002), <http://www.folkesundhed.dk/media/healthythroughoutlife.pdf> (accessed 29/01/2010)

enterprises and charities), the Public and Private sectors, communities, families, and individuals.

In relation to physical activity specifically, the policy notes that 20-30% of the population was 'so sedentary that this comprises a risk to health risk', and noted that physical activity levels correlated with education and income. It set out its target for physical activity thus:

*'The number of people who are physically active should be increased considerably, and physical activity should become a natural part of everyday life.'*

To achieve this aim, the policy set out a three-fold strategy:

1. To provide general information on recommendations for physical activity, including targeted information and counselling for physically inactive people. Information about the significance of physical activity should be included in the education of health care workers, teachers, child-care workers, and other professionals.
2. Making physical activity a natural part of everyday life, through such measures as improving opportunities for physical activity. The Third Sector should be particularly involved in this respect.
3. Ensuring physical activity as part of treatment and rehabilitation.

To achieve these aims for physical activity, the policy outlined the 'collective challenges' which need to be addressed. Within these 'collective challenges', the target groups which require particular attention are identified: children and young people, people with little 'tradition of experience' of physical activity (e.g. ethnic minorities), and the elderly. Responsibility for addressing these challenges is then shared between the government, communities and the individual (see below).

Breakdown of responsibility:

- Individuals:
  - Children: be physically active at least 60 minutes per day;
  - Adults: be physically active at least 30 minutes per day;
  - Support children and young people in becoming or remaining physically active;
  - Make daily transport active by cycling, taking the stairs or in other ways; and
  - Support sedentary people in becoming physically active;
- Communities:
  - Create physical environments that promote physical activity in such settings as schools, child-care centres and workplaces; and
  - Provide comprehensive schemes that can motivate people who do not have a tradition for being physically active, including ethnic minorities.
- Public Sector:
  - Ensure substantial information dissemination on the importance of physical activity for health; and

- Focus on physical activity in preventing disease and as part of treatment
- Include information on physical activity in the education of health care personnel, teaching personnel and other personnel.

Although no formal evaluation of the programme has been carried out (this would be difficult, since the policy did not outline measurable targets), it is perhaps encouraging that physical activity levels have increased in Denmark whilst the programme was in operation: 7% increase in those exercising/playing sport once a week, 5% increase in those exercising/playing sport once or twice a week.<sup>19</sup>

## 6.2 WHAT CAN NORTHERN IRELAND LEARN FROM DENMARK?

- Emphasis is given to *collective* responsibility – i.e. it is as much the responsibility of the individual as it is of the government to improve public health through physical participation;
- The programme recognises the merit in promoting physical activity as a form of rehabilitation, and encourages the integration of this idea into the training of the health care and educational professions;
- However, the programme has not outlined measurable targets (and this has meant that it cannot be quantifiably evaluated); and
- Target groups have been identified, but strategies to address the ‘collective challenges’ are ambiguous and lack specific detail. They are more aspirational than definite.

## 7 THE UK

This section outlines recent policy interventions in England and Wales, for detailed information on Scotland, please see Northern Ireland Assembly Research Paper ‘Background Information – Participation in Sports and Physical Activity’ (NIAR 112/09).<sup>20</sup>

### 7.1 ENGLAND

Partly in response to the statistic that 68% of the adult population in England were not taking moderate exercise at least 5 times a week, the UK Government commissioned a report into the future of sport and physical activity. In 2002 the UK Department of Culture, Media and Sport published the report (below) as well as recommendations for the ways in which the government could achieve higher levels of physical activity.

#### 7.1.1 ‘GAME PLAN: A STRATEGY FOR DELIVERING GOVERNMENT’S SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OBJECTIVES’ (2002-2008)<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Special Eurobarometer 213, ‘Citizens of the European Union and Sport’, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_213\\_summ\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_213_summ_en.pdf), (accessed 29/01/2010)

<sup>20</sup> see Northern Ireland Assembly Research Paper ‘Background Information – Participation in Sports and Physical Activity’ available <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/researchandlibrary/publications2009.htm>

<sup>21</sup> A Joint DMCS/Strategy Unit Report (2002) Game Plan: a strategy for delivering the Government’s sport and physical activity objectives.

