

Final conclusions

Policy Recommendations

Unfortunately health is too often seen as a luxury on a political level, and especially in periods with economic austerity, it is difficult for policy- and political decision makers to prioritize good health and health promotion because it is a long term investment, and does “not pay off” immediately. Health is a sensitive political issues, which is the most fundamental reason that a strategic view on health is necessary, which should be identified through a broad regional dialogue, so that it becomes a less political sensitive issue, but more an issue with broad community support. Creating common agreements, makes it difficult for any partners to “escape” from their responsibility and change direction in times close to elections or in times when resources are limited, and other priority areas are more popular among citizens.

The Healthy Regions project carried through an inter regional scenario planning session, and the overall result for this exercise is that citizens what regions to “Think global but act local”; the responsibility for health and health promotion must be kept on regional and local level – close to the citizens – and the regional and / or local level should have sufficient autonomy to act strategically. This scenario suits very well to the philosophie within the healthy regions project, because a strategic view on health and delivery of first class health promotion locally, can create innovation and new development ideas, which can be exploited and create global market shares. This leads us directly to one of the most difficult aspects to treat in the project was namely “health as a factor to create economic growth”, showing that it is obvious to continue exploring this and raise awareness about how health and health promotion can be a serious growth sector.

When we started the healthy regions project, the intention was to put health on the top of the political agenda, but during the project period, the partnership agreed that there is no need to put health on top of the political agenda. Sustainable growth and climate changes should be on the top, and health should be used to mainstream political discussions and decisions. At the time being, health is not integrated in all policies, but this should be a priority area on regional and local level, and general development strategies should show clear signs of sustainable development and a “healthy economic growth”.

In order to work actively with the healthy regions concept and use the tools that the healthy regions project has developed, an important experience from the project is that it is necessary to “un project the project”, meaning that the attempt to introduce the ideas and philosophies should not be presented as “a project” but as an additional methodology to add value to developing policy thinking, practice and planning. A regional co-ordinator should be appointed in order to bring a broad range of relevant regional stakeholders together in a structured and open dialogue.

The tools that the healthy regions project has developed are not “rocket science”, but simple tools that are easy to use in order to bring stakeholders together in a structured way, using the tools to facilitate the dialogue and structure the results into a list of clear, concrete and easy communicable strategic key messages or priority areas. Tools like the dialogue tool, the scenario planning method, dilemmas etc. are extremely good tools to use in a

strategic development process, because it allows participants to think a bit out of the box, still being able to structure the input and conclusions so that it gives a comprehensive meaning. They all allow a structured but open process and most important, they allow the stakeholders to create a common understanding of

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to go?
- And how do we want to go there?