'Game Plan' was not government policy per se, as it was commissioned on the basis that it would provide realistic *recommendations* to the government on how to increase levels of physical activity. Nevertheless, it offers insight into the strategic approach of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, whose recommendations could be applied to Northern Ireland.

'Game Plan' outlines the long-term vision for 2020:

*'to increase significantly levels of sport and physical activity, particularly among disadvantaged groups; and to achieve sustained levels of success in international competition'*

Of the report's three main objectives, one deals specifically with increasing physical activity levels (in a quantifiable way);

*'To encourage a mass participation culture (with as much emphasis on physical activity as competitive sport)... Our target is for 70% (currently ~30%) of the population to be reasonably active (for example 30 minutes of moderate exercise five times a week) by 2020'*

In particular, 'Game Plan' aims to increase physical activity and sport participation at grassroots level among those who are economically disadvantaged, especially the young, women, and older people. In order to do this, it identified the major barriers to participation affecting these groups of people being lack of:

- time;
- finance;
- information;
- motivation; and
- coaches/facilities.

It set out a number of recommended policy instruments for the government to adopt in order to attain the stated aims/objectives:

- Providing relevant and timely information: ensuring participants and co-organisers have sufficient information to make informed choices;
- Offering financial incentives: maximum use of government funding agreements with partner organisations, to ensure that required outcomes and expected quality standards are met. Good performance should be rewarded, and poor performance should be met with sanctions;
- Promoting best practice: standard setting, quality control, and disseminating best practice are all roles that government can undertake; and
- Using status incentives as encouragement: public recognition/government approval/government trademarks etc.<sup>22</sup>

### **7.1.2 WHAT CAN NORTHERN IRELAND LEARN FROM ENGLAND?**

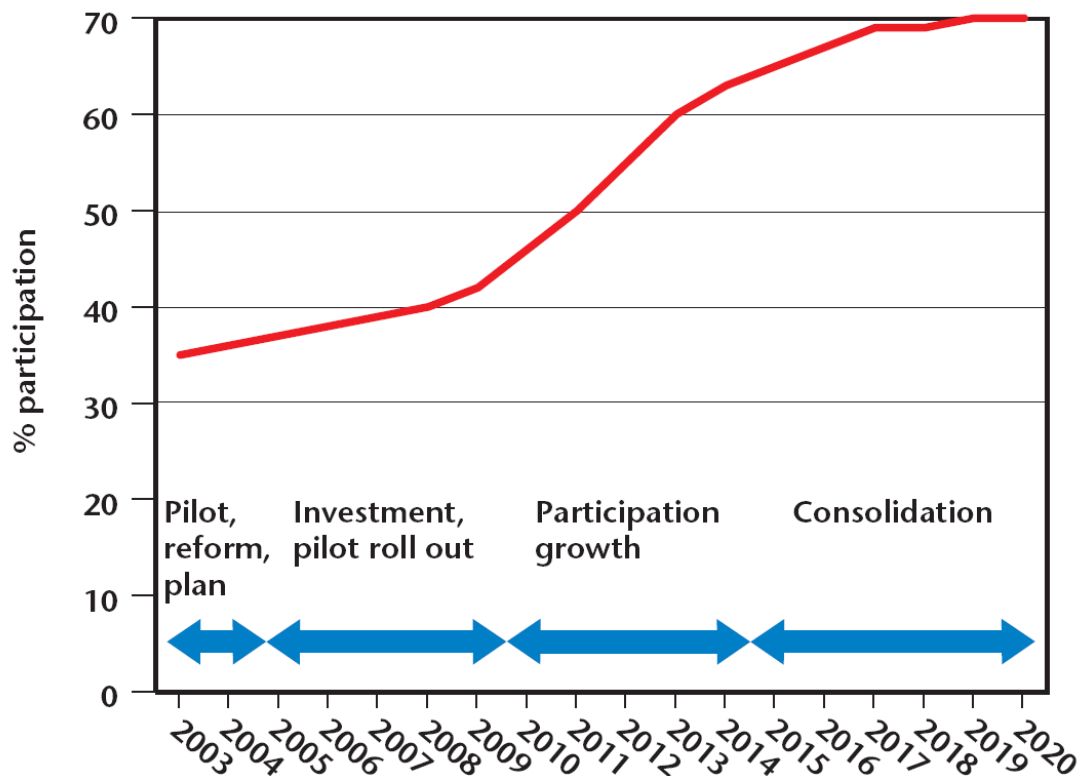
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<sup>22</sup> Ibid

There are numerous examples of good practice within the 'Game Plan':

- The recommendations are based on thorough research of the state of the (then) current physical activity and sport participation levels in England;
- A combination of short and long term objectives, some of which are *quantifiable* (e.g. 70% regular sport/exercise participation by 2020);
- Since the major objective is quantifiable, this allows for meaningful periodic (as well as overall) evaluations to be carried out;
- Importantly, a 'time-line for action' was outlined at the beginning of the process, so that progress could be monitored in relation to projections (see below);

Figure 1: Participation four-stage growth objective



- A wide range of government-led incentives, to encourage grassroots participation; and
- The adoption of the 'twin track' approach emphasises the advantages of participation in sport and physical activity for the individual (health, fun, success) as well as the nation/region (national health, economic benefits, collective pride). This gives appeal to the 'Game Plan' for those whom the project is not particularly designed for, since the objectives are for the benefit of the collective interest also.



## 7.2 WALES

In 2005 the Welsh Assembly set out a long-term strategic vision to place sport and physical activity at the heart of Welsh life and a focus of Government policy. Since then, several policies have been initiated – for example ‘The Food and Fitness Plan’ and ‘The Walking and Cycling Action Plan. The most recent policy (*‘Creating an Active Wales’*), launched in January 2010, is perhaps the most encompassing and ambitious plan to date.

### 7.2.1 ‘CREATING AN ACTIVE WALES’ (2010-2020)<sup>23</sup>

To achieve its vision of ‘an active, healthy and inclusive Wales’, this plan aims to promote sport and physical activity through a partnership between the Assembly, local authorities, the NHS, the Third Sector and local communities.

The plan has 4 main ‘strategic aims’:

1. Active environments - to develop and maintain a physical environment that makes it easier and safer for people to choose to be more physically active.
2. Active children and young people - to support children and young people to live active lives, and become active adults.
3. Active adults - to encourage more adults to be more active, more often, throughout life.
4. Sport for all - to increase participation in sport, by all sectors of the population.

These aims are to be achieved with the help of other government programmes, for example the ‘Walking and Cycling Action Plan’.

Not only has the plan set measurable targets, it has also identified key indicators which can be monitored to ensure participation rates are increasing across the whole population. For example, data relating to profession and educational attainment will be examined to ensure participation is increasing across all socio-economic backgrounds.

The plan has outlined seven key ‘themes’:

- national leadership;
- local delivery;
- communication;
- workforce development;
- inequities;
- wider partnerships; and
- developing the evidence base.

Objectives (‘Actions’) are then categorised under these themes (with corresponding dates), as is the leading Government Department and other participating governmental bodies. See the below example, which details the actions to be undertaken to develop the national leadership theme.

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Creating an Active Wales’, <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/phhs/publications/actiwales/100121actiwalesen.pdf> (accessed 29/01/2010)

Table 1: Wales: National Leadership Theme

<b>Action</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Date</b>
Welsh Assembly Government, Welsh Local Government Association, Sports Council Wales and Big Lottery to support Local Authorities to develop infrastructure and facilities that share best practice across Spatial Plane Areas and builds on programmes such as 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Schools	Department of Heritage - Culture, Welsh Language and Sport	DPHHP/WLGA/SCW/Big Lottery	2010-2012

DPHHP: Department for Public Health and Health Professions

WLGA: Welsh Local Government Association

SJ&LG: Social Justice & Local Government

SCW: Sports Council Wales

Table 2: Wales: Sports Participation

<b>Action</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Date</b>
Support Third Sector and Communities First Partnerships to deliver physical activity opportunities by broadening their existing programmes of work with a focus on people who would not normally participate in sport	Sports Council Wales	Third Sector/Communities First	2010-2015

## **7.2.2 WHAT CAN NORTHERN IRELAND LEARN FROM ‘CREATING AN ACTIVE WALES?’**

- One of the programme’s greatest strengths is that it is cross departmental: strategies are divided among numerous Government Departments, as well as with particular local authorities;
- The Third Sector has been included – and has been awarded the same level as importance as Government Departments;
- Aims, objectives (and the key themes to underpin these) have been clearly identified and agreed upon by all participants from the beginning;
- Targets are quantifiable, and continuous data analyse will provided periodic assessments of whether participation is increasing across the board;
- Priority groups have been identified within each of the strategic aims, and the cooperation of other Departments and the Third Sector should ensure that these groups are targeted from as many angles as possible; and
- The very detailed and unambiguous nature of the programme should ensure that it can be thoroughly evaluated (and monitored) in terms of the achievement of aims and objectives.

## **8 COMMONALITY IN APPROACHES**

The strategies outlined above share some common characteristics which may be adopted in a Northern Ireland approach:

- emphasis on a shared approach and the view that physical activity promotion is the responsibility of all levels of government, communities, the private sector, sporting bodies and educational institutions;
- the use of broad conception of physical activity to include work and home related activities. The strategies share an emphasis on physical activity as an integral part of daily life;
- Where leisure-time activity is considered the strategies suggest activities that are fun and which encourage activity for the sake of activity will be more likely to encourage participation among the least active than competitive sports;
- consideration the wider environment – whether that be the work place or infra-structure – and examine ways these elements could be used to encourage participation;
- inclusion of funding streams; and
- a stratified approach, tailoring specific projects to particular groups

**Annex 1 Eurobarometer 2005**

**0 Days of moderate activity in the past week**

<u>Country</u>	<u>%</u>
Malta	78
Spain	60
Ireland	57
Italy	54
France	52
UK	51
Portugal	48
Republic of Cyprus	48
Sweden	48
Luxembourg	42
Belgium	40
Finland	34
Hungary	34
Poland	32
Czech Republic	29
Latvia	29
Lithuania	29
Denmark	27
Greece	27
Austria	26
Estonia	26
Germany	26
Slovenia	24
Slovakia	22
Netherlands	13

**1-3 days of moderate activity in the past week**

<u>Country</u>	<u>%</u>
Slovakia	42
Austria	32
Sweden	32
Luxembourg	31
Slovenia	31
Czech Republic	30
Finland	30
Greece	30
Denmark	29
Belgium	28
Poland	28
Germany	27
Hungary	27
Latvia	26
Estonia	25
France	22
Italy	22
Republic of Cyprus	22
Lithuania	21
Netherlands	21
Ireland	20
UK	20
Portugal	16
Malta	12
Spain	12

**4-6 Days moderate activity in the past week**

Country	%
Austria	27
Netherlands	23
Germany	20
Greece	18
Poland	18
Slovakia	18
Slovenia	18
Czech Republic	17
Estonia	17
Denmark	16
Finland	16
Hungary	15
Lithuania	15
Portugal	15
Belgium	14
Ireland	14
Latvia	14
Italy	12
Republic of Cyprus	12
UK	12
Sweden	11
Luxembourg	10
Spain	9
France	8
Malta	5

**Seven days moderate intensity activity in the past week**

Country	%
Netherlands	43
Denmark	28
Estonia	28
Lithuania	28
Slovenia	26
Greece	25
Hungary	25
Germany	24
Latvia	21
Poland	20
Belgium	18
Czech Republic	18
Finland	18
Portugal	18
Republic of Cyprus	18
Luxembourg	16
France	15
UK	15
Slovakia	13
Austria	11
Spain	10
Italy	9
Sweden	9
Ireland	8
Malta	5